

Paper 2: Section A: American West, c.1835-c.1890: The Development of the Plains, 1862-90 Core Knowledge 2/3

Settlement Farming (Homesteads)

Problems:

- Water was in short supply meaning crops could fail e.g. Jan.1859-Nov. 1860 there was no rain fall in Kansas.
- There was little wood in some areas for fuel, housebuilding or fencing meaning it was difficult to enclose farmland to keep it safe from trampling.
- Sod houses were built as temporary homes. They had earth floors and were easily infiltrated by snakes, mice and rats.
- Ploughing was difficult as the prairie grass had very long roots and hadn't been ploughed before.
- European style crops (corn and wheat) were not well suited to the environment.

Solutions:

- 1837 - John Deere's sod-buster was strong enough to break up the ground.
- 1874 - Daniel Halladay's self-governing windmill was metal bladed and could pump water from 30m below ground level.
- 1874 - barbed wire was being used to fence off crops.
- 1875 - the Sulky Plough could break up tough weeds, sold 50,000 in 6 years.
- Turkey Red Wheat brought by Russians - it was hardier than other forms of wheat and could grow well on the Plains.
- Dry farming - a special method of preparing the soil to grow crops with minimal water.

Tension between homesteaders and ranchers

General issues

- Access to water - homesteaders would try to cut off access with fencing.
- Ranchers were often richer and could take homesteaders to court using expensive lawyers.
- More sheep on the land from the 1880s (5 million sheep in New Mexico) - cattle ranchers claimed the sheep spread disease and ate all the grass.

Examples

- 1870s, in Custer County the Olive family (ranchers) had their water source cut off by Homesteaders who fenced off access to the water.
- 1877-79: ranchers attempted to drive homesteaders off their land = 2 homesteaders murdered.
- 1865-1900: corporations bought up land to create huge open ranges and attempted to drive homesteaders off their land e.g. Lincoln County War and Mussel Slough County (4 millionaire owners of the Southern Pacific Railroad Company took out a legal case against homesteaders and won. But fighting broke out and 2 gunfighters working for the millionaires were killed as well as 5 homesteaders).
- Fence cutting wars e.g. 1883 following a drought, ranchers cut the barbed wire fences where homesteaders had cut off access to water leading to ranchers cutting fences down at night.

Consequences of the Californian Gold Rush (1848+)

- Population of California increased from 15,000 to 250,000 with prospectors e.g. Californian Indians, ex-convicts from Australia, Europeans, Americans from the East.
- Mining companies moved in with more sophisticated equipment and paid for Chinese labourers to come to USA.
- Mining towns provided shelter, supplies, alcohol and brothels for miners e.g. 500 saloons in San Francisco by 1853.
- Violence and law codes developed as miners decided on punishments for crimes e.g. claim jumping.

Cattle Industry

- **Before 1865 (Civil War)** - Texas had become the main state for cattle due to the success of the hardy breed of Texas Longhorn cattle there. Cowboys took cattle on long cattle drives to move/sell the cattle. This caused problems in 1855 as Missouri farmers formed a vigilante group to stop Texan cattle coming through as it carried a disease from ticks.
- **After 1865** - increased number of cattle but the price dropped significantly in the south (\$5 in the south but \$40 in the north) e.g. Charles Goodnight's herd increased from 180 to 5000 due to poor management.
- **Goodnight-Loving trail** was used to take cattle north (avoiding Kansas as they introduced Quarantine Laws to block the Texas Longhorn) in 1866. They sold their cattle in the north for a higher price to supply 2000 Navajo Indians and the US army = Goodnight became rich and grew his ranch to 1 million acres. By 1870, the government was buying 50-60,000 cattle per year to supply Plains Indians on reservations.
- **Cow Towns** - Joseph McCoy established Abilene next to the railroad so that cattlemen could sell their cattle to the east by loading them onto cattle wagons on the new railroad. He bought 100 railway cars and 3 million cattle went through Abilene between 1867 and 1872.
- **John Iliff** - bought land using the Homestead Act for 26,000 cattle in Colorado close to newly discovered gold - this allowed him to directly supply miners rather than driving cattle long distances = large-scale open ranges on the Plains rather than just raising cattle in Texas. He became Denver's first millionaire and others were encouraged to farm cattle on huge open ranges on the Plains.
- **Cattle barons** - overstocked their ranches leading to soil erosion and the price of meat fell.
- **Winter of 1886-7** - temperatures dropped to -55F meaning cattle could not move through the snow/ice and thousands died. Some cattlemen went bankrupt as prices had previously fallen. The surviving cattle were severely weakened.
- **End of the open range/small ranches** - the bad winter showed that cattle needed to be more carefully managed = homesteaders took up cattle farming as the cattle were safer and stocks/breeding could be controlled. Cowboys' roles were to patrol the fence line (more borina than cattle driving).

Exoduster Movement and Oklahoma Land Rush

Exoduster movement

- After slavery was ended (1865) black people continued to suffer discrimination in the south so moved West to start a new life. e.g. Benjamin Singleton claimed homestead land in Kansas in 1873. By 1879, 40,000 set off for Kansas after a false rumour that land was being given to ex-slaves for free.
- Blacks were generally given the worst land as whites had already taken the best land.
- Yellow fever in the Plains made many black Americans ill.

Oklahoma Land Rush

- The Dawes General Allotment Act forced Plains Indians to sign up for plots of land on the reservations but only half of the land was taken up meaning the rest was sold off. When the land was released for sale, there was a rush of people trying to buy it. There were 7 land rushes from 1889-93, the biggest saw 8 million acres of land opened up to settlers in 1893.