

# Contents

Reader's Guide.....	viii
Contributors.....	x
Introduction.....	xi
<b>Chapter 1: “The destinies of nations and of men”: Conquering the West.....</b>	<b>3</b>
John Winthrop: “A Model of Christian Charity” .....	8
Saukamappee: “Death Came Over Us All” .....	11
Jedidiah Morse: <i>The American Geography</i> .....	14
Western Confederacy: Message to the Commissioners of the United States.....	17
Thomas Jefferson: Second Inaugural Address.....	21
Tecumseh: Address to General William Henry Harrison at Vincennes, Indiana Territory.....	24
Tecumseh: Speech to the Osage.....	27
Cherokee Women Address Their Nation.....	31
Manuel de Mier y Terán: Letter to the Pueblo Viejo Minister of War.....	34
Benjamin Lundy: “Conditions for African Americans in Mexican Texas” .....	37
Andrew Jackson: “To the Cherokee Tribe of Indians” .....	40
Antonio López de Santa Anna: Message to the Inhabitants of Texas.....	44
Stephen F. Austin: Address in Louisville, Kentucky, March 7, 1836.....	47
Juan Nepomuceno Seguin: A Tejano Leader Calls for Support of the Texas Revolution.....	50
John Ross: Letter to Congress.....	52
Juan Nepomuceno Seguin: <i>Personal Memoirs of John N. Seguin</i> .....	55
James K. Polk: Inaugural Address.....	58
Frederick Douglass: “The War with Mexico” .....	61
Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.....	64
U.S. General Land Office Map of the United States.....	68
Oregon Exclusion Law.....	70
<i>The Other Side; or, Notes for the History of the War between Mexico and the United States</i> .....	73
<b>Chapter 2: “From hill to hill and from valley to valley”: Remaking the West.....</b>	<b>77</b>
Joseph Blaney Starkweather: “African Americans Working at Spanish Flat, California Gold Mine” .....	81
“Song of Gold Mountain” .....	84
<i>Mason v. Smith</i> .....	87
Pun Chi: A Chinese Merchant Petitions Congress to Address Anti-Chinese Abuse.....	90
Homestead Act.....	93
Joseph Cramer: Letter to Major Ed Wynkoop about the Sand Creek Massacre.....	97
“George Bent and Magpie” .....	100
Frederick Douglass: “Our Composite Nationality” .....	103
John Gast: <i>American Progress</i> .....	106

“Exodusters: African American Homesteaders” .....	109
“Ho for Kansas” Exoduster Flyer.....	111
Chief Joseph: “An Indian’s View of Indian Affairs” .....	114
John Nicholas Choate: “Before and After” .....	118
Thomas Nast: “Every Dog (No Distinction of His Color) Has His Day” .....	121
Chinese Exclusion Act.....	124
Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins: <i>Life among the Piutes</i> .....	128
Charles Siringo: <i>A Texas Cow Boy</i> .....	131
Ely Parker: Letter to Harriet Maxwell Converse about Indian Policy Reform.....	135
“The Chrisman Sisters Outside Their Nebraska Sod House in 1886” .....	138
Dawes Severalty Act.....	141
John Muir: “The Treasures of the Yosemite” .....	144
“The National Boundary Line at Nogales” .....	147
William T. Selwyn and Kuwapi: “It Is the New Messiah” .....	149
Wounded Knee Massacre: Statements and Eyewitness Accounts.....	153
Richard H. Pratt: “Kill the Indian, and Save the Man” .....	157
Frederick Jackson Turner: “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” .....	160
Two Moons: A Cheyenne Description of the Battle of the Little Bighorn River.....	163
Kimiko Ono: “Working in the Fields and the Home” .....	166
John Muir: “The American Forests” .....	168
Charles Eastman: <i>Indian Boyhood</i> .....	171
American Antiquities Act.....	174
Little Bear: Account of the Sand Creek Massacre.....	177
“Los Padrinos en los Funerales de Don Pedrito” .....	180
Elinore Pruitt Stewart: <i>Letters of a Woman Homesteader</i> .....	182
“Indian Land for Sale” Poster.....	185
 <b>Chapter 3: “Invasion of progress...progress of invasion”: Extending Conquest Overseas.....</b>	 <b>189</b>
Grover Cleveland: Message to Congress on Hawaiian Sovereignty.....	193
William McKinley: Message to Congress about Cuban Intervention.....	196
William McKinley: “Benevolent Assimilation” Proclamation.....	199
Clara Barton: <i>The Red Cross in Peace and War</i> .....	202
Louis Dalrymple: “School Begins” .....	205
Platform of the American Anti-Imperialist League.....	208
William McKinley: Home Market Club Speech.....	211
William McKinley: Statement to the General Missionary Committee of the Methodist Episcopal Church.....	215
Henry Cabot Lodge: Speech on the Retention of the Philippine Islands.....	218
Emil Flohri: “And, After All, the Philippines Are Only the Stepping-Stone to China” .....	221
William McKinley: Last Speech.....	224
José María Vargas Vila: <i>Facing the Barbarians</i> .....	227
Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine.....	231

