John Areno

Dr. Bruce R. Magee

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**The Great Red River Raft**

The Great Raft of the Red River was a constantly shifting series of logjams and silt deposits blocking travel up and down the river that had existed since before the earliest exploration expeditions by the Spanish and French in the Louisiana area (Humphreys, 102). Many attempts were made to clear the river since the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, but it wasn’t until thirty years later, in an effort to secure U.S. borders with Spanish territory, that the first large-scale attempt at completely removing the raft from the river was made, led by Captain Henry Miller Shreve (Humphreys, 102-3).

While Captain Shreve’s efforts in directing the clearing the Red River brought significant progress in the overall course of the project, his fame is somewhat misplaced (Keith, LeeAnna, paragraph 4-5). Shreve did indeed clear the Great Raft for steamboat travel after five years of work, but it quickly re-formed a year later, in the summer of 1839, forcing steamboats to detour through lakes, bayous, and canals (Humphreys, 103). It would not be until thirty-four years later, in 1873, that the Red River would be cleared again without reforming, this time by Lieutenant Woodruff (Humphreys, 103-4).

While the removal of the Red River raft was beneficial to commercial trade during the time period in which the project was undertaken, the consequences have begun to cause problems in the present day. The Raft Removal project has caused the Red River’s path to change and empty into the Mississippi River, as opposed running it natural course through the Atchafalaya Basin. As a result, the geographic integrity of the area has begun to deteriorate from the lack of soil and silt deposit that would otherwise be there if the Red River were allowed to run its natural course. This has ultimately led to the problem today with Louisiana’s wetlands disappearing (Keith, LeeAnna, paragraph 5).

**Bibliography**

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