

Manifest Destiny Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:
How did Americans justify Westward Expansion?

Materials:

- Manifest Destiny Powerpoint
- Copies of Melish Map Worksheet
- Copies of John O’Sullivan Documents and Guiding Questions

Plan of Instruction:

1. Do Now: Project slide of painting “American Progress.” Ask students to write:

- What do you see in this painting?
- The floating white woman in this painting is heading West. What do you think she represents? How is this symbolized in the painting?

2. Share student responses.

3. Continue lecture

Slide #3: Map of United States in 1872

- By 1872, the United States had already expanded to the Pacific Ocean.
- This is after the Louisiana Purchase, after the War with Mexico.
- So this painting is basically celebrating *what had already happened.*

Slide #4: Map of U.S. in 1816

- But in 1816, we hadn’t spread that far yet.
- This is before the annexation of Texas and before the Mexican War.

Slide #5: Melish map, 1816

- John Melish could have drawn the map of the United States to just include American territory.
- Instead he drew the continent from sea to sea.
- Why did he choose to draw the map this way?

Slide #6: This is Melish’s explanation for why he drew the map that way.

4. Hand out Melish Map and have students answer questions.

5. Discuss:

- What do you think of this explanation?
- What does this say about the power of maps?
- Do you think Melish would have said that his map is inaccurate?

6. Hand out O'Sullivan documents and Guiding Questions. Student should work on the questions in pairs.

7. Review student answers.

8. Discussion:

- Why did Americans think they were so special?
- Are you surprised by the reasons that O'Sullivan gives for expansion? Do you think he really believes that God wants Americans to expand?
- This theory that Americans are special is called "American Exceptionalism." It's this idea that America has had such a unique history and has become so powerful that there's something really special about it.

What do you think about this theory?

Citations:

John Melish. *Map of the United States with the contiguous British and Spanish Possessions*. Philadelphia, 1816. David Rumsey Collection.

John Rennie Short, *Representing the Republic*. London: Reaktion Books, 2001. 135. Quoting John Melish, *Geographical Description of the USA: with the contiguous British and Spanish possessions as an accompaniment to his map of these countries*. (Philadelphia, 1816).

"The Great Nation of Futurity," *The United States Democratic Review*, Volume 6, Issue 23, pp. 426-430. <http://digital.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=usde;cc=usde;rgn=full%20text;idno=usde0006-4;didno=usde0006-4;view=image;seq=0350;node=usde0006-4:6>

John O'Sullivan, "Annexation," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17, no. 1 (July-August 1845): 5-10 <http://web.grinnell.edu/courses/HIS/f01/HIS202-01/Documents/OSullivan.html>

1816 John Melish Map

Name _____



“To present a picture of it was desirable in every point of view. The map so constructed, shows at a glance the whole extent of the United States territory from sea to sea; and in tracing the probable expansion of the human race from east to west, the mind finds an agreeable resting place on its western limits. The view is complete, and leaves nothing to be wished for. It also adds to the beauty and symmetry [balance] of the map; which will, it is confidently believed, be found one of the most useful and ornamental [decorative] works ever executed [created] in this country.”

—John Melish, 1816

1. According to Melish, why did he decide to draw the map of the United States this way?
2. How does this relate to Manifest Destiny?

“Manifest Destiny” and the Writing of John O’Sullivan (Modified)

John O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity,” 1839.

Our national birth (and the Declaration of Independence) was the beginning of a new history, which separates us from the past and connects us only with the future.

We are the nation of progress, of individual freedom, of universal enfranchisement. Our future history will be to establish on earth the moral dignity and salvation of man -- the undeniable truth and goodness of God. America has been chosen for this mission among all the nations of the world, which are shut out from the life-giving light of truth. Her high example shall put an end to the tyranny of kings, and carry the happy news of peace and good will to millions who now endure an existence hardly better than that of beasts of the field. Who, then, can doubt that our country is destined to be the great nation of the future?

John O’Sullivan, “Annexation,” 1845.

It is time now for all opposition to annexation of Texas to stop. . . Texas is now ours. She is no longer to us a mere geographical space. She is no longer to us a mere country on the map....

The time has come for everyone to stop treating Texas as an alien, and to stop thwarting our policy and hampering our power, *limiting our greatness and checking the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.*

Vocabulary

Enfranchisement: the right to vote

Tyranny: cruel and oppressive government

Endure: suffer

Thwarting: opposing

Hampering: slowing down

Allotted: given

Providence: God

Source: John O’Sullivan was a writer and editor of a well-known newspaper around the time of the Mexican-American war. Most people give him the credit for coining the term “Manifest Destiny.”

Guiding Questions

Name _____

John O’Sullivan, "The Great Nation of Futurity," 1839.

1. What does John O’Sullivan think America stands for?

2. What, according to John O’Sullivan, is America’s mission?

John O’Sullivan, "Annexation," July 1845.

1. What do you think John O’Sullivan means by “*our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions*”?

2. Based on these two documents, how did Americans feel about expanding westward?