<b>Chapter 4: “Do not get lost on this new trail”: Remembering and Representing the West.....</b>	<b>235</b>
Ulysses S. Grant: Memoir on the Mexican War.....	238
Sacagawea Monument, Washington Park, Portland, Oregon.....	241
“Death of Custer” .....	244
Charles Eastman: <i>From the Deep Woods to Civilization</i> .....	247
Zitkala-Ša: “The Cutting of My Long Hair” .....	250
Luther Standing Bear: “The Plains Were Covered with Dead Bison” .....	253
Nicholas Black Elk: “The Butchering at Wounded Knee” .....	256
 List of Documents by Category.....	 261
Index .....	265

# Chapter 1

## “The destinies of nations and of men”: Conquering the West

As Europeans colonized North America, they understood that the land would be a scary, uncivilized wilderness. They knew that it would take belief in their aims, personal sacrifice, social unity, and collective labor to survive. Some historians argue that European colonists in America viewed the wilderness as something necessary to bring under control and civilize. This civilizing experience, they argued, created the true American.

However, the wilderness was never an unpopulated expanse. People of more ancient societies with different values, theistic beliefs, and cultural practices inhabited all regions of the Americas. While many Europeans had come to the Americas seeking religious freedoms for themselves, others had come to convert Native Americans to Christianity. Others still sought to use this op-

portunity to create an enlightened civilization from the ground up with direction taken from the Bible. As colonists turned from coastal footholds to inland expansion, both peaceful and violent interactions between Native Americans and Europeans increased. However, foundational concepts that brought Europeans to North America formed a unique perspective that shaped political, social, judicial, and ethical decisions that deeply affected these interactions. The struggle for dominance between these two societies played out along the East Coast since the seventeenth century. However, by the dawning of the nineteenth century, white European society had decidedly become the dominant force. Fueled through an emerging ideology and conducted through diplomacy and war, the American people had effectively laid claim to the current political boundaries of the contiguous nation by 1850.

## Foundational Concepts

The Puritans, and their efforts to create a simple society without sin, are central to understanding how the uniquely American perspective was created. An evident demonstration of these foundational American concepts is found in John Winthrop's 1630 sermon "A Model of Christian Charity." Winthrop was a noted orator and the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

While the production of resources sustained colonists, trade with the Old World enriched them. Furs were a lucrative and relatively compact good for trade. Colonists soon found it easier and more productive to trade with Native Americans than to hunt or trap themselves. This drove a fierce and often violent competition between Native American tribes for control of prime hunting grounds. In addition, the fur trade brought more routine contact between Native Americans and colonists, which resulted in increased religious and cultural assimilation as well as the spread of epidemic diseases that decimated Native American populations. Saukamappee, a Cree survivor of an eighteenth-century smallpox epidemic, relayed his experience to a traveling fur trader.

## Westward Expansion

After the American Revolution, a tremendous corridor of more than 260,000 square miles was ceded to the United States as part of the 1783 Treaty of Paris. However, there were still many Native Americans who had no part in the negotiations in Paris living on these lands. As British policy became void and Native American populations were decreasing, there were fewer risks and more potential rewards for white settlers moving westward. Though many trappers and military expeditions had written about the region, few knew what the land held.

In 1783, Congress ordered the land to be surveyed and land deeds to be created in order to sell these new public lands and start paying off war debts incurred by the revolution. While some advocated educating and assimilating the Native Americans living within the American geography, others felt that the two societies were fundamentally incompatible. The Americans began to negotiate with tribes to buy their lands in this new territory, leading to a series of disputed treaties and internal

divisions within Native American societies. Early in the nineteenth century, Americans negotiated the purchase of the Louisiana Territory, which effectively doubled the size of the nation. As the nation grew, Jedidiah Morse began to publish geographical textbooks to teach Americans about their vast country. This not only imbued young Americans with pride in the wealth of national resources and the remarkable nature of their nation, but began a standardization of American education. These themes would build on the foundational concepts to create the acculturated ideas of American exceptionalism and manifest destiny in the American polity.

