Did Manifest Destiny Justify America’s Expansion Into Occupied Lands?

Why Texas?
Timeline of Events

1829: Mexico forbids any more immigrants from the U.S. to lessen American influence.

November 1835: The Texas Rebellion Begins A group of Texan leaders convenes to draw up a provisional government and declare independence from Mexico. Shortly after, fighting breaks out.

March 6, 1836: The Alamo is Taken by Mexican Troops

April 21, 1836: Sam Houston and the Texans attack Santa Anna during siesta (630 dead) – independence

Spring 1844: John Tyler's Treaty Proposing the Annexation of Texas is Defeated in the Senate
February 1845: Congress Passes a Measure to Annex Texas

July 4, 1845:
Texas convention votes to accept annexation, despite the warning by the Mexican government that any agreement to join the United States will be equivalent to a declaration of war.

December 29, 1845: Texas is Admitted to the Union
Texas becomes the 28th state.

May 9, 1846: Polk Receives Word that Mexican Forces Have Ambushed Two American Companies
Polk, waiting for Mexico to strike the first blow, hears of these attacks and declares the Mexican War has begun. He demands that Congress vote for appropriations to carry out the war.

John L. O’Sullivan (1845)
On Manifest Destiny

“[Texas] was released, rightly and absolutely released, from all Mexican allegiance, or duty of cohesion to the Mexican political body, by the acts and fault of Mexico herself, and Mexico alone. There never was a clearer case.”
Justifying Manifest Destiny:

- Mission from God
- Civilize the savages
- More land
- Pacific ports
- Authorize power over continent

- How does this relate to John Winthrop’s “City Upon a Hill?”

Senator Thomas Hart Benton, 1846

- “It would seem that the White race alone received the divine command, to subdue and replenish the earth! For it is the only race that has obeyed it – the only one that hunts out new and distant lands.”

- “The van of the Caucasian race now top the Rocky Mountains, and spread down the shores of the Pacific. In a few years a great population will grow... their presence... cannot be without its influence upon eastern Asia.”
Senator John Dix (1848)

• “No one who has paid a moderate degree of attention to the laws and elements of our increase, can doubt that our population is destined to spread itself across the American continent, filling up... the space that intervenes between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.”
Across the continent Westward the Course of Empire takes its Way, Currier and Ives 1868

Ramifications of U.S. Western Expansion – Native Americans

• Plains tribes – nomadic
• Threat to buffalo
• Government wants to protect pioneers by building forts

What was the treaty between the Indians and U.S. government in 1851, and what did it do?
Buffalo Hunt under the Wolf-skin Mask by George Catlin 1832-33

Buffalo Hunt on the Southwestern Prairies by John Mix Stanley 1845
Catlin the Artist Shooting Buffalos with Colt’s Revolving Pistol by George Catlin 1855

The Far West. - Shooting Buffalo on the Line of the Kansas-Pacific Railroad by Ernest Griset From Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, June 3, 1871
Turner’s Frontier Thesis (1893)

America’s Frontier experience is responsible for the creation of a uniquely American character and distinctively American social institutions – so different from Europeans.

"The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward explain American development."
The Trapper’s Last Shot by William Ranney circa 1850

Long Jakes, “The Rocky Mountain Man” by Charles Deas 1844
Did Manifest Destiny Justify America’s Expansion Into Occupied Lands?
John O’Sullivan Coins the Phrase “Manifest Destiny”
1845


John L. O’Sullivan (1813–1895), founder and editor of the United States Magazine and Democratic Review and avid Democrat casually coined the phrase “manifest destiny” in this 1845 editorial in which he commended the addition of Texas to the United States and hopefully looked further west to California as a site for future expansion. Texas had won independence from Mexico in 1836, but President Andrew Jackson opposed admitting Texas to the Union for fear of provoking political conflict over the slavery issue. By 1844, however, James Polk won the presidency in part because of his pro-annexation position. Polk’s aggressive expansionism soon provoked war with Mexico. O’Sullivan also continued to advocate American expansion by supporting the filibuster movement that sought to conquer Cuba, among other Latin American lands. Not included below is a fairly neutral discussion of the problem of slavery, in which O’Sullivan suggested that manumitted slaves might be sent to Central and South America, by way of Texas, thus allowing the U.S. to “slough . . . off” the African race. Although O’Sullivan denied that the Texas issue had anything to do with the expansion of slavery, the westward expansion of slavery fueled the sectional tensions that led to Civil War. —D. Voelker

[1] It is time now for opposition to the Annexation of Texas to cease . . . . It is time for the common duty of Patriotism to the Country to succeed;—or if this claim will not be recognized, it is at least time for common sense to acquiesce with decent grace in the inevitable and irrevocable.

