

## Chapter 17: Manifest Destiny and Its Legacy (1841-1848)

- Activity in the Western U.S. and surrounding territories was the focus of much political interest and action
  - Land dispute over the Oregon territory
  - Debate over annexation of Texas
  - War with Mexico over California territory
- Conflicts from the Western U.S. strongly impacted the Civil War

### The Accession of “Tyler Too”

- Harrison was thought of as a weak figurehead by other major Whig leaders such as Daniel Webster and Henry Clay
  - Harrison was berated by politicians who helped him who wanted positions (as part of the spoils system)
  - Those two politicians (Webster and Clay) believed that they could use their political party's position of power to promote their own power and views
  - Harrison quickly got pneumonia and died after four weeks as president; ruined Webster and Clay's plans
- John Tyler (“Tyler Too”) was vice president for Harrison, became president
  - Came from Virginia
  - Seemed to be a Democrat like Jackson, but he rejected the despotism under Jackson
  - Actually was meant to increase support for Whigs by attracting some of Jackson's supporters (especially “influential southern gentry”)
- Most Virginians were against the Whig party that was “pro-bank, pro-protective tariff, and pro-internal improvements”

### John Tyler: A President Without a Party

- Whig Party tried to pass reforms that looked for government-funded reform
  - Tried to re-establish national bank
    - Tyler approved bill “ending the independent treasury system”
    - He vetoed the “fiscal bank” (another national bank), using constitutional grounds for his argument; he also vetoed its reworked substitute “fiscal corporation” later on
- Whig Party formally removed Tyler from party, many official positions held by Whigs left all at once
  - People called him “His Accidency” because he was expected to support the Whig reforms, but was not what they expected (supported Democratic ideals)
  - People gave him death threats and burned him in effigy (symbolically)
- Tyler was indecisive about tariffs
  - On one hand, his Democratic ideal went against tariffs, but he knew the country needed money from tariffs

- Originally vetoed bill about tariffs “for a distribution among states of revenue from the sale of public lands in the west,” but adopted a similar bill, the Tariff of 1842, when he changed his mind about the issue (decided country needed money)

*Politics and Power:* The switch of power from the strong Whig candidate General Harrison to the “ex-Democrat” vice-president Tyler greatly diminished the Whig party’s power as the ruling party. Rather than passing most of his party’s bills, he vetoed many out of his Democratic intent. This meant that a less powerful and less economically-involved central government was at play, rather than a more reform-based government. Rather than allowing the Whigs to be in power for the first time against the Democrats, he essentially continued the “reign” of Democrats (beginning with Jackson and Van Buren and continuing after him with Polk) that advocated for a more people-based, less government-intervention society. In other words, he acted conservatively, wanting less government involvement with society and economics, which greatly countered the wishes of his party, which wanted the opposite.

#### A War of Words with Britain

- Anti-British sentiment in America was very strong
  - Two British-American wars had already been fought (Revolutionary War, War of 1812)
  - Pro-British Federalists had died out, most of population were Democrats who were against Britain
  - British journalists and travelers negatively portrayed America and Americans: they “wrote acidly of American tobacco spitting, slave auctioneering, lynching, eye gouging, and other unsavory features of the rustic Republic”
- Americans reliant on Britain for money
  - America was spending a lot of money on internal reform, such as construction of infrastructure like railroads and canals, and therefore primarily borrowed money; Great Britain primarily lent out money because it was imperialistic
  - Americans looked at Britain as a “bloated British bond-holder” — the British were very rich and thought of themselves too highly
  - After financial Panic of 1837, some states went bankrupt and had to go into default or refuse to repay debt
    - British were mad because of Americans’ trickery
- American steamer Caroline on the Niagara River (Canada frontier) was sunk by the British (1837)
  - It was carrying supplies to insurgents
  - People took to this favorably, seeing this as a motivator for the start of war with Great Britain (again)
    - Federal government tried its best to avoid conflict with the original ideas of neutrality in foreign policy
  - Similar incident when American ship Creole had slaves on it, slaves were freed (1841)
    - Slavery was already abolished in the British empire, another point of contention between the U.S. and Great Britain
    - Americans worried that British Caribbean would become slave haven for escaped slaves, would increase slavery debate in America

