

Highlights of Westward Expansion

Oregon: Families in search of fertile farmland head to Oregon Country. Filled with fertile farmland and dense forests, Oregon was home to settlers from both Britain and the United States who jointly owned the land. Fur Trappers, **Mountain Men** (rugged individualists) missionaries battled the dangerous lifestyle. **Wagon Trains** carried pioneers to the Oregon Territory – starting in Independence, Missouri travelers covered 2,000 miles in five months.

Texas: Still part of Mexico, hundreds of American settlers flocked to Texas to establish colonies, the most famous being Stephen F. Austin and the original 300. In return for land, settlers agreed to become Mexican citizens. More Americans lived in Texas than Mexicans, however, resulting in significant loyalty to the U.S. Government instead of Mexico's. Mexico, in fear of losing Texas, began enforcing laws limiting the rights of settlers. The Texans rebelled, leading to a war for independence that included the infamous Battle of the Alamo, concluding with victory at San Jacinto. Texas then became the Lone Star Republic for nine years until annexation in 1845.

New Mexico: Back then, this region included present-day Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and parts of Colorado. When Mexico gained independence in 1821, American settlers were allowed into New Mexico, following the Santa Fe Trail.

California: Missions filled this vast territory, converting natives to Catholicism. To spur the economy, Mexico eventually transformed some of the missions into cattle ranches, setting up a culture of **vaqueros** (Indian and Mexican cowhands).

The Mexican-American War

When Texas was annexed to the United States in 1845 (signed by Sam Houston and President Polk) it REALLY made the Mexicans angry. They had never accepted Texas independence and they feared that by joining the United States, it would spark rebellion in California and New Mexico. Americans, on the other hand, felt that Mexico stood in the way of Manifest Destiny. A border dispute (*between the Rio Grande River and the Nueces River*) sparked war. President Polk sought a confident, quick attack on the Mexicans on several fronts.

As the war raged, Americans in northern California began to revolt against Mexico. They declared independence on June 14, 1846, naming their new country the **Bear Flag Republic**. By 1847, the United States controlled all of New Mexico and California. In the **Treaty of Guadalupe-Hildago**, Mexico was forced to cede all of California and most of New Mexico to the United States – otherwise known as the **Mexican Cession**. The United States paid Mexico \$15 million and agreed to respect the rights of Mexicans living in the territory.

A few years later (1853), the United States paid Mexico another \$10 million for a strip of land in present day Arizona and New Mexico now known as the **Gadsden Purchase** in order to complete a railroad. *With the Gadsden Purchase, many Americans felt that their dreams of Manifest Destiny had been realized.*