

PROMPT: evaluate the extent to which migration transformed the western United States across a broad time period in the mid- to late-nineteenth century.

During the mid- to late-nineteenth century, migration had a significant impact on the western United States, turning what had been lightly populated territory into a more economically developed and culturally diverse region. As Americans and immigrants moved west in large numbers, they created new farming communities, mining towns, and railroad hubs. This movement helped integrate the West into the nation's growing economy, but it also led to conflicts with Native Americans and environmental changes.

Before large-scale migration, the West was often seen as a frontier zone characterized by plains, mountains, and Native American nations who had long inhabited the land. The U.S. government's policies, such as offering land through the Homestead Act of 1862, encouraged farmers to settle there. Additionally, the construction of the transcontinental railroad in the late 1860s provided easier travel and shipping, linking eastern markets to western resources and making migration more practical and appealing.

As migrants arrived, they created new towns and communities. Many were drawn by the promise of mineral wealth, especially during gold and silver rushes in places like Colorado and Nevada. Others were seeking new farmland and opportunities to own property. Over time, the increasing number of settlers changed local economies. Mining companies, railroad corporations, and large-scale ranches influenced the development of these western territories. Although new opportunities arose, conflicts intensified as settlers and U.S. troops pushed Native Americans onto reservations. The expansion of farms and railroads also led to ecological shifts, such as the overhunting of bison.

Overall, migration brought the West into the national economy and reshaped its population and social structures. New wealth, transportation networks, and communities emerged, but the process was not without struggle. The transformation was significant, though not entirely positive, as it came at the expense of Indigenous lands and the natural environment.

A. Thesis/Claim (1 point):

Earned: The first paragraph makes a historically defensible claim, stating that migration transformed the western United States economically and culturally.

B. Contextualization (1 point):

Earned: The essay references the broader historical setting, mentioning that the West was initially lightly populated by Native Americans and that the U.S. government pursued policies like the Homestead Act to encourage settlement. It provides a sense of what the West was like before widespread migration.

C. Evidence (0–2 points):

Earned: 1 point

- The essay mentions the Homestead Act, transcontinental railroad, gold and silver rushes, and the push onto Native lands. This constitutes relevant evidence to the prompt.
- However, the evidence is not deeply or consistently connected back to a larger argument. It describes facts rather than fully supporting a line of reasoning, so it earns only 1 point.

D. Analysis and Reasoning (0–2 points):

Earned: 0 points

- While the essay does establish a cause-and-effect relationship between migration and changes in the West, it does so in a relatively straightforward manner without substantial explanation or complexity.
- It does not engage deeply in historical reasoning processes (e.g., comparison, change over time beyond the basic narrative, or considering multiple perspectives in a nuanced way).
- It does not demonstrate a complex understanding or go beyond a basic argument.

Total Score: 3/6