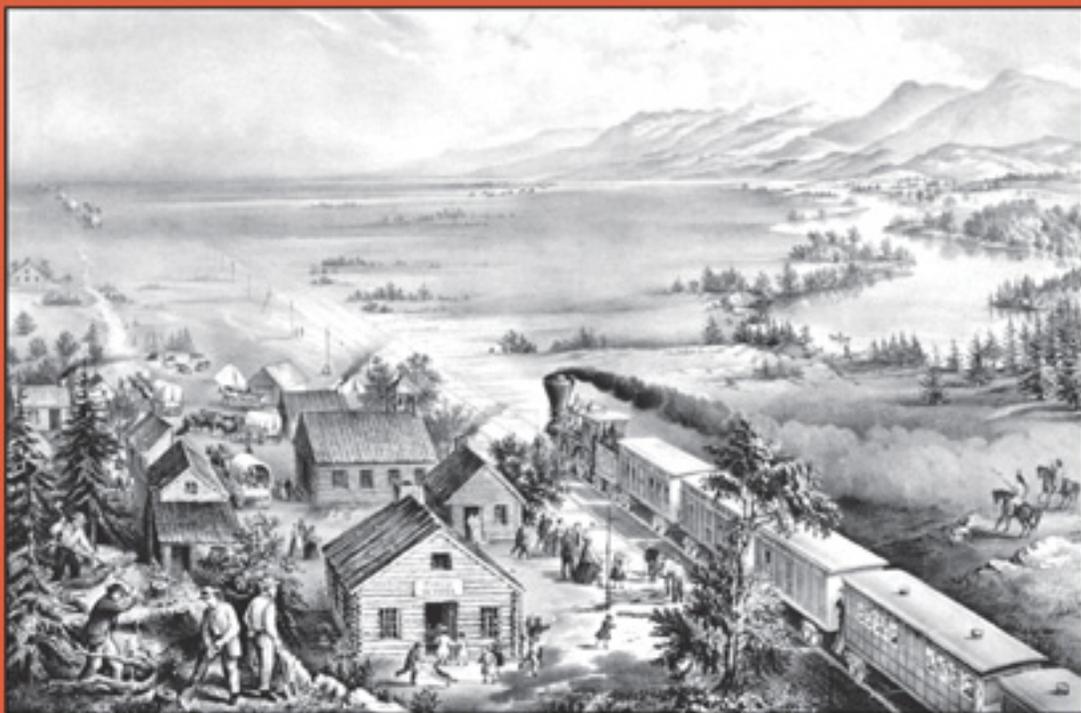


History
UNFOLDING

MANIFEST DESTINY

IMAGES OF AN AMERICAN IDEA



MindSparks
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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Introduction

Manifest Destiny: An American Idea

The American Revolution may have succeeded in forming a new nation. Yet it still left the United States of America hemmed in on all sides, with Great Britain, Spain and France in control of territory to the north, west and south of the young republic. It would take the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 and, a few years after that, another military confrontation with the British to give Americans a heady feeling of being the masters of the continent.

Several streams fed this sense of patriotic pride and confidence. The early stages of industrial development were setting in. Reports from explorers stirred interest in the western lands. Political democracy was expanding. The Second Great Awakening fostered a new spirit of social reform. These trends helped generate a missionary zeal and sense of perfectibility, and they convinced many Americans of the unique role they were destined to play on the stage of history. Out of this mix arose the concept of “manifest destiny,” the notion that the United States was ordained by God or fate to spread across the continent bringing the fruits of civilization with it everywhere.

The concept of manifest destiny today is more often seen negatively as a justification for ruthless conquest and empire. That is surely one aspect of it. Yet in this collection of images, we also call attention to its links with the idealism and romantic individualism of mid-1800s America. To fully understand and critically evaluate the concept, students need to see it in its full complexity. The 12 visual displays in this set focus on key aspects of the concept of manifest destiny and its history. The illustrations are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

A Young Nation Looks West

The illustrations here focus on the western lands and the growing sense Americans had in the early 1800s that these lands were theirs for the taking.

The “Go-Ahead Nation”

In general, a can-do spirit of limitless possibilities took shape in many forms in the United States during the early decades of the nineteenth century. This spirit contributed to a confident faith in the worthiness of westward expansion.

The Mexican War

The war and the years of the Polk presidency in general were the high tide of faith in manifest destiny.

Manifest Destiny: Ideal or Justification

The concept of manifest destiny has been seen as a justification for empire and conquest. Yet it also arose out of and expressed the nation’s highest ideals of democracy and civilization. The images here will give students a basis on which to debate the pros and cons of the concept.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

DIGITAL IMAGES The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will understand why Americans attitudes about the West changed in the early 1800s.
2. Students will understand how a growing sense of patriotic pride in the early 1800s contributed to interest in westward expansion.

A Young Nation Looks West

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

In 1812 the young United States went to war with Great Britain, the nation from which it had won its independence just 31 years earlier. One of the war's memorable moments was the burning of Washington D.C. by the British in 1814, as depicted here. Despite setbacks such as this, the U.S. held out against Great Britain, proving to Americans once again that they could beat Europe's best soldiers. So, in spite of the limitations suggested by the humiliating attack on Washington, American national pride soared. With his famous song, Francis Scott Key captured the national euphoria while he watched the British fail to bomb Baltimore's Fort McHenry into submission.

Illustration 2

These feelings of optimism and patriotic pride were not new. They went back as far as the Revolution. But by the early 1800s, the European presence on the North American continent had largely vanished. This was especially so after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 doubled the size of the young United States overnight. Lewis and Clark soon explored this vast territory. In 1806 and 1807, Zebulon Pike did the same in a large of portion of the Southwest, some of which belonged to Mexico. Interest in western lands soared as a result of the reports of these expeditions, both of which are traced on this map. Some Americans were already beginning to claim that the United States had a God-given right to all of this western land.

Illustration 3

This famous painting can be found in the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C. It is titled "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way." It is a symbolic painting rather than a depiction of an actual event. The painting captures the feeling of expansiveness and freedom characteristic of the vast westward movement that began in the mid-1800s. By 1820 most of the land east of the Mississippi River had been settled. As the population of the U.S. continued to soar, more and more Americans decided to make a new life for themselves in the west. In the minds of many Americans, hope, freedom and national power were becoming linked above all to images of land and the inevitable westward movement of a nation.

