

# U.S. History *Pre-Columbian to the New Millennium*

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#### ON THE WEB

##### Prairie Schooner

Americans began exploring Oregon Country in the early 1800s, and the Overlanders began arriving in the 1840s. Read their stories on this website, loaded with images and fascinating detail.

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##### Seeing the Elephant

I think that I may without vanity affirm that I have 'seen the elephant.' - Louisa Clapp, speaking of her experiences during the Gold Rush

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##### Levi-Strauss

The most famous '49er of all did not make his fortune by finding gold, rather he sold pants — his name was Levi-Strauss.

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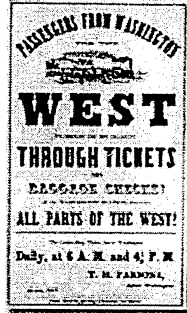


29. Manifest Destiny



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## 29. Manifest Destiny



Library of Congress

In the 1850s trains were leaving Washington for the West twice daily.

Expansion westward seemed perfectly natural to many Americans in the mid-nineteenth century. Like the Massachusetts Puritans who hoped to build a "city upon a hill," courageous pioneers believed that America had a divine obligation to stretch the boundaries of their noble republic to the Pacific Ocean. Independence had been won in the Revolution and reaffirmed in the War of 1812. The spirit of nationalism that swept the nation in the next two decades demanded more territory. The "every man is equal" mentality of the Jacksonian Era fueled this optimism. Now, with territory up to the Mississippi River claimed and settled and the Louisiana Purchase explored, Americans headed west in droves. Newspaper editor **JOHN O'SULLIVAN** coined the term "**MANIFEST DESTINY**" in 1845 to describe the essence of this mindset.

The religious fervor spawned by the Second Great Awakening created another incentive for the drive west. Indeed, many settlers believed that God himself blessed the growth of the American nation. The Native Americans were considered heathens. By Christianizing the tribes, American missionaries believed they could save souls and they became among the first to cross the Mississippi River.



A symbol of Manifest Destiny, the figure "Columbia" moves across the land in advance of settlers, replacing darkness with light and ignorance with civilization.

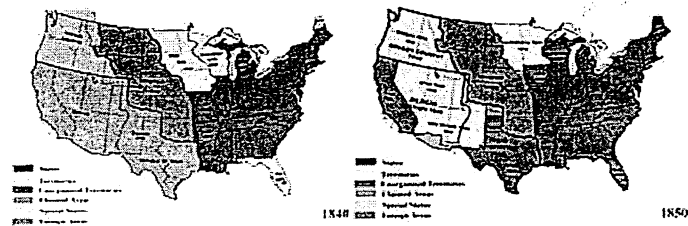
Economic motives were paramount for others. The fur trade had been dominated by European trading companies since colonial times. German immigrant John Jacob Astor was one of the first American entrepreneurs to challenge the Europeans. He became a millionaire in the process. The desire for more land brought aspiring homesteaders to the frontier. When gold was discovered in California in 1848, the number of migrants increased even more.

At the heart of manifest destiny was the pervasive belief in American cultural and racial superiority. Native Americans had long been perceived as inferior, and efforts to "civilize" them had been widespread since the days of John Smith and **MILES STANDISH**. The Hispanics who ruled Texas and the lucrative ports of California were also seen as "backward."

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In 1840, the entire southwestern corner of the United States was controlled by foreign powers (shown in orange), and the territorial dispute over the Oregon Territory (light green) had not been settled. By 1850 the U.S. had control of lands from the Atlantic to the Pacific, covering almost all of today's continental United States.

Expanding the boundaries of the United States was in many ways a cultural war as well. The desire of southerners to find more lands suitable for cotton cultivation would eventually spread slavery to these regions. North of the Mason-Dixon line, many citizens were deeply concerned about adding any more slave states. Manifest destiny touched on issues of religion, money, race, patriotism, and morality. These clashed in the 1840s as a truly great drama of regional conflict began to unfold.

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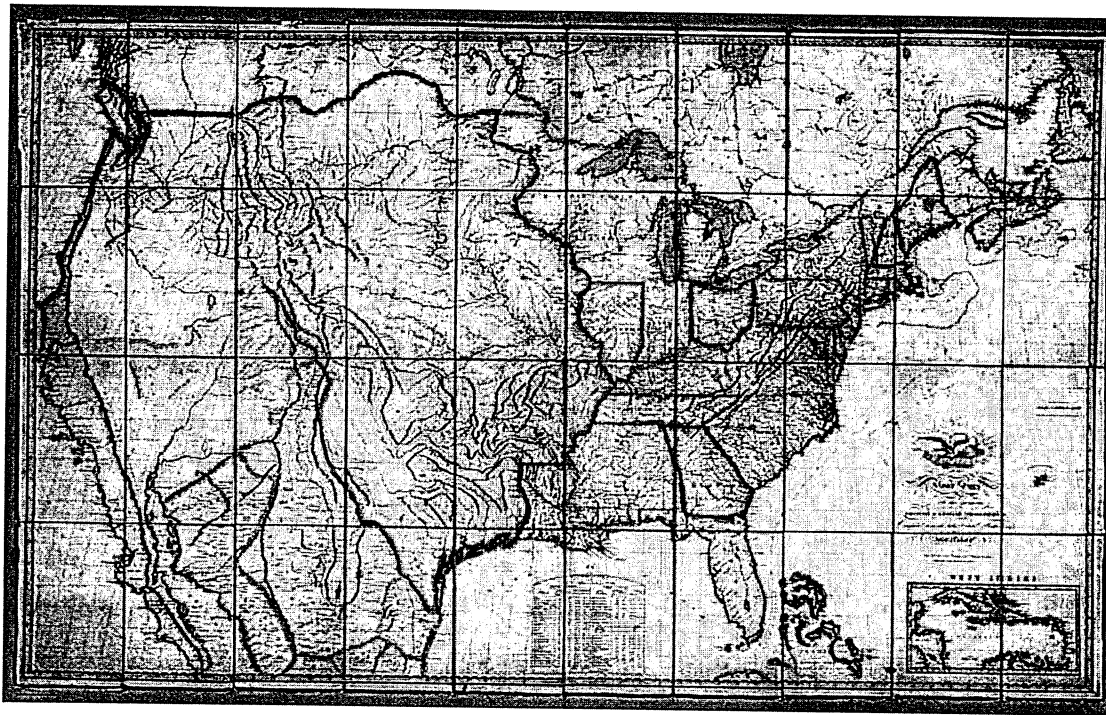
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## 1816 John Melish Map

Name \_\_\_\_\_



“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

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

## “Manifest Destiny” and the Writing of John O’Sullivan (Modified)

*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

*Source: 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.”*

**Guiding Questions**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

***John O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity,” 1839.***

1. What does John O’Sullivan think America stands for?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What, according to John O’Sullivan, is America’s mission?

***John O’Sullivan, “Annexation,” July 1845.***

1. What do you think John O’Sullivan means by “*our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions*”?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Based on these two documents, how did Americans feel about expanding westward?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Team: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Concept of Definition Map  
[Schwartz & Rafael, 1985]

