

SOHO Lesson Plan

Manifest Destiny



The phrase “Manifest Destiny” was coined by John O’Sullivan in 1845. O’Sullivan was a newspaper editor who believed in the philosophy that the United States was destined to spread democracy, capitalism, and dominion across the entire span of the North American continent. O’Sullivan believed that the phrase would catch on and that people would “go west,” populating new lands and increasing the wealth and power of the United States. He published his new phrase in the *Democratic Review* in an effort to encourage national westward expansion on behalf of:

“the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.”

Why would people wish to leave their homes, families and friends to head into unknown, uncharted territories? Why would they risk everything they owned, including their lives, for such a gamble?

- European immigration resulted in overcrowding of eastern cities
- Land was becoming expensive
- Increased competition for jobs
- Rapid spread of communicable (often fatal) diseases throughout crowded communities

What were the benefits of westward expansion for the common man?

- Cheaper land
- Opportunity/discovery of gold in California
- Adventure/see new lands
- Homestead Act of 1862, in which settlers could build a house, plant crops, and after living on and working the land for five years, receive up to 160 acres of land for free

What were the obstacles of westward expansion?

- Lack of established roadways and bridges for overland travel
- Sailing to California required taking an extended route around Cape Horn, which could take up to six months at sea
- Lack of reliable, closely linked water, food and fuel sources
- Extreme weather conditions
- Native American resistance to takeover of their lands
- Lack of communication with loved ones back home
- Lack of available medical care
- Families and friends might never see one another again

How did people move throughout 19th century North America?

- Walking
- Horses/mules
- Ship/boat
- Wagons
- Railroads

On January 24, 1848, gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill in Coloma, California by James W. Marshall. Though westward expansion to California was taking place as early as the 1830's, Marshall's discovery of gold accelerated Manifest Destiny.

When the cry of "Gold!" rang out in New York city newspapers in 1848, why would someone like 26-year-old Thomas Whaley consider leaving his family, friends, and sweetheart behind for what could be many years?

- Opportunity
- Adventure