Was It Destiny to Move West?

Supporting Questions

1. What factors influenced westward expansion?
2. What new technologies influenced westward expansion?
3. What conflicts arose from westward expansion?
7th Grade Westward Migration Inquiry

**Was It Destiny to Move West?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New York State Social Studies Framework Key Idea &amp; Practices</th>
<th>7.6 WESTWARD EXPANSION: Driven by political and economic motives, the United States expanded its physical boundaries to the Pacific Ocean between 1800 and 1860. This settlement displaced Native Americans as the frontier was pushed westward.</th>
<th>Gathering, Using, and Interpreting Evidence</th>
<th>Geographic Reasoning</th>
<th>Economics and Economic Systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staging the Question</td>
<td>Discuss actions students have taken that resulted in a moral conflict.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Supporting Question 1**

**Formative Performance Task**

List the factors that influenced westward expansion.

**Featured Sources**

- **Source A:** 1836 protest song
- **Source B:** Image bank: 19th-century population
- **Source C:** Excerpts from “The Great Nation of Futurity”
- **Source D:** Map of United States territorial acquisitions
- **Source E:** Excerpts from James K. Polk’s Fourth Annual Message
- **Source F:** Image bank: The California gold rush
- **Source G:** Excerpt from the Homestead Act of 1862

**Supporting Question 2**

**Formative Performance Task**

Create an annotated illustration (e.g., comic strip, political cartoon, timeline) that depicts technological forces that influenced westward expansion.

**Featured Sources**

- **Source A:** Image bank: Maps of the Erie Canal routes
- **Source B:** Chart comparing travel by dirt road and canal
- **Source C:** Excerpts from Digging Clinton’s Ditch
- **Source D:** Image bank: Technologies of the mid-19th century
- **Source E:** Maps showing changing rates of travel in the United States, 1800–1857

**Supporting Question 3**

**Formative Performance Task**

Make a claim supported by evidence about the conflicts that arose from westward expansion.

**Featured Sources**

- **Source A:** Timeline of European and US conflicts with Native Americans
- **Source B:** Map showing military engagements in the Mexican-American War

**Summative Performance Task**

**ARGUMENT** Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from historical sources while acknowledging competing views.

**EXTENSION** Create a video documentary about whether or not westward expansion was destined and/or justified.

**Taking Informed Action**

**UNDERSTAND** Investigate a contemporary issue in which the United States may be benefiting from something that could be considered controversial (e.g., drilling for oil in Alaska, carbon pollution, cheap labor in emerging nations).

**ASSESS** Evaluate competing perspectives and evidence supporting each of these views.

**ACT** Share and discuss findings in a school-wide forum to which parents and other interested community members are invited.
Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry prompts students to investigate the factors, conditions, and conflicts related to westward expansion in the United States before the Civil War. In the inquiry, students wrestle with various economic, geographic, and social ideas as they consider the value of the push westward. The compelling question “Was it destiny to move west?” prompts students to think about the historical justification for white Americans moving west in light of what we now understand as the problems associated with that expansion. In doing so, students explore the economic, geographic, and social conditions as well as ways new technologies contributed to westward expansion. Students also examine conflicts that arose as whites encountered Native peoples as well as the conflicts with Mexico over western lands.

In addition to the Key Idea listed earlier, this inquiry highlights the following Conceptual Understanding:

• (7.6a) Conflict and compromise with foreign nations occurred regarding the physical expansion of the United States during the 19th century. American values and beliefs, such as Manifest Destiny, and the need for resources increased westward expansion and settlement.

NOTE: This inquiry is expected to take four to six 40-minute class periods. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (i.e., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources). Inquiries are not scripts, so teachers are encouraged to modify and adapt them to meet the needs and interests of their particular students. Resources can also be modified as necessary to meet individualized education programs (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans for students with disabilities.

Structure of the Inquiry

In order to address the compelling question “Was it destiny to move west?” students work through a series of supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources in order to construct an argument with evidence and counterevidence from a variety of sources.

Staging the Compelling Question

To stage the compelling question “Was it destiny to move west?” students should reflect on an action they have taken from which they benefited at the expense of another individual or group. Teachers may support students by providing examples (e.g., getting extra playing time on a sports team, going on a trip with one friend instead of another). Teachers may also consider having students discuss benefits, drawbacks, and practical limitations to putting someone else’s interests above their own.
Supporting Question 1

The first supporting question—“What factors influenced westward expansion?”—asks students to consider the economic, geographic, and social factors that influenced westward expansion. In the formative performance task, students list the factors that prompted whites to move westward. The first two featured sources focus on push factors, such as poor working conditions and the rapidly growing and increasingly crowded population centers in the eastern part of the United States. The additional featured sources focus on pull factors in the West, including the promise of cheap land in Oregon, the California gold rush, and the Homestead Act of 1862. Included among these featured sources is a map that depicts land acquisitions in the United States from 1783 to 1853.

