

The Impact of Manifest Destiny on American Foreign Policy

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Published: 16 May 2019

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Abstract:

As the cornerstone of American values, Manifest Destiny has influenced this country in various fields. The thesis is aimed at analyzing the impact of Manifest Destiny on American Foreign Policy.

Key Words: Manifest Destiny, Impact, American Foreign policy

I. Introduction

Manifest Destiny is a political and philosophical belief that it is America's divinely assigned mission to expand westward, across the North American continent and to establish democratic and protestant ideals in the world. It is not only the intangible ideology that has created American history, but also the root of American foreign relations. Manifest Destiny has decided the general direction of American foreign policy as a fundamental theory. Its great impact in this field can be reflected by a series of principles and actions through the whole American history.

II. Brief Account of Manifest Destiny

A. Origin

In July 1845, an influential editor of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* which featured literature and nationalist opinion, John L. O' Sullivan, wrote a newspaper editorial about the annexation of Texas, in which he denounced "...the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federative development of self-government entrusted to us. It is right such as

Cite this article: Fei, X. (2019). The Impact of Manifest Destiny on American Foreign Policy. *International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science*, 7(4), 33-42.

that of the tree to the space of air and the earth suitable for the full expansion of its principle and destiny of growth"(Brinkley352). This was probably the first use of the phrase "Manifest Destiny", but the ideas implied in the term were current long before 1845. In 1811, John Quincy Adams, the 6th president of America had ever voiced the statement as follow--- "The whole continent of North America appears to be destined by Divine Providence to be peopled by one nation, speaking one language, professing one general system of religious and political principles, and accustomed to one general tenor of social usages and customs"(Divine 81). Indeed, the roots of the concept could be traced to colonial period and even earlier who professed the belief that the supplanting of the pagan practices of native people in the west was no less than an ordination from God.

Since then, the phrase "Manifest Destiny" became a rallying cry throughout America. It was publicized in the papers swiftly and was advertised and argued by politicians enthusiastically. It was even picked up by the expansionists in all political parties, especially the Republican Party to justify the purchase of Alaska, annexation of Hawaii, and entry into the Spanish-American, etc. Finally, this unique American idea became the torch that lit the way of this country's development.

B. Essence

At the very beginning, Manifest Destiny was the name given to an "upsurge of emotion" that began in the 1820' s and crested in the 1844 campaigns, a crusade involving expansion, slavery trade, politics, religion, etc. It was just used as justification for America's territorial expansion. However, this concept had acquired a variety of meanings over the years, and the inherent ambiguity had been part of its power, because it could mean almost whatever someone wanted it to mean. It was readily used by anyone. In the generic political sense, it usually referred to the idea that American government was destined to establish uninterrupted political authority across the entire North American continent, from one country to another, and to save those savage nations around the world. Thus, it became a seemly democratic slogan advocated by radical politicians, and led the draft of American foreign policy in the next following years.

C. Influence

The popularity of America's missionary was the most significant influence brought by Manifest Destiny. No matter the prominent or the ordinary, all of them hosted a thought that America was the country chosen by God, who had a special response to the development and destiny of human beings. They believed that American people enjoyed a natural superiority, and America was destined to be a great country, both politically and geographically. So, the American experiment in democratic government and capitalism would provide the best possible life for men and women, and be a model for other nations. As the United States assumed greater status as a power in world politics, Americans came to believe that the nation's action on the world stage should be guided by its own political and moral principles. As Harry Truman stated "The United States should take the lead in running the world in the way that it ought to be run"(Bardes, Shelley, and Steffen W Schmidt482). All of this made the whole country take the aggressively outward expansion as granted, which laid a foundation for the current principles existing in American foreign policy.

III. Analysis of the Impact of Manifest Destiny on American Foreign Policy

A. British-American War-Westward Movement

1. The Formulation of Manifest Destiny

With the establishment of the young country, the protestant spirit, which insisted that the Anglo-Saxon had the mission to spread the Christianity and conquer the uncultured civilizations, also settled down on this land. The fathers of America were affected greatly. For example, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, etc, these influential American leaders had claimed that America was destined to overspread the whole northern part of the West sphere. At the same time, the pressure from the population increase due to high birth rate and immigration which demanded new territories to accommodate, and the two economic depressions also asked for a changeover. All of this finally promoted the unique American ideology originally and officially shaped in the course of Westward Movement, which made Americans distinguishing from Europeans. It became the first spirit banner of this country, but still with mundane and religious veil.

