

Free essay about expansions towards the west

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Northern America had long been populated by many tribes and peoples before the Europeans settled in its eastern parts. This short paper will compare the expansion into the American West made by the American Indians, the Spaniards and finally the European-Americans via the ideology of Manifest Destiny. The strategies, motives and experiences of these groups, along with their encounters with the various actors involved, will all be explored in this paper.

Spanish Expansion into the American West

It is said that the Spanish expansion into the American West was borne out of a need for the Spaniards to find a way to move or travel to Asia. The westward conquest was primarily the result of the objective of obtaining more natural resources such as gold and silver for the Spanish Crown, such that these colonies would provide the Spaniards with their much-needed produce (and labor via the American Indians). Secondary to this was the objective of spreading the Catholic faith in the New World. This was accomplished via the actions of missionaries who put up missions along the western end of the United States from Mexico just up to San Francisco. One such missionary was Father Junipero Serra, a Franciscan monk who settled in the area in order to convert the natives and put up Catholic missions in the area. In the case of Father Sierra, he was intent on building a "Ladder of Missions" connecting one pueblo to the other, and converting all the people from the area into Roman Catholicism. His missionary work into Alta California began in 1769, starting in San Diego. It is said that Father Serra made use of forced labor of the Native Americans in order to construct the missions (Hackel, 2014, 2004-2007).

American Indian Expansion into the American West

Perhaps the American Indians had one reason in common with the Spanish explorers for moving into the American West. The American Indians wished to retain enjoyment of both their natural resources and to expand their own trade with certain European settlers. A case in point is that of the Sioux Indians. By the beginning of the 18th century, the Sioux pushed westward from the Missouri area into the Minnesota area. Most of the Sioux were fur traders with the Europeans and buffalo hunters (as the buffalo was their main source of sustenance and other prime commodities for home use). The Sioux had depleted the beaver supply east of the Missouri River, and they had to move west in order to have a consistent supply of beavers. Also, the Sioux were later on undercut by other White settlers in the fur trade, and thus this also became part of the reason why the Sioux moved westward (White, 1978, 322-324). Furthermore, the Western Sioux moved to the West to evade being victim to the deadly diseases brought by the Europeans, such as cholera and smallpox (White, 1978, 329).

In the case of the Lakota Indians, they were forced to leave the Black Hills and were herded into reservations. While the underlying story is that the White man lay claim to the Black Hills because of its mineral resources, the White man's reason is that during this time (mid-19th century) in order to provide for the movement of the White settlers into the western section of the United States, then the American Indians had to be moved into their own reservations (Ostler, 2010, 78-80). This therefore actually can be said to be the beginning of racial segregation in the young and new United States. To this day, the Lakota Nation is embroiled in a battle with the US federal

government for the return of the Black Hills to their tribe. One could also say that in this instance, the Native Americans elected to move into the reservations as they did not wish to assimilate into White society. The White man, similarly, wished to relegate the Native Americans into their own reservations where no or little integration could take place.

European-American Expansion into the West

The European-American expansion into the western section of the United States was justified by the ideology of Manifest Destiny. This concept states the belief that the United States was destined to occupy the continent or the land mass of the United States “ from sea to shining sea”. In the website of History Central, it is stated that the leadership of the country believed that it was the mission of the Americans to spread its culture and other beliefs, and make other races find these as superior and worthy of emulation. The new Americans thought that the other races were quite savages and without any culture or learning, and thus it was the responsibility of the White Americans to bring civilization to these “ uncivilized” people.

A succession of Homestead Acts also propelled the white settlers into moving westward in order to lay claim to land, such that the settlers would be able to earn a living out of farming the same. Federal land grants were issued to settlers, including immigrants from the European continent. The first act of this kind was the Homestead Act of 1862, signed into law by President Lincoln (Potter and Schamel, 1997). The westward migration of European-Americans thus took place such that Americans could populate the country from end to end, and such that the so-called “ savages” (American Indians)

could be relegated to their own reservations, with little access to public services).

Conclusion

Rather than being beset by the precepts of Manifest Destiny, Spanish and American Indian movement into the western section of the country was justified by the need to obtain more natural resources for the young country. Also, the movement into the west by the Sioux was also for self-preservation, as other ethnic races had begun to encroach on the fringes of their ancestral homelands. On the other hand, the White European-American settlers moved westward as they felt that they were superior to all the other groups living in the area, and thus had to work for the improvement of the area by educating the residents the Western way, and by driving out the Native Americans into their own reservations, thus enabling the settlers to claim the lands they settled on for their own. Perhaps it was the Spaniards who moved towards the west under an ideology similar to that of Manifest Destiny. This is because they claimed these lands in part because they felt that it was their responsibility to spread the Roman Catholic faith to the native residents, who the Spaniards considered as pagans and heathens. The Native Americans or the American Indians did not have the luxury of claiming Manifest Destiny as their reason for moving westward, as they did so simply to protect their livelihood and to have sustainable sources of surviving. They also moved westward because the White settlers were slowly encroaching and living on their ancestral domain.

Works Cited

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