

Manifest Destiny

MAIN IDEA

Americans moved west, energized by their belief in the rightful expansion of the United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The South and Southwest are now the fastest-growing regions of the United States.

Terms & Names

- manifest destiny
- Treaty of Fort Laramie
- Santa Fe Trail
- Oregon Trail
- Mormons
- Joseph Smith
- Brigham Young
- "Fifty-Four For or Fight!"

One American's Story

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TAKING NOTES

Use the graphic organizer online to take notes about the reasons Americans headed west.

Amelia Stewart Knight's diary of her family's five-month journey to Oregon in 1853 described "the beautiful Boise River, with her green timber," which delighted the family. The last entry in the diary describes when she and her family reached their destination, Oregon.

A PERSONAL VOICE AMELIA STEWART KNIGHT

"[M]y eighth child was born. After this we picked up and ferried across the Columbia River, utilizing a skiff, canoes and flatboat. It took three days. Here husband traded two yoke of oxen for a half section of land with one-half acre planted to potatoes and a small log cabin and lean-to with no windows. This is the journey's end."

—quoted in *Covered Wagon Women*

Knight's situation was by no means unique; probably one in five women who made the trek was pregnant. Her condition, however, did little to lighten her workload. Even young children shouldered important responsibilities on the trail.



▲ Amelia Stewart Knight told of camping by hot springs where she could brew tea without starting a fire.

The Frontier Draws Settlers

Many Americans assumed that the United States would extend its dominion to the Pacific Ocean and create a vast republic that would spread the blessings of democracy and civilization across the continent.

AMERICAN MISSION Thomas Jefferson had dreamed that the United States would become an "empire for liberty" by expanding across the continent "with room enough for our descendants to the thousandth and thousandth generation."

Toward that end, Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase in 1803 had doubled the young nation's size. For a quarter century after the War of 1812, Americans explored this huge territory in limited numbers. Then, in the 1840s, expansion fever gripped the country. Americans began to believe that their movement westward and southward was destined and ordained by God.

The editor of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* described the annexation of Texas in 1845 as “the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.” Many Americans immediately seized on the phrase “**manifest destiny**” to express their belief that the United States’ destiny was to expand to the Pacific Ocean and into Mexican territory. They believed that this destiny was manifest, or obvious. **A**

ATTITUDES TOWARD THE FRONTIER Most Americans had practical reasons for moving west. Many settlers endured the trek because of personal economic problems. The panic of 1837, for example, had dire consequences and convinced many people that they would be better off attempting a fresh start in the West.

The abundance of land in the West was the greatest attraction. Whether for farming or speculation, land ownership was an important step toward prosperity. As farmers and miners moved west, merchants followed, seeking new markets.

While Americans had always traded with Europe, the transportation revolution increased opportunities for trade with Asia as well. Several harbors in the Oregon Territory helped expand trade with China and Japan and also served as naval stations for a Pacific fleet.

Settlers and Native Americans

The increasing number of U.S. settlers moving west inevitably affected Native American communities. Most Native Americans tried to maintain strong cultural traditions, even if forced to move from ancestral lands. Some began to assimilate—or become part of—the advancing white culture. Still others, although relatively few in number, fought hard to keep whites away from their homes.

THE BLACK HAWK WAR In the early 1830s, white settlers in western Illinois and eastern Iowa placed great pressure on the Native American people there to move west of the Mississippi River. Consequently, representatives from several Native American tribes visited Chief Black Hawk of the Sauk tribe, and one told of a prophet who had a vision of future events involving Black Hawk.

A PERSONAL VOICE

“He said that the Big Black Bird Hawk was the man to lead the [Native American] nations and win back the old homes of the people; that when the fight began . . . the warriors would be without number; that back would come the buffalo . . . and that in a little while the white man would be driven to the eastern ocean and across to the farther shore from whence he came.”

—tribal elder quoted in *Native American Testimony*

The story convinced Black Hawk to lead a rebellion against the United States. The Black Hawk War started in Illinois and spread to the Wisconsin Territory. It ended in August 1832, when Illinois militia members slaughtered more than 200 Sauk and Fox people. As a result, the Sauk and Fox tribes were forcibly removed to areas west of the Mississippi. **B**



▲ John Wesley Jarvis painted Black Hawk (left) and his son, Whirling Thunder (right) in 1833.



THE OGLALA SIOUX

Following the Fort Laramie Treaty, the federal government gradually reclaimed the Sioux's sacred Black Hills, and since 1889 the Oglala Sioux have lived on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota.

In the 1990s, tourism was the largest source of revenue for Pine Ridge, which boasts some of the most beautiful territory in the Northern Plains. Visitors also come for the annual pow-wow, held in August, and the tribe's Prairie Winds casino.

Nevertheless, with only 20 percent of adults employed and a 61 percent poverty rate, the reservation remains one of the poorest areas in the United States.

