

Manifest Destiny Effects on Political and Economic Ideologies Prior to the U.S. Civil War

By Walter S. Zapotoczny

Prior to manifest destiny and the expansion west the politics and economics concerned only the Northern and Southern states. The North had industrialized and in the process changing the way things were made from hand and home-made to machine and factory made. The South was agrarian and a large grower of cotton. With the invention of the cotton gin in 1793 and invention of textile machinery, it created a need for a greater labor force increasing the slave trade in the south. The political problems in Europe and the Napoleon Wars helped the United States pursue manifest destiny and its expansion west. The United States annexed Texas, purchased Florida from Spain, Louisiana territory from France, Northwest Territories from Britain, and Southwest territory from Mexico after the Mexican-American War. This accession of land in the west created a third political and economic region which transformed the political and economic ideologies of the times in Washington. The acquired land created transportation routes directly from the east to the west, not only reducing the cost to transport good from the east, but also changed the routes away from the south. The West created ports in the Pacific which help grow trade to the East and California had gold deposits which created an economic boom. By the election of 1854 the Whig and Democratic Parties had lost their trust of the people and the Republican Party won majority seats of the Senate changing the political economic ideologies in the United States.

"Manifest destiny" is the phrase that is most frequently linked with the period from the conclusion of the War of 1812 to the start of the Civil War in American in 1861. Perhaps the concept of manifest destiny began with Thomas Jefferson. He often used impressive and inspiring phrases but one of his most memorable was an "empire of liberty." This phrase expressed the belief that the young United States of America could avoid or at least delay overpopulation and conflicts between classes through expansion. Some believed these conflicts would inevitably threaten the citizen's newly won freedoms. In *America and the Americas: The United States in the Western Hemisphere*, Lester Langley writes:

As the president who had masterminded the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, he had enabled the country to double that empire. A half century later, the United States fulfilled what a New York journalist called its "manifest destiny." The idea of manifest destiny conveyed as much a practical and strategic agenda as a providential one...to add territories that would eventually become states, to preserve the fragile federal system crafted in the Constitution and to satisfy the seemingly relentless land hunger of old-stock Americans and the waves of mostly Irish and German immigrants entering the country.

Other countries, namely Mexico and Great Britain, in the Northern Hemisphere viewed manifest destiny as simply the way for America to expand its territory and to increase its power. America's neighbors realized that the American Revolution was fought not only for freedom from British influence but over who would develop the Appalachian frontier. George Washington even predicted that the survival of the new nation depended on expansion west.

The purpose of this research paper is to address how manifest destiny influenced changes to political and economic ideologies in the United States prior to the Civil War.

By the 1830s, most U.S. leaders believed that expansion into the West was the best way to insure the survival of the republic. Probably the leader of the time that promoted manifest destiny the most was President Andrew Jackson. Jackson's speeches and actions that set the stage for the U.S. government to annex 1.85 billion acres from the Indian tribes in North America within a century after the American Revolution. Jackson was concerned about the proximity of the Indians to the white settlers in the Deep South. He thought that by removing the Indians he could not only provide better security on the southwestern frontier; he could also ensure peace and economic development for the white settlers. Jackson believed that the relocated Indians would change their savage ways and become members of the Christian community as long as they were under the protection of the U.S. government. Thinking he was helping the Indians, Jackson was upset by the details of the large loss of life that had occurred during the removal of the Indians. While upset, he was not sorry that he made the decision to relocate the Indians to the West as his main reason for his actions was to provide security on the western frontier. His action had both political and economic ramifications for the white settlers of the southeast.

In the 1840s, America was the most dynamic society in the Western World, with its population rising rapidly prior to the great territorial expansion from 9.6 million in 1820 to 17.1 million in 1840. A sense of national destiny became more pronounced in America during these years, having both political and economic consequences within the country. It also had consequences in relations with America's neighbors. It was celebrated in America not only as rhetoric by newspaper editors but also with the increasing number of pioneers who traveled west to Oregon and California. Yet, expansionism also posed problems. In particular, expansion helped shape the growing political divide between North and South and gave it both fresh issues and a special dynamic. In the South, the extensive promotion of cotton was made possible by the invention of the cotton gin in 1793. The transformation in the South kept cotton factories around the world busy for several decades. The cotton gin helped create a vast market and led to the growth of slavery. While the cotton gin decreased the number of slaves needed to remove seeds, it did not decrease the number of slaves needed to pick the crop. The growing of cotton was so profitable in the South for the plantation owners they looked for more lands and more slaves. Many in the South saw manifest destiny and the expansion into the west and south as the solution to the problem. Expansionism was also intended by some as a way to overcome this north-south divide by developing a contrary west-east alignment. In this way, a prosperous interior was to be linked to the Atlantic region by new transport links, notably canals, river improvements, steamships, railways and telegraphs, as well as by other measures of economic nationalism, including tariffs to protect budding industries and markets, the spread of banking and the acceptance of paper currency.