[2] Texas is now ours. Already, before these words are written, her Convention has undoubtedly ratified the acceptance, by her Congress, of our proffered invitation into the Union. . . . It is time then that all should cease to treat her as alien . . .

[3] Why, were other reasoning wanting, in favor of now elevating this question of the reception of Texas into the Union, out of the lower region of our past party dissensions, up to its proper level of a high and broad nationality, it surely is to be found, found abundantly, in the manner in which other nations have undertaken to intrude themselves into it, between us and the proper parties to the case, in a spirit of hostile interference against us, for the avowed object of 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. This we have seen done by England, our old rival and enemy; and by France, strangely coupled with her against us, under the influence of the Anglicism strongly tinging the policy of her present prime minister, Guizot. . . .

[4] It is wholly untrue, and unjust to ourselves, the pretense that the Annexation has been a measure of spoliation, unrightful and unrighteous—of military conquest under forms of peace and law—of territorial aggrandizement at the expense of justice due by a double sanctity to the weak. . . . The independence of Texas was complete and absolute. It was an independence, not only in fact but of right. . . .
[5] Texas has been absorbed into the Union in the inevitable fulfillment of the general law which is rolling our population westward; the connexion of which with that ratio of growth of population which is destined within a hundred years to swell our numbers to the enormous population of two hundred and fifty millions (if not more), is too evident to leave us in doubt of the manifest design of Providence in regard to the occupation of this continent.

[6] California will, probably, next fall away from the loose adhesion which, in such as country as Mexico, holds a remote province in a slight equivocal kind of dependence on the metropolis. Imbecile and distracted, Mexico never can exert any real government authority over such a country . . . The Anglo-Saxon foot is already on [California’s] borders. Already the advance guard of the irresistible army of Anglo-Saxon emigration has begun to pour down upon it, armed with the plough and the rifle, and marking its trail with schools and colleges, courts and representative halls, mills and meeting-houses. A population will soon be in actual occupation of California, over which it will be idle for Mexico to dream of dominion. They will necessarily become independent. All this without the agency of our government, without responsibility of our people—in the natural flow of events . . . And they will have a right to independence—to self-government—to the possession of the homes conquered from the wilderness by their own labors and dangers, sufferings and sacrifices . . . Whether they will then attach themselves to our Union or not, is not to be predicted with certainty. Unless the projected rail-road across the continent to the Pacific be carried into effect, perhaps they may not; though even in that case, the day is not distant when the Empires of the Atlantic and the Pacific would again flow together . . .

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What did O’Sullivan mean by “manifest destiny”?

2. What reasons did O’Sullivan give to support his argument that Texas (and probably California) should be annexed by the United States?

3. What role did race play in O’Sullivan’s understanding of “manifest destiny”?

4. In this editorial, O’Sullivan ignored the presence of Native Americans on the lands that he believed should be added to the United States. How or why was he able to do so?
Pioneers O Pioneers
Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass
Published in 1865

Come my tan-faced children,
Follow well in order, get your weapons ready,
Have you your pistols? have you your sharp-edged axes?
Pioneers! O pioneers!
For we cannot tarry here, We must march my darlings, we must bear the brunt of
danger, We the youthful sinewy races, all the rest on us depend, Pioneers! O pioneers!

O you youths, Western youths, So impatient, full of action, full of manly pride and
friendship, Plain I see you Western youths, see you tramping with the foremost, Pioneers!
O pioneers!

Have the elder races halted? Do they droop and end their lesson, wearied over there
beyond the seas? We take up the task eternal, and the burden and the lesson, Pioneers! O
pioneers!

All the past we leave behind, We debouch upon a newer mightier world, varied
world, Fresh and strong the world we seize, world of labor and the march, Pioneers! O
pioneers!

We detachments steady throwing, Down the edges, through the passes, up the mountains
steep, Conquering, holding, daring, venturing as we go the unknown ways, Pioneers! O
pioneers!

We primeval forests felling, We the rivers stemming, vexing we and piercing deep the
mines within, We the surface broad surveying, we the virgin soil upheaving, Pioneers! O
pioneers!

Colorado men are we, From the peaks gigantic, from the great sierras and the high
plateaus, From the mine and from the gully, from the hunting trail we come, Pioneers! O
pioneers!
From Nebraska, from Arkansas, Central inland race are we, from Missouri, with the continental blood intervein'd, All the hands of comrades clasping, all the Southern, all the Northern, Pioneers! O pioneers!

O resistless restless race! O beloved race in all! O my breast aches with tender love for all! O I mourn and yet exult, I am rapt with love for all, Pioneers! O pioneers!

