

Agatha Wozniak

Living in Nature & Living in Society

Westward Expansion

Objectives

- Define Manifest Destiny.
- Explain why America is destined to fulfill her manifest destiny.
- Explain how Westward Expansion challenged the individual to avoid becoming part of the group and remain focused on individual goals.
- Explain the relationship between humans and nature; what impact do we have on nature and vice-versa.
- Describe how being aware of the intersection of society and nature can help you find your place in both.
- Explain how society uses nature to advance technology.
- Describe how society can blind an individual to their personal destiny.
- Explain how we can remain true to our personal visions and goals.
- Describe the impact transportation has on people, particularly towns and cities.
- Describe how the sound of modernity permeates the world and affects our relationship with nature as individuals and as a society.

Essential Questions

- Is it possible to control modernization? Should we? How?
- Should technology allow Americans to view themselves as agents of a higher power to fulfill her “manifest destiny?” Why?
- How can we recognize the relationship between humans and nature?
- Do natural resources exist to be exploited for our use?
- What role does migration have in our lives?
- What can we do to ensure we do not get too comfortable in one place but remain open to new experiences?
- How can we explore our own private destiny?
- Is there is a correspondence between personal destiny and national destiny?
- What can we do to avoid becoming “the group” instead of focusing on our growth as an individual? How does this relate to Westward Expansion?
- How do policies that impact society also impact nature? (and vice versa)

Materials

Walden, “Sounds” <http://thoreau.eserver.org/waldeno4.html>

Henry David Thoreau - “Life Without Principle” <http://thoreau.eserver.org/life1.html>

Henry David Thoreau - "Walking" <http://thoreau.eserver.org/walking2.html>
John Gast - *American Progress*

Lesson 1 - Impact of railroad, technology on nature and society

- 1) Have students brainstorm the impact modern technology, especially transportation, have on their town (such as Concord).
 - a) Discuss whether these impacts improve their ability to live: deliberately and in society. What are the impacts on nature?
- 2) Take the students for a walk to Walden Pond. On the walk there, have them observe their surroundings, focusing on the hustle of life, the sounds it produces, the role of transportation, the easiness it is to walk to Walden, etc.
 - a) Upon arriving at Walden, have students make observations on how modernity and society have infiltrated Walden Pond. Eventually, walk them to the back by the railroad tracks and pause for them to sit and consider/brainstorm the role the railroad on both the town of Concord and Walden Pond. Have them listen and jot down what sounds they hear. (students should hear nature sounds plus the roar of cars, trucks, fellow people, and the train)
- 3) As a group, share observations and discuss impact on the town and Walden. How is Walden an intersection between society and nature? How can this help you find your place in both?
- 4) Present students with the below quotes. Divide the students into groups and assign one quote to group. Have them analyze the quote and explain its meaning. Then, jigsaw the students and have them share their responses.
- 5) Have the students return to their original group and brainstorm answers to the following questions, drawing upon the quotes and their observations at Walden for guidance. Once students have ideas under each question, have them choose one to present to the group -- they may choose a short skit, drawing, etc.
 - a) Is it possible to control modernization, such as the railroad? Should we? How?
 - b) Should technology allow Americans to view themselves as agents of a higher power to fulfill her "manifest destiny?" Why?
 - c) How can we recognize the relationship between humans and nature?
 - d) Do natural resources exist here to be exploited for our use? What does Thoreau mean by "...here comes the cattle-train bearing the cattle of a thousand hills...all but the mountain pastures, whirled along like leaves blown from the mountains by the September gales. The air is filled with the bleating of calves and sheep, and the hustling of oxen, as if a pastoral valley were going by."

- 6) Finally, present the students with one final quotation: “We do not ride on the railroad, it rides upon us.” (*Walden*, “Where I Lived and What I Lived For”) Have them silently reflect on what Thoreau meant by this and how it technology today may be “riding” upon them. Who really is in control? Them or the technology?

Quotes (*Walden*, “Sounds”) <http://thoreau.eserver.org/waldeno4.html>:

[7] The whistle of the locomotive penetrates my woods summer and winter, sounding like the scream of a hawk sailing over some farmer's yard, informing me that many restless city merchants are arriving within the circle of the town, or adventurous country traders from the other side. As they come under one horizon, they shout their warning to get off the track to the other, heard sometimes through the circles of two towns. Here come your groceries, country; your rations, countrymen! Nor is there any man so independent on his farm that he can say them nay. And here's your pay for them! screams the countryman's whistle; timber like long battering-rams going twenty miles an hour against the city's walls, and chairs enough to seat all the weary and heavy-laden that dwell within them. With such huge and lumbering civility the country hands a chair to the city. All the Indian huckleberry hills are stripped, all the cranberry meadows are raked into the city. Up comes the cotton, down goes the woven cloth; up comes the silk, down goes the woollen; up come the books, but down goes the wit that writes them.

