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HIST 413

Paper #1

September 25, 2018

### American West Importance to American History

As America spread farther West, the mind of man grew. Eyes were becoming more open to the growing of a country and the prosperity of a nation. The West was a time of expansion, conquest, and individualism. In the book “Legacy of Conquest” by Patricia Nelson Limerick, she talks about one historian Fredrick Jackson Turner and how he stated that the west was “The existence of an area of free land, and its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development” (21). This was a true statement about the west but once 1890 came about, there was no more land to conquest in the west. Which means according to Turner, that was the ending of western history when he stated “...the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.” (Limerick 21). But this statement he said was vastly untrue, the west had more history to make! As stated by Limerick, “reorganized, the history of the West is a study of a place undergoing conquest and never fully escaping its consequences” (26). The history that happened in the West was what made America how is it today. Many people migrated to the West from many different places looking to find better opportunities. As well as, many industries used the West’s resources to make product and uses the railroads to get that product to the right place. Mining was one of the biggest ways of money in the West and it helped make the West what it became.

To begin, the West was full of resources that places on the East and South didn't necessarily have. According to the book "West from Appomattox" by Heather Cox Richardson, "there were cattle in the West, and gold, and silver, and apparently endless herds of cattle" (114). With all of these resources more and more people decided to move out West. "In the years after the Civil War, the West grew dramatically" (Richardson 114). Now with all of these resources they needed to make money off of them somehow, so they used railroads. The railroads were to get the crops, gold, silver, etc to the East coast to then be processed so then they can make money off of the resources in the West.

In addition, when it comes to the south the west was a gateway to new opportunities for the people in the south. Once the war ended the people needed a place to go to get work and be free. In the book "West from Appomattox" by Heather Cox Richardson, it stated that "what was clear was that a free labor nation would include the West" (31). This was a big deal to the people in the south and caused a lot of them to migrate to the West. Limerick stated "...jobs in the booming defense industries pulled blacks west" (280). Southerners were also starting to migrate to the West to get away from the corrupt government that they had in the South. Richardson states "they saw antebellum southern leaders replaced by the white Unionists they detested, northern emigrants they loathed, and, even worse, African Americans, at a time when northerners refused to let blacks vote in their own region" (69). The new government that took control of the south was even worse than it was before, so the people saw the opportunity in the West and went for it. Unlike the South in the West "there was no traditional American System of government to overturn" (Richardson 69). With there being no government to have to deal with it gave the people migrating from the South hope on what they could do or find in the West. No government meant that they could Another problem associated with the south and contributed to

the migration was that “southern cotton could not recover the ground lost during the war: heirloom seeds had been lost, fields overgrown with weeds, levees broken” (Richardson 83). Meaning that the south was a place of struggle when trying to get work and there was a lack of money within the South due to the cotton not being a good market for them anymore. So, more southerners went West to find more resources such as farming resources or mining opportunities.

Furthermore, the West was very big for mining in hopes of finding gold or silver. This was also another reason many people from different places decided to migrate West. Mining was one of the biggest industries to impact the West. Limerick stated that “when it came to expansion, farmers moved fast—but minors moved faster” (99). When it came to mining it was a huge deal that only kept growing and getting more people interested. It put a lot of money into certain states and helped the expansion of the West as a whole. As stated by Limerick “mining took a gradual process and accelerated it, drawing thousands to California and then scattering miners, merchants, camps, towns, mines, mills, smelters, trails, and roads throughout the interior West” (99). Mining was one of the starts of the West and how it brought about so many more people as well as bringing the white settlers to places they weren’t before! This created problems with the Indians over territory of course. But mining started out being an idea and a dream for many people migrating to the West for that reason, but it “mining threw the West into the forefront of industrialized life” (Limerick 100). She also stated that “mining set a mood that has never disappeared from the West: the attitude of extractive industry—get in, get rich, get out” (100). The mining industry was one that wasn’t always a guarantee gold strike, sometimes the miners would come to these places to mine “that had looked promising but proven barren” (43). So, some people would come to the West in hopes of mining but land up having to spend their time doing other things because they often times had to wait until it was the right time of year. There

was also a lot of hard work that came with mining with no reward sometimes. Limerick stated, “even when things went well, placer mining was hard and wearing work that entailed standing in cold water and repeated stooping and bending” (104).