Chapter 16: Societies of the Far West
Objectives: Societies of the Far West

- We will study the various diverse ethnic settlers who came to settle the American West.
- We will study the transformation of the Far West from a sparsely populated region of Indians into a part of the nation's capitalistic economy.
“For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” Romans 13:9-10
By the Mid-1840s, Migrants from the Eastern Regions of the United States had settled in the West in substantial numbers.

Farmers, ranchers, and miners all found opportunity in the western lands.
THE SOCIETIES OF THE FAR WEST:

- The west was extensively populated land with a number of well-developed societies and cultures.
- This was contrary to popular perception.
- Indians, Mexicans, French and British Canadians, Asians and others had been living in the West for generations.
Anglo American settlers helped create new civilizations in this vast land, but they did not do so by themselves.
The western tribes developed several forms of civilization.

More than 300,000 Indians (among them the Serrano, Chumash, Pomo, Maidu, Yurok, and Chinook) had lived on the Pacific Coast before the arrival of Spanish settlers.
Disease and dislocation decimated the tribes:

- The Most widespread presence in the West was the Plain’s Indians.
- A diverse group of tribes and language groups.
- Some tribes formed alliances with one another; others were in constant conflict.
- Some lived more or less sedentary lives as farmers.
- Others were highly nomadic hunters.
Despite their differences, the tribes share some traits.

Their cultures were based on close and extended family networks and on an intimate relationship with nature.

Many of the Plains tribes including some of the most powerful tribes including the Sioux Nation subsisted largely through hunting buffalo.
Disease and dislocation decimated the tribes:

- The buffalo or bison provided the economic basis for the Plains Indians’ way of life.
- Its flesh was their principal source of food and its skin supplied materials for clothing, shoes, tepees, blankets, robes, and utensils.
- Buffalo Chips or dried manure provided fuel.
- Buffalo bones became knives and arrow tips
- Buffalo tendons formed the strings of bows.
Disease and dislocation decimated the tribes:

- The Plains Indians were formidable warriors but could not unite against white aggression.
- However by the nineteenth Century the Sioux, Arapaho, and Cheyenne had forged a powerful alliance that dominated the northern plains.
- However they were vulnerable to infectious diseases from the east such as smallpox epidemic.
- Smallpox decimated the Pawnees in Nebraska in the 1840s and many of the California tribes in the early 1850s.
The Far West had been first part of the Spanish Empire and later the Mexican Republic.

The U.S. acquired these lands in the 1840s, considerable number of Mexicans lived there and suddenly became residents of the American territory and most stayed.
Hispanic New Mexico:

- Spanish speaking communities were scattered throughout the Southwest, from Texas and California.
- All of them were transformed with the arrival of Anglo American migrants.
The American Capitalist Economy also expanded to the region.

Some Spanish residents gained greater wealth but for most, it meant an end to the communal societies and economies they had built over many generations.
Hispanic New Mexico:

- In New Mexico centers of Spanish-speaking society were the farming and trading communities the Spanish had established in the seventeenth century.
- There was a small aristocracy of great landowners where a large population of peasants worked on the great estates that were able to eke out a living.
- And Indians, some enslaved and indentured also worked the land.
When the U.S. acquired title to New Mexico in the aftermath of the Mexican War;

General Stephen Kearny who commanded the American troops in the region.

Kearny tried to establish a territorial government that excluded the established Mexican ruling class, the aristocratic landowners and influential priests.

Kearny bypassed the ruling class and gave the power to Anglo American settlers.
There was widespread fear between both the Indians and Hispanics that the new American rulers of the region would confiscate their land and otherwise threaten their societies.

In 1847 Taos Indians rebelled; they killed the new governor and other Anglo American officials before being subdued by the U.S. Army.
New Mexico remained under military rule for three years until the U.S. finally organized a territorial government in 1850.

By the 1870s the government of New Mexico dominated by one of the most notorious of many territorial rings that sprang up in the West in the years before statehood.

