

Wild West



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I. Letter From the Chairs

Head Chair: Anushka Paul

Hi delegates! I'm Anushka Paul, and I will be your head chair for Wild West. I'm currently a junior at Foothill High School. This is my third year in MUN and my third time chairing! This committee is interesting and gives delegates a chance to be creative during the conference. Outside of MUN, I love basketball, going to the beach, reading, and spending time with my friends. I love learning about current events and chemistry. This topic has endless outcomes, and we're excited to see how chaotic and compelling the committee will be! If you have any questions, my email is anushka22paul@gmail.com.

Vice Chair: Harini Solaimalai

Hey delegates, I'm Harini Solaimalai, and I'm so excited to be your Vice Chair for the Wild West Committee at NorCal MUN III! I'm currently a sophomore at Foothill High School and joined MUN during my freshman year. This will be my first time chairing a committee. I joined MUN because I was drawn to the combination of creativity, debate, and overall individuality that each committee brings. In my free time, I'll be singing, writing stories, playing violin, composing music, or binge-watching dramas. I promise this committee will be special and memorable. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out at hsolaimalai@gmail.com. See you soon!

II. Topic Background

“The Wild West” is a term that describes the Old West during the late nineteenth century. Geographically, all states west of the Mississippi encompassed the Wild West. Pioneers and people of many walks of life pushed west to better their lives. Oftentimes, they were in search of gold and silver or escaping the law.

President Lincoln’s Homestead Act offered acres of free land to anyone who followed a few simple requirements. People saw opportunities and poured out into the west. Ranchers, farmers, and railroad workers mixed in with outlaws and lawmen, creating chaos. As people settled, towns and settlements grew rapidly, seeking order on the frontier. Boomtowns grew in places near important resources like mining or railroad stops. It was hard to maintain towns due to the quick use of resources and the lack of structure in towns.

In the California foothills, opportunities such as the Gold Rush led to rapid development. As towns were built around the Gold Rush, other settlers found opportunities to build their futures. The frontier faced challenges in all aspects of life: harsh weather, diseases, difficult journeys, and criminal activities.

The 1848 discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill resulted in thousands of settlers arriving in hopes of finding gold. By the early 1850s, these fortune-seekers were named “49ers,” individuals with no intention of settling down to build a long-term community. These travelers came from all over the world, some arriving from the eastern United States, and others from international countries such as China, South America, Mexico, and Europe. They desired to strike gold, make a substantial amount of money through it, and then return home to their families. Most of the settlers were younger, unmarried men. The average age of a gold miner in 1849 was between 18

and 25. In 1850, women made up only 8% of California's population. Men vastly outnumbered women.

The settlers often disrupted the residents. Many gold miners were known for being territorial, violent, and independent, hastily rushing to defend their claims. With little to no official legal infrastructure, gold miners created their own mining codes. These codes were often ad hoc rules by armed groups or minor courts. The doing-it-yourself justice opened the doors to vigilante behavior and constant territory feuds in the Wild West.

In 1850, cowboys were working-class laborers who moved cattle across the large, undeveloped land. At the time, many were Mexican vaqueros, Black cowhands, and Native Californians, whose methods originated from Spanish and Mexican culture and traditions. The tradition began under Spanish rule, when the missionaries trained Native Californians to herd cattle on large ranches. Then, after the U.S. annexation of California, these traditions merged with American practices. Cowboys utilized Spanish tools, including lassos, saddles, and spade bits.

The Gold Rush led to an increase in cattle as miners and expanding towns required more food. This led to the long-range transportation of cattle across valleys like the San Joaquin. In the Southwest, where new territory was acquired, cattle barons quickly began claiming the open range. Cowboys were hired to protect hers, protect the land, and fend off external forces. They were known for using violence and survival skills to avoid the shaky legal system of a newly annexed state. Cowboys became informal enforcers of property claims, hired by powerful ranch owners or emerging business figures. With knowledge of land, animals, violence, and tied to large ranching families, they became influential figures throughout the Wild West.

The federal government had not finished the transcontinental railroad by 1850. The Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads were constantly buying influence and labor. Since the Pacific Railway Act would not have passed until 1862, smaller railroad projects sprang up instead. Railroad companies operated with political and capital funding, utilizing Congress for grants and using corporate assistance to buy cheap land, identify routes, and push locals out, sometimes forcibly. This caused political conflict over where the overall route would be for the entire railroad. Foreign investors, especially from Britain, who had stakes in American railroads. The European capital also helped fund development and brought competing geopolitical interests and secret agendas. Most representatives varied from businessmen to spies, political operatives, or even saboteurs. Companies mostly hired private security, hinting at the blurred line between business and warfare.

