

Manifest destiny in
the 1840s and
american imperialism
in the 1890s-1900s



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Manifest Destiny in the 1840s and American imperialism in the 1890s-1900s were both expansionist ideologies based on a belief in white, Anglo-Saxon superiority, a faith in American exceptionalism, and a desire to acquire territory for economic and/or strategic purposes.

American imperialism was motivated by four main factors: economic, political, geographic, and cultural.

The well-known phrase Manifest Destiny was coined by a New York journalist, John L. O'Sullivan, in 1844. Sullivan's meaning behind this word was that the United States had a divinely appointed mission, so obvious as to beyond dispute, to occupy all of North America. Americans, he proclaimed, had a far better title to western lands than could be provided by any international treaty, right of discovery, or long-term settlement. Their right to the continent was provided by the nation's divinely inspired mission to extend the area of freedom. Other people's claims, O'Sullivan wrote must give way to our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment in liberty. Those who stood in the way of expansion- European powers like Great Britain and Spain, Native Americans, Mexicans- were by definition obstacles to the progress of freedom. The idea of manifest destiny expanded the west and provided homes and jobs, however, it also ran the Native Americans out of their land and kept pushing them further and further west until their removal. Due to this, all of the land east of the Mississippi River was in the hands of white men.

The reality of manifest destiny is in the year 1843, the stage was set for the Great Migration. Throughout the 1840s westward expansion started rolling due to an intensification of the old belief that God intended the American nation to reach all the way to the Pacific Ocean. The settlement and economic exploitation of the West promised to prevent the United States from falling down the same path as Europe and becoming a society with fixed social classes and a large group of wage-earning poor. Overtime, as they moved across the Appalachian Mountains, so did the linkage between westward expansion and freedom. As repeated throughout history, American freedom comes at cost of someone else's, dating back to Europe colonizing early America and early Africa. Just because the Americans aren't abroad on foreign soil pushing people out of their homes, but are living amongst the citizens they are forcing out doesn't mean it is not an imperialist land grab.

The road to war began to be paved after Polk realized that acquiring California would prove to be more difficult than expected. He first attempted to dispatch an emissary to Mexico offering to purchase the region, however the Mexican government refused to negotiate. By that spring of 1846, James K. Polk was preparing for military action. That same year in April, American soldiers led by Zachary Taylor, moved into a stretch of land between the Nueces river and the Rio Grande. This land was claimed by both countries on the disputed border between Texas and Mexico; a tactic to successfully provoke Mexican forces and obviously made conflict with Mexico inevitable. When the fighting officially broke out, Polk claimed that the Mexicans had shed blood upon American soil and called for a declaration of war. Soon after The Mexican War took place and was majorly supported by Americans

because of the expansionist fervor of manifest destiny. Though Americans chose to support this war due to the potential benefits, anyone with comprehension skills can see right through Polk's plan; this was a war of greed not vengeance for American lives lost or of divine right/ manifest destiny. Once America defeated Mexico in the first battle and they still refused to negotiate, Polk ordered American forces under Winfield Scott to march inland and occupy the country's capital. Their success resulted in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that fixed the border at the Rio Grande and extended the United States to the Pacific coast. The treaty also annexed more than a one-third of Mexico's total area: Texas and ceded California, present-day New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and Utah to the United States. In exchange, the United States paid \$15 million, a mere price to pay to clean their guilty consciences after forcing a country to give up their land. It was unprecedented and unnecessary to launch a war because a country refused to sell a part of its territory to a neighbor. A well known war critic, Ulysses S. Grant defined the war as one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger nation against a weaker nation. Circling back to the definition of imperialism from Webster's dictionary meaning , to the policy and practice of seeking to dominate the economic or political affairs of underdeveloped areas or weaker countries. Not once during the war was there any talk of this God-given right to expand. It was solely imperialism and greed. Whether it be greed for glory and/or the economic (value) that comes with having more land.

The California Gold Rush provided a renewed passion to the idea of Manifest Destiny. The Gold Rush attracted thousands of people from around the

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country, and around the world, to make the journey west. The Rush offered people the dream of moving west, staking a claim on your own land, and finding gold. This dream became reality for some, who followed the route west and created a new life through Manifest Destiny. Before the Gold Rush California had a non indian of fewer than 15000 when the Mexican War ended. the non-indian population Rosa 200, 000 by 1852 in more than 36, 000 8 years later. However, when people started moving there the rate of immigrants increased flooding in from all backgrounds such as: Mexicans, Chileans, Chinese, French, and American Indians. This resulted in California beginning to impose stricter laws, limited the voting, and the right to testify in court to White, excluding Indians, Asian, and the state's few blacks. In order to control the state's population, state officials paid millions and bounties to private militias that lost attacks on the states Indians. Resulting in thousands of Indian children being declared orphans or bought and sold as slaves. This brought California Indian population from 15, 0000 to around 30, 000. The fact that someone could be so heartless and deem these as actions justified by God himself, is hard to fathom.

Whether or not they had the God-given right to settle in the west, that was exactly what they did. Nothing was able to stop them even massive amounts of death; that is the true misfortune of America's westward expansion.