*Culture and Society*: Americans began to generally have a more negative societal view of Great Britain. Great Britain had great control over the U.S. economy because it lent most of America's borrowed money for infrastructure and internal reform. The British differed from the Americans on their view of slavery: rather than being divided, they had already abolished slavery. This sparked conflict when the American slave ship *Creole* had its slaves freed. In general, the British held the same disdain for the Americans as well, with travelers tending to consider the Americans and their habits, such as "tobacco spitting, slave auctioneering, lynching, eye gouging," lowly. This made America stay cautious to not offend Britain again (so as to avoid a third Anglo-American war) and hastily make treaties with the British in terms of land (such as negotiating Oregon and Maine) in the Americas in case the British became hostile from these societal tensions.

### Manipulating the Maine Maps

- Maine had unclear northern border with Canada
  - Was established during the War of 1812, but was not very clear
  - British wanted to build a road through the disputed area
- Aroostook War (1842) was the "small-scale lumberjack clash," or the battle between local Americans and Canadians for the disputed land
- To settle border conflict, Britain sent Lord Ashburton, who was friendly to Americans (had married an American woman and established friendly relations with Daniel Webster), to settle the conflict
  - Decided on a border line that gave Americans a little more than half of the disputed area (7,000 of 12,000 square miles), but gave the British the land that the proposed route was to pass through
  - Britain also surrendered 6,500 square miles of land farther west along the American border, which included land that was "found to contain the priceless Mesabi iron ore of Minnesota"

### The Lone Star of Texas Shines Alone

- For eight years after 1836, the Texas territory was politically precarious
  - Mexico refused to recognize it as an independent territory, but rather as a "province in revolt" — still held it under its own power
    - Declared that they would engage in war with the U.S. if America tried to annex it
  - Texas had to make military allies in order to protect itself from the Mexicans, which greatly outnumbered its population
    - Concluded treaties with France, Holland, and Belgium but created negotiations with Britain and France
      - Britain wanted Texas to be independent, which would then become a state alongside the U.S. that it could use to influence the U.S. indirectly (a "smokescreen diversion, behind which foreign powers could move into the Americas and challenge the insolent Monroe Doctrine"), which

would then increase their power in the Americas and check the power of the U.S.

- The British had already abolished slavery and were trying to make Texas slave-free as well; this would fire up more domestic conflicts with the Southern U.S.
- The British wanted to make Texas a free-trade area, which would open up trading with the U.S. (which was difficult because of the high tariffs in the U.S.)

*America in the World:* These two disputed land areas (Maine and Texas) again greatly affected foreign affairs with Britain and Mexico. Britain wanted to build a road through disputed area in Maine, and therefore a clear border line had to be drawn. Texas was under the threat of Mexican attack and reclaiming. The American government had to work carefully and avoid disrupt. In Maine, Britain was looking to get economic benefit from the construction of a road and America was looking to avoid conflict, so the boundary line was negotiated swiftly and without conflict, benefitting America with its land gain and the acquisition of Minnesota's iron-rich lands and benefitting Britain with the desired land for its road. In the South, however, Mexico had no benefit from losing Texas; as a result, Mexico had nothing to lose and America had a new state to lose. Americans were also worried about the British and their efforts to make Texas into a antislavery, independent, free-trade state that would benefit Great Britain more than it would the U.S. As a result, this conflict was more tense and drawn out, without such an easy resolution as a war-less compromise.

#### The Belated Texas Nuptials

- Presidential election of 1844 had the issue of Texas as one of its major issues
  - James K. Polk won the election of 1844, Tyler believed that it was because he had won because he brought the popular stance of annexation of Texas into his campaign
- Before he left as president, Tyler annexed Texas
  - He knew that there would be great opposition in the North by anti-slavery advocates, who thought that Texas would just become another slave state that would offset the power between North/free and South/slave states
    - As a result, he didn't want to create a treaty in government (would require  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority)
  - Congress voted in annexation of Texas by joint resolution (only required  $\frac{1}{2}$  majority)
    - Texas invited to become U.S. state in 1845
- Mexico angrily claimed that the Americans had stolen Texas from it
  - Mexican influence over the Texas region was weakening
    - Comanche tribe raided area often, was a major power that threatened Mexican power in the region and would threaten Texan authority if they became independent
  - It was nine years since Texas seceded from Mexico; not very practical that Mexico regained it because of this weakening authority from Mexico over such a long period of time

