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“Our Country Is Destined to be the Great Nation of Futurity”: John L. O’Sullivan’s Manifest Destiny and Christian Nationalism, 1837–1846

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Academic Editor: Mark Edwards

Received: 12 December 2016; Accepted: 14 April 2017; Published: 17 April 2017

Abstract: As founding editor of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, John L. O’Sullivan (1813–1895) preached a particular form of Christian nationalism that centered on expansionist fever occurring during the 1830s and 1840s. O’Sullivan’s Christian nationalism was known as “Manifest Destiny”. He famously coined the term in 1845 while defending the right of the United States to annex the Republic of Texas. The central argument of this essay is that Manifest Destiny, as O’Sullivan articulated it in the pages of the *Democratic Review*, follows the contours of the innovative and heterodox political religion developed by Elie Kedourie and expounded upon by Anthony D. Smith. O’Sullivan’s Manifest Destiny was a conglomerated nationalistic paradigm consisting of elements from Protestant theology, Lyman Beecher’s vision for civilizing the West, and German idealism via George Bancroft’s use of historicism in his *History of the United States of America, from the Discovery of the American Continent*. As a form of Christian nationalism located in the context of antebellum America, Manifest Destiny is helpful to historians as they trace both continuity and change over time in how Americans have self-identified in religious terms since their origin as a collection of colonial, and later independent, polities.

Keywords: Manifest Destiny; nationalism; national identity; antebellum America

1. Introduction

As founding editor of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, John L. O’Sullivan (1813–1895) preached a particular form of Christian nationalism that centered on expansionist fever occurring during the 1830s and 1840s. O’Sullivan’s Christian nationalism was known as “Manifest Destiny”. He famously coined the term in 1845 while defending the right of the United States to annex the Republic of Texas. The central argument of this essay is that Manifest Destiny, as O’Sullivan articulated it in the pages of the *Democratic Review*, follows the contours of the innovative and heterodox political religion developed by Elie Kedourie and expounded upon by Anthony D. Smith [1,2]. O’Sullivan’s Manifest Destiny was a conglomerated nationalistic paradigm consisting of elements from Protestant theology, Lyman Beecher’s vision for civilizing the West, and German idealism via George Bancroft’s use of historicism in his *History of the United States of America, from the Discovery of the American Continent*. As a form of Christian nationalism located in the context of antebellum America, Manifest Destiny is helpful to historians as they trace both continuity and change over time in how Americans have self-identified in religious terms since their origin as a collection of colonial, and later independent, polities.

2. The *Democratic Review*, John L. O'Sullivan, and Manifest Destiny

O'Sullivan founded the *Democratic Review* with his brother in law, Samuel Daly Langtree, in 1837. He was the proprietor, editor, and regular contributor of the journal until 1846, when he sold it to Henry Wikoff for between five and six thousand dollars ([3], p. 84). Landon Fuller wrote that O'Sullivan had two major goals for the magazine from the outset. First, the *Democratic Review* was to be an outlet advancing "the fundamental principles of American democracy" ([3], p. 2). In doing so, O'Sullivan hoped to cast American democracy as the most ideal society on earth. Further, O'Sullivan consistently argued, from the beginning of his tenure as editor until the end, that America was destined to go from strength to strength in future years, and by its pure example, fulfill its God-given mission to overspread the entire North American continent. In an 1838 analysis of Alexis de Tocqueville's recently published first volume of *Democracy in America*, O'Sullivan predicted, "We see no reason, other than the merely material inconvenience of assembling representatives from so great a distance, why the Union may not cross the Rocky Mountains with as much facility as it has done the Alleghanies [*sic*], and spread itself from the Arctic Sea to the Gulf of Mexico with as much safety as it did of old from Maine to Georgia" ([4], p. 354). Just before he sold the *Democratic Review* in 1846, he wrote, "Is there one who does not hope for—nay, does not foresee—...that the future is to extend to all the people of the American continent, if true to their trust, institutions based upon the light of reason and truth, upon the benefits and inherent and equal rights of all men, and upon that fraternal bond of union which alone can give promise of universal peace?" ([5], p. 64).

Second, Fuller wrote that the *Democratic Review* was "to promote the development of American literature on a national and democratic basis" ([3], p. 2). O'Sullivan believed that, despite America's greatness as a pure experiment in democracy, the nation did not have a literary tradition or identity to match its political exceptionalism. A great nation ought to have an equally great body of literature. He wrote in 1842, "The spirit of literature and the spirit of Democracy are one" ([6], p. 196). Americans ought to have literature and arts that emerge out of the shadow of Europe to surpass their former masters. In 1839, O'Sullivan lamented, "And our literature!—Oh, when will it breathe the spirit of our republican institutions? When will it be imbued with the God-like aspiration of intellectual freedom—the elevating principle of equality? When will it assert *its* national independence, and speak the soul—the heart of the American people? Why cannot our literati comprehend the matchless sublimity of our position amongst the nations of the world—our high destiny—and cease bending the knee to foreign idolatry, false tastes, false doctrines, false principles?" ([7], p. 428).

O'Sullivan's stress on both politics and literature was one of the unique features of the *Democratic Review*. It was broader in scope than most of its contemporary outlets. Fuller compared the *Democratic Review* to the *American Quarterly Review* (which he described as "notoriously dull" ([3], p. 10)), the *Knickerbocker Magazine*, and the *Southern Literary Messenger*. He said that while these outlets were interested in literary developments, they were not so interested in politics. Others offered political commentary, but little in the way of literary content. Fuller cited a letter from George Bancroft to Jared Sparks to describe what, in his view, the *Democratic Review* accomplished under the editorship of O'Sullivan: "A vein of public feeling, of democratic independence, of popular liberty, ought to be infused into our literature. Let Mammon rule in the marts; but not on the holy mountain of letters. The rich ought not to be flattered; let truth, let humanity speak through the public journals and through American literature" [8]. And while the *Democratic Review* was an advocate of Democratic party principles, the literary figures who contributed were mostly non-partisan. Auspicious writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walter Whitman (as he was then called), James Kirke Paulding, William Gilmore Sims, Alexander H. Everett, Parke Godwin, Evert A. Duyckinck, and Henry T. Tuckerman were among the frequent men of letters who contributed to the poetry, fiction, and essay sections of the magazine. Political figures (and Democratic partisans) who contributed were equally famous: Benjamin F. Butler, Lewis Cass, Caleb Cushing, Samuel J. Tilden, Henry Gilpin, and Orestes A. Brownson joined their voices with O'Sullivan's [3].

