

# 1. Early Settlement 1835-62

## Who were the Plains Indians

Many tribes, such as the Sioux, Pawnee and Comanche. Each tribe was divided into bands, who lived and hunted together. The buffalo were central to Indian way of life: food, materials eg skin for tipis (homes), different tools (eg bones for knives). Nomadic: moved around following herds of buffalo. **Spiritual beliefs:** land is sacred. It cannot be "owned", fanning/mining disrespectful to "mother earth"; all creatures have a spirit. Horses: skilled riders for hunting / fighting; Indians measured their wealth by how many horses they had. Warriors: fought other tribes to capture horses. Counting coup: touching an enemy (not killing) = victory



## American government policy towards Indians

White Americans thought Indians were savages; wasted the land by not "using it" for farming, etc. Thought they should either stay separate from Indians, or make them live more like white people.

**Permanent Indian Frontier (1834):** Indians forced to live West of Mississippi River, white traders banned from selling guns / alcohol to Indians.

In 1840s, US won war vs Mexico, so included lots of land in West. Indian land was in the middle of this. Government wanted people to travel west and settle; they had to travel along trails, across Indian land.

**Indian Appropriation Act (1851):** Indians paid by government to live on reservations. They were allowed to hunt in certain places, but government expected them to start farming.

## Early migration / settlement

**Manifest Destiny:** idea that it was white Americans' "destiny" to settle and own the west; felt it was their mission from God to civilise the Indians.

1837 financial crisis – people in East lost jobs / money. Opportunity for excellent farming land in West.

**Oregon Trail:** discovered 1825, first way to travel west with carts (through Rocky Mountains), 3,200km. Government made a map and guidebook to help migrants make the journey. 1836-69, 400,000 people travelled West along Oregon Trail.

**Gold Rush (1849):** gold found in California. 300,000 "prospectors" (gold hunters) travelled there in search of gold by 1849-55 (though v few successful). Towns, shops, saloons (bars) opened in mining towns, which were v lawless. Prospectors murdered some Indians to protect claims to land where there was gold.

Problems with migration:

Oxen (pulling carts) v slow, so journey took many months. Needed to carry lots of food. Had to get through mountains before winter, or would not survive. Feared attack by Indians, though this rarely happened. **Donner Party (1846):** 300 migrants tried a short cut, but this caused delays (poor river crossings, land hard to get cart along). Arrived in mountains in November. Only half survived the winter, by eating those who had died.



## Mormons

Religious group led by Joseph Smith. Pushed out of West, because people disliked the practice of polygamy (having multiple wives).

1845 Smith murdered. New leader Brigham Young ordered them to migrate to Great Salt Lake (outside of US territory).

Set up Winter Quarters, so survived winter of 1846. Advance Party of 150 worked out safe route and planted crops along the way.

1847-69 70,000 Mormons travelled along the Mormon Trail.

Young was an excellent leader: made sure they had people with all necessary skills to live successfully in Salt Lake Valley; irrigated land (to provide water for crops).

## Early settler farming

Early settlers did well in good farming land in Oregon and California.

1850s people began to settle on the Plains, but it was v challenging.

Problems: not much water for crops / livestock; few trees for building; v hot summer v cold winter (so crops died); soil too tough for most ploughs; prairie fires during hot dry summers

## Tension between settler and Indians

White settler and Indians rarely mixed, so didn't understand each other. Settlers felt superior to Indians and feared them, (sometimes got caught up in Indian Tribal wars) Migrants ate lots of buffalo, and caused stampedes, which made hunting harder. Migrants' oxen ate grass (so less for buffalo and Indians' horses). Migrants wanted protection, so government built forts along Oregon Trail.

## Fort Laramie Treaty (1851)

Government called council of Indians : wanted to stop Indians fighting, guarantee safe journey for migrants, make tribes live in fixed territories.

Government agreed to pay tribes \$50,000 per year and protect Indians from settlers.

Indians agreed to stop fighting, allow government to build roads / plan railroad through Indian land.

Treaty was first step towards forcing Indians to live on Reservations. Ended Permanent Indian Frontier (migrants travelled through Indian land). Payments changed Indian way of life, and made them dependent on the white Americans

But neither side stuck to the Treaty: Indians did not understand (or accept) what representatives had agreed (it was not their culture to make decisions this way), carried on fighting. White migrants trespassed on Indian land.



## Lawlessness

Massive population increase as a result of Gold Rush. California 1846: 8,000; 1855: 300,000.