2. The Monroe Doctrine and Territorial Expansion

Under this condition, the whole country, from the big shots to the common people, asked for new lands eagerly, and they took the crazy gaining of territories as granted because of the divine mission in Manifest Destiny. With the pressure from all classes in the domestic, American government immediately made reaction, carrying out a series of actions. Form this, the most important theory in this period, Monroe Doctrine, the milestone of the US territory expansion, shaped.

On December 2nd 1823, President James Monroe made a statement of the United States policy on the activities and rights of European powers in the Western Hemisphere in his 7th annual address to the congress. He set forth the principles as follow:

The western hemisphere was no longer open for colonization.

The political system of the Americans was different from that of Europeans.

The United States would regard any interference in western hemisphere as a threat to its security.

The United States refrained from participation in European wars and would not disturb existing colonies in the west hemisphere (Cunningham25).

Initially, it was remained only a declaration of policy, for it was not supported by congressional legislation or affirmed in international laws. But its increasing use and popularity elevated it to a principle, specifically turned it to be the Monroe Doctrine after the mid 1840s and inevitably became one of the foundations of the United States policy in Latin America. As the significant component of America's foreign policy, the Monroe Doctrine had considerable effect and had strong support and impact in the United States, because it had promoted the United States interests greatly, but also served other American nations too, particularly because it asserted their right to independence. As the doctrine originally formulated made no clear distinction between the interests of the United States and those of the US neighbors, however, the US had used it to justify the intervention in the internal affairs of other American nations (Cunningham117). So, this doctrine looked like positive to hen independence campaign in Latin America, but essentially, it paved the way for the United States territorial expansion in the field of theories with its resounding slogan "America was American's America".

Holding this idea and enjoying the public's unanimous support, America began to carry out territorial expansion crazily, by settlement, negotiation and conquest. And the best example was the American-Mexico War. In 1845, The American annexation of Texas whose independence the Mexican had never fully accepted irritated Mexico, made the war with Mexico inevitable. When the Mexicans refused to meet with a US envoy sent to negotiate a settlement of outstanding issues, President Polk ordered American forces to maneuver close to the Mexican border in disputed territory. The Mexicans attacked American troops along the southern borders of Texas on April 25th, 1846, and the well-known Mexican-American War was on. Surprisingly, the War received enthusiastic support in all sections of the United States. In consequence of it, America achieved great triumph. The treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, approved by the US Senate on March 10th, 1848 and rectified by Mexico Congress on March 25th resulted Mexico's cession of California and New Mexico (including all the present-day states of the Southwest). And its recognition of US sovereignty over all Texas north of the Rio Grande also formalized the addition of 3.1 million square kilometers of territory (including Nevada, Utah, Western Colorado, etc.) to the United States, as a return, the United States agreed to pay just only 15 million. Five years later, the US paid Mexico \$10 million for strip of land in southern Arizona according to a negotiated agreement. And then little by little, the United States successfully gained almost 55% of Mexico's whole territories at last (Bauer175).

During this period, the territories of the United States increased by 10 times, from about 8.9 million square kilometers to over 35 million square kilometers. Besides the expansion in the America, especially Mexico, the United States also purchased land from European colonists, ravished the native Indians' glebe, etc, and finally formalized the present-day borders.

So, it was extremely obvious that territorial expansion, the focus of Manifest Destiny at that moment, fully occupied people's minds and led the government's actions. It were these cultural background and ideological impact reasons that American government had to meet the public's desire and set related foreign policies, and those policies which looked like aggressive and inhumane in other countries' eyes could gained great acceptance and support in the domestic.

