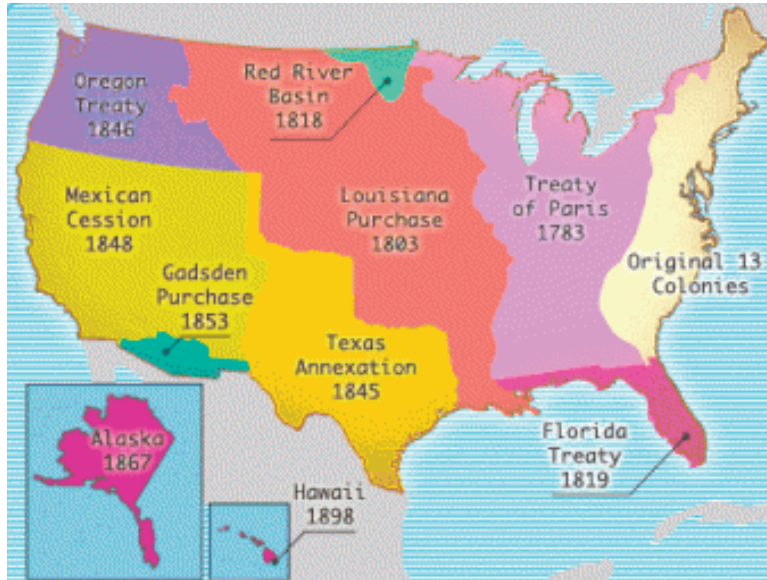




## Manifest Destiny

The term "Manifest Destiny" is usually associated with the territorial expansion of the United States from 1803 to 1867, when the United States expanded from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean - largely defining the borders of the United States as they are today. The term "Manifest Destiny" was first used in 1845 by John O'Sullivan, a newspaper editor, who believed it was America's "manifest destiny to overspread the continent." O'Sullivan called on the government to grant statehood to Texas and take all of the Oregon Territory.



Some historians have blamed America's belief in 'Manifest Destiny' for the US conquering the land that became the U.S. But the idea of 'Manifest Destiny' is as old as civilization itself. Although the "crime" of 'Manifest Destiny' has only been applied to America, other countries had and have their own version. Actually, America's version of manifest destiny is pretty small compared to other countries, rulers and religions.

The Concept of Manifest Destiny is Universal.

Moslems believe that it is their manifest destiny to conquer the world for Allah.

The Soviet Union believed their manifest destiny was to conquer the world for communism. The American military prevented this from happening.

Hitler's manifest destiny was his belief in Arian superiority and a large German empire for the Third Reich. The American military was largely responsible for preventing this from happening.

The Japanese believed they were racially superior to the rest of the world and that led them to conquer vast amounts of land in Asia and then attack Pearl Harbor to start World War 2 in the Pacific. The US military cut Japan down to size.

Genghis Khan, a 13th century warrior from Mongolia created the largest empire in world history by conquering parts of China, Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Genghis Khan means "universal ruler" and his vision of manifest destiny was to conquer as much of the world as possible.

The British believed it was their manifest destiny to expand the British Empire around the world.

Spain believed it was their Manifest Destiny to conquer all of the New World for Spain and Catholicism. In fact, Spain's vision of Manifest Destiny was immense - far more aggressive then the US. Claiming all of the New World for Spain (except for Brazil) wasn't enough. Spain wanted more. In 1513, Vasco Balboa crossed Panama and was the first European to see the Pacific Ocean from the west coast of the New World. With a wave of his arm, Balboa claimed the entire Pacific Ocean and all lands adjoining it for Spain. Although Balboa didn't know it, he claimed modern day United States, Canada, Alaska, Siberia, Japan, Korea, China, The Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Australia - all for Spain. Spain claimed all islands in the Caribbean although they did not settle all of them and didn't even know how many were there. **Many of Spain's land claims were meaningless.** It was really inevitable that Spain/Mexico's "Manifest Destiny" would come into conflict with America's more limited expansion. **While Spain/Mexico was claiming land just to claim it - land they had a difficult time putting people on - the US was rapidly expanding based on a growing population.**

## **The American Vision of Manifest Destiny**

America's vision of manifest destiny was a far more positive concept than other nations and religions. Early Americans were convinced of the superiority of the American form of government. They only had to look at the rest of the world to see the superiority of America. This superiority was proven as millions of people from around the world abandoned their ancestral homelands and immigrated to America. Canada had far less immigration. Mexico had virtually no immigration.

Many believed that the United States had embarked upon a special experiment in freedom and democracy - an idea that would remake the world. As Thomas Paine said in *Common Sense*, "We have it in our power to begin the world over again. A situation, similar to the present, hath not happened since the days of Noah until now. The birthday of a new world is at hand..."(1)

### **Manifest Destiny and the Indians**

The claim that a belief in Manifest Destiny played a significant role in the treatment of the Indians in the New World is NOT true. The confrontational attitude between the Indians and pioneers was in place LONG before America became a country. Bad relations with the Indians were initially caused by the brutality of the Spanish Conquistadors. Word spread tribe by tribe to fear the invaders. This may be why the settlers at Jamestown were attacked less than 2 weeks after landing in 1607. Later, the massacre of a quarter of the population of Jamestown in 1622 left an undying legacy of hatred between pioneer and Indian.

Animosity between Indians and American pioneers heading westward in the early 1800s was a continuation of a relationship in place for several hundred years. The concept of a Manifest Destiny was not a widespread belief in America until after the surprise purchase of all of France's holding in North America in 1803.

### **Was It Manifest Destiny? Or were we Lucky?**

The acquisition of land was remarkable. The US didn't expect to purchase all of France's land holdings in the New World. The US only wanted to purchase New Orleans and the area around it to insure freedom of movement of trade up and down the Mississippi River. It was France's idea to sell all its land. The US jumped at the chance to buy this land in 1803 and remove a colonial power from North America.

In 1846, the US signed a treaty with Britain dividing the Oregon Territory in half, with the US taking the southern portion.

Texas long desired to join the US after winning their independence from Mexico. The war with Mexico was not planned by the US, rather forced on us by an aggressive Mexico looking to start a war with the US over the issue of Texas independence and statehood. (See *War with Mexico*) The US defeated Mexico in 2 years in a war most observers felt the US could never win. Nearly every battle was close - they could have gone either way. But the US was "lucky" enough to win every battle. The price Mexico paid for their aggression was the southwest United States. Years later, Santa Anna sold the land that became known as the Gadsden Purchase to the US because His Serene Highness spent so much money on himself that Mexico was teetering on bankruptcy.

Alaska was purchased from Russia in 1867. The Russians were in severe financial straits, and they feared losing the land in a future war with Britain, whom they fought in the Crimean War of 1853-1856. Tsar Alexander II decided to sell the territory and hoped to start a bidding war between the British and the Americans. When the British expressed little interest in it, they sold the land to the United States.

So the question is this: Were all these fortunate circumstances dumb luck or Divine help - "Manifest Destiny?"

Source:

1. *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Philip S. Foner, vol. 1, p. 45 . Originally published in 1776.