[8] When I meet the engine with its train of cars moving off with planetary motion — or, rather, like a comet, for the beholder knows not if with that velocity and with that direction it will ever revisit this system, since its orbit does not look like a returning curve — with its steam cloud like a banner streaming behind in golden and silver wreaths, like many a downy cloud which I have seen, high in the heavens, unfolding its masses to the light — as if this traveling demigod, this cloud-compeller, would ere long take the sunset sky for the livery of his train; when I hear the iron horse make the hills echo with his snort like thunder, shaking the earth with his feet, and breathing fire and smoke from his nostrils (what kind of winged horse or fiery dragon they will put into the new Mythology I don't know), it seems as if the earth had got a race now worthy to inhabit it. If all were as it seems, and men made the elements their servants for noble ends! If the cloud that hangs over the engine were the perspiration of heroic deeds, or as beneficent as that which floats over the farmer's fields, then the elements and Nature herself would cheerfully accompany men on their errands and be their escort.

[11] What recommends commerce to me is its enterprise and bravery. It does not clasp its hands and pray to Jupiter. I see these men every day go about their business with more or less courage and content, doing more even than they suspect, and perchance

better employed than they could have consciously devised. I am less affected by their heroism who stood up for half an hour in the front line at Buena Vista,[\(10\)](#) than by the steady and cheerful valor of the men who inhabit the snowplow for their winter quarters; who have not merely the three-o'-clock-in-the-morning courage, which Bonaparte [\(11\)](#) thought was the rarest, but whose courage does not go to rest so early, who go to sleep only when the storm sleeps or the sinews of their iron steed are frozen.

And hark! here comes the cattle-train bearing the cattle of a thousand hills, sheepcots, stables, and cow-yards in the air, drovers with their sticks, and shepherd boys in the midst of their flocks, all but the mountain pastures, whirled along like leaves blown from the mountains by the September gales. The air is filled with the bleating of calves and sheep, and the hustling of oxen, as if a pastoral valley were going by. When the old bell-wether [\(16\)](#) at the head rattles his bell, the mountains do indeed skip like rams and the little hills like lambs. A carload of drovers, too, in the midst, on a level with their droves now, their vocation gone, but still clinging to their useless sticks as their badge of office. But their dogs, where are they? It is a stampede to them; they are quite thrown out; they have lost the scent. Methinks I hear them barking behind the Peterboro' Hills,[\(17\)](#) or panting up the western slope of the Green Mountains.[\(18\)](#) They will not be in at the death. Their vocation, too, is gone. Their fidelity and sagacity are below par now. They will slink back to their kennels in disgrace, or perchance run wild and strike a league with the wolf and the fox. So is your pastoral life whirled past and away. But the bell rings, and I must get off the track and let the cars go by; —

What's the railroad to me?

I never go to see

Where it ends.

It fills a few hollows,

And makes banks for the swallows,

It sets the sand a-blowing,

And the blackberries a-growing, [\(19\)](#)

but I cross it like a cart-path in the woods. I will not have my eyes put out and my ears spoiled by its smoke and steam and hissing.

Lesson 2 - Manifest Destiny and Moving Westward

- 1) Open class with having the painting, *American Progress*, projected on the board.
 - a) Have the students write down what they see (no inference), what they can infer, and any questions they have.
 - b) Discuss the responses as a class, ending it with the question “Knowing what you know, what should be the title of this painting?”

- c) Share responses then reveal to the students the title is *American Progress*. Compare/contrast this to their responses. Which is more positive? How does the painting portray the idea of Westward Expansion? How does it tie into the emerging technologies (railroads, telegraph, etc).
- 2) With the definition of manifest destiny on the board, have the students read excerpts from Manifest Destiny. In pairs, have them answer:
 - a) Why is it that the US is the chosen country?
 - b) Why is it the national destiny of the United States to expand westward?
 - c) Share responses as a class.
- 3) Have the students interpret the following quote: "...they may go their way to their manifest destiny, which I trust is not mine" (*Correspondence*)
 - a) Since it the duty of the US as a whole to expand, how can individuals be sure to still continue to follow their own personal destiny and not get lost in the bustle? Brainstorm answers a class.
- 4) Divide the students into groups and have them read and explain excerpts from Thoreau's "Life without Principle" and "Walking"
 - a) What does Thoreau believe can be found in the West?
 - b) What must we be careful of as we move West? What is "honest toil"?
 - c) How might we lose ourselves to the "group" today? How can we still be a part of the wildness, but use it to focus on our personal growth and destiny?
 - d) What can we do to not get too comfortable in one place (home) but remain open to new experiences?
- 5) Have students look at *American Progress* again. Have students answer the following question: "To what extent does a nation's destiny to expand control more resources an individual's destiny?" They should consider both the people expanding (conqueror) and those being conquered (Native Americans).

Excerpt from 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....

...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?"