*Politics and Power:* The last major action of Tyler in office was the annexation of Texas into the Union. This was a strategic move made to help bolster his and his party's mediocre statuses. Tyler allowed Texas to be annexed because he believed that it was what the majority of the people wanted, even despite the

opposition of the North, which didn't want Texas because it would be another slave state. This issue in turn was continued with Polk, who used the popular stance of the issue of annexing Texas to his advantage in the election of 1844. This showed Polk's ability to manipulate a political issue to his own power, wooing the public by going with the popular stance. This decision to annex Texas at this time was also powerful and strategic because the U.S. knew that Mexican strength was declining in Texas, especially with the increased raids from the Comanche; it had also been nine years since Texas had declared independence, so he felt that it had been long enough for them to switch over to the U.S.

### Oregon Fever Populates Oregon

- Oregon County was a great region of wilderness
  - Northern border was set to the 54° 40' parallel line
  - Originally had parts claimed by Spain, Russia, Britain, and the U.S., but Spain gave up land during the Florida treaty of 1819 and Russia kept above this latitude line in the treaties of 1824-5 (only Britain and U.S. were left)
- British claims in Oregon County were mostly limited to where they had settled (did not extend too far beyond what was already occupied)
  - Hudson's Bay Company, for example, held land in the Pacific Northwest region in which they traded furs with the Native Americans
- U.S. claims in Oregon County were also mostly based on occupation, but more on exploration
  - Captain Robert Gray had launched an expedition that had discovered and named the Columbia River in this region (1792)
  - The Lewis and Clark expedition had part of its exploration through the Oregon region (1804-6)
  - Explorations stimulated religious missions, in which an increased number of missionaries occupied the area in order to convert the Native Americans to Christianity to save their souls
- U.S. and Great Britain decided on a "joint occupation" of Oregon County
  - In the Anglo-American Convention of 1818, U.S. originally tried to take all the land up to the 49° latitude line, but British refused
- The U.S. started to settle the Oregon territory, much more so than with Great Britain
  - "Oregon fever" struck many Americans, who travelled along the Oregon Trail (two thousand miles) to colonize Oregon
  - By 1846 around 5,000 Americans had begun to settle Oregon; British only had around 700 new colonists
    - British knew that they were being outnumbered, knew that they would have to form a peaceful agreement with the U.S. about the Oregon territory eventually
- Only a small portion of the Oregon territory was actually in question, but it was all made into a big deal and made another issue of the 1844 presidential election; however, it was overshadowed by the issue of the annexation of Texas in the election

*Geography and the Environment:* Like in Maine and Texas (and later California), the acquisition of more land into the U.S. was very appealing with the Oregon territory. A series of more complex negotiations with Britain in order to gain land. At first there was joint occupation up to the 54° 40' parallel line, but as

more Americans settled (much more than the relatively few British who settled in the region), the Americans pushed for complete acquisition of the Oregon territory up to the 49° parallel. These negotiation lines were somewhat arbitrary, but for Great Britain it was the Columbia River (geography) that made the American request for the 49° parallel unfavorable (because some of the river lay south of that line). In the end, however, the impatient call for the finalization of a negotiation and the increased pressure on the British by the increased number of American colonists in the Oregon region called for a more lenient line (49° latitude) than the British originally intended.

