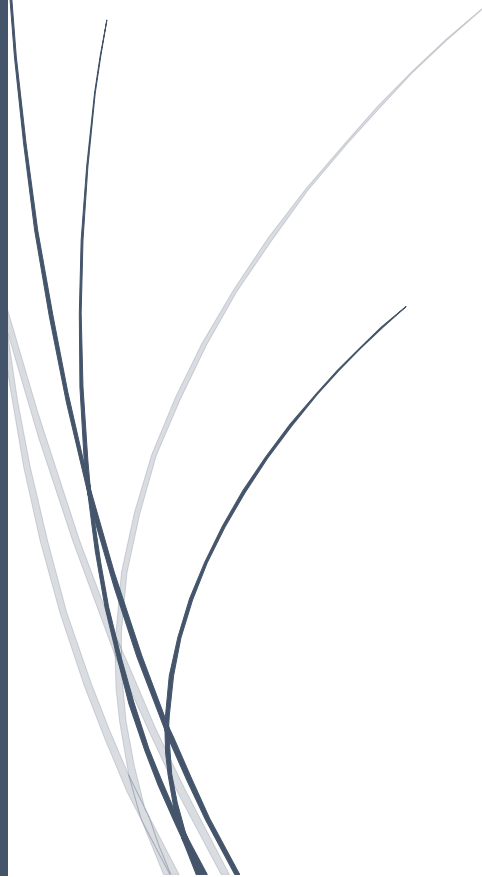




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The Idea Taken from the Past



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When looking into the history of the United States of America, many important events turned the country from just getting by, to becoming one of the greatest powers in the world. These events ranged from economic independence to eliminating discrimination, expanding from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts. The impact spread across the territories. One of the most influential roles came from an era in time, that not many look upon when it comes to growth of the United States, the American West. Starting with colonization, moving through to the industrialization age, the impact of the West stayed true. The important role the American West played in American history was not a location or physical being; it was an idea. This idea was the open freedom to expand, increase income, and ability to pursue a freedom that could not be realized from the confinements of the city.

“In the 1880s, middle-class Americans consolidated their identity around the idea that individuals could rise on their own through hard work. Increasingly, this vision took its contours from popular perceptions of life in the West, where, it seemed, everyone was welcome if only they were willing to put their shoulder to the wheel.”¹

Through unsteady terrain, inconstant weather, and unexpected complications, American West pioneers had anything but luck going against them. “Western emigrants understood not just that they were taking risks but also that risks led to rewards.”² These of which they had heard of as the great opportunities of the unknown 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 the eastern government.”³ This unclaimed land was for the

¹ Richardson, Heather Cox. *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War*. Yale University Press (2008), 230.

² Limerick, Patricia Nelson. *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*. W.W. Norton & Co., (2006), 42.

³ Richardson, Heather Cox. *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War*. Yale University Press (2008), 114.

taking and of the taking they would do. “Western history [was] a story structured by the drawing of lines and the marking of borders... There was one appropriate way to treat land—divide it, distribute it, register it.”⁴ Where there was unclaimed land, there was new opportunity.

“In Western America... the dominance of the profit motive supported the notion that the pursuit of property and profit was rationality in action, and not emotional at all. In fact, the passion for the profit was and is a passion like most others. It can make other concerns insignificant and inspire at once extraordinary courage and extraordinary cruelty. It was the passion at the core of the Western adventure.”⁵

With the interest in land, came the impression of money. “At the same time, word of the money to be made in the West in agriculture, hunting, mining, [and] cattle had spread east quickly...”⁶ Opportunity was springing up across the west and with that came a hunger. Eastern Americans began to look toward the idea. “Perhaps most important, mining set a mood that has never disappeared from the West: the attitude of extractive industry—get in, get rich, get out.”⁷ This caused the diversity of the West to shift.

“Everyone became an actor in everyone else’s play; understanding any part of the play now requires us to take account of the whole. It is perfectly possible to watch a play and keep track of, even identify with, several characters at once, even when those characters are in direct conflict with each other and within themselves. The ethnic diversity of

⁴ Limerick, Patricia Nelson. *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*. W.W. Norton & Co., (2006), 54.

⁵ Limerick, Patricia Nelson. *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*. W.W. Norton & Co., (2006), 77.

⁶ Richardson, Heather Cox. *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War*. Yale University Press (2008), 63.

⁷ Limerick, Patricia Nelson. *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*. W.W. Norton & Co., (2006), 100.

Western history asks only that: pay attention to the parts, and pay attention to the whole.”⁸

When visualizing the West, land and money are prominent, but underneath those wanted desires lies a want most desired by all, freedom to become who you want to be. “A deemphasis of the frontier opens the door to a different kind of intellectual stability.”⁹ The west created opportunities for not just white men, but for all races, genders, and ages. If you wanted more for yourself, your family, your legacy; all you had to do was go West. The opportunities in the eyes of the American pioneers were endless. These possibilities were seen not just from the East, but from the North and South as well. Mining, farming, and cattle ranching were the three main ways to earn an income. But as the economy grew and the job market of the West improved the possibilities were endless.

(I plan on continuing going into some fail/success stories of pioneers that traveled West.

This will lead into my conclusion.)

⁸ Limerick, Patricia Nelson. *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*. W.W. Norton & Co., (2006), 292.

⁹ Limerick, Patricia Nelson. *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*. W.W. Norton & Co., (2006), 26.