## Problems in mining camps

(which appeared wherever gold was found): alcohol / prostitution; racism against migrants from other countries, particularly China; "claim jumping" prospectors tried to steal land which may have gold; v violent (everyone had a gun); v few law enforcement officials



## Attempts to tackle lawlessness:

Each territory had a US Marshall and 3 judges. Marshall could appoint deputies to help catch criminals. Each county elected a sheriff (who had no training, and often favoured friends in disputes).

Problems: territories were v large, so took long time for Marshall / sheriff to get to crime scene. Badly paid, so officials often corrupt.

Mining camps created their own courts to settle claim disputes.

Vigilance Committees: groups of men who took law into their own hands, capturing suspects and putting them on trial. But the trial was often v quick and unfair and suspects were "lynched" (executed). Vigilance Committees often abused power. Government was racist, so laws discriminated against Chinese, Indians and black Americans.

## Key terms

Claim – owning a piece of land to search for gold

Manifest Destiny – belief that it was white American's "destiny" to settle the West Migration – moving to a new place Oregon Trail – first trail to get wagon across the Great Plains and through the Rocky Mountains

Prospector – a person searching for gold Permanent Indian Frontier – line which separated white Americans from Indians Reservation – piece of land which Indians made to live on

Scalping – cutting off hair and scalp of defeated enemy as a trophy

Tipi – Indian home, made of buffalo skin.

## 2. Development of the Plains 1862-76

### Homestead Act (1862)

Government wanted to encourage people to settle the West. **Homestead Act** divided plots of land of 160 acre homesteads (big enough to support a family). It cost \$10 to "file a claim" to a homestead. If you could live there for 5 years, build a house and plant 5 acres of crops you could "prove up" (pay \$30 and own the land).



Success: by 1876 +80million acres of land had been settled; lots of the Great Plains settled; encouraged migration from abroad

Limitations: only 13m acres "proved up". 80m acres of land homesteaded; 45m acres given to railroad companies to sell; +100m acres sold to cattle ranchers; rich land owners managed to buy most of the land

### Challenges for homesteaders

Expensive to start out; difficult land / climate to farm; v isolated (distant from other homesteaders)

New inventions solved some of these problems: eg barbed wire for fencing in animals and stopping them eating crops; steel ploughs; wind pumps to draw water from deep wells; Turkey Red wheat (new crop which could grow well in Plains soil / climate)

Timber Culture Act (1873): family could claim another 160 acres if they agreed to plant 40 acres of trees (so more fuel and resources)

Railroad made life easier as travel was easier, towns emerged along the railroad = place to meet, buy supplies / tools

### The Railroad

Government wanted a Transcontinental Railroad (railway line) across the country to make migration easier, quicker and encourage settlement of the West. Fort Laramie Treaty (1851) Indians agreed to allow surveyors onto Indian land to plan railroad Building the railroad was v expensive, and Southern states were opposed (as it would disadvantage them). After Civil War government decided a route across the Great Plains to Sacramento in California.

Two companies were given the job of building the Railroad.

**Pacific Railroad Act (1862)** government took away rights of Indians to land along the route, loaned companies \$16,000 per mile of track; gave companies \$61m and 45m acres of government land which they could sell to pay for the construction of the railroad.

Railroad companies then tried to encourage people to settle the West. By 1880 railroad companies responsible for settling 200m acres of land.



### The American Civil War (1861-65)

Fight between North and South over slavery. 600,000 dead, North eventually won. After war government set about rebuilding the USA: slaves freed, rebuilding the South. Ex-soldiers, defeated southerners, freed slaves looking to make a new life in the West.

Southern states had opposed settling the West, Northern states encouraged it. When North won the Civil War they encouraged the building of the railroad, and homesteads

### Government policy towards the Indians

Government used army to move more Indians onto Reservations. White settler expansion and loss of buffalo meant many Indians had no choice. Government made promises they would be looked, but often not the case.

Reservations destroyed Indian way of life, could not hunt buffalo, removed from sacred land, often run by corrupt officials.

President Grant's Peace Policy (1868)

Aimed to stop conflict between Indians and army. Corrupt reservation officials replaced with fair religious people; Indian Ely Parker appointed Commissioner of Indian Affairs, \$2m to provide better care for Indians on reservations.

