

Topic 5.2

# Manifest Destiny

## You Will Learn To:

- Explain the causes and effects of westward expansion from 1844 to 1877.

## Westward Expansion

During the 1840s, an expansionist ideology known as Manifest Destiny helped increase westward migration. Manifest Destiny motivated Americans to continue to push west, with settlements reaching as far as the Pacific coast. In doing this, Americans considered any existing European or Native presence as a threat to the spread of republicanism, individualism, and social progress.



## Origins of Manifest Destiny

Expansionists were convinced that the United States' superior republican government and social institutions, such as Protestant Christianity, were destined to spread across the continent.

### Commanded by God

Many Americans viewed westward settlement as a divine mission to spread democracy and Christianity. Therefore, the westward expansion of American settlement was, to Americans, both justified and inevitable.



"Oregon Trail", Albert Bierstadt, 1869

### Religious Persecution

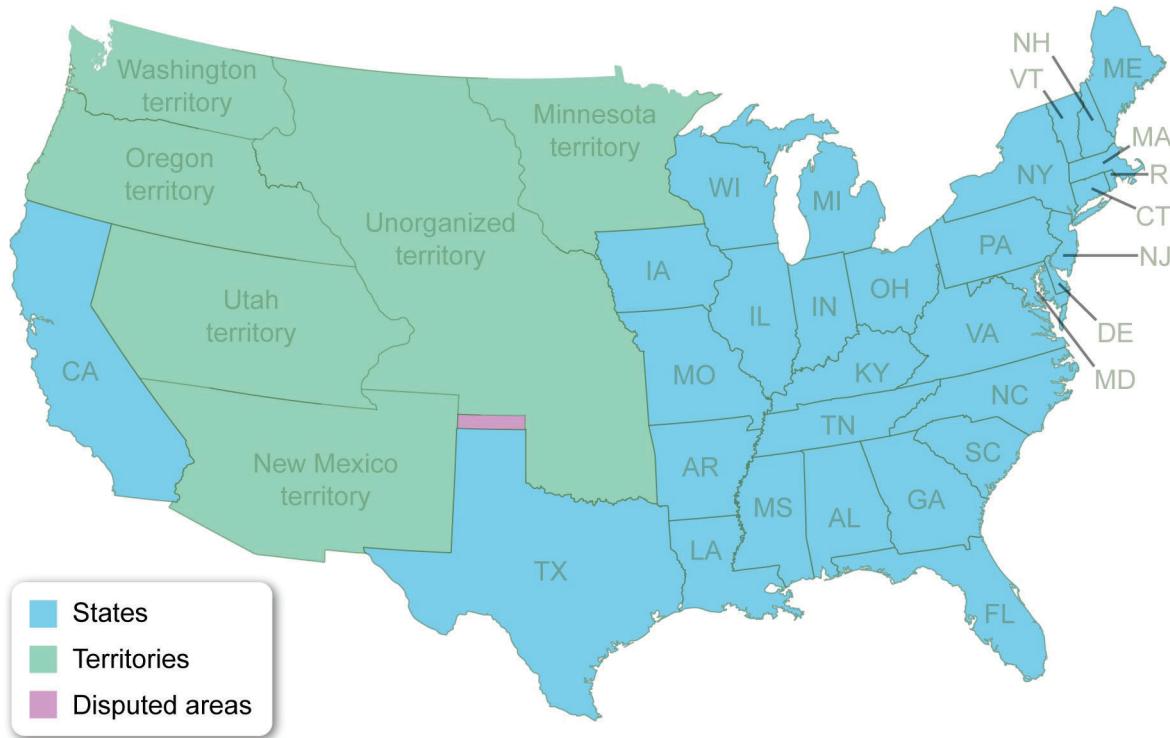
The West also offered religious freedom. For example, during the 1820s, Joseph Smith claimed divine revelation of new biblical texts, and he spread his message in New York's burned-over district of religious revivals. After Smith's death, his followers, known as the Mormons, settled in the "desert Zion" of Utah, where they thrived under the leadership of Brigham Young, free from persecution.

