*This podcast helps you to understand the importance of the Civil War and post-war reconstruction.*

The American Civil War was fought between the northern (or Union) and southern (or Confederate) states from 1861 to 1865 over the issue of slavery. States in the North wanted to limit the spread of slavery, with the abolitionist movement wanting to abolish it completely. In contrast, the Southern states were very much in favour of slavery, as their economy depended upon it.

The war was mostly fought in the southern states, where over 200,000 men were killed in battle or died from their wounds. The war also led to the destruction of many buildings in towns and cities; railroad tracks were torn up and crops were destroyed. As well as the obvious destruction of land and loss of life, the war slowed the process of settlement in the West, as both sides concentrated on winning.

When the war ended many men were inevitably changed by their experiences and were keen to begin a new life in the West. The US government decided to restart the settlement of the Great Plains by introducing the Homestead Act of 1862. This Act enabled any man who had not taken up arms against the United States to claim 160 acres of public land, which they were then required to farm and live on for five years. The success of this Act led to further legislation to encourage westward expansion, including the Southern Homestead Act of 1866, aimed at poor tenant farmers and sharecroppers in the southern states during the period of reconstruction after the war. It was intended to help freed slaves and whites who hadn’t supported the Confederacy but it had little real impact and was repealed ten years later.

Not all men wanted to return to civilian life after the Civil War and so many continued to serve in the US army, providing a fighting force against the Plains Indians in the Cheyenne Wars of 1884 to 1867. The end of the war also meant that the government had more money available for the development of the West, much of which was invested in the development of the railroad.

There was growing demand for a railroad across the US continent for two reasons – to help the development and settlement of the West and to improve trade between the USA and Asia. The Pacific Railroad Act of 1862 led to the creation of two new railroad companies – the Central Pacific Railroad Company which started in Sacramento and headed east; the other was the Union Pacific Railroad which began in Nebraska and headed west, with the idea that eventually they would meet somewhere in the middle.

The Civil War had delayed the construction of the railroads, but the ending of the war saw progress increase rapidly. By 1869 the first Transcontinental Railroad was complete and this had a huge impact on the development of the West. Homesteaders were encouraged to settle along the line, while the railroad also provided transport for settlers to head further West. Farmers could sell and transport their excess crops and new farming equipment could be obtained more easily. The railroad encouraged the growth of the cattle industry with cow towns springing up along the railway line. However, the railroad had a negative impact on the lives of the Plains Indians as it disrupted the buffalo herds. This resulted in the Plains Indians attacking the railroad builders, although the army could now be transported quickly along the railroad in order to defend the railroad builders.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the attempts by Homesteaders to find solutions to their problems and the spread of the railroad network.*

**Questioner:** We’re here to talk about the solutions which were attempted by Homesteaders to improve their lives on the Great Plains. Just to recap, could you tell us a little about the types of problems faced by the Homesteaders?

**Interviewee**: Of course. Some parts of the Plains were less fertile than others and therefore more difficult to farm. There was a lack of wood for building homes and for fuel and cooking. Homesteaders had to be very adaptable to succeed in the harsh winters, high winds and low rainfall experienced on the Plains. Natural hazards including the weather and plagues of locusts damaged crops and seeds and led to many settlers giving up their efforts to make a living on the Great Plains.

**Questioner:** So, how did they learn to adapt?

**Interviewee**: Several solutions were thought of – let me tell you about them:

* Windmills solved the problem of a lack of water as water could be pumped from underground. In 1874 Daniel Halliday invented a self-governing windmill which always stayed in line with the wind. This meant that the high winds that swept across the Plains did not damage the windmill. People were able to pump water from deep underground for washing and drinking and to irrigate their crops.
* New farming methods such as dry farming allowed homesteaders to make the most of the limited moisture contained in the soil.
* Homesteaders realised the crops they were used to growing in the East, such as corn, were unsuitable for the Great Plains. Instead, varieties of hard winter wheat such as Turkey Red were introduced. These thrived on the Plains where other seeds had failed.
* The land had never been ploughed before and contained tough prairie grass roots. Inventions such as a tough steel plough called the sod buster enabled the soil to be cultivated more easily.
* Barbed wire invented by Joseph Glidden in 1874 provided a cheap and effective solution to fencing off land to protect crops from being eaten by cattle and wild animals.
* Building materials became more readily available as the railroads spread. Gradually the sod houses of the early settlers were replaced by timber houses.

All of the above meant that those Homesteaders who survived the early difficult years tended to prosper. They were able to plough more land and grow more crops, selling the surplus to buy improved farming equipment and enabling them to raise their standard of living beyond one of subsistence.

