

# THE MAKING OF AMERICA, 1789 – 1900

## Unit 4: Settlement and Conflict on the Plains 1861 - 77

### How did White Americans exploit the Plains? Was home on the range really so good? What led to conflict on the Plains, 1861-1877?

In 1845, the writer **John O'Sullivan** wrote an article in *The Morning Post* newspaper in which he introduced Americans to the phrase '**Manifest Destiny**'. This was the idea that God had given North America to the United States so that white Americans could promote progress, freedom and democracy across the whole of America. O'Sullivan did not mention the existence of slavery, or the presence of Native Americans in the lands which he thought white Americans should occupy.

Several white American artists tried to portray the idea of '**Manifest Destiny**'. The picture below was painted by **Frances Palmer in 1868**. It has appeared in more history books in the USA than any other image and has helped to shape the way in which generations of Americans have viewed America's westward expansion. Frances Palmer created her painting at a time when white Americans had begun to settle not only in the Far West, but also in the middle of America on the Great Plains.



***Across the Continent: 'Westward the course of Empire takes its way', by Frances F. Palmer, 1868***

Frances Palmer's painting is an imagined scene, but several details in her painting were based on the historical reality of what happened on the Plains in the 1860s and 1870s. Between 1861 and 1869 a great project was carried out to build a railroad line connecting the eastern and western halves of the United States. The completion of the railroad marked a significant turning point in the settlement of the American West. From the 1860's, cattle ranchers began to raise cattle on the Plains and white Americans built homesteads and began to farm there.

On the right of Frances Palmer's painting you probably noticed two Native American on horseback, choking in the smoke from the train. As you will discover, the exploitation of the Plains by White Americans had far more drastic consequences for the Plains Indians. During the 1860's and 1870s the Plains became a battleground as Indian Chiefs like Red Cloud led their people in a number of bitter conflicts with the US army. Many Native Americans choked not in smoke, but in their own blood.



**Red Cloud: a photograph taken by Charles Bell in Washington, DC, 1880**

**Name:**

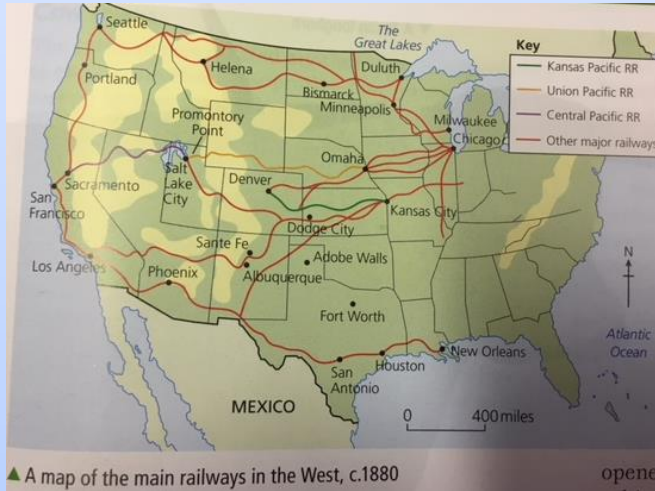




## Building the railroads

As early as 1853, the US Government had paid \$150,000 to survey possible transcontinental railroad routes, but the existing railroad companies did not have the funds to take on such a large project. When President Lincoln was elected in 1861 he knew that a transcontinental railway would provide opportunities for American business and would give people the opportunity to start their own farms in the West.

In July 1862, Lincoln approved the **Pacific Railroad Act**. This states that the US Government would provide money for any companies willing to create a railroad linking the eastern and western halves of the country. The US Government also offered the railroad companies free land on either side of the track which could be sold to settlers. Not only would the railroad make it easier for migrants to travel to the Far West, but it would also enable white Americans to start farming on the Plains.