The railroad workers were mostly Chinese immigrants who endured deadly tasks and harsh conditions for low pay. They were often known for blasting tunnels through the Sierra Nevada, a very high-stakes operation. Irish immigrants and war veterans were in charge of laying track, building bridges, and grading land. Workers struggled through long hours in dangerous conditions and were exposed to illness, dangerous terrain, and explosives. Companies viewed workers as expendable due to the abundance of laborers. Almost all railroad workers had no protection, no power, and no say in projects.

Criminal Activities and Conflicts

By the 1850s, formal law enforcement in the West was not common or reliable. Sheriffs were elected by townsfolk or other individuals with the most power/influence in a given settlement. Corruption was uncontrolled. Most sheriffs acted close to gang leaders who took bribes and supported certain groups over others.

Like many other places, San Francisco, a city in California, faced high crime rates formed by vigilante groups in attempts to bring justice where the government failed. These committees were groups of citizens who forcibly executed or exiled criminals, often with no legal trial. The groups claimed to restore order, but imposed their ideologies as a form of law that targeted immigrants or political enemies.

Deputies who were appointed were almost always friends or hired enforcers from the sheriff. Pay and threat defined which allegiance deputies were on. In the Wild West, many law enforcement officers had a high risk of becoming outlaws themselves. Between corrupt sheriffs, deputies, vigilante groups, and self-appointed marshals, the Wild West was constantly bombarded with tension, violence, and a power struggle.

In the Wild West, business tycoons who owned railroads, shipping routes, major cattle operations, and more were not looking to expand but instead to dominate the area. Having control over a railroad pass or mining area brought both wealth and political leverage. In order to change the law in their favor, capitalists used money to hire private enforcers and/or bought off local officials. If legal and financial pressure did not work, sabotage, pressure, and violence emerged. Merchants, settlers, and small business owners were forced to turn to unfavorable deals to survive.

While gold miners turned west to achieve a dream of riches and wealth, railroad workers worked to connect the continent. Though their objectives seemed different at first, competition for resources, power, and space sprang up as rapid expansion took place near railroad tracks. It was common for railroads to attempt to build through mining areas. While railroad expansion was a positive factor, it increased competition for gold even after bringing in supplies and trade.

Tensions could easily spring, especially in towns where miners and railroad workers fought for jobs, housing, and food.

There was only one question left: Who would rule the Wild West? And how? The authority in towns/territories could be from sheriffs, ranchers, merchants, governors, criminal groups, or even people who aren't what they seem. Alliances are frequently broken. Ladders could get people to follow them, from criminals to police officers backing them. The political void left by untouched resources, land, and unreliable law enforcement would take patience and strong backing in order to control. That is, if they could stay alive long enough.

III. Current Situation

People from diverse backgrounds rush west for new opportunities. The American West, stretching past the Mississippi, awaits, untamed. Anybody can stake their claim here. A group of settlers, all with different stories, arrive on the frontier looking to settle a new town. They arrive in the California foothills eager to begin their new lives. The area is ideal, with undeveloped land and potential resources surrounding the town. The settlers have been granted permission to make the town their own. They must create a strong foundation in order to grow and allow everybody to flourish. However, tensions can arise quickly as each person looks out for their interests. Disagreements over land ownership and the distribution of resources can create chaos and derail the future of the town and its settlers. With no enforcement of laws, disputes can often turn violent, questioning the legitimacy of the town. Other criminal activity on the frontier can make the surrounding area dangerous and not ideal to live in. Rapid depletion of resources can create a ghost town if settlers don't work together. To thrive in the wild west, pioneers must work together and move through conflict.

Throughout this committee, delegates must work through sudden conflicts, long-term problems, and personal agendas to establish a prosperous town in the wild west. Delegates are prompted to research several aspects of the Old West, including different lives in the West, economic opportunities, and criminal activity. As this is a specialized committee, there will be aspects of the general assembly and crisis tied in. This committee is a historical fiction, meaning it is the events are made up but set in the past. The situations and people are based on real events. Consider the different roles settlers will play in the committee. Focus on the correct region of the West to have the best understanding of the current situation. Stories and ideas should be creative

and authentic to history. Please research the time frame for the committee to stay historically accurate. Use the topic guide to understand the atmosphere.

IV. Character Bios

Sheriff Beauregard Flint

Taking the role of the law enforcer of the town. Tries his best to establish order as crime runs wild.

Marshal Clyde Hollister

A federal officer was sent to oversee the development and settlement of towns. Has certain powers above the locals; however, authority is difficult to keep.

Deputy Sadie McGraw

Works with the sheriff on smaller potential disputes in town. More friendly with other townspeople.