B. Civil War-World War I

1. The Combination of Frontier Theory with Manifest Destiny

At the end of the 19th century, American economy developed rapidly, but in this country, there were no more space to posit the surplus labor force. As a result, the class conflicts sharpened greatly. Policymakers like Presidents William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, as well as scholars like Capt. Alfred Mahan, began to warn about the future of the United States, especially its capitalism, one of the basic systems. For capitalism to survive, they argued, it must expand and the new land was needed urgently. At this moment, Frederick Jackson Turner, an American historian and professor, teaching at Harvard, read a paper, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, at the meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago, July 12. 1893. It was the origin of the famous Frontier Theory, which based on the economic power represented by free land. After studying American history, Turner came to the conclusion that the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession,

and the advance of American settlement westward, explained American development (1). From the very beginning, this theory received widespread recognition in America's historic circle and gained the rulers' great favor. It made the borders of the United States floating, which could be promoted to anywhere in the world. Also, this theory made itself combined with Manifest Destiny, in consequence of it, the somewhat religious Manifest Destiny became much more theorized, and occupied the status of America's main culture firmly.

2. The Open-door policy and the Roosevelt Corollary

In order to meet the new situation, namely, the demands of the overseas expansion put forward in manifest Destiny, another important policy, the Open-door Policy, came into birth. At first, it only hinged on the principle of equal commercial opportunity for all Asian markets, especially for China at the end of the 19th century. For at that moment, the major European powers had obtained control of important areas of China, and it appeared that the country would soon be divided into spheres of influence into which other trading nations would have no access. The United States could not accept this situation for it had become an East Asian power through the acquisition of the Philippine Islands and it desired access to China for trading purposes. Accordingly, the U.S. government strove to preserve equal industrial and commercial privileges. In 1899 and 1900 U.S. Secretary of State John Milton Hay negotiated an agreement with Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Italy, and Japan that guaranteed "equal and impartial trade with all parts of the Chinese Empire" and preservation of "Chinese territorial and administrative" integrity (Bau 113).

But once the United States achieved a secure trading position throughout the world, it extended the open-door principle everywhere relying on its increasing power, and this term also referred to the policies of equal trading rights in other countries. The principle framed an ideology for the progressive foreign-policy elite, and for decades the Open-door Policy was central to U.S. ascendancy in world affair, leading and determining many important events in the history. It was the cornerstone that America began to exercise the independent police power. Based on it, with carrot and stick policy, America achieved great economic interests and important strategic advantages.

At the same time, the Roosevelt Corollary, a significant theory in American history after the Monroe Doctrine, appeared to follow the trend. President Theodore Roosevelt in his second term declared that the United States would exercise "international police power" to get Latin American nations to honor their financial commitments. As part of his annual address to Congress in 1904, President Roosevelt stated that in keeping with the Monroe Doctrine the United States was justified in exercising "international police power" to put an end to chronic unrest or wrongdoing in the Western Hemisphere. This came to be called the Roosevelt Corollary. Although, the Monroe Doctrine's purpose had been to prevent intervention in the internal affairs of Latin American countries, the Roosevelt Corollary sought to justify such intervention throughout the Western Hemisphere whenever the American government thought it was necessary, which made American foreign policy enjoy much more flexibility.

At this moment, people, especially the capitalists began to realize the so-called "economic determination" that for a vigorous capitalistic system, it became essential to find foreign markets for industrial as well as agricultural goods, then to compete for those markets and, once in, to fight to

maintain a foothold and to improve it. This consensus on the necessity to reinvigorate the American business presence abroad came to have enormous consequences for the conduct not only of business but also of government. The federal government began to give more active assistance to Americans exporting or investing abroad. Most importantly, "The extension of government regulatory power at the turn of the twentieth century was also justified as being compatible with a liberal order, protecting the marketplace from unscrupulous operators and monopolistic practices," such as had developed at home and were developing abroad. European practices involved restrictions into markets as well as spheres of influence. Thus government assistance and participation would help remove some impediments. And all of this made the United States began to focus on the overseas expansion, and the Monroe Doctrine was promoted to the Pacific Ocean area from only the America.

One of the most representative examples of this change was the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898, which was the first large-scale invasion abroad of America. War fires stoked by "jingo journalism" as American people supported Cuban rebels against Spain. But indeed, the primary reason was that American business saw economic gain in Cuban trade and resources and American power zones in Latin America (W.E. Woodward 286), and policymakers met their demands timely. And the President Theodore Roosevelt also promoted the war for strategic considerations — American government wished to see European influence eliminated from the Caribbean islands- and by the conviction that "superior" nations had the right and duty to dominate "inferior" ones in the interest of civilization. In the end, the United States defeated Spain easily and its goals were overwhelmingly achieved. It gained control over the former colonies of Spain in the Caribbean and Pacific, such as Cuba, Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico, etc. Meanwhile, America occupied Hawaiian Islands, enhancing its power in the Pacific, and strengthened the control on Latin America by continuously intervening in affairs of countries there. The United States also got the permission of construction of the Panama Canal in Caribbean, and in Asia, shipping routes and military facilities were established. And the United States finally became an international player in this period.

