

Ken Kester

History 413

J. Rees

Paper #2

### Race in the West

The importance of race in the American West is important to American history overall because of the role it plays in the overall goals of the white Anglo American. Race has always been a hierarchical structure throughout American history, and only since the civil rights movement in the 1960s has that started to deteriorate. When this country was founded it thrived off a slave economy, in which deep racial tensions existed with Africans. As this country would grow and expand west, another racial divide can be seen with people who existed here since before the white man with the Native Indian people. Once we venture further in time to that of the gold rush, another type of racism would be seen in hatred for Asian or Oriental people. We can even look at Spanish speaking people to our southern border and analyze how some of the things they did was looked down upon by the white people, just because it was different. The importance of race in the west is important to American history as a whole because it reflects ideas of how white Anglos viewed anyone with different color skin color than themselves. We should consider the stories in the book *Empire of the Summer Moon*, and *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* and how those characters adapted to a racist culture, and how that society viewed these people. Racist views of Americans in the

19th and 20th century reflect the racist ideology that was present in the western frontier. Race was a tool used by white men to enhance their ability to achieve their goals, and it was used quite successfully.

Race is handled in the west the same way it was handled when white settlers first discovered "The New World." When Christopher Columbus convinced the Spanish monarchy to let the enslavement of Native people, it solidified this ideology that the Native people in the New World were of lesser being and that it was okay to enslave these people. During the push westward in America in the 19th century, many of the people were simple farmers with a fierce work ethic and an aggressiveness that made them refuse to quit even in the face of danger. These white farmers moving west were Calvinists, meaning they were part of a major branch of Protestantism that follows Christianity. As S. C. Gwynne says in the book *Empire of the Summer Moon* on page 20 when talking about the Parker family, "They were militant predestinarian Baptists, severe in their religion and intolerant of people who did not believe as they did."<sup>1</sup> White people would end up hating Indians with a passion considering them less than fully human and did not hold the same inalienable rights as white men. This would be especially true when Indian raids of American forts would result in the Indians taking captives, and ransoming them back for provisions.

Race in the west was not like race in the south, in the middle of the 19th century the American Civil War broke out. A deadly war over slavery in which white people believed that Africans were less than humans and deserved to be held captive. Racist

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<sup>1</sup> Gwynne 20

views seem to come naturally to white Americans in the 19th century, and if White Americans can have such a hatred for Africans, what's stopping that ideology from encompassing any race that looks different than them? When looking at Gwynne's empire of the moon, the hatred for Indians can be seen in the conflicts between soldiers and Cheyenne Warriors. One such example is on page 220, when Gwynne details the night of November 28, 1864 and the extermination that happened at the Cheyenne village of Chief Black Kettle. An estimated 600 people at this village, and roughly 35 of them were warriors.<sup>2</sup> At the end of the massacre 300 Cheyennes lay dead, all were scalped, and many were mutilated. Having just made a peace agreement with another group of white soldiers the Sand Creek Massacre would be the bloodiest, most treacherous, and least justified slaughter of Indians in American history. The atrocities done to the Native people is evidence of the contempt for other races that the White ideology holds for outsiders. By defeating your enemy you put them in their hierarchical place, and for White American men in the 19th century they seemed to have no problem killing you in order to establish their power. Power which they sought in a military, and political sense.

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<sup>2</sup> Gwynne220