Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

The American West, c1835–c1895

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The Plains Indians' way of life

- The Lakota Sioux lived in bands led by chiefs and councils, with warrior societies. Many were nomadic, following the buffalo, which gave them food, tipis, clothing and tools.
- Their beliefs centred on Wakan Tanka (the Great Spirit) and the circle. Land was sacred, especially the Black Hills, and was not owned by individuals. Ceremonies included the Sun Dance.

Early settlement, 1835–c1862

- Push and pull factors: an economic crisis in the east (1837), the belief in **Manifest Destiny**, and cheap, fertile land in Oregon and California.
- The Oregon Trail began in 1843; the Donner Party was trapped by snow in 1846–47; the Mormons reached the Great Salt Lake in 1847; and the California Gold Rush began in 1849. Lawlessness in mining towns led to **vigilance committees**, as in San Francisco (1851).
- Government policy: the **Permanent Indian Frontier** was replaced by **reservations**. The **Indian Appropriations Act** (1851) paid for moving tribes onto reservations, and the Fort Laramie Treaty (1851) set out tribal lands.

Development of the Plains, c1862–c1876

- The **Homestead Act** (1862) offered 160 acres of free land, and the Timber Culture Act (1873) offered 160 more acres to settlers who planted trees on 40 of them. The first transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869.
- The cattle industry boomed: the Goodnight–Loving Trail (1866) ran from Texas to New Mexico and Colorado, and Joseph McCoy set up the cattle town of Abilene (1867) next to the railroad.

- Conflict: Little Crow's War (1862) in Minnesota, the Sand Creek Massacre (1864), and Red Cloud's War over the Bozeman Trail, which ended with the Fort Laramie Treaty (1868).

Conflict and conquest, c1876–c1895

- Gold was found in the Black Hills (1874). The Great Sioux War followed, including the Battle of the Little Bighorn (1876). The buffalo were slaughtered, the Plains Indians were forced onto **reservations**, and the Dawes Act (1887) broke up **reservation** land. The massacre at Wounded Knee (1890) ended armed resistance.
- Barbed wire (1874), overgrazing and the hard winter of 1886–87 ended the **open range**. Ranchers and homesteaders clashed in the Johnson County War (1892) in Wyoming. Black Americans known as the **Exodusters** moved to Kansas (1879), and settlers rushed to claim land in the Oklahoma Land Rush (1889).
- Law and order: sheriffs and marshals; Billy the Kid in the Lincoln County War (1878); and Wyatt Earp, in Dodge City and at the gunfight at the OK Corral in Tombstone (1881).

Key terms

Manifest Destiny	The belief that Americans were meant to spread across the continent.
Permanent Indian Frontier	The line west of which the Plains Indians' land was supposed to be protected.
Indian Appropriations Act	The 1851 law that paid for moving tribes onto reservations.
Homestead Act	The 1862 law giving 160 acres of land to settlers who farmed it for five years.
Long drive	Driving cattle hundreds of miles from Texas to the railroad.
Open range	Unfenced grassland where cattle grazed freely.
Reservation	An area of land set aside for Native Americans.
Exodusters	Black Americans who left the South for Kansas in 1879.
Vigilance committee	A group of citizens who enforced the law themselves.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What did the Indian Appropriations Act (1851) do?
2. What was the Permanent Indian Frontier?
3. What did the Timber Culture Act (1873) offer?
4. Who set up the cattle town of Abilene in 1867?
5. What was the Goodnight–Loving Trail (1866)?

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6. What was Little Crow's War (1862)?
7. What led to the Great Sioux War of 1876?
8. Who were the Exodusters?

Answers

1. Paid for moving tribes onto reservations
2. A line west of which the Plains Indians' land was meant to be protected
3. Another 160 acres to homesteaders who planted trees on 40 of them
4. Joseph McCoy
5. A cattle trail from Texas to New Mexico and Colorado
6. A Santee Sioux uprising in Minnesota
7. Gold was found in the sacred Black Hills
8. Black Americans who moved from the South to Kansas in 1879

What to do next

Practise 12 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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