

# Contrasting Views on Land in the American West

Version A

"The Old West": These words can bring to mind images of a wild frontier and the brave cowboys who tried to tame it. It may also bring up images of battles between American settlers and Native Americans. But why were there battles?

Both groups wanted to use the same land in the mid-1800s. However, that wasn't the only reason that they did not get along. Each group also had very different perspectives on life and the role of nature.

## Native American Perspective

Although not all Native American tribes had the same views, most shared certain beliefs. They saw the land as something to respect and care for. They also believed that every form of life—human and nonhuman—has equal value and must be cared for.

Native Americans depended on the land and the creatures that lived on it for survival. Their goal was to use sustainable methods when using them for food and shelter. In this way, they could continue to have the resources they needed for years to come.

## U.S. Settler Perspective

The U.S. settlers, on the other hand, saw the land as something they needed to conquer and occupy. As people streamed into the Western lands, they saw parts of nature that they would need to control. This included dense forests, wild rivers, high mountains, scorching deserts, and even Native peoples and wild animals. When they reached their destinations, they transformed each area from its natural state into what they wanted it to be, such as a farm or a town.



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Settlers soon placed telegraph wires and railroad tracks across the continent to stay connected to the cities back East. When resources were used up and the good lands were settled, settlers moved farther and farther west to meet their needs.

## The Conflict

The settlers felt that it was their "Manifest Destiny" to own all the lands of the North American continent. As they took over land across the United States, the Native Americans were pushed out of their territory. Eventually, the United States government forced many Native American groups to relocate to special reservations where the land was often not as useful for their survival.

## Glossary

**Manifest Destiny:** this term was used to describe the belief that the United States should control all the land from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific coast

**sustainable:** using resources in a way that helps make sure that they remain available for future generations

## Writing Assignment

Using your notes from the lesson and activity, write a one- to two-page paper on one of the following topics:

1. Imagine that you are a Native American watching the settlers come. Write what you see, and then describe how you feel about these new arrivals and how you think they may affect you.
2. Imagine that you are an American settler traveling to the West. Write a journal entry describing some of the things you observe about the land, animals, and people along the way.

If you would like more information to complete your paper, check out the following Web sites:

**U.S. Territorial Maps 1775-1920**

[http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MAP/terr\\_hp.html](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MAP/terr_hp.html)

**The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History: Module: Westward Expansion Module**

<http://www.gilderlehrman.org/teachers/module8/index.html>

**Boundaries of the Contiguous United States (animation)**

<http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~stephan/48states.html>