

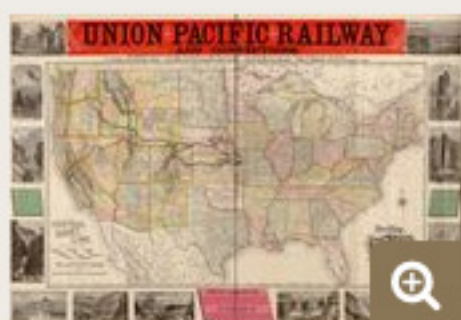
Developing and Settling in the American West

Creator: American Social History Project

Date: 2015

Source type: Historical Essay (secondary)

Introduction: This essay, written by historians, describes how railroad companies and farmers benefited from congressional land **distribution** acts and developed large portions of the American West.



The **distribution** of western land by federal, state, and local governments was one of the most important events in the economic development of the American West. After the Civil War, Congress, **state legislatures**, and **town councils** gave around 180 million free acres to railroad companies like the Union Pacific Railroad to develop **transcontinental** railroad systems. This free land—equal in size to Texas and Oklahoma combined—allowed railroad companies to reduce their costs. Once built, the railroads were the main method of transporting goods and people throughout the American West. With full control of the West’s major form of transportation, railroad companies earned **massive profits**.

Small portions of government land also went to **pioneering** family farmers, who either purchased the land directly from the government or from the railroad companies. Railroad companies offered cheap land to Americans and encouraged them to move west. From 1860 to 1890, over 2.5 million Americans **migrated** westward, turning thousands of acres of land into **homesteads** and settling towns. Most of these farmers depended on the railroad to ship the **crops** they harvested to faraway customers.

By creating a transportation system that stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts, railroad companies made it possible for **crops** and products to travel across the country more quickly than they ever had before. For instance, before the development of railroads in the American West, moving one ton of **cargo** from New York to San Francisco took four weeks and cost 30 cents per mile. The same trip on a **transcontinental** railroad took less than one week and cost 2 cents per mile. This increase in **efficiency** created more opportunities to buy and sell goods and led to greater profits for farmers, businesses, and railroad companies.

This dramatic improvement in shipping speed and cost helped the economy to grow and connect Americans on both coasts in ways unimaginable before the development of the railroad. As travel author Samuel Bowles wrote in 1869, “The Railroad is the **chord** along whose quick lines moves...our New West. It **puts the great sections of the Nation into sympathy and unity**, and it **determines** the future of America as the first nation of the world in **commerce**.”

Image Source: Library of Congress. (1833). *New Map of the Union Pacific Railway, The Short, Quick and Safe Line to All Points West*, Rand McNally and Company

Agricultural Impact of the Railroads

Creator: American Social History Project, City University of New York

Date: 2015

Source type: Chart

Introduction: Land grants made it possible for settlers to buy large plots of land to develop farms and grow crops. The railroads made settling the West easier and allowed farmers to ship their crops throughout the country.

Agricultural Growth in California in the Years After Completion of the Transcontinental Railroad

Year	Bushels of Wheat	Bushels of Corn	Cattle
1872	887,790	7,883	15,468
1879	2,308,526	212,004	24,140

Show Transcript +

Economic Impact of the Railroads

Creator: American Social History Project

Source type: Chart

Introduction: The ten years following the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 saw increased economic growth for portions of the country. Railroads saved American farmers and businesses money by allowing them to transport more goods in less time throughout the American West, increasing the region's **income**. The Union Pacific Railroad benefitted from this increased **income** because it controlled rail travel and shipping prices and the land around the railroad.

Economic Impact of the Railroads

Year	Increased income in western states due to the Union Pacific Railroad	Union Pacific Railroad Income
1872	\$7,810,000	\$3,670,000
1879	\$14,650,000	\$10,730,000

Show Transcript +

The Iron Horse and The Buffalo

Creator: American Social History Project

Date: 2015

Source type: Historical Essay

Introduction: This essay, written by historians, describes how the **slaughter** of buffalo by settlers—made possible by the growth of the railroad—was a **devastating** event for American Indians that destroyed their way of life and ultimately forced them from their lands.



Railroads transformed the West and forever changed the lives of Native Americans. After the **completion** of the **transcontinental** railroad in 1869, railroads carried farmers and **ranchers** who settled on the **Great Plains**, soldiers who fought in the **Plains Wars**, and hunters who killed buffalo for sport and profit. The farmers, **ranchers**, soldiers, and buffalo hunters, together with businessmen who came to develop the West's **mineral and lumber resources**, spelled destruction for the **Plains Indians** and their way of life.

The policy of Indian removal succeeded in part because of **superior** U.S. military force. But just as **crucial** was the nearly complete destruction of the West's buffalo **herds**. Central to the religion, culture, and **sustenance** of Great Plains tribes, the buffalo served many purposes. Native Americans used its meat for food and its **hides** to create clothing and shelter. By the 1880s, the buffalo was near **extinction**. In less than 30 years, the buffalo population dropped from an estimated 30 million to less than 1,000. Powerful railroad **locomotives**, or iron horses as some Indians called them, now rode the Plains where buffalo once roamed.

