



## Chapter 15

# Manifest Destiny and the Growing Nation

### *How justifiable was U.S. expansion in the 1800s?*

#### 15.1 Introduction

More than 150 years ago, the phrase *manifest destiny* inspired great hopes and dreams among many Americans. It led to a war with Mexico. And it changed the map of the United States.

Manifest destiny means “obvious fate.” John O’Sullivan, a New York newspaper editor, first used the phrase in 1845. O’Sullivan wrote that it was the United States’ “manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent.” Looking at the land beyond the Rocky Mountains, he argued that Americans had a **divine** right to settle this area and make it their own.

The fact that Great Britain claimed part of this land—a huge area known as Oregon—made no difference to O’Sullivan. After all, the United States had stood up to Great Britain in the War of 1812.

Nor was O’Sullivan impressed by Mexico’s claims to much of the West. Like many Americans of the time, he believed that the United States had a duty to extend the blessings of democracy to new lands and peoples. It was God’s plan, he wrote, for Americans to expand their “great experiment of liberty.”

When Americans began their “great experiment” in 1776, the idea that the United States might one day spread across the continent seemed like a dream. By 1848, however, the dream was a reality. In this chapter, you will learn how the United States tripled its size in a little more than a single lifetime.

Manifest destiny took many forms. The United States expanded through treaties, settlement, and war. As you read, think about how each new area was acquired and whether the decisions that led to U.S. expansion across North America were **justifiable**.

◀ *American Progress*, painted in 1872 by John Gast

The spirit of manifest destiny helped the continental United States more than double in size between 1803 and 1853.