Supporting Question 2

The second supporting question—“What new technologies influenced westward expansion?”—asks about the role of technology in encouraging and supporting westward movement. In the formative performance task, students create an annotated illustration that depicts the influence of these new technologies. The first three featured sources present information related to the Erie Canal. The other featured sources focus on an assortment of new technologies, such as the steamboat, railroad, and telegraph, all of which helped improve transportation and communication to and from the West.

Supporting Question 3

The third supporting question—“What conflicts arose from westward expansion?”—turns to the unrest that emerged between the United States and inhabitants of western lands during the antebellum period. The formative performance task asks students to make a claim supported by evidence about the conflicts that arose as whites moved westward. The first source is a timeline of European and United States conflicts with Native Americans. The second source is a map depicting the Mexican War with the United States.

Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined many influences on American expansion westward and made a claim about the resulting conflicts. Students should be able to demonstrate their understandings of this relationship and use evidence from multiple sources to support their claims. In this task, students construct an evidence-based argument responding to the compelling question “Was it destiny to move west?” It is important to note that students’ arguments could take a variety of forms, including a detailed outline, poster, or essay.
Students’ arguments are likely to vary but could include any of the following:

- Given the advantages of natural geography as well as the social and economic forces of the time, it was likely that the United States would expand westward.
- The contributions of individuals, governmental policies, and new technologies made American expansion possible, if not inevitable.
- The idea that American expansion west was destined is offensive to the Mexican and Native American inhabitants who lived there.

As an extension activity, students could adapt their arguments by creating video documentaries about whether or not westward expansion was justified. In preparing the documentaries, students could make use of the featured sources included in the inquiry as evidence for the perspectives they advance. Teachers may modify the extension by having students write transcripts instead of actually creating documentaries.

Students have the opportunity to Take Informed Action by applying the historical lessons and skills developed throughout the inquiry to a contemporary issue. To demonstrate that they understand, students explore a contemporary issue in which the United States may benefit at the expense of another nation or group of people (e.g., drilling for oil in Alaska, carbon pollution, cheap labor in emerging nations). To demonstrate their capacity to assess, students evaluate competing perspectives and evidence supporting views on both sides. To demonstrate their ability to act, students share and discuss their findings in a school-wide forum to which parents and other interested community members are invited.
Supporting Question 1

| Featured Source | Source A: Unknown author, protest song sung by mill workers, Lowell, Massachusetts, 1836 |

1836 Lyrics Sung by Protesting Workers at Lowell

Oh! Isn't it a pity, such a pretty girl as I,
Should be sent to the factory to pine away and die?
Oh! I cannot be a slave, I will not be a slave,
For I'm so fond of liberty,
That I cannot be a slave.

Supporting Question 1

**Featured Source**

**Source B:** Image bank: Maps and table showing 19th-century population and population density

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**Image 1:** United States Population Density, 1820.
Courtesy of Dr. Gayle Olson-Raymer, Humboldt State University.

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**Image 2:** United States Population Density, 1860.
Courtesy of Dr. Gayle Olson-Raymer, Humboldt State University.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>decade</th>
<th>population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>3,893,635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>5,308,483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>7,239,881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>9,638,453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>12,866,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>17,069,453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>23,191,867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>31,443,321</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NOTE: The excerpts here are from an article by newspaper columnist John O'Sullivan, who is credited with coining the term “Manifest Destiny.” Although he did not use the term in the article, the basic ideas informing O'Sullivan's notion of Manifest Destiny are described.

The American people having derived their origin from many other nations, and the Declaration of National Independence being entirely based on the great principle of human equality, these facts demonstrate at once our disconnected position as regards any other nation…we may confidently assume that our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity....

The expansive future is our arena, and for our history. We are entering on its untrodden space, with the truths of God in our minds, beneficent objects in our hearts, and with a clear conscience unsullied by the past. We are the nation of human progress, and who will, what can, set limits to our onward march? Providence is with us, and no earthly power can....

All this will be our future history, to establish on earth the moral dignity and salvation of man —the immutable truth and beneficence of God. For this blessed mission to the nations of the world, which are shut out from the life-giving light of truth, has America been chosen; . Who, then, can doubt that our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity?

