

Until June of this year, I taught World Cultures in the Middle School at the Latin School of Chicago. The Latin School is a K-12 independent school located in the near north side of Chicago, on the border of Lincoln Park. Latin has an urban campus and a majority of the students live in the city of Chicago. With Lower School tuition at \$22,825 and tuition for the Middle and Upper schools at \$26,985, a majority of the students at Latin have privileged socioeconomic statuses. However, about 12% of students receive some level of financial aid.

With respect to the racial diversity of the student body, a majority of the students are white, though there are a number of African-American students, and a smaller number of Latino students, as well as students of Indian and Asian descent. This racial makeup being what it is, there certainly exists less racial diversity at The Latin School than exists in the context of all schools in the city of Chicago. However, the diversity level compares favorably with other Chicago independent schools. The area in which diversity at Latin is more evident is religion. While the actual percentages are currently unavailable, there exists a strong balance of Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Hindi, and Muslim students.

The 160 members of the Latin School faculty teach in one of three main buildings on the campus: the Lower School, the Middle School, and the Upper School. The student faculty ratio is 8:1, though the actual class sizes vary greatly depending on the course as well as the school in which the course is being taught. In my experience at Latin, class sizes rarely exceeded 21 students, and some courses are as small as 13. This commitment to smaller class sizes necessarily results in a more personal classroom environment.

*. The Acquisition of California and the Importance of Religion to  
Westward Expansion*

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**Grade(s) Level:** 8

**Classroom Time:** One 90 minute class period

**Handouts:** Article II, Section II of the United States Constitution, The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, John L. O’Sullivan’s speech on Manifest Destiny, short biographies of the key players in the negotiations that resulted in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

**About this Lesson**

In an 1845 article published in the *Democratic Review*, it was declared that expansion represented “the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.” The concept of Manifest Destiny was thus born and Americans were now able to articulate what they viewed as a religious basis for imperialism and the acquisition of new territories. As a part of a unit that asks students to consider these and other related ideas, this lesson will explore the acquisition of California from Mexico under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, with a particular emphasis on the religious origins of the United States fulfilling what it saw as its destiny to acquire new lands. Recognizing the importance of the acquisition of territories like Texas and others acquired, the presumption here is that California was the most significant acquisition for the United States, chiefly because of its economic contributions to the country since acquisition. Understanding why the United States believed it was entitled to acquire such lands and to encourage westward expansion is crucial to understanding Manifest Destiny and the mindset of the American people at the time of expansion and the current size of the United States and its holdings. Constitutionally sanctioned treaties, like the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, indicate the uniqueness of the American views concerning expansion and land, and have also shaped our country and our history.

**Background**

By the beginning of this lesson, students will have studied the Louisiana Purchase, the travels of Lewis and Clark, westward expansion, Manifest Destiny, the ambitious mindset of the American people, and relevant portions of the Mexican-American War.

## **Objectives**

Students will:

- Examine – Manifest Destiny, how countries are shaped by the acquisition of the land, and how Americans believed that religion sanctioned these actions..
- Summarize – Why the United States was able to dictate the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the role of the United States Constitution in creating treaties, and why California specifically is considered by scholars to be the key part of the total land acquisition.
- Understand – How constitutionally sanctioned treaties such as the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo can shape the direction and history of countries and regions.

## **Standards**

Standards will vary depending on the state. This lesson was designed specifically for use in the independent school environment, where adherence is not required.

## **Activities**

1. In the class prior, students will have been provided lecture notes relating to the Mexican-American War and the beginning of the negotiation process that culminated in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Students will have also read Article II, Section II of the Constitution, John L. O’Sullivan’s 1839 speech on Manifest Destiny, and the full text of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo for homework. Ideally, the lead time for this reading is three days. The prep time then should be three to four days of class (45 – 90 minute periods) with this as a culminating activity.

2. Class begins with a wrap up discussion of the key points of the Mexican-American War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, specifically with respect to the acquisition of California. A discussion of Article II, Section II, particularly regarding the creation of treaties, will also be important. The emphasis of the conversation will be getting at the ideas the students have about religion and a common belief among the American people that we are entitled to acquiring new lands.

3. Students compare and contrast the key objectives of Mexico and the United States as the parties began negotiating the end of the Mexican-American War. The teacher should make a chart on the board as they list the points.

4. After briefly discussing the O’Sullivan speech, students will watch the short video clip, “Two nations’ identities: Looking forward and looking back” from the PBS series “The U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848).” This clip relates to the concept of Manifest Destiny and how the United States and Mexico view themselves in different ways with respect to their ideas of expansion and the modern world.

