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| **American West Revision Notes** |

Remember, when you are revising for the American West unit, that it is best tackled by dividing it up into the various sections. However, remember that all these things happen at the same time, and this may be very important for certain question types.

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| **The Indians** |

**Why they were on the Plains**

* They were originally forced onto the Plains by the rapid growth of the East of America in the early 1800s
* The Plains were given to the Indians, and in 1832 the US government established the Permanent Indian Frontier. The land was supposed to be protected for life; however the US government also hoped that by pushing the Indians onto the Plains that they would no longer be an irritation to “white society”
* The whites brought with them many diseases and so threatened the Indians, they would be safer on the Plains
* The Plains were empty of other people but full of Buffalo, which they would use to survive

**The Buffalo**

* The Indians used every part of the Buffalo – none was wasted
  + The bones were used as arrowheads and knives
  + The hide was used for clothes and tipi covers
  + The dung was used for fuel
  + The intestines were used as buckets!
* The hunting of the Buffalo was very difficult – the Indians would have to follow the herds wherever they went. They could not kill too many at a time either, or else there would not be enough to sustain them

**Homes**

* The Indians did not believe you could own land – therefore being **nomadic** was part of their lifestyle
* The Indians lived in tipis
* These were designed to withstand the extreme conditions of the Plains
* They were cool in the summer yet warm in the winter. They were shaped like a cone so they would not fall over in the high winds
* Everything was done inside the tipi – sleeping, cooking and often the tipi would fill up with very dense smoke due to the open fires

**Religion and lifestyle**

* The Indians believed in **Polytheism** – that there is more than one God
* The most famous religious ceremony was the Sun Dance – this was performed in order to get help from the spirit world
* The Sun Dance was performed in a circle – the circle was sacred to the Indians
* Women were very important – they did most of the work, including all the food preparations and keeping of the homes. The men’s’ roles were simply to fight and hunt
* They believed in **Polygamy** – you were allowed to have more than one wife. Many men had at least three or four wives
* During battle, the Indians scalped their enemies – this was believed to be removing the spirit of his enemy so that he could not go into the afterlife

**Problems they faced**

* The gradual invasion of white settlers – trailblazers and homesteaders interrupted their lifestyle and that of the buffalo
* The US government always wanted the principle of Manifest Destiny to be invoked one day
* The Indians and the government would never get along whilst their lifestyles were so different – polygamy vs monogamy; polytheism vs monotheism; the right to own land, etc etc

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| **The First Settlers** |

**Mountain Men and trappers**

* These were the first adventurers and explorers – they relayed information about the Plains back to the East – they made a good living out of selling the Beaver skins back in the East
* They helped set up the first Trails – for example what would later become the Santa Fe Trail and the Oregon Trail
* The US government believed in **Manifest Destiny** – the idea that whites should own the entire country and so regularly helped out the trailblazers

**The Gold Rush**

* In 1848 gold was discovered in California – by the end of the year 10 000 people were crossing the plains to dig for gold
* Within a year, over 100 000 people had crossed the plains. These were known as the forty-niners
* As the West developed there were many problems:
  + Racism – many different cultures and races clashed over land rights and taxations placed on foreign miners
  + Poor living conditions – so many people rushed to the area so quickly that conditions were very poor with many living in dirty tents. Diseases spread quickly
  + Law and order – there was no proper system of law. Miners turned rapidly to heavy drinking and gambling. Murders and claim-jumping was very common
  + Vigilantes – gangs developed that took the law into their own hands – many were as bad as the criminals they were attacking
* The Gold Rush did help to “open up” the West – more and more industries were set up in the West, San Francisco became a financial centre that rivalled New York and it also paved the way for the increased development of the railroads

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| **The Mormons** |

**Who were they?**

* A religious group started by Joseph Smith in 1830 – aka The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints
* He had seen a vision of the angel Moroni who told him to go and find some golden plates. He found and translated the plates to form the Book of Mormon. It said how Israel tribes migrated to America and that Jesus went to America after he rose from the dead. Eleven people were allowed to see the plates to prove that Smith was not lying
* They were hated in the East because of their beliefs –
  + You are allowed Polygamy – it was the will of God – Joseph Smith had ten wives
  + The number of Mormons grew very quickly
  + They had their own army
  + Smith ran for President – people were worried that if they became too powerful they would enforce their beliefs on the people of America
  + They believed that they were God’s chosen people
  + They were very hard-working and became very successful – this made many jealous

**What happened in the East?**

* They were attacked in their first “holy city” Kirtland after the collapse of their bank in 1837
* They moved to Missouri but stayed only one year as they were attacked and their leaders were put in prison
* Brigham Young took the Mormons to Nauvoo but again they were persecuted. In 1844 Smith and his brother were arrested. Non-Mormons attacked the prison and killed the brothers
* Young realised he had to take the Mormons away from the East and started leading them towards the Great Salt Lake in the West

**Why Salt Lake City?**

* The area was uninhabited, and so no one would attack them any more
* The land was almost entirely useless and so was not wanted by anyone else – this made it safe for the Mormons
* The Salt Lake Valley was still owned by Mexico, so the US government should now leave them alone

