

Manifest Destiny Documents

What was Manifest Destiny? _____

How was Manifest Destiny used? _____

Document 1

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, "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?

Texas Annexation

What was the Texas Annexation? _____

Document 2

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

John O'Sullivan, "Annexation," 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?

Mexican American War

How did the war start? _____

Document 3

This document is an excerpt from an article published in the Mexican newspaper El Republicano.

No one has any doubts about the intentions the Washington cabinet has had for some time now with respect to Mexico...One fights in the name of usurpation; the other defends justice... the war has begun and the [Mexican] nation has a great deal at stake, since even if justice is on its side, that is unfortunately not enough to triumph. And hold back the excesses of a powerful enemy. The war...has now begun, to our misfortune, and it is urgent that time not be wasted

"Neutralidad," El Republicano, 20 June 1846, p. 3.

1. What does the writer mean by "in the name of usurpations"?
2. Why would a Mexican newspaper think that justice was on their side? Do you agree with them?

What was the outcome of the war? _____

Document 4

The cup of forbearance had been exhausted even before the recent information from the frontier of the Del Norte. But now, after reiterated menaces, Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil. She has proclaimed that hostilities have commenced, and that the two nations are now at war.

As war exists, and, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of Mexico herself, we are called upon by every consideration of duty and patriotism to vindicate with decision the honor, the rights, and the interests of our country. . . .

James K. Polk

1. What did Polk mean by the phrase "Cup of forbearance had been exhausted"?
2. Why do you think "Mexico passed the boundary of the United States"?

3. What “honor, rights and interests” were we trying to vindicate?

4. Why did America elect a President who would convince push for a war with Mexico?

Document 5

“We are a city set upon a hill, and our light cannot be put under a bushel. We are a great light-house, and our influence should go forth to break the fetters of the enslaved and to destroy kingly dominations. We should spread out arms like seas, that those in bondage should come to us. Republican life was the principle when God covenanted with man and made him a free agent, and despotism should no longer domineer over the world.”

The New York Times January 15 1869

1. What did it say about American views that we considered ourselves “a city upon a hill”?

2. How did we spend forth out influence and spread our arms like seas?

3. Did we free the enslaved and destroy kingly dominations?

4. Have we made it so that despotism no longer domineers in this land?

Document 6

As our population has expanded, the Union has been cemented and strengthened. As our boundaries have been enlarged and our agricultural population has been spread over a large surface, our federative system has acquired additional strength and security. It may well be doubted whether it would not be in greater danger of overthrow if our present population were confined to the comparatively narrow limits of the original thirteen States than it is now that they are sparsely settled over a more expanded territory. It is confidently believed that our system may be safely extended to the utmost bounds of our territorial limits, and that as it shall be extended the bonds of our Union, so far from being weakened, will become stronger.

James K. Polk

Document 7

[T]he Indians have melted before the white man, and the mixed, degraded race of Mexico must melt before the Anglo-Saxon. Away with this vile sophistry! There is no necessity for crime. There is no fate to justify rapacious nations, any more than to justify gamblers and robbers, in plunder ... We talk of accomplishing our destiny. So did the late conqueror of Europe [Napoleon Bonaparte]; and destiny consigned him to a lonely rock in the ocean, the prey of ambition which destroyed no peace but his own.

William Ellery Channing

1. What factors were responsible for fueling U.S. expansion across the continent?
2. Do you think it was inevitable that the U.S. would take possession of the continent from ocean to ocean? Why or why not?
3. What did John O'Sullivan mean when he described the U.S. as the "great nation of futurity"?
4. Many critics of Manifest Destiny claimed that it resulted in barbaric treatment of the Indians, who were often forced off their lands to make room for white settlers. Could the U.S. have expanded westward without displacing the Indians?
5. Describe what the U.S. would be like today if it had not followed an expansionist agenda, and Spain, France and Russia still possessed territory on the continent.