Lesson 1—A Young Nation Looks West

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

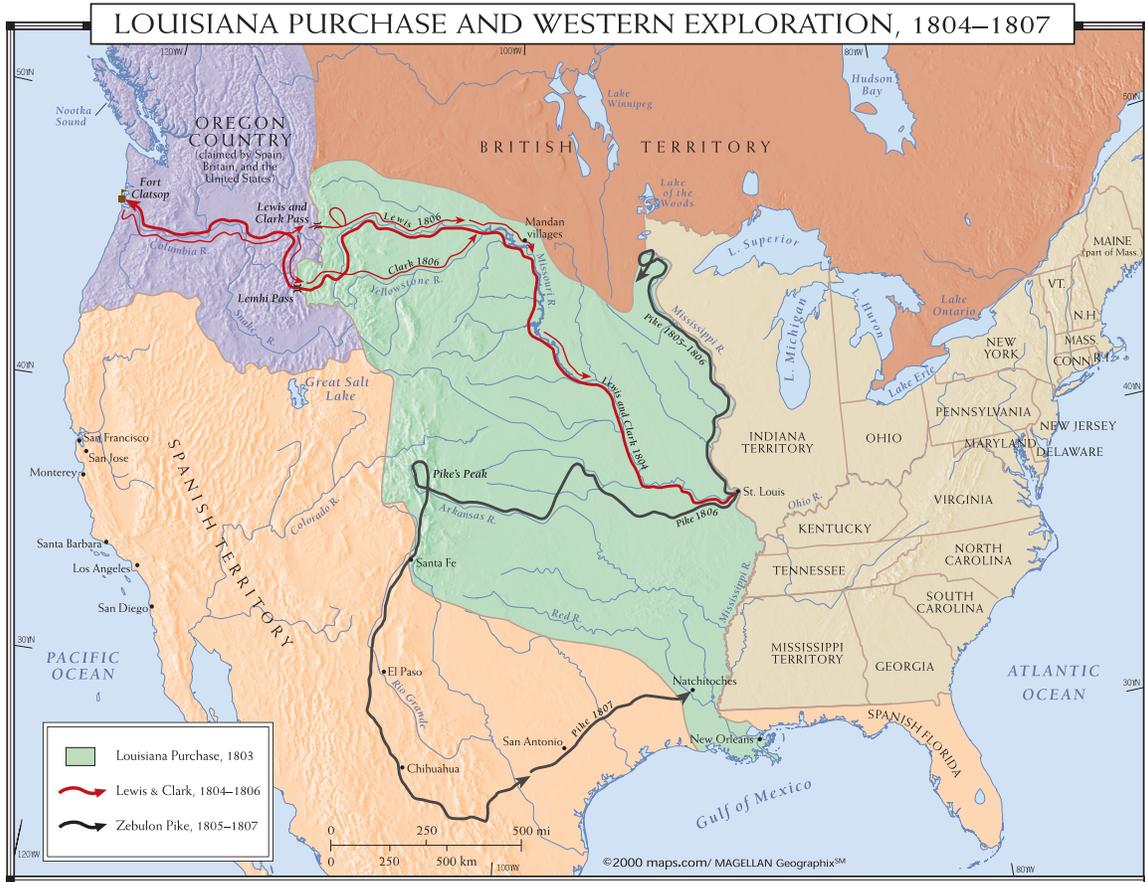
1. This engraving shows a scene from the War of 1812. What nation did the United States fight in the War of 1812?
2. The engraving actually shows an important event from the War of 1812—the burning by British soldiers of a very important city. What city is it?
3. The words on the left were written during the war of 1812. They are the words to the U.S. national anthem. What do these words have to do with the War of 1812? How do they help convey the general feeling or spirit of many Americans during and after this war?
4. In the War of 1812, the U.S. not only defeated Great Britain, it also won important victories over several Native American tribes in the East who had joined with the British in the fight. How do you suppose the defeat of these groups helped spur the movement west that took place in the years following the end of the War of 1812?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Read a detailed account of the War of 1812, including the burning of Washington, D.C. Now imagine it is late August 1814, and you and the other members of your group work for a New York City newspaper. Elect one member of the group to serve as editor of the paper. Then, as a group, write the articles for and design the front page for your paper for the day after the burning of Washington, D.C. Use this engraving as part of your design layout. You may also want to find other images to include – such as other war scenes, maps or portraits. Be sure to include an account of how Dolly Madison rescued the portrait of George Washington from the burning White House. Finally, write a front-page editorial about what the war and the burning of Washington mean to the young nation.
2. Imagine you are a relative of Francis Scott Key. He has just sent you his copy of “The Star Spangled Banner.” He says some friends want him to put it to music. Write him back with your suggestions.

Lesson 1—A Young Nation Looks West

Illustration 2



© 2000 Maps.com/MAGELLAN Geographixsm

Discussing the Illustration

1. In 1803, the U.S. nearly doubled in size when it bought the Louisiana Territory, shown here shaded in green on the overhead. From what nation did the U.S. purchase the Louisiana Territory?
2. In 1804, President Thomas Jefferson sent two explorers and their crew to explore the land that had been bought in the “Louisiana Purchase.” Can you name those two explorers?
3. Zebulon Pike explored other parts of the West in 1806–07. As you can see, much of his trip took place in Louisiana Territory. But much of it took place in the area shaded light orange. What nation controlled that territory?
4. How do you suppose people in the East, in the settled parts of the United States, reacted when they read or heard the reports of Pike’s or Lewis and Clark’s adventures? What overall affect do you think the Louisiana Purchase had on Americans and their feelings about their young nation?

Follow-up Activities

1. Use this map to help you design a different map, one you can use in a brief presentation to the class. Call your map, “America on the Eve of Westward Expansion.” The map should show the United States in 1812, as well as Canada and Mexico (but keep in mind that Great Britain and Spain controlled those two nations then, as well as large portions of what would later become the U.S.) Finally, include on your map the largest Native American populations at the time and where they were located.
2. The lands Lewis and Clark encountered on their journey were drastically different from lands with which most Americans were familiar. Find three excerpts from the journal of Lewis and Clark that describe such lands. Write a brief account of the journey and use those three excerpts in your account. Explain where the expedition was at the time of each excerpt and what may have made that spot seem unique to the explorers and worth describing.

Lesson 1—A Young Nation Looks West

Illustration 3



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. In this famous painting, a number of people all appear to be at the start of a long trip. In what direction do you think they are heading? How can you tell?
2. The painting is called “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way.” From this painting, what impression do you get about the pioneers, the trip ahead for them and of the West in general?
3. From the painting and your general knowledge, what types of transportation did the early pioneers use?
4. The journey west for the early pioneers was very dangerous. What types of dangers might they have been likely to come upon or experience? Does this painting hint at any of these dangers in any way?
5. According to some, this painting shows a romantic view of westward settlement in the 1800s? What does the word “romantic” mean here? What aspects of the painting could be described as romantic?