## Money and Land

In California, the **Central Pacific Railroad Company** was awarded the contract to build the line from the West. The Central Pacific had been set up in 1860 by 5 shopkeepers who invested \$350,000 in the company. **The Union Pacific Company** built the line from the East. Its funding came mainly from a large number of speculators hoping to make a profit. At first, government investments were slow because of the large amount of money that was required to fight the Civil War. However, as the war began to draw to a close, the Government started pumping more money into the railroads. In 1864, over \$50 million was made available to encourage the companies to start building. It was easier for the Government to stick to its promise of granting land to the railroad companies. Across the Plains, the companies received 6400 acres of land for every mile of track they built. By the time the transcontinental railway was completed, the two main railroad companies owned an area of land which was greater than the whole state of Texas.

## The impact of the railways on the Plains

Thousands of workers were needed to build the new track. In the West, the **Central Pacific Company** employed 12,000 Chinese migrants to do the dangerous work of tunnelling through the rock of the **Sierra Nevada and Rocky Mountains**. As the lines rolled out across the Plains, men worked 6 days a week in baking sun or winter snows to complete the railroad. They lived in temporary towns of tents. Sanitation was poor and disease was a danger. America's transcontinental railway cost many lives through accident and illness.

When the transcontinental railway opened in 1868 it was praised as a great American achievement. Soon, a network of lines began to spread across the West. On the Plain, towns emerged which would play an important part in the **cattle trade**. At first, these were unruly places with much drinking, gambling and violence. The railway companies sold land cheaply to people who wanted to build farms on the Plains. During the 1870s, there was a flood of homesteads moving into the Plains, not only from America but also from Europe.

The construction of the railroads across the Plains had a serious impact on the culture of the Native Americans. The railroads divided the lands where the Indians had once hunted buffalo. Cattle towns and homesteads intruded on the vast areas of grassland over which the Plains Indians needed to roam to follow the buffalo herds. Americans with a completely different culture from the Native Americans came to dominate the Plains.

Turn the information above into flashcards under the headings:-

- **Building the railroads**
- **Money and Land**
- **The impact of the railways on the Plains**

## The cattle business

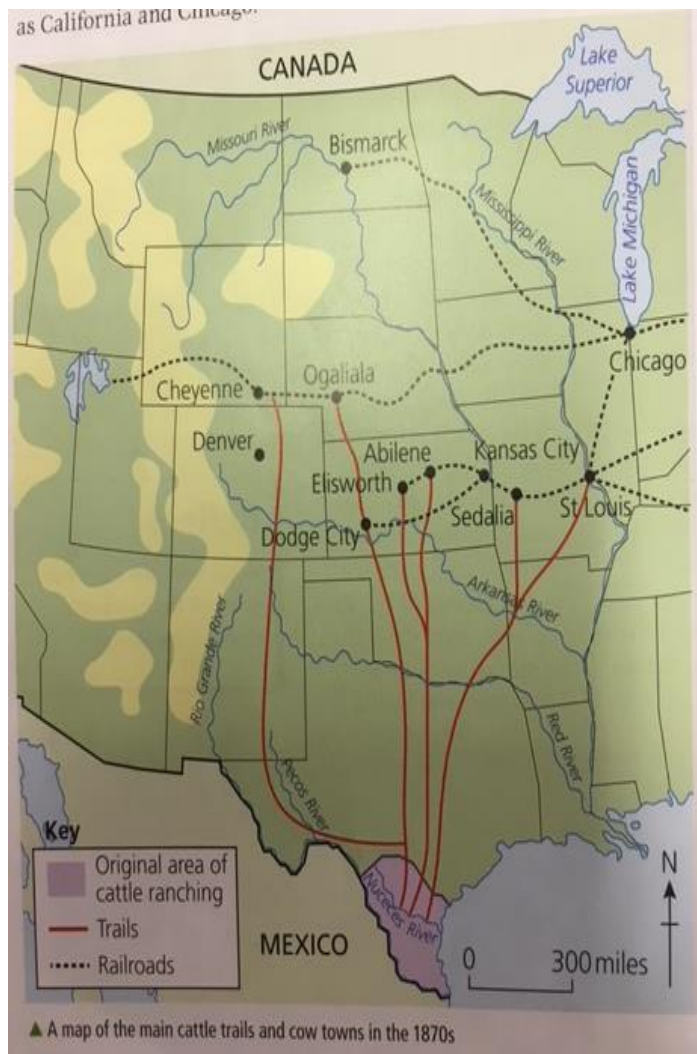
It was the Spanish who first brought cattle to America. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century southern Texas became an important centre of cattle ranching. By the 1850s, when beef became a popular food in America, Texas ranchers made big profits by producing a breed of cattle known as the Texas longhorn. The cattle roamed freely, grazing on what the cattlemen called **'the open range'**. From time to time, cowboys rounded up the cattle into large herds and drove them to markets and cities, mainly in the southeast of the USA. By the 1850s cattlemen had even begun to drive cattle as far as California and Chicago.