5. Upon being provided with short biographies of all of the key players, students will be divided into two groups. The first group, the United States, will have students assuming different roles including U.S. peace commissioner Nicholas P. Trist, President James Polk, Secretary of State James Buchanan, Sam Houston, and General Winfield Scott. Students not assuming one of these roles will act as United States citizens invited to

negotiations to express their views. The second group, Mexico, will have students assuming roles including the interim Mexican president Manuel de la Peña y Peña, Mexican Peace Commissioners Luis G. Cuevas, Bernardo Couto, and Miguel Atristain, General José Joaquín de Herrera. Students not assuming one of these roles will act as Mexican citizens invited to negotiations to express their views.

6. Assuming their assigned roles, students will engage in a mock negotiation. The instructor should be involved as little as possible, only informing students that they must create a Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The treaty created by the students need not mirror the actual treaty.

7. Following the negotiations, student recorders will write the key points of the actual Treaty of Hidalgo with the one created by the student negotiators. An outlining of the similarities and differences between the treaties will spark further discussion.

8. Wrap-Up. Focusing on California, the instructor will guide students in a discussion of why California is considered to be the most important acquisition under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The instructor should mention how California's economy is the largest of any state and has the eighth largest economy in the world. The instructor should guide students toward the understanding that the Constitution indirectly sanctioned Manifest Destiny, that treaties have fundamentally shaped the histories of the United States and Mexico, and that many scholars argue that Social Darwinism has dictated this fact. Students will then have the opportunity to express their thoughts on the ethical and moral considerations.

### **Assessment Options**

Assessment can include a written assignment for the wrap up portion in which students discuss examples of Manifest Destiny after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Further assessment of understanding can be accomplished through the students' performances during the mock negotiation.

**John L. O'Sullivan on *Manifest Destiny*, 1839**

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; that we have, in reality, but little connection with the past history of any of them, and still less with all antiquity, its glories, or its crimes. On the contrary, our national birth was the beginning of a new history, the formation and progress of an untried political system, which separates us from the past and connects us with the future only; and so far as regards the entire development of the natural rights of man, in moral, political, and national life, we may confidently assume that our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity.

It is so destined, because the principle upon which a nation is organized fixes its destiny, and that of equality is perfect, is universal. It presides in all the operations of the physical world, and it is also the conscious law of the soul -- the self-evident dictates of morality, which accurately defines the duty of man to man, and consequently man's rights as man. Besides, the truthful annals of any nation furnish abundant evidence, that its happiness, its greatness, its duration, were always proportionate to the democratic equality in its system of government. . . .

What friend of human liberty, civilization, and refinement, can cast his view over the past history of the monarchies and aristocracies of antiquity, and not deplore that they ever existed? What philanthropist can contemplate the oppressions, the cruelties, and injustice inflicted by them on the masses of mankind, and not turn with moral horror from the retrospect?

America is destined for better deeds. It is our unparalleled glory that we have no reminiscences of battle fields, but in defence of humanity, of the oppressed of all nations, of the rights of conscience, the rights of personal enfranchisement. Our annals describe no scenes of horrid carnage, where men were led on by hundreds of thousands to slay one another, dupes and victims to emperors, kings, nobles, demons in the human form called heroes. We have had patriots to defend our homes, our liberties, but no aspirants to crowns or thrones; nor have the American people ever suffered themselves to be led on by wicked ambition to depopulate the land, to spread desolation far and wide, that a human being might be placed on a seat of supremacy.

We have no interest in the scenes of antiquity, only as lessons of avoidance of nearly all their examples. 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. We point to the everlasting truth on the first page of our national declaration, and we proclaim to the millions of other lands, that "the gates of hell" -- the powers of aristocracy and monarchy -- "shall not prevail against it."

The far-reaching, the boundless future will be the era of American greatness. In its magnificent domain of space and time, the nation of many nations is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles; to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High -- the Sacred and the True. Its floor shall be a hemisphere -- its roof the firmament of the star-studded heavens, and its congregation an Union of many Republics, comprising hundreds of happy millions, calling, owning no man master, but governed by God's natural and moral law of equality, the law of brotherhood -- of "peace and good will amongst men." . . .

Yes, we are the nation of progress, of individual freedom, of universal enfranchisement. Equality of rights is the cynosure of our union of States, the grand exemplar of the correlative equality of individuals; and while truth sheds its effulgence, we cannot retrograde, without dissolving the one and subverting the other. We must onward to the fulfilment of our mission -- to the entire development of the principle of our organization -- freedom of conscience, freedom of person, freedom of trade and business pursuits, universality of freedom and equality. This is our high destiny, and in nature's eternal, inevitable decree of cause and effect we must accomplish it. 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; and her high example shall smite unto death the tyranny of kings, hierarchs, and oligarchs, and carry the glad tidings of peace and good will where myriads now endure an existence scarcely more enviable than that of beasts of the field. Who, then, can doubt that our country is destined to be *the great nation* of futurity?