**Questioner:** How did the US government help?

**Interviewee**: The government introduced the Timber Culture Act in 1873 which gave a further 160 acres of land to homesteaders provided that they planted 40 acres of it with trees. In years to come this ensured that there was adequate timber to build with and also provided windbreaks against the strong prairie winds.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the continued problem of law and order in settlements and how the government tried to solve them.*

As settlements continued to grow, the problem of lawlessness also continued. This was not helped by a number of factors, such as how there was a primitive code of honour in the west where in the absence of law and order you settled disagreements yourself. Since most westerners had guns, this often led to shootings and bloodshed. Additionally, as new mining towns and cow towns sprung up so quickly, there was a shortage of well trained and reliable law enforcement officers. There was inevitable conflict between the different economic groups using the land of the Plains, for example between cowboys and townspeople; homesteaders and ranchers and miners and hunters. On top of this, the west was a vast area and transport was slow, meaning law and order was difficult to enforce. Finally, there were potential sources of conflict between the different ethnic groups such as black Americans, Chinese, European, Plains Indians and Mexicans.

Types of crime included stage coach robberies, bank robberies and train robberies. Shootings became a major problem – some historians have estimated that between 1866 and 1900, 20,000 people were shot in the West. Others say that the number of shootings was much less; what’s clear is that the West became famous for its gun fights.

As new lands were settled, the US government put in place measures to try and solve lawlessness in the West. As territories grew in size they were able to apply to be states of the Union, i.e. part of the United States of America, and they could then form their own government which would be responsible for law and order. States and territories were subject to federal government, which related to the state or territory as a whole, and local government, which related to individual towns and cities.

US marshals were appointed by the President to oversee a state or territory. Because the territories often covered a vast area, the marshal appointed local deputies to assist him. The marshal and his deputies were responsible for maintaining law and order and capturing outlaws. Each territory also had three federal judges who heard cases brought by the marshal. There were also judges to try cases.

Local government consisted of a town marshal, elected by the people of a town, together with a sheriff who was elected by the people of a county, although often the area they were expected to cover was too large for them to be effective.

There were also non-government solutions to the problems of law and order. One of these was the Pinkerton Detective Agency, which was a private company set up in 1850 to provide protection against outlaws to banks, railroad and stage coach companies. The Agency was also engaged to catch particular outlaws – an example of private law enforcement – and often operated close to the law itself.

One other solution to the problems of law and order in the West was the use of vigilante groups. This involved local communities taking the law into their own hands and they used violence including shootings and hangings to defend communities and businesses from gangs of robbers. Despite the fact that the vigilantes broke the law in order to enforce the law, they often received a sympathetic hearing from those in power and usually went unpunished.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the cattle industry and the reasons for its growth.*

At the end of the Civil War, Texan ranchers and their cowboys drove their cattle to the railroad towns to be sold. The live cattle were shipped to towns in the East, but as the West became more settled and the railroads expanded there, so too did the market for beef cattle.

Texas in the 1850s was a major centre of cattle ranching and Texas Longhorn cattle had been bred to withstand the harsh conditions on the Plains. Beef was a popular food at this time which meant the cattle industry was a prosperous one. At the end of the Civil War, Texans returned to their ranches to find that their herds had increased dramatically – it is estimated that in 1865 there were around five million cattle in Texas.

Cattle needed to be driven to markets in the eastern states to be sold if money was to be made from them. However, the cattle drivers often found themselves turned away by the homesteaders as they drove their cattle north, because the Texas Longhorns carried a disease called Texas fever and the homesteaders were afraid their animals would become infected. Charles Goodnight and his partner Oliver Loving found a lucrative way around this problem. They made money from cattle by selling beef to feed the US army stationed in the forts as well as to the Plains Indians on their reservations. Despite Goodnight’s success, the major market for beef remained the millions of people who now lived in the eastern states.

The railroad provided the solution to reaching these people and the person who recognised how to exploit this development was Joseph McCoy. McCoy created the cow town of Abilene in 1867, which was situated further west than the homesteaders, ensuring that the cattle drives would not infect their livestock. Abilene was situated on a river which meant there was water and good grazing pasture for the cattle. McCoy purchased the land and built stock pens. The cattle were then driven from Texas to Abilene where they would be loaded onto the railroad and shipped further east for slaughter and sale. Great profits were made from this enterprise. The peak years of the cattle drives were from 1867 to 1885 and, during this time, it is estimated that around four million cattle passed through the cow towns.

The homesteaders on the Great Plains were a major problem for the cattlemen driving their herds northwards, because their settlements blocked the routes of the cattle drives. The solution to this was to develop ranching on the Plains. John W Iliff was one of the first ranchers on the Plains. Having failed to make money as a gold miner, he set up near the town of Cheyenne, where he made the important discovery that cattle were able to survive the harsh winter on the Plains. Iliff began to build up a herd, buying cattle from settlers as well as from Goodnight and Loving mentioned earlier, until eventually he owned 35,000 cattle. By 1868, Iliff had obtained a lucrative US Government contract to supply beef to the Sioux reservations.

