

Recap – The American West – the Story so far

American West Recap

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOCNi5ThFOg>

The First Transcontinental Railroad 1869

Lesson Objective:

To understand why the government decided to build a railroad (railway) linking the East and West coasts of America

To assess what the consequences of this railroad would be.

Target 4-5: I can describe reasons why railways were constructed across the Great Plains to the West

Target 6: I can explain reasons why railways were constructed and why the railways were important in opening up the West

Target 7+: I can explain reasons why railways were constructed and why the railways were important in opening up the West and assess the positive and negative affects of the railroads on America

Background Information:

The Government had wanted to build a East to West railway for some time but the southern states had always blocked it as they thought it would benefit the north more than the south. When the Southern states left the USA and the Civil War began the government seized its chance and passed the **1862 Pacific Railroad Act**.

By 1862 the East of America had a network of railways but nothing further West than the Missouri river. The government surveyed and chose a route to extend a railroad to the West coast.

Two companies were given the contract to build the railways – the **Union Pacific** and the **Central Pacific** - they would meet in the middle.

In order to make this happen the government decided to:

- Extinguish any rights Plains Indians might have had to land along the route (totally going back on old promises and treaties)
- Loaned the two companies \$16,000 for every mile of track they laid
- Granted each rail company land along the railroad they could sell.
- In total 45 million acres of free land given to the companies and the government loaned them over \$61 million

Problems for the **Union Pacific Company**

They faced attacks from the Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians. 5,000 soldiers were needed to protect the workers who in turn needed feeding . Buffalo hunters were employed to provide fresh meat. One, William Cody (Buffalo Bill) claimed to have killed 4,280 buffalo. The Plains Indians were not blind to this new threat to their existence.

Problems for the **Central Pacific Company**

They faced huge problems in having to tunnel through the mountain ranges in the West. Estimate say 12,000 men died during the construction. Many of these were labourers from China.

Background Information cont..:

Each company had a Bureau of Immigration to persuade people from other countries to settle on the Plains. One agent persuaded 60,000 Germans to emigrate to Kansas. 10,000 people from Sweden and Norway settled in Nebraska.

By 1880 the railroad companies had sold and settled people on 200 million acres in the West. They were more successful in this than the Homestead Act as they had better marketing, more land to sell and people wanted land next to the railways

Questions:

- 1) Name the two railroad companies given the contract to build the railroad and summarise the challenges they both faced.
- 2) What did the government commit to doing in order to ensure this railway got built?
- 3) How was the decision to build the railways likely to worsen relations with the Plains Indians?
- 4) Why were the railways more significant than even the Homestead Act in getting land settled on in the West?
- 5) Stick in your copy of the map and add any annotations you wish to.



Figure 2.2 The route of the First Transcontinental Railroad.

Task: You now need to complete the tasks in your *Pros and Cons of the Railway* Booklet which leads to an exam question.



Pros and Cons of the Railroad (Railway)

Read the boxes below and colour code the pros and cons of the building of the railroad.

It meant more and more white Americans were able to seize and settle on the lands of the Plains Indians.	Government officials, law enforcement officers, and soldiers could travel more easily and quickly - helpful for the problems of law and order in the 'Wild West.'
Some farmers were unhappy because they believed that the railway builders were only interested in making profits, rather than providing a good service.	Essential supplies such as seeds, machinery, timber, food, raw materials and manufactured goods could be carried to the new settlements from the East, helping the Homesteaders.
Buffalo numbers started to seriously decline.	The railway-building boom coincided with the USA's industrial revolution and helped to make the USA the world's leading industrial power by 1890. In that year its rail network was bigger than the whole of Europe's, including Britain and Russia.
The railways made a huge difference to the lives of the Indians. Not only did they bring a large number of settlers who wanted their land, but they also disturbed the buffalo. It became a new pastime to shoot the buffalo through the window of a moving train whenever a herd was seen. Buffalo were also killed to feed the soldiers and the labourers they were protecting whilst the railways were being built.	The railway network provided the opportunity for thousands of new settlers to travel to the West and for the cattle industry to grow up on the Plains. So the railways prepared the way for the second major phase of migration on the Great Plains. (more of that soon)
	Towns grew rapidly along the railroad routes.
	Encouraged immigration from Europe
	Agricultural produce could be carried more cheaply to distant markets, helping farmers and homesteaders make a living.
	The foreign trade of the USA was helped by the railways and this helped to increase the wealth of the country.
Cheaper rail travel meant homesteaders felt less isolated on lonely plots.	The railways encouraged the growth of cities in the West, such as Denver, Dallas and Los Angeles.
	Conflict with the Plains Indians increased considerably.