These were circles of local Anglo businesspeople and ambitious politicians with access to federal money who worked together to make the territorial government mutually powerful.
Hispanic New Mexico:

- This caused the Old Hispanic Elite in New Mexico to lose much of its political and economic authority.
- Even without its former power and despite the expansion of Anglo-American settlement, Hispanic society in New Mexico survived and grew.
- The U.S. Army did what Hispanic residents were unable to do, it broke the power of the Navajo, Apache, and other tribes that had so often harassed residents of New Mexico.
Hispanic New Mexico:

- The defeat of the tribes led to the substantial Hispanic migration into other areas of the Southwest, and as far north as Colorado.
- Most involved peasants and small tradespeople who were looking for land or new opportunities for commerce.
Hispanic New Mexico:

- Mexican Americans in the region sought to preserve control of their society, but with the railroads establishing came new extensive ranch farming.
- Anglo Americans were entrenched as the ruling class and now Mexicans were subordinate to them.
In California, Spanish settlement began in the eighteenth century with a string of Christian missions along the Pacific Coast.

The Missionaries and soldiers who accomplished them gathered most of the costal Indians into their communities, some forcibly and some by persuasion.
Many Indians were baptized and also became a labor force for the largely self-sufficient economies of the missionaries.

In the 1830s, the new Mexican government began reducing the power of the church and the mission collapsed.

A secular Mexican aristocracy emerged.

The arrival of Anglo Americans before and after the Civil War became disastrous.
Hispanic California and Texas:

- There were so many English immigrants pouring into the region that the Mexicans living in the region had little power to resist them.

- English speaking prospectors organized to exclude Californios (Hispanic residents in the state) some violently from the mines during the gold rush.

- Some Californions lost their lands either through corrupt business deals or through outright seizure.
Hispanic California and Texas:

- Texas suffered the same fate.
- The late nineteenth century saw the destruction of Mexican American authority in a region they had long considered their own.
- And it saw the movement of large numbers of Hispanics both long time residents of the West and most recent immigrants into an impoverished working class serving the expanding capitalist economy of the United States.
The ambitious or impoverished Europeans were crossing the Atlantic in search of opportunities of the New World, many Chinese crossed the Pacific in hopes of better lives than they could expect in their own impoverished land.
The Chinese Migration:

- Migrants from China moved to the U.S., Hawaii, Australia, South and Central America, South Africa, and even the Caribbean, some as “coolies” indentured servants whose conditions was close to slavery.
The Chinese Migration:

- A few Chinese had come to California even after the gold rush but after 1848, the flow increased dramatically.
- By 1880, more than 200,000 Chinese had settled in the U.S. mostly in California where they constituted nearly a tenth of the population.
The Chinese Migration:

- Almost all came as free laborers.
- Initially, Americans welcomed the Chinese as a hard working people, and even the governor of California called for more Chinese immigrants to come to fill the inadequate labor force.
- Very quickly this opinion changed and white opinion turned hostile.
- In part because Chinese were so industrious and successful that some white Americans began considering them rivals, even threats.
The Chinese Migration:

- In the 1850s large number of Chinese immigrants worked in the gold mines and for a time enjoyed considerable success.
- But this ended when a series of laws passed by the California legislature began trying to exclude the Chinese from gold mining by enacting taxes on the Chinese.
The Chinese Migration:

- This drove them out of the mines, and as mining declined as a source of wealth and jobs for the Chinese, railroad employment grew.
- Chinese found work building the transcontinental railroad where the workers formed 90 percent of the labor force of the Central Pacific and were responsible for construction of the western part of the railroad.
The Chinese Migration:

- The company preferred them to white workers because they had no experience of labor organization.
- They worked hard, made few demands and accepted relatively low wages.
- Many railroad workers were recruited in China by agents from the Central Pacific.
- Once employed, they were organized into work gangs under Chinese supervisors.
The Chinese Migration:

- It was dangerous work with brutal conditions.
- Some even went on strike but pressure from the company caused them to return to their jobs.
- In 1869, transcontinental railroad was completed.
- Thousands of Chinese were now out of work.
- Many went to agriculture.
- Some were able to acquire land.
- Some hired themselves to the drainage and irrigation projects of the central valley.
The Chinese Migration:

- Increasingly, Chinese immigrants flocked to cities.
- By 1900, nearly half the Chinese population of California lived in urban areas.
The Chinese Migration:

- By the largest single Chinese community was in San Francisco.
- Much of the community life there and in other “Chinatowns” throughout the West, revolved around powerful organizations, usually formed by people from a single clan or community in China.
- They functioned as something like benevolent societies and filled many of the roles that political machines served in immigrant communities in eastern cities.
The Chinese Migration:

- They were often led by prominent merchants.
- Other Chinese organizations were secret societies known as "tongs."
- Some of the tongs were violent criminal organizations involved in the opium trade and prostitution.
- Few people outside the Chinese Communities were aware of their existence, except when rival Tongs engaged in violent conflict or Tong wars occurred frequently in San Francisco in the 1880s.
The Chinese Migration:

- In the cities, the Chinese usually occupied the lower jobs such as common laborers, servants, and unskilled factory hands.
- Some established their own small businesses especially laundries.
- They moved into this business not because of experience, but it was easy to enter into and required only limited English.
The Chinese Migration:

- Chinese women who migrated to California suffered worse.
- The earliest migration to California saw all the women who came to California sold into prostitution.
- As late as 1880, nearly half the Chinese women in California were prostitutes.
The Chinese Migration:

- But efforts of both Chinese and Anglo reformers tried to stamp out prostitution in the 1890s.
- But more effective was the growing number of Chinese women in America that balanced the gender ratio and Chinese men were more likely to seek companionship in families.
As Chinese communities grew larger and more conspicuous in western cities, anti-Chinese sentiment among white residents became increasingly strong.

Anti-coolie clubs emerged in the 1860s and 1870s.

They sought a ban of employing Chinese and organized boycotts of products made with Chinese labor.

Anti-Chinese Sentiments:
Anti-Chinese Sentiments:

- There was growing political pressure and violence toward Chinese throughout the Pacific coast.
- Chinese were not only seen as an economic threat but also as savage and not able to assimilate to American culture.
Anti-Chinese Sentiments:

- In 1882, Congress responded to the political pressure and the growing violence by passing the Chinese Exclusion Act.
- This Act banned Chinese immigration into the United States for ten years, and barred Chinese already in the country from becoming naturalized citizens.
Anti-Chinese Sentiments:

- It also reflected the growing fear of unemployment and labor unrest throughout the nation and the belief that excluding an industrial army of Asiatic laborers would protect American workers.

- Congress made the law permanent in 1902 that caused the dramatic decrease of Chinese immigrants.
Migration From the East:

- After the Civil War settlers came in the millions throughout the vast western territories.
- Foreign born immigrants from Europe: Scandinavians, Germans, Irish and Russians contributed to the boom.
- Vast farmlands, gold and silver deposits and the transcontinental railroad line in 1869 all contributed to the expansion.
The land policies of the federal government also encouraged settlement.

The Homestead Act of 1862 permitted settlers to buy plots of 160 acres for a small fee if they occupied the land they purchased for five years and improved it.
Migration From the East:

- It would be a form of government relief to people who otherwise might have no prospects.
- And it would help create new markets and new outposts of commercial agriculture for the nation’s growing economy.
Migration From the East:

- However the law had some flaws. 160 acres in the West was too small for grazing and grain farming in places like the Great Plains.
- Farming became more expensive because of mechanization.
- Some were unable to cope with the harsh conditions of the Great Plains.
Migration From the East:

- Congress hearing the pleas for help from westerners increased the homestead allotments.
- The Timber Culture Act (1873) permitted the homesteaders to receive grants of 160 additional acres if they planted 40 acres of trees on them.
Migration From the East:

- With western expansion brought forth statehood for a number of territories.
- Nevada (1864), Nebraska (1867), Colorado (1876), North and South Dakota, Montana, Washington, Wyoming, and Utah reached statehood when its Mormon leaders assured congress that they would outlaw polygamy.
Arizona and New Mexico were excluded because their scanty white populations remained minorities in the territories, because their politics were predominately Democratic in a Republican era.

And because they were unwilling to accept admission as a single state.