Follow-up Activities

1. This famous painting is located in our nation’s Capitol Building. The painter Emanuel Leutze was commissioned by the U.S. in 1861 to paint a scene symbolizing the movement west. Find out more about Leutze and this painting. Then imagine you are Leutze and you are almost finished with the painting. No one has seen it yet, but you’ve been asked by a group of senators to write a letter explaining what the painting shows and the meaning you hope people will find in it. Write your letter and share it with the class.
2. This painting attempts to express the feelings of an entire generation of Americans about an important change or development taking place in the nation. Look through illustrated history books and magazines from the recent past. Find drawings, photographs or other illustrations you think also sum up the feelings of a large number of people about a major issue or development in the nation or world. Share these in a discussion of the power of images to convey such feelings or views.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will think about how the spirit of westward expansion was linked to the central ideals of the young republic.
 2. Students will consider how a spirit of reform in the early 1800s added to a sense of America as a nation with a great destiny ahead of it.
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The “Go-Ahead Nation”

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

The spirit of westward expansion seemed to arise directly out of the core ideals of the American republic in the early 1800s, stressing as it did freedom, individualism and self-sufficiency. Although poet Walt Whitman wasn't a pioneer, he gave voice to this broader American outlook. Whitman's poetry represented a break with tradition. His free-flowing verse celebrated the individual and the common man. He sang and celebrated himself; yet the “self” in his poems was really meant to be every self—or at least every American self. Whitman pictured America as a land of limitless possibilities. His positive view of America and of Americans led him also to accept the idea of territorial expansion as a natural outgrowth of this expansive American spirit.

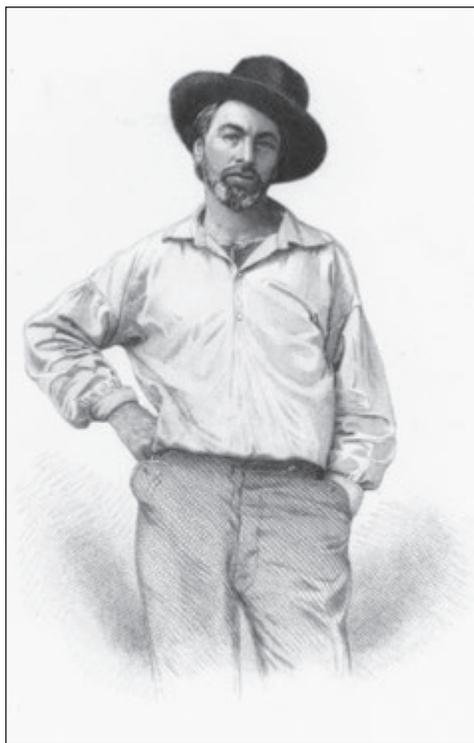
Illustration 2

By the 1840s, pioneers were heading west by the thousands. Many of them followed the famous Oregon Trail, shown in the drawing on the right. Those who endured this grueling, six-month journey were rewarded when they arrived in the lush, fertile Willamette Valley in the Oregon Territory. In the late 1840s, the discovery of gold in California led to a new flood of pioneers, all hoping to “strike it rich.” Stories of the bounty to be found in Oregon and California only fueled America's belief that the West was an untouched land full of promise for anyone willing to take the risks involved.

Illustration 3

A number of reform movements arose during the early 1800s, and these, too, expressed a sense of the limitless possibilities of American life. Many of them grew from a great revival of religious feeling, the Second Great Awakening (the first one had taken place in the 1730s). Charles G. Finney, shown here, was the best known of the preachers who led this revival movement. It featured large, open-air meetings where emotional sermons instilled in listeners a strong sense of sin and a longing for redemption. The revivals stressed each individual's own ability to bring about his or her salvation. Preachers like Finney also said people could improve or even perfect society as well. The revivals reflected a growing democratic spirit. It was a spirit that contributed powerfully to the belief that America was destined to expand and change the world.

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

*I CELEBRATE myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.*

—Walt Whitman,
from “Song of Myself” (*Leaves of Grass*)

Discussing the Illustrations

1. The man shown here is Walt Whitman, a famous American poet of the mid-1800s. In his poems, Whitman praised the common citizen and celebrated the rapidly growing United States. How does this portrait of him help convey this aspect of his ideas?
2. Many people say Whitman’s poetry expressed the deepest ideals of the American people in the mid-1800s. From the words here and your knowledge of the time period, can you guess what those who say this about Whitman have in mind?
3. These words come from a poem of Whitman’s called “Song of Myself” (which is part of a larger work of his poems called *Leaves of Grass*). What do you think of this part of “Song of Myself”?
4. Whitman believed in the basic goodness of people, especially of Americans and their country. What else do you know about his poetry? Do you think poetry can shape the way an entire society thinks of itself and its place in the world? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. Read Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, and prepare a report on it. Focus your report on the elements of *Leaves of Grass* that describe or sing the praises of the individual. Explain in your report how Whitman’s praise for individual freedom and perfectibility fit in well with the spirit of his times.
2. **Small-group activity:** Walt Whitman was part of a philosophical and literary movement of mid 1800s known as “transcendentalism.” Other famous writers who were part of this movement were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Each group member should read more about one of these men. Then, in character as that famous person, write a letter to Walt Whitman responding to “Song of Myself” in *Leaves of Grass*. Tell Whitman what you do or do not like about his poem. Try to make your writing seem believable as a letter from the figure you have chosen. Post the letters on the bulletin board.

Lesson 2—The “Go-Ahead Nation”

Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

1. The drawing on top shows a long line of pioneers on a famous trail that people used in the 1800s to get to what is now called the Pacific Northwest. Can you guess the name of this trail?
2. How many different types of transportation do you see here? Describe them. What do you suppose it must have been like to travel hundreds of miles this way into the wilderness?
3. In 1848 an important discovery was made that led many Americans to head to western lands south of Oregon? Can you explain?
4. The picture on the bottom shows miners digging for gold. How do you think the settlement of California, and of the American West itself, would have been different had gold not been discovered in California? In what other parts of the West did the search for gold or other minerals add to the flood of settlers on the move in those decades?

