

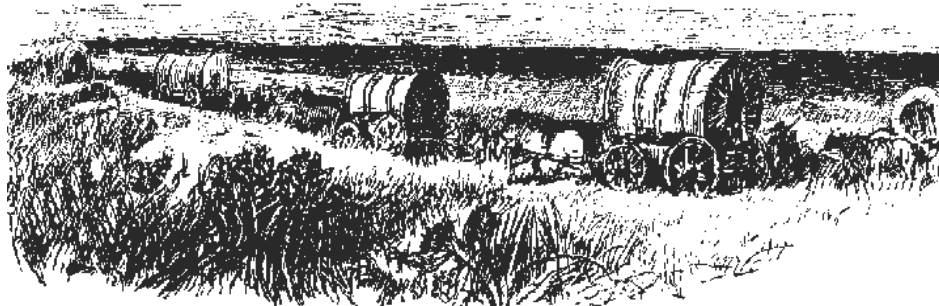
## Introduction

Until the 1840s, nearly all Americans lived in the eastern part of the country. Much of the western part of the country was occupied by Native Americans, or Indians. During the 1840s, however, the country began to acquire new territory.

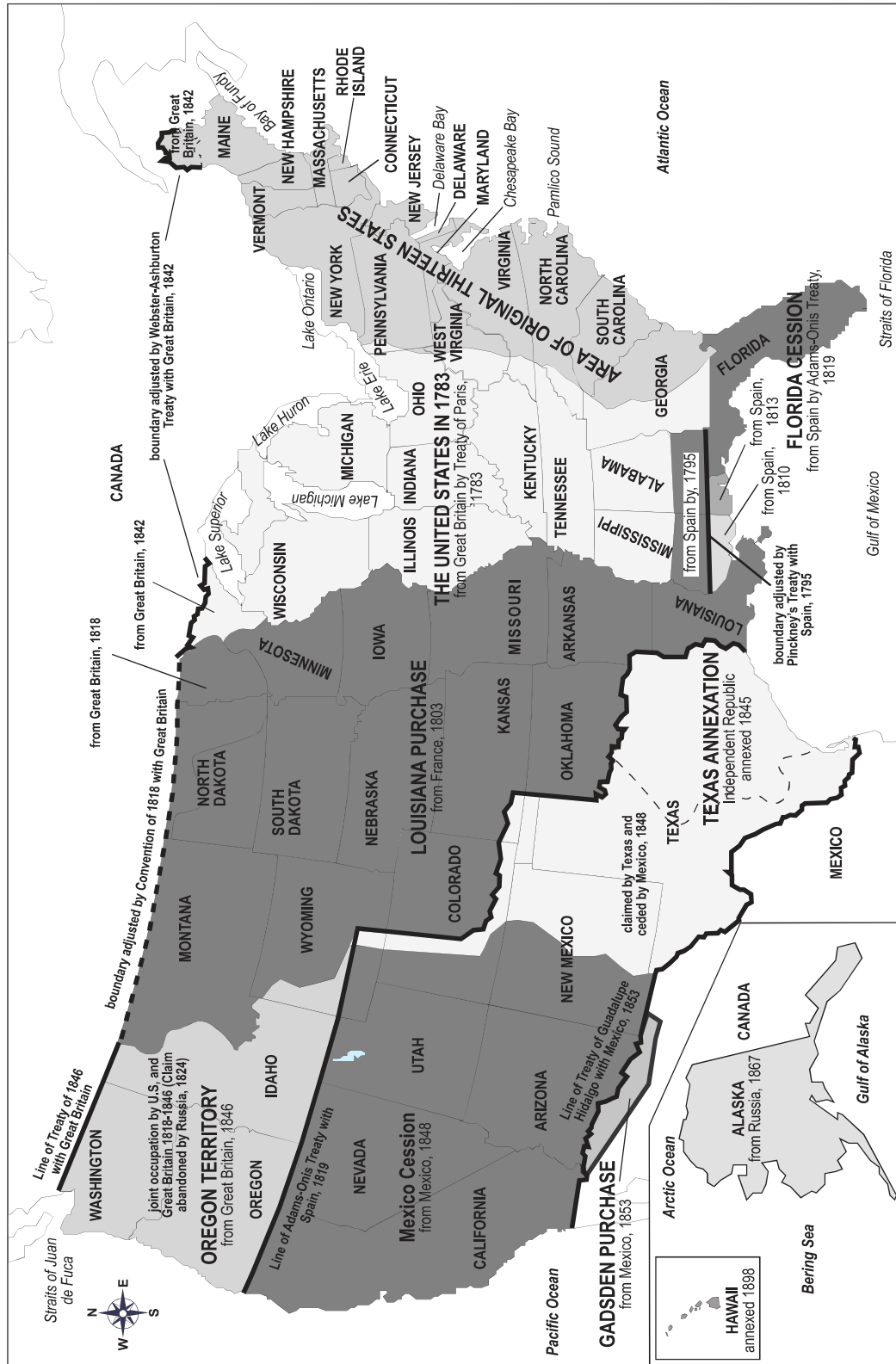
In 1845 Texas became a state. One year later, the government struck a deal with the British and Oregon became a territory. Bit by bit, the land across the country became part of the United States. By 1865 the land between the east and west coasts, and from Canada to Mexico, was in possession of the United States as states or territories.