### Economic Opportunities

The Panic of 1837 destroyed family incomes, requiring many Americans to start over. The promise of land pulled many westward. In the early 1840s, the first covered wagons departed Independence, Missouri, for Oregon's fertile Willamette Valley. By 1860, hundreds of thousands had followed the 2,000-mile Oregon Trail, despite the risks of death and disease.



Farther south, the Gold Rush in California attracted more than 300,000 settlers by the 1850s. Although few struck gold, merchants made fortunes in nearby cities, supplying potential prospectors.



Initially, most migrants passed through the Great Plains to the Pacific coast, rather than filling the continent's interior. Dubbed the "Great American Desert," the Great Plains remained undeveloped until after the Civil War.

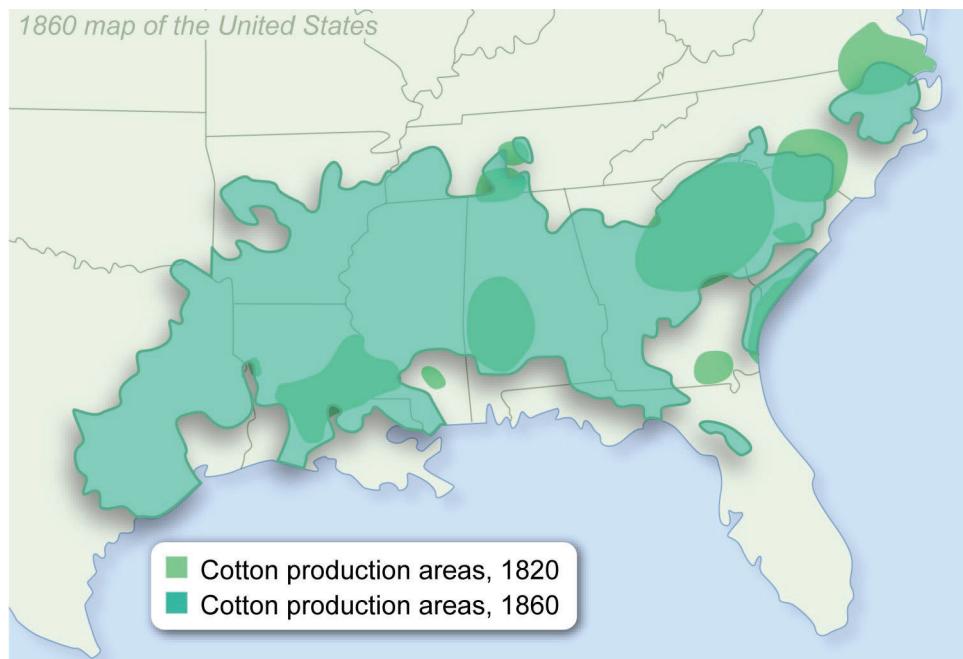


Andrew Russell, "East and West Shaking Hands at the Laying of Last Rail" (1869)

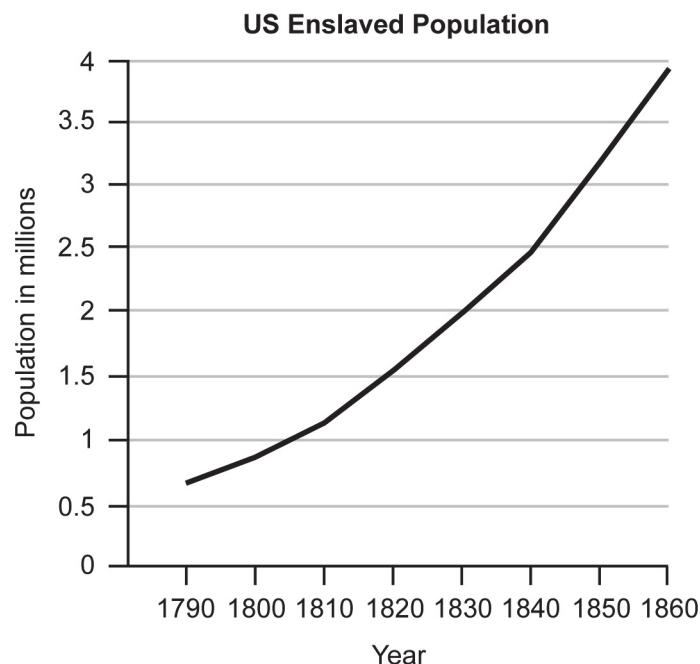
Beginning in 1862, the US government fueled Western development. Congress authorized the construction of a transcontinental railroad and incentivized Western settlement with the Homestead Act. New rail networks brought supplies and settlers into the continent's interior, while technological advances in farming made the Great Plains profitable.

