Running Head: WESTWARD EXPANSION

Westward Expansion And The Railroad

Name

Institution

**Westward Expansion and the Railroad**

Westward Expansion was the desire of America to control the territories of western parts of America that were either unclaimed or occupied by other nations. It is pertinent to comprehend that the United States history was influenced by England in diverse ways. In the second half of 18th century, the railroad which that was invented in England brought a major impact in the United States expansion to the West. Railroads originated from England. England had a dense populace, large financial resources and short distances between its cities. Conversely, in America the story was different. It had a sparse population, few financial resources and largest distances between cities in a huge country. The transcontinental railroad largely increased Westward Expansion in the US during 1860-90.

Westward Expansion is viewed as the main theme of the history of America during the 18th century and as the central factor in American history shaping. The greatest influence or force that shaped American society and democracy is the availability of vast free land in the West which affected profoundly the American society. Drives after the revolution, the Western parts of United States were opened up by the winning of independence that resulted in the steady flow of migrants to the Mississippi valley. The far west was a region of high mountains, strange rock formations, brilliant colors, deserts and immense distance. The discovery of paths made it possible for migration to the west of United States as the ox- driven carts could cruise through the mountains and across the desert (Roza, 2011). It should be noted that at this time persons had the desire of moving out of the overcrowded cities to settle in the uninhabited lands in the west of US. Consequently, there was the development of infrastructure to the west. Railroads were constructed that linked the west and east of United States. This was accompanied by mushrooming of cities towards the west as constructions of communication lines were ongoing (Quay, 2002).

The construction of infrastructure that was extended from the East to the West paved the way for more migration to the west. The settlers occupied the uninhabited land in the west and commenced developing it. They started practicing agriculture both in small scale and large scale. This was boosted by the construction of more roads and railroads in the west that connected to the east parts of America. The settlers could transport their produce to the far markets in the eastern parts of America as well as transport the farming inputs. This made agriculture to be lucrative (Domnauer, 2010).

Due to the construction of the transcontinental railroads, opportunities surged. This meant that new markets and towns were developed around the railroads, construction centers. In addition, manufacturing factories developed around the railroad stations and construction centers. Later, these towns developed into big cities and the factories turned into multinational factories. It is important to note that the railroads were constructed to connect these major towns and industries in the western parts of America (Torr, 2003).

In the year 1861-65, there was a tremendous expansion of agriculture and industry in the west parts of America. This agriculture and industrial expansion resulted in increasing in population in the west. It is imperative to note that most of the economic prowess was concentrated in the plain states, Midwest and Northeast of America. The southern parts were dominated by agriculture and industrial production while the Northeast was the core of industry of the nation`s processing and manufacturing of raw materials from the West and Midwest. This was possible due the infrastructure development which made the transportation and communication easy.

The Midwest and North constructed networks by 1860s that connected every city. Short lines were built to link cotton regions to river ports and oceans. The Midwestern which was heavily settled had over 80 percent of its farms located 5 miles away from railway roads that facilitated the exportation of agriculture produce to international and national markets. It can be noted that many short lines were constructed as a result of good financing system that was based on Wall Street and leaned to railway bonds. Later, these lines got consolidated by 1890 into 20 trunk lines (Roza, 2011). The local and state government often subsidized the lines though they never owned them.

It should be noted that the westward railway expansion was blocked by the Southern states before 1860. However, after the secession in 1862, the pacific railway acts were passed which allowed the first transcontinental railroad to be finished in the year 1869. The completion of this transcontinental railroad enabled the trip from New York to San Francisco to take six days. The Santa Fe and Southern Pacific were built in the South and the Great Northern and Northern Pacific were constructed along the Canadian border. Therefore, there was an acceleration of the settlement in the West permitting the offering of ranches on credit and cheap farms, carrying supplies and pioneers westward , and minerals, cattle and wheat eastwards. Further, the northern funds were used to finance the building and remarkable expansion of railroads during the reconstruction period of 1890. It should be noted that these railroads were modern in regard to equipment, track gauge and in terms of service standards. The railroads created a group of mechanically skilled craftsmen thereby breaking much of the western region `s isolation (Roza, 2011).

 In, conclusion it is evident that in the Westward Expansion, the transcontinental railroad played a central role. It connected New York and San Francisco and other major cities in the West. This opened up the West to economic development. Agriculture and trade were the most notable development that resulted from the construction of the railroads. Famers could transport their inputs and produce to national and international markets. Besides these, the construction of railroads saw the mushrooming of towns along the railroad stations and construction centers that later developed to big cities and towns. This further added to the development of the West.

**References**

Domnauer, T. (2010). *Westward expansion*. New York: Children's Press.

Quay, S. (2002). *Westward expansion*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

Roza, G. (2011). *Westward expansion*. New York: Gareth Stevens Pub.

Torr, J. (2003). *Westward expansion*. San Diego: Greenhaven Press.