MIDDLE GROUND The place that neither the Native Americans nor the settlers dominated, according to historian Richard White, was the middle ground. As long as settlers needed Native Americans as trading partners and guides, relations between settlers and Native Americans could be beneficial. Amelia Stewart Knight described such an encounter on the middle ground.

A PERSONAL VOICE AMELIA STEWART KNIGHT

“Traveled 13 miles, over very bad roads, without water. After looking in vain for water, we were about to give up as it was near night, when husband came across a company of friendly Cayuse Indians about to camp, who showed him where to find water. . . . We bought a few potatoes from an Indian, which will be a treat for our supper.”

—quoted in *Covered Wagon Women*

By the 1840s, the middle ground was well west of the Mississippi, because the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and other Indian removal treaties had pushed Native Americans off their eastern lands to make room for the settlers.

FORT LARAMIE TREATY As settlers moved west, small numbers of displaced Native Americans occasionally fought them. The U.S. government responded to the settlers' fears of attack by calling a conference near what is now Laramie, Wyoming. The Cheyenne, Arapaho, Sioux, Crow, and others joined U.S. representatives in swearing “to maintain good faith and friendship in all their mutual intercourse, and to make an effective and lasting peace.”

The 1851 **Treaty of Fort Laramie** provided various Native American nations control of the Central Plains, land east of the Rocky Mountains that stretched roughly from the Arkansas River north to Canada. In turn, these Native Americans promised not to attack settlers and to allow the construction of government forts and roads. The government pledged to honor the agreed-upon boundaries and to make annual payments to the Native Americans.

Still the movement of settlers increased. Traditional Native American hunting lands were trampled and depleted of buffalo and elk. The U.S. government repeatedly violated the terms of the treaty. Subsequent treaties demanded that Native Americans abandon their lands and move to reservations. ☹

Trails West

While the westward movement of many U.S. settlers had disastrous effects on the Native American communities there, the experience was also somewhat perilous for traders and settlers. Nevertheless, thousands made the trek, using a series of old Native American trails and new routes.

THE SANTA FE TRAIL One of the busiest and most well-known avenues of trade was the **Santa Fe Trail**, which led 780 miles from Independence, Missouri, to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

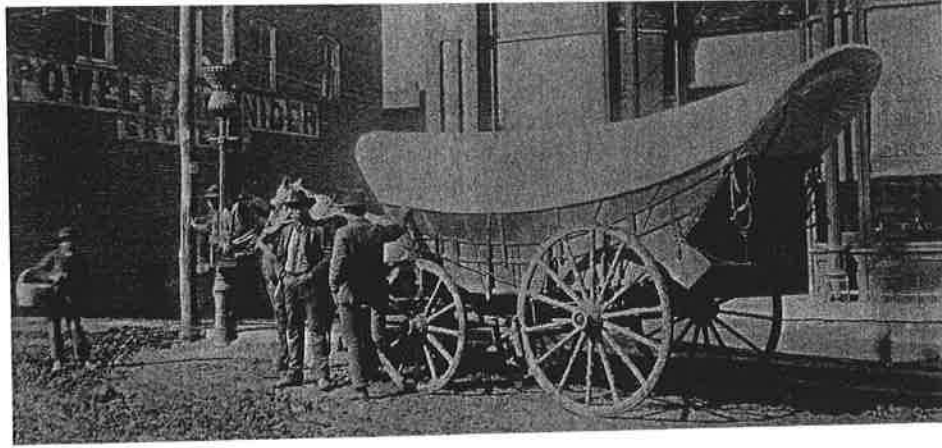
Each spring between 1821 and the 1860s, Missouri traders loaded their covered wagons with cloth, knives, and guns, and set off toward Santa Fe. For about the first 150 miles—to Council Grove, Kansas—wagons traveled alone. After that, fearing attacks by Kiowa and Comanche, among others, the traders banded into

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Effects

☉ What were the effects of the U.S. government policies toward Native Americans in the mid-1800s?

Conestoga wagons were usually pulled by six horses. These wagons were capable of hauling loads up to six tons.



organized groups of up to 100 wagons. Scouts rode along the column to check for danger. At night the traders formed the wagons into squares with their wheels interlocked, forming a corral for horses, mules, and oxen.

Teamwork ended when Santa Fe came into view. Traders charged off on their own as each tried to be the first to enter the Mexican province of New Mexico. After a few days of trading, they loaded their wagons with silver, gold, and furs, and headed back to the United States. These traders established the first visible American presence in New Mexico and in the Mexican province of Arizona.

