

# 3 Life in the West

## TERMS & NAMES

homestead

Mexicano

William “Buffalo  
Bill” Cody

buffalo soldier

## MAIN IDEA

Diverse groups of people helped to shape both the reality and the myth of the West.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The myth of the West continues to be a part of our culture.

## ONE AMERICAN’S STORY

Abigail Scott was born in Illinois in 1834. She was told that her mother remarked at the time, “Poor baby! She’ll be a woman some day! . . . A woman’s lot is so hard!” At 17, Abigail moved to Oregon by wagon train with her family. Her mother died on the journey. In Oregon, Abigail taught school until she married a farmer named Benjamin Duniway in 1853. When he was disabled in an accident, Abigail assumed the support of her family. She wrote about a day on a pioneer farm with its endless chores.

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

[W]ashing, scrubbing, churning . . . preparing . . . meals in our lean-to kitchen . . . [having] to bake and clean and stew and fry; to be in short, a general pioneer drudge, with never a penny of my own, was not pleasant business.

Abigail Scott Duniway, in her autobiography, *Path Breaking*

Later, Duniway grew committed to the cause of women’s rights. In 1871, she started a weekly pro-suffrage newspaper. Two years later, she founded the Oregon Equal Suffrage Association.

Oregon honored Duniway for her part in the suffrage struggle by registering her as the state’s first woman voter. As you will read in this section, women like Duniway helped to shape the West.



Like Abigail Scott Duniway, this pioneer woman worked long and hard. She is shown here with buffalo chips she has collected on the treeless prairie to use as fuel.

## Women in the West

Women often were not given recognition for their efforts to turn scattered Western farms and ranches into settled communities. In their letters and diaries, many women recorded the harshness of pioneer life. Others talked about the loneliness. While men went to town for supplies or did farm chores with other men, women rarely saw their neighbors. Mari Sandoz lived in Nebraska on a **homestead**, a piece of land and the house on it. She wrote that women “had only the wind and the cold and the problems of clothing [and] shelter.” Living miles from others, women were their family’s doctors—setting broken bones and delivering babies—as well as cooks.



Despite its challenges, Western life provided opportunities for women. Most who worked held traditional jobs. They were teachers or servants or gave their families financial support by taking in sewing or laundry. However, a few became sheriffs, gamblers, and even outlaws. In mining camps and cow towns, some even ran dance halls and boarding houses.

Western lawmakers recognized the contributions women made to Western settlement by giving them more legal rights than women had in the East. In most territories, women could own property and control their own money. In 1869, Wyoming Territory led the nation in giving women the vote. Esther Morris, who headed the suffrage fight there, convinced lawmakers women would bring law and order to the territory.

When Wyoming sought statehood in 1890, many in Congress demanded that the state repeal its woman suffrage law. But Wyoming lawmakers stood firm. They told Washington, “We may stay out of the Union for 100 years, but we will come in with our women.” Congress backed down. By 1900, women had also won the right to vote in Colorado, Utah, and Idaho.

### ReadingHistory

#### A. Making

**Inferences** Why were women in the West the first to win the right to vote?

## The Rise of Western Cities

Cities seemed to grow overnight in the West. Gold and silver strikes made instant cities of places like Denver in Colorado Territory and brought new life to sleepy towns like San Francisco in California. These cities prospered, while much of the area around them remained barely settled. San Francisco grew from a small town to a city of about 25,000 in just one year after the 1849 gold rush.

Miners who flocked to the “Pikes Peak” gold rush of 1859 stopped first in Denver to buy supplies. Not even a town in 1857, Denver was the capital of Colorado Territory by 1867. A decade later, it became the state capital when Colorado was admitted into the Union. The decision by Denver citizens to build a railroad to link their city with the transcontinental railroad sent population soaring. In 1870, it had about 4,800 residents. In 1890, it had nearly 107,000.

The railroads also brought rapid growth to other towns in the West. Omaha, Nebraska, flourished as a meat-processing center for cattle ranches in the area. Portland, Oregon, became a regional

### Population of Western Cities

CITY	1860	1890
Denver	2,603*	106,713
Omaha	1,883	140,452
Portland	2,874	46,385
San Francisco	56,802	298,997

#### SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Charts

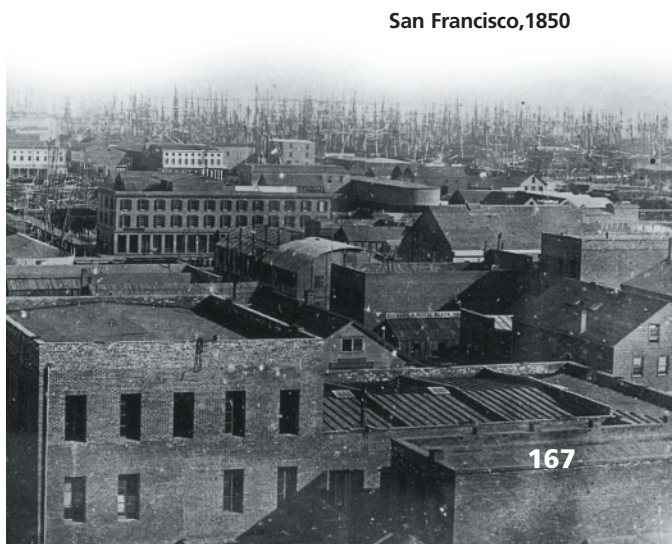
Which city had the largest increase in numbers of people, 1860–1890?

\*1861 Territorial Census

Sources: *Population Abstract of the United States*; *Colorado Republic*



San Francisco, 1847



San Francisco, 1850

## Legends of the Old West

### "Billy the Kid"

(Henry McCarty, 1859–1881)

He was an outlaw and hired gun who called himself William Bonney and was killed at 21.