## The Texas Question

The revolutionary spirit in America and Haiti soon crept into New Spain, and by 1810, the Mexican Revolution had begun. The fighting was costly to both sides in both lives and currency. Spain was no longer receiving huge shipments of gold and silver from its holdings in the New World and needed funds to support its effort to put down the Mexican insurrection. Spain announced that they would open their sparsely populated frontier in Texas to foreign settlers, provided they swore an oath of loyalty, converted to Catholicism, and paid a small fee. While the Mexican Republic removed Spanish control of the region, the new government effectively saw the same use for their Texas frontier. However, it was concerned about the long-term effects of foreign settlement.

Moses Austin and Benjamin Lundy both saw Texas as an opportunity. For Austin, this allowed him to create a private fiefdom. At the same time, Lundy saw Texas as an ideal location to resettle emancipated slaves. The issue came to a violent head in 1836 when the Texans declared independence from Mexico. After the revolution, the Texans began petitioning for annexation to the United States. However, slavery caused much political division in the nation until James K. Polk came to office. The annexation of Texas introduced a dispute between the United States and Mexico. The Mexican-American War would draw significant internal and international criticism of American actions. However, it would ultimately result in the annexation of the majority of the American Southwest.

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# Tecumseh: Speech to the Osage

**Author**

Tecumseh

**Date**

1811

**Type**

Speeches/Addresses

**Significance**

Exemplified the dire predictions and earnest motivations for the survival of tribal culture and society that demonstrate why Tecumseh has been revered as a great folk hero

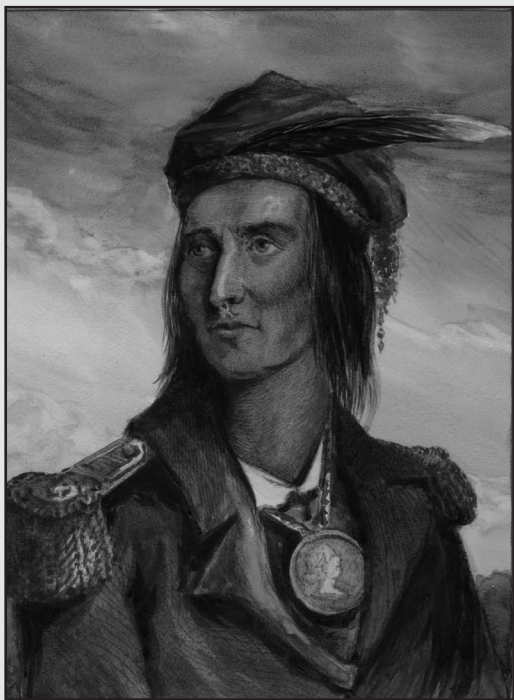
## Overview

**S**hawnee Chief Tecumseh, along with his younger brother, the Prophet Tenskwatawa, began a crusade in 1808 to reject the white man's cultural and religious influences and unite Native Americans as a single multi-tribal confederacy. Initially a believer that nonviolent diplomacy would stem the white incursions into tribal lands, Tecumseh soon came to understand that political and cultural unification of the tribes was necessary if diplomacy was going to work. Tecumseh spent much of the fall and winter of 1811 and 1812 traveling to gain converts from tribes of the Eastern Seaboard, the South, the Northwest Territory, and Canada.

Tecumseh's oration was born from an earnest desperation and belief in the necessity of his cause. Tecumseh argued that white expansion was an existential crisis for the tribal communities, and he knew the key to survival was to act in unity against their common enemy. Some historians argue that Tecumseh was aided

by the appearance of a comet that remained visible for months and a series of powerful earthquakes in present-day Missouri that were interpreted as ill omens.

Though Tecumseh was generally successful in gaining converts to the multi-tribal confederation, he was never successful in bringing the Osage into the confederacy. By summer 1811, Tecumseh's confederacy had become recognized as a threat to both the American government and to several tribal leaders who, from fear, hubris, greed, or pride, felt that they could best provide for their people through independent negotiations with whites. While Tecumseh was traveling, American forces killed Tenskwatawa. This prompted Tecumseh to ally the confederacy with the British and ultimately led to his death at the 1813 Battle of the Thames. After his death, the confederacy collapsed, and the United States swiftly reasserted its claims to Native lands as Tecumseh's dire fears came to fruition.



