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8. Why were the 1830s through the 1850s a period of western expansion?

The period of time from 1830 to 1850 was a great area of growing in American History out west. Due to technological advancements, economizing ventures, and the positive political influence of the government, the United States began to mark westward in order to spread throughout the entire North American continent. These factors played a major role in the expansion west, although other reasons such as the motivation of religious freedom and slavery also played their part in expansion, but these are not readily discussed.

One of the many reasons why the United states was so successful in expanding west was because of the new technology that had been invented in the 1800s. This in turn allowed for more settlements and cities to blossom due to the flood of people that could now travel out there. The canal systems throughout the country became more and more extensive in the 1820s and 1830s. Canals started to link major waterways, an example of such was the Erie Canal that linked the Mississippi- Ohio waterway to the Great Lakes. Not only were bulky supplies shipped on canals but people started to travel on them too. The invention of the steamboat also aided in the expansion west, it was versatile, speedy, and ready for use of all seasons. The steamboat was also a cheaper, faster, and safer method of transportation than other devices used previously. As the canal boom slowed in the late 1830s, railroads began to take hold, these were even faster and cheaper than canals. The Pacific Railroad Act gave 170 million acres of land to the railroads for construction. This in turn brought immigrants from all over to work on the railways, not only from inside the US but from other countries as well. Not only did the means by which settlers started arriving to west start growing, but the rewards of making it out there seemed to flourish as well.

Another aspect that drew settlers out west was the ever growing concept of becoming economically prosperous. There were multiple reasons why people came to this conclusion. To begin with, the Homestead Act that was passed allowed for interested farmers to obtain 160 acres of underdeveloped land to farm on, so long as they built a house on the property and lived there for a certain length of time. This would have worked well for small farming communities, but clever entrepreneurs abused this act. They accessed multiple land trusts, subdivided them, raised the price per unit and sold them to interested farmers. Another means by which people could obtain land out west was through purchasing it through the government. Wealthy spectators took advantage of this policy as well by buying as much land as the banks would allow, then dividing them up into small sections, and selling at exorbitant prices to poor small farmers. The result of this land boom forced small farmers into cash cropping. Another method by which settlers dreamed of growing rich was through the Gold Rush. Discovered at Sutter's Mill in 1848, this new finding created an influx of eastern settlers out west. Once

small towns and cities expanded with the population increase, these were called boom towns. The towns that sprouted up around mines, Gold Towns, also flourished with people. However living in these towns became increasingly expansive as day to day commodities were hard to come by, and having the gold in such proximity inflate prices. Mostly men were drawn to this new phenomenon out west, but in some cases couples and even families made the trek westward. Women in these Gold Towns ran and owned much of the land and stores as they and their husbands had come westward for the exciting experience of the gold rush. Commercial advantages were not the sole reason settlers started to come west, but the encouragement of the United States government also aided in the growth of the expansions west.

Politically, from the period of 1830 to 1850, the government felt that the expansion west intended for the nation. Thomas Jefferson felt that those small farming communities should control the west, calling it the “empire of liberty”. Adversely, Federalists thought that wealthy spectators should have more power out west as they brought in more profit for the government. Again by raising the prices of land distributions, and through stemming the flow of settlers from north and south. A further explanation for the expansions west was attributed to the turmoil between the powers of Mexico and the Native Americans in the southwest, expansion was possible in this area due to the lack of defenses. Another policy that the US government was adamant on during this era was Manifest Destiny. This philosophy claimed that the US should spread to encompass the entire North American continent, also called continentalism, and was supported by the democrats. The key themes of Manifest Destiny were; the virtue of the American people and institutions, the mission to spread these institutions, and that is was American people’s destiny under God to do this work. This policy had a negative impact to the nations in and surrounding the US while expansion was popular. Examples of such were the Native Americans in the East and to the North, Mexico in the south while the US was trying to annex Texas, and with Britain in Oregon. The authority of the federal government during this time endorsed as a core explanation for the positive results of the nation’s expansion westward.

There are a plethora of reason why the United States had such an abrupt period of territorial expansion out west from the period of 1830 through the 1850. Motivation, such as the freedom of religious practices, and the ever disputed topic of slavery effected the nation’s growth out west, however, these are not significant in this essay. The major role players in the expansion west for the United States were due to technological advancements in transportation, the growing dream of becoming economically prosperous, and the influence of the federal government all had a great impact on the westward expansion.