### ▲ Wyatt Earp

(1848–1929)

He was a frontier peace officer, gunfighter, and gambler in towns such as Dodge City, Kansas, and Tombstone, Arizona.



### ◀ "Calamity Jane"

(Martha Jane Canary, c. 1852–1903)

She had a legendary career as a wagon driver, scout, and Wild West Show performer.

market for fish, grain, and lumber. While these cities were growing on the Great Plains and Pacific coast, the Southwest was also developing.

## Mexicanos in the Southwest

The Southwest included what are now New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, and California. For centuries, it had been home to people of Spanish descent whose ancestors had come from Mexico. These Spanish-speaking southwesterners called themselves **Mexicanos**.

In the 1840s, the annexation of Texas and Mexico's defeat in the Mexican War brought much of the Southwest under the control of the United States. Soon after, English-speaking white settlers—called Anglos by the Mexicanos—began arriving. These pioneers were attracted to the Southwest by opportunities in ranching, farming, and mining. Their numbers grew in the 1880s and 1890s, as railroads connected the region with the rest of the country.

As American settlers crowded into the Southwest, the Mexicanos lost economic and political power. Many also lost land. They claimed their land through grants from Spain and Mexico. But American courts did not usually recognize these grants. One Mexicano remarked that "the North Americans . . . consider us unworthy to form with them one nation and one society." Only in New Mexico Territory did Hispanic society survive despite Anglo-American settlement.

## The Myth of the Old West

America's love affair with the West began just as the cowboy way of life was vanishing in the late 1800s. To most Americans, the West had become a larger-than-life place where brave men and women tested themselves against hazards of all kinds and won. Easterners eagerly bought "dime novels" filled with tales of daring adventures. Sometimes the hero was a real person like Wyatt Earp or "Calamity Jane." But the plots were fiction or exaggerated accounts of real-life incidents.

Also adding to the myth were more serious works of fiction, like Owen Wister's bestselling novel about Wyoming cowhands, *The Virginian* (1902). Such works showed little of the drabness of daily life in the West. White settlers—miners, ranchers, farmers, cowhands, and law officers—played heroic roles not only in novels but also in plays and, later, in movies.

### ReadingHistory

**B. Summarizing**  
Who were the Mexicanos?

Native Americans generally appeared as villains. African Americans were not even mentioned.

**William “Buffalo Bill” Cody**, a buffalo hunter turned showman, brought the West to the rest of the world through his Wild West show. Cody recognized people’s fascination with the West. His show, with its reenactments of frontier life, played before enthusiastic audiences across the country and in Europe.

## The Real West

The myth of the Old West overlooked the contributions of many peoples. The first cowhands, as you read earlier, were the Mexican *vaqueros*. Native Americans and African Americans played a role in cattle ranching, too. Many African Americans also served in the U.S. Army in the West, where Native Americans nicknamed them “**buffalo soldiers**.” And the railroads would not have been built without the labor of Chinese immigrants.

Western legends often highlighted the attacks by Native Americans on soldiers or settlers. But the misunderstandings and broken treaties that led to the conflicts were usually overlooked.

Historians also say that the image of the self-reliant Westerner who tames the wild frontier ignores the important role played by the government in Western settlement. Settlers needed the help of the army to remove Native Americans. The government also aided in the building of the railroads and gave the free land that drew homesteaders to the West. You will read about these homesteaders and the problems that they faced in the next section.

### Background

From 1866 to 1898, some 12,500 African Americans served in the West in the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry regiments.

### ReadingHistory

#### C. Comparing

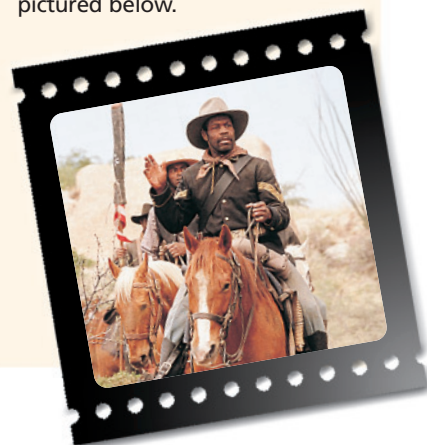
How does the real West compare to the myth of the West?

## Now and then

### THE WEST IN POPULAR CULTURE

The distorted picture of life in the West that had been part of popular culture for decades eventually changed. Starting in the late 1970s, the view became more realistic, especially in motion pictures.

For example, the hardships of the cattle drives were shown in *Lonesome Dove* (1989). The sufferings of Native Americans were portrayed in *Dances With Wolves* (1990). The role of women in the West was dramatized in *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (1991). And the contributions of African Americans were noted in *Buffalo Soldiers* (1997), pictured below.



## Section 3 Assessment

### 1. Terms & Names

#### Explain the significance of:

- homestead
- Mexicano
- William “Buffalo Bill” Cody
- buffalo soldier

### 2. Taking Notes

Use a chart to compare Wild West myths with the realities of Western life.

Myth	Real life

What do you think is the most well-known myth about the West?

### 3. Main Ideas

- How were women’s contributions to the West recognized by Western lawmakers?
- Which factors led to the growth of such Western cities as Denver, Omaha, and San Francisco?
- How did the arrival of Anglo-Americans change life for Spanish-speaking residents of the Southwest?

### 4. Critical Thinking

**Making Inferences** What changed the attitudes of Western lawmakers about giving women voting rights?

#### THINK ABOUT

- new roles for women
- need for stability in Western communities
- part played by women in settlement

### ACTIVITY OPTIONS

#### MATH SPEECH

Pick a Western city mentioned in this section. Create a **database** of information about the city or give a **short speech** describing its growth.