Indian Appropriation Act (1871) tribes no longer recognised as independent nations, made it easier for government to take Indian land

Second Fort Laramie Treaty (1868)

Because of Red Cloud's success (below) government agreed to close Bozeman Trail. Sioux agreed to move to reservation in Dakota (though some Indian chiefs like Sitting Bull who had fought opposed signing the treaty)

### The Cattle Industry

Texas left Mexico in 1836. Texan cowboys herded Texan Longhorn cattle along trails across the plains to sell in the North. But these cows carried a disease (Texas Fever), which killed other breeds of cow.

After the Civil War there was more demand for beef in the North (cow worth \$5 in Texas was worth \$40 in Chicago); but homesteaders didn't want these cows to cross their land.

**Abilene.** First "cow town" set up by Joseph McCoy. It was next to the railroad, so good transit point to drive cattle to along the Chisholm Trail (took approx. 3 months. Large stockyards built to house cattle. 1867-72, 3m cows driven to Abilene

**Goodnight Loving Trail (1866).** Route to drive cattle to sell to Cheyenne then on new towns in the West and for government to buy for Indians who were starving on reservations (because they couldn't hunt). Drive took 6 months.

**Cattle drives** often = 3,000 cattle, 12 cowboys (each with several horses). Led by trail boss (paid \$100 per month, others approx. \$25). Slept in the open, cows grazed in their morning then driven approx. 15 miles per day.

When they reached Abilene or other cow town, cowboys would be paid, get drunk then head back to Texas. Ranching on the **Open Range**. 1866 John Iliff used Homestead Act to gain 160,000 acres of land near Denver on the Great Plains. This meant he could fatten his cattle near to mining towns, without difficulty and expense of a long cattle drive.

Cattle industry was a great way to make money in the 1870s (low cost, high profit). Best way to make money was huge ranches and herds, so a small number of v powerful **cattle barons** dominated the industry. They controlled lots of land and local politics.

Cowboys on the ranches: little work in winter, in spring lots of cowboys needed to round up herd.



### Rivalry

#### Ranchers & homesteaders

Ranches were on public land. This could be sold to homesteaders, which ranchers obviously opposed. So ranchers bought bits of land which contained springs (so rest of land around could not be farmed); bought land from railroad companies; took poor homesteaders to court over claims, which they could not afford.

#### Indians & railroad

Land Grants to railroad companies took huge amount of Indian land; fences blocked buffalo / hunting; tribes in the way of the railroad forced onto reservations.

#### Indians & cattle industry

Cattle and buffalo competed for grass. 1860 130,000 cattle in the west; 1880 4.5m. Some Indians began to work on ranches, which took them away from traditional lifestyle. Cattle drives through Indian territory: some Indians stole cattle / horses, so army protected some drives and attacked Indians.

#### Indians & gold prospectors

In California prospectors murdered Indians or moved tribes to protect claims to land. Immigrants from abroad bought new diseases which killed Indians. Gold bought huge numbers of prospectors to an area, towns sprang up which were v different to Indian culture. When gold was found in Montana prospectors travelled there on Bozeman Trail, through Sioux Indian land (against terms of Fort Laramie Treaty).

### Conflict

#### Little Crow's War (1862)

Chief of Dakota Sioux in Minnesota, where white population increasing. Agreed to give up 24m acres of land and live on reservations for \$1.4m. Government delayed payment; reservation not big enough to hunt so Indians left; settlers took bits of reservation land to farm.

Sioux attacked settler towns, killed 600. Army arrived, some Indians put on trial; others forced onto poor reservation land where many died.

#### Sand Creek Massacre (1864)

When gold found in Montana prospectors travelled across Cheyenne Indian land. Chiefs agreed to move to reservation, but young warriors refused. Cheyenne chief Black Kettle tried to reach an agreement. But Governor sent Colonel Chivington to who massacred 130, who were waving white surrender flags. Government eventually forced Cheyenne onto reservation.

#### Red Cloud's War (1866-68)

Gold discovered in Montana 862, prospectors travelled there on Bozeman Trail, across sacred Lakota Sioux land. This broke Fort Laramie Treaty. Red Cloud did not trust government, so fought rather than agreeing to allow forts along Bozeman Trail: 3,000 Indians fought 700 US soldiers. They won many battles

### Key terms

Claim – claim to own a piece of land  
Cow town – transit point for herds of driven cattle to meet the railroad  
Drive – moving cattle north for sale  
Homestead – 160 acre family farm  
Open Range – allowing cattle to graze on Great Plains, then round the up in the spring  
Prove up – prove that family could successfully farm their homestead, so they could buy the land  
Railroad – railway  
Ranch – cattle farm  
Trail – route that cattle were driven along

### 3. Conflict and Conquest 1876-1890

#### Changes in Farming and Cattle ranching

Developments in technology made it more manageable for homesteaders to farm on the Plains.

