

Manifest Destiny and U.S Westward Expansion

The phrase “**manifest destiny**” originated in the nineteenth century, yet the concept behind the phrase originated in the seventeenth century with the first European immigrants in America, English Protestants or **Puritans**.

Manifest destiny is defined as “the concept of **American exceptionalism**, that is, the belief that America occupies a special place among the countries of the world.” The Puritans came to America in 1630 believing that their survival in the new world would be a sign of God’s approval. As their ship the *Arbella* neared shore, group leader **John Winthrop** gave a sermon entitled “A Modell [*sic*] of Christian Charity,” in order to prepare his fellow passengers for what lay



American Progress, 1872, John Gast, chromolithograph, Library of Congress

ahead. His sermon stressed the importance of this experimental religious settlement in the new world, and how it would come to serve as an example for all settlements thereafter, stating “For wee [*sic*] must consider that wee [*sic*] shall be as a citty [*sic*] upon a hill. The eies [*sic*] of all people are upon us.” Winthrop also recalled God’s instruction in the Bible about the need to expand and prosper, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.” The ideology of manifest destiny continued through the eighteenth-century as victorious America won independence from Great Britain, an event that many occasioned to be preordained and lauded by God and an example of American exceptionalism.

*Yes, more, more, more! . . .
 . till our national destiny is
 fulfilled and . . . the whole
 boundless continent is ours
 – John L. O’Sullivan, 1845*

The use of the term “manifest destiny” did not enter conventional conversation until 1845, when journalist **John Louis O’Sullivan** wrote that it was “our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us.” Nineteenth-century **expansionism** went

hand in hand with the concept of manifest destiny, each signaling that there was a God-given, sanctioned right to conquer the land and displace the “uncivilized,” non-Christian peoples who, it was believed, did not take full advantage of the land which had been given to them. This

ideology served as justification for the violent displacement of native peoples and the forceful takeovers of land by military means. Nineteenth-century Americans expanded upon Winthrop's notion of "a city upon a hill" to encompass the idea that all countries should look to the United States as a model nation. Just as sixteenth-century Puritans had seen it as their divine right to "tame and cultivate" the frontier, so too did nineteenth-century capitalists and politicians see the expansion of the frontier as providential, their personal and professional profit in harmony with the nation's economic development.

U.S. Territorial Expansion

The European settlers who came to America in search of a new life believed that land acquisition was crucial to their future prosperity. Following the **Louisiana Purchase** of 1803 from France and the subsequent exploration of that western territory by **Meriwether Lewis** and **William Clark**, the nation's appetite for expansion grew. The Louisiana Purchase, which tripled the size of the young country, effectively started a chain reaction for U.S. territorial expansion. The next fifty years of American history saw the nation increase its land holdings exponentially: in 1845 Texas was incorporated into the U.S.; Britain's 1846 treaty with the U.S. gained the young nation the disputed Oregon territory; California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada and Utah were incorporated following the 1848 war with Mexico; and finally, in 1853, the **Gadsden Purchase** completed the last contiguous land purchase in the continental U.S., finalizing the southern borders of New Mexico and Arizona as we know them today. In 1846 **Walt Whitman** wryly opined on the relentless territorial expansion, stating "The more we reflect upon annexation as involving a part of Mexico, the more do doubts and obstacles resolve themselves away. . . . Then there is California, on the way to which lovely tract lies Santa Fe; how long a time will elapse before they shine as two new stars in our mighty firmament?"

Expansion and the Artwork

Emmanuel Gottlieb Leutze's mural study for the Capitol in Washington, D.C. celebrates the idea of Manifest Destiny just when the Civil War threatened the republic. The surging crowd of figures in the painting records the births, deaths, and battles fought as European Americans settled the continent to the edge of the Pacific. Like Moses and the Israelites who appear in the ornate

"Let me propose, that a series of pictures representing the history of our country may be painted for the Capitol, with just regard to the truth of history, with regard to the exhibition of the glorious examples of our great men for the benefit of future generations, and as a token of a nation's glory, that they may be continued as our history advances..." – Emanuel Leutze to Montgomery C. Meigs, Captain of the U.S. Engineers, February 14, 1854

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Name: _____

Period: _____ Date: _____

The Controversy Over Manifest Destiny

Written below are four quotes about the idea of "Manifest Destiny" For each, answer the questions found below in order to better understand the varying points of view about America's "Manifest Destiny."

1. *"It is America's right to stretch from sea to shining sea. Not only do we have a responsibility to our citizens to gain valuable natural resources we also have a responsibility to civilize this beautiful land."*
2. *"... The American claim is by the right of our manifest to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federative self-government entrusted to us. It is a right such as that of the tree to the space of air and earth for the full expansion of its principle and destiny of growth..."*

Pulling from quotes 1 & 2, list and describe the reasons given in **SUPPORT** of Manifest Destiny.

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

3. *"America has no right to take the lands west of the Louisiana Territory. Those lands are rightfully owned by Mexico and to enter into conflict with the Mexicans just to expand and take that land would violate the principles of this great nation."*

4. *"Manifest Destiny "*
More blood on the hands of Christ
They called themselves Christians
And gave themselves the rights
Disguised as missionaries
They were really after gold
Many Indians died for that
How many's never told

Pulling from quotes 3 & 4, list and describe the reasons that are given in **REJECTION** of Manifest Destiny.

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____

Painting Analysis: Manifest Destiny

Directions: Split the painting into 4 quadrants and record your observations. What do you see? What do you think the pieces symbolize?



Quadrant #1	Quadrant #2
Quadrant #3	Quadrant #4

Draw Conclusions: What message is this painting communicating to the viewer? Does it support or reject the concept of Manifest Destiny? Explain.