Americans were eager to settle in the western territories and begin farming and raising cattle. These early settlers were called **pioneers**. To make travel westward faster and safer, railroads were built that connected the east and west coast. Much of the land settlers wanted to develop was the homeland of Native Americans, so the settlers and the United States Army battled Native American tribes for the land.

As the population of the United States grew, more and more people moved west. In 1845 John L. O'Sullivan, a newspaper editor, introduced the idea of **manifest destiny** after Texas became a state. O'Sullivan's words, "the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence [God] for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions," convey approval of westward expansion during the mid-1800s. Many Americans began to accept the idea of manifest destiny, believing that it was the right, the responsibility, and the fate of the United States to extend its borders to the Pacific Ocean.



*Many people went west in covered wagons.*



States and Territories

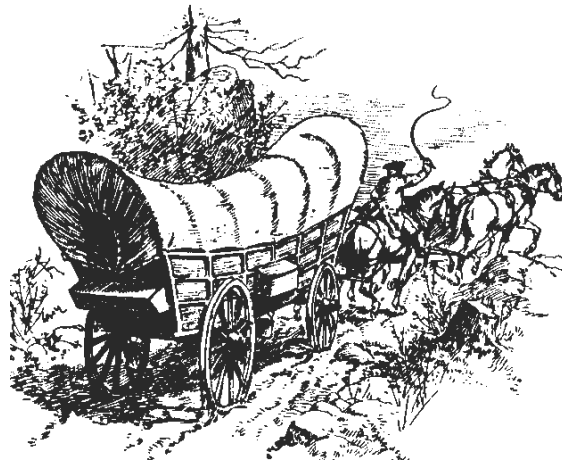
## Native Americans in the West

The first people who lived in the continent of North America and its West were Native Americans. Native Americans made their homes in the West for centuries before white people ever arrived on the continent and began migrating west.

Native Americans lived in many different tribes. Each tribe had a distinct culture, or way of living. Some lived by gathering food and farming. Others lived by hunting big game animals, especially the plentiful buffalo.

## American Settlement of the West

Before 1848 few settlers moved west of the Mississippi River. In 1848, however, gold was discovered in California. Many Easterners made the slow and dangerous journey out west to prospect, or search for deposits of gold, silver, or other valuable minerals. Most people traveled to the west in **wagon trains**—covered wagons, pulled by horses or oxen, that traveled together for protection. Others sailed in ships around South America to get to the gold fields of California.