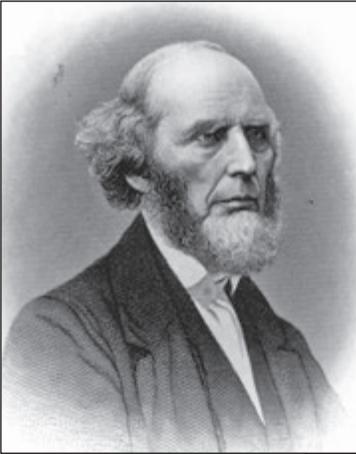
Follow-up Activities

1. Read more about life on the Oregon Trail. Imagine it is 1843 and you are setting out from Independence, Missouri, with your family heading for Oregon. It typically took about six months to get to the Oregon Territory. Write one journal entry for each month of your journey—at the end, you should have about six entries. Write about the different plants, animals and people you encounter along the way. Write about the other members of your group. Write about why you are making the journey. Finally, write about what you hope to find once you get to your final destination.
2. Write a front-page newspaper story about the discovery of gold in California. To help you write it, “interview” the men you see in the engraving shown here. Imagine you are in this scene with them and are sending your article back east on a ship set to sail around South America. Include this engraving with your story.

(You should do some background reading before taking on either of the above writing activities.)

Lesson 2—The “Go-Ahead Nation”

Illustration 3



Courtesy of the
Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

1. The man in the upper left is Charles G. Finney. In the early 1800s, Finney was the most famous preacher in a great revival movement that affected American life in many ways. What is a revival movement?
2. At revival meetings such as the one shown here, preachers like Finney stressed the power of the individual to change and to change all of society as well. In this way, some historians say, the revivals of the early 1800s fit in with the overall mood of America itself. What do you think these historians mean?
3. Out of the revivals of the early 1800s grew all sorts of social reform movements, such as temperance, prison reform, anti-slavery and women's rights. Why do you suppose the religious revivals had that effect?
4. The reformers often insisted that society itself could be made perfect. Some say this added to Americans' sense that their nation had a great destiny and that it was entitled to grow in power and size. Do you agree or disagree with this view? Why?

Follow-up Activity

1. In the early- to mid-1800s, revivals led by Charles G. Finney and others fostered a reform spirit, which in turn may well have added to the desire for the nation to expand westward. Here is what Robert Johanssen, a professor at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, has said about this spirit of reform:

People over and over were talking about democracy as the best form of government—that it was adapted to the happiness of mankind and was God's plan for mankind. The kind of republican government that the United States had was providentially provided since we were the favored nation of God. So with a spirit of reform, you don't just stand still—you bring the blessing of self-government to as broad an area as possible, extending the area of freedom.

Look through all the illustrations in this booklet. Choose three that you think best illustrate the point Professor Johanssen is making here. In a class discussion, explain why you picked these three illustrations. Also discuss the point Johanssen makes and whether or not you agree with it.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will understand why the Mexican War was a crucial event in fostering a spirit of manifest destiny in the nation.
 2. Students will debate the pros and cons of U.S. expansion in the 1840s.
-

The Mexican War

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

James Polk's campaign for the presidency was a ringing call to expand the boundaries of the United States all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Like many others, he saw this as the nation's "manifest destiny" — a phrase that came to be used for the idea that the United States was meant to and entitled to expand westward. Polk favored the annexation of Texas, which had declared independence from Mexico several years earlier. His campaign slogan "54-40 or Fight" referred to the degree of latitude he wanted for our border in the Northwest. In the Southwest, Polk coveted New Mexico and California, which still belonged to Mexico. Polk would achieve most of these goals. And his presidency would see the triumph of the principle of manifest destiny.

Illustration 2

Mexico warned that U.S. annexation of Texas could lead to war. It had accepted independence for Texas on the condition that it not align itself with any other nation. Moreover, Texas and Mexico both claimed some of the lands between them. President Polk sent an official to Mexico to resolve the dispute and to purchase California and New Mexico, but Mexico was not interested. After some U.S. soldiers were killed in the disputed territory, Polk asked Congress to declare war. Many Americans opposed the war, but others supported it, including Walt Whitman. His words here sum up the way many in the U.S. felt towards Mexico at that time. War with Mexico officially began in May of 1846.

Illustration 3

This map shows the course of the war with Mexico, including many of the important battles. The war went well for the U.S. from the start. Within just a few months, U.S. troops controlled most of the disputed territory north of the eventual border between Mexico and the United States. In February of 1848, Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the war. The treaty set the Rio Grande as the border between the two nations. The U.S. received almost all of what is now the U.S. Southwest, including most or all of Arizona, New Mexico, California, Nevada and Utah. With this treaty, and a treaty with the British on the Northwest, the dreams of the expansionists were realized. The United States now stretched from coast to coast.

Lesson 3—The Mexican War

Illustration 1



Both illustrations courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

1. The man in the upper right was the U.S. president from 1845 to 1849. Can you name him?
2. Polk strongly supported a large expansion of the borders of the United States. For example, during his term a treaty was signed with Great Britain setting one part of our border at the 49th parallel. Where and along what other nation is this border located?
3. President Polk also wanted to expand the United States to the southwest. To help do this, he favored annexing Texas, or making it a part of the U.S. This occurred just before he took office. The Texans were in favor of this, and yet it still soon led the U.S. into a war. Can you briefly explain why?
4. These and other actions by Polk made him a key champion of the concept of “manifest destiny.” What is your own best definition of this term? Do you think beautiful nineteenth century western landscapes such as the one shown here could have added to this spirit of manifest destiny in any way? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. President James K. Polk was known as “Polk the Purposeful” for his determination to annex the Oregon Territory and expand the U.S. into the southwest by purchasing New Mexico and California from Mexico and getting Mexico to agree to set the border along the Rio Grande. Read more about Polk. Then write an essay titled “Westward Expansion: Was It Inevitable, Or Did President Polk Make It Happen?” In your essay, offer your opinion as to whether or not expansion would have occurred as it did had James Polk not been elected president in 1844.
2. **Small-group activity:** Read more about Texas. Create a time line for the history of Texas from 1800–1850. Each member of the group should learn more about one key figure in Texas history, such as Stephen Austin, Sam Houston, General Santa Anna, etc. Assume the role of this person, and write a brief comment on the time line your group creates and the history it details. Use these paragraphs and the time line in a bulletin board display.

Lesson 3—The Mexican War

Illustration 2



The National Archives

*What has miserable,
inefficient Mexico—with her
superstition, her burlesque
upon freedom, her actual
tyranny by the few over the
many—what has she to do
with the great mission of
peopling the new world with
a noble race? Be it ours, to
achieve that mission!*

—Walt Whitman

Discussing the Illustrations

1. This engraving shows a battle scene from the Mexican War. In what year did the war begin?
2. Many who supported the war with Mexico believed it was the God-given right, the “manifest destiny,” of the U.S. to control the lands in dispute. Their feelings could be summed up by the words here from the poet Walt Whitman. Explain in your own words what Whitman does not like about Mexico and why he thinks it should not be able to hold the lands in dispute in the Mexican War.
3. Do you agree with Whitman’s judgment about the Mexico of those times and its society in any way at all? Why or why not?
4. Whitman refers here to a “mission” we Americans should set out to achieve. What is that “mission”?
5. Does it surprise you that Whitman would express these views. In what ways, if any, do his views here fit with his sentiments in “Song of Myself,” a part of which was discussed in the previous lesson?

