

# 4

## War With Mexico

As You Read

### Explore These Questions

- How did the United States gain Oregon?
- What were the causes and results of the Mexican War?
- How did cultures blend in the new American territories?

### Define

- cede

### Identify

- Zachary Taylor
- Mexican War
- Winfield Scott
- Stephen Kearny
- Bear Flag Republic
- John C. Frémont
- Chapultepec
- Mexican Cession
- Gadsden Purchase

### SETTING the Scene

American troops marched off to war with Mexico in 1846. Many Americans were eager to fight. Soldiers proudly sang new words to the popular tune “Yankee Doodle”:

“ They attacked our men upon our land,  
 And crossed our river too, sir.  
 Now show them all with sword in hand  
 What yankee boys can do, sir. ”

Not all Americans supported the war against Mexico. Some even accused President Polk of provoking the war himself in order to win Texas.

The bloody Mexican War lasted 20 months. In the end, it helped the United States achieve its dream of Manifest Destiny.

### Dividing Oregon

James K. Polk took office in March 1845. Acting on his campaign promise, he moved to gain control of Oregon. War with Britain threatened.

Polk did not really want a war with Britain. In 1846, he agreed to a compromise. Oregon was divided at latitude 49°N. Britain got the lands north of the line, and the United States got the lands south of the line. The United States named its portion the Oregon Territory. Later, the states of Oregon

(1859), Washington (1889), and Idaho (1890) were carved out of the Oregon Territory.

### Annexing Texas

Texas proved a more dangerous problem. As you read, the United States at first refused to annex Texas. In 1844, Sam Houston, president of Texas, signed a treaty of annexation with the United States. The Senate again refused to ratify the treaty. Senators feared that annexing Texas would cause a war with Mexico.

Sam Houston would not give up. To persuade the Americans to annex Texas, he pretended that Texas might become an ally of Britain. Houston’s trick worked. Americans did not want Europe’s greatest power to gain a foothold on their western border. In 1845, Congress passed a joint resolution admitting Texas to the Union.



Sam Houston

## Conflict With Mexico

The annexation of Texas made Mexicans furious. They had never accepted the independence of Texas. They also were concerned that the example set by Texas would encourage Americans in California and New Mexico to rebel.

At the same time, Americans resented Mexico. President Polk offered to pay Mexico \$30 million for California and New Mexico. However, Mexico strongly opposed any further loss of territory and refused the offer. Many Americans felt that Mexico stood in the way of Manifest Destiny.

## The war begins

A border dispute finally sparked war. The United States claimed that the southern border of Texas was the Rio Grande. Mexico argued that it was the Nueces (noo AY says) River, some 200 miles (320 km) to the north. Both nations claimed the land between the two rivers.

In January 1846, Polk ordered General **Zachary Taylor** to cross the Nueces River and set up posts in the disputed area along the Rio Grande. (See the map below.) Polk knew that the move might lead to war. In April 1846, Mexican troops crossed the Rio



### Geography Skills

Fighting along a disputed border between Texas and Mexico triggered the Mexican War.

- 1. Location** On the map, locate: (a) Rio Grande, (b) Nueces River, (c) Buena Vista, (d) Veracruz, (e) Mexico City.
- 2. Movement** Describe the movements of each of the following American commanders: (a) Winfield Scott, (b) Stephen Kearny, (c) John Frémont.
- 3. Critical Thinking** Based on the map, was sea power important to the United States in the Mexican War? Explain.

▲ Cap of a United States soldier in the Mexican War

Grande and fought briefly with the Americans. Soldiers on both sides were killed.

President Polk was already considering going to war with Mexico. When he heard about the fighting at the Rio Grande, he asked Congress to issue a declaration of war. Polk told Congress:

“Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory, and shed American blood upon American soil.”

Not everyone supported Polk’s request. Abraham Lincoln, a young Whig Congressman, disputed Polk’s claim that the fighting actually took place “upon American soil.” Still, at Polk’s urging, Congress declared war on Mexico.

### Americans respond

Americans were divided over the war. Many people in the South and West wanted more land and so were eager to fight. Many northerners, however, opposed the war. They saw it as a southern plot to add slave states to the Union. “Fresh markets of human beings are to be established,” claimed Charles Sumner, a Massachusetts opponent of slavery. “Further opportunities for this hateful traffic are to be opened.”

Still, many Americans joined the war effort. Since the nation’s standing army was small, thousands of volunteers were needed. When the call for recruits went out, the response was overwhelming, especially in the South and West.

### Fighting in Mexico

As the **Mexican War** began, the United States attacked on several fronts at the same time. President Polk hoped this strategy would allow American forces to win a quick victory. General Zachary Taylor crossed the Rio Grande into northern Mexico. There, he won several battles against the Mexican army. In February 1847, Taylor met Santa Anna at the Battle of Buena Vista. The Mexican troops greatly outnumbered the American forces, but the Americans were better armed and led. After fierce fighting, Santa Anna retreated. A major in Taylor’s army

later recalled feeding wounded Mexican soldiers after the battle:

“We collected the wounded, who were suffering awfully from hunger and thirst as well as their wounds, and sent them to hospitals in town. . . . When coffee and biscuit were placed before them, they showed even in their famished state some signs of surprise and gratitude. This was the greatest victory of all, a victory unstained by blood. . . .”