Rivalry between the ranchers and homesteaders continued to be a problem and land was at the root of it. There were disputes about access to water, with the ranchers wanting to keep the Plains open range so their cattle could continue to access the water supply. The homesteaders, however, were keen to fence their land off with barbed wire to stop the ranchers’ cattle destroying their crops.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the impact of the changes in ranching on the lives of the cowboys.*

**Interviewer:** Ranches on the plains were typically open range which meant unfenced land claimed by the rancher. At the centre of the ranch were buildings where the ranch hands known as ‘cowboys’ lived. Today we are joined by John, a cowboy, who is going to tell us about his work on the Plains. John, could you tell us about your life please?

**John**: Of course. Most of us cowboys were originally from the southern states although a few are black Americans and Mexicans. Our job is basically to look after the ranch owner’s cattle.

**Interviewer:** Are you well paid?

**John**: No sir! We get between $25 and $40 per month but we do get a room and our board.

**Interviewer**: So what are your duties?

**John:** One of our main roles is to line ride. It’s a pretty lonely job as we have to stay in line shacks situated along the ranch boundaries.

**Interviewer:** What are you expended to do when line riding?

**John:** We go out all day, patrolling the boundary and herding any stray cattle back. We also drive off any strays from our neighbours because we don’t want them eating our precious grass. We discourage cattle rustlers, rescue animals from the deep snow and treat any sick animals. Sometimes we meet wild animals – I’ve shot a few wolves in my time!

**Interviewer**: I’ve heard that the animals are branded – what was the reason for that?

**John**: Branding shows whose animal it is. Every spring we round up all the cattle and identify them by their brands. We also brand any young cattle that need to be branded for the first time. It’s pretty hard work and you need to be a good horseman to take part in the round-up.

**Interviewer:** What about the cattle drives to the cow towns?

**John:** Cowboys are responsible for ensuring that cattle get to the cow towns quickly and safely and in good condition so the ranchers can make as much money as possible from them. Everyone has a job to do – the trail boss leads the way – he’s in charge and chooses the route and pace of the drive. The point riders lead the herd in the direction set by the trail boss. Then come the swing and flank riders – they stop the herd spreading out too wide. At the back are the drag riders who round up any stragglers. No one wants this job as you’re riding in the dust of the herd all day. Finally there are the wranglers who are the inexperienced cowboys who look after our horses.

**Interviewer**: Thank you for this fascinating look at the life of the cowboy.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the impact of the railroads, the cattle industry and gold prospecting on the Plains Indians*

**Teacher**: We’ve been discussing the impact of development of the land on the Plains Indians in the period from 1862 to 1876.As we know, the Great Plains were beginning to be used for many different purposes by the settlers including the building of the railroads, cattle ranching and gold prospecting to name but three. Ben, can you tell me what impact did these activities have on the Plains Indians?

**Ben**: A negative one to put it simply! For example, when gold was discovered in Colorado in 1858 it was estimated that 100,000 people rushed across the Plains of Kansas and Nebraska. This had a serious impact on the animals that were hunted by the Plains Indians, with many buffalo either killed or driven away from their normal roaming areas. The result was increased tension between the Plains Indians and settlers on the southern Plains.

**Sabine**: In 1862 when gold was discovered in Virginia City, prospectors left the Oregon Trail and strayed into Sioux Lands, breaking the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. The government did nothing to stop the miners.

**Teacher**: What impact did the cattle industry have?

**Ben**: The development of cattle drives towards cow towns like Abilene along the railroad resulted in some disruption to the Plains Indians’ hunting grounds. However, it was the open ranges that created the biggest problem for the Indians because it meant that cattle were in direct competition with the buffalo for grazing ground. This threatened the buffalo numbers as there was a reduction in the area that buffalo herds could roam and feed. As the number of ranches increased, taking up thousands of acres, the area in which Plains Indians were able to live and hunt was continually squeezed.

**Teacher**: And the impact of the railroads?

**Sabine**: Again, the building of the railroads disrupted the hunting of the Plains Indians. Track builders were fed buffalo meat and soon hunting buffalo was made into a sport. Special excursion trains were run so that people could go and shoot buffalo. Not only that, by 1871 buffalo hides were in great demand to make high quality leather.

**Teacher**: That must have had an effect on the number of buffalo?

**Ben**: Yes, the increase in hunting meant that by 1875 the southern buffalo herd had been completely destroyed.

**Teacher**: Thank you both for explaining these points so clearly.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the Conflict with the Plains Indians, beginning with Little Crow’s War in 1862 and ending with the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868.*

**Announcer**: Welcome to another edition of Look Back at History. Today’s contestant will be answering questions on the conflict with the Plains Indians. If you’re ready, we’ll start … in which year did violence erupt during what became known as ‘Little Crow’s War’?