Other journals that advanced Manifest Destiny were the *New York Herald* under the editorship of James Gordon Bennett and the *New York Sun*, edited by Moses Y. Beach. New York City was the source of most of the journals advocating for Manifest Destiny, and these two in particular boasted the largest circulation of the New York journals. Bancroft edited the *Bay State Democrat* in Boston, and he and O'Sullivan were in frequent correspondence during this period ([9], p. 35). The *Democratic Review* did not have the largest circulation of the Democratic outlets, but it had a national audience and was credible enough to attract some of the most influential figures as contributors under O'Sullivan's editorship. Anders Stephanson wrote that under O'Sullivan, the *Democratic Review* "became such a thorn in the side of conservatives that the *American Whig Review* was revamped in 1845 into a political counterpart" ([10], p. 39).

Unfortunately, comparatively little is known about O'Sullivan. Edward L. Widmer marveled that "[H]e was unusually intimate with eminent writers and politicians, yet there exists almost no likenesses of him, nor any substantial manuscript collections" ([11], p. 29). His father, John O'Sullivan, who drowned after attempting to rescue sailors after their ship ran aground off the coast of South America, was a source of romantic inspiration to him. He matriculated into Columbia College at the age of fourteen and finished his freshman year at the top of his class. He was allowed to skip his sophomore year, and the trustees of the college even permitted him to complete his studies without attending classes. Decades later, the president of the college mused of O'Sullivan, "it presents an example of native ability combined with resolute industry, and crowned with distinguished success, to which I do not know a parallel" ([12], pp. 4–5). He graduated with an A.B. degree in 1831 at the age of eighteen and spent two more years at Columbia serving as a tutor and instructor. In 1835, he was admitted to the New York bar.

After his education was complete, O'Sullivan's mother moved the family down to Washington, D.C. where she hoped to settle claims against the US government. Just prior to his death in 1825, the elder John O'Sullivan had purchased a merchant ship, the *Dick*, which was subsequently seized as a pirate ship by the American government in Buenos Aires. With the help of Martin Van Buren and Democratic Congressman Churchill C. Cambreleng of New York City, Mrs. O'Sullivan was awarded \$20,210 from the US Treasury as compensation for the unfounded seizure of the *Dick*. This influx of money served as the basis for the founding of the *Democratic Review*. O'Sullivan sold the *Democratic Review* in 1846, and actively filibustered for Cuba against Spain for ultimate annexation to the United States. He was tried for violating the Neutrality Act and acquitted in 1852. He became minister to Portugal from 1853 to 1857 during the Pierce administration, and advocated on behalf of secession and state rights leading up to the Civil War. During the war, O'Sullivan took to England with his reputation tarnished, not returning to the United States until the late 1870s. By this time, he had been nearly forgotten in the United States and he died in 1895 impoverished and obscure. Adam Gomez wrote, "[h]aving once been the voice of the radical Democrats, O'Sullivan at his death was less than an embarrassment; he was barely a memory" ([13], p. 255).

O'Sullivan is probably most famous for having coined the term "Manifest Destiny" in 1845. Widmer observed, "[a]lmost every history of the Jacksonian period contains a one-sentence summation of O'Sullivan as the author of the phrase" but O'Sullivan himself seems to have been oblivious to the significance of this fact. Widmer wrote, "he never claimed his territorial rights to it, despite his self-aggrandizing personality" ([11], p. 31). The context for the origin of the term was the issue of Texas annexation. In April 1844, O'Sullivan wrote "[t]hat Texas is to be, sooner or later, included in the Union, we have long—nay, ever since the battle of San Jacinto [21 April 1836]—regarded as an event already indelibly inscribed in the book of future fate and necessity" ([14], p. 423). Just over a year later in July 1845, O'Sullivan advocated in favor of annexation and criticized the intrigues of European powers, namely Great Britain and France, as they sought to undermine the relationship between Texas and the United States. He accused Europe of "thwarting our policy and hampering our power, limiting our greatness and checking the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions" ([15], p. 5). Texan annexation

was completed by the end of 1845, and was one of the background causes for the Mexican American War, which broke out in the spring of 1846.

Interestingly enough, while O'Sullivan clearly thought the United States had a rightful claim to Texas, he was strongly opposed to any conquest of Texas or any other lands, for that matter. When advocating for annexation in 1844, O'Sullivan insisted, "[n]or ought the Annexation be made without the consent of Mexico, or her recognition of the independence of her successfully revolted province. We must avoid even the appearance of evil" ([14], p. 430). O'Sullivan maintained his anti-war of conquest stance consistently because since it was America's God-given destiny to possess North America in time, and since it would betray the principles of American democracy, it was futile and hypocritical for the United States to take by force any territories [16]. Still, expansionism in the 1840s would not wait.

While expansionism and Manifest Destiny were powerful nationalistic expressions during this period, these were not without their opposing positions. Expansionism was mainly found in the Democratic party, and especially among Democrats in the states of the Old Northwest. These wanted to see the United States annex Texas, northern Mexico, and the Oregon Country up to 54° 40'. Their opponents in the Whig party, centered primarily in the Northeast, did not want the United States to acquire any new territories. Whigs believed that America had a divine mission just as Democrats like O'Sullivan did, but according to Daniel Walker Howe, "[t]hey saw America's moral mission as one of democratic example rather than one of conquest" ([17], p. 706). President James K. Polk settled on the 49th parallel as the northernmost American claim to Oregon, but was determined to have northern Mexico—placing him in the position of a centrist ([18], p. 357).

There were two powerful dynamics behind Manifest Destiny, one practical and one religious. Practically speaking, many believed that the annexation of territories south and west would alleviate the slavery problem. David M. Potter observed that "expansionism meant expansionism southward, and expansion southward meant the extension of slavery" ([19], p. 197). By the 1850s, expansion of slavery into the territories was a sectional issue, but prior to the Mexican American War this was not yet the case. O'Sullivan agreed with Mississippi Senator Robert J. Walker, who according to Sean Wilentz, "argued that annexation would lead to a dispersal of the slave population through the West and into Latin America, hasten slavery's demise, and leave behind an all-white United States—a rehashing of the old Jeffersonian 'diffusion' idea" ([20], p. 63). O'Sullivan sided with Free Soil, but his views on slavery were not strongly abolitionist. Tocqueville believed that African Americans would eventually emigrate to Latin America and the islands of the Caribbean, a position which O'Sullivan found to be "extremely probable." Furthermore, O'Sullivan did not think that African Americans were the moral or intellectual equals of whites. He wrote, "[t]he attempt to raise [African Americans] to a political equality with the white race, has not succeeded in practice in the States where it has been carried into effect in theory" ([4], p. 352).

