

Chapter 12: Westward Movement

1. Mountain Men

Fur Trappers

After the Lewis and Clark Expedition returned in 1806, interest in the West exploded in America. People went west in search of adventure and wealth mostly because of a new fashion trend based upon a hat made of beaver fur. Fur trappers began exploring Louisiana Territory, the Rocky Mountains, and the West Coast in search of beaver pelts to sell to the eastern fur companies.

By the 1830s, the beaver had been hunted to extinction in many parts of North America. So, fur trappers needed a new way to make money. Since they knew the land so well, they started to guide settlers from the east to Oregon Country on the West Coast.

2. Texas

Land of Opportunity

In 1821, Mexico gained its independence from Spain. The new Mexican government needed money, so they encouraged Americans to **immigrate** to the northern state of Texas. Mexico required that Americans learn Spanish, convert to Catholicism, and obey Mexican laws. For Americans, Mexico offered free or cheap land and an opportunity for a better life.

Texas Independence

Thousands of Americans poured into Texas and soon outnumbered the Mexicans. Americans had more loyalty to the United States than to the Mexican government. Realizing that Texas might

try to join with the United States, Mexico outlawed further immigration. This angered many Americans in Texas. To make matters worse, the Mexican government was falling apart and this allowed General Antonio López de Santa Anna to become dictator of Mexico. When Americans and Mexican soldiers fought a small battle in the town of Gonzales in 1835, Santa Anna had enough and sent the army to put down the rebellion.

The Texans declared **independence** from Mexico on March 2, 1836, but they were unprepared for the war. Only a few days later, Santa Anna and the Mexican army defeated the Texans at the Battle of the Alamo. Santa Anna executed all the male Alamo survivors hoping this show of brutality would stop the rebellion. Instead, it only angered the Texans more.

Under the command of Sam Houston, the Texas army attacked and defeated Santa Anna at San Jacinto on April 21, 1836. After the battle, the Texans captured Santa Anna and wanted to execute him. In exchange for his life, Santa Anna granted Texas its independence. For the next nine years, the Republic of Texas acted as an independent country.

3. Oregon Country

To the West Coast

Americans poured into Oregon Country, a vast territory on the West Coast above California that included all or part of present-day Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and British Columbia. Since 1818, the United States and Britain agreed to jointly occupy the territory. By the 1840s, thousands of American **pioneers** traveled on the

Oregon Trail in search of good farmland and a mild climate. Americans began calling for the United States to **annex** most or all of Oregon Country.

Since the founding of the country, Americans had been moving west. Most people hoped to expand the country to the West Coast. This became known as **Manifest Destiny**, the idea that it was America's future to spread across the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans.

James K. Polk won the presidential election in 1844 on a promise to expand the borders of the United States. In the Oregon Treaty of 1846, Britain and the United States agreed to divide Oregon Country at the 49th parallel. This officially gave the United States its own territory on the West Coast.

4. The Mexican War

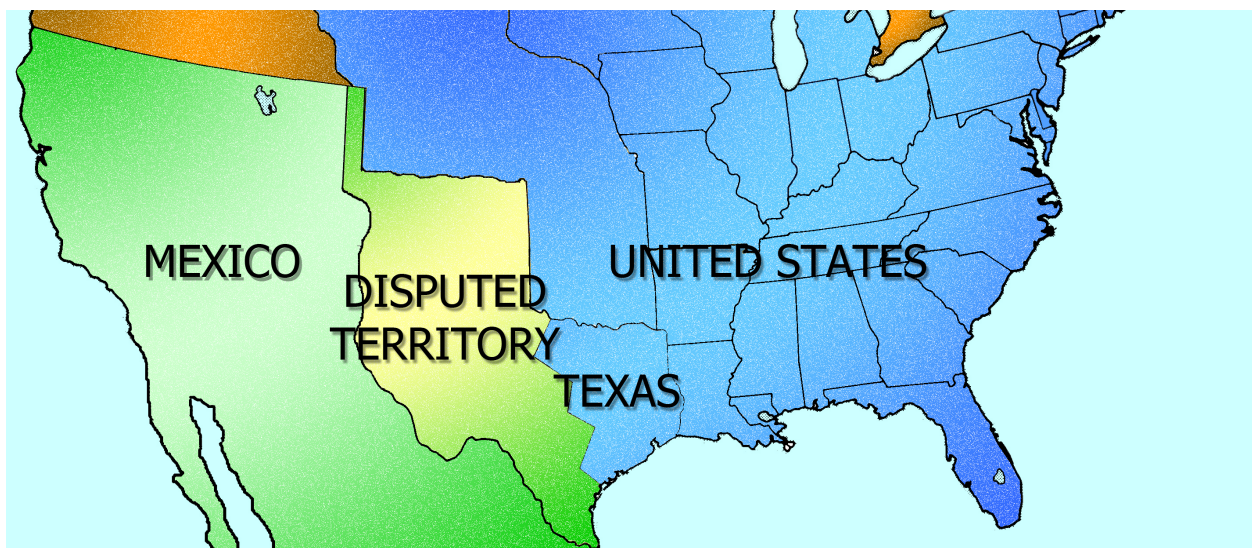
Texas Boundaries

The United States annexed the Republic of Texas in 1845. This angered Mexico who was threatening to get Texas back. When word reached Mexico City that

Texas now belonged to the United States, Mexico reacted by calling back its ambassadors on March 6, 1845. In addition, Mexico was a political mess with two governments fighting for control of the country.

President Polk sent an ambassador to Mexico to offer \$25 million for upper California and to extend the southern Texas border from the Nueces River to the Rio Grande River. Mexico refused. Both the United States and Mexico sent troops into the disputed Texas border area. Mexican troops attacked American soldiers killing about a dozen men.

On May 13, 1846, Congress declared war against Mexico. The war lasted about a year-and-a-half, ending with the American capture of Mexico City in September 1847 by General Winfield Scott. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was approved by the Senate on March 10, 1848, officially ending the Mexican-American War. The United States gave Mexico \$15 million and took upper California and the New Mexico territory.



Texas became the spark that started the Mexican-American War (1846-1848).