Raise the mighty mother mistress, Waving high the delicate mistress, over all the starry mistress, (bend your heads all,) Raise the fang'd and warlike mistress, stern, impassive, weapon'd mistress, Pioneers! O pioneers!

See my children, resolute children, By those swarms upon our rear we must never yield or falter, Ages back in ghostly millions frowning there behind us urging, Pioneers! O pioneers!

On and on the compact ranks, With accessions ever waiting, with the places of the dead quickly fill'd, Through the battle, through defeat, moving yet and never stopping, Pioneers! O pioneers!

O to die advancing on! Are there some of us to droop and die? has the hour come? Then upon the march we fittest die, soon and sure the gap is fill'd. Pioneers! O pioneers!

All the pulses of the world, Falling in they beat for us, with the Western movement beat, Holding single or together, steady moving to the front, all for us, Pioneers! O pioneers!

Life's involv'd and varied pageants, All the forms and shows, all the workmen at their work, All the seamen and the landsmen, all the masters with their slaves, Pioneers! O pioneers!

All the hapless silent lovers, All the prisoners in the prisons, all the righteous and the wicked, All the joyous, all the sorrowing, all the living, all the dying, Pioneers! O pioneers!
I too with my soul and body, We, a curious trio, picking, wandering on our way, Through these shores amid the shadows, with the apparitions pressing, Pioneers! O pioneers!

Lo, the darting bowling orb! Lo, the brother orbs around, all the clustering suns and planets, All the dazzling days, all the mystic nights with dreams, Pioneers! O pioneers!

These are of us, they are with us, All for primal needed work, while the followers there in embryo wait behind, We to-day's procession heading, we the route for travel clearing, Pioneers! O pioneers!

O you daughters of the West! O you young and elder daughters! O you mothers and you wives! Never must you be divided, in our ranks you move united, Pioneers! O pioneers!

Minstrels latent on the prairies! (Shrouded bards of other lands, you may rest, you have done your work,) Soon I hear you coming warbling, soon you rise and tramp amid us, Pioneers! O pioneers!

Not for delectations sweet, Not the cushion and the slipper, not the peaceful and the studious, Not the riches safe and palling, not for us the tame enjoyment, Pioneers! O pioneers!

Do the feasters gluttonous feast? Do the corpulent sleepers sleep? have they lock'd and bolted doors? Still be ours the diet hard, and the blanket on the ground, Pioneers! O pioneers!

Has the night descended? Was the road of late so toilsome? did we stop discouraged nodding on our way? Yet a passing hour I yield you in your tracks to pause oblivious, Pioneers! O pioneers!

Till with sound of trumpet, Far, far off the daybreak call--hark! how loud and clear I hear it wind, Swift! to the head of the army!--swift! spring to your places, Pioneers! O pioneers!
“To Colonize 500 families . . . Catholics, and of good morals”: Stephen Austin and the Anglo-American Immigration to Texas, June 4, 1825

Sam W. Haynes

During the early decades of the nineteenth century, as Anglo-Americans began to push westward across the continent in ever-increasing numbers, many in the southern states looked covetously at Texas, then owned by Spain. Some eager expansionists claimed that the United States had acquired the territory as part of the Louisiana Purchase, prompting politicians in Washington to regularly call for its “re-annexation.” American adventurers launched occasional forays into the area with the goal of wresting Texas away from Spanish control. After Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, the United States stepped up its efforts to acquire Texas. Mindful of the new nation’s financial difficulties in the wake of its decade-long revolutionary struggle, two American presidents, John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson, offered to buy the region, but their overtures were rebuffed by the Mexican government.

For Mexican leaders, the nation’s territorial integrity was a point of honor that could not be compromised. Operating on the principle that “to populate is to govern,” the national government in the early 1820s initiated an immigration program designed to attract settlers to the lands above the Rio Grande. According to this policy, enormous land grants were issued to agents known as emprresarios, who were required to bring at least one hundred families to settle the area within a six-year period. Settlers who agreed to become Catholics and Mexican citizens received approximately 4,500 acres of land for $100, which could be paid in installments over a period of six years. Although the colonization plan was designed to attract an international community consisting of Mexican, American, and European settlers, the overwhelming majority of immigrants to Texas were citizens of the United States. By the end of the decade several thousand Americans had rushed into the area to take advantage of the generous terms offered by the Mexican government.

