

# Manifest Destiny:

**An introduction to the  
belief that fueled  
westward expansion.**



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## Introduction:

1.) This lesson should be used to introduce the American belief of “Manifest Destiny.” Students will understand this belief system by first picking apart the term to learn about it separately, then will learn about it as a whole. Students will then examine primary source documents to understand how Americans justified their expansion.

2.) This student packet should be used alongside the included PowerPoint.

3.) First, introduce the idea the goal for today “What is (was) Manifest Destiny?” Have students think about what this could mean. Then, look at each word separately.

4.) Have students define the word “destiny” first (since it was one they might understand). They should fill in the “top right” box on the first worksheet with their definition. Then, project it on the PPT. Then, do the same with Manifest. Now, give students an opportunity to provide a prediction about the term “Manifest Destiny.” Give students some time to fill in, then take student volunteers to share their prediction. Then, show students the actual definition and give them time to copy it into the correct box. Finally, now that students know what “Manifest Destiny” was - have them brainstorm positives and negatives that can result from this belief system. This can be done as a class OR individually. Debrief if done individually.

5.) Next, show the backward progression of maps, starting from 1872. In 1872, America’s westward expansion had completed. By 1850, it was mostly completed. But, by 1816, it had only just begun. Show students the PPT slide with the 1816 map and discuss the question on the slide - “why would the painter paint the entire, when the US was only a fraction of it?” “When we are looking at map of the United States today, is all of North America still shown?” Then, have students turn to the next page in their packet to analyze the image further. There is a quote that students should read to themselves - this is from the author in regards to this painting. Again, debrief once class has finished.

6.) Next, there are two sources from the man who coined the term “Manifest Destiny”, John O’Sullivan. Both of these quotes get at the heart of what this belief system was all about. Have students work individually or in pairs on reading the primary source, then breaking it down with the questions on the following page. Again, debrief once complete.

7.) Finally, show students the popular “westward angel” that so commonly represents Westward Expansion. Have students answer the image analysis questions on the page - once again, debrief once finished. Use the PPT to project the image on the screen for the class to examine closely.

# Manifest Destiny

What was it all about?

The word “**manifest**” means:

The word “**destiny**” means:

Manifest Destiny was a “belief” many Americans shared. Make a prediction about what it might mean based on these two words:

Manifest Destiny actually was:

Now, brainstorm the consequences - both positive and negative - that this shared belief might have.

**Positive:**

**Negative:**

# Manifest Destiny

What was it all about?



In 1816, author and writer John Melish created map of the United States. Here is what he said regarding the map he made:

*“To present a picture of it was desirable in every point of view. The map so constructed, shows at a glance the whole extent of the United States territory from sea to sea; and in tracing the probable expansion of the human race from east to west, the mind finds an agreeable resting place on its western limits. The view is complete, and leaves nothing to be wished for. It also adds to the beauty and symmetry [balance] of the map; which will, it is confidently believed, be found one of the most useful and ornamental [decorative] works ever executed [created] in this country.”*

—John Melish, 1816

## Questioning the Document:

- 1.) According to Melish, why did he decide to draw the map of the United States this way?
- 2.) How does this viewpoint represent Manifest Destiny?

# Manifest Destiny

What was it all about?

*Note: John O'Sullivan was a writer and editor of a well-known newspaper around the time of the Mexican-American war. Most people give him the credit for coining the term "Manifest Destiny."*

## **John O'Sullivan, "The Great Nation of Futurity," 1839.**

Our national birth (and the Declaration of Independence) was the beginning of a new history, which separates us from the past and connects us only with the future. We are the nation of progress, of individual freedom, of universal enfranchisement. Our future history will be to establish on earth the moral dignity and salvation of man -- the undeniable truth and goodness of God. America has been chosen for this mission among all the nations of the world, which are shut out from the life-giving light of truth. Her high example shall put an end to the tyranny of kings, and carry the happy news of peace and good will to millions who now endure an existence hardly better than that of beasts of the field. Who, then, can doubt that our country is destined to be the great nation of the future?

## **John O'Sullivan, "Annexation," 1845.**

It is time now for all opposition to annexation of Texas to stop. . . Texas is now ours. She is no longer to us a mere geographical space. She is no longer to us a mere country on the map.... The time has come for everyone to stop treating Texas as an alien, and to stop thwarting our policy and hampering our power, limiting our greatness and checking the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.

### **Vocabulary**

Enfranchisement: the right to vote

Tyranny: cruel and oppressive government

Endure: suffer

Thwarting: opposing

Hampering: slowing down

Allotted: given

Providence: God



# Manifest Destiny

What was it all about?



The title of this picture is called America Progress. It was painted by John Gast in 1872 as a representation of Manifest Destiny.

1. Describe what is happening in the picture.
2. What does the woman represent?
3. What does the dark and light imply?
4. What does the author want you to notice, think, and feel?
5. What does this picture imply about the time period?
6. What is the painter's opinion about westward expansion?