Follow-up Activities

1. As a congressman in 1846, Abraham Lincoln vigorously opposed the Mexican War. Read more about Lincoln’s views. Then pretend you are Abe Lincoln and write a letter to Walt Whitman. In the letter, comment on the passage of his shown here about the war with Mexico. Now pretend you are Whitman and write back. As a class, discuss some of these pairs of letters.
2. Learn more about Walt Whitman. Compare his words here with the portion of his poetry shown earlier in this booklet in Illustration 1, Lesson 2 (page 9). Based on these two passages and anything else you are able to learn about Whitman, write a brief essay entitled: “Democracy and Manifest Destiny: Walt Whitman’s View.”

Lesson 3—The Mexican War

Illustration 3



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Discussing the Illustration

1. Before the war, Mexico insisted that the border between it and the U.S. should be the Nueces River. But the U.S. said the border lay approximately 100 miles to the south, along another river. From the map and your knowledge of geography today, can you name that river?
2. Using this map and what you know of the Mexican War, try to summarize briefly the key battles and the overall course of the war.
3. The U.S. won the war without an enormous effort. Why do you think that was so?
4. As a result of the war, the U.S. grew in size by about 60 percent. What was the name of the treaty that ended the Mexican War?
5. Along with the disputed land—shown as the striped area on the map—the U.S. also acquired the land shaded light orange on the overhead. Can you name the U.S. states that were formed eventually out of this territory?

Follow-up Activity

1. Ulysses S. Grant, a young lieutenant during the Mexican War, wrote in his memoirs the following about the annexation of Texas and the war it helped bring about:

Generally the officers of the army were indifferent whether the annexation was consummated or not; but not so all of them. For myself, I was bitterly opposed to the measure, and to this day regard the war, which resulted, as one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation. It was an instance of a republic following the bad example of European monarchies, in not considering justice in their desire to acquire additional territory.

As a class, divide into two groups to debate Grant's statement. One group should defend Grant's point of view. The other should defend President Polk's decision to go to war with Mexico.

OBJECTIVE

1. Students will discuss and debate manifest destiny from a variety of viewpoints. They will consider whether or not the concept was a positive ideal or merely a justification for conquest, or both.

Manifest Destiny: Ideal or Justification

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

In 1845, journalist John Louis O’Sullivan wrote, “Our manifest destiny is to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.” This was the first use of the phrase “manifest destiny,” a term expressed in images in this John Gast painting, titled “American Progress.” In it, a mythic female figure, Columbia, leads the march of progress across the plains with a schoolbook in one hand and a telegraph wire in the other. Other symbols of progress such as wagon trains and railroads follow her, banishing darkness and bringing the light of a new and better life. In this vision, the West is an untamed wilderness ready to be civilized and improved through settlement.

Illustration 2

Not everyone saw the idea of manifest destiny in such a positive light. For example, many Americans opposed the annexation of Texas in 1845. Texas was a slave state at that time. Its annexation and the other new territories acquired in the Mexican War were all seen as a boon to slavery and slave owners, not ordinary settlers. Also, Native Americans were seen merely as obstacles to be overcome in the grand march westward. The engraving on the left shows Indians shooting cows on a reservation, instead of hunting the buffalo on the open Great Plains. For Indians and African Americans, the idea and the reality of manifest destiny offered little hope for the kind of progress they needed.

Illustration 3

The photo on the left was taken on May 10, 1869, when workers from the Central Pacific Railroad linked up with workers from the Union Pacific Railroad at Promontory Point, Utah. The moment was historic because it meant that for the first time, the U.S. Atlantic and Pacific Coasts were linked by rail and were within a few day’s journey of each other. Railroads played a crucial role in the peopling of the American West. As the painting on the right suggests, they were the latest tool in the nation’s drive to realize its manifest destiny. But they also brought that drive to a close, at least with respect to the western frontier. What new forms the spirit of manifest destiny might take remained for future generations to decide.

Lesson 4—Manifest Destiny: Ideal or Justification

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. This painting is about America's westward movement in the 1800s. In it, a huge female figure floats westward. This figure is actually a common symbol often appearing in paintings and cartoons. Can you name this figure and explain what it is a symbol of?
2. The title of the painting is "American Progress." But it could be called "America's Manifest Destiny." On Columbia's forehead is a Star of Empire. She holds a schoolbook in one hand and strings a telegraph wire the other. How do these features help make the painting a portrayal of "American Progress" or "America's Manifest Destiny"?
3. What else in the painting adds to its overall message that westward settlement was also the spreading of American progress? How do the movements and gestures of the many smaller figures add to this idea? How does the use of dark and light add to the idea? Do you agree or disagree with this painting's point of view? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. The artist John Gast painted this picture in 1872. By then, Americans had been talking about the idea of manifest destiny for some time. Gast titled his painting "American Progress." Do you think this painting could have instead been titled "America's Manifest Destiny"? Answer this question in a brief essay on the painting. In your essay, comment on or explain as many of the details in the painting as you can, and explain how they do or do not give expression to a romantic or idealistic notion of manifest destiny.
2. Pretend that John Gast is alive today. And imagine that someone has asked him to paint a picture titled "American Progress" to get across the way Americans feel about this idea today. What kind of picture would Gast paint? What objects, symbols or figures would he put in it? What style of painting would he use? Try to sketch your own idea of how he might portray American progress today. As a class, share your sketches and discuss your views about the idea of American progress now.

