Luchetti introduction

In the excerpt of *Men of the West: Life on the American Frontier,* Cathy Luchetti explains some of the most important things about life on the American Frontier. At the end of the 19th century the West was very different from today. There was a lot of free land and to a lot of people it was just open to conquer even though the Indians were already there. It was constantly evolving and cities sprang up in no time. But first of all it's important to know why people moved there.

Luchetti claims that the main reason for people to move there was that they wanted to follow their dreams and desires. To these people the frontier was a synonym of wealth, land and freedom. It was about taking control and not having to follow laws made by others but to try to transform the world into your ideal of it. Luchetti also describes this movement by saying that the men were "always searching for their concept of earthly paradise".

These opportunities mostly attracted young men at the time. Wanting to live at a place where you're the one who takes control and where nothing is decided for you would most likely appeal to huge individualists. And that's exactly what these men were. Not only were they individualists, they were accountable to no one. Luchetti describes that by telling us how "they forged their way across the country, the results of their heedlessness was seen in diminished herds of buffalo, trees felled, grass cropped rootless and streams deeply muddied". But the men didn't care about the buffalos being exterminated or the trees being felled because to them the most important thing was to make their own decisions and become wealthy.

Cathy Luchetti also portrays the men of the West as strong men, both physically and mentally, who reach out for their goals by being tenacious and having a lot of hope. She does that by using a quote from Frederick Jackson Turner. He describes how they are combining "coarseness and strength with acuteness and inquisitiveness, practical, inventive turn of mind... a masterful grasp of material things... restless nervous energy... and the buoyancy and exuberance that come from freedom". They are almost described as if the freedom is defining their character.

But Luchetti puts a question mark to how much freedom the men actually had in the West. Even though the actual laws were okay to break, there were a lot of unwritten codes that

weren't to be violated. For example you could kill a man if it was justified, but you would always have to give him a fair chance to defend himself. If you didn't, you were a coward. According to Luchetti a lot of violence was created because some of the men didn't care about breaking the unwritten codes since they weren't planning on settling. They only wanted to become rich and then return to their homes. In addition to that you could say that the men of the West acted like they didn't have a lot of responsibilities in their life. And somehow you could say that they didn't, because being accountable to no one but yourself takes away a lot of responsibility. Luchetti even explains how the men of the West were shy of their companions because it was a sign of weakness. Especially during the winter, they would drink a lot, smoke a lot and to say the least, look for causes to fight. You had to be "game" as Luchetti describes it and to be someone important, you had to have killed a man.

These violent tendencies didn't just appear out of nothing. A lot of the men were raised during the Civil War and had been witnesses to a lot of violence. This made them more violent of nature and they would only have to be provoked to start a fight, which they easily were since the western men had a lot of prejudice that created many conflicts.

So if the men of the West were such violent people, why have the cowboys become such an important symbol of the American dream? Because even though their ways of living led to a lot of violence, their ideals were all about being American. The American dream says that you can achieve everything no matter where you come from if you work hard for your goals. And the cowboys did just that. They moved to a whole new place and started from the ground. They depended only on themselves and achieved their goals with tenacity and strength. This practically makes them the essence of the American dream and is probably a huge inspiration to a lot of Americans today.