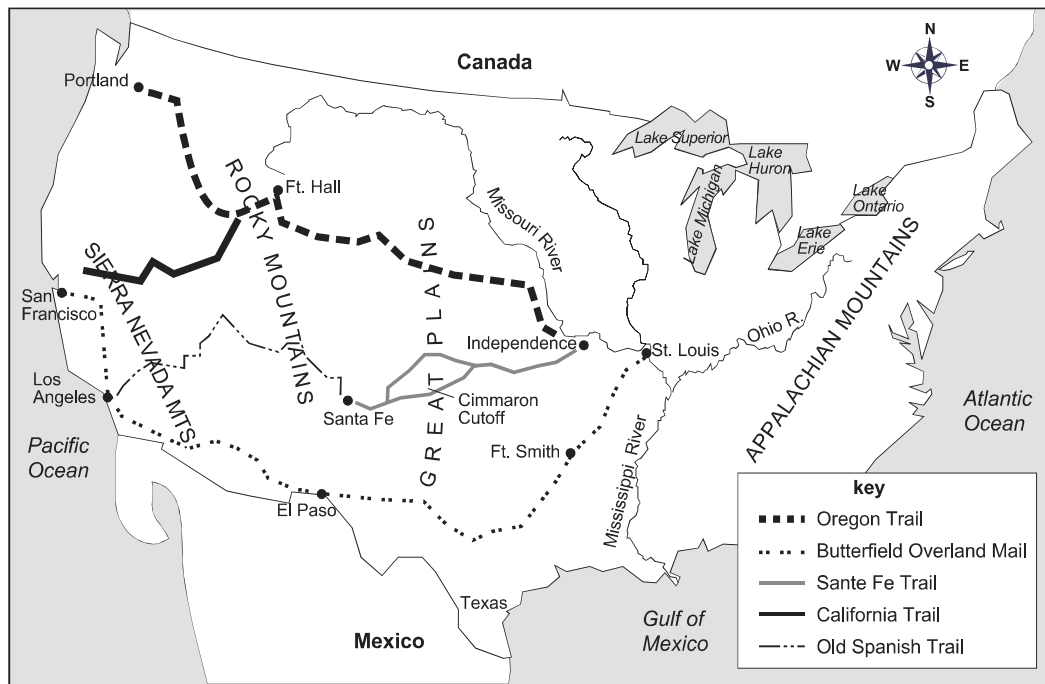


*Conestoga wagon, named after Conestoga, Pennsylvania where it was first made.*

With so many people migrating westward across the continent, railroad companies started to build tracks to connect the East Coast with the West Coast. These **transcontinental** railroads allowed people, goods, and mail to travel across America more quickly. Between 1869 and 1887, three transcontinental railroads were completed. Much of the grueling work of railroad building was done by Irish immigrants working from the East Coast and Chinese immigrants working from the West Coast. Before the transcontinental railroad was built, traveling from the East Coast to the West Coast was dangerous and took many weeks. The railroad made it possible to travel safely across the country in less than a week.

The federal government encouraged people to settle the western lands. In 1862 Congress passed the **Homestead Act**. This law allowed anyone over

the age of 21 to get 160 acres of land as a homestead. The cost was a small \$10.00 registration fee. In return, the person had to do two things: (1) improve the land by farming it or building on it, and (2) live on the land for five years.



*Western Trails, 1860*

The people who claimed land on the frontier were called **homesteaders**. On their new homesteads, pioneers farmed, raised cattle, or mined for gold. The offers of free land attracted immigrants from Europe. Gradually, small towns began to appear in the vast open stretches of the West.

Most people settled in the **Great Plains**. The Great Plains stretch from the foot of the Rocky Mountains in Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana on its western border to Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota on its eastern border. The weather on the Great Plains is often very cold in the winter and blistering hot in the summer. It is also an area that normally receives just a little rain each year and is frequently plagued by droughts. Many different Native American



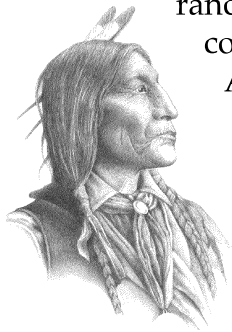
tribes, such as the Sioux, Crow, Pawnee, and Arapaho lived there. With homesteaders staking out claims and preparing to build new homes, the Native Americans were pushed off of their homelands. This led to many battles between the Native Americans who lived there and the United States Army, who defended and protected the settlers.