#### A Mandate (?) for Manifest Destiny

- Henry Clay chosen as Whig party candidate
- James K. Polk chosen as Democratic party candidate
  - Considered a “dark-horse” (surprise) candidate
  - Not very well known (unlike Henry Clay), but was already an established politician and was “industrious, ruthless, and intelligent”
    - Whigs used this to try and taunt him, “jeer him into oblivion”
  - Was a friend of Jackson’s, and some people called him “Young Hickory”
- Election of 1844 part of a larger (emotional) movement in the U.S, the Manifest Destiny
  - It was a “sense of mission” that many Americans felt, believing that God had given the people the destiny of conquering the American continent
    - Was potentially a justification of American greed for land through religion
    - Believed that conquering more land and initializing American ideals upon it would help promote democracy and expansion
- Democrats were heavily influenced by Manifest Destiny
  - Slogans/main ideas of election campaign included “reannexation of Texas,” “reoccupation of Oregon,” “all of Oregon or none,” “fifty-four forty or fight”
    - The latter was coined two years later under future negotiations
  - They also condemned Clay as “a ‘corrupt bargainer,’ a dissolute character, and a slaveowner”
- Whigs had slogan “Polk, Slavery, and Texas, or Clay, Union, and Liberty”
  - This was more tailored towards the North (slavery and Texas’s annexation was looked upon negatively by the North)
  - Clay wrote letters that mentioned that he wanted to annex Texas (favoring the South) but also postpone that movement (favoring the North) — indecision probably lost him the election, because abolitionists didn’t want annexation of Texas as well
- James K. Polk won the election of 1844 against Clay
  - Won 170 to 105 electoral votes, 1,338,464 to 1,300,097 popular vote
  - Liberty Party (an antislavery party) was a minority party that helped Polk win New York, which swayed the entire election in his favor
  - Victorious democrats felt that the voters gave them the right to annex Texas; Polk helped this by passing the joint resolution to annex Texas three days before his presidency ended

#### Polk the Purposeful

- Polk was “methodical and hard-working but not brilliant, he was shrewd, narrow-minded, conscientious, and persistent”
  - Very serious and his stubborn hardworkingness potentially drove him to an early death
  - Created a methodical four-point plan that he completed in his four years as president
    - First goal was a lowered tariff
      - Walker Tariff (1842) lowered tariff rates from 32 to 25 percent; was opposed by the Northerners (who supported tariffs to protect their industries) but widely supported by Southerners
      - Lowered tariff was successful, because it boosted profits because there were “boom times and heavy imports” following the lowered tariffs
    - Second goal was to make treasury independent of government again
      - Passed in 1846, despite opposition from the Whigs, who had tried to recreate the national bank and reunite the treasury with the government in 1841 under Tyler
    - Third goal was the acquisition of California
    - Fourth goal was the settlement of Oregon
      - After annexation of Texas, Polk was not too intent on annexation of Oregon territory; however, he continued the previous presidents’ efforts to get ownership of Oregon
      - Polk originally asked Britain for the Oregon territory for the U.S. to end at the 49° parallel, but this was rejected (at first) by the British; British had a change of heart and supported the 49° parallel as well, and this established the northern border of the American Oregon territory
        - Little Englanders, or British anti-expansionists, helped to propel this decision and argue that the Columbia River was not so important for England, which then allowed Britain to give it up
      - Many people were not so optimistic about this agreement about Oregon
        - Some people wondered why all of Texas was annexed, but only a part of Oregon territory
          - Some people raised call of “54° 40’ or fight,” wanting to claim all of the Oregon territory; however, Polk did not push for this
      - Oregon territory’s annexation was a peaceful compromise

*Politics and Power:* There was yet another overturn in power when President Polk of the Democrat party rose to power. He was a very able leader with clear goals, and he was able to accomplish all of the major ones during his presidency. These goals, such as the annexation of the California and Oregon territories, were already issues popular amongst the people and in urgent need because of outside pressures (such as the potential sale of the California region to Great Britain). He also had economic goals similar to those of Jackson, which included the separation of economics and government and the lowering of taxes, both of which were strongly Democratic ideals. In summary, Polk was a leader that carried out changes that followed both the beliefs of the common people and of his party, which allowed him to

accomplish a lot during his presidency. This clearly shows the idea of power derived from the people; his power was great with the support of the people (as opposed to Tyler, who was despised by his own party and by some of the people who were expecting a Whig president).

