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The American West has a significant place in American History. Generations before us have learned of this fascinating time through popular Westerns on television. Although my generation did not participate a whole lot in this leisurely activity, we learned about the American West through school. We learned of the cowboys and Indians, the same content that was present in the Westerns, just orally passed down to us from the generation that actually sat down and watched them. Being in some elementary classrooms during my field experience, now the children are given a quick overview, a sort of glaze over, of the American West. It seems to be shrinking both in knowledge and popularity. Battles seem to be the highlight of the American West now, in classrooms, with a quick applause for the main characters such as Sitting Bull or Ulysses Grant. After reading both, "The Legacy of Conquest," and "West from Appomattox," there is knowledge both authors present demonstrating how influential the American West was on the country. These books describe the importance the West held in forming America both physically, when land and resources are being discussed, but also the overall mentality, when the people are being discussed. After going through a devastating war, the people of America were looking for a new beginning. They wanted to have something to look forward too. It seems this is still done now, living in America we want to believe there is a justification for some of the horrible stuff being done. If we can justify the unpleasant actions Americans take on others, then there is a means to why those horrible things are being done. There is a reason, and as long as we have a reason then it is acceptable for the bad things to happen. The American West is important

to American history because it was a strong mindset present in many. It created a false foundation for a perceived new beginning. The American West demonstrates the silver lining in the devastation. To many people the American West was an opportunity to change. The opportunity to change laid a different foundation in an area that was new to them, which in turn affected many other lives.

Just as other parts of history, the American West has a dilemma that must be sorted through. As someone studying this era through these different authors it must be considered the fact that depending on who's lens you are looking through, the events described will look different. As Patricia Nelson Limerick put it in her book, "Western American history has multiple points of view." (39) As I was reading I kept reminding my self of this. I wanted to keep it in the forefront of my mind, because it plays a huge role in how someone will interpret the events of the American West. It also plays a very significant rule in the importance of the American West to American history. Looking at this time period from different angles, through different lenses presented different opportunities to different groups of people.

The American West presented the people of the North, South, and East with something to look forward too. These people had just been through a war and were looking West to find more. They wanted a better life and whether it was truthful or not the West held that ideal for them. Throughout Heather Cox Richardson's book she discusses a woman named Kellie. She talks about how Kellie wanted to move out west due to hearing about how great it was. The American West was an idea put into her head of better opportunity. Her father moved out first. She then married, had children, and followed. At one point the book described her becoming worried about her father and going west to look for him. She comes across him, but he does not look the same. He looks dirty and different. She describes seeing the sod homes and how she thought they

would be beautiful and green and really just a dream to live in, but when she actually had to live in one she described how awful and dirty, and just horrible it was to truly live in one. I thought this was a perfect example of how the west was and its importance in American History.

The people of America hailing from the North, South and East wanted so badly to believe in something different. They wanted to know there was something better out there waiting for them. This can be seen in the Heather Cox Richardson's book when she is discussing the way easterners looked at the West, "In their romantic view, the West was a world where unlimited resources were free for the taking by unfettered individuals, a pristine world untouched by the corrupt struggles of eastern government." Many believed in this idea so much that they were willing to make the long trek out to the lands of the West to see everything it had to offer, just like Kellie did. For someone to be willing to travel such a far distance in what they knew would be harsh conditions, there has to be a strong sense of opportunity present. Once they got to the West, many like Kellie, found it very different than it was described.

Another idea that was set in the heads of many coming to the West was the idea discussed in Mrs. Richardson's book. The idea of the free labor dream. Because the West had been a land of nomadic people there was no government in the sense that many moving to the West from the North, South, and East knew government to be. They believed it was a new land which needed some type of overseer of power. They wanted someone to be responsible for everything. The only problem was they also had a fear of who was going to be trusted with all of that power. The free labor dream would work if the person or people in charge would let it. There was also the problem of someone in the government holding all of that power but having their own personal agenda which would then trickle down and cause problems for others who did not fit into that agenda. Once again ideas in the minds of many different people holding different

points of view held a very strong significance in the American West. The idea of a government was nice but how it was organized and what it truly was going to lay out for the people of that land to follow was a fear many did not want to have.