From "The Great Nation of Futurity," The United States Democratic Review 6, no. 23 (1839): 426–430. Public domain. The complete article can be found online at the Making of America website, Cornell University Library: http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/moa/moa-cgi?notisid=AGD1642-0006-46.
Supporting Question 1

**Featured Source**

**Source D:** Map of United States territorial acquisitions from 1783 to the present, no date

Territorial acquisitions of the United States from 1783 to the present.
Supporting Question 1

| Featured Source | Source E: James K. Polk, speech that announced the discovery of gold in California, “Fourth Annual Message” (excerpts), December 5, 1848 |

It was known that mines of the precious metals existed to a considerable extent in California at the time of its acquisition. Recent discoveries render it probable that these mines are more extensive and valuable than was anticipated. The accounts of the abundance of gold in that territory are of such an extraordinary character as would scarcely command belief were they not corroborated by the authentic reports of officers in the public service who have visited the mineral district and derived the facts which they detail from personal observation....

The effects produced by the discovery of these rich mineral deposits and the success which has attended the labors of those who have resorted to them have produced a surprising change in the state of affairs in California. Labor commands a most exorbitant price, and all other pursuits but that of searching for the precious metals are abandoned. Nearly the whole of the male population of the country have gone to the gold districts. Ships arriving on the coast are deserted by their crews and their voyages suspended for want of sailors. Our commanding officer there entertains apprehensions that soldiers cannot be kept in the public service without a large increase of pay. Desertions in his command have become frequent, and he recommends that those who shall withstand the strong temptation and remain faithful should be rewarded.

This abundance of gold and the all-engrossing pursuit of it have already caused in California an unprecedented rise in the price of all the necessaries of life.

That we may the more speedily and fully avail ourselves of the undeveloped wealth of these mines, it is deemed of vast importance that a branch of the Mint of the United States be authorized to be established at your present session in California....

The vast importance and commercial advantages of California have heretofore remained undeveloped by the Government of the country of which it constituted a part. Now that this fine province is a part of our country, all the States of the Union, some more immediately and directly than others, are deeply interested in the speedy development of its wealth and resources. No section of our country is more interested or will be more benefited than the commercial, navigating, and manufacturing interests of the Eastern States. Our planting and farming interests in every part of the Union will be greatly benefited by it. As our commerce and navigation are enlarged and extended, our exports of agricultural products and of manufactures will be increased, and in the new markets thus opened they can not fail to command remunerating and profitable prices.

Supporting Question 1

**Featured Source**

**Source F:** Image bank: The California gold rush

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**Image 1:** Artist unknown, advertisement for traveling to California by clipper ship, c1840s.  
[http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf1r29p10v/?layout=metadata](http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf1r29p10v/?layout=metadata).
AN ACT to secure homesteads to actual settlers on the public domain. Be it enacted, That any person who is the head of a family, or who has arrived at the age of twenty-one years, and is a citizen of the United States, or who shall have filed his declaration of intention to become such, as required by the naturalization laws of the United States, and who has never borne arms against the United States Government or given aid and comfort to its enemies, shall, from and after the first of January, eighteen hundred and sixty-three, be entitled to enter one quarter-section or a less quantity of unappropriated public lands, upon which said person may have filed a pre-emption claim....Provided, that any person owning or residing on land may, under the provision of the act, enter other land lying contiguous to his or her said land, which shall not, with the land already owned and occupied, exceed in the aggregate one hundred and sixty acres.

http://www.smithsoniansource.org/content/dbqs/westwardexpansion/impact_westward_expansion.pdf.
Supporting Question 2

**Featured Source**

**Source A:** Image bank: Maps of the Erie Canal routes

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Image 1: Map of the Erie Canal routes.

Public Domain. New York State Archives.

The Erie Canal provided businesses and consumers with time and cost savings when shipping goods. The chart below compares shipping costs by dirt road to shipping by canal in the 19th Century.

### Travel During the Erie Canal Era

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Dirt Road (freight)</th>
<th>Canal (freight)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Wagon 8 Horses</td>
<td>Line Boat 2 Mules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of Time</td>
<td>15-45 Days</td>
<td>9 Days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>$100/Ton</td>
<td>$6/Ton</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The size, shape and nature of the United States, as it now exists, is due largely to the political, social and economic landscape of the first half of the nineteenth century. In what was, for many reasons, the most important period in the nation's history, the construction of the Erie Canal ranks at the top of the list, along with the Louisiana Purchase, of the most significant events of the antebellum period, impacting westward expansion, and in turn, the development of the nation. The canal also had other important, if unintended, consequences for the country, including promoting nationalism and helping to preserve the Union, which further affirm its value to the nation.

