

Miners in the West

I think it's 1875 now, and I'm heading up to Deadwood, Wyoming by way of Nevada. You see I came out here in a wagon with a couple friends of mine to the West to make my millions in mining. I heard of the Comstock Lode down in Nevada around 1860, and since I wanted nothing to do with that War Between the States back home in the East, I decided I'd seize the opportunity to make my millions looking for that silver.

It can be a bit hairy down here, with the vigilantes and all, but I heard Wild Bill is running Deadwood, and he can keep the peace. So I'm gonna head up to those Black Hills and see if I can find me some silver.

It's tough striking big here now. In 1849 I was only a young buck, but I remember all the men coming out here to the West in their wagons, prospecting to make it big. We called them Forty-Niners. Quite a name, almost worthy of having something named after them. We don't have a nickname like that, but miners nowadays still work hard, even if big ol' mining companies control everything. We might get a small salary, and it sure is dangerous, but who knows what you'll find underneath a couple hundred feet of earth?

I plan on staying out West until I can get my share of the gold, silver, kryptonite, or whatever we can find in them hills. Once it's all dried up I might move back East, but there is a lot of doubt in my heart when it comes to that. I left everything behind for a reason, and that reason was to make it big either by finding gold, silver, or whatever it can be.

Farmers and women of the West

Pioneer life out here in the Great Plains is mighty difficult. Sure is different from where we came from back east. My husband expects the whole family to pick up and help with everyday chores. No longer am I just minding the house.

Thanks to the Homestead Act in 1862 my husband and I thought about taking our family out here and farm this free land. Once the Morrill Act passed, we thought even more so our kids could go to college. During the Oklahoma land rush we were mighty lucky to grab ourselves a spot to start living. We are just living off of the land now. No more cities, factories or streets. It's just our farm against the elements.

Since we got here in the middle of 1889. We've been fighting blizzards, drought, Indians and many deprivations. But, we still have our farm and even some livestock. The government told us we needed to farm this land for at least five years, and thanks to some steel plows, windmills and a little bit of luck, we've been able to keep it this long. Not many others can say the same. Since we've gotten through the tough times we have no intentions of picking up and getting out. But for a lot of folk, they had to move back East when they couldn't get things working.

It sure is different since we got here. It seems like yesterday though. I remember getting off of the train just past the Mississippi and loading up the wagon. Nothin' but me, my husband, and our young boy. But, now we have two sons, a little girl, some livestock and our farm. Times were tough and not for the faint of heart, but I wouldn't ask for anything different. It's joyous to see what we've accomplished.

African Americans in the West

I had been wanting to get out of the South since I could remember. Once all those amendments passed I thought I'd finally be free in my home state of North Carolina, but with all those black codes and the Ku Klux Klan, I was right back to where I started, dying to get out.

A friend told me about the Homestead Act, and how free slaves could get land too, but I didn't want to go it alone. Then I heard about a Mr. Benjamin Singleton in Tennessee. He was organizing a group of black men and women to head west and I jumped at the chance. We called ourselves the "Exodusters," just like Moses leading the Jews out of bondage. And that's what we were doing, getting out of bondage.

Our promised land was in Kansas and Oklahoma. I chose to head to Oklahoma because I thought it would be a great name for something, even a musical maybe. I've been to an all-black town in Kansas though called Nicodermus, and it's a real nice place. I've even heard of an all-black regiment fighting Indians over in Arizona. They're called the buffalo soldiers, and just like Oklahoma that could be a real swell name for a song.

After getting to Oklahoma, we got off our wagons and began surveying the land. There is so much opportunity out here, but many find a great living planting crops and farming out West. Thanks goodness for the windmills to help us get some source of water. It sure beats being stuck back home without a voice. Here I am not a black man, but a property owing farmer, and citizen of the United States.

Immigrants in the West

It was a long trip to America from China. I came only with my brother. Back in China my family was only considered peasants, so when we heard of the opportunity to become wealthy in America, my brother and I boarded a boat in 1865 and got here as quickly as we could.

In San Francisco there are many Chinese and Japanese immigrants. Upon entering America, I was surprised to see so many people of Asian descent. They owned their own shops and farms, but like me, most of us from China have found jobs working for the Central Pacific railroad. It is a very dangerous job as we slowly work to finish the transcontinental railroad. We have used dynamite to blast through the Sierra Nevada, and Rockies. People speculate that we will connect with the railroads from the East in Promontory Point, Utah.

My brother was injured while working on the railroad a few years ago. Since then he has been managing a shop in a mining town that caters to the Chinese workers. Like many of us Chinese, he hopes to make his fortune here in the United States and someday return to China. I think that he can't bear to see our family live as peasants. But, I enjoy this country. Although the work is hard, I feel like I have the opportunity to succeed and make my own wealth here. There are some other Chinese like me, who believe they will stay in this great country, but many want to go back home. I miss my family and know the dangers of my work, but I love my opportunities and hope one day to settle down in San Francisco and find a nice girl to spend my life with.