

WARM-UP: American Progress by John Gast

“Expansion westward seemed perfectly natural to many Americans in the 1800s. Independence had been won in the Revolution and reaffirmed in the War of 1812. The spirit of nationalism that swept the nation in the next two decades demanded more territory. The "every man is equal" mentality of the Jacksonian Era fueled this optimism. Now, with territory up to the Mississippi River claimed and settled and the Louisiana Purchase explored, Americans headed west in droves. Newspaper editor **JOHN O’SULLIVAN** coined the term "**MANIFEST DESTINY**" in 1845 to describe the essence of this mindset.

The religious fervor spawned by the Second Great Awakening created another incentive for the drive west. Indeed, many settlers believed that God himself blessed the growth of the American nation. The Native Americans were considered heathens. By Christianizing the tribes, American missionaries believed they could save souls and they became among the first to cross the Mississippi River.” -ushistory.org

Manifest Destiny: The belief that the United States was destined by God to extend its boundaries to the Pacific Ocean.

The painting below, American Progress by John Gast, illustrates this era of Manifest Destiny and Westward Expansion. The woman in the center is called “Progress.” Progress guides American settlers from the settled and light-skied East to the dark and treacherous West. Based on the images in the painting...

1. Identify one piece of symbolism in the painting and explain what it means.
2. Based on the images in the painting, what can you assume occurred during this era of Westward Expansion? (ex: specific interactions with specific groups of people, advancement in technology, communication, travel, agriculture, religion, settlement, etc.).


