



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
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The Rhetoric of Maps and the Westward Expansion of the United States

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The acquisition of new territories by the United States between 1783 and 1850 expanded the nation's borders to the Mississippi, then to the Rocky Mountains, and finally to the Southwest and West Coast. A pageant of now famous historical figures, as well as, lesser known, and unknown persons, pushed the frontier further westward through politics, diplomacy, squatting, courage, good fortune, warfare and, at times, apparent thievery. However, of all the tools at the disposal of politicians, patriots, explorers, adventurers, businessmen, and speculators, the map, above all things, legitimized westward expansion and symbolically made these gains manifest. With all of its rhetorical powers, lies, and limitations, the map became the concrete embodiment of the notion of Manifest Destiny.

This unit is created to incorporate the rhetoric of maps, 18th and 19th surveying and mapmaking techniques, and the historical events that lead to the westward expansion of the United States into the United States history curriculum at Wilbur Cross High School, a comprehensive urban high school in New Haven, Connecticut. While it is specifically designed to target student needs in my 10th grade United States History I class, it should be easily adapted to work with students in grades 7-12. The unit includes background information on events such as the Mason Dixon Line, the Land Ordinance of 1785, and the Lewis and Clark Expedition. It also contains reference to numerous map collections and authoritative works. Most importantly I believe my unit features an instructional, yet fun, map practicum where students will use period mapmaking tools and techniques (compass, striding, and Gunter's chain) to measure, scale and draw space around our school.

(Developed for U.S. History I, grade 10; recommended for History and Social Studies, grades 7-12)

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