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Greed-Driven Mistreatment

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Mr. Haferman

U.S. History

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Greed-Driven Mistreatment

Every conquering nation to ever invade an already inhabited land was driven by a desire for power. It was that greed that drove the Romans to the edges of their known boundaries. The same greed inspired French, British, and Spanish armies to spread their empires to unknown lands. Often when greed accompanies the conqueror, he cares little for how he treats those considered inferior to him. He would treat the conquered in any way most likely to benefit himself. The same pattern of history found its way into the western region of the United States. Out of greed for land and money to be made from the land, newcomers to the area showed little to no care for those already living in the land and the workers they used to turn a profit. Through their expansion and business ventures, settlers mistreated Native Americans and the Mexican and Chinese workers while the government officially opposed mistreatment; but in reality, supported it through the laws they made or failed to make.

The westward movement revived the familiar mistreatment of Native Americans and gave birth to a new mistreatment of Mexicans and Chinese workers. Beginning with the Transcontinental Railroad, many additional railroads were created cutting through the West, thus making westward expansion more feasible. The Central, Union, Northern, and Southern Pacific railroads, along with many other railroads, replaced the grueling wagon trails once used to move west. New opportunities created by the cattle, farming, and mining industries drew people westward. Made possible by the broad, deserted plains of the West, cattle ranching took off, with

many available positions to work as a cowboy. Although the land was not always optimal, new farming innovations made the industry possible by using a steel plow and dry farming techniques. Finally, the discovery of gold and other precious resources drove people west in search of their fortunes. The enormous number of settlers attempting to settle the West forced Native Americans to lose their land and much of their freedom. In the treaties of Fort Laramie and Atkinson, the U.S. government tried to force Native Americans onto reservations. Many tribes did not accept the restrictions that the government wanted to place on them. As unrest rose in the tribes, the U.S. Army was sent west to put down rebellions and enforce the government's will for the Native Americans. At Sand Creek, commanded by John Chivington, the army massacred a friendly, unarmed group of Cheyenne Indians. Then, in a series of battles known as the Indian Wars, tribes were eventually defeated and forced to move onto reservations. The road to the reservation, and life inside the reservation caused the death of many Indians. When the Navajo were captured, many died on the journey to their reservation. Most reservations simply could not provide sufficient supplies to Indians, so many died. Once inside reservations, Indians were forced to assimilate to the White man's culture. The white people in favor of assimilation justified themselves by explaining the Indian's life would be better if he adopted the ways of the white man. Indian children were strongly encouraged to attend boarding schools that taught them how to live like a white man. Later, to speed up assimilation, the Dawes General Allotment Act was passed which gave one Indian family 160 acres to farm. However, the plot of land was generally not enough because of the poor farming conditions of the West.

In addition to stealing Native American lands, railroad businesses also contributed to the mistreatment of Chinese and Mexican immigrants. Many job opportunities created by railroad and mining companies called for Mexican and Chinese workers. The work that Mexicans and

Chinese laborers carried out was often the most dangerous. Caused by prejudices brought on by differences in religion, culture, and language, many company owners forced Mexicans and Chinese workers to accept relatively low wages for hazardous conditions. Railroad companies used Chinese immigrants to do most of the explosive work. Mining companies commonly sent Mexican and Chinese workers miles underground to harvest the precious metals. Despite the undesirable jobs that Chinese and Mexican workers held, new settlers still hated the immigrants for taking away their jobs. In addition, the immigrants crowded the cities and racial prejudice led to violence between ethnic groups and calls to end immigration.

Sitting back, watching all the mistreatment of Native Americans, Mexicans, and Chinese, was the U.S. government. Although the government promised equal rights for all people and protection under past treaties made, their policies and acts suggested that the government felt the opposite. Initially, the government promised that if the tribes moved to reservations in the west, white people would leave them alone and no one could trespass on their territory. The Cherokee nation was relocated from Georgia to Oklahoma, the Sioux to the Black Hills, and many other tribes were relocated as well, all bearing the same promise. However, as railroads, mining, and farming opportunities presented themselves in the west, settlers began to demand the Indian lands. The Homestead Act of 1862 only encouraged more settlers moving west. The law gave 160 acres of land to any family as long as they met certain qualifications. In most cases, the government gave in to settlers' demands for Indian land. The treaties of Fort Laramie and Atkinson were examples of the government's attempts to move the tribes onto another reservation so that the white settlers could have their reservation land. When Indian tribes refused to move for the white settlers, the government fought them in the Indian Wars. Led by Geronimo, the Apache tribe was one of the last to comply and resisted the U.S. Army the best

they could. Not until 1934, did the government pass a law truly benefiting Indians. In general, the government promoted mistreatment of Native Americans, Mexicans, and Chinese by doing nothing to stop the crimes against the groups. Any attempt to break any part of the treaties made with the Indians should have been sharply ended and punished. In addition, regulations should have been incorporated into the workplace to end the poor conditions and racial prejudice of Mexican and Chinese workers. Considering what they could and should have done, the government was largely responsible for mistreatment that took place in the West.

Quite easily, one can turn his nose up in disgust at the way in which one nation treats another. The same disgust can usually be directed at the person's own nation as well. The United States is no exception to the rule. Through the westward expansion by railroad, mining, and farming industries, white settlers showed how poorly they were willing to treat Native Americans, Mexicans, and Chinese in exchange for more land and money for themselves. The greed that drove those fortune-minded settlers still drives mankind today and will continue to be the force that drives one man to mistreat another for his own benefit.