Related to this position was the notion that Anglo Americans were the only people able to civilize the land and make it productive. In his 1845 article "Annexation", O'Sullivan stated that Mexicans lacked the ability to govern California. The result was that Mexico had no rightful claim to the territory, and it was thus *de facto* independent and open for the taking by the United States. "Imbecile and distracted, Mexico never can exert any real governmental authority over such a country" ([15], p. 9). Later in 1845, when considering how to treat the people of Mexico in the event that the United States annexed that country, he stated what he really thought of the Mexican people's ability to live and possess a stake in a republic. "Beyond a question the entire Mexican vote would be substantially below our national average both in purity and intelligence. The Mexican people are unaccustomed to the duties of self-government, and for years to come must travel up through numberless processes of political emancipation before they can dispense with restraints which the Saxon family threw off more than three hundred years ago" ([21], p. 245).

O'Sullivan's view was not uncommon. It is related to a commonly held racist position on the dominion mandate in the nineteenth century. The dominion mandate was the commandment of God

given to humans shortly after Creation to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1:28, ESV). The racist view of the dominion mandate lurked behind Andrew Jackson’s 1830 justification for the removal of Native American from their homes in the South. In his Second Annual Message to Congress of December 6, 1830, Jackson said that removal would “place a dense and civilized population in large tracts of country now occupied by a few savage hunters...It will...cause them gradually, under the protection of the Government and through the influence of good counsels, to cast off their savage habits and become an interesting, civilized, and Christian community” ([22], III.1083). Sam Haselby wrote that Jackson’s message represented “the first explicitly racist statement on the political community from a sitting US president, and it was also the first time a US president turned to a theological justification for an imperial act” ([23], p. 312).

Mexicans, according to many Americans of the 1840s, were unable or unwilling to fulfill the dominion mandate. Thus, by not fulfilling the dominion mandate, a nation forfeits its title to any tract of land. For example, in arguing for conquest of northern Mexico, Congressman Timothy Pillsbury of Texas said, “[a] country kept vacant by the policy of a nation which claims the right of ownership over it is common property, and reverts to the situation in which all land was before it became property, and is open to be occupied, subdued, and cultivated by man—by those who will do so—as the Creator designed it should be” ([24], p. 194). Ex-president and Massachusetts Congressman John Quincy Adams expressed similar views on the floor of Congress, arguing for the annexation of all of Oregon Country. Richard Kluger wrote that Adams, a committed abolitionist, wanted all of Oregon “to offset the Texas annexation”. Adams said, “We claim that country...to make the wilderness bloom as the rose, to establish laws, to increase, multiply, and subdue the earth, which we are commanded to do by the first behest of God Almighty”. He went on to excoriate the British, who were doing nothing in his view to develop the land, but simply sought “to keep it open for navigation, for hunters to hunt the wild beasts...for the buffaloes, braves, and savages of the desert” ([25], pp. 428–29).

In addition to these factors, technological advancements like the steam engine and the telegraph had the effect of practically shortening vast distances between spaces in the republic and creating demand for access to new lands. Also, the Panic of 1837, America’s worst economic crisis to that date, contributed further to this demand. Thus, Frederick Merk called Manifest Destiny a “reform” of the 1840s advanced by emerging politicians and thinkers known as “Young America.” Some figures associated with Young America were O’Sullivan, Stephen O. Douglas, William Allen, Andrew Kennedy, Thomas Ritchie, and James K. Polk who became president in 1845. Polk, at 49, was the youngest person to date to be elected president. Merk wrote, “[y]outh was responsible, doubtless, for such characteristics of Manifest Destiny as its grandeur and scope, and for the moral exaltation with which it was set forth” ([9], pp. 54–55). But Manifest Destiny ultimately paved the way for the Civil War by exacerbating the slavery issue, transforming it into the most divisive economic, social, political, and moral problem of the 1850s. James M. McPherson said “[t]he triumph of Manifest Destiny may have reminded some Americans of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s prophecy that ‘the United States will conquer Mexico, but it will be as the man swallows the arsenic, which brings him down in turn. Mexico will poison us.’ He was right. The poison was slavery” ([26], p. 50).

3. Manifest Destiny and Christian Nationalism

How do we assess Manifest Destiny as Christian nationalism? Anthony D. Smith’s engagement with Elie Kedourie’s landmark work on nationalism is particularly helpful as we consider the meaning of nationalism as an idea and the relationship that Christianity might have with nationalism. Smith divided Kedourie’s modernist understanding of nationalism into three positions: (1) “secular replacement” whereby traditional religion is replaced by a “secular, revolutionary nationalism” (as in revolutionary France or Soviet Russia), (2) “neo-traditional”, in which religion serves as an “ally” of nationalism (as in, say, the nineteenth century Church of England), and (3) “a secular version of millennial ‘political religion’ which “depicts nationalism as a new *ersatz* and heterodox religion

opposed to conventional, traditional religions, yet inheriting many of their features" ([2], p. 13). It is this third position which seems to comport best with Manifest Destiny as we assess it as a form of Christian nationalism. His aim was not to advance or advocate for a Protestant theology *per se*, but to strive for, in Smith's words, "the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of a population some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential 'nation'" ([2], p. 24). In so doing, O'Sullivan appropriated certain Protestant theological themes in order to advocate for America's Manifest Destiny, which we will discuss later.

Kedourie's third sense of nationalism illustrates how nationalists appropriate religions to advance their purposes, thereby putting forth a political religion with the nation at its center. A religion's themes and figures are put to use in the service of a particular nation in order to advance the nation's interests. So, Kedourie wrote, "[m]en who thought they were acting in order to accomplish the will of God...are suddenly seen to have been really acting in order that the genius of a particular nationality should be manifested and fostered" ([1], p. 69). He provided the historical examples of Abraham, Moses, Muhammad, and Luther as figures prominent in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity which are reinvented in the present by nationalists to serve the political purpose of galvanizing the concept of the Jewish, Arab, or German nation respectively. Thus, Kedourie wrote, "[n]ationalists make use of the past in order to subvert the present" ([1], p. 70). In other words, nationalists distort the histories of particular religions in order to develop a political religion that casts a nation in metaphysical terms in the present. As they do this, the nationalist ideology and the religion it appropriates are often at odds with one another. Commenting on Kedourie's paradigm of nationalism as political religion, Smith wrote "while modern nationalisms often incorporate motifs from earlier, traditional religions, they also reject many of their ideas and practices, particularly those that hold out the prospect of seeking salvation from a cosmic, other-worldly source" ([2], p. 17).

