WESTWARD EXPANSION (1860-1890)

After the Civil War, Americans moved west of the Mississippi River, taking over the land for farms, ranches, and mines, and forcing out the original users, the Native Americans. American settlers and European immigrants braved the hardships of life on western farms, hoping to build new lives. Much of the land in the West claimed by settlers was actually the homeland of Native American groups that had used it for centuries. Native Americans were not only forced off their lands, but also lost much of their tradition. By the late 1800s, American farmers were feeding the nation and the world, yet they were increasingly concerned about feeding themselves. Declining incomes created fertile ground for a farmer’s protest. Although the traditional image of the Wild West captures the imagination, this image leaves out many experiences that shaped the nation.

Essential questions:
- To what extent was Westward expansion beneficial for Americans? How did American expansionism impact other populations and cultures?
- How has geography and human-environment interaction influenced the development of the United States?

Objectives:
- Contrast the cultures of Native Americans and white settlers.
- Explain why people moved west.
- Describe how the expansion and construction of railroads impacted the nation in the 19th century.
- Identify restrictions imposed by the government on Native Americans and describe the consequences.
- Identify how government policies contributed to conflicts with Native Americans.
- Describe the life of early settlers and how they transformed the land.
- Examine the problems farmers faced and their cooperative efforts to solve them.
- Explain the rise and fall of the Populist Party.

Key Terms:
1. Great Plains
2. Assimilation
3. Dawes Act
4. Battle of Wounded Knee
5. Homestead Act
6. Exodusters
7. Soddy
8. Populism
9. Gold Standard
10. William McKinley
11. William Jennings Bryan

Readings: Textbook, The Americans: Chapter 5
- Section 1: pp. 202-211
- Section 2: pp. 214-218
- Section 3: pp. 219-223
Key Questions:
1. Why did people move to settle the western frontier? Describe two reasons.
2. What were some of the challenges and hardships that the settlers faced?
3. How did the expansion and construction of railroads impact the US during the late 19th century?
4. How did the culture of the white settlers differ from the Native Americans?
5. How did the government attempt to deal with the growing conflict between Native Americans and white settlers?
6. What was the Dawes Act and what goal did it seek to achieve? Do you think the assimilation policy adopted by the U.S. government was a good idea? Give at least two reasons for your opinion.
7. How did technology help the farmers settle the west? How did new inventions make frontier farming both easier and more difficult?
8. What hardships did farmers face in the late 1800s?
9. What economic problems did many farmers face during the late 1800s?
10. How did the farmers try to address their problems?
11. What reforms did the Populist Party promote?
12. Why did the Populist movement collapse?