*This podcast helps you to understand the changes in farming and the cattle industry during the late nineteenth century.*

As the railroad continued to expand in the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s so did improvements to farming. New equipment such as binders, reapers and threshers as well as new windmills could now be obtained and these enabled farmers to harvest more quickly and easily.

The sod buster plough enabled farmers to cultivate increasing amounts of land, which meant that more crops could be sown and higher crop yields. Farmers were now making a profit from the land they were able to use the money to invest in improvements in farming methods and technology.

Barbed wire continued to be used by farmers to protect their crops from the few remaining buffalo as well as the cattle on the open range.

Hard Turkey Red wheat, which had been introduced to cope better with the harsh conditions of the Plains, led to refinements in flour milling and this meant that farmers could now readily sell their wheat to be processed.

Despite all these improvements, the one obstacle that remained was the harsh Plains climate. Drought was a continuing problem, despite the use of windmills to extract water from deep underground, and in the 1870s and 1880s the drought was so severe that many farmers became bankrupt. It is estimated that between 1889 and 193, 11,000 homesteads were repossessed in Kansas. However, by the 1890s life for the farmers and homesteaders was become more prosperous, as wheat production on the fertile Great Plains steadily increased.

Cattle ranching had grown on the Plains because of the ability to transport the animals on the railroad to market in the East. At first, cattle were transported live and slaughtered on arrival in Chicago, where their meat was either sold or salted and placed in barrels for wider distribution. By 1870, the refrigerated railcar had been developed and this enabled the transportation of meat over long distances.

The peak period for cattle ranching was from 1880 to 1885. However, after 1885 the cattle industry went into decline for a number of reasons:

1. More and more cattle were put in the open range leading to pressure on the stock of grass, partly because cattlemen had been ordered to remove their cattle from the Cheyenne and Arapaho reservations.

2. The drought of 1883 led to the grass withering, further reducing the availability of pasture.

3. Demand for beef in the East began to fall and therefore so did the price of cattle.

4. The winter of 1886 to 1887 was severe and thousands of cattle died.

By 1890 the cattle boom was over with many cattle men having gone bankrupt. Open range ranches were replaced by smaller ones that used barbed wire to retain the cattle. This meant that fewer cowboys were needed to prevent animals from straying or wandering into other ranches. Ranchers began to concentrate on breeding fewer but better quality animals. They installed wind pumps to provide a supply of water and reduced their labour costs significantly as they didn’t need to employ large numbers of men to maintain their herd. Cowboys found their way of life had changed forever.

*This podcast is from Hodder GCSE History, Dynamic Learning, and is copyright Hodder & Stoughton*

*This podcast helps you to understand the continued settlement of the West.*

The Civil War ended in 1866 and America began a period of reconstruction in the South. Political life restarted, with the issue of African Americans once again at the fore. Although many freed slaves were uneducated and poor, others had played a leading role in the Union army during the War, and this had increased their desire for opportunities in education as well as freedom from white control.

The development of independent African American churches across the South, particularly the Baptist Church, was a key development as this time. More African Americans began to serve in state government and even Congress, although the most powerful positions in government were awarded to white Republican politicians. These politicians were often from the North, where they had been strong supporters of African American rights. Others who headed south were those in search of business opportunities as well as professionals such as lawyers, teachers and preachers. Those who headed south were derided by southern Democrats as ‘carpetbaggers’ – northern opportunists who had so few possessions they could be carried in a travelling bag made of carpet.

The Republicans remained in control of all the southern states until 1877 and during that time they set up the first state school system which enabled African American children to receive an education. They also made African Americans equal before the law and gave them the right to own property, set up a business or join the professions.

However, by 1877 the Democrats had regained control for a number of reasons, including the drift of Republicans over to the Democrats, a loss of Republican morale because of the anti-black American terrorist group known as the Ku Klux Klan, vote rigging and a lack of political will at federal level to continue to support African American rights. The US government had tired of the southern struggle and instead was focused on expansion in the West and the Indian Wars.

Many of the freed slaves left the plantations of the South to move to Texas or to live in towns and cities. Often poor and with limited technical skills, many freed slaves became sharecroppers. Sharecroppinig was a system where a landowner provided the land, housing, tools and seed and a local merchant provided the sharecropper with food and supplies on credit. At harvest time, the landowner gave a share of the crop in payment for the sharecroppers labour and kept the rest. The sharecropper had to then pay off his debt to the merchant. Although the system gave freed slaves more control over their lives, they remained in continual debt and the system was inefficient.

