Explorers or entrepreneurs: mountain men of the far west
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Abstract:
The men who explored, exploited, and wandered the American West during the first half of the 19th Century were a varied lot. Historians and fiction writers have romanticized the legends, lifestyles, and accomplishments of the first explorers and pioneers of North America’s western lands, but the lives of these individuals were often harder and more harrowing than ever depicted in history books, dime novels, and movie theaters. Washington Irving described the mountain men as leading a “wild, Robin Hood kind of life,” and Swiss artist, Rudolph F. Kurz, wrote that these men were “stared at as though they were bears.” They were members of military expeditions like Lewis and Clark (1804-06), Zebulon Pike (1806), and Charles Fremont. They were also men like Jedediah Smith and Joseph R. Walker who, as Bil Gilbert states in The Trailblazers, used beaver fur trapping as a way to support their explorations. Noting their variety, William H. Goetzmann, Exploration and Empire, describes most as “expectant capitalists”, seeking a way to make their fortunes. It was this “varied lot” and their dealings with an unknown landscape and peoples that Thomas Jefferson would require if his vision of an American empire extending to the Pacific Ocean were to be realized. President Thomas Jefferson’s attention became focused on the far west while reading Alexander Mackenzie’s Voyages from Montreal. According to Robert M. Utley’s, A Life Wild and Perilous, it was Mackenzie’s explorations and writings of an overland crossing to the Pacific Ocean that caused Jefferson to consider the idea of the Corps of Discovery and explorations across the Louisiana Territory. The Louisiana Purchase gave no claim to the U.S. of any lands west of the Rocky Mountains, as Jefferson acknowledged. David J. Wishart states in The Fur Trade of the American West 1807-1840 that it was Captain Robert Gray’s discovery of the mouth of the Columbia River in 1792, the Lewis and Clark exploration of 1804-06, and the Pacific Fur Company’s settlement in Astoria from 1811 to 1813 that gave the United States even a tenuous claim on the Pacific Coast region. It was Britain, Spain, France, and Russia, but mostly American Indian tribes who held the most valid claims to this region. Jefferson was not the only American interested in western lands, in fact, the westward surge of the inhabitants of the American frontier was beyond the control of the combined powers of the federal government as well as the resident Native American populations. As non-citizen Americans, the rights Native American tribes were not considered relevant to the U.S. federal policies nor to the dominant white American and European populations of the day. However, to those white explorers, traders, and trappers who dealt with tribal members on a regular basis, the relations with the native peoples were of paramount importance. The explorers depended on the resident Indian populations for advice and trade. Trappers and traders often married tribal women and maintained positive relationships with Native Americans. Relationships were not always friendly and newcomers not always welcome. This project seeks to illustrate just how the explorers of Western America related to the Native American tribes and individuals as well as how these early contacts continued to influence those that followed. As an eighth grade teacher of American history in a multiethnic classroom, I seek out historical events relating to the cultural history of my students. In the conflicts between Native American cultures and European-American culture, my students are often on both sides of this historical debate. The emphasis of curriculum development in this project will build an understanding of the fluid and diverse relationships between western explorers and Native American cultures. This fits within the California State History Standards 8.8 Students analyze the divergent paths of the American people in the West from 1800 to the mid-1800s and the challenges they faced.

Description:
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Mountain men were instrumental in opening up the various Emigrant Trails (widened into wagon roads) allowing Americans in the east to settle the new territories of the far west by organized wagon trains traveling over roads explored and in many cases, physically improved by the mountain men and the big fur companies originally to serve the mule train based inland fur trade. By the time two new international treaties in early 1846 and early 1848[1] officially settled new western coastal territories on the United States and spurred a large upsurge in migration, the days of mountain men making a Why did the mountain men move west? It was profitable. The pelts and furs that they trapped there could no longer be trapped in Europe or the East coast but they were in abundance in the American west. Although …they were abundant because of the in ability to procure large amounts cheaply the price remained high , rendering it profitable. Mountain men also moved west to discover gold, silver, etc. What did the mountain men do in the west? English lawmakers passed the Proclamation of 1763 to forbid further settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains. This was largely done to calm the fears of uneasy Native Amer…icans who had opposed the colonists in the French and Indian War. Many colonists resented the proclamation and ignored it altogether.