Meanwhile, General **Winfield Scott** had landed another American army at the Mexican port of Veracruz. After a long battle, the Americans took the city. Scott then marched west toward the capital, Mexico City.

### Rebellion in California

A third army, led by General **Stephen Kearny**, captured Santa Fe without firing a shot. Kearny hurried on to San Diego. After several battles, he took control of southern California early in 1847.

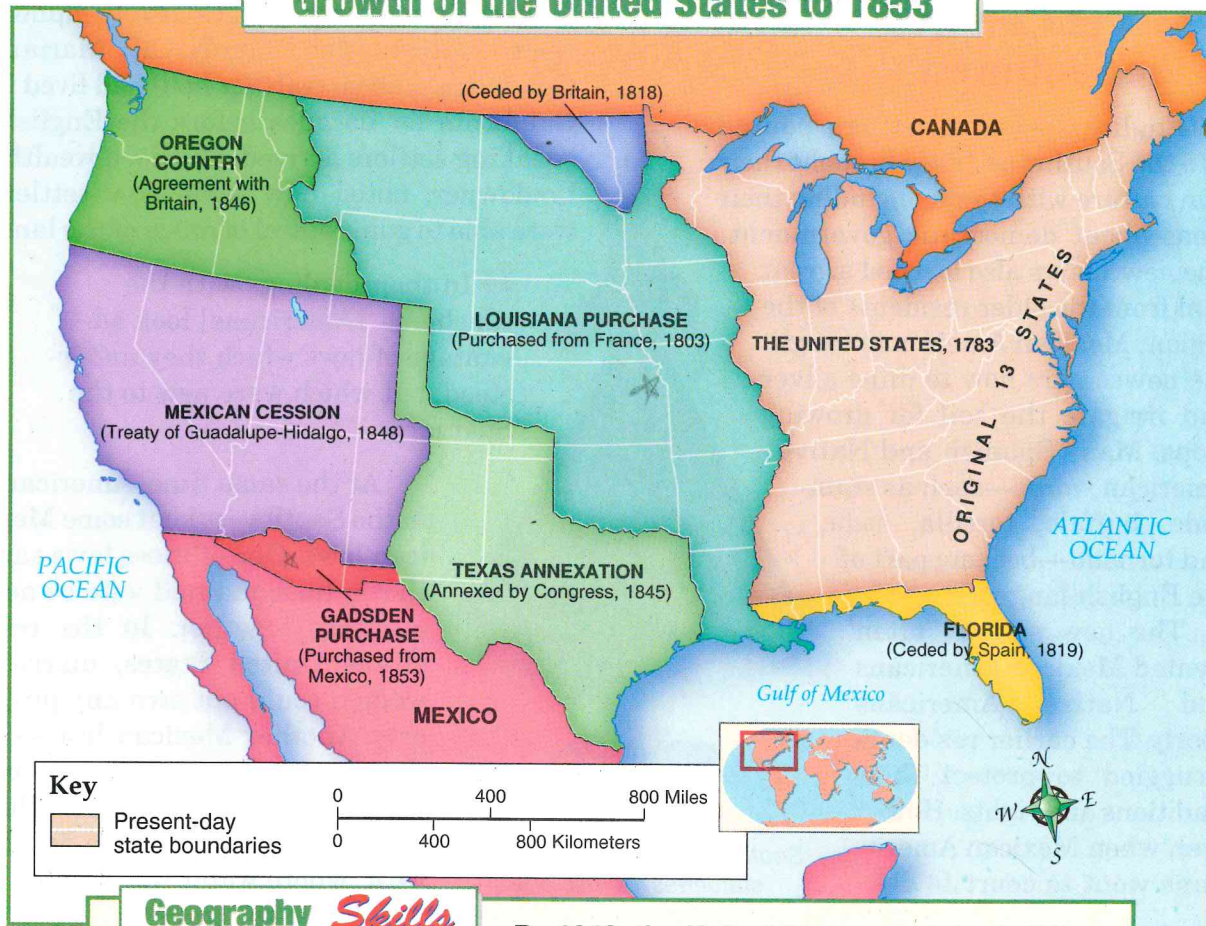
Even before hearing of the war, Americans in northern California had risen up against Mexican rule. The rebels declared California an independent republic on June 14, 1846. They called their new nation the **Bear Flag Republic**. At that time, a dashing young American explorer, **John C. Frémont**, was traveling in California on a scientific expedition for the army. Frémont quickly rushed to support the rebellion. Taking command of the rebel forces, he drove the Mexican governor’s troops out of northern California. Frémont later joined forces with United States troops.

### The final battle

By 1847, the United States controlled all of New Mexico and California. Meanwhile, General Scott had reached the outskirts of Mexico City.