*fighting between settlers and Native Americans*

## Conflict with the Native Americans

American settlements in the Great Plains destroyed the Native Americans' way of life. Farmers took Native Americans' land to grow crops. Cattle ranchers killed large herds of buffaloes so that their own cattle could graze on the land. Without the buffalo, many Native American tribes lost their main source of food, clothing, and even shelter. The federal government forced the Native Americans onto **reservations**, or special homelands set aside for the Native Americans. Without land to farm or buffalo to hunt, Native Americans had to depend on the government for food. This violated their beliefs.



Some Native Americans lived in such bad conditions on the reservations that they died of disease and starvation. Others were **massacred**, or ruthlessly killed, by the settlers and the United States Army. The Native Americans, frightened and angry, left the reservations and tried to fight back. Many battles took place between the Native Americans and the United States Army. However, at first the Native Americans had only bows and arrows and spears to fight against the guns used by the army.

Americans wanted the lands for more than farming and grazing their cattle. In 1874 gold was discovered in the Black Hills of the Dakotas. This was the home of the Sioux and Cheyenne. In a written treaty, the government had given this land to them *forever*. Now, the government tried to buy it back from the Native Americans. The Native Americans refused to sell and made plans to defend their land.



*The government tried to buy back the land from the Native Americans when gold was discovered.*

In June of 1876, a band of several thousand Sioux camped at the Little Bighorn River in Montana. *General George A. Custer* led the United States Army in an attack against the Native Americans. The Native Americans, led by *Crazy Horse* and *Sitting Bull*, defeated and killed Custer and his men at the **Battle of the Little Bighorn**. The army's defeat angered many Americans. More army troops went west to destroy the fighting power of the Native Americans.

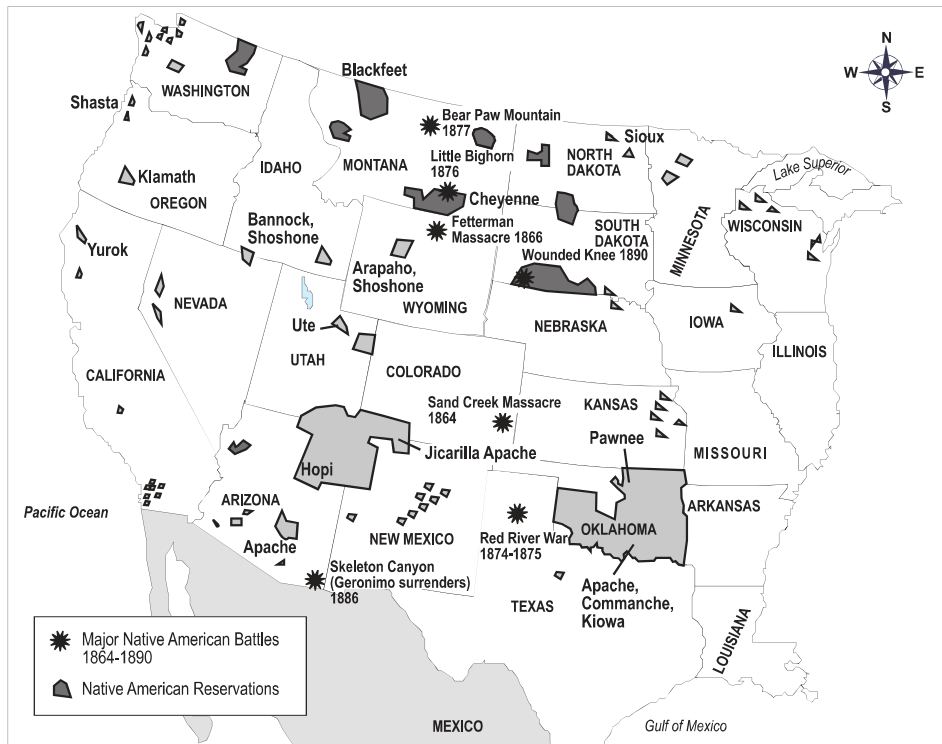
The Native Americans thought the government's policy and the reservation system was extremely unfair. One notable Native American chief who protested against the government's policy was *Chief Joseph*, a Nez Percé (nose pierced) Native American. Chief Joseph was a brilliant military strategist. He led a small band of Nez Percé who refused to settle on a government reservation. Chief Joseph took 800 tribe members on a peaceful movement to freedom. They traveled through Wyoming and Montana to reach the border and cross into Canada. In the words of Chief Joseph:

*All men are made by the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers. The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it....If you pen an Indian up on a small spot of earth and compel him to stay there, he will not be contented nor will he grow and prosper.*

The army finally caught up with the band of Nez Percé at Bear Paw, Montana. They fought a five-day battle before the Nez Percé surrendered.

