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Hist 413

Paper #1

Rees

Western love child

The goal of the antiquarian is the dead past; the goal of the historian is the living peasant.¹ The West is important to American history as a whole because it gave Americans a new platform to create something for their own. After the civil war there were three emerging groups that would end up relying on one another in more ways than one, the federal government, the labor force, and the politicians of all branches and sides of the aisle. I like to think of the west after the civil war, as the child that needs to be raised after a messy divorce. Because if we think of it on those terms, how is going to be funded? What does that look like? The west was the best place for opportunity in Americans after the civil war; it had the best potential for growth, and expansion.

The biggest question that had to be solved before any of this could take place in the west was how to establish free labor in the west after reconstruction the south after the war. The west after the civil war looks a little like a free for all, there were a few territories, but mainly it was inhabited by Indians. A big problem for the government was the question of free labor. By 1868 the idea of free labor had almost been achieved. It was imperative for America's free labor world that all Americans support the idea of a shared harmony of interest, and that they believe they are working together to achieve something greater. The first big business to come after the civil war the Railroad, as the railroads grew so did the economy. The new western economy needed workers, to actually build the railroads, but it also needed other positions like bankers, managers, typists, regular jobs that make all the logistics of creating the west possible. in Richardson's book on page 91 she makes arguments that to me seem like this idea of a free labor market really divided republicans and democrats of the day. It seems like the republicans were in favor of protecting the idea of economic harmony and peace. The democrats made arguments to make it seem like the republicans would have a monopoly over the free labor market. This really struck nerve with people living in 1868, they had just ended a war based off the federal government having too much power and now it would seem like they have all the power over the labor market. However this doesn't hold for very long, as the American idea of hard work and independence begins to form and the push west begins to mean opportunity for everyone as a free labor system. Everyone had competing ideas of what America should be, but the west seemed to be the buffer that would let people

¹ Legacy pg1

put aside their differences and seek financial gain. here we see the federal government playing a crucial role in shaping what the west was going to look like and how it would operate. It gives way to questions like how is the west going to be funded.

Federal government assistance it was instrumental in bridging gaps in a cultural, economic, and political sense after the civil war. The West was an escape for some and an opportunity for others. Industry was booming, and the West had the resources to fuel its needs. At a time when America couldn't have been any lower, the west was seen as a light at the end of the tunnel for some people. For other however, pushing west was risky, but the potential for growth and prosperity was alluring. Even though these people might have been escaping to the west to be free from the war and all the back and forth about the federal government's role in states' rights, the federal government funding was probably the only thing that made western expansion possible. This federal involvement in the western territories was ensuring that all states had equal representation based on their populations. The problem was that western states had huge area of land, only a handful of people in it, and would be represented by two senators a piece. Given this equality with states back east, western senators seemed to have an advantage as they had the opportunity to work with and represent major economic interests. Francis Warren was one these people to invest in ranching, utilities, banks, railroads, and even merchandising. Like many people who were pushing west, he really wanted two things. First he wanted to become rich. Secondly, we wanted to develop and grow the state of Wyoming. What made him successful, and why he was able to invest in all those seemingly pivotal business, was his ability to acquire federal subsidies.² One thing that was attractive to the people of that day was one's ability to put aside any issues of the day and focus on economic development. Warren was able to do this and it made his continuants vote in favor of policies that were written and designed to increase their claim in society. The west offered growth and opportunity, and the federal government were the ones who were able to fund a lot of these projects. The fed's influence would not disappear either, many other policy's that assert federal control over the west would be seen, like the Reclamation act of 1902, and the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934. So if we go back to our metaphor, and were asking how ourselves how were going to fund our child. The answer is with opportunities put forth by the federal government that offer incentives to those with business's that drive economic growth.

One thing that everyone thinks of when they here about the West is the Cowboys and Indians, or about Manifest Destiny and how everyone who came west did it on their own by the sweat on their brow and hard labor. But nothing so undermines the Western claim to a tradition of independence as this matter of federal support to western

² Lagcy pg86

development. The two key frontier activities were the control of the Indians, and the distribution of land these were primarily federal responsibilities, and at times would involve a considerable expense. ³

³ Limerick pg 82