

MANIFEST DESTINY:

- In 1845 John O'Sullivan, editor of a New York newspaper, the *Morning Post* wrote that it was the manifest destiny (the clear purpose) of the whites of the USA to control the entire continent.
- This was the belief that it was God's wish that whites should control the whole of North America.
- There was also a deeply racist element to this. Most whites thought that they were better than Indians, so it would be a good and a natural thing to wipe them out.
- The Indians had not discovered writing or the wheel. They were not Christians. Many whites believed that this proved that the Indians were inferior.
- The whites were not interested in the buffalo and so did not worry when they disturbed the large herds.

MOUNTAIN MEN:

- In the Eastern states, animal fur could be sold at a high price. There were plenty of animals in the mountains that could be killed for their fur, so there was profit to be made.
- Mountain men lived in the mountains hunting animals, particularly beaver, used to make hats. They lived solitary, dangerous lives.
- Some Indians also killed animals and sold their skins to the mountain men. In this way the Indians were able to get goods (e.g. metal goods, like cooking pots), which they could not produce for themselves.
- So the mountain men and the Indians lived reasonably happily side-by-side because their interests did not conflict. Some mountain men had Indian wives.
- By 1840 there were fewer animals to trap and most mountain men had given up. Some turned their knowledge of the Plains to use by becoming guides for the wagon-trails.
- Unfortunately for the Indians the mountain men told people in the east that there was lots of good farming land in the west. This encouraged the whites to look for land.

PROBLEMS OF EARLY WAGON TRAINS:

- At first there were few people who were prepared to risk the long and dangerous journey to California and Oregon.
- There were no good maps or roads and no bridges across huge rivers.
- The trails were 3,800 km long and involved crossing the Rocky Mountains.
- The journey had to be made between April, when the spring grass was growing on the plains to feed their cattle, and November, when snow made the Rockies impassable.
- Several wagon trains were setting off every day. 5,000 people died of cholera on the way
- Illnesses struck the wagon-train pioneers owing to lack of hygiene on the trail and were difficult to treat.
- Wagon trains had to carry everything they needed, not only for the length of the journey but also until they could harvest the crops they would plant when they got to their final destination. This could take as long as 18 months.
- If a wagon train failed to make it, everybody might die, and many did. Some people were forced to eat the bodies of people who had died in order to survive.

WHY DID WAGON TRAINS INCREASE IN THE 1840s AND WHAT WERE THE EFFECTS?:

- There were also Russian settlements in California until the mid-1840s, but the settlers had all left before gold was discovered in California.
- Following the discovery of gold in California, the trickle of people travelling the trails to the West became a flood.
- Some went by sea around Cape Horn, but most went overland, which was much cheaper.
- From the 1840s whites began to come into conflict with the Indians. These whites were not going to live on the Plains. They travelled across the Plains to go to farm good land on the west coast in California and Oregon.
- Consequently they disrupted the Indians' way of life.