By the 1870s, many black Americans decided to escape the poverty and racism of the South by heading west to Kansas, a free state. They became known as ‘Exodusters’ because they were moving to the ‘promised land’. In 1879 a rumour that the government were planning to give out free land and money in Kansas led to over 4,000 Exodusters heading to the river banks of the Mississippi in order to catch the steam boats to Kansas. Although many were able to build a new life as farmers or living in small settlements, others returned home disappointed. For freed slaves, the Promised Land remained a dream as they lacked the resources to make the journey to Kansas.

The Indian Appropriations Act which the federal government passed in 1889 led to the opening up of two million acres of land for settlement in Oklahoma. Previously Indian Territory, the land was some of the most fertile land still unoccupied in the West. Homesteaders were allowed to settle on any areas of land not assigned to the Native Americans, with many trying to sneak across the boundary early in order to stake the best claim. They were removed by the army, which proved the army could remove intruders from Indian land when it wished to. At noon on 22 April 1889 a starting gun signalled that the territory was open for settlement and an estimated 50,000 settlers crossed the boundary, racing to claim the best pieces of land. By the end of 1889, the population of Oklahoma stood at 60,000 and was made a territory of the United States of America.

*This podcast is from Hodder GCSE History, Dynamic Learning, and is copyright Hodder & Stoughton*

*This podcast helps you to understand the problems of law and order on the Great Plains.*

Problems of law and order were a constant feature of the Great Plains, as homesteaders, ranchers, hunters and miners all arrived in their droves to settle. The different groups came into conflict with the Plains Indians and each other, with robberies, range wars and cattle rustling being common occurrences. Gradually the forces of law and order became more established, but in the final three decades of the nineteenth century, lawlessness was a problem, often settled by the use of the gun.

The Lincoln County War in 1878 was fought between two rival factions in Lincoln County in New Mexico territory. The House was a store run by Lawrence Murphy and his partners and they controlled the law and order forces in Lincoln County through their political connections. The House was involved in cattle rustling and selling on the stolen beef at inflated prices to the US government. An Englishman, John Tunstall, decided to set up a rival business in 1876, hoping to displace the House. Tunstall wanted to do this legally although he hired notorious tough cowboys to run his ranch, including one called Billy the Kid.

War broke out following the murder of Tunstall by House gunmen. Tunstall’s cowboys set out to avenge him and killings and counter-killings continued for many months, ending in a five-day battle in July 1878. By the end of the fighting, more than 30 people had been killed and Billy the Kid was on the run. Murphy, meanwhile, was put on trial for the murder of Tunstall, but was acquitted. Billy the Kid became famous when the governor of New Mexico put a price on his head and he was eventually shot dead at Fort Sumner in July 1881. Billy the Kid became part of the folklore of the West with many Hollywood films being made about him.

Wyatt Earp and the gunfight at the OK Corral in 1881 similarly went down in US folklore. Wyatt Earp was the brother of Virgil Earp who was hired as Town Marshal to tackle lawlessness in the mining town of Tombstone. Virgil had served in the Union army during the civil war, but his brothers, Wyatt and Morgan, did not have such a good record and had not always been on the side of law and order. Despite this, Virgil appointed his brothers to be Deputy Marshals.

The leading citizens of Tombstone were Republicans who wished for the town to become a peaceful law abiding place in order to attract investors into the town. The ranchers and cowboy outlaws were mainly Texans and former Confederate sympathisers, known as the ‘Cowboys’. They lived out of town, coming in from time to time to gamble and drink which often led to violence.

In the performance of their duties as lawmen, the Earps had angered the Cowboys who were now threatening to fight or kill the Earps. A gun battle between the Earp brothers and the Cowboys broke out on 26 October 1881 near to the OK Corral. Within seconds, three of the Cowboys were dead and Virgil and Morgan were wounded. A series of tit for tat killings continued between the two rival sides, with Virgil again being seriously wounded and Morgan shot and killed through a window while playing billiards. The Earps realised that Tombstone would never be safe for them and they left town in 1882. By this time, the power of the Cowboys had been broken and Tombstone became a more peaceful place – the mine owners and leading citizens of the town had won at last.