### Developing the northern trails

### Cow towns

### Cattle ranches

Using the information on the next two pages, complete the boxes on the side





# GCSE Style Question



**“REMEMBER  
THE COMMAND  
WORDS!”**

Below is an extract from an answer to the question:

**What was the impact of the railroads and the cattle industry on the Plains in the 1860's?  
Explain your answer. (10 marks)**

Railroads and the cattle industry had an enormous impact on the Plains. The Transcontinental Railroad was built between 1862 and 1869 and connected states in the East to the new ones in the West. The impact of the railroad was huge, because it was thousands of miles long. The workers had to cut through the Sierra Nevada Mountains so that it could get to California. This had a big impact on the environment. The railroad also affected the Plains because it disrupted the lives of Native Americans living there. Many Plains tribes hunted the buffalo, but the buffalo herds were disrupted by the trains running across the country. As well as this, the railroads allowed more and more settlers to travel and settle on the Plains. This meant that more people were farming the land, but also disrupting Indian ways of life.

Use the mark scheme below to decide which mark you would award. You need to annotate the extract and then explain why you have awarded this mark

**Level 5 (9 – 10 marks)**

**Demonstrates strong knowledge of key features and characteristics of the period in ways that show secure understanding of them. Uses these to show sophisticated understanding of one or more second-order concepts in a fully sustained and very well-supported explanation**

**Level 4 (7 – 8 marks)**

Demonstrates sound knowledge of key features and characteristics of the period that show secure understanding of them. Uses these to show strong understanding of one or more second-order concepts in a sustained and well-supported explanation.

**Level 3 (5 – 6 marks)**

Demonstrates sound knowledge of key features and characteristics of the period in ways that show some understanding of them. Uses these to show sound understanding of one or more second-order concepts in a generally coherent and organised explanation.

### **Tip**

A good 10-mark answer should clearly address the question at the start and end of each paragraph. A good way to do this is to reuse some of the key words from the question. This helps to show you have fully understood the focus of the question.

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Blank lined writing area (middle section).

Blank lined writing area (bottom section).





The cattlemen built profitable ranches and used the Plains for grazing, but they did not fence the land and try to grow crops. It was the farmers known as **'homesteaders'** who first tried to turn the Plains into rich farmlands. The homesteaders had begun settling on the Plains before 1861 but they were few in number. In the 1860s and 1870s, hundreds of thousands of homesteaders headed west. These people included free slaves from the Southern States, immigrants from Europe and Americans from the East. In the 1870s, over half a million homesteaders moved to just one of the states in the mid-West – **Kansas**.

