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History 413

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How did the West Benefit the Eastern United States?

The west was a world where people of all ethnicities could live in peace, a land where people could live in harmony and help each other endure the hard work and overcome the endless obstacles that existed. There would be Indian wars, the farmer would have to contend with insects and weeds they had never known existed. The miner would spend days on a river bank praying that the next pan of dirt and water would contain that shiny bit of gold. The cattlemen would spend endless days on the lonely plains chasing cows with minds of their own. "These people knew that this move was a risk but was the risk worth the reward?" (Limerick 42)

The eastern United states filled up rapidly, immigrants were arriving daily. The cities were over crowded and the air smelled like rotten garbage. The people started to wonder where they could find a better life. Horace Greely kept writing "Go West Youngman" and it kept getting louder, and people decided to take the plunge and escape the life they found themselves trapped in. The pioneers had a lot of obstacles to overcome, the first was the land they wanted was not vacant. Indian tribes called this land home and had land grants. The government had to find a way to move the Indians and make room for the white farmers. (Limerick 193) Of course, the Indians were not happy about the pioneers taking over their land and wars became a regular

happening. (Limerick191,192) The next problem was that farmers need water for their fields, and a way to transport their harvest to market. This meant that the farms needed to be close to a waterway. The third and no less important was how to get the money for seed to plant, and how to feed their family until the crop came in.

The next type of pioneer came along, gold was discovered. Finding a natural resource like gold put dollar signs in the eyes of a lot of young men. Men sold everything they owned to get enough money for a chance to find gold. They felt that the risk was worth taking. This was the end of a dream for some, because by the time they got to the gold field, the easy gold was gone. The mining companies had taken over and huge operations held all the claims. (Limerick44)

A great part of the west was arid, sandy, and covered with a lot of weeds. This was not land for planting, either the weeds took over the fields, or grasshoppers ate everything in sight. A few rugged men realized that cattle would do well in this environment, the cattleman was born. There was work for everybody on a ranch, the owner took care of the money, the cowboys took care of the cattle, the branding and the herding. There had to be cooks and hands that mended fences, the cattle industry was lucrative for a lot of people. (Limerick 43)

This was not easy work to start a farm the pioneer had to build a house, it did not have to be big or pretty, just shelter. (Limerick 98) The trees must be cut away and the land plowed. Everybody had to work from the oldest to the youngest. The women took on many hats, childcare, planting and took part in the everyday running of the farm. (Limerick 53) When the farmers over came the weeds and grasshoppers the farmer became the heart of the Nation. Not only did they feed the west but the east as well. The crops would be loaded on barges and floated down many waterways until they reached the Gulf of Mexico, where they were loaded on to

ships and transported to the east coast. John Muir came to the west as a boy, when his family immigrated from Scotland. He remembered, “almost everything connected with wheat raising abounded in trying work, cradling in the long sweaty dog-days. Racking and binding, stacking and thrashing. And it often seemed to be that our fierce, over-industrious way of getting the wheat from the ground was too closely connected to grave-digging.” (Richardson 118)

The eastern part of Texas was great for cotton and the southern cotton farmers began to migrate to this fresh new land. The western half of Texas was too dry and windy for cotton but was great grazing land for cattle, sheep and goats. The main problem was transportation of the beef to the eastern seaboard. During the Civil War the Union took possession of the Mississippi river and the southern railroads. The cattle produced at such a fast rate that the ranchers were offering free meat to the southern troops, if they would transport them. (Richardson 34) After the war the federal government gave land grants to anyone who would build a railroad that would join the east and west coast. (Richardson 75-76) Not only did the railroad help transport the beef but the produce from the farms. The west was feeding the entire nation, and part of the orient. (Richardson 75)

After the war had ended there were many African Americans that had no place to go and no way of earning a living for their families. These people migrated west and found jobs on cattle ranches and found land for their own farms. The west was a place where the freeman could live without the constant fear of the white land owner. The African American had a home at last, a home where he could fill free and make his own decisions. (Richardson 72) In the neighborhood of one-third of the western immigrants were African American. (Richardson 72)