**The settlement**

* Every family was to build their own wagons
* Search parties were sent ahead to gather resources such as wood together before the bulk of the people arrived
* Land was shared out equally
* An irrigation system was built to supply the people with fresh water
* Travellers who crossed the valley were charged taxes
* Taxes would b paid to the church

**The problems**

* In 1848 the Salt Lake Valley was handed over to America by Mexico
* The US government wanted to make the Mormons submit to their laws
* The Mormons and the government clashed violently in 1857 – fearing a full scale war, the US government allowed the Mormons to practice their own religion and live their own way but their territory (Utah) was not allowed to become a state whilst they still practiced polygamy
* In 1890 the Mormons finally abandoned polygamy. Utah was admitted as a state by 1896

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| **The Homesteaders** |

**What was the attraction of the Plains?**

* Some moved to the West to escape from poverty or religious persecution
* Letters home encouraged more and more people to follow onto the Plains
* People were attracted by the various articles in newspapers and magazines which portrayed amazing images of the West
* The Plains were obviously habitable, this had already been proved by both the Indians and the early settlers such as the mountain men and trappers
* The railway companies were anxious to attract settlers – they needed to sell the land to finance the railroads
* **The Homestead Act 1862** – this gave away land free of charge as long as you built a house on the land and live there for five years. Each plot was 160 acres in size

**Life on the Plains**

* The problems:
  + Lack of water and very hard earth
  + Shortage of building materials
  + Extremes of weather – scorching hot summers and freezing winters
  + Prairie fires and plagues – these could both destroy crops in no time at all
  + Protecting the crops – especially against the cattle trails
* The solutions:
  + New crops – they grew harder types of wheat such as Turkey Red Wheat which could survive the harsh conditions better
  + Better machinery – stronger ploughs were built that would churn the earth
  + Fencing the land – this protected it against any wild animals
  + Wimdpumps – these provided water to the land and homesteaders
  + Dry farming – this was a method by which they conserved the water in the soil through ploughing soon after heavy rain

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| **Conflict on the Plains** |

**Why did the Indians and the Americans hate each other?**

* The US government believed in Manifest Destiny, that whites should own all of America
* Ranchers grazed their cattle on the land where the buffalo used to graze – many buffalo were wiped out because of the lack of food
* The US government usually supported the white settlers in any conflict with the Indians
* Miners were digging for gold in land that was owned by the Indians
* The homesteaders took a lot of land away from the Indian tribes – the government gave them this land
* The Us government tried to destroy the Indian culture by forcing them onto reservations and making them reliant upon handouts
* The US army were often brought in to help the white settlers in conflicts with the Indians
* Thousands of buffalo hunters invaded the Plains – by 1885 there were only 200 buffalo left on the Plains. In 1840 there were an estimated 13 million
* Indian children were taken from their families and sent to boarding schools where they were taught life in the “white man’s world”. If parents tried to stop their children from going their rations were stopped
* The railroads divided up the Plains and invited more settlers onto the Plains. They also helped supply the army and facilitate its fast deployments and movements

**The Indian Wars**

* Permanent Indian Frontier 1840 - all land given to the Indians
* 1848 gold rush
* First Fort Laramie treaty 1851
* 1857 gold rush
* Fort Lyon treaty 1861
* Little crow’s war 1862 – revolt by Santee Sioux against bad conditions on reservations
* Cheyenne Uprising 1863 – revolts against conditions on reservations. Wagon trains attacked for food
* Sand Creek Massacre 1864 – at least 163 killed of which at least 110 were women and children – us army attacked despite white flag being raised
* Red cloud’s war 1867 – Sioux attacked travellers on the Bozeman trail and forced withdrawal of army
* The Second Fort Laramie treaty 1868 - us government abandon Bozeman trail, Sioux given permanent reservation in Dakota
* The winter campaign of 1868
* Sheridan and Custer attack black kettle’s winter camp – the Battle of Washita this was exactly the same as the events at Sand Creek
* Gold in Dakota - 1874
* The Battle of Little Big Horn 1876
* Defeat of Custer and the 7th cavalry
* The Dawes Act 1887 - divides land into 160 acre allotments, some of these given to Indians. Now they were forced to learn to farm - completely destroys way of life
* 1890 Wounded Knee - End of the Indians’ wars and they are finally defeated.

**Why did the Indians lose?**

* The US army were greater n number than the Indians, especially in major battles
* The Indians did not work together as a collective unit – some tribes actually joined forces with he US army against their “common enemy”
* The US army changed and manipulated their tactics – they fought during the night and the morning and even mounted campaigns in the depths of winter when the Indians were not expecting it
* The Indians kept attempting to sort things out peacefully through treaties but were then left open to attack when the treaties were not honoured
* The Indians were less well armed than the US army and were unable to replace their losses in the same manner as the army
* The Indians were never able to fight long campaigns – they had their families to look after and feed – their whole way of life depended on the males