The gun fight at the OK Corral in 1881 might have become part of history if it were not for two things: the first was a biography of Wyatt Earp published in 1931 which portrayed him as a hero in the fight to establish law and order. The second was the 1957 film, *Gunfight at the OK Corral*, which also portrayed Earp as a heroic figure and helped to confirm the popular stereotype that the gunfights of the West were a simple fight between good and evil.

*This podcast is from Hodder GCSE History, Dynamic Learning, and is copyright Hodder & Stoughton*

*This podcast helps you to understand the range wars including the Johnson County War of 1892.*

**Teacher:** As you know, there was increasing tension between homesteaders and ranchers as they both competed to use the Plains. Can you explain this in a little more detail?

**Sabine**: Land was at the root of the conflict. The homesteaders had tried to stop the cattle drives because they were afraid of damage to their crops and also the risk of their animals catching Texas fever, a disease carried by the cattle. However, when the cattle drives came to an end in the 1870s and were replaced by ranches, the disputes became even worse.

**Teacher**: Why did things get worse?

**Ben**: Arguments broke out between the ranchers and the homesteaders over land and access to water. The ranchers, corporations and railroad companies were rich and powerful and they tried to remove the homesteaders from their land by charging them high rents or by removing them with force, using gun-fighting cowboys to achieve their aims.

**Teacher**: What was the impact of sheep farming on the cattle ranchers?

**Sabine**: Sheep were a threat to cattle as they competed for grazing land and they outnumbered cattle by ten to one in Arizona. New Mexico had approximately five million sheep and California and Utah also had large numbers of sheep. Some cattle ranchers handed out violence to sheep farmers, including shooting shepherds, slaughtering sheep and burning hay to reduce the availability of fodder.

**Teacher**: What part did barbed wire play in the disputes between ranchers and homesteaders?

**Ben**: Homesteaders used barbed wire to fence off land, but sometimes it led to ranchers and farmers being unable to reach water. Most of the fencing was around legally-owned land but some enclosed public land or even blocked roads and cut off access to churches and schools. This led to the Fence Cutting War of 1833, in which small armed bands went out at night to cut the fences, resulting in violence and even a few deaths. Eventually both sides came to an agreement and the disputes came to an end.

**Teacher**: The Johnson County War of 1892 is an example of when the disputes between homesteaders and ranchers went beyond mere rivalry. What was the background to this conflict?

**Sabine**: In the 1870s a very powerful group of ranchers, known as cattle barons, formed themselves into the Wyoming Stock Growers Association. The group also included the governor of Wyoming and state senators. By the 1880s there were three main problems which the Association felt were threats to their businesses:

1. Beef prices were falling and recent droughts and severe winters had seriously damaged their income.

2. A growing number of homesteaders and smaller ranchers had settled in Wyoming, leading to disputes over land rights with the cattle barons claiming the land was theirs.

3. The cattle barons were losing cows to rustling (stealing of cattle) and blamed the homesteaders and smaller ranchers.

**Teache**r: So how did this boil over into a full-scale conflict?

**Ben**: Two people who criticised the cattle barons for land grabbing were lynched outside their property, but no one was prosecuted for the crime, despite the cattle barons being known to be behind it. Other killings and murders followed yet once again no one was convicted as witnesses were either killed or disappeared.

**Teacher**: The cattle barons must have felt untouchable.

**Sabine**: Yes they did. In 1892 they planned a full-scale invasion of Johnson County and hired gunfighters to kill a number of people they suspected of cattle rustling. The invasion force of around 50 cattlemen and gunfighters was led by Major Frank Wolcott. The invaders planned to capture the town of Buffalo, murder the sheriff and then kill the rest of the men on the death list of rustlers they had drawn up.

**Teacher**: So what happened next?

**Ben**: Wolcott and his invaders cut the telegraph wires to Johnson County so that it was cut off from the outside world. They then tried to capture nearby ranches but were held off by fierce fighting. This delay meant that people in neighbouring towns were now armed and ready to fight them. The invaders retreated to a nearby ranch where they were besieged by 300 men – they were only saved when the US cavalry arrived who had been ordered there by the President himself – the invaders’ powerful friends had used their influence at the highest level.

**Teacher**: So how did the Johnson County War end?

**Sabine**: Wolcott and his force were taken into protective custody and although they were brought to trial, the trial date was continually delayed until eventually the Johnson County authorities had no money left to continue the case. No convictions followed and Wolcott and his gunfighters walked free.

