

The Impact of the Railroad (Railway)

<p>It meant more and more white Americans were able to seize and settle on the lands of the Plains Indians.</p>	<p>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.'</p>
<p>The railways encouraged the growth of cities in the West, such as Denver, Dallas and Los Angeles.</p>	<p>Essential supplies such as seeds, machinery, timber, food, raw materials and manufactured goods could be transported to the new settlements from the East, helping the Homesteaders.</p>
<p>Buffalo numbers started to seriously decline.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>The railway network provided the opportunity for thousands of new settlers to travel 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)</p>
	<p>Towns grew rapidly along the railroad routes.</p>
	<p>Encouraged immigration from Europe.</p>
	<p>Agricultural produce could be carried more cheaply to distant markets, helping farmers and homesteaders make a living.</p>
	<p>The foreign trade of the USA was helped by the railways and this helped to increase the wealth of the country.</p>
<p>Cheaper rail travel meant homesteaders felt less isolated on lonely plots.</p>	<p>Conflict with the Plains Indians increased considerably.</p>

Encourage more white Americans to settle on the Plains

Increase immigration from abroad

Assist with Law and Order

Support the Homesteaders already living on the Plains

Boost the USA's economic power

Contribute to the destruction of the Indian way of Life

Can you think of any others?

Summary

The actions of the US government

The US government recognised the need to populate the West and to help achieve this the **Homestead Act** was passed in **1862**. It was intended to encourage people to settle in the West by allowing each family 160 acres of land. This land was given to them virtually free, provided they lived on it and farmed it for five years. Two later Acts also encouraged settlers. These were the:

The Timber Culture Act, 1875

This gave settlers a further 160 acres of free land, provided they planted 40 acres with trees. This was because it was recognised it was hard to make a living from 160 acres and would also help address the problem with a lack of timber.

The Desert Land, 1877

This gave settlers the right to buy 640 acres cheaply in area where lack of rainfall was a particular problem.

The effect of these three Acts was to make millions of acres of land available for homesteaders to settle. Thousands of men and women seized this opportunity and became homesteaders.

The end of the American Civil War

The American Civil War lasted from 1861 to 1865. It was fought between the slave-owning southern states known as Confederacy, and the anti-slavery northern states, known as the Union. It was partly triggered by events in the West. A major argument in the years up to 1861 was whether slavery should be allowed in the new western states.

The end of the war marked a turning point in American history. Thousands of demobilised soldiers and their families were looking to rebuild their lives. Thousands of newly freed black slaves were looking for a new life. The southern states where they had grown up and lived as slaves did not seem to be the best places to do this. One obvious place to look was the West, and that is what thousands of them did. They became the homesteaders, cowboys, miners, soldiers and railroad-builders who transformed the West.

The building of the transcontinental railroads

The US government had long wanted to build a transcontinental railroad to link East and West. In the 1860s two companies started building, one from the East, the other from the West. Eventually they met in Utah.

This had two main effects. Now it was easy for future homesteaders to get to the Plains: it was also cheap to buy the land as the railroad companies sold off the land on either side of the line at low prices.