Lesson 4—Manifest Destiny: Ideal or Justification

Illustration 2



Courtesy of Dover Publications



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

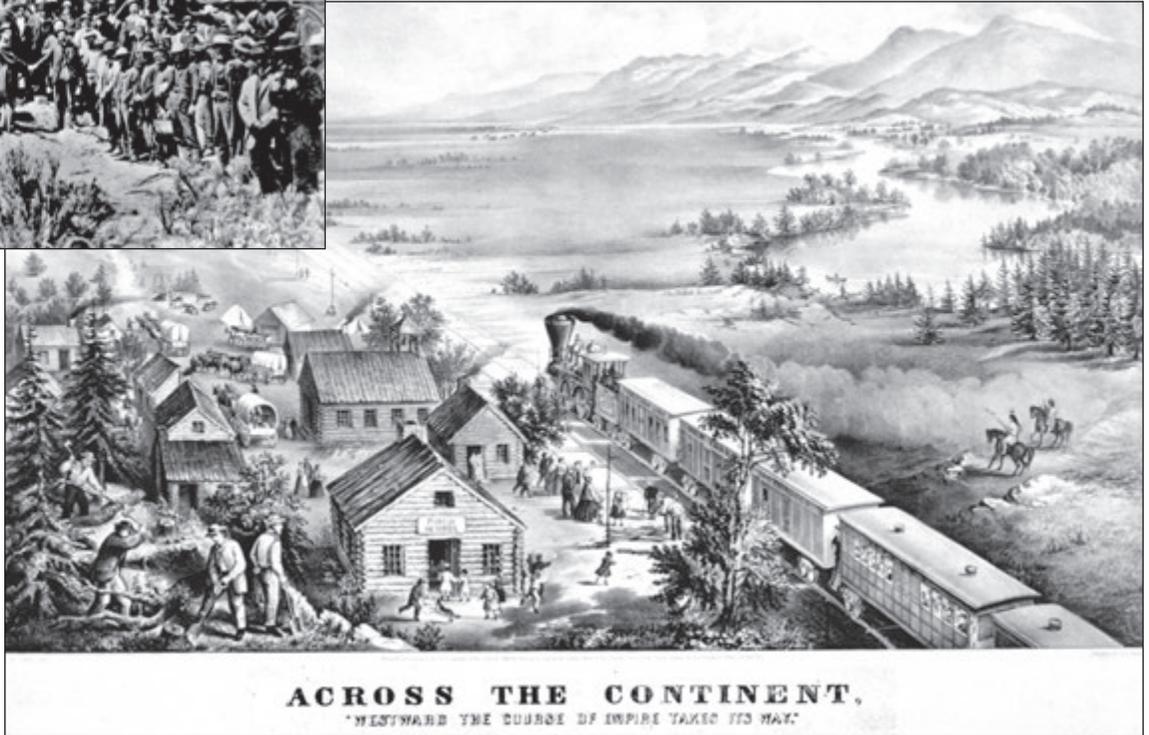
1. Not everyone accepted such a favorable view of manifest destiny. For many abolitionists in the mid-1800s, manifest destiny meant the westward expansion not of God's will but of America's worst sin, a sin illustrated here on the right. Who were the abolitionists and what "sin" did they fear America would carry with it to the West?
2. The annexation of Texas and the Mexican War added greatly to the fears of such opponents of slavery. Can you explain why that was so?
3. On the left, an Indian on a reservation is shown shooting a cow as a substitute for the game he once hunted independently on the Great Plains. What game was that? To Native Americans like this man, the idea of manifest destiny must have seemed only a way to justify what had been done to him and his people. Can you explain this point of view?

Follow-up Activities

1. Go through your history textbook and other books and make photocopies of at least 10 illustrations of Native Americans in the American West in the late 1800s. Create a bulletin board display called "The Portrayal of the Indian in the Age of Manifest Destiny." Write captions or brief paragraphs explaining each image and what you think it shows about how Native Americans were seen by Americans in the 1800s.
2. In years after the Civil War, many African Americans moved west to become farmers or take work as cowboys. Learn more about them. Pretend you are one of these men and a relative back east sends you a magazine article praising the westward movement of Americans and celebrating what the writer refers to as the nation's "manifest destiny." Write a letter back explaining your own reactions to this concept as you understand it. Try to make your letter as realistic as you can given what you learn about the experiences of the African Americans who went to work as cowboys in the West.

Lesson 4—Manifest Destiny: Ideal or Justification

Illustration 3



Both illustrations courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

1. If “manifest destiny” meant settling the West, then the most important force in achieving manifest destiny may have been the railroad. Can you explain why?
2. The photo on the left shows a key moment in the drive to secure control of the West. It illustrates the joining up of two teams of railroad workers in 1869. Can you identify this scene and explain its importance in settling the West?
3. The railroad itself was an important symbol of manifest destiny. That seems clear from the painting shown here. How does the train help the painting express the idea of manifest destiny? What other features in the painting help it to do this?
4. Of the positive and negative views of manifest destiny shown in this lesson, which do you think express the idea of manifest destiny most accurately? Or in other words, do you think the idea was mainly a positive one or mainly a negative one—or a little of both? Explain your answer.

Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** Each member of the group should read about one of the following individuals: Walt Whitman, Meriwether Lewis, Francis Scott Key, Susan B. Anthony, James Polk, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sitting Bull, Chief Joseph, Sojourner Truth or Frederick Douglass. Pretend that somehow, all of these individuals were alive together and able to ride the first train traveling the entire route of the first transcontinental railroad. It is now a week after the trip. Each member of the group should play the part of the historical individual he or she has read about and write a long letter to one of the other members of the group about the trip. The letter should describe what this historical figure saw and thought about during the trip. It should also express his or her likely views about the meaning of the transcontinental railroad in the history of the western lands and of the United States as a whole.

Image Close-ups

A Young Nation Looks West Illustration 1

J. W. MERRICK, Song Publisher, Stationer & Printer, No. 7 North Third St. Philadelphia

STAR SPANGLED BANNER.



Revised and Printed expressly for the Public Schools.

O! see you are by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watch'd, were so gallantly streaming,
And the rocket's red glare, and the bomb's bursting in air,
In our ears the loud peal that our flag was still there,
O! see, how the star-spangled banner yet waves,
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

On the shore dimly seen through the mists of the deep,
Where the few lonely lodges in fabled romance sleep,
What a thrill when the breeze of the evening's soft sigh,
As it softly waves, half-mooned, half-dimmed,
How it waives the green of the morning's first beam,
In full glory unfolded, and shone on the stream,
O'er the star-spangled banner, O! long may it wave,
O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave!

And where is that land who so bravely we're,
That the hours of our and the battle's confusion,
A home and a country should leave us no more?
That land has weaned out their full homelands pollution,
No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight, or the gloom of the grave,
And the star-spangled banner in triumph still waves,
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

O, thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand,
Between their loved home, and the war's devastation,
Blood with victory and peace, may the heav'n rescued land
Pursue the power that hath waded and purposed as a nation,
Then conquer we must, when our cause is just,
And this be our motto—"In God is our trust!"
And the star-spangled banner in triumph still waves,
O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave!