All of these actions and policies only indicated one thing that overseas expansion had become the center goal when American government dealt with the foreign relations in this period, which was accorded to the change of Manifest Destiny's emphases and also indicated that Manifest Destiny led the draft of policies. This again proved the impact of Manifest Destiny on America's foreign policy.

C. World War I-the Cold War

1. The Combination of the Sea Power Theory and Social Darwinism with Manifest Destiny

With the pace of overall development in various countries, the political structure and the national power comparison through the world changed greatly, and the traditional values also took place some variations. Under this condition, Manifest Destiny perfected itself promptly. It absorbed many latest and pragmatic theories, while the Sea Power theory and Social Darwinism were the two ones that did great impact on its amendment.

The theory of Sea Power emphasizing that naval power was the key to success in international politics, the nation that controlled the seas held the decisive factor in modern warfare was put forward by

Alfred Thayer Mahan, an US navy officer and historian, in his two major works — *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* and *The Influence of Sea Power upon French Revolution and Empire*, which affected Americans, especially the big shots, such as Theodore Roosevelt deeply. It also pointed that domestic goods, sea transportation and colonies were three crucial links of enjoying sea power (Hubbard 37), which not only provided theoretic analyses, but also offered a functional way for America's overseas expansion. The theory of Sea power met the mass' desire and enjoyed great popularity, so naturally it turned to be a part of Manifest Destiny.

While Herbert Spencer introduced “adaptation” and “survival of the fittest” social thought and created Social Darwinism (438), a fierce shock to people around this country was brought out. Americans thought since nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America were not the fittest to survive, and then they could colonize these places, which would not violate their principles. Therefore, Social Darwinism immediately combined with the viewpoint of “White Man's Burden” in manifest Destiny, which further provided for America's expansion and made the whole country believe that there were the right ones in the world.

All of this made Manifest Destiny present a totally new look, full with vigor, and enjoy greater popularities.

2. The Carrot and Stick Policy and the Outside Expansion Theory

In order to meet the times' demands, Manifest Destiny amended itself again and in this period, the new Manifest Destiny completely reshaped. It was promoted primarily by industrial interests and its goal acquisitions turned to the new lands for settlement and farming, markets for surplus goods and access to coaling stations and bases for navy and merchant ships, but not the traditional territories and raw materials. The new one also encouraged America's expansion to spread to the outside of North America. And simultaneously, the patriotic and nationalist concerns replacing the sectional concerns influenced this ideology much more greatly, especially after the outbreak of the world wars. Their focuses on the economic motives to a large extent encouraged and rationalized American Imperialism. The new Manifest Destiny advocated America's progress and power were the result of the natural selection, and insisted that expansion was the destiny in the course of America's development, which made the original missionary partly turn to be the outside expansion theory, and greatly promoted America to start its global expansion.

When American people accepted this notion that the outside expansion was also one of their missions, everything became easy. The whole country readjusted its highlights again, and global expansion had occupied their minds. Having settled this goal, America began to put it into action. It made a good use of the opportunities during the wars, accumulating wealth and enforcing strength crazily. It used the famous Carrot and Stick policy and the warfare alternatively in the worldwide to enlarge the power sphere and gain political, economic and military interests, which made America become the only one among the powers to benefit from the wars. And by the end of the World War Two, America had become the No.1 throughout the world. Its hegemonic strategies of global expansion had originally shaped which influenced this country even the world greatly.

Here, the public's voice played a crucial role again. American people who were affected by Manifest Destiny deeply took this idea's demands as granted, and at the same time, considered that to finish the task arose by Manifest Destiny was their principle. It was this mind which enjoyed great popularity that guided this nation's life. And the draft of the latest foreign policies to cater to the desire was just one of its aspects. The great impact of Manifest Destiny was reflected once more.