This is exactly what we see in how O'Sullivan framed Manifest Destiny—his American Christian nationalism. Throughout his writings in the *Democratic Review*, he took the figure of Christ and Christ's messages and marshaled them in the service of American ideals. Christ was no longer the suffering servant, despised and rejected of men, and giving his life as a ransom for many, as the Tanak book of Isaiah and the gospel of Mark portrayed him. He was not the savior of the world through his death, burial, and resurrection as the four gospels described him. O'Sullivan replaced Christ with democracy as the savior of the human race. For example, in 1839, he wrote that "democratic liberty" had its source in the American founding documents, and that it was the "source of true civilization". Neither Christ nor the gospel, but democratic liberty ushered in a world order "destined to cease only when every man in the world should be finally and triumphantly redeemed" ([27], p. 213). O'Sullivan also used Christ as the embodiment of the expressions of equality and natural rights in the Declaration of Independence. He further saw Christ as exemplar of human progress, the champion of liberty, and the enemy of tyranny. In 1840, he wrote, "Christianity struck its first blow at the vitals of unjust power. The annunciations of its lofty Teacher embodied truths after which the nations in their dim twilight had long struggled in vain" ([28], p. 228).

O'Sullivan hosted editorialists who also transformed the biblical Christ into a political savior. An editorialist known as simply "D.D.F." commented on an address given by Mark Hopkins, the president of Williams College, on the fiftieth anniversary (1844) of the school's founding. Hopkins' address was entitled, "The Law and Progress of the Race." In that address, Hopkins recast Christianity from a theological system centered on the atonement of Christ to a political theology advancing the upward progression of the human race in history via the inherent freedom of the individual. Furthermore, the religion founded by Christ was the only system that, in Hopkins' words, "could have amalgamated materials so discordant as the northern barbarian and the effeminate Roman" and without Christianity, there could be no way that "Europe could have been freed from the curse of domestic slavery and of feudal institutions". The editorialist D.D.F. took Hopkins to mean that American civilization was the perfection of a Christian society—not in terms of literature, heroism, the arts, or "the production of noble men", necessarily. But more importantly for D.D.F., American civilization champions the

“rights of man as man”. Finally he wrote, “In our days man is invested with a certain sanctity.... He has rights too sacred for man to touch, born with him, and inalienable.” And what is the source of America, this pinnacle of civilization? Simply put, Christianity. The editorialist took the Christian religion and recast its essence from the gospel of Christ and transformed it into an ideology setting America above other nations, including Germany and England, upon highest pedestal of human society. D.D.F. asked in conclusion to his essay, “who shall presume to set limits to [Christianity’s] work of regeneration?” ([29], p. 202). D.D.F. even changed the term “regeneration” from its New Testament meaning in Tit. 3.5 to a political meaning with America as the medium through which Christianity’s liberal regeneration of humanity would take place in future time. Conrad Cherry observed this departure from Protestant theology—“According to the exponents of Manifest Destiny, God’s New Israel was elected for clear or *manifest* reasons—because of its superior form of government, its geographical location, and its beneficence” ([30], p. 117).

Clearly then, Manifest Destiny entailed more for America than simply existing as “a Christian nation”. It was an exceptional Christian nation, because it was the divine choice of God for the political salvation of the world. Mark Noll’s analysis of Christian nationalism is particularly helpful here. He distinguished between two types of Christian nationalism: “strong” and “weak Christian America” ([31], pp. 7–13). Advocates of strong Christian America posit the nation as “an extension of the history of salvation” and are convinced that “God must have providentially intervened in that conflict on the side of ‘his people,’ the Americans”. America is an “anointed land, set apart by a divine plan for an extraordinary existence as a nation and an extraordinary mission to the world” ([31], pp. 7–8). By contrast, advocates of a weak Christian America would hesitate from providential certainty and assess the American experience by thinking historically and along the pattern of traditional orthodoxy in order to critically understand America’s past. Noll wrote of weak Christian America, “[b]y reasoning from theological principle and historical actuality—rather than from intuitions about God’s secret providence—it should be possible to say that some aspects of a nation’s history comport better with generally Christian principles than do other aspects of that history” ([31], p. 10). O’Sullivan posited a “strong Christian America” in the pages of the *Democratic Review*.

So, we have located Manifest Destiny on Kedourie’s map of nationalism as, what Smith described, “a secular version of millennial ‘political religion’” ([2], p. 13). We have also identified Manifest Destiny as consistent with Noll’s model of “strong Christian America.” As such, O’Sullivan incorporated elements from disparate sources to construct Manifest Destiny, his particular brand of Christian nationalism, which served as a political religion of the antebellum period in American history. These sources include Protestant theology, a vision of westward expansion advocated by Lyman Beecher, and George Bancroft’s writing of history, which was informed by German historicism.

First, what Protestant theological themes can be found in Manifest Destiny? As we begin to think about this question, it is helpful to broadly consider the Christian America thesis, that is, the notion that America is, and always has been, a Christian nation. As John Fea has noted, most generations of Americans have believed they were living in a Christian nation. And more particularly, America was probably more of a Christian nation during the antebellum period than at any other time in its history. Fea wrote, “[i]f the United States was ever a ‘Christian nation’, it was so during the period between the ratification of the Constitution (1789) and the start of the Civil War (1861)” ([32], p. 4). An obvious example of the Protestant religiosity of the American people is in the evolution of Federalist engagement with American religion, politics, and society in the early republican period. Jonathan Den Hartog traced this evolution, identifying three successive stages occurring among Federalists between the Revolution and the 1820s in their attitudes concerning how best to maintain the virtue of the United States as a Protestant Christian nation. Den Hartog’s categories are (1) “a Republican attitude” that prevailed from the Revolution through the end of Washington’s administration; (2) “a Combative perspective” from the 1790s to the War of 1812; and (3) “a Voluntarist strategy” which occurred after 1815 and the subsequent fracturing of the Federalist Party. Den Hartog noted that the Federalists sought to adapt themselves to the developing democratic impulse in the new nation in the first decades

of its existence, while simultaneously working to maintain the nation's identity in decidedly Protestant terms. What they failed to do by political means, they sought to carry on their mission through voluntary religious societies. Den Hartog wrote, "[Federalists] were pushed out of politics in the face of Democratic electoral success, but they were also pulled in the direction by the successes they saw resulting from early voluntarist endeavors" ([33], p. 7).

As a nineteenth century nationalist articulation of strong Christian America, O'Sullivan's Manifest Destiny appropriated the Protestant metaphysical and ethical themes of providence, innocence, mission, and millennialism. First, let us consider O'Sullivan's use of Protestant themes in his expression of Manifest Destiny as nationalism. The most prominent Protestant theme appearing in O'Sullivan's nationalistic writings is providence. Providence is the unifying concept in Manifest Destiny, and scarcely does O'Sullivan describe America without somehow appealing to providence. Providence permeates O'Sullivan's nationalism, and O'Sullivan clearly believed that he could have certainty with regard to God's purposes. For him, it was God's will to bring history to an ideal state, and American democracy was the medium by which God would accomplish his purposes. In 1839, he wrote, "[i]n its magnificent domain of space and time, the nation of many nations [that is, America] is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles; to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High—the Sacred and the True." Earlier in the same essay, he asserted, "[w]e 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'" ([7], p. 427). In these lines, O'Sullivan accomplished several nationalistic objects simultaneously: he spoke with certainty about God's will with regard to America, he claimed America to be the chosen people of God, he explained the millennial purpose God had bestowed upon America, and he conflated the Christian gospel with the ideals expressed in the American Declaration of Independence.