Courtesy of the Library of Congress

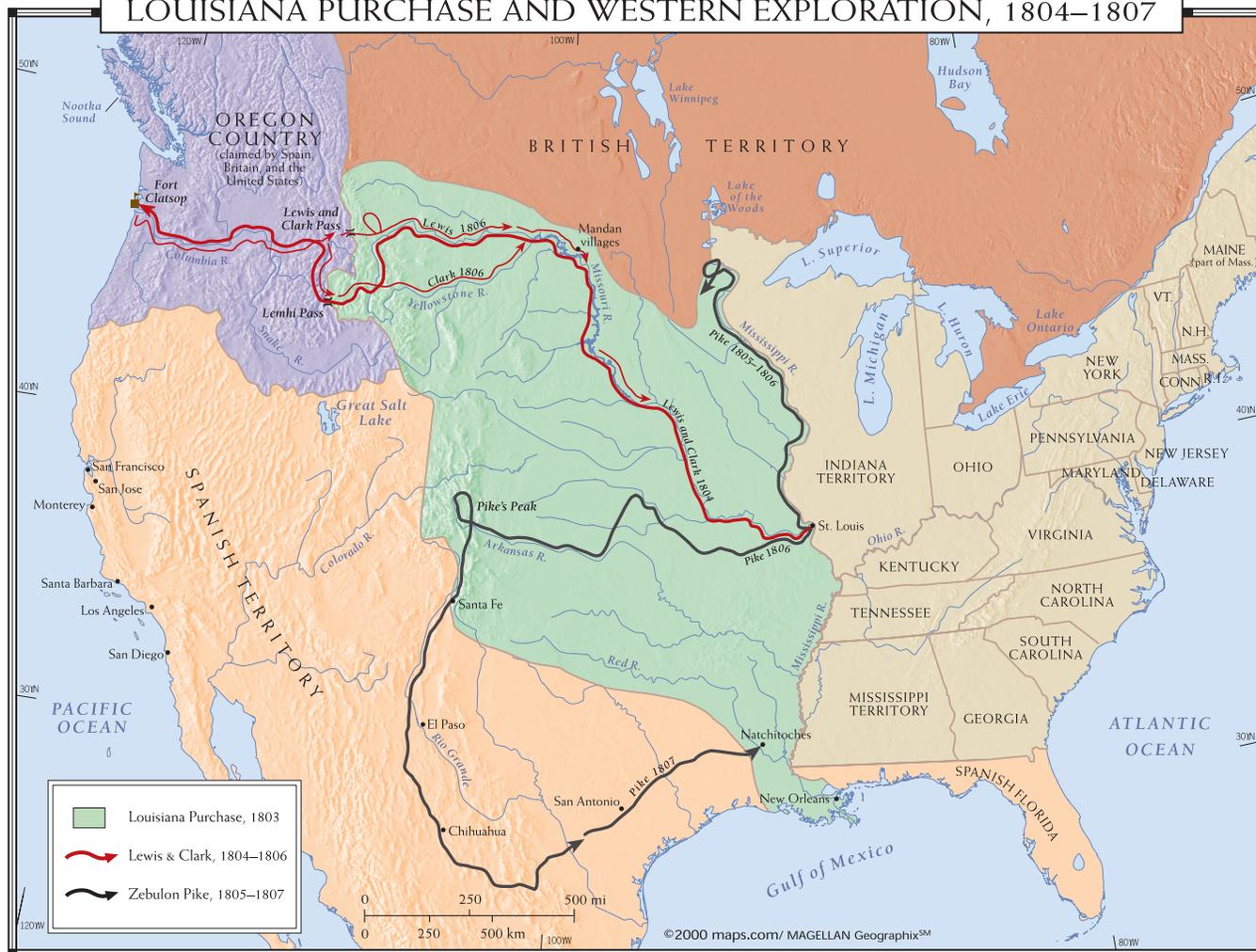


Courtesy of the Library of Congress

A Young Nation Looks West

Illustration 2

LOUISIANA PURCHASE AND WESTERN EXPLORATION, 1804–1807



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A Young Nation Looks West

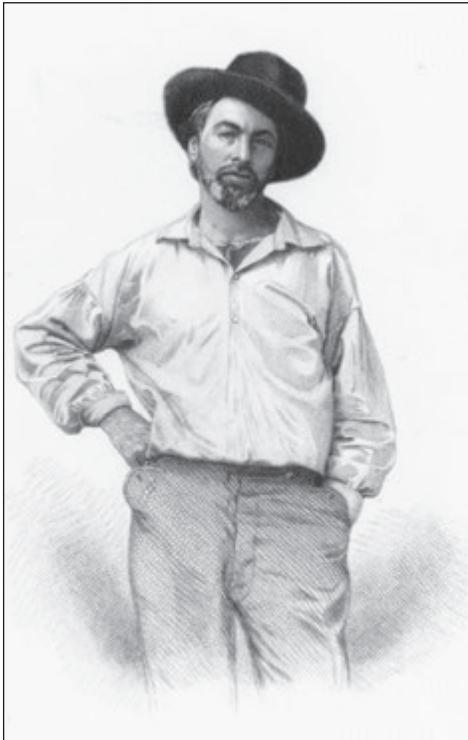
Illustration 3



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

The “Go-Ahead Nation”

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

*I CELEBRATE myself, and
sing myself,*

*And what I assume you
shall assume,*

*For every atom belonging to
me as good belongs to you.*

—Walt Whitman,
from “Song of Myself”
(Leaves of Grass)