By 1880s metal **wind pumps** could pump water from +100m underground for use farming or raising cattle. Solved the biggest problem on the Plains.

**Barbed wire** (1874) cheap, easy way to protect crops and stop cattle escaping/coming onto pasture.

**Dry Farming.** New method trapped water under the surface of soil, particularly good for growing wheat.



During 1870s the open range became overstocked (too many animals, so not enough grass). By 1880s price fell as there was so much beef available; not enough grass; the "Great Die Up" (winter 1886-7) - 55degrees and deep snow. 15% of open range cattle died; many cattle ranchers went broke.

After spring 1887 end of the open range. Smaller ranches = easier to find cows, provide water in drought, less beef so higher prices; produced better quality meat. As ranchers quit, this land was taken over by homesteaders. Less work for cowboys

#### More settlers on the Great Plains

##### Exoduster movement (1879)

After Civil War (1865) 4m slaves freed, but many whites in the south (slave states) resented black former slaves being free. To escape racism in the South, some black Americans moved west, became homesteaders. In 1873 Benjamin Singleton moved to Kansas (the first free state – free of slavery in 1861), and encouraged others to follow him, by end of 1879 more than 40,000 Exodusters had settled in the West.

However, white settlers had already taken the best land, so Exodusters got poor land to farm. Many could not afford to pay for their claims. Kansas govt gave some help to struggling black newcomers, but many local white people unhappy about this. By 1880s news of how hard it was in Kansas got back to South, and Exoduster migration ended

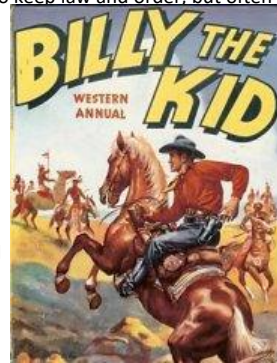
##### Oklahoma Land Rush (1893)

In the middle Indian Territory was an area of land not given to any tribe. Whites had been trying to settle there, but US army stopped them. 1889 US govt decided to open this land for white settlement. Divided up into 160 acre plots to be claimed. 1000s of settlers claimed 2m acres of land on 22<sup>nd</sup> April. Seven other "land rushes", largest = 8m acres. US govt failed to protect Indian land as had promised.

#### Law and Order

Conflict over resources (eg homesteaders vs ranchers) and race. Lot of poverty, very violent culture, large territories impossible to police, corrupt lawmen, vigilantes (groups taking law into their own hands). Cowboys in towns alcohol, prostitutes, gambling = lots of fighting. Settlements elected sheriffs to keep law and order, but often not effectively.

**Billy the Kid.** Grew up poor in mining camp. Became notorious thief and cattle rustler, escaped from jail many times, had a gang and many hideouts. Violent outlaw, but his story was told in newspapers and books and he became a folk hero. Eventually killed by sheriff Pat Garret



**Wyatt Earp.** Helped deputy sheriff in Wichita restore order; hired as dep sheriff in Tombstone Arizona. Lot of violent clashes between Earp + brothers and cowboy gangs, town became +violent. Shoot out at OK Corral (1881), Earp killed two leading cowboys. More violence, people of town turned on Earp saying he had made lawlessness worse. In most settlements lawlessness decreased. Many voted for local laws banning guns. Railroad and electric telegraph also meant better communication, so law enforcement became easier and better.

Most notable of the **Range Wars** (battles over control of land between cattle barons / small ranchers / homesteaders) was Johnson County War (1892). Wyoming had been dominated by small number of powerful cattle barons. Great Die Up (1886-7) small ranchers coped better than huge ranches, but cattle barons suspected them of cattle rustling. Most people resented rich barons... so juries rarely convicted anyone accused of rustling... so cattle barons took law into their own hands.

Cattle baron Albert Bothwell wanted rid of two homesteaders who farmed a claim in the middle of his pasture. Ella Watson (one of the homesteaders) bought a herd of cattle; she was accused of rustling so Bothwell hung her and took her land. Increasing tension between barons and homesteaders. Barons paid \$100,000 for "Invaders" to go to Johnson County and kill 70 suspected rustlers. Sheriff arrested Invaders. Invaders had support of state governor and other powerful people; eventually the charges were dropped. Showed that vigilante justice still dominated the West.

