

On Land Use

Native Americans and white American settlers had completely different attitudes toward land, land use, and land ownership.

As you read the passages below, try to identify the combination of experiences and values that influence a group's attitude toward land.

CONQUERING THE ENVIRONMENT

Britain's Lord James Bryce visited America in the 1880s and observed the following American attitude toward the frontier.

All the passionate eagerness, all the strenuous effort of the Westerns is directed towards the material development of the country. To open the greatest number of mines and extract the greatest quantity of ore, to scatter cattle over a thousand hills, to turn the flower-spangled prairies . . . into wheat fields, to cover their sunny slopes . . . with vines and olives: this is the end aim of their lives, this is their daily and nightly thought. . . . To have an immense production of exchangeable commodities, to force from nature the most she can be made to yield, and send it east and west by the cheapest routes to the dearest markets, making one's city a centre of trade, and raising the price of its real estate—this . . . is preached by Western newspapers as a kind of religion.

These people are intoxicated by the majestic scale of the nature in which their lot is cast, enormous mineral deposits, boundless prairies, forests which, even squandered—wickedly squandered as they now are—will supply timber to the United States for centuries; a soil which, with the rudest cultivation, yields the most abundant crops, a populous continent for their market. They see all round them railways being built, telegraph wires laid, steamboat lines across the Pacific projected, cities springing up in the solitudes, and settlers making the wilderness blossom like the rose. Their imagination revels in these sights and signs of progress, and they gild their own struggles for fortune with the belief that they are the missionaries of civilization and the instruments of Providence in the greatest work the world has seen.

DEVELOPING THE RESOURCES

Congressman Moses K. Armstrong (Dakota Territory) presented his views on northwestern territories in a speech before Congress in 1894.

Nearly one-half the area of our American domain is yet but sparsely settled, and a large proportion of our Northwestern territories, though fertile in soil, suffers from a scarcity of timber and running streams. It is the duty of the government to develop its hidden resources, and encourage its people in new fields of industry and enterprise. Enact such generous laws as will induce immigration, and open new homes and harvest fields all over the broad and uninhabited prairies of the West. Then will our own grain fields supply Europe with bread, and bring money to our shores, in return for the millions in gold which we are taxed yearly to pay as interest on our national debt.

RESPECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Young Chief of the Cayuse, who opposed selling land in the Washington Territory, explained his views on land use in 1855.

The ground says, The Great Spirit has placed me here to produce all that grows on me, trees and fruit. The same way the ground says, It was from me man was made. The Great Spirit, in placing men on the earth, desired them to take good care of the ground and to do each other no harm.