As towns emerged along the Erie Canal, bringing business, agriculture and industry to the previously unsettled western New York, the canal helped New York City establish its trade position and develop into the world’s dominant commercial center. Additionally, the canal brought people and products west and provided the fertile land of the Old Northwest (what is now considered the Midwest) a burgeoning market for its produce. The emigration from New England and the northeast and the development of America’s breadbasket was at least as important to achieving Manifest Destiny as any other expansion era movement. The economic value of the canal is immeasurable, extending beyond its significance to the state and allowing the United States to compete in world markets. Finally, an often-overlooked achievement of the Erie Canal, and one with enormous national significance, is the role it played establishing a bond between the east and the west and its impact on the preservation of the Union. The Erie Canal's impact when measured in the context of the national expansion that occurred directly prior to the Civil War serves to vindicate the assertion that construction of the canal was an act of nationalism in every way.

Reprinted with permission from the American Studies Programs at the University of Virginia, author Paul Volpe, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma02/volpe/canal/firstpage.html.
Image 2: Photographer unknown, photograph of a steamship, *Robert Fulton’s Clermont, the First Steamboat, on the Hudson*, c1909. NOTE: This photograph is likely of a replica of the *Clermont*.


Image 4. James Lloyd, map of travel and communication lines, Lloyd’s Railroad, Telegraph, and Express Map of the United States, 1867.

Supporting Question 2

**Featured Source**


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1715–1717: The Yamasee War was a series of violent conflicts between American colonists and a Native American confederation centered in South Carolina. The conflicts led to disruption of many Native American alliances and migration and loss of land for several groups, including the Yamasee and Apalachicola.

1754–1763: The French and Indian War was a conflict between the British and French in North America that involved Native Americans in the Haudenosaunee Confederation. The Haudenosaunee sided with the victorious British in the conflict. While the defeat of the French allowed Native Americans and the Haudenosaunee to consolidate their power, it also created new hostilities with the British over settlement and land borders.

1763–1766: Pontiac's War was an unsuccessful effort led by Ottawa leader Pontiac and a loose confederation of Native American groups to drive British soldiers and settlers out of the Ohio River Valley after the French and Indian War. The "Devil’s Hole Massacre" of 72 British soldiers on a supply train by Senecas, Ojibwas and Ottawas near Fort Niagara was one notable success. The conflict is often remembered for the smallpox-infested blankets British officers gave to Native Americans at Fort Pitt in hopes that the disease would spread and decimate the Native American populations.

1811–1813: Tecumseh’s War was a conflict between the United States and a Native American confederacy led by Shawnee chief Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa (known as "The Prophet) in the Northwest Territory. American troops led by future president William Henry Harrison attacked and destroyed the native settlement at Prophetstown in what is known as the Battle of Tippecanoe. As a result, the confederation led by Tecumseh allied with the British and Canada during the War of 1812.

1813–1814: The Creek War, also known as the Red Stick War, was a conflict among different factions of the Creek Nation and US and European powers. Led by future president Andrew Jackson, US troops defeated a faction of Creek warriors, which led to the disputed August 8, 1814, Treaty of Fort Jackson, where the Creek Nation ceded 21,086,793 acres in Georgia and Alabama.

1817–1818: The First Seminole War began after General Andrew Jackson led troops into then Spanish-owned Florida in an attempt to recapture runaway slaves. Jackson and his troops burned and seized towns along the way. The war was instrumental in Spain’s decision to cede Florida to the United States in 1819.

1832: The Black Hawk War occurred in northern Illinois and southwestern Wisconsin. The Sauk and Fox tribes were led by Chief Black Hawk in an attempt to retake their homeland. Native American groups in the area lost millions of acres of land as a result.

1835–1842: In the Second Seminole War, the Seminoles under Chief Osceola resumed fighting for their land in Florida. Over many years, the Seminoles defended their territory but were ultimately defeated and lost most of their land. While most Seminoles were forced to move west to Indian Territory, a small number remained in Florida, where their ancestors still live today.

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Created for the New York State K–12 Social Studies Toolkit by Binghamton University, 2015.
Supporting Question 3

**Featured Source**

**Source B**: Map of military activities during the Mexican-American War, 1846–1848, 2012

Map of the Mexican War, 1846–1848

Created by Kaldor, 2012. Reprinted under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

[Map Link](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mexican%E2%80%93American_War_(without_Scott%E2%80%99s_Campaign)-en.svg)