Rethinking Race in the American West

JOHN GAST - "AMERICAN PROGRESS" (1872)

Kathryn Jones
North Reading Public Schools
8th Grade U.S. History
Manifest Destiny Unit
**Name:** Kathryn Jones  
**District:** North Reading Public Schools  
**Subject:** U.S. History  
**Grade:** 8th Grade  
**Unit:** Manifest Destiny  
**Lesson Title:** “Rethinking Race in the American West”

**Goal:** After this lesson, students will see the American West as a cultural crossroads. Students will be forced to examine the issue of race, and American culture and values not only in American West in the 19th century, but also today.

**Essential Questions:** Was Manifest Destiny justified? Was the spreading American culture superior to those it incorporated? What is the effect of Manifest Destiny on race and race issues today? What is the effect of Manifest Destiny and the way we study American History?

**Historical Background:**

I attended the Organization of American Historians New York City conference in March, 2008. I was fortunate to be able to attend many excellent workshops and roundtable discussions. The focus on this lesson was from a presentation on March 29th, titled: “Rethinking Race in the American West”. During this presentation, Grace Delgado, from Penn State University focused on the topic of national-transnational history. She spoke regarding international/inter-racial identities in the American West including Mexican American, African American, Native American, and Asian American. Allison Varzally, from California State University, Fullerton addressed the topic of multicultural history and race relations. She focused on when cultures collide and which culture dominates and who maintains material resources. Katie Benton-Cohen, from Georgetown University, addressed the Arizona Borderlands and multi-racial California. Matthew Whittaker, from Arizona State University, discussed the importance of sub-histories within groups. He advocated looking at anthropology, archaeology, and oral histories and taking a holistic approach to history looking within race, gender, class, and religious differences for various points of study. He argued for new research on multi-racial groups such as Latino/African American sub-groups. The Chairperson, Linda Gordon, of New York University, summed up this discussion noting historical and regional changes and the interesting relationship between race identity and national identity.

I found their presentations very interesting. Having just finished Hampton Sides’ *Blood and Thunder*, in our Teaching American History grant Book Discussion Group, this topic intrigued me. In his novel, Sides illustrates how the American West was a cultural crossroads between the Americans, the Mexicans, and the Native Americans.

Most speakers at the conference were using the term “trans-nationalism” in their presentations. I was fascinated by this concept. In short, the idea of trans-nationalism is in direct contrast with the Turner Thesis. Trans-nationalism argues against American “exceptionalism”, and advocates more of a world view of multicultural contributions.

This idea of trans-nationalism and the cultural crossroads presented in Hampton Sides’ *Blood and Thunder* was the inspiration for my lesson. I want students to be able to see the concept of Manifest Destiny from various points of view. Starting out with the stereotypical and historical/cultural “American Progress” view, but then seeing the viewpoints of other peoples affected by American settlement of the west. I want students to understand how westward migration of Americans affected the lives of other peoples, but how the absorption of these peoples affects American culture and American history.

The Presidential Race of 2008, specifically that of Barack Obama, emphasizes the need to address, accept, and advocate international and inter-racial contributions to American culture and history.
Historical Thinking Benchmarks Addressed:

*Analysis of primary and secondary sources.*

*An understanding of historical debate and controversy.*

*An understanding of bias and points of view.*

*Understanding that although the past tends to be viewed in terms of present values, a proper perception of the past requires a serious examination of values of that time.*

Massachusetts Frameworks Addressed:

USI.26 Describe the causes, course, and consequences of America’s westward expansion and its growing diplomatic assertiveness. Use a map of North America to trace America’s expansion to the Civil War, including the location of the Santa Fe and Oregon trails. (H, E, G)

A. the War of 1812  
B. the purchase of Florida in 1819  
C. the 1823 Monroe Doctrine  
D. the Cherokees’ Trail of Tears  
E. the annexation of Texas in 1845  
F. the concept of Manifest Destiny and its relationship to westward expansion  
G. the acquisition of the Oregon Territory in 1846  
H. the territorial acquisitions resulting from the Mexican War  
I. the search for gold in California  
J. the Gadsden Purchase of 1854

Learning Objectives:

Students will understand the impact of Manifest Destiny on various people in the American West, including Native Americans, Mexican Americans, Chinese immigrants and African Americans.