Exam Question:

Explain the importance of two of the following....;

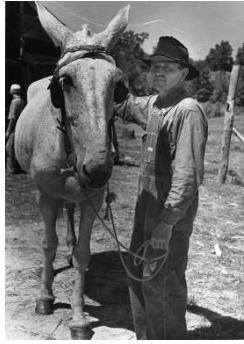
- The Homestead Act of 1862
- The end of the American Civil War
- The Completion of the First Transcontinental Railroad 1869

..on the settlement of the Western Plains between 1860 and 1880

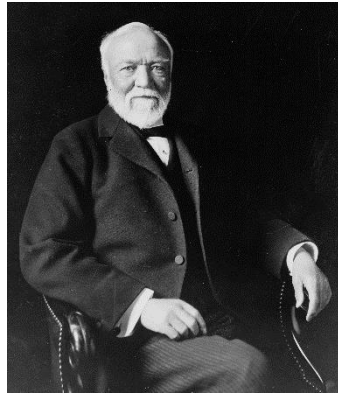
Can you think of any others?

Did the railways have a positive or negative impact on the West?

Winners or losers?



Farmers were... because...



Owners of industry and factories were... because...



Plains' Indians were... because...



Stagecoach companies were... because...



Towns close to railways were... because...



Towns not close to railways were... because...



The USA were... because...



Law and order were... because...

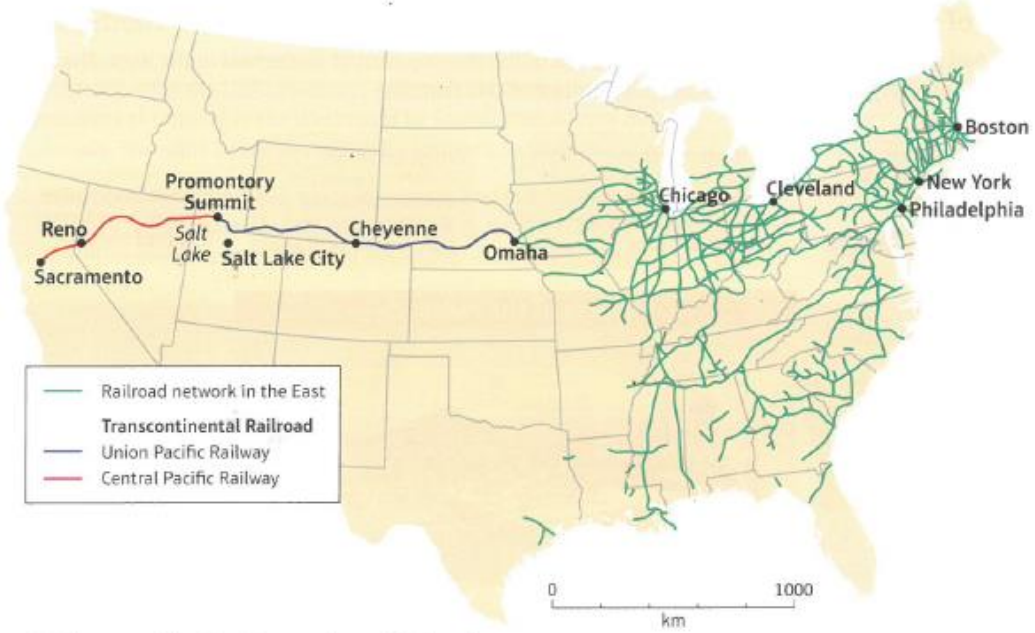


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