

Law and order in the american west essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Many Americans emigrated across the Plains (‘ The Great American Desert’) as a result of various push and pull factors which forced them to abandon their present residence in search of a better life in the West. Since the East and West were separated by the seemingly uninhabitable ‘ Great American Desert’ the only knowledge emigrants had of the West were circulating rumours and stories told by people who had travelled to the West.

This included traders such as the Fur Trappers, missionaries who wanted more immigrants from the East to come settle and help convert more Indians to Christianity and people keen to make money out of the new settlers. These stories depicted places like Oregon and California, in the West as ‘ paradise on earth’, with weather conditions perfect for farming and plentiful supplies of food and other natural resources. To the people of this time period these two locations were no more than distant outposts seen and understood by few. There was no sound proof that assured the authenticity of these stories, consequently one would wonder why people in the East would risk the level of comfort they enjoyed at their present residence to move to a location of which they had little knowledge and no guarantee of a better life. However, all of a sudden the quality of life in the East dropped dramatically. Banks collapsed in a great economic depression, wages fell and farmers suffered because the value of the crops (i.

e. wheat and corn) they grew collapsed. All factors considered many people concluded circumstances could not be much worse in the West and resolved to undertake the risk of the journey. The different groups of people who migrated west all had their own motives for travelling west and circumstances, which influenced their decision to make the journey. In the

January of 1848, James Marshall's discovery of Gold in the Sierra foothills was the catalyst needed to turn the steady stream of emigrants travelling westwards into a deluge of desperate 'speculators' eager to strike it lucky.

This mass movement of travellers westwards in search of Gold is known as 'The Gold Rush'. Drove of travellers (tens-of-thousands), mostly able-bodied men and some entire families joined the search for Gold. As the population in the East grew, towns became congested and the inhabitants began to feel crowded. The West offered land in enormous quantities and the American government realized the need to populate the West.

The American government passed various acts to entice farmers and their families to migrate west across the Great Plains. These acts included: The Homestead Act of 1862: The Homestead Act of 1862 passed by the U. S Congress was meant to encourage settlers to travel to and farmland in the west. The act allowed 160 acres of free land to each family provided they resided on it and cultivated it for five years.

The Timber Culture Act of 1873: To encourage the growth of settlements as well as tree raising this act was passed stating that families could claim an extra 160 acres of land provided 40 acres of it was used to plant trees and that they farmed it for 10 years. The Desert Land Act of 1877: This act was passed to encourage the development of the arid regions of the west. The act permitted settlers to buy 640 acres of land at a reduced price of \$1. 25 per acre in particular areas known to have little precipitation provided irrigated the land for 3 years and showed proof of their efforts. The development and expansion of the transcontinental railroads in the 1870s

that linked the East and the West made it much easier for homesteaders to travel across the plains.

This improved mobility along with the plentiful land offered at a minimal price enticed many people to make the journey west in search of a better life. The result was a flood of homesteaders pouring onto the plains to start afresh. Buffalo Trade Huge herds of Buffalo once roamed the Great Plains serving as the one intrinsic element that formed the Native American Indian way of life. Native American Indians used the buffalo for food, shelter, clothing and it was the subject of many of their religious beliefs making it a very prominent and essential part of their way of life.

The Fur trappers originally hunted and killed beavers for the value of their furs but as beaver's neared extinction and buffalo meat and buffalo hides became more popular in Europe the buffalo became the Fur Trappers' primary target. The Fur Trappers were not the only ones interested in the buffalo trade but any settlers who saw their potential as a means of earning money. Buffalo hides were valuable material for making robes, rugs, industrial machine belts and their value also shot up when an eastern tannery discovered a process through which buffalo hides could be turned into high quality leather in 1871. Millions of buffalo were butchered, stripped of their hides and any other parts that the trappers deemed useful and their carcasses and bones were left to rot on the plains. The bones were then collected by farmers and grounded into phosphorous fertilizers.

Advancements in communication and travel such as the development of the transcontinental railways brought an even greater number of homesteaders

and pioneers who shaped the West. This mass slaughter of the buffalo took place over a few short violent decades and was concluded by the disappearance of the last of the large buffalo herds. Some Indian tribes also reportedly traded no less than 100, 000 buffalo hides with the white settlers. This not only marked the disappearance of the buffalo herds but in effect the Indian way of life.