### Competing Visions

Understandings of Manifest Destiny varied geographically. For example, many Northerners viewed westward expansion as fulfilling Thomas Jefferson's agrarian republic dominated by independent farmers.



Southerners, on the other hand, saw slavery's expansion as vital to Southern economic and political interests. Expanding cotton production required cultivating more land west of the Mississippi River, for which enslaved labor was needed.



Furthermore, Southern enslavers after Nat Turner's Rebellion feared additional slave revolts and sought new lands to diffuse racial tensions. Finally, new slave states would preserve Southern political power, countering the North's growing influence.

## Whose Manifest Destiny?

Native and European inhabitants of the interior US often conflicted with expansionists.

### Oregon Country

The growing American presence in Oregon Country alarmed the outnumbered British. Although the US and Britain agreed to administer the territory jointly, the lack of a formal border proved troubling.



Prior to 1846, the US and Britain asserted conflicting claims in the Oregon Country.



In 1846, President James Polk signed the Oregon Treaty, resolving the boundary dispute and resulting in the US gaining land south of the 49th Parallel.

Some expansionists demanded extending US claims to the 54<sup>th</sup> parallel. Fearing conflict and the loss of valuable trade, Britain ceded Oregon to the US in 1849, establishing a permanent border at the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel.

### The Texas Revolt

US claims of Manifest Destiny clashed with Mexico. After Spanish rule was overthrown in 1821, the new Mexican government invited American settlers to develop the economy and to defend Mexico's vast borders from Native attacks.



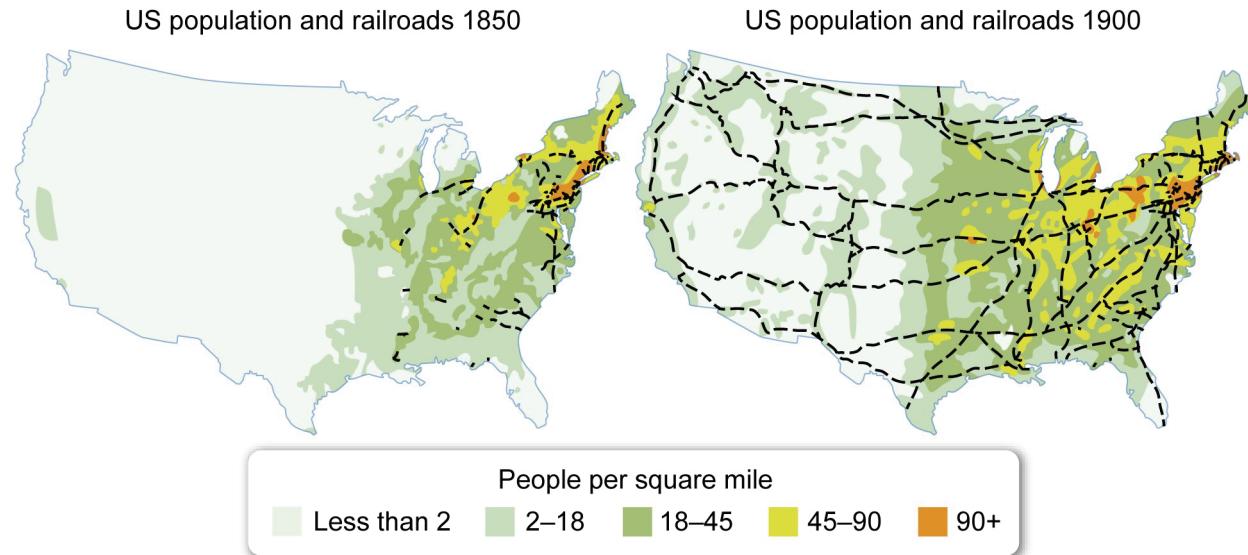
Americans led by Stephen F. Austin settled in the Texas region, eventually demanding greater autonomy from Mexico. Tensions escalated after the Mexican dictator Santa Anna took power in 1835, abolished slavery, and provoked resistance from the American enslavers.