The “Go-Ahead Nation” Illustration 2

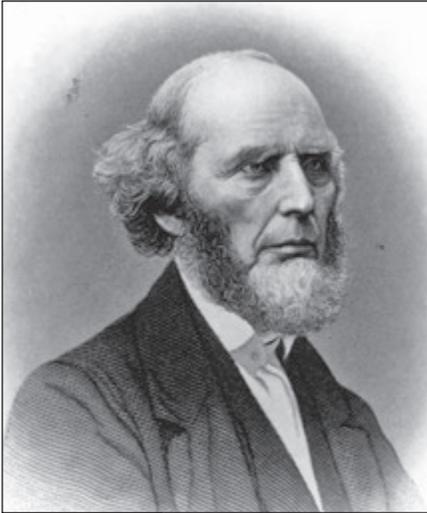


Courtesy of the Library of Congress

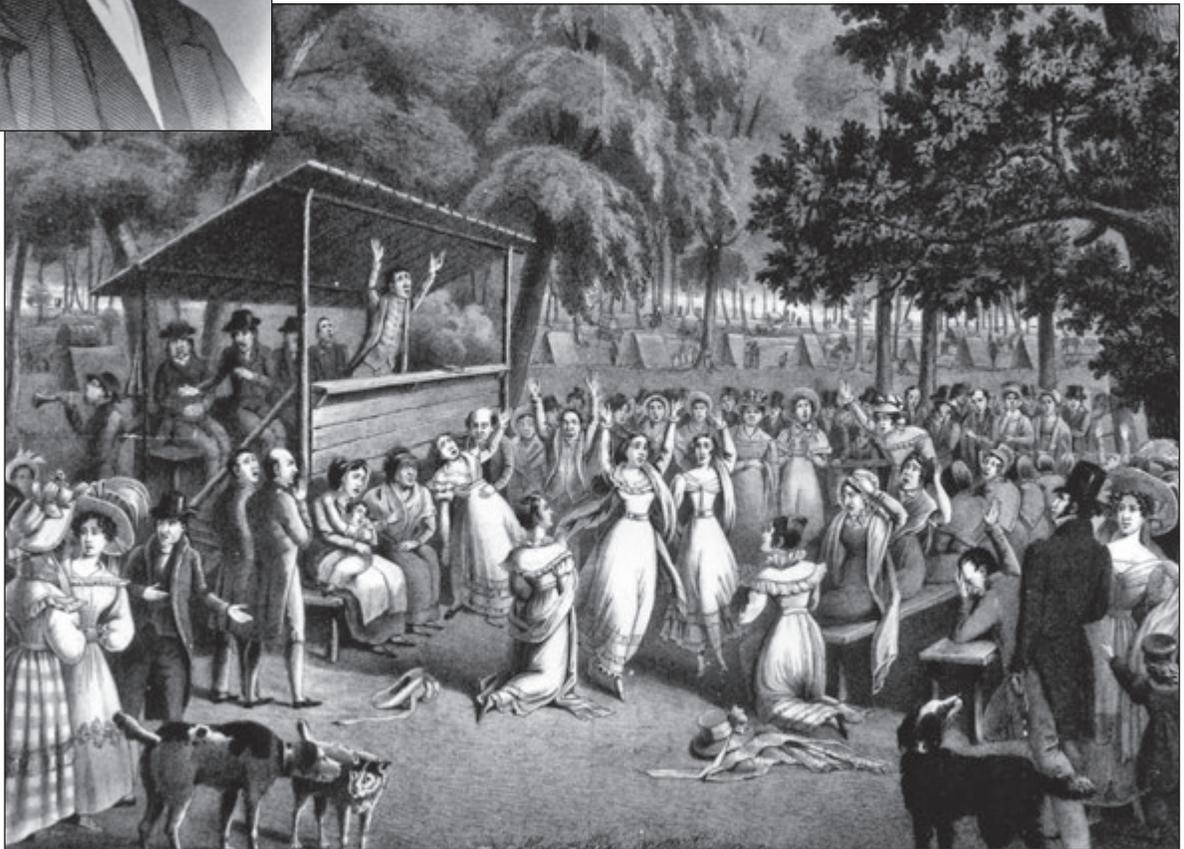


Courtesy of the Library of Congress

The “Go-Ahead Nation” Illustration 3



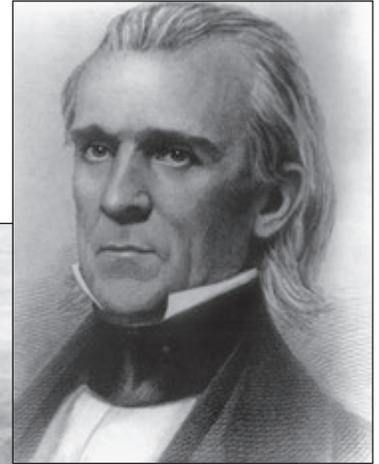
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Courtesy of the Library of Congress

The Mexican War

Illustration 1



Both illustrations courtesy of the Library of Congress

The Mexican War Illustration 2

What has miserable, inefficient Mexico—with her superstition, her burlesque upon freedom, her actual tyranny by the few over the many—what has she to do with the great mission of peopling the new world with a noble race? Be it ours, to achieve that mission!

—Walt Whitman



The National Archives

The Mexican War Illustration 3



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Manifest Destiny: Ideal or Justification

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Manifest Destiny: Ideal or Justification

Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



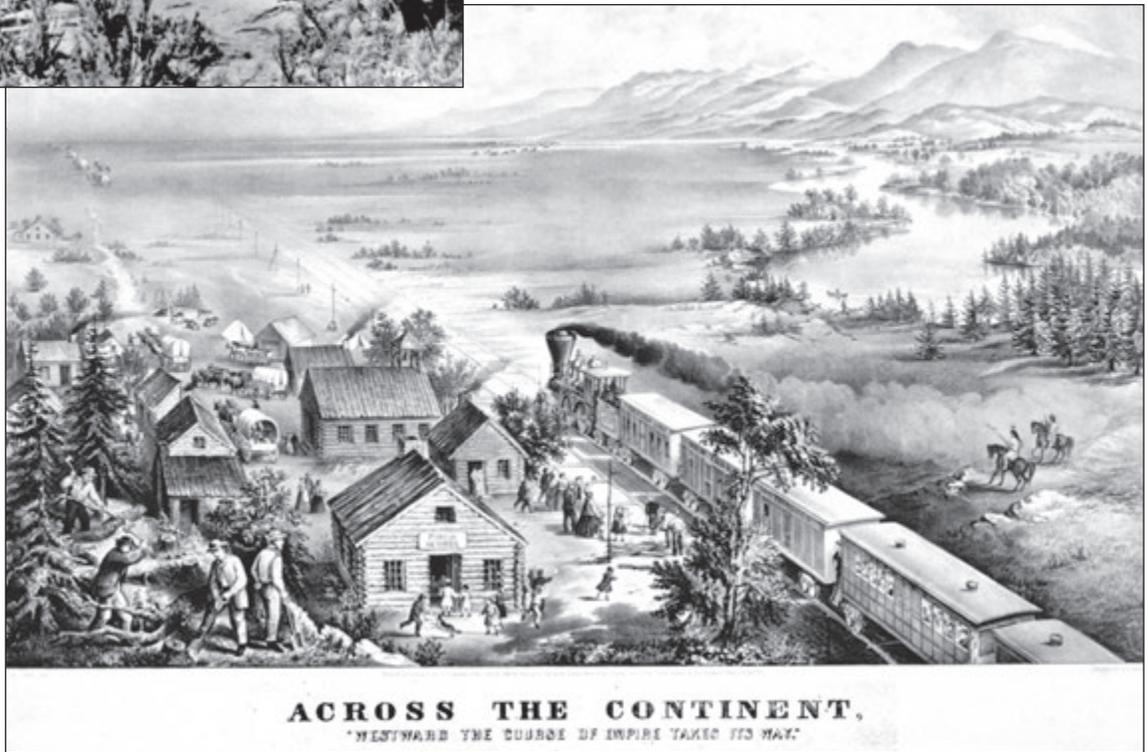
Courtesy of Dover Publications

Manifest Destiny: Ideal or Justification

Illustration 3



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