Before they could take the Mexican capital, Scott’s troops faced a fierce battle. Mexican soldiers made a heroic last stand at **Chapultepec** (chah POOL tuh pehk), a fort just outside Mexico City. Like the Texans who died at the Alamo, the Mexicans at Cha-

## Growth of the United States to 1853



### Geography Skills

By 1848, the United States stretched all the way from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean.

- 1. Location** On the map, locate: (a) Mexican Cession, (b) Gadsden Purchase, (c) Oregon Country.
- 2. Region** Which of the territories shown on this map did the United States purchase from other nations?
- 3. Critical Thinking** Refer to the map of the United States in the Reference Section. (a) Is your home state included on the map above? (b) If so, when and how did it become part of the United States?

pultepec fought to the last man. Today, Mexicans honor these young soldiers as heroes.

### Achieving Manifest Destiny

With their capital in American hands, the Mexican government had no choice but to make peace. In 1848, Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (gwah duh LOOP ay-ih DAHL goh). The treaty forced Mexico to **cede**, or give, all of California and New Mexico to the United States. These lands were called the **Mexican Cession**. (See the map above.)

In return, the United States paid Mexico \$15 million. Americans also agreed to respect the rights of Spanish-speaking people in the Mexican Cession.

A few years after the end of the Mexican War, the United States completed its expansion across the continent. In 1853, it agreed to pay Mexico \$10 million for a strip of land in present-day Arizona and New Mexico. The Americans needed this land to complete the building of a railroad. The land was called the **Gadsden Purchase**. The dream of Manifest Destiny was now complete.

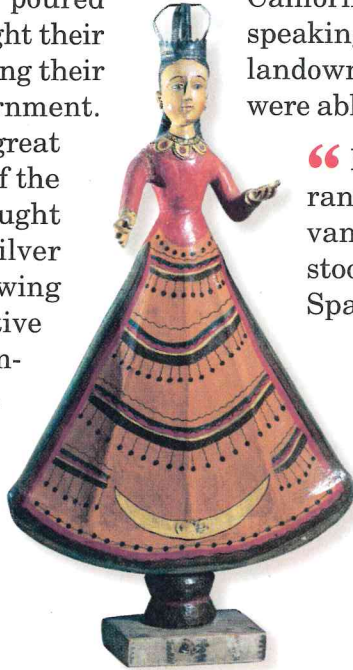
## A Mix of Cultures in the Southwest

English-speaking settlers poured into the Southwest. They brought their own culture with them, including their ideas about democratic government. The newcomers also learned a great deal from the older residents of the region. Mexican Americans taught the newcomers how to mine silver and irrigate the soil for growing crops. Many Spanish and Native American words—such as stam-pede, buffalo, tortilla, soda, and tornado—became part of the English language.

The new settlers often treated Mexican Americans and Native Americans poorly. The earlier residents struggled to protect their traditions and rights. However, when Mexican Americans went to court to de-

fend their property, judges rarely upheld their claims. The family of Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo (vah YAY hoh) had lived in California for decades before the English-speaking settlers arrived. Vallejo, a wealthy landowner, noted how some new settlers were able to gain control of much of the land:

“In their dealings with the rancheros, [Americans] took advantage of laws which they understood, but which were new to the Spaniards.”



Many Mexican homes in the Southwest contained religious statuettes like this one.

At the same time, Americans in the Southwest kept some Mexican laws. One of these laws said that a husband and wife owned property together. In the rest of the United States, married women could not own any property. Another Mexican law said that landowners could not cut off water to their neighbors. This law was important in the Southwest, where water was scarce.

## ★ Section 4 Review ★

### Recall

1. **Locate** (a) Rio Grande, (b) Nueces River, (c) Buena Vista, (d) Veracruz, (e) Mexico City.
2. **Identify** (a) Zachary Taylor, (b) Mexican War, (c) Winfield Scott, (d) Stephen Kearny, (e) Bear Flag Republic, (f) John C. Frémont, (g) Chapultepec, (h) Mexican Cession, (i) Gadsden Purchase.
3. **Define** cede.

### Comprehension

4. How did President Polk avoid war with Britain over Oregon?
5. (a) What event sparked the beginning of the Mexican War? (b) What were the final results of the war?

6. (a) Name two things that English-speaking settlers learned from Mexican Americans in the Southwest. (b) Name one tradition that settlers brought with them.

### Critical Thinking and Writing

7. **Identifying Alternatives** Do you think the United States could have avoided going to war with Mexico in 1846? Explain.
8. **Recognizing Points of View** Frederick Douglass, an African American who fought to end slavery, wrote of the Mexican War that Americans “ought [to] blush and hang our heads for shame.” (a) Why do you think Douglass opposed the war? (b) Who might have agreed with his statement? Who might have disagreed?



**Activity Roleplaying** With your classmates, choose among the following roles: a citizen of Mexico; a white American living in Texas; a Mexican living in Texas; an American Californian; a northerner; a southerner; President Polk. Hold a debate about whether the United States should go to war with Mexico.