#### Misunderstandings in Mexico

- Third main point of Polk was to get California territory for America
  - As part of the Manifest Destiny's push towards expansionism, they looked towards the "verdant valleys" and the "spacious bay of San Francisco"
    - San Francisco was a promising location for future American shipping in the Pacific
- California had unique demographics
  - About 13,000 Spanish Mexicans
  - About 75,000 Native Americans
  - Less than 1,000 foreigners, including Americans
- Relationship between California and Mexico was strained
  - Mexico owed American citizens \$3 million for damages
    - Mexico couldn't pay all of it, had to default some of its payments
- America more worried about annexation of Texas than about California
  - All diplomatic communication between Mexico and America was lost
  - Texas had a boundary dispute with Mexico
    - Texan Americans believed that their border extended down to the Rio Grande; Mexicans believed the border of the Texas territory to extend down only to the Nueces River (a little farther north than the Rio Grande)
  - When rumor broke out that Britain might buy the California territory from Mexico (which would infiltrate the American continent with a European power and therefore break the Monroe Doctrine) Polk sent John Slidell and other diplomats to try and buy California from Mexico
    - Mexico declined, considering such a proposition "insulting"

*Geography and the Environment:* The demographics and geographical aspects of Mexico also determined the conflict and policies of the Mexican-American conflict. First of all, California was greatly coveted by the Americans because of its "verdant valleys" and the promising "spacious bay of San Francisco" — this, along with the rumor that the British were willing to buy up the California territory and therefore infringe upon the Monroe Doctrine, was a major driving factor of the Mexican-American War (they knew that war was the only way to wrestle California from Mexico's grip). The conflict between Texas and Mexico was also provoked by a geographical dispute: the border of Texas. Because Texas claimed that its southern border with Mexico was at the Rio Grande and Mexico claimed that its northern border with Texas was at the Nueces, the in-between zone was a hostile no-man's land that was eventually used by Polk to precipitate the war by placing a provocative army there. Hence, geography both formed the causes of the war, and was used to start the war (with the army in the no-man's-land).

#### American Blood on American (?) Soil

- Polk became frustrated by lack of control over California and Texas



- Ordered General Zachary Taylor to take 4,000 troops down to Mexican-American border (to disputed territory between Rio Grande and the Nueces), wanted to provoke conflict
- Declared war on Mexico for unpaid claims (the \$3 million of damages) and the refusal of Slidell's proposition (to buy California) in 1846
- Mexican forces attacked U.S. forces (1846)
  - Polk told Congress "that despite 'all our efforts' to avoid a clash, hostilities had been forced upon the country by the shedding of 'American blood upon the American soil'"
    - Bent the truth in order to get support of the public; he knew that he had sent provocative troops to Mexico; Mexico had good reason to attack
      - This caused Abraham Lincoln, a Whig statesman, to publish the spot resolutions, which asked for the specific spot on which the conflict was started, because it may have been the U.S.'s fault; a direct challenge to the president's words in order to find the truth, which may be different than public opinion and knowledge; called Polk a liar
    - Got much popular support, and slogans such as "Mexico or Death!"
      - Many Americans even believed that Mexico was the aggressor to the conflict, not the U.S.
- Both sides were impatient for war to start
  - Relations with Mexico were tolerable for America, but force seemed to be the only way to annex California
    - Decision pushed over the edge when pressure to annex California in order to avoid the British presence in America; Polk saw forcing Mexico into ceding California to U.S. was the only way
    - Mexicans wanted to get back at Americans, the "Bullies of the North"
      - They had a sizeable army, many generals, and they wanted antislavery
      - They wanted Britain to go into war with the U.S. over the Oregon territory to weaken U.S.; unfortunately for them, this did not happen

### The Mastering of Mexico

- Polk only wanted purposeful war
  - Did not want war but did not want to lose California and Texas; wanted to pull out when war was over and only fight until California and Texas could be gained
- Exiled Mexican dictator Santa Anna promised that he would sell lands to America if he was released back to Mexico
  - U.S. complied, but Santa Anna went back to rousing Mexican support against Americans (refused to follow the negotiation)
- General Stephen W. Kearny won battle at Santa Fe (1846)
- Captain John C. Frémont was in California, roused local support for independence
  - Californians had declared themselves the California Bear Flag Republic
- General Zachary Taylor took the main forces
  - Won multiple major battles, such as the one at Buena Vista (he became the "Hero of Buena Vista" afterwards)
  - However, could not win over Mexico City

- General Winfield Scott won over Mexico City (1847) with command of Taylor's troops
  - Considered "the most distinguished general produced by his country between the Revolution and the Civil War"