**Teacher**: What happened to the cattle barons?

**Ben**: The cattle barons lost their power and were widely condemned. Their political power in Wyoming was never the same again but some turned to a bounty hunter called Tom Horn who mounted a clandestine vigilante campaign against those on the original death list. He continued to ambush and kill until his execution in 1903.

*This podcast is from Hodder GCSE History, Dynamic Learning, and is copyright Hodder & Stoughton*

*This podcast helps you to understand the continuing conflict with the Plains Indians.*

**Announcer**: Welcome to another edition of Look Back at History. Today we have a contestant who will be answering questions on the Indian Wars of the late nineteenth century. If you’re ready, then we’ll begin. In which area, sacred to the Sioux, was gold discovered in 1875?

**Contestant**: The Black Hills.

**Announcer**: Correct. What did the government try and do to stop the Sioux attacking railway surveyors and miners who migrated to the Black Hills to find gold?

**Contestant**: The government offered to buy the Black Hills from them, but the Sioux rejected the offer as they believed the land couldn’t be owned.

**Announcer**: Correct. Why were the Sioux unable to obey the government’s order to return to their reservation in December 1875?

**Contestant**: It was winter time, so 7,000 Indians with their chiefs, Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, remained in the Powder River country.

**Announcer**: Correct. What would happen to any Sioux who weren’t on their reservation by February 1876?

**Contestant**: They would be viewed as hostile and attacked by the US army. This resulted in the battle of the Little Bighorn in June 1876.

**Announcer**: Correct. What the plan of campaign prepared by General Philip Sheridan to attack the Indians?

**Contestant**: He decided there would be three columns of soldiers, led by General Crook, General Gibbon and General Terry. Each would head towards the Indians from a different direction, trapping the Indians between them.

**Announcer**: Correct. What were the two major weaknesses of Sheridan’s plan?

**Contestant**: One, there was no effective communication between General Crook and General Terry and two, no one had tried to accurately work out how many Indians the army might be facing. The army assumed a maximum of 800 Indian warriors which they would have had no problem in defeating, but numbers turned out to be much larger than that.

**Announcer**: Correct. What happened to General Crook’s column on 17 June?

**Contestant**: It was attacked by Crazy Horse at Rosebud Creek and sustained heavy losses.

**Announcer**: Correct. What happened to Custer and his men?

**Contestant**. Custer was ordered to march along the Indian Trail and to approach the Little Bighorn from the south, circling the Wolf Mountains. He refused extra men and guns and deliberately disobeyed orders by marching his men through the night directly over the Wolf Mountains. They arrived at the Little Bighorn a day early and surprised the Indians camping there, but the soldiers were so exhausted they were defeated by the Indians, with no survivors remaining.

**Announcer**: Correct. What was the result of the defeat at the Little Bighorn?

**Contestant**: The American public were shocked at the army’s defeat and efforts to increase the army campaign followed. The Indians split back into their bands and the US army followed them and attacked them. There were too many soldiers for the Indians to fight and they were low on ammunition, food and other supplies. One by one the bands returned to their reservations. This marked the end of the Sioux resistance.

**Announcer**: Correct. What was the name of the movement which some Plains Indians believed would create a new world?

**Contestant**: The Ghost Dance – it was said that if the Indians remained peaceful and danced the Ghost Dance, all the whites would disappear, the buffalo would reappear and dead Indians would come back to life.

**Announcer**: Correct. The Army pursued one of the leaders of the Ghost Dance called Big Foot to a camp at Wounded Knee in December 1890. What happened next?

**Contestant**: Soldiers tried to disarm the Sioux. One resisted and the soldiers opened fire, killing 146 Indians, of whom many were women, children and the elderly.

**Announcer**: Correct. What was the overall impact of this massacre?

**Contestant**: It effectively marked the end of the Plains Wars as the Indian Nations were broken and scattered.

**Announcer**: Correct. And thank you for playing Look Back at History.

*This podcast is from Hodder GCSE History, Dynamic Learning, and is copyright Hodder & Stoughton*

*This podcast helps you to understand what life was like for the Plains Indians on the reservations and the reasons for the extermination of the buffalo.*

One of the obvious ways of making the Indians stay on their reservations was by destroying the economic foundation of their nomadic life – the buffalo. Buffalo hunters were encouraged to hunt the buffalo to extinction, but unlike the Plains Indians, the hunters were only interested in the buffalo hides and they left the rest of the carcass to rot. In later years, collectors known as ‘bone pickers’ went out to collect the buffalo skeletons and transported them to the railroad, from where they were transported east to factories. In the East, the buffalo bones were ground to make fertiliser or used to make buttons, combs and knife handles while the hooves were made into glue. It might be said that use of the buffalo by the whites now resembled that of the earlier Plains Indians.

