**Gap Pulls "Manifest Destiny" T-Shirt, Gets History Lesson from Outraged Consumers**

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Is this T-shirt offensive? (Photo: Gap.com)Clothing giant [Gap](http://yhoo.it/T0rX7U%20) has pulled a [controversial T-shirt](http://yhoo.it/TuPOZw%20) off its warehouse shelves after outraged consumers [lashed out via social media](http://yhoo.it/T0rZN3%20).

The simple, dark-blue T-shirt with "MANIFEST DESTINY" printed on it in stark white letters was part of the "Gap x GQ" collection, a joint effort between Gap and GQ Magazine to showcase America's best new designers.

Adding fuel to the fire, the shirt's designer, Mark McNairy, tweeted "MANIFEST DESTINY. SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST" last Friday in response to customer complaints. He quickly deleted his tweet, but not before [a screengrab of it](https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10151197786087436&set=o.14856729724&type=1&theater) was widely circulated, and then he followed up—three days later—with an all-caps semi-apology.

"Unfortunately, the meaning of my 'Manifest Destiny' T shirt has been misconstrued and the sentiment behind it grossly misunderstood," McNairy [posted on Twitter](https://twitter.com/mmcnairy/status/258298358391767040/photo/1) on Tuesday, blatantly disregarding his "survival of the fittest" quip. "I first learned of Manifest Destiny in American History in Junior High School. To me it has always meant that one could set goals, work hard, and achieve their dreams. Having the opportunity to design for the Gap was the realization of one of my dreams. This phrase and they way I used it was in no way meant to be offensive or hurtful, and I apologize to those who might have interpreted it in that manner."

Dear Mark McNairy: The term "Manifest Destiny" does not mean what you think it means. (Also? Your junior high school history teacher is weeping right now.)

While it might be nice to think that it's some sort of inspirational mantra, maybe based on [The Law of Attraction](http://yhoo.it/Qs3bLJ%20)—Create your own life path! Manifest your destiny!—as McNairy and the PR department of Gap, Inc., have learned, "Manifest Destiny" actually refers to the mid-19th century mindset that white Americans had a divine obligation to claim as much of the continent as possible for themselves, slaughtering and oppressing native people in the process.

The term was coined in 1845 by John O'Sullivan, a newspaper editor at the Democratic Review, [who wrote that](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_L._O%27Sullivan) the United states should annex Texas and claim the Oregon Country because "that claim is by the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us." It also was used to justify the idea that people with darker skin were "heathen," "backwards," and otherwise less than human.

Needless to say, Gap is experiencing a bit of a backlash.

More than 4,700 people have signed [a petition at Change.org](http://www.change.org/petitions/gap-discontinue-the-manifest-destiny-tshirt-and-issue-a-formal-apology) calling on Gap to discontinue the shirt and issue a formal apology, and there are [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/aimsocalifornia/posts/375525099190156) [protests](https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.547271127914.2023950.80300382&type=3) [aplenty](https://www.facebook.com/events/369207419829661/?ref=nf). While the $30 shirt is no longer available on gap.com (you can see it [in this cached version of the page](http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:xQIXWq9Xa98J:www.gap.com/products/gap-x-gq-mark-mcnairy-manifest-t-P349697.jsp+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=firefox-a)), it is still available in some stores.

"This article of clothing promotes a belief that has resulted in the mass genocide of indigenous people, and it serves to normalize oppression," wrote Dorit I, who launched the petition. "This shirt is marketed to teens and young adults, and it gives no context for the racism and inequality that persists in our society, to this day, as a result of this doctrine."

" 'Manifest destiny' was the symbolic banner settler colonizers marched behind while waging genocidal wars against Indigenous Peoples," wrote Klee Benally of IndigenousAction.org. "This shirt design is grossly offensive and should be immediately removed. I certainly don't think 'Arbeit macht frei' would have made it this far. Gap Inc, has been under serious scrutiny for exploitative labor practices within the past couple of decades, maybe they are just now making their intentions more clear?"

But not everyone is offended by the shirt. "Manifest destiny is the reason our country even exists," Casey Jo Adams-Carlisle, who describes herself as "a racial mutt," wrote on Facebook. "If you don't like it, pack up, and get out. Simple."

Designer Mark McNairy, right, poses with a Gap model wearing the Manifest Destiny T-shirt at the Gap x GQ party …On Tuesday night, Gap released an official statement and apology. "We're sincerely sorry for the offense that the 'Manifest Destiny' t-shirt may have caused," read the statement, which was [posted on their Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/gap/posts/10151205041409725). "This shirt was part of the partnership between Gap and GQ featuring new designers and was never meant to be insensitive. Because of your feedback, we made the decision to no longer sell the t-shirt as soon as it was brought to our attention. The t-shirt has been removed from Gap.com and we are in the process of removing it from our stores. We are also focusing on how we select product designs for these types of partnerships in the future. Thank you for your continued feedback; we're always listening."

It's possible that the shirt is more about ignorance than arrogance, but if that's the case, it goes all the way to the top. Online, Gap lauds the shirt as "rebellious and playful." And [in their writeup](http://www.gq.com/style/blogs/the-gq-eye/2012/09/last-night-launching-gq-x-gap-best-new-menswear-designers-in-america-2012-collaboration.html) of the Gap x GQ launch event, GQ described McNairy's "left-of-center spirit" and his "tech sports jacket with pop yellow, trim, bengal stripe daisy print boxers, and wool camo cargo pants" but didn't mention the "Manifest Destiny" shirt, even though both the designer and an African American model were wearing it [in photos from the event](http://www.gq.com/style/party-photos/201210/gq-gap-best-new-menswear-designers-party-photos#slide=18).

**What do you think? Arrogant, ignorant, or much ado about nothing?**