During the booms, crime posed a serious problem. Prospectors fought over claims, and thieves haunted the streets and trails. Law enforcers were scarce, and self-appointed volunteers sometimes formed **vigilance committees** to track down and punish wrongdoers. In some cases, they punished the innocent or let the guilty go free, but most people in these communities respected the law and tried to deal firmly but fairly with those accused of crimes.

Mining towns such as Virginia City at first were inhabited mostly by men, but soon they attracted more women. Some women owned property and were influential community leaders. Others worked as cooks or in laundries. Still other women worked at "hurdy-gurdy" houses (named after the mechanical musical instrument), where they danced with men for the price of a drink.

Other Bonanzas Mining also spurred the development of Colorado, the Dakota Territory, and Montana. The discovery of gold near Pikes Peak in 1858 set miners on a frantic rush. Inspired by the phrase "Pikes Peak or Bust," many panned for gold without success and headed home, complaining of a "Pikes Peak hoax."

In truth, there was plenty of gold and silver in the Colorado mountains, but much of it was hidden beneath the surface and hard to extract. One of the richest strikes occurred in the late 1870s in Leadville, named for deep deposits of lead that contained large amounts of silver. By the summer of 1879, as many as 1,000 newcomers per week were pouring into Leadville, creating one of the most famous boomtowns to dot the mining frontier.

Overall, operations at Leadville and other mining towns in Colorado yielded more than $1 billion worth of silver and gold (many billions in today's money). This bonanza spurred the building of railroads through the Rocky Mountains and transformed Denver, the supply point for the mining areas, into the second largest city in the West after San Francisco.

The discovery of gold in the Black Hills of the Dakota Territory and copper in Montana led to rapid development of the northern Great Plains. Miners flooded into the region in the 1870s. After railroads were built in the 1880s, many farmers and ranchers moved to the territory. In 1889, Congress divided the Dakota Territory and admitted North Dakota and South Dakota, as well as Montana, as new states.

Reading Check **Explain** How did the discovery of new mines affect settlement of the West?

Ranching and Farming the Plains

Main Idea **Ranchers built vast cattle ranches on the Great Plains, while settlers staked out homesteads and began farming the region.**

Reading Connection When you think of cowhands, what images come to mind, and from what sources do these images derive? Read on to learn about the realities of life as a cowboy in the West.

While many Americans headed to the Rocky Mountains to mine gold and silver after the Civil War, others began building vast cattle ranches and farming homesteads on the **Great Plains.** This region extends westward to the Rocky Mountains from around the 100th meridian—an imaginary line running north and south from the central Dakotas through western Texas.

Ranching the Plains In the early 1800s, Americans did not think cattle ranches on the Great Plains were practical. Water was scarce, and cattle from the East could not survive on the tough prairie grasses. Farther south, however, in Texas, there existed a breed of cattle **adapted** to living on the Great Plains.

The Texas longhorn was a breed descended from Spanish cattle that had been brought to Mexico two centuries earlier. Ranchers in Mexico and Texas had allowed their cattle to run wild, and slowly a new breed—the longhorn—had emerged. Lean and rangy, the longhorn could easily survive in the harsh climate of the Plains, and by 1865, as many as 5 million of them roamed the grasslands of Texas.

Mexicans had introduced cattle ranching in California, New Mexico, and Texas before these areas became part of the United States. The industry grew in part because of the **open range**—a vast area of government-owned grassland. The open range covered much of the Great Plains and provided land where ranchers could graze their herds free of charge and unrestricted by the boundaries of private farms.

Mexican cowhands developed the tools and techniques for rounding up and driving cattle. These Hispanic herders taught American cowhands their trade and enriched the English vocabulary with words of Spanish origin, including "lariat," "lasso," and "stampede."

Prior to the Civil War, ranchers had little incentive to round up the longhorns. Beef prices were low, and moving the cattle to eastern markets was not practical. Two developments changed this situation: the

Geography Skills

1. **Interpreting Maps** What cities were destination points for the Chisholm Trail?
2. **Applying Geography Skills** Why do you think the destination cities at the end of the cattle trails are all located along railroad lines?

Civil War and the construction of the railroads. During the Civil War, eastern cattle were slaughtered in huge numbers to feed the armies of the Union and the Confederacy. After the war, beef prices soared, making it worthwhile to round up the longhorns if a way could be found to move them east.

By the 1860s, railroads had reached the Great Plains. Lines ended at Abilene and Dodge City in Kansas and at Sedalia in Missouri. Ranchers and livestock dealers realized that if the longhorns were rounded up and driven north several hundred miles to the railroad, they could be sold for a huge profit and shipped east to market.

In 1866 ranchers rounded up cattle and drove about 260,000 of them to Sedalia, Missouri. Although only a fraction of the herds survived this first **long drive,** the drive overall was a tremendous success as cattle was sold for 10 times the price it could get in Texas. As railroads expanded in the West , other trails soon opened from Texas to towns in Kansas, Nebraska, Montana, and Wyoming.

