

## DOCUMENT 8.9

JOHN L. O'SULLIVAN, "The Great Nation of Futurity," *United States Democratic Review*

1839

John L. O'Sullivan (1813–1895), a prominent Democratic journalist and editor, argued for American expansion in terms of the nation's "Manifest Destiny," or the claim that the United States was destined to spread from the Atlantic to the Pacific and beyond.

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*. . . .

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. . . .

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John L. O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity,” *United States Democratic Review* 6, no. 23 (November 1839): 426–430.

### **PRACTICING Historical Thinking**

**Identify:** How does O’Sullivan contrast the past and the future?

**Analyze:** What does O’Sullivan mean when he states that “entire development of the natural rights of man, in moral, political, and national life” depends on Manifest Destiny?

**Evaluate:** To what extent does O’Sullivan’s view parallel the views of the New England Puritan colonists like John Winthrop (Doc. 2.4)? Consider O’Sullivan’s references to monarchy and religion in your response.