Destiny or Decision?

Read a historical claim and examine what it leaves out.

8.C.9.1.B "Define the concept of Manifest Destiny including its belief in the inevitable spread of American institutions (e.g., religion, government, culture) and analyze claims made in such writings as The Great Nation of Futurity by John O'Sullivan."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline O'Sullivan's claims about the nation's future, circle words that make expansion sound certain, and number two details that challenge his claims.

Who Called It Destiny?

1. In 1839, newspaper writer John O'Sullivan described the United States as "the great nation of futurity." He argued that the country had a special role in bringing liberty and self-government to the future. He called its people "the nation of human progress" and asked who could stop their "onward march." These words were claims, not proof that expansion was certain or fair. O'Sullivan's language invited readers to picture a nation whose growth followed a natural path, rather than decisions made by people.

2. By 1845, O'Sullivan used the phrase "manifest destiny" while arguing that the United States should expand across North America. Manifest Destiny was the belief that the nation's growth was meant to happen and that American institutions would spread with it. Supporters expected forms of government, religious beliefs, and customs they valued to move into new territory. The word "destiny" made a political goal sound unavoidable. But moving borders required choices by leaders and settlers. Calling expansion inevitable hid those choices and made disagreement seem like an obstacle to progress.

3. That story left out people already living on lands the United States sought. Native nations had their own governments and cultures, and Mexico governed much of the Southwest in the 1840s. Enslaved people and women did not enjoy the political equality O'Sullivan praised. His claim that the nation stood for liberty therefore described an ideal, not everyone's experience. To analyze his argument, ask whose interests it served and whose rights it overlooked. Expansion was not a force of nature; people supported it, resisted it, and suffered its effects.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What did O'Sullivan claim about the United States in 1839? Which words made its growth sound unstoppable?

2. Define Manifest Destiny as the passage explains it. Name two kinds of American institutions its supporters expected to spread.

3. How did the word "destiny" turn a political goal into a claim about the future?

4. Choose one detail that challenges O'Sullivan's claim that the nation stood for liberty. Explain the conflict.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a three-sentence reply to O'Sullivan from someone who questions expansion in the 1840s. State a claim of Manifest Destiny, explain why calling expansion inevitable is misleading, and name one existing right or institution the claim overlooks.

ANSWER KEY

Destiny or Decision?

GRADE 8 · 8.C.9.1.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline O'Sullivan's claims about the nation's future, circle words that make expansion sound certain, and number two details that challenge his claims. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What did O'Sullivan claim about the United States in 1839? Which words made its growth sound unstoppable?	**He claimed the United States had a special role in bringing liberty and progress to the future. His question about who could stop its "onward march" made its growth sound unstoppable.**
2	Define Manifest Destiny as the passage explains it. Name two kinds of American institutions its supporters expected to spread.	**Manifest Destiny was the belief that U.S. growth was meant to happen and American institutions would spread with it. Accept any two of government, religious beliefs, and customs.**
3	How did the word "destiny" turn a political goal into a claim about the future?	**It made expansion sound unavoidable, even though leaders and settlers had to choose to pursue it.**
4	Choose one detail that challenges O'Sullivan's claim that the nation stood for liberty. Explain the conflict.	**Enslaved people and women did not enjoy the political equality he praised, so his claim about liberty did not match everyone's experience.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Supporters say the United States is destined to spread its government and customs across this land. Calling that spread inevitable hides the decisions people make to take land and the efforts of Native nations to resist. Our nation's right to govern its own land deserves respect.

Accept other passage-based challenges to O'Sullivan's claims, including the governments and cultures of Native nations or Mexico's control of much of the Southwest. For Part 3, look for a three-sentence reply that addresses all three requested elements.