Innocence is a second key ethical Protestant theme O'Sullivan adopted for his nationalism. Gomez observed that because of the workings of providence through the chosen people, America is thus a morally regenerate nation. America's sinlessness comes by virtue of its being the agent of God's providence and in the sense that America is the paragon of what O'Sullivan called "the democratic principle" ([13], p. 240). In O'Sullivan's 1837 inaugural editorial for the *Democratic Review*, he said, "[w]e feel safe under the banner of the democratic principle, which is borne onward by an unseen hand of Providence, to lead our race toward the high destinies of which every human soul contains the God-implanted germ..." ([34], p. 9). For O'Sullivan, the past is irrelevant and the only history that matters is future history. America is the nation of the future, and thus it is America that will define future history under the hand of providence. Furthermore, all morality must be defined according to the democratic principle. The upshot of this is that America, being the ideal democratic nation, is morally pure. "All history has to be re-written; political science and the whole scope of all moral truth have to be considered and illustrated in the light of the democratic principle" ([34], p. 14).

Mission is another Protestant theme found O'Sullivan's Manifest Destiny. Gomez wrote that for O'Sullivan, "America does not *have* a mission, it *is* a mission, and the spread of American government is always the spread of human liberty..." ([13], p. 252). Spreading democracy across the North American continent, and ultimately, to the whole of humanity was at the center of O'Sullivan's understanding of mission. God has chosen America, not in a passive way but in an active way. America has been chosen not to *be* something, but to *do* something. O'Sullivan defined the mission as being "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...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 the beasts of the field" ([7], p. 430). Thus, O'Sullivan transformed the Christian gospel—the

“glad tidings” of Isa 52:7, Matt 24:14, Luke 2:10, and Rom 10:15—into another gospel of salvation in American democracy in his nationalism.

Finally, O’Sullivan annexed millennialism to Manifest Destiny. Recall that Kedourie observed that a key feature of nationalism as political religion occurs when a central religious figure is recast from his traditional, orthodox role to a new role that serves the interests of the nation. O’Sullivan took the figure of Christ and recast him, from the orthodox pattern of Suffering Servant, Son of God, Savior of world, and eschatological Judge of all humankind to the preacher of American democracy who will ultimately bring about the Kingdom of God on earth. In 1843, he said, “those principles and those precepts of Him who spoke as never man spake, which it is henceforth the joint and blessed mission of both to apply in practice to the regeneration of human society, to realize that inconceivably glorious result, of the coming of the Kingdom of God upon the earth, of which He himself promised the attainment, as well as taught the way” ([35], p. 567). So American democracy was the gospel of Christ who brought forth the United States into the world sinless to serve as the example to all humankind and the usher in the kingdom that would be defined by personal liberty and equality.

O’Sullivan imported these and other important Christian themes from Protestant theology to Manifest Destiny. He was not the first to do this. The history of the use of Protestant themes to situate the identity and significance of the nation goes back to the early seventeenth century Puritans who established the New England colonies. It continues into the eighteenth century as American colonists adapted the way they self-identified to the colonial wars and the Revolution. And Americans continued to use theological themes after their independence in the late eighteenth century and into the nineteenth. O’Sullivan’s Manifest Destiny is the antebellum iteration of a long tradition of religious exceptionalist ideas that emerged in the American colonies and later, the nation [36]¹.

No genealogical accounting of Manifest Destiny is complete without a consideration of how westward expansion inspired its adherents, particularly O’Sullivan. In particular, the rapid westward expansion of the United States, beginning with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, seemed evidence to many that the nation was chosen by God to fulfill a special destiny on the continent that would extend to the world. Westward expansion gave a new significance to the Protestant theological vocabulary that had been in use since the seventeenth century. And while Manifest Destiny did signal the beginning of sectionalism in the nation, nevertheless, the rhetoric its advocates used to promote it was nationalistic in its scope.

Lyman Beecher (1775–1863) expressed his vision for expansion into the west in his 1835 book, *A Plea for the West*. Beecher’s vision provides the means by which we may place the Christian nationalism of Manifest Destiny in its antebellum context. John C. Pinheiro argued in his religious history of the Mexican-American War that Americans took the concepts of Anglo-Saxonism, Protestantism, and anti-Catholicism to arrive at what he termed the “Beecherite Synthesis” [37]², a new providentialist and destinarian language of exceptionalism befitting the growth of the American population, the expansion of its territory, and the democratization of its Christianity. The Beecherite Synthesis evolved from the 1830s through the Texas annexation debates of 1844–45 and culminating in the Mexican-American War from 1846–48. By the time open hostilities had broken out between the United States and Mexico in April 1846, Pinheiro argued O’Sullivan’s Manifest Destiny and the Beecherite Synthesis had become nearly synonymous.

In *A Plea for the West*, Beecher admitted he was initially skeptical about the idea of a divinely-ordained destiny reserved for the United States. But upon reflection on the history of

¹ See John D. Wilsey. *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea* for a historical and theological consideration of American exceptionalism from the colonial period to the present.

² Pinheiro carefully examines how the concept of race went far beyond distinctions of color, e.g., black/white. He demonstrates that in nineteenth century discourse on race could be broadly understood to refer to color, religion, ethnicity, nation, and other factors. Other excellent treatments on race and nationalism can be found in Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) [38] and Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607–1876* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007) [39].

western expansion to his own time, he confessed he had come to see the light. Whereas he once found the idea of divine destiny for America “chimerical”, he came to believe, “there is not a nation upon earth which, in fifty years, can be all possible reformation place itself in circumstances so favorable as our own for the free, unembarrassed applications of physical effort and pecuniary power to evangelize the world” ([40], p. 123). And how would America make good on fulfilling its divine destiny? It would do so by securing civil and religious liberty through a concerted effort of education in Protestant theology and morals. Beecher asserted, “the conflict which is to decide the destiny of the West, will be a conflict of institutions for the education of her sons, for purposes of superstitions, or evangelical light; of despotism, or liberty” ([40], pp. 123–24).

