Related Current Events

1. Many believe that school, specifically, college is the “Great Equalizer” of today - hence, No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top and other recent educational mandates. Yet there is growing evidence that suggests education - even with the influx of technology - is not closing the gap. Do you agree or disagree?

2. Historians argue that American identity is wrapped up in the conquering of the West - namely, ‘rugged individualism.’ What kind of evidence/examples can you think of that tend to support this idea. Furthermore, what does it mean to be American?
Critical Thinking Question

1. “Popular fascination with the cowboy, the pioneer, and the stories of Horatio Alger in the period 1870-1915 reflected Americans’ uneasiness over the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society.”

Assess the validity of this statement.

2. How were the lives of the Plains Indians in the second half of the 19th century affected by the development of the West?

Consider government actions and technological developments
Impact of the Civil War

• The Union victory led to a Republican dominated national platform for the next several decades. That included settlement of the West through homestead programs and agricultural programs and railroad expansion.

• Many of the settlers or homesteaders were former Civil War veterans - the fear of ‘gunslingers’ was often attached to war stories
The Myth of the West

• It was all about ‘rugged individualism’ right?

• The view many have of the West is that it was the great equalizer. That all who came to the West fought to survive in much the same way.

• While the image of the West is often individualized - most survived by adopting interconnected communities.

• The romanticized view of the West is also seen in contrast to the ever expanding influence of politics in daily life in the East.
The Realities of the West

- *Great Equalizer*- Americans took their prejudices with them to the West
  
  - If a minority group gained economically, legal attempts were made to restrict them.
  
  - Consider new restrictions on: Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Native Amer and African-Amer.

- *Poor? “Go West Young Man!”*- Movement West was limited, difficult and expensive.

- *Cowboys, Indians, and six-shooters* - the most dominant figure in the west was a farmer and contact, let alone conflict, with Native tribes was uncommon for most.
How the West was (actually) won

- As industrialism and ultimately urbanization overtook many of the eastern states and cities, a renewed desire to escape society and government and head westward grew in popularity.

- Ironically, however, the settlement and managing of the West was done almost exclusively through governmental actions and/or support.

  - The Preemption Act of 1841; Graduation Act of 1854, Homestead Act of 1862 and college land grants in excess of 30,000 acres per state encouraged settlement.

  - Interstate mail services, federal support for Wells Fargo and below cost land deals for railroads connected farmers to eastern markets.
Settling the West

Three key causes of settlement:

1. Discovery of gold
2. Development of the Cattle Industry
3. Building of the transcontinental railroads.
Settling the West

Existing states as of 1857
New states added, 1858–1876, with dates of admission to Union
Territories as of 1876, with dates of admission to statehood
State and territorial capitals
Settlers Push Westward

- Discovery of silver and gold is what attracted many settlers to the West.
  - Comstock Lode, Black Hills
- Actual chances of striking it rich were low
  - (Ratio)100,000 who headed for the Alaskan gold strike - only 200 became rich or 1 in 500
- Gold strike in Sutter’s Fort in 1848 led to over 80,000 Americans moving to San Francisco by the end of 1849
Homesteaders and Exodusters

- Benjamin “Pap” Singleton - helped organize the great Exodus of 1879 for southern blacks. (Exodusters)

- Movement to the West was viewed by blacks as an opportunity for landownership and true democracy.

- Disenfranchised often lower class whites moved West via homesteads offered by the government or railroad companies.

- Few ever owned enough land to be profitable farmers.

- Almost all midwest settlement determined by railroad companies.
Oklahoma 1889 - a one day land rush where settlers were allowed to claim free land in Oklahoma gave away 2 million acres.

Some people claimed land sooner than they were supposed to. Therefore, Oklahoma became known as the Sooner State.
Oklahoma Land Rush
Cattle becomes big business

Demand for beef increased after the Civil War because more people were moving to cities.

The cattle industry grew as railroads allowed easier transportation to the cities.

Cattle drives were often dangerous and costly - bad weather, flooded rivers, long distances.

Over 20 mil. heads of cattle moved from TX to Dodge City Kansas from 1866-1900.
**Mythical Cowboy**

**Frederick Remington:** painter and sculptor made famous the cowboy image

White male

Riding horses on open range

Battling indians and bad guys

Life of adventure and unstructured

Cowboys called cowpoke or cowhand.

