

Learning goal:
understand the
opening of the west.

Countries, United States



Learning Goal: Understand the opening of the west. Montrell Simmons TB1 4/18/12 Westward Movement, the populating (by Europeans) of the land within the continental boundaries of the mainland United States, a process that began shortly after the first colonial settlements were established along the Atlantic coast. Despite those decades of continuous westward pushing of the frontier line, it was not until the conclusion of the War of 1812 that the westward movement became a significant outpouring of people across the continent. From the 1700s, several countries have had frontiers to settle, or at least to exploit for natural resources. Known the world over, the westward movement that took the United States from a string of East Coast settlements to the Pacific Ocean is certainly the most famous. That settlement-and the wild rush of pioneers into the Oklahoma Indian Territory-constituted the last chapter of the westward movement. The first British settlers in the New World stayed close to the Atlantic, their lifeline to needed supplies from England. Between the gold rush and the Civil War, Americans in growing numbers filled the Mississippi River valley, Texas, the southwest territories, and the new states of Kansas and Nebraska. During the war, gold and silver discoveries drew prospectors-and later settlers-into Oregon, Colorado, Nevada, Idaho, and Montana. Trappers and traders made the first forays into the Far West during the 1820s. Fur trappers in California and Oregon traded cattle hides with eastern merchants for manufactured goods. Only a small number of explorers, fur trappers, traders, and missionaries had ventured far beyond the Mississippi River. These trailblazers drew a picture of the American West as a land of promise, a paradise of plenty, filled with fertile valleys and rich land. John L. O'Sullivan on Manifest Destiny, 1839 The

American people having derived their origin from many other nations, and the Declaration of National Independence being entirely based on the great principle of human equality, these facts demonstrate at once our disconnected position as regards any other nation; that we have, in reality, but little connection with the past history of any of them, and still less with all antiquity, its glories, or its crimes. It took Americans a century and a half to expand as far west as the Appalachian Mountains, a few hundred miles from the Atlantic coast. It took another 50 years to push the frontier to the Mississippi River. By 1830 fewer than 100, 000 pioneers had crossed the Mississippi. But by the late 1880s, with the decline of the range cattle industry, settlers moved in and fenced the Great Plains into family farms. But Canada, Australia, Russia, and South Africa, among other countries, also have had their frontiers. During the 1840s, tens of thousands of Americans began the process of settling the West beyond the Mississippi River. Thousands of families chalked G.T.T. ("Gone to Texas") on their gates or painted "California or Bust" on their wagons, and joined the trek westward. By 1850, pioneers had pushed the edge of settlement all the way to Texas, the Rocky Mountains, and the Pacific Ocean.