

Why were the 1830's-1850's a period of western expansion?

Nichole Hancock

Period 2/9-9-11

When the first people reached the shores of North America, they immediately set up settlements along the east coast. It wasn't until the 1830's-1850's that people started to journey westward. The cause of western expansion during this time period was due to the advancements in industrial technology and the Gold Rush. Another topic not covered in this essay that also caused western expansion in this time period was the belief in Manifest Destiny.

Since the beginning of time, people have been hindered by their lack of technological capabilities. This era changed that forever. Many people never made the journey out west before this time period because there was no simple way to get there. Getting on a rickety flatboat or walking along with a covered wagon was a dangerous, long, and tedious task that most people were not willing to do. The steamboat was invented by Robert Fulton and Robert Livingston in 1807. It was not a popular mode of transportation until this era. The steamboat allowed people to cross the Mississippi River without having to worry about the dangers a flatboat or paddleboat could bring. The next obstacle the western settlers had to face was getting around on land. When 1850 came around, the Railway Era began. Nearly 50,000 miles of railways were built in this era. The USA had more railways at this time than the whole world combined. This allowed people to travel faster and more efficiently than ever before. Some individuals, after crossing the Mississippi River, wanted to stay put in the area we now know as The Great Plains. The land was fertile and excellent for farming. However, the typical horse drawn plow was slow and inefficient. They needed a fast and effective way to farm the land. John Deere invented the first tractor in 1837. This allowed people to start agriculture west of the Mississippi. This lured people out of the east since the standard of living in the western areas did not seem as impossible. Once people got where they wanted to go, and were settled in the west, how were they supposed to reach their families and loved ones back east? They Pony Express was a long and tiring process. It could take 6 months for a letter to travel from west to east. Samuel Morse invented the electronic telegraph in 1844 that changed this tedious communication strategy. The telegraph could send 40-50 words per minute through a wire, compared to the months and months it would take using the Pony Express. People were hesitant to move westward before this time period because they were unsure they would be able to easily survive. These new industrial technology innovations eased the minds of the settlers, and even inspired people to pack their bags and start a new life out west.

As well as the industrial technology of this time period, the Gold Rush was also a factor that provoked western expansion. Since the beginning of time, man has always had the yearning to be filthy rich. In 1848, John Marshall found the first pieces of gold on Sutter's Mill. When news of this traveled back to the east, thousands of individuals packed up their bags and headed west to California in hopes of gaining their share of wealth. Along with individual

miners, large mining corporations set down their roots in the west hoping to start a large and long-lasting franchise. However, not all people lured by the Gold Rush came to out west to mine for gold. Women would start businesses such as laundromats, motels, restaurants, etc. out west to attract the local miners. After a hard day's work in the mines, the miners were weary, famished, and filthy. The women took advantage of this and overpriced for the basic things that they knew the men needed. By the time the miner had a hearty meal, clean clothes, and a good night's sleep, he may have given away all the gold he found that day to these women-owned businesses. Women could make as much as the men doing what they've done all their lives; cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Another entrepreneur was Levi Strauss. He was the first person to patent the 5-pocket blue jeans. These jeans were durable, long-lasting, and perfect outerwear for the miners. His business took off, and he set his roots in the west. What started as a small business turned into a large franchise that is still around to this day. With all the business, wealth, and people that were out west, small towns known as boomtowns sprang up practically overnight. They had saloons, dance-halls, libraries, churches, etc. After the Gold Rush died down, many of these boomtowns became what are known today as 'ghost towns'. However, some of these small towns ended up becoming large cities that are still there today. Some examples of these prosperous boomtowns are San Francisco, Sacramento, and Denver. California may be the area that spurred the Gold Rush, but it was not the only place that attracted the settlers. Gold found at Pike's Peak in 1859 provoked nearly 100,000 individuals to pack up there things and head to Colorado. When the Gold Rush died down, many people remained. This heavily populated the west, and set a tone for others to make the voyage as well. The get rich quick appeal of the Gold Rush was the setting that spurred western expansion.

People fear what they do not understand. Many people were hesitant to leave the east to venture out west because they did not know what hardships they would have to face. When industrial technology boomed and the Gold Rush era took off, this placated the worried minds of the eastern people. It provoked them to move out west during the 1830's-1850's. It truly was a time of western expansion.