

9/12: Presentation/Discussion on Settler Colonialism: Race, Space, and Nature on the Great Plains 1541-1876

- What is settler colonialism?
 - form of colonialism, but not just political regime or military domination of a place
→ it also involves:
 - a system of colonial oppression (often genocide of some kind)
 - aim = to displace a population of a nation (usually Indigenous peoples) and replace it with a new settler population...
 - foundational to history, society → still affecting things today: like controversies of naming places, etc.
- American Indian Policy (c. 1776-1933)
 - eradication of Native Americans (physical, cultural)
 - supported by belief in responsibility to “progress”
 - ex: Indian removal, wars out West, railroads, residential schools (Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania - “Kill the Indian, save the man”)
- White Settlement and The Great Plains
 - 400,000 sq. mi. of United States
 - < 20 in. of rain per year
 - flat, treeless, few major waterways
 - susceptible to periodic, extended drought (ecosystem developed to withstand this before settlement - symbiotic relationship between grasses and mammals)
 - *What changed to allow humans to settle this place?*
 - horses → allowed indigenous peoples to move down to plains from mountains and conquer the space, build a new society
 - Comanche Empire - controlled interior for about 150 years
 - American History in Eastern North America (c. 1700-1876)

- British colonies
 - establishment of a new nation, but weak centralization (U.S.)
 - westward expansion → “Manifest Destiny”: God wants Americans to settle the rest of the continent
 - White relations with indigenous peoples of the Great Plains
- Major initiatives to settle the West
 - * Civil War (1861-1865) affected these policies
 - Centralization of federal power
 - Republicans/North controlled Congress - belief in infrastructure, “internal improvement”, “economic expansion”
 - To enable westward expansion without South/slavery
 - Homestead Act of 1862 (land grants for settlers in the West)
 - Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 (land grants for state universities)
 - Railroads in the United States - public & private projects - e.g. transcontinental railroads
 - Federal subsidies, land-grants to railroad companies (~ 10 sq. mi. plots)
 - Railroad companies then make their money by selling land around railroads, then moving crops that are grown on those lands → the definition of a monopoly; also, it was entirely speculative: the railroads were built before any farms or towns...
 - Land boosters/boomers - make *propaganda* to get people from East Coast/Europe to get people to move out West - “rain follows the plow”
- Making money off the Great Plains
 - Bison: buffalo hunters → leave carcasses, collect hide, brought to factory (most of herd killed within 3 yr)

- Comanche are pretty much gone, too - way of life connected to buffalos + disease (smallpox) + federal government cut off their markets, using violence, etc. → attacks and brought to reservations
- Ranching and Charles Goodnight - major figure, one of the greatest ranchers in American history
 - created ranching communities in the Texas Panhandle
 - helped to establish “the range system” (which lasts for ~ 20 yr)
 - moving to area near waterway
 - claiming land without actually owning it (usually 8 mi. in every direction) - backed up by editorial in newspaper/cattle brand + protected through violence

* connections to “*settler colonialism*”

→ “cowboy” as a symbol of America, wrapped into mythology: individualism, self-preservation and doing something with the land, land as a commodity...

9/14: Presentation/Discussion: The Agricultural Wonderland

- Concept of “The Agricultural Wonderland”
 - story of Timothy Dwight Hobart and land, real estate speculation
 - concept of land having value, ownership is a White European-American idea → Chief Black Hawk: “*Nothing can be sold, but such things as can be carried away*”
 - United States kept control of its public lands and then started to systematically distribute it
 - Riparian (river, waterways) law traditions and new ideas about land claims, home ownership
- Texas land law as a case study

- Texas joined Union in 1845 as a slave state (was Lone Star Republic since 1836 - only state to join as a country)
 - so: Texas owns all of its public lands (although indigenous peoples live on the land to the West); once land was surveyed, it could officially be sold
- Texas granted land to people (millions of acres); ends up with...
 - real-estate speculators
 - railroad companies
 - ranchers (millions of acres)
- New form of ranching - “stock farming”
 - Invention of barbed wire (Joseph Glidden gets the patent for it)...
 - used for 3 things: keep things out, keep things in, and keep things separate
 - creating a barrier through promise of pain → *allowed for fencing of land*, fixes ranchers’ problem with inventory and elevates breed (Longhorn cattle specifically)
 - Major demand for Texas and Montana beef - growth of Chicago
- Solving problems of the Plains...
 1. Fencing (barbed wire creating barriers, enforcing land claims)
 2. Windmills (driven into ground, used for water, using underground lake)
 3. Railroads (increasing connections and creating new networks of wealth)
- The Rise of Technology in Agriculture (1870-1900)
 - farming is faster and more efficient → prices go up → land prices go up
 - ex: the tractor allowed for larger acre farms, even more productivity

- massive turnover of agricultural real estate (c. 1880s-1920s)
- Case Study: W.P. Soash...
 - “Empire-builder” → real-estate developer
 - Ran trains from Iowa, Chicago, Ohio, etc.
 - Advertised to get people to land in Texas (emphasizing climate, soil, railroad, self-sufficiency, etc.)
 - Land value kept down because there is so much of it and it’s all on the market at the same time
 - The next operation he built was in a town where he owned all of the land (speculation)
 - however, the railroad was 25 mi away (town of Soash is now a “ghost town”)
- Back to idea of Great Plains towns
 - Settlement of the West was very chaotic in the beginning, but then it came together...
 - Towns built by real-estate companies promising them a “*wonderland*”
 - The layout: towns built on the railroad with central business district → *imposing order on the landscape*
 - It goes against the tension of farmers v. towns that is very real in many other parts of U.S. (everyone is part of agricultural market)
 - Everything worked until it stopped raining...
 - *The Dust Bowl* (driven by real-estate sales, intensive agricultural production of wheat for example - heart of it: parts of Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, New Mexico)