Central to Beecher’s work was the notion that Catholicism and liberty were mutually exclusive, and one must win out completely over the other when they come into conflict. At the national founding, there was not much concern among Americans about a Catholic threat—in 1800, Catholics represented only about 1.7% of the total population ([37], p. 41). But because of the Second Great Awakening and the influx of immigrants during the early decades of the nineteenth century, that percentage jumped to 3.5% by 1840 ([37], p. 41). According to Pinheiro, by 1830 “there were over a dozen Catholic seminaries and colleges and the number of monasteries and convents were approaching forty” ([37], p. 42). For Beecher, the rising tide of Catholicism in the United States threatened to undermine its destiny to civilize the west. If Americans did not awaken themselves to the Catholic threat and establish Protestant institutions in the west, then the fabric of republicanism in the nation could be torn asunder. But, Beecher urged, “if this work be done, and well done, our country is safe, and the world’s hope is secure. The government of force will cease, and that of intelligence and virtue will take its place” ([40], p. 130).

When *A Plea for the West* appeared in 1835, Beecher’s anti-Catholicism was aimed primarily at Catholic immigrants coming into the United States. But by the mid 1840s, the Beecherite Synthesis shifted its focus from American Catholics to Roman Catholic Mexico. Pinheiro traced this evolution from the writings of Charles Joseph Latrobe, George Wilkins Kendall, William H. Prescott, Brantz Mayer, and William Stapp. These authors characterized Mexican society as dilapidated, indolent, bigoted against Protestants, and the Mexican people as racially inferior. Anglo-Saxons were, in contrast, freer, more enlightened, more industrious, and most obviously favored by God over all other racial groups in the world. Pinheiro wrote, “by 1846, America’s identity seemed most intelligible only when defined in contradistinction to Mexico: Protestant, not Catholic; Anglo-Saxon not Indian/Mestizo/Spanish (i.e., white not non-white or black); republican not tyrannical; industrious not slothful” ([37], p. 65). But it was O’Sullivan that culminated this shift in his “Annexation” essay published just less than a year out from Polk’s war address of May 11, 1846. According to Pinheiro, O’Sullivan transformed the Beecherite Synthesis “by spelling out the shape of the Catholic menace, relocating it for the time being in Mexico, and reinforcing the divinely ordained American role in the advancement of civil and religious liberty” ([37], p. 65). O’Sullivan’s writings lack the strenuous anti-Catholic and covenantal elements found in Beecher’s book—he was after all, the son of Irish immigrants and was raised Catholic. Still, O’Sullivan’s exultations over the superiority of Anglo-Saxonism in the pages of the *Democratic Review* neatly situate his Manifest Destiny within the Beecherite Synthesis.

As Christian nationalism then, O’Sullivan’s brand of Manifest Destiny bears the marks of a political religion that contrasts with Christianity while simultaneously appropriating themes from Protestant theology; and it fits within the antebellum context via the Beecherite Synthesis. Lastly, Manifest Destiny is a Christian nationalism informed by the Enlightenment, and perhaps most significantly, from nineteenth century German idealism. It accurately represents the Enlightenment’s emphasis on human progress, and it bears resemblance with certain characteristics of G. W. F. Hegel’s philosophy of history. While it is unclear whether or not O’Sullivan was familiar with Hegel’s writings, it is clear that he was personally acquainted with historian and diplomat George Bancroft (1800–1891), and had knowledge of his work in American history. Bancroft serves as the connection

between O'Sullivan's Manifest Destiny and German idealism, via the historicism he had adopted while studying at universities in Berlin, Heidelberg, and Göttingen, where he earned his doctorate in 1820.

The influence of the German Enlightenment is clear in O'Sullivan's writings. For example, with regard to the doctrine of providence, O'Sullivan followed the leading philosophers and historians of his day in assuming that providence was the way in which the past itself and knowledge of the past were reconciled [41]³. Jonathan Boyd, in his dissertation on Bancroft, wrote that providentialists "argued consistently that there is *no dichotomy*—no divide between natural law and providence, between justice and caprice, between mechanism and agent, or between reason and history" ([42], p. 36). O'Sullivan clearly espoused that view of providence in his writings. Also, like Bancroft, O'Sullivan believed that nations possess a life span of their own, much like a human being. They have a birth, maturity, and old age. And as Boyd wrote, "nations are the individuals, the moral agents with which the historical narrative must deal" ([42], p. 187). By God's hand of providence, nations fulfill the purpose for which God calls them into being, and that purpose transcends their own interest and identity. Boyd, writing of Bancroft's concept of the American nation, said that America is providentially subsumed under "the international shape of world history, wherein all nations derive their identity, their calling, and their destiny from the larger pattern of history in its forward march of liberty" ([42], p. 200). A similar concept of nation is found in O'Sullivan's writings on the American nation.

Before we explore how, let us first consider some key tenets of the Enlightenment. "Enlightenment" is often used ambiguously—people use it assuming there is a universally understood and simple definition that everyone intuitively comprehends. Of course, the Enlightenment is enormously varied and complex. Still, there are some elements of Enlightenment that we can identify that are common from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century as it appeared in all its forms on the European continent, the British Isles, and America. Henry F. May summarized Enlightenment thought by saying, "[l]et us say that the Enlightenment consists of all those who believe two propositions: first, that the present age is more enlightened than the past; and second, that we understand nature in man best through the use of our natural faculties" ([43], p. xiv)⁴. Entailed in May's first tenet is the idea of inevitable progress. Inevitable progress is the insistence that human civilization, knowledge, morality, etc. were perpetually on the advance. Charles Van Doren wrote that the "eighteenth century not only believed in progress, it even began to believe in *necessary* progress; things *had* to get better, because that was the nature of things" ([44], p. 217).

O'Sullivan's writings are fraught with the concept of inevitable progress. "Our national birth," O'Sullivan wrote, "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;...we may confidently assume that our country is destined to be *the great nation* of futurity. It is so destined, because the principle upon which a nation is organized fixes its destiny, and that of equality is perfect, is universal" ([7], p. 426). He went on to assert that American laws, education, literature, and culture "are carried onward by the increasing tide of progress; and though they cast many a longing look behind, they cannot stay the glorious movement of the masses, nor induce them to venerate the rubbish, the prejudices, the superstitions of other times and other lands, the theocracy of priests, the divine right of kings, the aristocracy of blood, the metaphysics of colleges, the irrational stuff of law libraries" ([7], p. 429). But this advancement was not for America alone. Recall that America's mission, for O'Sullivan, was to bring the light of the democratic principle to the whole world. "The movement of man, then, must be upward. The virtue of earth and the holiness of Heaven, are pledged to his

³ See G. E. Lessing. *Lessing's Theological Writings* for Lessing's famous "ditch." Lessing posited, "accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason." Lessing meant that events and truths were of two separate categories, and must not be conflated. His view of history was purely secular, in that he asserted that one could not attain knowledge of God from historical events. Claims about God fall into the realm of faith, not knowledge.