THE OREGON TRAIL In 1836, Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, Methodist missionaries, made their way into Oregon Territory where they set up mission schools to convert Native Americans to Christianity and educate them. By driving their wagon as far as Fort Boise, they proved that wagons could travel on the **Oregon Trail**, which started in Independence, Missouri, and ended in Portland, Oregon, in the Willamette Valley. Their letters east praising the fertile soil and abundant rainfall attracted hundreds of other Americans to the Oregon Trail. The route from Independence to Portland traced some of the same paths that Lewis and Clark had followed several decades earlier.

“Eastward I go only by force, but westward I go free.”

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Following the Whitmans' lead, some of the Oregon pioneers bought wooden-wheeled covered Conestoga wagons. But most walked, pushing handcarts loaded with a few precious possessions. The trip took months. Fever, diarrhea, and cholera killed many travelers, who were then buried alongside the trail.

Caravans provided protection against possible attack by Native Americans. They also helped combat the loneliness of the difficult journey, as Catherine Haun, who migrated from Iowa, explained.

A PERSONAL VOICE CATHERINE HAUN

“We womenfolk visited from wagon to wagon or congenial friends spent an hour walking, ever westward, and talking over our home life back in ‘the states’; telling of the loved ones left behind; voicing our hopes for the future . . . and even whispering a little friendly gossip of emigrant life.”

—quoted in *Frontier Women*

By 1844, about 5,000 American settlers had arrived in Oregon and were farming its green and fertile Willamette Valley. **D**

THE MORMON MIGRATION One group that migrated westward along the Oregon Trail consisted of the **Mormons**, a religious community that would play a major role in the settling of the West. Mormon history began in western New York in 1827 when **Joseph Smith** and five associates established the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Fayette, New York, in 1830.


Smith and a growing band of followers decided to move west. They settled in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1839. Within five years, the community numbered 20,000. When Smith's angry neighbors printed protests against polygamy, the Mormons'

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Events

D What difficulties we faced by family like the Whitman and the Haun:

practice of having more than one wife, Smith destroyed their printing press. As a result, in 1844 he was jailed for treason. An anti-Mormon mob broke into the jail and murdered Smith and his brother.

Smith's successor, **Brigham Young**, decided to move his followers beyond the boundaries of the United States. Thousands of Mormons travelled by wagon north to Nebraska, across Wyoming to the Rockies, and then southwest. In 1847, the Mormons stopped at the edge of the lonely desert near the Great Salt Lake. 

The Mormons awarded plots of land to each family according to its size but held common ownership of two critical resources—water and timberland. Soon they had coaxed settlements and farms from the bleak landscape by irrigating their fields. Salt Lake City blossomed out of the land the Mormons called Deseret.

RESOLVING TERRITORIAL DISPUTES The Oregon Territory was only one point of contention between the United States and Britain. In the early 1840s, Great Britain still claimed areas in parts of what are now Maine and Minnesota. The Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842 settled these disputes in the East and the Midwest, but the two nations merely continued “joint occupation” of the Oregon Territory.

In 1844, Democrat James K. Polk's presidential platform called for annexation of the entire Oregon Territory. Reflecting widespread support for Polk's views, newspapers adopted the slogan **“Fifty-Four Forty or Fight!”** The slogan referred to the latitude 54°40', the northern limit of the disputed Oregon Territory. By the mid-1840s, however, the fur trade was in decline, and Britain's interest in the territory waned. On the American side, Polk's advisors deemed the land north of 49° latitude unsuited for agriculture. Consequently, the two countries peaceably agreed in 1846 to extend the mainland boundary with Canada along the forty-ninth parallel westward from the Rocky Mountains to Puget Sound, establishing the current U.S. boundary. Unfortunately, establishing the boundary in the Southwest would not be so easy.

Americans Headed West to...

- escape religious persecution
- find new markets for commerce
- claim land for farming, ranching, and mining
- locate harbors on the Pacific
- seek employment and avoid creditors after the panic of 1837
- spread the virtues of democracy

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Motives

Why did the Mormons move further west in their search for a new home?

SECTION 2

ASSESSMENT

TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- manifest destiny
- Santa Fe Trail
- Mormons
- Brigham Young
- Treaty of Fort Laramie
- Oregon Trail
- Joseph Smith
- “Fifty-Four Forty or Fight!”

MAIN IDEA

TAKING NOTES

Use a chart like this one to compare the motivations of travelers on the Oregon, Santa Fe, and Mormon trails.

Trail	Motivations
Oregon Trail	
Mormon Trail	
Santa Fe Trail	

Which do you think was the most common motive? Explain.

CRITICAL THINKING

3. EVALUATING

What were the benefits and drawbacks of the belief in manifest destiny? Use specific references to the section to support your response. **Think About:**

- the various reasons for the move westward
- the settlers' point of view
- the impact on Native Americans
- the impact on the nation as a whole

4. ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

John L. O'Sullivan, editor of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, described manifest destiny as meaning that American settlers should “possess the whole of the continent that Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and . . . self-government.” Do you think the same attitudes exist today? Explain.