D. After the Cold War

1 The Combination of the Theory of the Stability of a Unipolar World with Manifest Destiny

The collapse of the Soviet Union produced the greatest change in world power relationships since World War Two. With Moscow's headlong fall from superpower status, the bipolar structure that had shaped the security policies of the major powers nearly half a century vanished, and the world situation endured great shaking. The old theories could not meet the new demand, and at this moment, Manifest Destiny firmly grazed critical point again.

William C. Wohlforth, the assistant professor of international relations in the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, put forward a new viewpoint, *The Stability of a Unipolar World*. He pointed that United States emerged as the sole surviving superpowers, and it was the time for the "Unipolar Moment" (Krauthammer 23). People in this country were quick to recognize that a new era of unprecedented U.S. power had arrived and they thought the right vacuum left by the Soviet Unions could only be filled by the United States. As a result, everybody became excited and ambitious for the bright future. At the same time, considering the potential danger from the actions of other nations which threatened America's predominance, the U.S. government did a lot of efforts to consolidate its status, but all of this was explained as the high-sounding reasons, to protect the nation's interests, and made Manifest Destiny much nobler. In consequence of it, the mass quickly accepted it and took it as granted once more. And right now, Manifest Destiny nearly had met the desire of every class and enjoyed overwhelming recognition. Its influence in this country climbed to the apex.

2. The Strategy of "World Order" and "Participation and Expansion"

The new situation in the post-cold war put forward great challenges. After the wars, although the specific details of America's global strategies modified several times, the essence idea always insisted that America should use all the ways, no matter the political, economic, diplomatic or the military ones, to keep its leadership, maintain America's global interests and extend democratic system, free trade and the market economic system. In a word, this country must graze and confirm its hegemony in the world, and every policy should serve for this final goal. Meanwhile, ironically, Americans gave their actions a noble reason, to keep the world peace and protect the democracy and the human rights.

Naturally, in these decades, America's foreign actions became extremely active. On March 6th, 1991, President Bush raised the strategy of "World Order" in his speech to the Congress, which was considered as the administration's principal policy statement on the postwar order in the world, especially in the Middle East. The attack on Iraq was the best example. And the following conspiracy theorists who believed there was a coming New World Order often cited it as one of their important evidences. Taking it as the leading banner, America intervened the internal affairs successively in the Middle East and caused

many deputies and conflicts.

Then, the Clinton Administration did a perfect inhabitation, and even enlarged its scale. He and his tanks drafted the strategy of "Participation and Expansion", which made the ambition of America spread to every corner of the world, using various kinds of ways, either peaceful or bloody.

While the current President Gorge W. Bush emphasized American Leadership even more. America attacked Afghanistan, ignoring the objection of the United Nations and many other countries started the war against Iraq, etc. All of this made many parts of this planet suffered unrest and built up a tense atmosphere throughout the world.

But, these seemed unacceptable actions for people in other parts through the world quickly got acceptance in the domestic, for Americans thought all of this was served for their divine ideology and mission that they were the right one in the world. So, the concept that a country's policies from its belief was proved again, and here, we could say America's foreign policy came from Manifest Destiny.

IV. Conclusion

From the analyses above, it is clear that during the nearly two centuries, Manifest Destiny has continuously developed and perfected itself according to absorption, combination, learning and etc, so that it can catch the pace of the world closely, and enjoy a "life-long" revitalization. As a result, this ideology is always functional and prompt in leading America's history, especially, its foreign policy's draft.

And Manifest Destiny, the significant ideais really a multi-faceted philosophy. It can provide excuses for territorial expansion, conquest, slavery, and even genocide. It is the point at which racism, religion, and politics can meet and form a unified front and a unified philosophy for the ignoble aim of America's world empire. All of this makes Manifest Destiny become such a powerful force in the whole development course of the United States. Here, we have just only focused on the impact of Manifest Destiny on the draft of America's foreign policies, and of course, its magic is not limited in what it presents in this paper. It places the responsibility of the destruction of nations and peoples on the victims themselves, not on the perpetrators of it. It gives a holistic and divine rationale for what in any other era will have been simple conquest and empire building.

At the same time, this broad concept has also combined many other points view into a unifying theory. It has been internalized in the culture, and will never vanish and be abolished. Its adaptation to the present conditions has transformed itself into a suitable logic for the time and its great impact will still exist in this country's history. But people holding this two-side sword must have a careful consideration and make a good use of it, otherwise the dark side of Manifest Destiny will lead this nation to a depressive mess in the international relations.

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