

# 1) An Era of Growth and Change 1870 - 1900

## Advanced



There were a number of significant changes and developments that occurred in Texas after the Civil War and Reconstruction. First, the population of Texas increased dramatically as people flooded into Texas for new opportunities in farming, ranching, and other industries.

Some people in Texas began migrating out of rural areas in the countryside into more urban areas like Fort Worth, Galveston, and San Antonio. Many migrated west into the Great Plains region, which was still largely dominated by Plains tribes like the Comanche and Apache at the beginning of the era. Hunters were drawn to the Plains to hunt bison for their valuable hides.

Conflicts between Indian tribes and the U.S. military, Anglo settlers, and bison hunters eventually caused the forced removal of Indian tribes from the Texas Plains.

The overwhelming majority of Texans during this era still lived in rural areas in the countryside as agricultural workers cultivating crops like cotton. These farmers experienced financial hardships during the era that caused many of them to join groups advocating for political and economic reforms to help farmers. The efforts of farm workers influenced state and national politics, while facing opposition from many political leaders in Texas and across the South.

# 2) The End of Comanche Dominance of the Plains 1875

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During this period, many Texans migrated west into the Great Plains region of the state for new opportunities. The Plains also attracted a number of hunters. Demand for buffalo hides had increased across the U.S. and Europe, and bison hunters were attracted to the Plains by the promise of great profits. By the end of the era, hunters would kill more than 3.5 million bison for their hides.

At the same time, the U.S. military began to reoccupy frontier forts that had been abandoned during the Civil War to protect the Anglo settlers and hunters moving west. The combination of the drastic depletion of bison herds, the increase in Anglo settlers, and the growing military presence in the Great Plains led to many conflicts between Anglos and American Indian tribes in the Plains like the Comanche, Apache, and Kiowa.

A Kiowa chief named Satanta led an attack on a U.S. Army wagon train known as the Salt Creek

Massacre in May 1871. A Comanche chief named Quanah Parker, who was the son of Cynthia Ann Parker and Chief Peta Nocona, led a group of Indians from the Comanche, Kiowa, Apache, and Cheyenne tribes in resistance against Anglo incursions and attacks in the Great Plains. Parker mounted an attack on buffalo hunters at Adobe Walls in June 1874, which led to a conflict known as the Red River War from 1874 to 1875 between Plains Indians and the U.S. Army.

During the Red River War, the U.S. Army pursued the Comanches, Apaches, Kiowas, and Cheyennes, ultimately forcing the surrender of all Plains Indians by June 1875. The tribes were removed from Texas and moved to reservations in Oklahoma. This ultimately ended American Indian dominance of the Plains in Texas and opened the region to more Anglo settlement and industry.

### 3) Cowboys and Cattle Drives *1860s - 1890s*

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After the Civil War and Reconstruction, there was a high demand for beef in Northern states where cattle were less abundant. A cow that costs \$4.00 in Texas could be sold for \$40.00 in the North. As a result, cowboys in Texas began gathering up herds of cattle and driving them to Northern states like Kansas and Missouri.

Some of the first cattle drive trails passed through east Texas on their way to northern states. As the population increased and more farms were established in the east, this posed challenges to cattle drivers. Additionally, Texas cattle carried a tick-borne illness known as the "Texas Fever," which infected herds in the populated areas north of Texas. Cattle drivers began establishing trails in west Texas to avoid many of the challenges they faced in more populated areas and limit the spread of "Texas Fever" to other herds.

Cattle drives became a significant part of the Texas cattle industry and gave rise to "cowboy culture," which presented a romanticized view of cowboys and their lifestyle. In reality, life as a cowboy was very difficult, and pay was typically quite low.

Large ranching operations were soon established in the Great Plains, and ranchers used a new invention called barbed wire to fence in their land and water resources. Cowboys were no longer able to freely access water and grazing land on their way to Northern markets, and cattle drives dramatically decreased as a result.

Though the era of the cowboy and cattle drives was short-lived, the view of Texas as a western state of cowboys would continue to live on for many, even to the present day.

### 4) The Rise of Mega Ranches *1870s - 1900*

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The removal of the American Indians and the depletion of the buffalo herds had opened large expanses of land in the Great Plains of Texas for ranching. By the mid-1870s, men who had found early success in cattle drives began building ranches in the Great Plains to raise large herds of cattle for the beef industry.

The growth and success of the cattle industry in Texas brought investments from people around the United States and even from other countries like England. A man named Charles Goodnight partnered with an English investor named John Adair to establish the JA Ranch in the Palo Duro Canyon in 1876. The JA Ranch held 100,000 head of cattle and occupied 1.3 million acres of land.

Then in 1885, investors from Chicago and Britain bought 3 million acres of land from the Texas government to establish the XIT ranch in the west Texas panhandle. The Texas government sold the land to fund construction of a new capitol building after the previous capitol was destroyed by fire in 1879.

These mega ranches began using a new invention called barbed wire to fence in their property, which prevented cowboys on cattle drives from grazing their cattle freely or accessing important water resources. As a result, the practice of cattle drives came to an end, and ranchers shipped their cattle to market on the new railroad lines that were established throughout the state.

## 5) Farmers & Laborers Organize *1870s – 1890s*

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Despite the popular image of Texas at this time as a state of western cowboys, the majority of Texans lived in the eastern part of the state and took part in agriculture, growing crops like cotton on small farms. A number of economic challenges at this time made life for farmers incredibly difficult.

Economic depressions in the 1870s and 1890s caused financial struggles and uncertainty for many, including farmers. The prices of cotton dropped dramatically during this era, meaning farmers were paid less for the crops they produced. As a result, farmers grew more cotton, which flooded the market with the product, making it even less valuable. Farmers struggled to pay for their needs and provide for their families, with many being forced to sell their land and become tenant farmers.

With no relief in sight, many farmers began to form and join organizations that supported farmers and advocated for political changes that

would help farm workers. Organizations like the Grange and the Farmer's Alliance sought to support farmers by pushing for lower railroad rates to transport crops, reducing government taxes, and arguing for government support to store excess cotton crops.

In 1892, a new political party was established called the Populist Party. This organization supported many of the same goals as the Grange and the Farmer's Alliance, while also working to support many other groups of laborers in the country. The organization accepted both white and Black members and worked to get its members elected to public office.

Though the Populists never held the same level of power as the existing Democratic and Republican Parties, it demonstrated the strong dissatisfaction many had with the two main parties and forced many in politics to seriously consider the needs of farmers and laborers.

## 6) The Rise of Jim Crow in the South *1890s – 1960s*

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During this era, governments of Southern states like Texas began to pass laws to restrict and control Black citizens in society, business, and politics. These laws were referred to as Jim Crow laws, and they affected many different facets of life for Black citizens in the South.

State legislatures passed laws requiring segregated railroad cars – or railroad cars with passengers separated by race. Additionally, lawmakers took measures to reduce the number of Black voters. Poll taxes required a fee at the voting booth, and literacy tests required people to prove they could read. For some newly freed people with few

resources and little education, these requirements prohibited them from exercising their right to vote.

Violence was sometimes used to enforce these restrictions and punish those who did not adhere to the Jim Crow laws.

Despite the Jim Crow laws, Black Southerners played a significant role in the development of Texas during the era. Black cowboys took part in cattle drives and ranching. Black cavalry units served on the Texas frontier, defending settlers and taking part in conflicts with Texas Indians. American Indian tribes often referred to the Black military units as “buffalo soldiers.”