Rebellion ensued, culminating in a Mexican victory at the Alamo in 1836, but Texans under General Sam Houston soon defeated Santa Anna and declared Texan independence. Texas remained independent until 1845. This was largely because the newly independent Texas allowed slavery. Therefore, neither President Andrew Jackson nor President Martin Van Buren pushed Congress to admit a new slave state to the Union.

## Native Americans and Manifest Destiny

To hasten White settlement east of the Appalachian Mountains, the government's policy of Indian removal forced tribes to Oklahoma. To the west, conflicts with the Plains Indians were rare, as White settlers bound for Oregon passed through Native lands.



However, westward expansion after the Civil War sparked 30 years of intermittent war, as tribes struggled to resist White settlement.

## Manifest Destiny Reaches Asia



San Francisco harbor, Yerba Buena Cove, *circa* 1850

By securing the Pacific coast, Americans looked to expand economic, diplomatic, and cultural relations with Asian nations. For example, in 1854, Commodore Matthew Perry led US ships to Japan, opening trade through the Treaty of Kanagawa. Until the 1850s, Japan had isolated itself from Western influence, but the treaty established a foundation for future trading with the US.

In 1868, the US negotiated the Burlingame Treaty to establish US missionaries in China and to bring Chinese laborers to the US. The influx of Chinese workers assisted with the transcontinental railroad's construction. However, Chinese settlements on the Pacific coast resulted in a nativist backlash among White Californians during the 1870s.

## Things to Remember

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- During the 1840s, Manifest Destiny swept the country, with many Americans believing that God commanded the US to subdue the continent.
- Americans were motivated by economic opportunities and religious freedom to migrate westward.
- Westward expansion led to US conflicts with Great Britain and Mexico over their respective North American claims.
- After the Civil War, Manifest Destiny accelerated as the government financed railroad construction and provided land for settlers, leading to warfare with Great Plains tribes.
- Manifest Destiny expanded beyond US shores to expand economic, diplomatic, and cultural ties with Asia.

## Key Terms and Developments

Burlingame Treaty

California Gold Rush

Homestead Act

Indian Removal

Manifest Destiny

Oregon Country

Texas Revolution

Treaty of Kanagawa

## 5.2 Check for Understanding

- 1. Which of the following individuals would be most likely to support the ideas behind Manifest Destiny?**
  - A. Native Americans
  - B. Southern cotton planters
  - C. Female reformers
  - D. Northern abolitionists
  
- 2. Which of the following territories posed a potential conflict between the US and Great Britain?**
  - A. Utah
  - B. New Mexico
  - C. Oregon
  - D. Minnesota
  
- 3. US claims of Manifest Destiny in the Southwest put the US in conflict with which of the following?**
  - A. Mexico
  - B. Spain
  - C. New France
  - D. Great Britain
  
- 4. US westward expansion in the 1840s allowed Americans to strengthen economic, cultural, and diplomatic ties with which of the following?**
  - A. South America
  - B. China
  - C. Australia
  - D. Russia