

## Wilderness House Literary Review 8/2

S.R. Glines

### Go west young man!

“Go West, young man” was advice from American author Horace Greeley just after the American Civil War to young men seeking their fortune, seeking the American Dream. It was fashionable then to believe in America’s Manifest Destiny which, at the time, dictated that American settlers should expand across the continent. America’s Manifest Destiny would come to mean the mastery of any challenge and the conquering of any frontier. It was America’s Manifest Destiny to send men to the moon and conquer the “new frontier” of space.

Greeley favored westward expansion. He saw the fertile farmland of the American west as an ideal place for people willing to work hard for the opportunity to succeed. The phrase came to symbolize the idea that agriculture could solve many of the nation’s problems like the poverty and unemployment in the big cities of the East. It is one of the most commonly quoted sayings from the nineteenth century and had considerable influence on the course of American history. If nothing else, the Cowboys and Indians genre of American film and fiction like the exploits of Wild Bill Cody would not have been possible without the westward expansion of settlers. The American West was viewed as a vast land of opportunity where every man was promised 40 acres (~16 hectares) and a mule if they’d just stake a claim to the land and work it for five years. It was the America of every immigrants dream, where the streets were paved with gold for those willing to work hard.

In less than 30 years, by 1900, the limitless frontier of the American West had been declared closed. Immigrants were told to stay home and only the engines of Industry sought new frontiers to conquer, often overseas. America became not that much different from many other countries save for its apparently limitless resources and lack of any natural enemies on its borders. Canada and Mexico, while occasionally resentful, no longer view war with the US as a useful policy unlike traditional enemies in other parts of the world.

Fast forward. The frontier is closed but the *American Dream* is still available ... for a price. Just buy that dream education and you will land that dream job so that you can buy that dream home in the suburbs and mow that dream lawn while wearing those dream designer slacks all for the low, low price of ... *far more than you can afford* but don’t worry they’ll loan you the money at only twenty or thirty times what they pay to borrow it from the U.S. Government. And, oh, by the way, the loan is guaranteed by the U.S. Government, your taxes, and, guess what? You can’t default on it or get rid of it in bankruptcy. They own you for the rest of your life before you’ve even started and they’ll call you at least twice a week to remind you of that fact. Muhahahahaha! But wait, there’s more.

That job they promised you either doesn’t exist or it doesn’t pay enough to pay back your college loans or has now been outsourced to Asia. You’ve spent years looking for a job in your field and have either moved back home with your parents (who are themselves underemployed) and/or have taken that service job you vowed you’d never take because, after all, you have a college education.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 8/2

But somewhere in the back of your mind you hear, "Go west young man," and you realize that if you go west far enough you arrive in the East and discover that you can easily get an job in Asia teaching, of all things, English to those very same people who big business has outsourced your job to. But wait there's more, they will pay you more than you ever thought possible *and* they'll give you a round trip ticket and a full months paid vacation with airline tickets to almost anywhere in the world and a free apartment with all utilities included. You will soon discover that teaching in Asia is a profession with the social stature equal to a doctor or lawyer back in the states.

So you *could* pay your debts back with the remittances you make from Asia but the American Dream is dead and you look to the East for your future not "home" in America. But if you have no future in America then why pay those debts at all? When the immigrants came to America they, no doubt, turned their backs on whatever life they may have had "back home." So you find the life you want to live, elsewhere. You are no longer an American. That is why an American born woman, a housewife, married to a Canadian and living in Canada turned her back on America when the IRS told her she had to file income tax on her husbands income. She marched into the American Consulate in Alberta and gave America the finger. Over 100,000 other American ex-pats living in Canada did the same last year. How many more elsewhere?

Here's a hint to those in charge. Yes, Barry O, I'm talking to you. Fix it or let history write the obituary of another fabled but failed civilization.