⁴ May categorized four periods of Enlightenment thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

support. May God hasten the day of his complete final success!" ([28], p. 229). Thus was America's mission a world movement of liberation and of the establishment of the kingdom of God.

What marks of Hegel does O'Sullivan's Manifest Destiny bear? First, let us explore Hegel's philosophy. Hegel's thought is notoriously opaque. Bertrand Russell drily noted that Hegel "is, I should say, the hardest to understand of all the great philosophers" ([45], p. 730). But Hegel is not impossible to understand, and his philosophy of history in particular is recognizable in O'Sullivan's nationalism.

Hegel was a monist, in other words, he saw reality as a singular whole unified by logic, which to him was identical to metaphysics. The One, the Absolute Idea, for Hegel was God, or *Geist*, meaning "Spirit". *Geist*, wrote Russell, "is the only reality, and that its thought is reflected into itself by self-consciousness." Furthermore, "[t]he Absolute Idea [again, *Geist*] is pure thought thinking about pure thought. This is all God does throughout the ages—truly a Professor's God" ([45], pp. 734–35). History is the act of God in the process of becoming through the stages of the dialectic: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The process of time, for Hegel, is a movement from the less perfect to the more perfect, to finally culminate in an ideal logical end. Russell described it this way: "logical perfection consists in being a closely-knit whole, without ragged edges, without independent parts, but united, like a human body,...into an organism whose parts are interdependent and all work together towards a single end; and this also constitutes ethical perfection" ([45], pp. 735–36).

As *Geist* moves through a process of becoming, Hegel identified three phases: the Oriental, the Graeco-Roman, and the German. Each phase is recognized by a certain level of freedom. Hegel said, "[t]he East knew and to the present day knows only that *one* is free; the Greek and Roman world, that *some* are free; the German world knows that *all* are free. The first political form therefore which we observe in history, is *despotism*, the second *democracy* and *aristocracy*, the third *monarchy*" ([46], p. 203). Hegel also cast the nations representing historical development in organic terms. The Oriental stage "is the childhood of history". The Greek stage "would be the boyhood of history". The Roman stage, "the *manhood* of history"; and Hegel described the final, German stage as "the periods of life human life to its *old age*." In contrast to the physical, the "*spirit* is its perfect maturity and *strength*, in which it returns to unity with itself, but in its fully developed character as *spirit*" ([46], pp. 204–5). Once the Absolute Idea, or *Geist*—or God—has completed the process of becoming (and we must understand "God" as everything that is), then, wrote Hegel, "[f]reedom has found the means of realizing its ideal—its true existence" ([46], p. 206). Of course, time is a mirage, and the dialectical process of history—God working through a process of becoming—proceeds through eternity. But for Hegel, the German state represents the *telos* of history, the logical and ethical end of process in which perfect freedom exists [47].

Hegel located the fulfillment of historical *telos* in Germany, while O'Sullivan clearly located it in America. Hegel's ethical *telos* was perfect freedom—as was O'Sullivan's, although Hegel's notion of freedom was not the liberal brand of the eighteenth century British or American Enlightenment. Russell said that for Hegel, freedom "means little more than the right to obey the law" ([45], p. 737). Still, Hegel shows up in O'Sullivan's writings through his conceptions of progress, *telos*, and freedom.

For example, in his "On the Intelligence of the People", O'Sullivan embraced the notion of *vox populi, vox Dei*. God's providence is such that it works through even the destructive tendencies of humans. God is the "Governor of the universe" and "is literally...the life and soul...directing [man] in every thought and action that he may attain to the true ends of his being..." ([48], p. 361). Most strikingly, in his essay "The Course of Civilization", O'Sullivan posits an order of progression of human civilization that resembles that articulated by Hegel. The first stage of history, O'Sullivan called the "theocratic" stage and "was born among the oldest people in the East, in Judea, Persia, India....Little social elevation, and less of personal freedom, could be found under such a dominion." O'Sullivan's second stage was the Graeco-Roman stage, and was marked by "the indisputable supremacy of the State." The third stage, or the "aristocratic order of civilization" was defined by power, which when wielded by the elites was done for the purpose of "mutual envy and ambition." Finally, the last stage was the "democratic" which "received its first permanent existence in this country." The Declaration of Independence "established the direct existence of democracy as a social element, and began

a reform destined to cease only when every man in the world should be finally and triumphantly redeemed" ([27], pp. 209–13). For O'Sullivan, human civilization and human freedom are synonymous with salvation, and these are culminated in American democracy. "Nothing short of the broadest reception of the principles of democracy can regenerate man" ([27], p. 216). The working out of human salvation—equated by O'Sullivan with American democracy—is the work of divine providence, and not an accident of history. "The spirit is that of the Christian gospel—working sometimes most powerfully through many of those who are the most unconscious of the source from which their inspiration and stimulus have been derived" ([35], p. 563). Gomez described O'Sullivan's views of the *telos* driven course of civilization in this way: "O'Sullivan believes that the *telos* of politics, and thus of history, is human liberation. Liberty is for him a primary political good, being both the will of God and the universal human interest" ([13], p. 246). While O'Sullivan had no developed philosophy of history on the plane of Hegel, these elements of Hegelian idealism can be recognized in O'Sullivan's Manifest Destiny. O'Sullivan's ontology is understood, not as a German *telos*, to be sure, but certainly as an American one.

The most direct connection O'Sullivan had with German idealism in general is through Bancroft's historicism. Boyd described the historicism of German idealists like Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, F. D. E. Schleiermacher, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Hegel as "a developing historical consciousness...which centers on historical change, on history itself as the ultimate locus of reality" ([42], p. 59). For German historicists such as these and others like Bancroft's mentor Arnold H. L. Heeren and Leopold von Ranke, providence was integral to the interpretation of history. Also for them, providence was the activity of a God who was strictly immanent and impersonal. For American providentialists like Bancroft, God was at all times personal, immanent, and transcendent.

Boyd noted three prominent themes in historicism: the idea of flux (emphasizing the importance of causation and history's coherence), contingency (i.e., "that historical events are shaped by and contingent upon their immediate historical surroundings" ([42], p. 74)), and anachronism (in that all historical events and periods are distinct from one another, thus the past is foreign to the present). In addition to these themes, Boyd stressed the nature of history as an active participant in the flow of events, rather than an abstract hermeneutical category. He wrote that historicism recognizes that "history has such great power over the objects caught up in its currents that historical understanding becomes a—if not *the*—central avenue for the knowledge of reality" ([42], p. 76).

