

American manifest destiny and slavery expansion history essay

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Name: University: Course: Tutor: Date: American Manifest destiny and slavery expansion

Introduction Manifest destiny was an idea that heavily shaped American policy in the 1800s. American manifest destiny was the major driving force behind the massive territorial expansion for the United States during the 1840s. However, while the idea was welcomed by many Americans, it became one of the issues that led to further division of the American politics. While there were many issues that shaped the divisive politics around the issue, the most divisive issue was whether slavery would be allowed in the new territories acquired by the US. Based on theoretical and empirical explanations, the paper will analyze the delicate nature of expanding slavery into new states and some of the issues that characterized expansion of slavery as a divisive issue. An overview of the manifest destiny

Manifest destiny was an expansionist agenda advanced by the United States in the 1880s. Efforts to consolidated American economic, political and social influence around the world offered the motivation for increased westward colonization and territorial acquisition. While the agenda to strengthen the US as a transcontinental power was ideologically advanced by democrats, it was not itself an official policy set by the American government. According to Hammond (2007), slavery was a critical issue between Free states of the north and the slave states of the south. Following the inception of the Northern states and those in the south, North America sought to expand its territorial control through acquisition of new states (p. 1). Profoundly, the end of the American Revolution after the passage of the 1783 treaty of Paris gave North America the right to huge tracks of unsettled British land in areas linking the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi

River (Carlisle, p. 138). However, while the US undeniably acquired the land, the question of slavery expansion into the newly acquired territory came to the government attention. Efforts to include slavery expansion into the American manifest destiny were marred by a number of previous regulatory legal provisions that had abolished such advances in other states. For example, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 prohibited slavery in the new territory north of the Ohio River. However, other provisions such as the southwest ordinance of 1790 permitted slavery practices in the southern areas covering the Ohio River to the Mississippi River. The provision also articulated that, slavery was permissible in any territory where it was not banned by federal law (Carlisle, p. 139). Even while the fledgling nation forged toward creating a new government, the issue of slavery dominated political debates between the North and South. Despite the presentation of the petitions by the Pennsylvania abolition society to promote the gradual end of slavery, efforts to spearhead an empire of slavery in the west became real. Even though, the inception of the Wilmot proviso in 1846 was put in place to bar slavery from the Mexican cession, it largely shaped the sectionalized politics that surrounded the issue of slavery expansion. This provision was seen as an unchallengeable battle regarding control of the government between the North and South. The provision, sought to block the development of slavery into the recently acquired territories, a step that aggravated the south. Even though, the Wilmot proviso was defeated in the senate, its re-introduction by the Whig party in the house led to a highly provoking sectional debate, which to many historians, was a precursor to the civil war (Morrison, p. 219). Much of the debates surrounding slavery in the

quest for territorial expansion were triggered by the need to address the relevance of slavery to American society, particularly in the future. According to the northerners, the future of the new American society could be safeguarded by planting the frontier with white, free labor. Citizens of the Free states in the north believed that, the retrogressive nature of slavery slowed down progress of the nation, degraded white workers, and breached the fundamental principles of liberty and equality (Morrison, p. 6). To many northerners, aristocratic form of leadership in the south by a minority of slaveholders was the prime reason holding the rest of the white population in poverty. The commitment of the northerners toward promotion of individual freedom strengthened support for the ideology of free labor. For the new America, free labor was regarded as a vital tool that will foster the development of a competitive, democratic and market-oriented economy (Carlisle, p. 145). On the other hand, southerners comprising of slave owners and non-slave owners alike felt that slavery was necessary in all states since it promoted equality by reducing class conflict. They also argued that, slavery ensured liberty since it made the exploitation of white workers and independent agriculturists unnecessary. In addition, to the southerners, efforts by the North to introduce a free labor system led to the development of hierarchy, rigid oligarchy and increased conflict between capitalism and democracy. In this case, the American union was likely to face a serious economic dependency, something viewed by southerners as unwanted (Morrison, p. 6). According to Hammond (2007), while the need to uphold equality and liberty surrounded the debate of slavery expansion to new territories, the idea of preventing blacks from "degrading" the newly

acquired territories took center stage. Racial inequality at that time was seen as The Missouri compromise in 1820 is one of the events that triggered discussion on the issue of slavery in relation to territorial expansion efforts by the young republic (p. 124). The failure of the Missouri Compromise to cover new territories not included in the Louisiana Purchase triggered increased interest in the debate on slavery's expansion. The rise of anti-slavery and focus on racial inequality also shaped the sectional debate since it triggered the involvement of abolitionist. Efforts by the anti-slavery movements to help enslaved blacks played a critical role in the opposition against the institution of slavery. The question on the legal status of slavery not only in the western territories but also future states manifested itself following the introduction of the manifest destiny (Mountjoy, p. 36). While efforts by the northerners to promote equality and liberty helped to prohibit the spread of slavery to the newly acquired territories, the introduction of The Slave Code by Senator Jefferson Davis largely compromised anti-slavery efforts. According to the slave supporters in the southern states, there was a need to recognize slaves as property that could be taken into the new territories (p. 147). They argued that, territorial governments had no sovereign power to decide on the slavery issue while the federal government had the command to protect slavery. The raid by the militant abolitionist John Brown at the federal armory and arsenal depot at Harpers Ferry in Virginia was an attempt that sought to strengthen the fight against slavery. Even though, efforts to arm slaves to create an insurrection failed response to it crystallized the crisis atmosphere of sectional division, which led to the presidential election of 1860. Work cited Boyer, Paul S. The Enduring Vision: A

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