Materials/Resources:

- Interactive map PBS - http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/west/map/1803-1853.html
- PowerPoint with 3 Primary Source images (see attached file)
- Student Worksheet: “Art in Social Studies!” (appendix 1)
- Student Worksheet: “Photo Analysis Worksheet” (appendix 2)
- Chapter 7 Kit Carson American West video online http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/carson/program/
- Student Worksheet: “Motion Picture Analysis Worksheet” (appendix 3)
- Chinese transcontinental railroad picture (appendix 4) and timeline, and information links
  - http://www.cis.umassd.edu/~gleung/nacaf/Timeline.htm (timeline)
  - http://cprrr.org/Museum/Chinese.html (information on Chinese labor)
- African Americans 3 images: three roles in the west
  - Link to information page: http://www.liu.edu/cwis/cwp/library/african/west/west.htm#settlers
  - Image of Buffalo Soldier (appendix 5)
  - Image of James Beckwith (appendix 6)
  - Image of Miners (appendix 7)
- Mexican American voice – Primary Source Reading (appendix 8) and timeline link
  - Timeline link: http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/modules/mex_am/chronology.html
- “Manifest Destiny and Its Effect” student worksheet
Procedure:

Day 1

1) Review Westward Expansion and Manifest Destiny using PBS interactive map on Smartboard.

2) Show PowerPoint with three primary source images: Photograph of wagons crossing a river, A painting of Bison and Elk in the Upper Missouri, and John Gast’s American Progress painting. Students fill out image worksheets. (Appendix 1 and 2) Discussion follows. Students will be asked to think about Manifest Destiny and the images they’ve seen. The topic of bias/perspective will be addressed, especially with the Gast painting.

3) Homework: Students view online clip of Kit Carson and the Navajo Longwalk. (chapter 7 running time 8:47) [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/carson/program/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/carson/program/) Students will complete “Motion Picture Analysis Worksheet” after viewing clip.

Day 2

1) Discuss the video clip of Kit Carson and student written responses from worksheet. Students will receive the “Manifest Destiny and Its Effect” student worksheet and will respond to the Navajo questions as a class.

2) Divide the class into groups of 3. Each group receives the following primary sources and secondary source material:

   - Chinese transcontinental railroad picture and timeline with 2 primary photographs and information link
   - African Americans 3 primary source images and link to information page
   - Mexican American voice primary source document, timeline, and information page

3) Each group will then finish the “Manifest Destiny and Its Effect” student worksheet using the above sources.

4) Homework: Students will choose one group discussed today, and create an illustration that they think represents either the impact of Manifest Destiny on the group, or the contribution(s) of the group.

Day 3:

1) Students will share their illustrations.

2) Class discussion. Teacher will direct discussion, ending with challenging students to rethink Manifest Destiny and the roles of many other peoples in American History.

Assessment:

Students will be asked to write a letter to the editor regarding John Gast’s painting. Students must incorporate actual arguments from the primary source readings/images and/or secondary information used in class.
Bibliography


ART in SOCIAL STUDIES!

Sketch the image. If you have trouble sketching, try seeing the “big” picture, or just focus on one part of the image.

5 Observations:

•
•
•
•
•

What you see: colors, shapes, objects, symmetry, composition, balance, perspective, use of light, etc.

5 Inferences:

•
•
•
•
•

Educated guesses based on observations: What do you think the image is? Where does it come from? What is it made of? Who made it? What is its purpose?

Appendix 1
Photo Analysis Worksheet

Step 1. Observation

A. Study the photograph for 2 minutes. Form an overall impression of the photograph and then examine individual items. Next, divide the photo into quadrants and study each section to see what new details become visible.

B. Use the chart below to list people, objects, and activities in the photograph.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People</th>
<th>Objects</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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Step 2. Inference

Based on what you have observed above, list three things you might infer from this photograph.