The railroads contributed to the destruction of the buffalo **herds** in two significant ways. Railroad companies organized buffalo hunts as vacations for eastern sportsmen. In just two years, from 1872 to 1874, hunters using high-powered rifles with **telescopic scopes**, some never leaving the comfort of their railroad cars, **slaughtered** 3,550,000 buffalo. Approving of these hunting trips, General Phil Sheridan of the U.S. Army said that hunters should be allowed to: "kill, skin, and sell until the buffalo is **exterminated**, as it is the only way to bring lasting peace and allow civilization to advance." Railroads also transported the buffalo **carcasses** back to eastern **industrial centers**, where their meat was sold in markets and factories turned their **hides** into leather and their bones into household items like glue and ink.

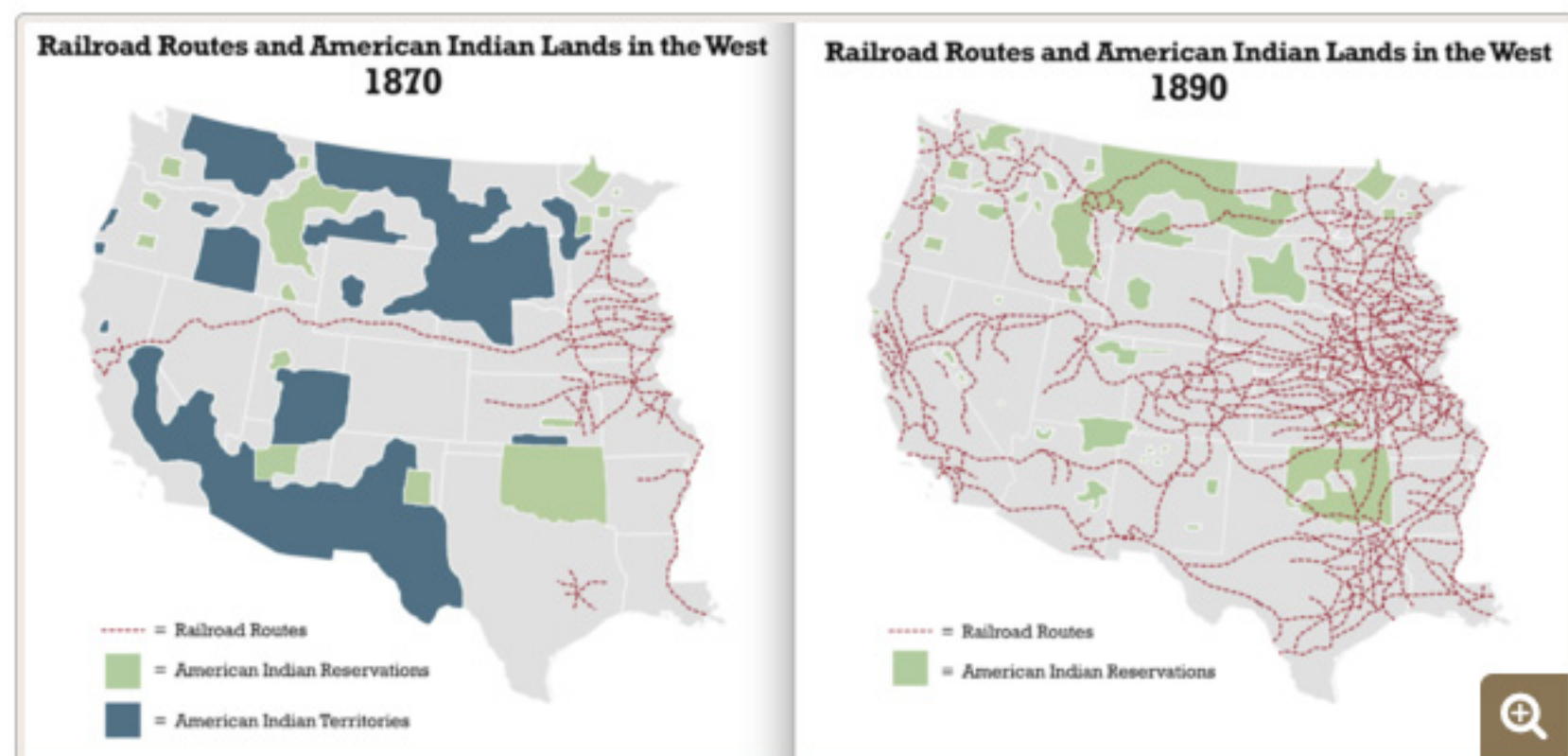
With the removal of the buffalo from the landscape of the American West, a central source of food, clothing, and shelter for Plains Indian tribes was destroyed. In 1874, General Sheridan explained that the buffalo hunters, who were responsible for the near **extermination** of the **species**, "have done more in the last two years, and will do more in the next year, to settle the **vexed** Indian question [removing tribes to reservations] than the entire regular army has done in the last thirty years."

Image Source: Frank Leslie. (1883). Shall the Buffalo Go? — **Slaughtered** for a Pastime, *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*. January-June. Frank Leslie Publishing House.

Railroad Routes and American Indian Lands in the West 1870-1890

Source type: Map

Introduction: These two maps represent the loss of American Indian lands from 1870 (a year after the completion of the first transcontinental railroad) to 1890. Settlers developed farms, towns, and even some cities near the railroad tracks with lands given to them by the U.S. government.



Two maps show changes in railroad routes and American Indian lands in the American West between 1870 and 1890. The 1870 map shows a few railroad routes west of the Mississippi River, and only one railroad line reaching the west coast, threading between many large Indian **territories**, and a few Indian **reservations**. The 1890 map shows vastly more railroad routes west of the Mississippi, and many routes to the west coast, traversing what were once Indian lands. The large Indian Territories of the southwest and upper plains are gone; what remain are about two dozen Indian Reservations.