

How manifest destiny benefited america

[History](#)



Manifest Destiny on the Western Frontier

President Andrew Jackson once said, “ Americans are not a perfect people, but we are called to a perfect mission.” The perfect mission he was referring to was that of manifest destiny. Manifest destiny was the belief that the American settlers were pre-destined or divinely ordained to expand the United States across the North American continent. Westward expansion was justifiable and unavoidable regardless of what obstacles they may encounter including wild life, or original inhabitants. Manifest destiny benefitted Americans greatly but caused the decimation of native American way of life and populations.

Manifest destiny benefited America immensely by propelling the American people westward with a sense of American pride that spurred an increase in industry, resources, and migration. The increase in industry was largely because the creation of the transcontinental railroads. Government funding assisted entrepreneurs by “ granting 130 million acres of land” (Cross, 102) to the construction of the railroads in the name of manifest destiny and westward expansion. This project created thousands of jobs, set up settlements along the rails, while simultaneously connecting their markets together, and promoting the growth of businesses. With the country better connected by the railroads and a large network of bridges and tunnels, new technologies spread faster and farther than ever before. The transcontinental railroads “ came to epitomize progress, nationalism, and civilization itself” (White, xxii) and were prompted by manifest destiny. Secondly, the increase in resources was largely due to the increase in agricultural land and natural resources available. As the country doubled in

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land area it also increased its goods and resources. Pioneers laid claim to large plots of land across the country in the name of manifest destiny including whatever was on that land such as, agricultural fields or any natural resources. Manifest destiny made it possible for farmers and merchants to produce more crops, and “resources such as coal and iron began to be harvested at a previously unseen rate” (Cross, 104).

Lastly, the increase in migration was largely because of the California gold rush, and homestead act of 1862. The California Gold Rush began in January 1848 and as news spread of the discovery, hundreds of thousands of immigrants moved west to harvest resources from land they believed they had a right to because of manifest destiny. The homestead act of 1862 was the governments rapid and strategic dispersal of civilized American settlers throughout the western frontier. Under this law anyone from newly arrived immigrants, single women, to former slaves could own 160 acres of undeveloped land for free by living on it for five years, building a home, and in some way making improvements on the land. Lincoln once said, “the wild lands of the country should be distributed so that every man should have the means and opportunity of benefitting his condition.” Although manifest destiny created America’s increasing industry, resources, and migration and caused the development of the country, the people who previously occupied the land weren’t as fortunate.

Manifest destiny destroyed the native American way of life by eliminating their natural lifeline, boarding schools for children, and legislation banning traditional practices. Nomadic tribes on the plains heavily relied on the North American buffalo as their lifeline for food, shelter, tools, weapons, and

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clothes. Millions of wild buffalo roamed the west in the mid 1800s but hunting from trappers, traders, and the army dwindled them down to less than 400 by 1893. This selfishness stemmed from the idea of manifest destiny and the belief that it was white men's right and duty to tame the west. Because their natural lifeline was eliminated, once proud and independent people, were reduced to farming techniques that were much different from their tribal way of life. The government told them, "A good farmer is the best thing you can be in our culture," (Jawort, 2017), so they were forced to abandon traditional practices and attempt farming on small plots of near-desert lands. Secondly, settlers and believers of Manifest destiny asserted that it was their duty to teach the more civilized cultural ways of Americans to the people across the continent. Boarding schools were created in 1860 with the goal of reforming native American education so they may better assimilate into mainstream American way of life. They were taught the importance of private property, material wealth, and monogamous families in efforts to civilize them. This destroyed the fundamental Indian belief of communal ownership, which taught children that the land was not something that could be claimed, it was for all men and creatures to share.

Lastly, as a final nail in the coffin of native American tradition and way of life, Congress passed the Dawes Act of 1887 and the Curtis Act of 1898. The Dawes act, also known as the general allotment act, gave the president of the united states the power to break up shared reservation land into smaller allotments for individual ownership. The Curtis act Weakened the Indian territorial governments by abolishing tribal courts and laws, and replacing

them with federal law. These legislations forced tribes that believed in communal ownership and tribal laws to conform to American culture at the cost of their own. The Indian way of life was seen as inferior or savage and the American people saw it as part of their manifest destiny to civilize them but in the process destroyed traditions and in doing so destroyed populations.

