

Westward migration in 1800s



WESTWARD MIGRATION IN 1800s Westward migration or the vast expansion of the United States towards the west is a belief prevalent in the nineteenth century that propelled the latter to occupy the nearby countries in the west during that time. As expressed by a New York journalist, Mr. John O'Sullivan, it is considered by the United States to be a divine mission to spread and possess the whole continent for the development of liberty and self-government to which the United States is known to. 1

Philosophically speaking, this is true. Indeed many American authorities had a strong belief that their country's freedom and ambitions are very ideal and perfect that it should be shared to other countries beyond their jurisdiction. This was actually promoted by the Young America movement headed by Franklin Pierce. Realistically speaking however, this was not the case. The otherwise divine mission became an excuse, a moral justification that inspired the origin of imperialism in forcefully occupying the lands of those who previously live in peace and abundance. Most leaders and politicians promoted territorial expansion towards the west because of the desire to acquire new lands. Acquisition of more lands does not only connote more power; it represents additional source of income and wealth.

During that time, the United States were already in the process of producing goods that require raw materials. These raw materials however could not be found therein as it has not much natural resources sufficient to provide its needs. Hence, upon learning of the fact that the west have these raw materials, they logically found their way, not just to the physical territory of the west, but also to the mainstream of the latter's government in order to fully control its policies. They manipulated everything just to get the much-needed favorable policies like legitimate land grabbing. The United States

was able to enact a law granting homestead rights to their citizens, The Homestead Act of 1862. ² This in turn turned away the natives who used to live there. The enjoyment of the vast natural resources came to the hands of the immigrant Americans. Westward migration therefore was able to satisfy the grave need of the United States for cheap sources of raw materials. In addition, the United States found a big market for their products by selling their final products to the natives who were enticed to buy these products which are not actually necessities. ³

In addition to the need for raw materials, the discovery of gold in 1848 became a major driving force for the migration. This became an expanded opportunity for American craftsmen, businessmen and service providers. Indeed, every viable opportunity that is discovered in the west prompted the people to migrate there and permanently settle therein.

Westward migration, in short, is in reality, prompted by the selfish desire to gain profit, at the expense of the natives. The humane yearning for more encouraged this historical migration. In fact, if not for this strategic step taken by the early American leaders, its economy could not have prospered as it is now, and its influence not given the weight as it now continuously enjoys. Westward migration, a civil term for imperialism, is truly a state necessity.

SOURCES:

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