“Life Without Principle” <http://thoreau.eserver.org/life1.html>

[17] The rush to California,⁽⁵⁾ for instance, and the attitude, not merely of merchants, but of philosophers and prophets, so called, in relation to it, reflect the greatest disgrace on mankind. That so many are ready to live by luck, and so get the means of commanding the labor of others less lucky, without contributing any value to society! And that is called enterprise! I know of no more startling development of the immorality of trade, and all the common modes of getting a living. The philosophy and poetry and religion of such a mankind are not worth the dust of a puffball. The hog that gets his living by rooting, stirring up the soil so, would be ashamed of such company.”

[18] “ God gave the righteous man a certificate entitling him to food and raiment, but the unrighteous man found a *facsimile* of the same in God's coffers, and appropriated it, and obtained food and raiment like the former. It is one of the most extensive systems of counterfeiting that the world has seen. I did not know that mankind were suffering for want of gold. I have seen a little of it. I know that it is very malleable, but not so malleable as wit. A grain of gold will gild a great surface, but not so much as a grain of wisdom.”

[19] “ The gold-digger in the ravines of the mountains is as much a gambler as his fellow in the saloons of San Francisco. What difference does it make whether you shake

dirt or shake dice? If you win, society is the loser. The gold-digger is the enemy of the honest laborer, whatever checks and compensations there may be. It is not enough to tell me that you worked hard to get your gold. So does the Devil work hard. The way of transgressors may be hard in many respects. The humblest observer who goes to the mines sees and says that gold-digging is of the character of a lottery; the gold thus obtained is not the same same thing with the wages of honest toil. But, practically, he forgets what he has seen, for he has seen only the fact, not the principle, and goes into trade there, that is, buys a ticket in what commonly proves another lottery, where the fact is not so obvious.”

[20] “...At any rate, I might pursue some path, however solitary and narrow and crooked, in which I could walk with love and reverence. Wherever a man separates from the multitude, and goes his own way in this mood, there indeed is a fork in the road, though ordinary travellers may see only a gap in the paling. His solitary path across lots will turn out the *higher way* of the two.”

[21] “Men rush to California and Australia as if the true gold were to be found in that direction; but that is to go to the very opposite extreme to where it lies. They go prospecting farther and farther away from the true lead, and are most unfortunate when they think themselves most successful. “

“Walking” <http://thoreau.eserver.org/walking2.html>

[2] When I go out of the house for a walk, uncertain as yet whither I will bend my steps, and submit myself to my instinct to decide for me, I find, strange and whimsical as it may seem, that I finally and inevitably settle south-west, toward some particular wood or meadow or deserted pasture or hill in that direction. My needle is slow to settle — varies a few degrees, and does not always point due south-west, it is true, and it has good authority for this variation, but it always settles between west and south-south-west. The future lies that way to me, and the earth seems more unexhausted and richer on that side. The outline which would bound my walks, would be, not a circle, but a parabola, or rather like one of those cometary orbits, which have been thought to be non-returning curves, in this case opening westward, in which my house occupies the place of the sun. I turn round and round irresolute sometimes for a quarter of an hour, until I decide for the thousandth time, that I will walk into the south-west or west. Eastward I go only by force; but westward I go free. Thither no business leads me. It is hard for me to believe that I shall find fair landscapes, or sufficient Wildness and Freedom behind the eastern horizon. I am not excited by the prospect of a walk thither; but I believe that the forest which I see in the western horizon stretches uninterruptedly towards the setting sun, and that there are no towns nor cities

in it of enough consequence to disturb me. Let me live where I will, on this side is the city, on that the wilderness, and ever I am leaving the city more and more, and withdrawing into the wilderness. I should not lay so much stress on this fact, if I did not believe that something like this is the prevailing tendency of my countrymen. I must walk toward Oregon, and not toward Europe. And that way the nation is moving, and I may say that mankind progress from east to west. Within a few years we have witnessed the phenomenon of a south-eastward migration, in the settlement of Australia; but this affects us as a retrograde movement, and, judging from the moral and physical character of the first generation of Australians,(1) has not yet proved a successful experiment. The eastern Tartars (2) think that there is nothing west beyond Thibet.(3) "The World ends there", say they, "beyond there is nothing but a shoreless sea." It is unmitigated East where they live.

[3] We go eastward to realize history, and study the works of art and literature, retracing the steps of the race, — we go westward as into the future, with a spirit of enterprise and adventure. The Atlantic is a Lethean stream, in our passage over which we have had an opportunity to forget the old world and its institutions. If we do not succeed this time, there is perhaps one more chance for the race left before it arrives on the banks of the Styx;(4) and that is in the Lethe (5) of the Pacific, which is three times as wide.

[4] I know not how significant it is, or how far it is an evidence of singularity, that an individual should thus consent in his pettiest walk, with the general movement of the race; but I know that something akin to the migratory instinct in birds and quadrupeds, — which, in some instances, is known to have affected the squirrel tribe, impelling them to a general and mysterious movement, in which they were seen, say some, crossing the broadest rivers, each on its particular chip, with its tail raised for a sail, and bridging narrower streams with their dead, — that something like the *furor* which affects the domestic cattle in the spring, and which is referred to a worm in their tails, — affects both nations and individuals, either perennially or from time to time.