As the U.S. looked to expand, the Mexican territory of Texas presented an opportunity. President Jackson attempted to bribe Mexican officials into selling Texas, however, these attempts failed. The situation in Texas became tense as, in addition to offering land grants as an

incentive for American emigrants to become naturalized Mexican citizens, the central government of Mexico circulated a series of decrees inhibiting the trade of foreigners. One of these highly restrictive laws, effective in April 1844, forbade foreigners from engaging in the retail trade. However, it contained a clause which exempted those foreigners who were naturalized citizens, those who were married to Mexicans, and those who were residents of Mexico with their families. Needless to say, this did not sit well with the newly transplanted independent-spirited Americans who had migrated into Texas.

In 1835, the Mexican government decided to exercise control over the defiant Texas by putting down a rebellion of Texans. The battle of the Alamo ensued. News of the Texan's loss soon reached the newspapers in the U.S. inspiring Americans to take up the cause of Texas freedom. Langley writes:

By the time most of them got to the fighting, the decisive battle of San Jacinto had been fought, and Sam Houston had extracted surrender from Santa Anna. Santa Anna's surrender was the opening act in a drama for domination of the Gulf Coast, from the Texas-Louisiana border round the Mexican shore, a political battle in which the expansion of statehood and slavery and the European balance of power in North America led to a larger conflict with Mexico.

By 1843, the interests of the U.S. government focused on Britain's Oregon Territory and the Mexican province of California. Controversy over an American presence in Oregon and Texas had helped propel the expansionist Democrat James Polk into the White House. In the mid-1840s, the United States, still recovering from the effects of a disastrous economic depression, also was confronted of the dilemma over slavery and expansion. Many in the country promoted the idea of manifest destiny as the solution of both problems. In the atmosphere charged with political ambition and ideological conviction, the Senate deliberated the merits of territorial expansion. Expansion west appealed especially to Democrats from the North and South, who believed that increasing the size of the frontier preserved and maintained personal freedom. Most immediately, the addition of Texas to the Union promised to extend the area of freedom by spreading American institutions farther into the Southwest. At a deeper level, however, Democrats believed that western expansion was necessary and essential to promote individual freedom and republican government. Personal liberty, they would say, was incompatible with extremes of wealth and poverty and would bring on "those evils so prevalent in other countries." Individual liberty, they concluded, was a function of an expansive republic. They looked to independent settlers as the great and permanent source of the republican spirit which was to maintain and perpetuate free institutions. The party's enthusiasm for the acquisition of new territory, cheap western land prices, and preemption rights spoke to a political agenda of the mid-1840s.

When Mexico rejected President Polk's proposal to buy New Mexico and California, the president used a border dispute at the Rio Grande border to start a war with Mexico. The president deployed troops to California to insure that any chance of it becoming a separate republic was stopped. The Mexican War started with U.S. forces penetrating New Mexico, California and northern Mexico. By 1847, the U.S. strategy included invading the interior of

Mexico. The war was the first foreign war fought by the U.S. The result for Mexico was the loss of half their territory to the U.S. The war also shattered any ideas European powers had of establishing influence in North America. By 1848, revolutions in Europe had shaken the monarchies. News of the events bolstered the Democrats in the United States and their ideas of expansion. The expansionist newspapers editors in the U.S. proclaimed that Republicanism was triumphant in Europe and in North America, bragged that the United States in victory had won a coveted place in the history of civilization and the human race.

By the 1850s, political and economic opportunism led the debate in Washington. The annexation of Cuba became a divisive issue in the government. Politicians from the South were concerned that Spain might abolish slavery in Cuba. This would mean the "Africanization" of the island and the existence of a free labor nation less than a hundred miles from the South. This was unacceptable to the pro-slavery politicians. The U.S. attempted to purchase Cuba from Spain. They sent representatives to Madrid with an offer of \$125 million to buy Cuba. After the Spanish government rejected the offer, the U.S. representatives hatched a plan for the U.S. to annex Cuba if Spain refused to sell. Word of the plan was leaked to the abolitionist press, and ultimately, convinced the northern politicians that the South wanted to expand its slavery. After the attempt to purchase Cuba failed, southern attention shifted to the Isthmus of Panama, where energetic U.S. diplomats as well as forceful U.S. entrepreneurs had already made inroads into what was a British protectorate.