**Contestant**: 1862.

**Announcer**: Correct. Why were the Santee Sioux unhappy on their reservation?

**Contestant**: Much of their land wasn’t suitable for farming. The annuities they were promised weren’t always paid. In 1861 their corn crops were devastated and because their credit at the government store was stopped, they couldn’t buy food.

**Announcer**: Correct. What happened after Little Crow’s attacks on an Indian Agency and US soldiers in August 1862?

**Contestant**: Little Crow continued to fight but was unable to pull together a large enough force of warriors to defeat the US army. By October 1862, 2,000 Santee Sioux were transferred to a reservation at Crow Creek after they were captured or surrendered to massive US army reinforcements and 303 of the warriors were sentenced to death.

**Announcer**: Correct. How many Santee Sioux died during their first winter at Crow Creek due to poor quality land and unfit drinking water?

**Contestant**: Nearly 400.

**Announcer**: Correct. What and when was the Sand Creek Massacre?

**Contestant**: This occurred in 1864 and was an attack led by a militia unit called Colorado Volunteers on a Cheyenne village. The leader was called Colonel John M Chivington and he led a force of around 1,000 men on the village of Cheyenne chief Black Kettle. Black Kettle believed that a peace treaty was in effect and they were flying both a white flag and an American flag. The surprise and unprovoked attack led to the killing and mutilation of around 150 Cheyenne men, women and children.

**Announcer**: Correct. What was the reaction of the America to this raid?

**Contestant**: At first Colonel Chivington and his men were greeted as heroes. However, the truth of the attack later emerged and Chivington was condemned by both the US army and the government for his actions.

**Announcer**: Correct. When was Red Cloud’s War fought and why was it significant?

**Contestant**: From 1866 to 1868 and it was significant for several reasons. By circling Fort Phil Kearney with warriors, Red Cloud stopped soldiers from moving out of the fort as well as preventing travellers using the Bozeman Trail. The war involved several bands of Indians – Sioux, Arapaho and Cheyenne – and showed that by co-operating together they could be a match for the US Army, keeping it on the defensive.

**Announcer**: Correct. In what year was the second Fort Laramie Treaty signed and what were its main agreements?

**Contestant**: It was signed in 1868 by Red Cloud of the Sioux. Under the terms of the Treaty the government agreed to withdraw from the forts along the Bozeman Trail and to create the Great Sioux Reservation. No non-Indian settlers were allowed to enter this land.

**Announcer**: Correct. What did the Sioux agree in return for this?

**Contestant**: Not to disrupt the building of the railroad, not to attack settlers travelling west and not to kill or scalp white men or attempt to harm them.

**Announcer**: Correct. Did all the Sioux agree to be bound by the terms of the Second Fort Laramie Treaty?

**Contestant**: No, not all. Although Red Cloud lived peacefully on the Great Sioux reservation, many other Sioux joined other Indian bands led by militant leaders such as Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, who had refused to live on the reservation.

**Announcer**: Thank you and well done for getting all answers correct.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the impact of US government policy towards the Plains Indians.*

In the 1850s the US government policy for dealing with the Plains Indians was to force them on to reservations. In the case of the Santee Sioux, this had been particularly unsuccessful and had ultimately led to Little Crow’s War from 1861 to 1862. Some of the reasons for the failure of government policy were that the Plains Indians faced difficulties trying to adapt their lifestyles to being farmers, the Indian agents were often corrupt and the government failed to deliver on its promises.

The policy of separation that underpinned the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 was not enforced. For example, when miners crossed into Indian reservations near the Bozeman Trail during the gold rush of 1862, the government did nothing about this. Whenever conflict between the settlers and Plains Indians arose, the government’s response was to use the military to force the Indians back on to reservations and to kill them if they resisted.

In 1868, the new President, Ulysses S. Grant saw what was happening and described the ‘wars of extermination’ as unacceptable. He advanced a Peace Policy which consisted of three parts:

First, Plains Indians continued to be confined to the reservations but government funding and training was introduced so they could learn how to be members of American society.

Second, corrupt and incompetent Indian agents running the reservations were replaced with Christian clergymen.

Third, army officers were placed in command of the surrounding areas to protect Indians from outside disruption and prevent war parties from leaving the reservations.

Although the Peace Policy did lead to a reduction in the number of conflicts while President Grant was in office, the pressure against the Plains Indians and their way of life was immense and corruption in government meant that once again the Plains Indians did not receive all the subsidies they were promised.

A further policy was introduced by the US Government in 1871. This was the Indian Appropriations Act and it ended the government’s policy of treating the Plains Indian tribes as independent sovereign nations. Instead, the Indians were treated as individuals or wards of the state. The Act also meant that all previous treaties between the Indian Nations and the US Government were now invalid.

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