Another misfortune being the amount of Indian deaths acquired during this conquest. By the 1800s the U. S had created a legacy of broken treaties with the Iroquois, Cherokee, Nez Perces and many other nations. In Century of Dishonor written in the mid 1800s by Helen Hunt, called attention to what Jackson termed the government's "" shameful record of broken treaties and

unfulfilled promises. More specifically, broken promises and treaties issued by the United States government to these tribes, forced removal of tribes to reservations located on unsuitable land for farming or sustaining the Native American way of life, massacres of the Native American people by whites. After the nullification crisis, Andrew Jackson highlighted his commitment to the sovereignty of the nation. Leading him to follow through with his final act in hopes of resolving centuries worth of conflict between the White Americans and Indians east of the Mississippi river. During the 1820s, Missouri forced its Indian population to leave the state. Jackson's administration carried out The Indian Removal Act of 1830, providing funds for five civilized tribes, specifically: the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole with a total population nearing 60,000 living in North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi. James Monroe stated that, the removal of the tribes from the territory which they now inhabit . . . would not only shield them from impending ruin, but promote their welfare and happiness. Experience has clearly demonstrated that in their present state it is impossible to incorporate them in such masses, in any form whatever, into our system. It has also been demonstrated with equal certainty that without a timely anticipation of an provision against the dangers to which they are exposed, under causes which it will be difficult, if not impossible to control, their degradation and extermination will be inevitable. He is basically claiming that they are doing the Indians a favor by removing them and making them out to be incapable of coexisting in order to justify taking their land. The Cherokee nation was forced to give up its lands east of the Mississippi River and to migrate to an area in present-day

Oklahoma. The Cherokee people called this journey the "" Trail of Tears,""
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because of its devastating effects. It seems as if God intended on you having this land then you wouldn't need to draft an entire document based solely on removing people who were rightfully there. Imperialism on the other hand has a main objective to acquire land, regardless of the cost.

The Louisiana territory, which stretched from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada and from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. The territories geographical location would give the United States access to the port of New Orleans was only able to be bought because of a loophole in the Constitution. It is also provided a neat solution for Jefferson, in which Indians would not have to choose between assimilation and extermination. The government could relocate Indians further westward, while opening up the vacated lands to white settlement. Jefferson abandoned his conviction that the federal government was limited to powers specifically mentioned in the Constitution, since the document said nothing about buying territory from a foreign power. Jefferson was successful in his \$15 million dollar purchase of the territory, resulting in him doubling the size of the United States and ended French presence in North America. There were mixed feelings about this impulsive financial decision. As stated by a federalist, We are to give money, of which we have too little, for land, of which we already have too much. This statement alone shows the clear line crossed between America divine destiny and their greed. It is mentioned that Jefferson acknowledge his actions exceeding those asked of him in the Constitution but validated it by mentioning the benefits justified his transgressions. To sway favor he wrote that farmers are the chosen people of God, insinuating that if America buys land and remains predominantly agricultural the country would always

succe~~d~~e. He also offered his own statement after Monroe saying, Jackson offered his own justification for Indian removal in December 1829, claiming that the removal was necessary for the preservation of American Indians essentially asserting that removal was a humanitarian act for the good of the Indian tribes. [The Indians'] present condition with what they once were, makes a most powerful appeal to our sympathies. Our ancestors found them the uncontrolled possessors of these vast regions. By persuasion and force, they have been made to retire from river to river, and from mountain to mountain; until some of the tribes have become extinct, and others have left but remnants, to preserve, for a while, their once terrible names. This fate surely awaits them, if they remain within the limits of the States, does not admit of a doubt. Humanity and national honor demand that every effort should be made to avert so great a calamity. All in all, If you have to go outside you rights in the constitution and have to justify your actions then it is evident it was a means of imperialism and not Divine right.

Though Oregon had given away all its free land by 1855, more would still continue to migrate to California and Oregon for many years. Hundreds and thousands traveled the Oregon Trail, and though approximately one in ten died from illness and accident, many more remained to settle and farm the land. They believed it was their divine right to do so. Many of the brave and bold from the east traveled its path, with ambition and hope in their hearts. Many would never see the lands they wanted to settle in. In a bid to encourage people onto the Plains advertisements told success stories of those who had claimed land under the terms of the Homestead Act and had become successful. It divided 2. 5 million acres of Planes land into sections

or homesteads of 160 acres. People could now claim 160 acres of land. The only requirement on their part was that they paid a small charge and built a house or added something to the land such as a house or a well and lived on the land for at least 5 years. The Homestead Act took effect on January 1 1863, the same day as the Emancipation Proclamation, another document implementing the blurred vision of freedom. Congress also took part by making huge grants of money and land for internal improvements, including up to 100 million acres to the Union Pacific and Central Pacific , two companies chartered in 1862 and charged with building a railroad from the Missouri River to the Pacific coast. The point that is failed to look at is how this land was acquired and who originally resided on this land being given away. The idea of God giving men and to be more specific, white Anglo-Saxon men, the right to conquer land for their own or it being the American right to conquer land is hard to fathom. The United States being associated with the term land of the free is hard to fathom when those that don't agree with the white males are ridiculed and walked over however, it is all justified in the name of God.

In conclusion, this idea of Manifest Destiny and Divine Right is simply a justification for the American peoples subjugation. However, in its natural, non-sugar coated term, all it is just imperialism. A term frowned upon, since it is typically a strategy used on foreign countries abroad in efforts to colonize weaker nations, not typically your own. The self-serving concept of manifest destiny, the belief that the expansion of the United States was divinely ordained, justifiable, and inevitable, was used to rationalize the removal of American Indians from their native homelands. In the minds of

white Americans, the Indians were not using the land to its full potential as they reserved large tracts of unspoiled land for hunting, leaving the land uncultivated. If it was not being cultivated, then the land was being wasted. Americans declared that it was their duty, their manifest destiny, which compelled them to seize, settle, and cultivate the land. The United States paved their way by picking on people who didn't have the means to fight back just as any imperialist would.