Farming Becomes Big Business Like ranching, farming also seemed unsuitable for the Great Plains. Rainfall averages less than 20 inches per year there, and trees grow naturally only along rivers and streams. During the late 1800s several factors undermined the belief that the Plains was a "Great American Desert." One important factor was the construction of the railroads, which provided easy access to the Great Plains. Railroad companies sold land along the rail lines at low prices and provided credit to prospective settlers. Railroads opened offices throughout the United States and in major cities in

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Europe where land was scarce. Posters and pamphlets proclaimed that booking passage to the Plains was a ticket to prosperity.

The catchy slogan "Rain follows the plow," coined by a Nebraskan to sell the idea that cultivating the Plains would increase rainfall, encouraged settlers. As if to prove the saying correct, the weather cooperated. For more than a decade beginning in the 1870s, rainfall on the Plains was well above average. The lush green of the endless prairies contradicted the popular belief that the region was a desert.

In 1862 the government also supported settlement in the Great Plains region by passing the **Homestead Act.** For a $10 registration fee, an individual could file for a **homestead**—a tract of public land available for settlement. A homesteader could claim up to 160 acres of public land and could receive title to that land after living there for five years. Later government acts increased the size of the tracts available. The Homestead Act provided a legal method for settlers to acquire clear title to property in the West. With their property rights secured, settlers were more willing to move to the Plains.

When settlers arrived on the Plains, they often found life very difficult. The lack of trees and water forced them to build their first homes from sod cut from the ground and to drill wells up to 300 feet deep. Summer temperatures often soared over 100° Fahrenheit. Prairie fires were a constant danger. Sometimes swarms of grasshoppers swept over farms and destroyed the crops. In winter there were terrible blizzards and extreme cold. Despite these challenges, most homesteaders persisted and learned how to live in the harsh environment.

For those who had the financial resources, farming could be highly profitable on the Plains. During the 1880s, many farmers from Minnesota and other Midwestern states moved to the Great Plains to plant wheat, which was more drought-resistant than other crops. They took advantage of the inexpensive land and utilized new farming technology, such as reapers and threshers. This productive new **Wheat Belt** began at the eastern edge of the Great Plains and encompassed much of the Dakotas and the western parts of Nebraska and Kansas.

The bountiful harvests in the Wheat Belt helped the United States become the world's leading exporter of wheat by the 1880s. In fact, wheat became as important to the Great Plains as cotton was to the South. American wheat growers faced rising competition, however, from other wheat-producing nations. In the 1890s, a glut of wheat on the world market caused prices to drop.

Reading Check **Analyzing** Why did the Homestead Act motivate settlers to move to the Great Plains?

Picturing History

Farming the Great Plains Technology made farming the vast open plains of America feasible. Here horse-drawn binders are being used to gather hay in the late 1800s. What other factors encouraged settlement on the Great Plains?

Profiles IN HISTORY

Sitting Bull
1831–1890

In June 1876, a showdown loomed between Custer's troops and the Lakota Sioux who had left their reservation. Lakota chief Sitting Bull sought help for his people from the supreme power they called *Wakan Tanka,* or the "Great Mystery," by performing the Sun Dance.

Before dancing, an assistant made many small cuts in the chief's arms and shoulders. Then Sitting Bull raised his bleeding arms to heaven and danced around a sacred pole with his eyes on the sun. He continued to dance through the night and into the next day, when he entered a death-like trance. When he revived, he told of a vision in which he saw white soldiers upside down. The Lakota were encouraged by Sitting Bull's dream and the sacrifice he had made for them. Many felt that his Sun Dance helped bring them victory over Custer.

Sitting Bull remained devoted to the traditional religious practices of his people even after he and his followers reluctantly returned to the reservation under pressure from the army. Federal authorities regarded ceremonies like the Sun Dance—practiced in one form or another by many Plains Indians—as heathen and subversive. In 1883 the federal government outlawed the Sun Dance and many other Native American religious rites.

Native Americans

Main Idea **The settlement of the West dramatically altered the way of life of the Plains Indians.**

Reading Connection Can you recall a situation in which someone broke a promise or agreement with you? Do you remember your reaction? Read on to find out how Native Americans responded when the government broke treaties during the late 1800s.

For centuries the Great Plains was home to many Native American nations. Some lived in communities as farmers and hunters, but most were nomads who roamed vast distances, following their main source of food—the buffalo.

Despite their differences, the groups of Plains Indians were similar in many ways. They lived in extended family networks and had a close relationship with nature. Plains Indian nations, sometimes numbering several thousand people, were divided into bands consisting of up to 500 people. A governing council headed each band, but most members participated in making decisions. Gender determined the assignment of tasks. Women generally performed domestic tasks: rearing children, cooking, and preparing hides. Men performed tasks such as hunting, trading, and supervising the military life of the band. Most Plains Indians practiced a religion based on a belief in the spiritual power of the natural world.