By far the most successful emprresario was Stephen F. Austin, whose father, Moses Austin, had received the first land grant (from Spain) in 1821. After quickly fulfilling the terms of his original contract, the 32-year-old Virginia native applied for a second colonization contract, reprinted here. The document suggests some of the obstacles and challenges that the Mexican government faced in its program to populate Texas. Although Austin made every effort to attract settlers of good moral character, the challenge of turning them into loyal Mexican citizens once they arrived in Texas proved more difficult. Preoccupied with the many tasks of building a frontier community, Anglo-Texans possessed neither the resources nor the inclination to abide by the Mexican government’s insistence on building Spanish-speaking schools and Catholic churches. Thus, when Mexican government official Manuel de Mier y Terán made a tour of Texas in 1828, he found to his dismay that little progress had been made toward the long-term goal of Hispanic acculturation. Indeed, Mier y Terán expressed concern that further Anglo immigration would lead to the very result the colonization policy had been designed to prevent: Mexico’s loss of Texas to the United States. His warnings prompted the Mexican Congress to pass the April 6, 1830 Law, which prohibited further Anglo-American immigration and the importation of slaves into Texas. Although the national government later repealed the act’s most important provisions, relations between the new colonists and the host government quickly became strained, ultimately leading to the outbreak of the Texas Revolution in 1835.

Sam W. Haynes, Associate Professor of History at the University of Texas at Arlington, has written and edited several books on Texas and the American Southwest. He recently co-edited, with Cary Wintz, an anthology of documents and essays, Major Problems in Texas History (Houghton-Mifflin, 2004).

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Questions for Discussion
1. In the first two paragraphs what word is used to describe the lands on which the Americans would be allowed to settle? How does this term help to explain why the Mexican government allowed them to settle there?
2. In what way did this agreement clash with the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution? Given this clash, why were these obligations considered legal?

3. Which clauses in this contract would you most oppose if you were a settler from the United States? Why?
4. Are there any clauses in this contract you would have favored if you were a settler from the United States? Explain.
5. Looking at this from a Mexican point of view, why would the Mexican authorities have included the clauses on language and religion?
6. If you were Stephen Austin, would you have signed this contract? Explain why or why not.

Transcript of Second Colony Contract Authorizing Stephen F. Austin to Settle 500 Catholic Families in the State of Coahuila and Texas, June 4, 1825 (GLC 01160)

Conditions on which the Empresario Stephen F. Austin is authorized by the Govt. of the State of Coahuila and Texas to Colonize 500 families on the vacant Lands remaining within the limits of the Colony already established by him, in the Department of Texas.

1st The Govt. admits the project presented by Citizen Stephen F. Austin in his representation of the 4th of February of the present year relative to the Colonization of 500 foreign Families so far as is in Conformity with the Colonization Law passed by the Legislature of this State 24 March last, and hereby designates in Conformity with the 8th article of said Law, and agreeably to his petition the vacant Lands remaining within the limits designated for the Colony which he has already established excepting only 10 (ten) Leagues from the Coast which Cannot be Colonized except with the previous aprobation of the Supreme Executive power of the Nation agreeably to the Law of the 18th Augt [1824] [2]

Possessions given to [lost text] titles within the limits designated shall be respected.

3d. In Conformity with the said Law of Colonization of the [24th] March the said Empresario Citizen Stephen F. Austin shall be obliged to introduce the said families within the term of 6 [years] Counting from the day on which these Conditions are signed by the said Empresario under the penalty of losing the rights and benefits granted to him by the 8th Article of the said Law.

4th The families which are to Compose this Colony besides being industrious as he offers in his petition must be Catholics, and of good morals proving these qualifications by the documents required by the 5th Article of the said Law of Colonization of the 24th March.

5 He shall be obliged not to admit in the new Colony Criminals, Vagabonds, or Men of bad Conduct or Character, and Cause such as are within his limits to leave it and should it be necessary he shall drive them out by force of arms.

6th For this purpose he shall organize the new Colonists in a body of National Militia of which he shall be the Chief until otherwise ordered.

7th As soon as he shall have introduced 100 families at least he shall notify the Govt thereof in order that a Commissioner may be sent on with the Competent instructions to put the new Colonists in possession of their Lands and to establish Towns in Conformity with the Law.

8th Official Communications with the Govt. or with the authorities of the State, instruments of writing and other public acts, must be written in Spanish, and when new Towns are formed it shall be his duty to establish Spanish Schools in them.

9 It shall also be his duty to promote the erection of Churches in said Towns and that they are provided with ornaments, holy vases and other things necessary for divine worship and in the proper time to solicit the necessary number of Pastors for the Administration of Spiritual affairs.

[10] In all other [lost text] and other general Laws.

The foregoing Conditions were accepted and signed by the Empresario Stephen F. Austin on the 4th of June 1825 on the 20th May 1825 the Governor of the State by an Official order increased the number of Families to Five Hundred.

Stephen F. Austin

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