

A phenomenon of manifest destiny

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Manifest Destiny was the 19th century belief that America was destined to stretch from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. People believed it was the will of God that America reach from coast to coast, driving out or civilizing the native people. The expansion of the United States was seen as inevitable and a logical progression of events.

From America's beginning, the settlers believed they were destined to expand across the continent. They took the fact that they survived the journey across the Atlantic to mean they were destined to be there and expand as far as possible (Document 1). Benjamin Franklin held the same view, expressing this in a letter to Lord Kames in 1767. Franklin said that the continent held many advantages and the settlers should take advantage of them, making America a great country. He predicted that America would expand and become great in a very short time, which it did (Document 3).

By the mid-eighteenth century, Manifest Destiny had developed from simply an idea into a national ideology, something spanning the nation. It became somewhat of an obsession, a constant push westward. This is particularly evident in the 1840s with the explosion of westward expansion.

2. In sections 4, 5, and 6, we see a more aggressive expansionist period for the United States. How were ideas about gender and race used in arguments for and against expansion?

Race played a major part in the debate of American expansion. By this point in history, almost all slavery was race-based. Many people said the annexation of Texas would completely wipe out slavery (Document 21), though quite a few people begged to differ.

Ideas of gender were also used in the expansion debate, though not as one might expect. Jane Swisshelm anonymously published articles about expansion and other such political topics, something that was generally immediately discredited since it was written by a woman. She asserted that women were just as important as men and could be part of society and decision-making just like men were (Document 28).

Both race and gender helped arguments for expansion in that they challenged the way things were. With Americans thinking about how new all the expansion was, they were more likely to get the idea that maybe things could be switched up a little bit.

3. In the introduction, Greenberg describes the breakdown of the consensus on Manifest Destiny. “ Expansion and sectional harmony were proving incompatible.” (Introduction, 24) What did she mean by this?

Eventually, since America continued to grow, sectional differences began to interfere with the harmony between sections. Though both the North and the South wanted to annex new territories, they could not peacefully decide which areas to attempt to annex next. The South wanted territories that would be beneficial to the slave trade, while the North wanted to annex places like Canada and Hawaii (Document 44).

Such disputes, as well as the ongoing tensions about slavery in the North and South, caused America to somewhat lose its focus. Instead of being focused on how to make the United States great, the South continued to look for sources of slaves that would be better and easier than Africa. The North

wanted lands to settle on that would be more peaceful and would not allow slavery.

Eventually, all this led to disputes between the North and the South, not helped by the Civil War at the end of this time period. In fact, the Civil War essentially brought Manifest Destiny to an end, as the United States had expanded to both coasts and was busy fighting a war against itself. Thus, America is a much larger nation now than it would have ever been without the ideology of Manifest Destiny that swept the nation, beginning with the very first settlers.