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American West

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American West Compared to America

As history unfolds, there is always a story to be told on how it all went down. With the expansion of the American West much of the process that it took to come about the American West can be easily related to American History as a whole. Through the novels, *The Legacy of Conquest*, by Patricia Limerick and *West From Appomattox*, by Heather Cox Richardson, it can be seen how the expansion of American West is comparable to American history as a whole.

Patricia Limerick, shows us a competitive, controversial American West, where for Native Americans, Latinos, Anglo and Afro Americans it was an important area of growth. She argues, the West has a history grounded primarily in economic reality, in questions of profit, loss, competition, and consolidation. She interprets the stories and the characters in a new way that was not seen. The trappers, traders, Native Americans, farmers, oilmen, cowboys, and sheriffs of the Old West meant business in more ways than one. Limerick's western worldview, the frontier has been replaced with invasion, conquest, colonization, or exploitation.

Heather Cox Richardson tells the story of Reconstruction, Reconstruction is about how a middle class formed in America and how its members defined what the nation would stand for, both at home and abroad, for the time being and for the future of America. Reconstruction was not simply about the rebuilding of the South after the Civil War. Instead, the late nineteenth cen-

ture was building modern America, as Southerners, Northerners, and Westerners into a national identity that united these three regions into a country that would become a world power.

Early in Limerick's writing she is seen comparing the expansion into the West to slavery. "Like slavery, conquest tested the ideals of the United States. Conquest deeply affected both the conqueror and the conquered, just as slavery shaped slaveholder and slave (Limerick 18)." With the expansion West much was conquered in order to make the expansion West possible. Whether it start with the conquering of the Native Americans, to the animals in the land, the land was conquered to live and farm on. It tested what the United States was going to be while they expanded Westward. Slavery tested the ideals of the United States back in the colonial area and a little part of the expansion West.

Slavery was seen as a serious matter in the twentieth century to Americans, however the conquest West was not. For slavery was seen to be held between the rich, landholding scholars who used the African, African American slave to build their profits and legacy. As for the conquest West, was for exploration, entertainment and the national escapism, the conquest remained an adventure. "Children happily played 'cowboys and Indians' but stopped short of 'masters and slaves'(Limerick 19)." These two acts of conquest and slavery are seen as devastating times in the American history, however they built the American society it is today. They are so similar in many ways and can be seen throughout the shaping of the American ideals then and in present day America.

With the Civil War and the conquest of the American West happening side by side, the expansion west gave the southern free African Americans a place to go and begin a new life. Nat Love talks about his life in the South being hard for his family as he worked grubbing the fields,

picking nuts and berries just to survive as the whites cheated him and his family. In contrast, he talks about the West as a great land of opportunity where race did not matter (Richardson 225). The West provided these African Americans more opportunity, it was not absolutely perfect to them but it was much better than the life they had previously lived in the South.

While slavery and conquest West, were able to be compared significantly to one another, the coming of factories and railroads transformed the West and were able to link it all together to the South and the North. The nation's first big business were the railroads. As they grew after the war, they transformed the economy. Trade was made possible not just north and south along the rivers and the coast but east and west on the railroads (Richardson 79).

With the West having three types of natural resources, mining, farming, and cattle ranching, the upcoming of the railroad transformed the way these natural resources were transported from area to area. The farming products could be sent from the farms in the West to the people living in the South and North within a couple days. As well the South and North were able to send out the products they were growing and had cultivated to the West. In addition, farmers did not need to own land near a river or body of water to ship their goods. With the trains, they were able to set up their land anywhere and their goods would be carried out and sold off the trains. Barges were no longer a necessity, the railroad made it possible without rivers.

Meat was able to be sent from the cattle ranches in the West around as well. Chicago in American history is known well for its meat industry, but without the cattle ranches in the West and the railroads, the meat industry in Chicago would never be as significant as it was.

With the uprising in agricultural, mining, and cattle ranching, it required an expansion in labor as well. The railroad in addition was set up to transport the people from New York all the

way to most West, California, Colorado, Arizona, etc. The expansion west grew dramatically with the opening of the railroad. In addition not only was the labor force needed for the hard hand in the dirt stuff but with the economy booming, unskilled labor was needed such as clerical workers, bankers, and managers(Richardson 80).