

# Westward expansion

[History](#), [American History](#)



To what extent is it accurate to claim that the ideal of manifest destiny was a motivating factor in the western expansions of the United States? The 1840s was a time of great territorial expansion during which the United States fought to annex Texas, acquire the Oregon territory, and conquer California and New Mexico from Mexico.

As the people sought reasoning behind their territorial ambitions, a belief known as Manifest Destiny sprouted from their feeling of nationality as they came to believe that America was destined to expand past the current borders. Manifest Destiny was also a term used by Democrats to promote and persuade people to support the territorial expansions that the United States was undergoing at the time.

Although manifest destiny was a huge motivating factor in the western expansion of the United States, other factors such as the rising population, expansion of slavery and freedom-seeking slaves, the gold rush of California, and new opportunities sought by settlers. The rising population helped push Americans towards expanding westward. The early 1800s was a time when the United States was experiencing a rapid growth in population. The U. S. population grew from more than five million in 1800 to more than 23 million by mid-century. During that time, there the U. S had been experiencing a periodic high birth rate.

The growth on the sizes of families only added pressure to expand their land and gather more resources to survive. Immigration also added to the explosive population growth in the United States. Over 7.5 million immigrants migrated to the United States. Many immigrants fled their countries in order to escape from poverty and famine. The Gold rush also

<https://assignbuster.com/westward-expansion-research-paper-samples/>

caused a great influx of immigrants as they hoped to acquire some of the wealth found in the United States. Since agriculture provided the primary economic structure, many incoming immigrants would scout for farmable land.

However most of the fertile land east of the Appalachian Mts. had already been taken. This pushed immigrants to scout west to look for better land. Nearly 4, 000, 000 Americans moved to western territories between 1820 and 1850. The Gold Rush of California attracted all kinds of attention from money-hungry miners to hopeful farmers. The first discovery of gold in California in 1849 influenced many settlers and immigrants to flock westward in the hope of gaining wealth. As news spread of the discovery, thousands of gold miners traveled by sea or over land to San Francisco and the surrounding area.

The Gold Rush attracted more than just the American people but it also helped the influx of immigrants. Thousands of Chinese migrated to the U. S after hearing about the opportunity to mine for wealth. This caused the non-native population of the California territory to reach 100, 000. Many of the thousands of settlers never found gold but helped to promote west expansion. New opportunities were another factor that helped to motivate westward expansion. As the increasing population put pressure on settlers, many of them headed west in hopes of acquiring cheap, fertile land to grow more food to feed their families.

Since the government offered most of the land cheap, or in some cases free, many didn't hesitate to move. Government passed things like the Homestead Act to encourage settlers to settle west. Others sought the

<https://assignbuster.com/westward-expansion-research-paper-samples/>

chance at a new life. They wanted to increase their political power or standing by owning more land. In their eyes, land ownership was tied to wealth, political power, self-sufficiency, and independent “ self rule. ” New technologies also had an impact on westward expansion. New technological innovations helped to influence the economy by enhancing trade and commerce.

This proved wrong the belief that, like previous empires, the United States would get weaker with expansion. By the 1840s, steamboats made use of America’s waterways and turned them into busy commercial thoroughfares. Their popularity grew as they continued to increase trade between towns and cities. Railroads were another innovation that helped to fuel trade. They integrated eastern markets with the towns on the western slope of the Appalachians. Robert Fulton’s invention of the canal and the invention of the telegraph were two other great examples of the technologies that helped to enhance westward expansion.

The last factor that also affected westward expansion was the desire to expand slavery and slaves desire Politicians, editors, soldiers, and citizens, wanted new territory for various reasons. In the case of Texas, the Tyler administration sought to prevent the abolition of slavery there, control a potential rival in cotton production, provide a haven for masters and their slaves, thwart Great Britain from keeping Texas independent, and comply with the wishes of most Texians to join the United States.

In the Oregon dispute, Democrats hoped to dominate Asian commerce, provide land for future pioneers, and safeguard citizens already settled there. The war with Mexico and the strategy of conquest revealed a desire to

secure a border at the Rio Grande, satisfy claims against Mexico, and acquire California to monopolize trade with Asia. Democrats wanted to supply abundant land to the nation's poor and to future immigrants. To attain this laudable goal, however, they relied on bribery, bullying, and warfare to wrest land from Native Americans and Mexicans.

Often idealistic, they were also racist and materialistic. Yet anti-slavery activists and Democrats, whose belief in federal power was threatened by the South, were opposed to any expansionist move that would add new slave-holding states to the Union and thereby upset the fragile balance of power between North and South. After the Mexican-American War ended in 1848, disagreements over the expansion of slavery made further territorial annexation too divisive to be official government policy. Many Northerners were increasingly opposed to what they believed to be efforts by Southern slave owners—and their friends in the North—to expand slavery at any cost. The proposal during the war of the Wilmot Proviso (a statement declaring that slavery would not be permitted in any new territory acquired by the U. S. ), and the emergence of various "Slave Power" conspiracy theories thereafter, indicated the degree to which Manifest Destiny had become controversial. The Fugitive Slave Law or Fugitive Slave Act was passed by the United States Congress on September 18, 1850, as part of the Compromise of 1850 between Southern slave-holding interests and Northern Free-Soilers. This was one of the most controversial acts of the 1850 compromise and heightened Northern fears of a "slave power conspiracy". It declared that all runaway slaves were, upon capture, to be returned to their masters.

Abolitionists nicknamed it the "Bloodhound Law" for the dogs that were used to track down runaway slaves.

## References

1. [http://www.pbs.org/kera/usmexicanwar/prelude/md\\_expansionism.html](http://www.pbs.org/kera/usmexicanwar/prelude/md_expansionism.html)
2. <http://solpass.org/6ss/games/westwardcloze.htm> [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Manifest\\_Destiny](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Manifest_Destiny)