#### Conflict between the settlers and the Indians

1830-70s treaties between US govt and Indians failed to protect Indians. Each time gold was found the govt broke treaty.

##### Battle of Little Bighorn (1876).

Northern Pacific Railroad extending into Sioux land. US army Commander Custer protecting railroad builders, but also looked for gold in Black Hills. Found it, US govt offered to buy land, but Sioux rejected. Indians felt betrayed, so 7,000 left reservations and joined leaders Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse. They were ordered back by govt, but refused. Custer found a camp of 2,000 Sioux, he attacked with 200 soldiers – all killed by Indians led by Crazy Horse.

Public opinion among white Americans turned against Indians – seen as a real threat. They would have to "assimilate" (become like white Americans) or die. Govt policy changed: Indians forced to stay on reservations; previous treaties could be ignored; more soldiers and forts in Indian areas; Indians' horses and weapons taken. 1877 Crazy Horse surrendered then killed; Indian resistance over.

##### Wounded Knee Massacre (1890)

Despair among Indians on reservations worsened when govt cut rations and drought in 1890.

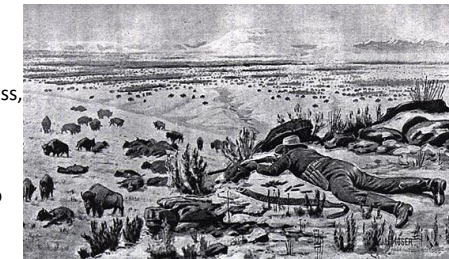
Wovoka had a vision that if Indians reject white ways and perform a sacred Ghost Dance all dead Indians will come back to destroy white settlers.

Sitting Bull killed; his followers fled. Army caught them at Wounded Knee Creek, some began Ghost Dance; army killed 250 (1/2 women and children). Last clash between US army and Sioux. Public opinion supported the massacre, seen as revenge for Little Bighorn. This suggests most American thoughts Indians should be killed if they could not be controlled. *1890 govt ended the Indian Frontier, no land belonged to the Indians.*

#### End of the Indian way of life

##### Extermination of buffalo

1871 buffalo hide could be used for industrial process, so money to be made hunting them. Also new powerful rifles. 5,000 hunters on the plains. 1872-4, 4m of southern herd killed for hides. Killing buffalo meant there were none for Indians to hunt, so they had to learn to farm and settle. Also opened land for cattle ranching



##### Life on reservations

By 1880s govt thought large reservations allowed Indians to cling to old way of life. So reservations made smaller and extra land sold.

Govt set up councils among tribes to make decision – they could be threatened or bribed.

Govt agents used bribes of extra food rations to ensure 'good' behaviour of Indians, and some Indians joined Indian Police Agency, policing their former tribespeople. Children educated off reservation, so learned white Christian way of life; parents lost rations if they refused to send children.

Living conditions on reservations v poor: hungry, struggling to farm on poor land, dependent on govt, spread of disease, alcoholism and depression.

##### Changing Govt Attitudes

By 1880s Indian way of life was destroyed. Indians given incentives to become civilised farmers, but most sunk into poverty and sickness, reliant on govt support. This angered many whites who resented Indians having reservation land which they did not use profitably.

Govt decided reservation system meant Indians still living as tribes, working together and sharing (not competing with one another for land like whites). **Dawes Act (1887)** = Homestead Act for Indians. Each Indian family offered 160 acre plot to and become a US citizen. All remaining land could be sold to whites. Aim was to make individual families farm, behave more like white Americans (assimilate), reduce cost to govt of reservation system.

Consequence of Dawes Act, by 1890 Indians had lost half land they had in 1887. Conditions were tough, so farming v difficult; most Indians sold land to whites or cheated; those that kept it divided it among children so plots became smaller. Life for Indians worse than before.

#### Key terms

**Assimilation** – becoming like white Americans in lifestyle, attitudes and behaviour

**Dry farming** – method that made it easier to farm on the dry Plains

**Exodusters** 40,000 former slave who travelled West to new life as homesteaders

**Ghost Dance** Spiritual dance summoning Indian ancestors to return and destroy the white man

**Great Die Up** V cold winter 1886-7, killed 15% of cattle on Open Range

**Kansas** First slave free state, where most Exodusters migrated to

**Land Rush** Govt made former Indian land available for people to stake a claim on a particular day

**Range war** conflict between cattle baron / small rancher / homesteader

**Vigilante** someone who takes law into own hands