Cowboy Jake "Dusty" Boone

Works for a private ranch, herds and transports cattle across the area. He is known in town to be courageous and wild.

Rancher Elsie Callahan

Laid claim to land for a large cattle ranch operation. Respected and feared all over town.

Farmer Levi Brody

A hardworking settler trying to grow crops in harsh conditions. His goal is to provide for his family while fighting through pests, land disputes, and droughts.

Railman Hank Duval

One of the tough railroad workers who spends harsh days laying track, blasting through terrain. He is loyal to his crew and distrusts outsiders who can disturb the workers' progress.

Telegraph Operator Clara Rose

Transmits messages across large portions of land and connects the town. Known for quick wit, sharp observation, and detailed memory of everyone's business.

Saloon Owner Ruby Delaney

Runs one of the busiest spots in town, while her shop may seem like a normal saloon, deals, fights, and alliances are made. Smart and charming, knows how to utilize gossip.

Gambler Silas "Quickhand" Vane

The entertainer in town who loves to take chances. He has nomadic tendencies, moving between events and places in town.

Banker Thaddeus Wright

Manages the town's savings and loans, despite his secretive demeanor, Thaddeus is powerful. He favors certain settlers over others.

Blacksmith Amos Kline

A reliable person is essential for the betterment of the town. He creates and repairs materials for anyone in town.

Widow Maybelle Crane

Manages property and real estate all over town. Everyone in town sympathizes with her struggles with the loss of her husband.

Bartender Gus Tiller

Known for his drinks, but less known for his keen hearing behind the counter. Gus knows many secrets, but never shares his own.

Stagecoach Driver Molly Brinks

Delivers mail and passengers through the rough, dangerous trails. Molly Brinks is brave, skillful, and has seen more of the Wild West than most others.

Town Doctor Eli Mercer

Provides medical care for everyone in town. Smart and practical about town structure and calm under pressure.

Newspaper Editor Irene Hall

Knows everything goes around in town. Handles public information and makes the final decisions about the news that everyone in town sees.

Gunsmith Jasper Finn

Has an inventory of any weapons needed in town. Incredibly crafty, but everyone is a little intimidated by his intense attitude and energy.

Land Surveyor Milton Graves

Was sent to town to map the boundaries and help estimate the land value for real estate. Gets in the middle of many land disputes.

Cattle Driver Boone “Ridge” Carter

Works for the larger landowners, herding the cattle across the open land. Likes to observe and loves animals more than people.

Prospector Otis McGill

His motivations are solely for gold and wealth. He is very stubborn and works solely under contracts for money.

Restaurant Owner Lyle Brewster

The go-to place to eat in town is owned and run by him. He runs a tight ship, making sure everyone is fed and good profits are made. Everyone straightens up around him.

Schoolmarm Winifred Day

Educated, nurturing, and ordered by every kid in town. Outspoken on town matters, making others nervous.

General Store Owner Millie Hart

Millie Hart runs the town's only general store. She supplies everything from mining tools to daily necessities such as water and food. Known for her business instincts and inclusivity.

Judge Rufus Pike

A previous war veteran who works as a judge, Rufus Pike, follows the law and order only when it suits him. Accepting favors or looking the other way are common when it "suits the town."

Ranch Hand Cole Draven

Cole Draven works for some of the region's wealthiest ranchers. He stays quiet almost all of the time, while proving his loyalty time and time again.

Homesteader Annie Briggs

Anne Briggs traveled to the West on her own to claim land under the Homestead Act. She's determined to act alone. The homesteader has grit, weapons, and a hate for trespassers.

Auctioneer Billy Rawlins

Billy Rawlins can sell anything from a pile of dust to a blacksmith and still get richer. He hosts all the town auctions and makes them memorable, flashy, and complex. Secrets, land, and animals are up for sale.

Deputy Newt Crayton

Newly appointed Deputy Newt Crayton is idealistic, ambitious, young, and wants to prove himself in the Wild West. He believes in justice and wants to spread his ideologies over the lawless land.

Railroad Tycoon Silvester Crane

Silvester Crane owns a huge portion of the railroads and wants to extend his control over the entire Wild West. He is a man who will buy or get rid of anything he does not support.

*Note: If delegates need help understanding their characters, please email the chairs!

V. Questions to Consider

1. How should control and justice be established in town?
2. How should land ownership and mining disputes be settled?
3. How are gender roles and power dynamics shaping daily life?
4. How should people's general roles in town affect the dynamics and the growth of the town?
5. Is it necessary to follow a specific style of governmental organization for the success of the town?
6. Is it better to focus on short-term profit? Or long-term stability?
7. How can you help facilitate the steady growth of the frontier town?

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