

<p>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.</p> <p>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.”</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The editor of the <i>United States Magazine and Democratic Review</i> 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</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
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<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>“He said that the Big Black Bird Hawk was the man to lead</p>	<p>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 <i>Native American Testimony</i></p> <p>The story convinced Black Hawk to lead a rebellion against the United States.</p> <p>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.</p>
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<p>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.</p> <p>“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.”</p> <p>—Amelia S. Knight, quoted in <i>Covered Wagon Women</i></p> <p>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.</p> <p>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</p>	<p>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.”</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
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<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>“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.”</p> <p>—Catherine Haun, quoted in <i>Frontier Women</i></p> <p>By 1844, about 5,000 American settlers had arrived in Oregon and were farming its green and fertile Willamette Valley.</p>
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