The British presence dated from 1824, when the five Central American states banded themselves into a federation. In the following decade, as U.S. envy of the British grip increased, the federation came apart, mostly from local ill will. But the Central Americans held the British responsible for allegedly encouraged pro-independence groups in Guatemala and Costa Rica. Nicaragua and Honduras particularly resented British encroachment into the Mosquitia, the large lowland area to the east. On the eve of the Mexican War when the United States tried to secure passage across the Panama Isthmus, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras turned to the U.S. for help. In 1846, they negotiated a treaty with the United States that gave America free transit and the opportunity to build transportation links across Panama. Langley writes about the results of the treaty:

In the 1850s, Americans bound for the California gold fields favored the Panama transit, thus enhancing the opportunities for local entrepreneurs. With the development of California came the building of ports that facilitated trade with the Far East and the creation of a new economy in the West financed by the discovery of gold.

Between 1803 and 1853, as a result of the Louisiana Purchase from France, the acquisition of Florida from Spain, the annexation of about half of Mexico and the occupation of the British Oregon territory, the United States extended its territorial claims to encompass all of what is now known as its lower forty-eight. Although force was generally used, in each case the United States was anxious to justify its expansion as a lawful, or at least legitimate, exercise of power under international law. Politicians of all parties were unwilling to limit themselves to the bounds of that law, and therefore throughout the process exceptions were made. Quite consistently, where law obstructed U.S. purposes, the United States exempted itself from its

application claiming, as European colonial powers had claimed for centuries, that rules of civilized warfare did not apply to uncivilized peoples or by invoking the higher good of bringing civilization to new lands and peoples.

Once California joined the Union in 1850, it gave the non-slavery states a majority in the Senate. The minority status of the South in the Union was a key feature of the regional controversy of the 1850s. Minnesota and Oregon followed as non-slavery states in 1858 and 1859 respectively. A sense of being challenged caused the Southern states to threaten secession several times in the 1850s, before they finally seceded from the Union in 1860-61. The southern politicians believed that the alternative to secession was to make the Union safe for the South and slavery in part by acquiring more slave states through expansion. The national debate led first to pressure on the Whig Party, as with the rise of Libertyites and the Free Soil Party and its subsequent demise in the aftermath of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. The Act created new territories, opening new land for settlement and allowing slavery to be decided by local elections. Pro-slavery and non-slavery settlers rushed into the new territories attempting to influence the outcome of the votes of slavery. The Act encouraged a realignment of political parties and voter loyalties. One of the results of the political realignment was the collapse of the Whig Party. While the Democratic Party survived, many northern Democrats joined the "Free Soilers Coalition" and the new Republican Party. Pro-slavery Democrats aligned with the Southern Democratic Party. The election of Lincoln in 1860 who was a man almost unknown reflected the refashioning of politics by the slave issue. The rise of the Republicans as a Northern sectional party focused on the restriction of slavery and on the continued expansion.

Conclusion

The concept of manifest destiny, born out of the American Revolution, was actively carried out by the United States from the end of the War of 1812 until the beginning of the Civil War in 1861. Expansionism created a new and powerful nation that encompassed land from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans, often at the expense of U.S. neighbors such as Mexico and the Indian people. Manifest destiny and expansion to the West fostered an independent and free-spirited attitude among the settlers. This expansion and the question of slavery in the new lands altered the political and economic dynamic. By the elections of 1854, Whig and Democratic Parties had lost their trust of the people and a new political party was formed that not only opposed slavery but demanded that the West be opened up for homesteaders and for the building of railroads. The new Republican Party believed that all men should be free to make a good life through his own efforts. In the 1860 election, the Republican Party offered Abraham Lincoln as a candidate for President. Manifest destiny had changed the political and economic ideologies of the United States prior to the Civil War. Elected President, Lincoln abolished slavery and fought the Civil War. With the end of the war, America's era of manifest destiny and expansion had come to an end but the political and economic ideological changes it created continue to affect the United States.

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