Step 3. Questions

A. What questions does this photograph raise in your mind?

B. Where could you find answers to them?

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## Motion Picture Analysis Worksheet

### Step 1. Pre-viewing

**A.** Title of Film: 
Record Group Source: 

**B.** What do you think you will see in this motion picture? List Three concepts or ideas that you might expect to see based on the title of the film. List some people you might expect to see based on the title of the film.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts/Ideas</th>
<th>People</th>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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### Step 2. Viewing

**A.** Type of motion picture (check where applicable):
- Animated Cartoon
- Theatrical short subject
- Documentary Film
- Training film
- Newsreel
- Combat film
- Propaganda Film
- Other

**B.** Physical qualities of the motion picture (check where applicable):
- Music
- Live action
- Narration
- Background noise
- Special effects
- Animation
- Color
- Dramatizations

**C.** Note how camera angles, lighting, music, narration, and/or editing contribute to creating an atmosphere in this film. What is the mood or tone of the film?

### Step 3. Post-viewing (or repeated viewing)

**A.** Circle the things that you listed in the previewing activity that were validated by your viewing of the motion picture.

**B.** What is the central message(s) of this motion picture?

**C.** Consider the effectiveness of the film in communicating its message. As a tool of communication, what are its strengths and weaknesses?
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<td><strong>D.</strong></td>
<td>How do you think the filmmakers wanted the audience to respond?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E.</strong></td>
<td>Does this film appeal to the viewer’s reason or emotion? How does it make you feel?</td>
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</table>
| **F.** | List two things this motion picture tells you about life in the United States at the time it was made:  
1.   
2.   |
| **G.** | Write a question to the filmmaker that is left unanswered by the motion picture. |
| **H.** | What information do you gain about this event that would not be conveyed by a written source? Be specific. |

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Chinese Immigrants Working on the Transcontinental Railroad
1999 Commemorative stamp for the 150th year of the discovery of Gold in California.
Mexican/American Voice:

The Americans from the north have taken possession of practically all the eastern part of Texas, in most cases without the permission of the authorities. They immigrate constantly, finding no one to prevent them, and take possession of the sitio [site] that best suits them without either asking leave or going through any formality other than that of building their homes. Thus the majority of inhabitants in the Department are North Americans, the Mexican population being reduced to only Béjar, Nacogdoches, and La Bahía del Espíritu Santo, wretched settlements that between them do not number three thousand inhabitants, and the new village of Gudalupe Victoria that has scarcely more than seventy settlers. The government of the state, with its seat at Saltillo, that should watch over the preservation of its most precious and interesting departments, taking measures to prevent its being stolen by foreign hands, is the one that knows the least not only about the actual conditions, but even about its territory.... Repeated and urgent appeals have been made to the Supreme Government of the federation regarding the imminent danger in which this interesting Department is becoming the prize of the ambitious North Americans, but never has it taken any measures that may be called conclusive....

The Americans from the North, at least the great part of those I have seen, eat only salted meat, bread made by themselves out of corn meal, coffee, and homemade cheese. To these the greater part...add strong liquor, for they are in general, in my opinion, lazy people of vicious character. Some of them cultivate their small farms by planting corn; but this task they usually entrust to their Negro slaves, whom they treat with considerable harshness.

Manifest Destiny and Its Effect

Navajo

1) How would members of the Navajo respond to Gast’s painting, *American Progress*?

Chinese Immigrants

After viewing the photographs and responding to the photo analysis worksheet, as well as viewing the timeline and information links, please answer the following questions:

1) What role did Chinese immigrants play in the settlement of the West?

2) Looking at the timeline, what happened with regard to Chinese immigration toward the end of the 19th century?

3) Why was that legislation passed?

4) How would Chinese Immigrants of the 19th century West respond to Gast’s painting, *American Progress*?

Appendix 9
African Americans

Explain the 3 different African American experiences presented in these sources.

1) 

2) 

3) 

4) How might African Americans of the 19th century West respond to Gast’s painting, *American Progress*?

Mexican Americans

After reading the primary source selection please answer the following questions:

1) How does José María Sánchez feel about Americans settling the lands around him?

2) How would José María Sánchez respond to Gast’s painting, *American Progress*?