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Different Americans were motivated by different reasons to move west.

Ranchers would move to more land in the west to raise cattle, particularly Texas and Kansas. These cattle ranchers would then ship their cattle back to the Eastern states to sell. They sold for much higher prices back east. The expansion of the railroad made it possible to easily transport the cattle east.

Farmers were motivated because they could get free land. The Homestead Acts entitled homesteaders to 160 acres of free land as long as they cleared and farmed it. Homesteaders then rushed to claim land in the Great Plains, made possible by pumping water out of the ground, which eventually became the world's most productive wheat-growing region in the world.

Miners would also move west whenever and wherever gold or silver was discovered. They were responsible for fast-growing and lawless boom towns that were soon abandoned and became ghost towns after mines dried up. As a result of Americans moving west, the Indians already living there were badly affected. It became a big fight between land and cultures. Ranchers would take all of the Indian lands and kill off all the buffalo, the Plains Indian's main source of food, just so they could have room to raise cattle.

New railroad was being built, and buffalo were getting in the way, so they were often shot and killed by hunters in trains. Also, railroad moved more settlers out to the east, creating more conflict with the Natives. Farmers took all the land in the Great Plains, where the Plains Indian tribes lived. Miners would take Indian lands to dig up, leading into some rough battles like Little Big Horn and the Battle of Nez Perce. Indians were forced to give up their land to live in reservations where they were promised food, tools, and schools

but rarely got any. Indians were very unhappy and often left to find food or to attack settlers.