Long drives from TX to KS or MO
Reality of Cowboy Life

12% Mexican
25% African American
Long 12-14 hour work days
Often structured work
Law often dictated by government appointed Marshals
End of the Open Range

Cowboys disappeared as quickly as they appeared.

Barbed wire made it possible to retain cattle with fewer workers.

Joseph Glidden, 1874

Increased railways made cattle drives shorter.
Decline of the farm community

The growth of industry led to ‘bonanza’ farms or large-scale farms dedicated to single crop mass production.

Coupled with increasing efficiency of agriculture - prices drop leaving many new farmers in debt.

Additionally, to keep up, many small farmers invested large sums of money in machinery - which created a cycle of indebtedness to eastern banks.

Transportation costs were wholly determined by the railroad company and often too expensive for most farmers.
Turner proposed that American character had been greatly enhanced and shaped by the presence of a vast frontier.

I. Population mobility - II. Inventiveness - III. Wastefulness and IV. Democratic spirit

“The forging of the unique and rugged American identity occurred at the juncture between the civilization of settlement and the savagery of wilderness. The spirit and success of America is directly tied to the westward expansion” - Frederick Jackson Turner 1895

According to Turner, America’s character would gradually change with the closing of the frontier and the growth of urban environments.
Pattern of Indian Relations

- Bureau of Indian Affairs administers government relationships with tribes
- Forced “concentration” onto reservations

Three key stages:
1. Removal (West of Mississippi 1830s-40s)
2. Concentration (1860s-1880s) led to
   a. Indian Wars
   b. Reservation system
Family Life - native americans on the plains lived in small extended family groups.

No one person was allowed to dominate the group.

Tribes ruled by counsels.

Land was shared - not owned.
A mountain of buffalo skulls
Government Restricts Native Americans

1834 - Great Plains region was designated for Native Americans - per Andrew Jackson

1850s - Indians forced to sign more restrictive land treaties

As Indians are restricted, they naturally fight back
Native American Battles

Massacre at Sand Creek, 1864 (Colo.)

Fetterman Massacre, 1866 led to Treaty of Fort Laramie

Red River War, TX 1874-1875
Native American Battles

Gold Rush in Black Hills 1874
Custer’s Last Stand 1876
Battle of Wounded Knee - Dec 28, 1890
Buffalo Soldiers

A segregated unit of soldiers that were seen as unfit for combat in the Civil War but still employed by the Union army

Included both African and Native Amer.

Served a variety of purposes in the Indian Wars - worked for less money, with poor equipment.

Persevered despite systemic racism and prejudice.
Battle of Little Big Horn

June 25, 1876

Custer leads 264 soldiers in an attack against a Sioux village near the Black Hills River.

Believed the village to contain 48 warriors

Reality was 2500

“Custer’s Last Stand” utilized as propaganda against Na. Amer
American attitudes towards Native Americans

“The only good indian is a dead indian” - W. Sherman

forced assimilation - gov’t policy under which Native Americans would give up their beliefs and way of life and become part of the white culture

In 1867, the US government adopted a reservation policy placing Indians in the Black Hills, Southwest and Oklahoma.

Dawes Act 1887 - broke up existing reservations into smaller land tracts. The government sold the remaining land with the intent to use the money to “educate” the Indians.
Indian redistricting resulting from the Dawes Act
American attitudes towards Native Americans

**Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show**

Wild Bill Hickok and Texas Jack Omohundro started in 1873.

Annie Oakley and Sitting Bull also joined.

Battle Re-enactments and shows for those in the cities.

Fed the cowboy/indian mythology of the west

**Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor, 1881***

Was published to speak against the **1871 Indians Appropriations Act** which nationally made all indians wards (children) of the federal government.

Book was meant to “redeem the name of the United States from a century of dishonor.”
End of an Era

Battle of Wounded Knee, 1890
- 350+ starving and freezing Sioux were rounded up by American troops and killed. Ended the era of Indian Wars
- Mass graves
- Myth of Sitting Bull’s horse
- Death of Sitting Bull is often the noted end date of the ‘Open West’ 1865-1890