Over the next few years, the army and the Native Americans fought other battles. Finally, the army defeated the Native Americans and forced them back on the reservations. By 1887 Native Americans from the Great Plains were forced to live on reservations.





*Major Native American Battles and Reservations*

Few Americans cared about the Native Americans—they just wanted to control the Great Plains. Some Americans, however, did recognize the rights of Native Americans and tried to improve their life. One person who sought to rally support for the Native Americans was *Helen Hunt Jackson*. In 1881 Jackson’s book *A Century of Dishonor* was published. Jackson set out the story of repeated broken promises made to the Native Americans by the government of the United States. *A Century of Dishonor* helped bring about a movement to help the Native Americans. Sometimes others who wanted to help the Native Americans were not much more helpful than their enemies. They supported **assimilation**, in which Native Americans were expected to give up their beliefs and way of life to become part of the white culture. Native Americans had lost much land and their ways of independent living, but they did not want to lose their culture as well.

In 1887 in an effort to make assimilation the official government policy, the federal government passed the **Dawes Act**. This act gave Native Americans the right to own property. It also gave them the right to an education and a promise of citizenship if they settled down on farms and gave up membership in their tribe. Although intended to help the



Native Americans, it did not. Instead the Dawes Act wiped out tribal ownership of the land. Native Americans were given some of the poorest land to farm. Citizenship was held back from most of them, and it was not until 1924 that Native Americans were granted American citizenship.

The Sioux continued to suffer reduced rations, increased restrictions, and loss of cattle to disease. They turned to Wovoka, a Paiute prophet who envisioned the Native American lands restored, the buffalo returned, and the whites all gone. The prophet promised the Sioux if they performed a ritual called the **Ghost Dance**, this vision would actually happen.

Native American officials and military authorities grew alarmed and thought the Ghost Dance was a warning of trouble rather than a religious ceremony. Chief Sitting Bull was arrested and shot. Then on December 29, 1890, the Seventh Cavalry (Custer's old division that had been defeated at Little Bighorn) slaughtered 300 unarmed Native Americans, including several children. This massacre was called the **Battle of Wounded Knee** and brought the Native American wars, and an entire era, to a bitter end. Americans, blind to any value in the Native American life and traditions, shattered a proud people and an ancient culture. The Native Americans' fate would weigh heavily on the American conscience in generations to come.

## Farming in the West

Life on farms in the Great Plains was very hard. Where there were streams, farmers were able to irrigate their crops, but this was not always possible. To find enough water to grow crops and keep their livestock and themselves alive, farmers dug deep wells. After finding water, farmers used mechanical pumps and windmills to pump water out of the ground. Another method farmers used to deal with the scarcity of water was **dry farming**. Dry farming was a plowing technique to preserve the water in the soil.

The dry farming method was developed by agricultural researchers whom the federal government supported with the **Morrill Land Grant Acts** of 1862 and 1890. To find better ways to farm, federal lands were given to the states to help pay for agricultural colleges.

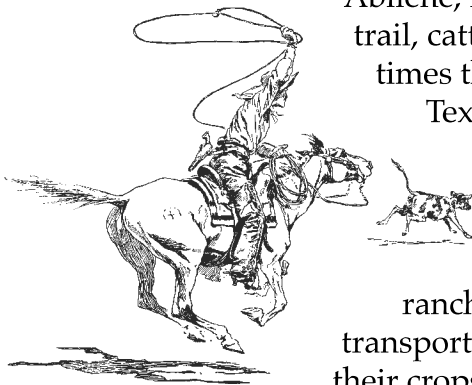
Farmers on the Great Plains faced other problems. With few trees for wood to construct shelters, houses were built out of blocks of hard sod cut from the ground. Families living in these houses were often called “soddies.” Some years brought floods, while others brought drought to the Great Plains. Farmers also faced destructive insects. Sometimes great swarms of grasshoppers destroyed the farmers’ crops by eating every blade or stalk. Long droughts and insect damage caused thousands of farmers to give up their land and move back east.