### Moving to the Plains

Three factors led to this explosion of people moving onto the Plains after 1861:

- Many Americans and European immigrants dreamed of becoming independent farmers with their own land. The high price of land in the Eastern states, and increasing prices in Oregon and California in the 1860s, meant that many people could only fulfil their dream by buying cheaper land on the Plains.
- To encourage people to become landowners, **Lincoln's Government** introduced the **Homestead Act in 1862**. This promised people **160 acres of Plains land** if they farmed it for a full 5 years and paid a small fee. For many people this was too good an offer to refuse. **The Homestead Act** allowed women to apply for land as well as men, as long as they were single. Records show that between 5 and 15% of all homesteads were owned by women.
- The railroad companies created demand for their railroads and land by promoting the West as a land of great opportunity. From the 1860s, they began a huge advertising campaign, not only in America but also in Europe.

### Living on the Plains

For most who went West, life on the Plains was very different from the one portrayed on the railroad posters. Building a new life and raising a family on the Plains required courage and determination. Each family had a different story to tell, but few homesteaders left much evidence of their struggles to survive and thrive on the Plains. One exception in the **Oblinger family, who have left a record of their lives in the 1870s**.





**Grades 7 – 9**

How far can it be argued that homesteaders had a better life on the Plains?

**Grades 4 – 6**

What challenges did the Oblingers face when they moved to Nebraska?

**Grades 1 – 3**

What helped the family to survive on the Plains?



A large rectangular area containing multiple horizontal lines for writing, intended for student responses to the questions above.

**The Oblinger family**

Uriah Oblinger set out to Nebraska with his brother in 1872. He left his wife (Mattie) and his young daughter (Ella) back in Indiana. On 6<sup>th</sup> October 1872, he wrote back to them from his 'government claim' in Nebraska...

"Dear wife and baby, well I suppose the first question you would ask me now would be, how do you like Nebraska? Wife...you can see just as far as you please here, and almost every foot in sight can be ploughed...The longer I stay here the better I like it."

Over the next year, Uriah built the house which he and his family would live in. In the Spring of 1873, Mattie and Elle came out to join his, bringing all their worldly possessions and a large number of chickens. On 16<sup>th</sup> June 1873, Mattie wrote to her family back in Indiana:

"Dear Brother & Sister and all of Uncle Wheelers: Thinking you would like to hear from is and how we are prospering...The reasons I have not written sooner (is) I have not had the time...I have been here two Sundays...We have a good Sunday school in progress now. I suppose there must be about fifty enrolled...We have our bibles and hymn books and we all gather together and read a lesson..."

I get milk & butter from Mrs Furgison who lives ¼ of a mile from us (we) get the milk for nothing and pay 12 cents for a pound of butter...Most of all the people here live in sod houses and dug outs...The one we are in at present in 14 by 6 and a dirt floor...I wish I have a cow or two to milk, I would feel quite proud then. Think (we) will get one after the harvest...The wheel and oats look well here...

Almost every man here does his own work yet they are not able to hire (men). I think it will be quite different in a few years. Uriah has 23 acres of sod corn planted it looks real well I tell you it is encouraging to have out a lot of corn and all your own...Uriah is breaking sod today he will soon have 40 acres turned over then it will be ready to go into right next Spring."

The Oblingers continued to farm their claim through the 1870s. Mattie died in childbirth in 1880. Uriah was devastated and returned to Indiana. But his desire to farm on the Plains did not disappear. Eventually he remarried and returned to Nebraska to become a homesteader once again.

**Surviving and thriving**

Like many, families were drawn to the Plains by the promise of cheap land and a better life. But homesteaders faced many difficulties in living and farming on the Plains. For nearly half of all homesteaders the challenge was too great and they were forced to move to the nearest city or back to the East.

Keeping healthy

Fencing the land

Keeping warm

Lack of water

Building a house

Hazards

Isolation

Ploughing the land

Using the information on the next two pages, complete the boxes above.

# GCSE Style Question



**“REMEMBER  
THE COMMAND  
WORDS!”**

1. Give two reasons why people moved to the Plains? (1 mark)  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Give one problem that homesteaders faced? (1 mark)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Below is an incomplete paragraph from an answer to the question.