Cultures Under Pressure As ranchers, miners, and farmers moved onto the Plains, they deprived Native Americans of their hunting grounds, broke treaties guaranteeing certain lands to the Plains Indians, and often forced them to relocate to new territory. Native Americans resisted by attacking wagon trains, stagecoaches, and ranches. Occasionally an entire group would go to war against nearby settlers and troops. Congress became convinced that something had to be done to end the growing conflict with Native Americans on the Great Plains. In 1867 Congress formed an **Indian Peace Commission,** which proposed creating two large reservations on the Plains, one for the Sioux and another for southern Plains Indians. Agents from the federal government's Bureau of Indian Affairs would run the reservations. The army would be given authority to deal with any groups that refused to report or remain there.

This plan was doomed to failure. Pressuring Native American leaders into signing treaties did not ensure that chiefs or their followers would abide by the terms. Those who did move to reservations faced poverty, despair, and the corrupt practices of American traders.

Conflict and Assimilation By the 1870s, many Native Americans on the southern Plains had left the reservations in disgust. They preferred hunting buffalo on the open Plains, so they joined others who had also shunned the reservations. Buffalo, however, were being killed in large numbers by migrants, professional buffalo hunters, and sharpshooters clearing rail

lines for railroad companies. By 1889 very few of the animals remained.

The Lakota Sioux, led by **Sitting Bull,** and the Nez Perce under Chief Joseph tried to resist government efforts to force them back on reservations. Sitting Bull and his followers escaped to Canada, but the remaining Lakota and the Nez Perce had to give up their fight against military forces.

Native American resistance to federal authority finally came to a tragic end on the Lakota Sioux reservation in 1890. Defying the orders of a government agent, the Lakota continued to perform the **Ghost Dance,** a ritual that celebrated a hoped-for day of reckoning. The government agent blamed Sitting Bull, who had returned to the reservation from Canada. The attempt to arrest him ended in an exchange of gunfire and the death of the chief. The participants of the Ghost Dance then fled the reservation. On December 29, 1890, as U.S. troops tried to disarm the Native Americans at Wounded Knee Creek, gunfire broke out. A deadly battle ensued, costing the lives of 25 U.S. soldiers and approximately 200 Lakota men, women, and children.

Even before Wounded Knee, some Americans had long opposed the treatment of Native Americans. Author Helen Hunt Jackson described the years of broken promises and assaults on Native Americans in her book, *A Century of Dishonor,* published in 1881. Jackson's descriptions sparked discussions—even in Congress—of better treatment for Native Americans. Some people believed that the situation would improve only if Native Americans could **assimilate,** or be absorbed, into American society as landowners and citizens. That meant breaking up reservations into individual allotments, where families could become self-supporting.

This policy became law in 1887 when Congress passed the **Dawes Act.** The act allotted to each head of household 160 acres of reservation land for farming; single adults received 80 acres, and 40 acres were allotted for children. The land that remained after all members had received allotments would be sold to American settlers, with the proceeds going into a trust for Native Americans.

While some Native Americans succeeded as farmers or ranchers, many had little training or enthusiasm for either pursuit. They often found their allotments too small to be profitable, and so they sold them. Some Native American groups had grown attached to their reservations and hated to see them transformed into homesteads for settlers as well as Native Americans.

In the end, the assimilation policy proved a dismal failure. The Plains Indians were doomed because they were dependent on buffalo for food, clothing, fuel, and shelter. When the herds were wiped out, Native Americans on the Plains had no way to sustain their way of life, and few were willing or able to adopt American settlers' lifestyles in place of their traditional cultures.

Reading Check **Cause and Effect** What impact did Helen Hunt Jackson's book *A Century of Dishonor* have?

HISTORY Online Study Central

For help with the concepts in this section of *American Vision: Modern Times* go to tav.mt.glencoe.com and click on ***Study Central.***

SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

Checking for Understanding

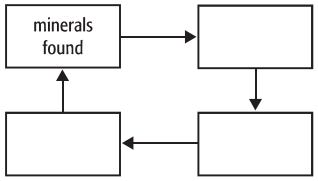
1. **Vocabulary** Define: extract, placer mining, vigilance committee, adapt, open range, prior, long drive, homestead, assimilate.
2. **People and Terms** Identify: Henry Comstock, Homestead Act, Indian Peace Commission, Sitting Bull, Ghost Dance, Dawes Act.
3. **Places** Locate: Great Plains, Wheat Belt
4. **Identify** the goals and terms of the Homestead Act.

Reviewing Big Ideas

5. **Explaining** How did the mining industry and the growth of ranching and farming each contribute to the development of the West?

Critical Thinking

6. **Evaluating** What factors contributed to the making of the Wheat Belt in the Great Plains and then to troubled times for wheat farmers in the 1890s?
7. **Analyzing** How would you evaluate the government's policy of assimilation of Native Americans?
8. **Organizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to demonstrate the cycle of boom and bust in mining.



Analyzing Visuals

9. **Analyzing Maps** Examine the map of mining country and cattle trails on page 239. Based on the details of the map, how did railways contribute to the opening and the settling of the West?

Writing About History

10. **Descriptive Writing** Write a summary for the story line of a Hollywood movie. Your summary should realistically portray the lives of a miner, a rancher, or a Native American in the West in the mid- to late 1800s. Be sure to include detailed descriptions of people and places. CA 11WS1.2