## The Cattle Kingdom

Cattle had become an important product because eastern cities wanted meat to feed their growing populations. Consequently, cattle ranchers moved onto the Great Plains to graze their cattle on **open range**. The open range was a vast area of unfenced land. Ranchers raised thousands of cattle on the Texas plains. When the cattle were fat enough, cowboys herded them north to railroads. This trip was called the **long drive**, since it

covered nearly 600 miles from San Antonio, Texas to Abilene, Kansas. After the 11 to 13 weeks on the trail, cattle were sold at the railhead for eight times the price they would have been sold for in Texas. The cattle were loaded into boxcars in towns like Abilene, Kansas and Cheyenne, Wyoming. Then they were shipped to the eastern markets.

Without the railroads, neither ranchers nor farmers would have been able to transport their products to eastern cities where their crops and meat were sold.



Cattle ranchers and farmers disagreed and often fought over how land on the Great Plains should be used. Cattle ranchers wanted the rangelands to remain unfenced and open, which would insure enough grazing land for their cattle. But grazing cattle often ruined farmers’ crops. In 1874 Joseph Glidden invented **barbed wire** for fencing. Farmers began to build barbed wire fences to keep out the cattle. These fences were often torn down by cattle ranchers and then replaced by farmers in ongoing conflicts called *range wars*.

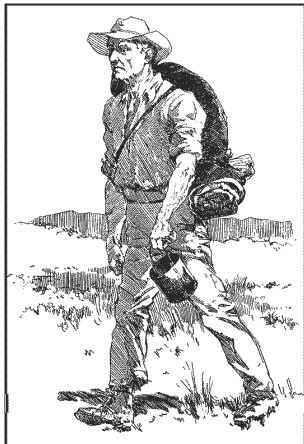


## Mining Towns

Other people who moved west were **prospectors** and miners. They explored the Rocky Mountains looking for gold, silver, copper, and lead. When a mine was started, **boom towns** quickly grew nearby. A boom town is a town that grows very fast.

People moved to boom towns to work in the mines. After a mine was emptied of its valuable minerals, people deserted the boom town in search of other mines. These deserted towns were called ghost towns.

There were many gold and silver strikes, or finds, in the West. One of the most famous gold strikes took place at Sutter's Mill in California in 1848. People rushed to California to mine for gold in the hopes of getting rich. These people were called the **forty-niners** because they arrived in California in 1849. Gold was also discovered in Colorado in 1858. The people who searched for this gold were called **fifty-niners**, or Pike's Peakers.



*forty-niner*

Another gold strike took place at the Comstock Lode in Nevada, which produced over \$300 million in silver and gold. Between 1860 and 1890, \$340 million in gold and silver was mined in California, Colorado, and Nevada.

## Summary

Native Americans were the first people to live in the West and particularly on the Great Plains. When people in the eastern United States began to move west to mine, farm, and raise cattle, they drove the Native Americans from their homeland. Many Native American tribes depended on the buffalo, but the buffalo were all but wiped out by white people. The United States Army battled Native Americans and eventually forced them to live on reservations.

The transcontinental railroad transported many people from the eastern part of the country to the Great Plains and the West Coast. Many people moved west to mine for gold. Others moved to the Great Plains to farm or raise cattle. Farmers and cattle ranchers fought over how the land was to be used. Eventually, the farmers succeeded in fencing their land in and stopping cattle from grazing and roaming freely across the land.



## Practice

Use the **topographical map** of a cross-sectional cutout of the **United States**, previous maps, and the list below to write the names of these **landforms** and **waterways** on the map.

Appalachian Mountains	Missouri River
Atlantic Ocean	Pacific Ocean
Great Lakes	Rocky Mountains
Great Plains	Sierra Nevada Mountains
Mississippi River	

