

The Mexican-American War

The Big Idea

The ideals of manifest destiny and the outcome of the Mexican-American War led to U.S. expansion to the Pacific Ocean.

Main Ideas

- Many Americans believed that the nation had a manifest destiny to claim new lands in the West.
- As a result of the Mexican-American War, the United States added territory in the Southwest.
- American settlement in the Mexican Cession produced conflict and a blending of cultures.

Main Idea 1: Many Americans believed that the nation had a manifest destiny to claim new lands in the West.

- Americans believed they could build a new, better society founded on democratic principles.
- The United States had a booming economy and population in the 1840s.
 - Needed more space for farms, ranches, businesses, and families
 - Looked to the West
- Some believed it was America's **manifest destiny**, or obvious fate, to settle all land to the Pacific.
 - Question was whether slavery would be allowed in new territories.

Acquiring New Territory

- Democrat **James K. Polk** elected in 1844; favored acquiring Texas and Oregon; was perceived as the expansionist candidate.
- **Oregon**
 - Polk avoided war with Britain over Oregon and negotiated treaty for land south of forty-ninth parallel.
 - Oregon organized as territory in 1848.
- **Texas**
 - Texas annexed in 1845, but this action angered Mexico.

California under Mexico

- Mexico had lost Texas but controlled other areas in the present-day Southwest—New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and California.
- The mission system was important in California, carrying out huge farming and ranching operations using Native American labor.
- Missions were broken up in the 1830s by Mexico.
 - Land grants given to wealthiest California settlers
 - Created vast ranchos, or ranches
 - Worked by **vaqueros**, or cowboys
- About 3,200 settlers, or **Californios**, were in California in the early 1820s.
- Anglos, settlers from the United States, started to arrive in small numbers. They began calling for independence.

Mexican-American War

Conflict Breaks Out

- The United States and Mexico were engaged in border disputes.
- John Slidell went to Mexico to try to buy New Mexico and California for \$30 million. Mexican officials refused to speak to him.
- Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor and his army into the border region around the Rio Grande in 1846.
- U.S. troops clashed with Mexicans in April.

War Begins

- Congress declared war on Mexico in April.
- Taylor's forces won battles south of the Rio Grande in Mexico.
- General Stephen Kearny seized control of New Mexico.

Bear Flag Revolt

Settlers

Only about 500 Americans were in California in 1846, in contrast to about 12,000 Californios.

Revolt

Americans seized Sonoma and declared California to be an independent nation on June 14, starting the **Bear Flag Revolt**.

John C. Frémont

Frémont, leader of a U.S. Army mapping expedition, entered California to support its independence.

U.S. Forces

U.S. naval and military forces invaded California in July 1846 and claimed California for the United States.

War's End

Buena Vista

- General Taylor's forces defeated the Mexican army under Santa Anna at Buena Vista in February 1847.
- The Mexican army had fled overnight.
- It was a fierce battle with heavy casualties on both sides.

Veracruz

- General Winfield Scott's forces seized the port of Veracruz in March 1847.
- Veracruz was the strongest fortress in Mexico.

Mexico City

- Scott's troops took Mexico City in September 1847 after a brave defense by Mexican soldiers.

Main Idea 2: As a result of the Mexican-American War, the United States added territory in the Southwest.

- **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo** officially ended the war in 1848.
 - Mexican Cession included present-day California, Nevada, and Utah, and parts of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming.
 - Mexicans in the cession areas were "protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty and property, and secured in the free exercise of their religion."
 - Also included area claimed by Texas north of Rio Grande
 - Increased size of United States by almost 25 percent
- In the **Gadsden Purchase** of 1853, the United States paid \$10 million for southern parts of present-day Arizona and New Mexico.

Main Idea 3: American settlement in the Mexican Cession produced conflict and a blending of cultures.

Surge of American Settlers

- Americans flooded into the Southwest.
- New settlers battled longtime residents to control land, water, and minerals.
- Most Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans faced legal, economic, and social discrimination from settlers.

Cultural Encounters

- Different cultures shaped one another in the Southwest despite conflicts.
- Names of places showed Hispanic and Native American heritage.
- Mexican and Native American knowledge and traditions also shaped many local economies.