**Write a clear and organised summary that analyses the difficulties faced by settlers on the Plains and how they tried to overcome these. Support your summary with examples. (9 marks)**

The paragraph begins with a relevant comment but is lacking detail and examples. Read the paragraph and complete it, adding in the missing information.

**Homesteaders faced many difficulties when they tried to settle on the Plains. One such difficulty was**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**One solution to this problem was**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**This solved the problem by**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Another major problem was**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**This was a big issue because**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**The best solution to this problem was**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**This was effective because**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_





# Why was there so much bloodshed on the Plains, 1861 - 77

As more ranchers and homesteaders followed their own vision of a West filled with small farms and towns, tensions with Indians rose. Through the 1860s and 1870s, Indians who held onto their vision of a nomadic life came into a bloody conflict with white settlers and their government. There were three underlying reasons for the conflict:

1. **Ecological tensions** – There were often intense competition for land between different tribes on the Plains. The growing number of white settlers created even more competition for resources and added to the pressure. By 1860, white American settlement meant that the ecological tensions created by competition for grassland and water had reached a crisis point.
2. **Hardening attitudes** – There was a general hardening of attitudes between white Americans and Indians in the 1860s. For white Americans, scientific theories of race supported the idea that they were genetically superior to other races. The idea that Indians should lose their lands was seen by some as entirely natural. Government attitudes were also hardening. As white Americans began to settle on the Plains, the US Government came under pressure to sign treaties with different tribes, concentrating the Native Americans on smaller reservations. There, Indians had to survive on rations supplied by the Government, or convert to a farming way of life and feed themselves. Groups of young warriors from different tribes promised that they would never bow to this white vision of their future. From the 1850s these warrior societies drew larger followings from the Plains Indians as the tensions grew.
3. **Guns and fear** – Some historians argue that growing gun ownership, coupled with increasing suspicion and fear, was an important cause of the violence on the Plains,. By the 1850s, owning handguns and revolvers had become normal. **Winchester's repeating rifles** were sold to hunters, farmers and local militia and Indians alike. The Civil War led to a huge increase in gun ownership. By 1865, one in every three households owned at least one gun. As fear grew on both sides, guns were used more and more to 'solve' conflicts.

In the period 1861 – 77 these underlying tensions led to a number of terrible wars on the Plains.

Over the next four pages you will be looking specifically at four of the worst conflicts between the Plains Indians and white Americans in the year 1861 – 77.

These were:-

## 1. Little Crow's War, 1861-62



## 2. The Sand Creek Massacre, 1864



## 3. Red Cloud's War, 1865 – 68



## 4. The Great Sioux War, 1875 – 77



As you read about each of the conflict, complete the notes in the boxes.

# Little Crow's War, 1861 - 62

Disputes over land

Problems on the reservations

The words and actions of individuals

Violence and revenge



# The Sand Creek Massacre, 1864

Disputes over land

Problems on the reservations

The words and actions of individuals

Violence and revenge



# Red Cloud's War, 1865 - 68

Disputes over land

Problems on the reservations

The words and actions of individuals

Violence and revenge





# The Great Sioux War, 1875 - 77

Disputes over land

Problems on the reservations

The words and actions of individuals

Violence and revenge



# GCSE Style Question



**“REMEMBER  
THE COMMAND  
WORDS!”**

Below is an incomplete paragraph from an answer to the question.

**Why did Red Cloud and the United States come into conflict in the 1860s? Explain your answer. (10 marks)**

The paragraph begins with a relevant comments but is lacking detail and examples. Read the paragraph and complete it, adding in the missing information.

There are many reasons why Red Cloud and the United States came into conflict. One reason is that Red Cloud’s lands were being flooded by miners. Miners were arriving in Sioux territory because

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Red Cloud was especially angry that miners were coming on to Sioux lands because

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Because of this Red Cloud and his warriors

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This led to war because

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