The historicism utilized by German idealists was *Historismus* and Bancroft spent years immersed in it while he studied in Europe. A central presupposition in *Historismus* was that history can be known, understood, and communicated. Through the use of primary sources, text criticism, and narrative historiography, historians in this classical historicist school approached history as, in Boyd's words, being "metaphysically integrated" ([42], p. 84). Thus, ideas in history grew from infancy to maturity, just as all living things do including nations. History, then, provides access to ultimate reality and the mind of God. Boyd stated it this way: "[m]etaphysical historicists—among them the classical German historicists (and, to jump ahead, Bancroft in America)—believed in a reality that transcended the material world and included the real existence of the ideal" ([42], p. 85). Because the metaphysical historicists invested history with such power, providentialism was necessary to the study of history. As Boyd wrote describing Bancroft's use of providence in history-writing—"his] providentialism asserts the reality of that divine intelligence which gives foundation to his romantic idealism, that intelligence who things the great thoughts which come to life in history" ([42], p. 107). And it is a similar approach to providentialism that is a necessary element in O'Sullivan's Manifest Destiny.

To be sure there are differences between Bancroft and O'Sullivan in the ways they understood America as a providential nation. Bancroft's historicism led to a cyclical view of history (e.g., Hegel's dialectical process of becoming), with an emphasis on coherence amid change over time (e.g., flux). O'Sullivan was not a trained historian in the German idealistic tradition, and his rhetoric about the United States representing something utterly new reflects that whatever influence he felt from historicism was limited in its scope. He still carried significant characteristics of pre-historicist, linear

history when thinking of inevitable progress and America representing “futurity”. Furthermore, both Bancroft and O’Sullivan had to deal with the problem of the lifespan of the American nation as an organic being with a birth, maturity, and old age. Would America ultimately die, as other nations had? Would it usher in the millennium? Or would it live on in another form, carrying its providential purpose into another age? Bancroft’s developed historicism offers more coherent solutions, whereas O’Sullivan’s prehistoricism limits his solutions to only one: that America would itself be the millennial kingdom of Protestant theology. These differences are helpful in preventing us from overstating the weight of German idealism upon O’Sullivan’s nationalism.

Still, that influence is there and it is evident in O’Sullivan’s association with Bancroft. They were connected through both diplomatic and literary circles. They corresponded with one another frequently on the issues of their day. In 1841, O’Sullivan wrote to Bancroft on his opposition to the death penalty ([11], p. 45). In the months preceding the American annexation of Texas on the issue of possible war with Mexico, O’Sullivan expressed concern to Bancroft about the bellicose attitude America was taking toward Mexico ([11], p. 31). O’Sullivan also commended Bancroft as an example of a true historian of the American mold. In 1842, he wrote, “[w]e are happy to see the latest of the great historians, Bancroft (a name to be placed close to Hume and Tacitus) tracing the growth of the democratic principle in our colonial history with nicety and profound research” ([6], p. 199). Two years later, O’Sullivan referred to Bancroft as “the most democratic historian of modern times” in a piece for the *New York Morning News* ([11], p. 41). In addition to providing his own endorsement of Bancroft’s writing, he featured an opinion of Bancroft from the literary critic W. A. Jones in an essay entitled “Unitarian Portraits”. Jones described Bancroft as a historian who “possesses the most philosophical spirit of any writer of history in England or in this country since Hume”. Jones noted that Bancroft’s work was marked by “great ingenuity and boldness” and, in pure O’Sullivan style, he said that Bancroft “is the historian for the people....He traces, with a masterly hand, the progress of the democratic principle,—the ultimately sovereign power in the State” ([49], p. 391). Widmer asserted that the unique nature of the *Democratic Review* under O’Sullivan’s editorship—as a political-literary outlet—united the spread-eagle rhetoric of Manifest Destiny with “Bancroft’s delineation of the democratic principle in his history” ([11], p. 63). The combination of nationalistic flair with literary sophistication were not found only in the *Review*, but according to Widmer, “never in so dramatic a fashion, with so public a manifesto, such ardent energy, and such a clear intention of presenting literature and politics as part and parcel of the same idea” ([11], p. 63). While O’Sullivan was not directly influenced by Hegel in particular, or nineteenth century German philosophy in general, through his personal and professional association with Bancroft, his reading of Bancroft’s history, and his affinity with Bancroft’s historical method, it seems clear that his Manifest Destiny was informed in part by German idealism.

4. Conclusions

Manifest Destiny, as it appeared during O’Sullivan’s tenure at the *Democratic Review* from 1837 to 1846, conformed to patterns around the specific historical context of the day. By the 1850s, Manifest Destiny had played out—at the end of the Polk administration, the United States had acquired more territory in four years than in any equivalent period before or since. The Civil War shattered the political framework of the early republican period, but Manifest Destiny would achieve a revival in the late 1890s with the American victory over the Spanish and the resulting acquisition of overseas colonies in the Pacific and Caribbean. This second emergence of Manifest Destiny was different than the first because it arose in different historical circumstances. At every period of American history, Christian nationalism has taken a particular form: the Christian republicanism of the 1770s and 80s; Manifest Destiny of the 1840s and 1890s; Christian civilization of 1917–1919; the Manichean division between the free and Communist worlds of the 1950s–1980s; and the Christian America thesis of the 1970s–present

to name a few manifestations that Americans have embraced over time [36]⁵. While much has changed in terms of how Americans have self-identified using religious terms, much has stayed the same. Smith defined national identity as “the maintenance and continual reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions that form the distinctive heritage of the nation, and the identification of individuals with that heritage and its pattern” ([2], pp. 24–25). Smith noted both *maintenance* and *continual reinterpretation* in his definition. Americans have always believed their nation was exceptional, and have always believed that it enjoyed a special relationship with God which entailed particular duties in the world. How that exceptionalism should be defined, and what America’s privileged status has meant to its people has changed significantly depending on both internal and external circumstances. It has been thus since the origins of the nation, and will likely be thus for the foreseeable future. For these, and other reasons, Christian nationalism is a theme worthy of continual historical and religious study.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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⁵ See John D. Wilsey. *One Nation Under God? An Evangelical Critique of Christian America* for a philosophical, historical, and theological assessment of the Christian America thesis as it has been articulated from 1977 to the present [50].

- was more consistent with the Whigs' position on expansion, who were exemplarist rather than imperialist in their attitudes toward Texas, Mexico, and Oregon.
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47. I must acknowledge that this description is a massive simplification of Hegel's philosophy of history. I also want to clearly state that my reading of O'Sullivan does not entail a direct influence from Hegel's philosophy. I am only asserting that Hegel's philosophy can be recognized in O'Sullivan's nationalism, albeit in an unrefined and Americanized form.
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