

Hunter Meservey

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US History 103

September 30, 2020

Research Paper Proposal

Research Topic:

My research topic is looking at the role of cattle and the impact of the cattle market on westward expansion as well as how the large-scale cattle drives were not only fueled but also killed by the birth of large scale railroads.

Thesis (working):

Although agriculture had always been a part of this country even before westward expansion, the introduction of ranching and cattle in the 1870's led to drastic changes by in part fueling some of the growth of the railroad, changing the physical landscape of the west and giving incentive for more settlers to move into the west.

Thesis Road Map:

- The economic impacts of ranching and cattle
- The ways in which ranching and cattle in the west helped lead the growth of the railroad system
- The many ways in which ranching and the invention of barbed wire changed the landscape of the west as it marked the first time the land would be parceled off into physical sections in the history of the country

What I know about this topic and why am I interested:

From the time, I was born my family has raised cattle and had horses, I was immersed in agriculture my whole life and I am intrigued as to how it in part originated in this country. Not only have we always raised cattle but we are a very passionate hunting family and have always put food on the table ourselves, not just from the store so I have seen not only the raising and processing on cattle from a young age but also spent my whole life hunting just about anything you can imagine. The switch from living off the land in the west, the way the natives always did to using the land for ranching and in some people's eyes ruining the land is very interesting and thought provoking for me.

What I want to learn:

I want to learn how the roles of cattle and ranchers shaped the American west into what we see today as well as how it was before the introduction of ranching, railroads and barbed wire, before all the bison were hunted out. Not only was there a change in the people living on

the land, there was a change in the actual ecosystem when the ranchers came in the 1870's, I want to learn more about this shift.

Initial Questions:

1. How did the introduction of cattle change the general ecosystem?
 - a. How did the cattle influence what was left of the bison for the natives?
2. How did ranching influence the railroads?
3. Was there any push back from Native Americans towards cattle, ranching, etc?
4. How did the invention of barbed wire in 1874 change the western landscape?
5. How did barbed wire and cutting up the landscape change the ecosystems?
6. What were the obstacles and difficulties that the ranchers met?
7. How did it change the economy? Good or bad?
8. How did the government deal with ranchers taking claim of public lands? (Fence Cutting War 1883-4)
9. As more money came into ranching, did it change the way of life in many of the small western towns?
10. Ranching vs. the gold rush? Which proved more successful and did one influence the other?