

1) An Era of Growth and Change 1870 - 1900

Grade Level



There were a number of significant changes that occurred in Texas after 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 Anglos migrated west into the Great Plains region during this era. Hunters were drawn to the Plains to hunt bison for their valuable hides.

At the time, the Plains were still largely dominated by Plains tribes like the Comanche and Apache. As more Anglos migrated to the Plains, conflicts

between Indian tribes and the U.S. military, Anglo settlers, and bison hunters increased. Eventually, these conflicts caused the forced removal of Indian tribes from the Texas Plains.

The large majority of Texans during this era still lived in rural areas in the countryside as cotton farmers. These farmers experienced financial hardships during the era because of falling cotton prices. Farmers and other laborers established organizations to support farm workers. 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

Grade Level



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. Buffalo hides were becoming more popular in the U.S. and Europe, so 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 occupy frontier forts to protect settlers as they moved west. The combination of the decrease 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 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 against Anglo incursions 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, causing 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

Grade Level



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, it was difficult for cowboys to continue to use eastern trails. Additionally, Texas cattle carried a disease from ticks known as the "Texas Fever." Texas fever infected other 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.

4) The Rise of Mega Ranches 1870s - 1900

Grade Level



The removal of the American Indians and the overhunting of buffalo left large areas of land in the Plains open to industry. By the mid-1870s, men who had found early success in cattle drives began building large 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

Cattle drives became a significant part of the Texas cattle industry. They also 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 ranches 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. 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.

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 pay for 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. This 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

Grade Level



Many people think of Texans at this time as western cowboys, but the majority of Texans lived in east Texas and worked as cotton farmers on small farms. A number of economic challenges at this time made life for farmers incredibly difficult.

During this era, the prices of cotton dropped dramatically, so 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, and many were forced to sell their land and become tenant farmers.

Farmers in Texas formed an organization called the Farmer's Alliance to support farm workers and work for political and economic reforms. The Farmer's Alliance pushed for lower railroad rates

to transport crops, reduced government taxes, and government support in storing 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 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. It also forced many in politics to seriously consider the needs of farmers and laborers.

6) The Rise of Jim Crow in the South 1890s - 1960s

Grade Level



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 severely restricted the rights of Black Southerners.

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."