Manifest destiny decimated native American populations through displacement, massacres, and wars that arose because of the need to colonize and expand westward across the continent. Manifest destiny led to settlers spreading out across the continent and the brutal displacement of some 250, 000 native American people from their home lands because white settlers saw them as standing in the way of progress. The displacement of those Indians largely contributed to the decimation of their populations and when president Jackson signed the Indian removal Act of 1830, the federal government gained the power to exchange Native-held land for territory in the West. Participation in removal was meant to be voluntary, and the negotiations fair, however many were forcibly removed and very few ever received promised aid from negotiations. Tens of thousands of Indians lost their lives and their homelands in the series of forced migrations called the Trail of Tears, from whooping cough, typhus, dysentery, cholera, starvation and adverse weather conditions along the way. “ Unlike other settlers heading west, who saw in America’s open expanses the hope of a new life... They left behind highly coveted land that was, even as they walked, being divided up among white land speculators” (Blackburn, 2012). The self-

serving concept of Manifest Destiny was used to rationalize the suffering of the people whose lands were taken from them without their consent.

Confrontations with white Americans also contributed to the decimation of their population. The Indian wars were bloody conflicts between soldiers and native Americans sparked by the settler's manifest destiny of moving into ancestral lands. During the sand creek massacre on November 29th 1862, seven hundred militiamen attacked a camp of peaceful Cheyennes and Arapahoes along Sand Creek. They fought for control over lands and brutally slaughtered, scalped, and mutilated 165 unarmed Indian men, women, children, and the elderly. Lastly, wars and battles influenced by manifest destiny also had a role in the decimation of native American populations. The Great Sioux War is another example of fighting over territory except the Indians stood their ground and fought back. After the discovery of gold in the black hills, " The Grant administration tried to buy the hills, but the Sioux, considering them sacred ground, refused to sell" (Powers, 7). Sioux and Cheyenne Indians worked together to protect their lands in the Dakotas in the largest military campaign since the end of the Civil War. The Indians had their greatest victory at the battle of Little Bighorn but the U. S. government swiftly abandoned the " peace policy", and aggressively responded with relentless attacks, more troops, and brought the war to an end. If not for manifest destiny the U. S. government wouldn't have believed they had a right to the land and no lives would have been lost.

In conclusion, Manifest destiny was a proud and uplifting mentality of white Americans that propelled the development of the country. Industry was fast tracked by the transcontinental railroad and connecting the continent with a <https://assignbuster.com/how-manifest-destiny-benefited-america/>

faster and more efficient way of traveling. Resources and opportunities at new life sprang up everywhere you looked as the country doubled in size giving people in need a start at a new life. Migration was designed to be an efficient and rapid way of settling the frontier and each of these were influenced by the idea that it was the duty and inevitable fate of the country to do so and it benefitted America tremendously. However Manifest destiny was also the cause of the destruction of native American way of life. Wild buffalo on the plains were the life line of the plains Indians so with the destruction of the buffalo came the destruction of tradition. Boarding schools were designed to reeducate native American children to specifically teach them civilized way of life rather than their “ savage” roots. Legislation was the final step in erasing native American way of life by making it illegal. Manifest destiny shaped all of these actions, native Americans were in the way of progress and needed to be assimilated. Manifest destiny had the most direct consequences on the decimation of native American populations. Massacres occurred that killed hundreds of Indians over simply land disputes. Legislation that made it legal for the government to move native American populations hundreds of miles killed thousands before even reaching their destination. Confrontations arose when white Americans wanted lands promised to the native Americans and instead of rolling over they decided to fight a larger and stronger enemy to protect their rights. Avoidable deaths all caused by the idea that it was the destiny and right of the us to take over favorable land occupied by natives. It makes me wonder how their rich culture and populations would have effected society today if the U. S. hadn't used manifest destiny as a tool and justification of genocide.