*America in the World:* Again, America showed its military might to the world. Now on a great winning streak of wars (none of which it had lost), the Mexican-American war became another victory for the Americans. Like the other wars, popular sentiment drove America into a war despite isolationist ideals in the U.S., especially with the pull of Manifest Destiny arguing that Americans were destined to continue expanding and claiming land—which would be the outcome of this war as Texas and California would be acquired by the U.S. During the war, prominent generals came to power, many of which would become generals again in the American Civil War a few years later. This conflict with Mexico was also the first major interactions between the U.S. government and Mexico, which set a bad precedent for U.S.-Mexican and U.S.-Latin-American relations in general because it established America as a land-greedy "bully in the North."

#### Fighting Mexico for Peace

- Polk wanted to end the war as quickly as possible now that Mexico was defeated
  - Sent chief clerk of State Department, Nicholas Trist; he created a \$10,000 arrangement with Santa Anna to establish a truce
    - Santa Anna again double-crossed the Americans, took the money as a bribe and returned to fighting for Mexico against the Americans
  - Polk was disgusted by Trist's failure for peace with Santa Anna, called Trist back, but Trist denied
- Trist, wanting to be the one to negotiate with Mexico, signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848)
  - Treaty gave America huge expanses of land: Texas and land towards California
    - Half of Mexico's land area was ceded to the U.S.
  - U.S. paid Mexico \$15 million for new land, and assume the \$3.125 million debt that Mexico owed the U.S.
  - Sent the results of the resolution to Congress
    - Time was of the essence: Congress had a majority of Whigs who didn't want to fund this war, threatened to stop providing supplies for general Scott (which would lose the benefits of the war)
    - "Conscious Whigs" ("Mexican Whigs") were against slavery and condemned the war for the annexation of Texas, which would likely bolster slavery
    - Some dissenters wanted none of Mexico annexed to U.S., some wanted all of it
  - The Senate passed the treaty 38 to 14
- After winning and passing the treaty, Polk agreed to pay \$18.25 million
  - Some people say that he felt guilty, and that this felt a little more fair

#### Profit and Loss in Mexico

- America gained a lot of land from the Mexican-American War
  - Increased land area of U.S. by over a third, even more gain than Louisiana Purchase

- Land gain increased spirit of Manifest Destiny, hence calling for more Westward expansion into the newly won lands
- American military gained experience
  - Most of the military generals of the Civil War, such as Captain Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant, fought in the Mexican-American War
  - The Navy and Marines worked effectively during the war, blockading Mexican ports; West Point Academy's graduates formed elite ranks of the military
  - There were no major defeats or blunders of the American military, even despite the obstacles encountered (e.g., long marches and criticism from antislavery states)
  - U.S. gained more recognition internationally of its military strength, especially for Britain and Mexico
- War left great bitterness amongst Mexicans
  - Over half of Mexican territory was taken from them
    - The U.S. only offered a \$15 million payment for such a huge loss
  - Latin America considered the U.S. a bully in the North, scared of its new power and the precedent that it set when it attacked one of them (Mexico)
- War continued the slavery issue, which continued until the Civil War
  - David Wilcot of PA proposed the Wilcot Provision that stated that no new states created from lands gained from Mexico should become slave states
    - Vetoed by the South in Congress, so was not passed nationally; however, most free states passed it in state legislatures

*American and National Identity:* The outcomes of the war were similar to those of other American wars, showing the general greed for land and unforgivingness that the Americans negotiated. In this war, over half of Mexico's land area was ceded to the U.S. for a mere sum of \$18.5 million; this established bitter relations between the U.S. and Latin America, just as the earlier Anglo-American wars had left Britain very bitter about its loss and cession of land. However, this was not totally ruthless; it simply demonstrated the new American ideal of expansionism, and the Americans took only land; they paid a small sum back to defeated Mexico in compensation.

Despite the huge land gain of the war, the rewards borne by the war were not enough to break the deep sectionalism in the U.S., which was a major part of American identity at the time. Slavery remained a major issue that threatened to break the North from the South, which it eventually did only a few years later with the outbreak of the Civil War.