*Painting of Tecumseh* (Toronto Public Library)

## Document Text

Brothers,—We all belong to one family; we are all children of the Great Spirit; we walk in the same path; slake our thirst at the same spring; and now affairs of the greatest concern lead us to smoke the pipe around the same council fire!

. . . We are friends; we must assist each other to bear our burdens. The blood of many of our fathers and brothers has run like water on the ground, to satisfy the avarice of the white men. We, ourselves, are threatened with a great evil; nothing will pacify them but the destruction of all the red men.

. . . When the white men first set foot on our grounds, they were hungry; they had no place on which to spread their blankets, or to kindle their fires. They were feeble; they could do nothing for themselves. Our father commiserated their dis-

treas, and shared freely with them whatever the Great Spirit had given his red children. They gave them food when hungry, medicine when sick, spread skins for them to sleep on, and gave them grounds, that they might hunt and raise corn.

. . . The white people are like poisonous serpents: when chilled, they are feeble and harmless; but invigorate them with warmth, and they sting their benefactors to death.

The white people came among us feeble; and now we have made them strong, they wish to kill us, or drive us back, as they would wolves and panthers.

. . . The white men are not friends to the Indians: at first, they only asked for land sufficient for a wigwam; now, nothing will satisfy them but the whole of our hunting grounds, from the rising to the setting sun.

. . . The white men want more than our hunting grounds; they wish to kill our warriors; they would even kill our old men, women and little ones.

. . . Many winters ago, there was no land; the sun did not rise and set: all was darkness. The Great Spirit made all things. He gave the white people a home beyond the great waters. He supplied these grounds with game, and gave them to his red children; and he gave them strength and courage to defend them.

. . . My people wish for peace; the red men all wish for peace; but where the white people are, there is no peace for them, except it be on the bosom of our mother.

. . . The white men despise and cheat the Indians; they abuse and insult them; they do not think the red men sufficiently good to live.

The red men have borne many and great injuries; they ought to suffer them no longer. My people will not; they are determined on vengeance; they

have taken up the tomahawk; they will make it fat with blood; they will drink the blood of the white people.

. . . My people are brave and numerous; but the white people are too strong for them alone. I wish you to take up the tomahawk with them. If we all unite, we will cause the rivers to stain the great waters with their blood.

. . . If you do not unite with us, they will first destroy us, and then you will fall an easy prey to them. They have destroyed many nations of red men because they were not united, because they were not friends to each other.

. . . The white people send runners amongst us; they wish to make us enemies that they may sweep over and desolate our hunting grounds, like devastating winds, or rushing waters.

. . . Our Great Father, over the great waters, is angry with the white people, our enemies. He will

send his brave warriors against them; he will send us rifles, and whatever else we want—he is our friend, and we are his children.

. . . Who are the white people that we should fear them? They cannot run fast, and are good marks to shoot at: they are only men; our fathers have killed many of them; we are not squaws, and we will stain the earth red with blood.

. . . The Great Spirit is angry with our enemies; he speaks in thunder, and the earth swallows up villages, and drinks up the Mississippi. The great waters will cover their lowlands; their corn cannot grow, and the Great Spirit will sweep those who escape to the hills from the earth with his terrible breach.

. . . We must be united; we must smoke the same pipe; we must fight each other's battles; and more than all, we must love the Great Spirit: he is for us; he will destroy our enemies, and make all his red children happy.

## Glossary

**Great Father:** the king of England; Tecumseh is referencing the British-American War of 1812 and his alliance with the British

**Great Spirit:** a deity that is personally engaged with the lives of living creatures, generally depicted as a paternal force that resides in the sky above

**our mother:** the earth, the source of human, animal, and plant life; as the feminine representation of a deity, demonstrates a belief in the equality, partnership, and worth of the sexes

**squaw:** at this time, the term had taken on a derisive or offensive meaning for a generally weak Native American maiden, woman, or wife

### Short-Answer Questions

1. Why do you think Tecumseh felt allying with the British was safe when he clearly did not trust the white man?
2. How does Tecumseh interpret white civilization to be living in respect to Native American religious views?
3. How does Tecumseh mirror Christian teachings to demonstrate his point?