

Fresno Center for Nonviolence 2022

February 2022

Shortest month of the year yet is known for celebrating St. Valentine Day. The day to show your love you care.



Edited by
Richard Gomez.

dedicated to PEACE and SOCIAL JUSTICE through

SIMPLICITY ~ JUSTICE ~ INCLUSIVENESS ~ NON-INJURY

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Manifest Destiny, White Supremacy, and James Polk.

by Professor Emeritus Gerry Bill.

What do Manifest Destiny and white supremacy have in common? A whole lot, it turns out. Both are based on the belief that so-called white people are somehow superior to all other peoples, and therefore have a “divine” right to be in charge of all human affairs. The founding principles of the ideology of Manifest Destiny make this blatantly obvious. It was based on the belief in the inherent superiority of white Americans, as well as the conviction that they were destined by God to conquer the territories of North America, from sea to shining sea. It included the idea that the institutions created by white Americans were better than any others in existence, and therefore white people were doing nonwhite people a favor by imposing those institutions upon them. In so doing, they were claiming to be doing God’s work. Was committing genocide against the indigenous peoples of North America God’s work? I find that concept hard to swallow now, although as I child I probably did accept it without question. I guess many of us bought into that idea as children. Maybe it is time for us to leave such childish things behind. Manifest Destiny is clearly a racist ideology.

The US President most associated with Manifest Destiny was James Polk—a white supremacist if there ever was one. The term Manifest Destiny first appeared in the US print media in 1845, the year Polk took office. Polk embraced this racist concept, and probably did more to implement Manifest Destiny than any of his successors. He waged war against Mexico and took away 55% of Mexico’s land by force—the part of the US we now call the Southwest, including us here in California. The land upon which we now stand would probably still be Mexico except for Polk’s war of conquest. But it wasn’t only the war with Mexico that fueled the westward expansion of the US in Polk’s term. He is also credited with obtaining the Oregon Territory for the US (present day Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and part of Montana). That led to the displacement, slaughter, even near genocide of some of the Native American Indians living in the Northwest.

Oddly, Polk’s defenders seem to praise him for presiding over this westward expansion. I can understand why avowed white supremacists would praise him for those acts, but they are not the only ones. Many ordinary people in the US think the westward expansion was a good thing. They were probably taught to think of it that way in school. When history is written by the victors, they are likely to paint the victory as a good thing. I guess we aren’t supposed to look at the underlying racist ideology behind all of this. This all plays into the controversy of changing the name of James K. Polk Elementary School here in Fresno (in the Central Unified District). A recent opinion piece in the Fresno Bee opposing the name change defended Polk’s owning of slaves as common among presidents of that era, and then went on to Praise Polk for doing so much to expand the US to the Pacific Ocean (sea to signing sea, as was the goal of Manifest Destiny). I suspect the author of that opinion piece did not see his position as at all racist, as he was not able to connect the westward expansion to racism. Let us not make the same mistake. Let us no longer honor James Polk by continuing to name a school after him.

Wednesday,
February 9th a 3pm

Stir it, UP!

KFCF
88.1 FM

In February our radio show will be hosted by Josh Shurely with his guest Rachel Bowman. She helps the Center for people with Trans issues. For more information call on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at (559)237-3223 or check our website at www.centerfornonviolence.org

In January our show was hosted by Josh Shurely with his guest History Professor Paul Gilmore of Fresno City College to talk about human rights, the MLK Jr. commemoration and other related issues. Should be fun. To hear it again go to: <https://soundcloud.com/user-32180141/stiu011222>.

In December we ended the year with your host Richard Gomez talking with Jim Grant of the local Human Rights Coalition. To hear it again go to: <https://soundcloud.com/user-32180141/stiu120821>.