

# **OPINION: A nation divided – an optimistic west and a pessimistic east**

During the Civil War, in 1862, the United States created a piece of legislative history entitled The Homestead Act. This important piece of American history served many purposes and essentially said that any U.S. citizen or an intended citizen could claim a parcel of land up to 160 acres in the western parts of our early nation for a mere filing fee.

The Homestead Act served many purposes and worked to put people that had never before been eligible to own property into ownership positions. For the first time, freed slaves, as well as women and even unnaturalized immigrants, were given the opportunity to become landowners.

The reasoning behind this act of incredible generosity by the U.S. government was excessive population on the eastern-most cities was leading to density levels that were becoming a problem for our growing infrastructure, and with newly acquired and cleared land in the west, the government saw an opportunity to gain a little breathing room.

Another reason was that the government felt that if the land won from wars with the Native American Indians wasn't soon settled, the tribes would return to claim their land, the battles would have to be refought or the U.S. would lose ground that they had successfully taken from the Native inhabitants.

Upon hearing of this offer of free land, and what could only be described as the bargain of the century, the densely-packed residents of the east coast and Massachusetts specifically could probably be described as falling into one of two categories: the naysayers, and the go-getters.

The naysayers looked at the Act with skepticism. They didn't trust anything that seemed too good to be true, and since never before had the government done anything but take from them, they saw this as a scam and a trick. Likely, many of them made statements like 'if something sounds too good to be true, it usually is.' They probably saw people that were going west to take advantage of the opportunity as gullible, idealistic or maybe even downright foolish.

The go-getters, being gullible, idealistic and maybe even a tad bit foolish, didn't even hear what the naysayers had to say about the matter. They, having just heard the news, were too busy loading up their families and all their earthly possessions into large, covered wagons to set off on the greatest adventure of their lives. They believed that opportunity for fortune and stability and innovation lay in their future, and they were going to seize that opportunity. They were likely the type that trusted blindly, were often taken advantage of, but were the dreamers of society, envisioning change and growth.

While many times things that seem too good to be true, are false, this rare and special time in history, it wasn't. The effects of this have, quite possibly, had some of the furthest reaching changes and developments our nation has ever seen.

Because the go-getters had their dreams come true, had trusted blindly and been rewarded for the trust and faith that they had in their government, and because they were able to see their dreams and goals reach fruition, they developed an ultimately optimistic outlook. They went on to raise their children with that optimism and the general thought that you can do and have absolutely anything you put your mind to. They taught their children to trust first, that dreams do come true and that if they take chances, though they may fail, they have the possibility of achieving any goal they set before themselves.

Because means of communication over long distances was in its infancy, and because nobody likes to hear about opportunities that they missed out on, the information of the government's claims being true were either poorly communicated to those who had remained in the east or were largely ignored. The naysayers went on naysaying, raising their children to be cautious and not immediately trusting of others. They encouraged rational and logical planning over extravagant and possibly foolish or unobtainable dreams and goals. While they wanted to see their children succeed in life, they were more realistic and limiting of their assertions of the future their children could realize.

This one simple act effectively split our nation into an optimistic west and a pessimistic east. The results of this are still seen to this day, not only in the general attitudes of people you will meet and interact with on either coast of our nation but also in the ventures that have come from these regions. The west has been responsible for nearly all of our technological companies and continues to lead the nation in new innovations.

The west coast has more start-ups and more failures than the east, but there is a higher percentage of people willing to take that risk. It could be argued that the west is full of gamblers, constantly rolling the dice of life. Some of the largest west coast companies include Google, Microsoft, Apple, Intel, eBay, Expedia and Amazon. The businesses seen on the east coast are more of an 'old money' origin, focusing on banking, investments and securities. These are traditionally seen as the safer, more conservative entities, less likely to take a risk and always requiring proof before offering faith and rarely taking a gamble.

Some of the largest East coast companies include JP Morgan, Berkshire Hathaway, New York Life, Freddie Mac, Fannie Mae, Bank of America and Prudential. Although there are exceptions to this, and this is in no way anything more than mere

speculative theory, having lived on both coasts, owned properties in both places, and begun businesses on both the west coast and the east coast, this is the most significant difference I've noticed between the two.