Extinction of the buffalo on the southern plains was complete by 1875 and on the northern plains by 1883. In 1840 it is estimated that there were over 35 million buffalo and yet by 1890 their numbers were reduced to less than a thousand.

By the mid-1870s, the Indians were virtual prisoners on the reservations, often living in poor conditions. The land made available for reservations was often of poor quality and therefore not desired by the homesteaders. Most of the Plains Indians had no culture of farming and they struggled to grow crops on the poor quality land. Unable to grow food to feed themselves, they became dependent on government handouts which further demoralised them.

Many Indian agents were dishonest and treated the Indians badly. Money was often stolen and food rations were inadequate. Many Indians had little resistance to diseases previously unknown to them, such as measles, influenza and whooping cough, and medical treatment was often unavailable. Punishment without trial was common and individuals were sometimes murdered by those in charge of the reservations.

However, a small number of Indians were able to make a success of life on the reservations. Some joined the Indian Police, which gave them power and prestige. Some of the Indian Nations, such as the Pawnee, were already farmers and so their change in lifestyle was not as great as it was for nomadic hunters like the Sioux.

Government policies were designed to further undermine the Indians’ way of life. In 1885 the Indians lost all control of legal matters and any power to judge or punish members of their bands. Feasts, dances and ceremonies were forbidden and the power of the medicine man was undermined. The government sought to fill this spiritual ‘gap’ by sending in missionaries to convert the Indians to Christianity.

One of the harshest government policies was to remove Sioux children from their parents and send them to boarding school, where they would be prepared for life in ‘the white man’s world’. Indian children were not allowed to speak their own language and would be punished if they did so. Sioux parents were unable to stop their children from being sent away to school and would have their rations removed if they protested. Many children returning from boarding school found they no longer fitted in the Sioux world nor the world of other Americans.

The government policy towards the Plains Indians damaged their tribal structures and weakened the Indians’ self-belief. Federal government control of the Indian reservations resulted in poverty and limited opportunities for Native Americans which persisted well into the twentieth century.

*This podcast is from Hodder GCSE History, Dynamic Learning, and is copyright Hodder & Stoughton*

*This podcast helps you to understand the significance of changing government attitudes to the Plains Indians.*

The introduction of the Indian Appropriations Act of 1871 had ended the treatment of Plains Indians as independent sovereign nations and from this point on, they tended to be more usually described as Native Americans. President Grant’s Peace Policy of 1869 depended on the Plains Indians living on the reservations as farmers, and only leaving to hunt the buffalo. Although a bill to protect the buffalo had been passed by Congress, President Grant did not sign it so it did not become law.

By 1876, government policy meant that any Plains Indians not on their reservation would be assumed to be at war with the US army. Following its humiliating defeat at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the government increased spending on troops and built new forts in order to finally defeat the Sioux and their allies.

Once the Native Americans were confined to their reservations, the government began a series of measures to break up the tribal structures and groupings of the Indian bands. This meant reducing the size of reservations from one large reservation to several smaller ones, thus dividing up the tribes and bands that lived there. The government also removed from chiefs responsibility for distributing supplies and settling disputes, further eroding their power.

The Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887 was the final straw in the destruction of the Indian way of life as it allowed communal reservation lands to be broken up into individual plots. The Act aimed to completely destroy the tribal structures and power of chiefs by making individual Native Americans self-sufficient. Once the Native Americans were landowning farmers, they no longer needed their chiefs and so the destruction of the Plains Indians’ way of life was complete. In a further effort to destroy the structure of the Plains Indian bands, the Act allowed the sale of any leftover land to non-Native American buyers, which provided more income to the government.

In 1890 the US Census Bureau announced the end of the Indian frontier. As far as the US government was concerned, there was no longer a frontier line in the West – the West was now settled and all Native Americans were confined to reservations. The United States of America had achieved its Manifest Destiny.

*This podcast is from Hodder GCSE History, Dynamic Learning, and is copyright Hodder & Stoughton*