Westward Movement Essay, Research Paper

The West, is so much more to American history than just a cardinal direction. Between 1815 and 1850, it was the sight of many of the events which set precedents, left legacies, and created conflicts. The War of 1812 had simulated interest in the west by clearing out the native Americans providing vast amounts of land ready for any who were willing to take on the west In the years immediately following the second war for independence, thousands of people migrated from the new world, or immigrated from the old to the west. . As the country expanded the West became the “land of promise.” During theses years the populations of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan grew tremendously. The so called “Era of good feelings” began with Americans looking hopefully towards the west.For a hundred years after Jefferson, the real history of the U.S. was the settlement of the land between the Appalachians and the Pacific Ocean. It was one of the greatest migrations in human history. It went in waves: the Kentucky fever, the Oregon and Texas fevers, the Gold Rush, the Kansas fever. Zebulon Pike announced in 1810 that a large part of America was hopeless desert, buy by 1850 this too, had yielded to Mormon resolution and irrigation and long horned steer. It all happened so fast that neither the Mexicans, who lost the empty half of their country to the infiltrators of “manifest destiny,” nor the bison, which were reduced from an ocean to a curio in three human generations, quite knew what hit them. And where the settlers went, the “civilizers” women, preachers, scribes, gamblers, speculators, tradesmen, schoolmasters, and men of business went too. Wherever there are people there are problems, and the west was no exception. The westward movement of the population brought the tremendous problem of slavery, into light. Until this great movement of people had occurred, the slave-holding southwest and the non-slave-holding northwest had experienced parallel growth. The issue was forced on both Congress and the United States by immigrants and traders who moved into Missouri. Once the settlers had established themselves there, they began to demand the political and civil rights and privileges which they become accustomed to in the older states, or territories from which they had come. In 1818, the Territory of Missouri applied for admission to the Union as a slave state. At the time of the application there were an equal number of slave and free states in the Union. The balance was about to be upset. Of couse this balance had been upset, temporarily, in the past but previously it has always been easy to decide whether states east of the Mississippi River should be slave or free. Both Mason and Dioxin’s line as well as the Ohio River formed a naturally well understood boundary between the two sections. Unfortunately no one had ever constructed such a line west of the Mississippi River, and to make matters even more complicated one half of Missouri was north of the Ohio River while the other half was south. Both the house and senate heatedly debated on this topic for months. Finally a compromise was reached. The Missouri compromise stated that Missouri could be admitted as a slave state, and Maine would be admitted as a free state to maintain the balance of power. The compromise also banned slavery from the Louisiana Purchase north of the southern boundary of Missouri, except in the state of Missouri. The Missouri Compromise temporarily maintained the balance between free and slave states, however this crisis was minuscule in comparison to the panic that originated in the West in 1819.

A panic is a finical and economic crisis marked by public loss of confidence in the finical structure, it is characterized by runs on banks and a rapid fall of the securities market and usually result in bank failures as well as bankruptcies. The Panic of 1819 was not an exception to this norm in any way. In January of 1819, the national debt had skyrocketed to $95,529,648.28. Western state banks had been overly optimistic and had overextended credit. The Bank of the United States could have taken control in the matter, but instead became caught up in the rush for profits. In late 1818, directors began to realize what a problem they had on their hands and began to take long overdue steps to reduce credit. They ordered branches to accept no bills but their own, to present all state bank notes for payment at once, and to renew no personal notes or mortgages. The result was to hasten the inevitable panic; and in 1819 all the bank directors in the United States could not stop it. Many state banks collapsed, and enormous amounts of Western real estate were foreclosed by the Bank of the United States. The growing animosity of the now foreclosed west against the evil east and its bank, threatened the nationalism that until the panic struck had been growing in the west. The nation’s first domestic crisis and first finical panic came from the west. Hope too, came from the west, the accessibility of land, and the opportunity to better one’s station in life could not be dampened by any crisis. The west inevitably survived, more than that it thrived.It is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes. Distinctions in society will always exist under every just government. Equality of talents, of education, or of wealthy can not be produced by human institutions. If the full enjoyment of the gifts of heaven and the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue, every man is equally entitled to protection by law; but when the laws undertake to add to these natural and just advantages artificial distinctions, to grant titles, gratituties, and exclusive privileges, to make the rich richer and the potent more powerful, the humbler members of society the farmers, mechanics, and laborers who have neither the time nor the means of securing like favors to themselves, have a right to complain of the injustice of their government. There are no necessary evils in government. Its evil exists only in its abuses. In the west all people were considered equal. The land and the people were new. They were all equal in the sense that they all arrived, close to the same time. There were no traditions or land holding families that could be considered superior to those immigrants from the lower classes, or even from other countries. These feelings of equality nurtured democracy. From these strong feelings of equality and democracy, came pride for the country. The nationalism, of the west, although tested was not killed. These problems were in fact only a small portion of what was about to come in the following years.