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

**Main Ideas**

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

**What You Will Learn…**

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2. As a result of the Mexican-American War, the United States added territory in the Southwest.
3. American settlement in the Mexican Cession produced conflict and a blending of cultures.

**The Big Idea**

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

**Key Terms and People**

- **manifest destiny**, p. 355
- **James K. Polk**, p. 355
- **vaqueros**, p. 357
- **Californios**, p. 357
- **Bear Flag Revolt**, p. 358
- **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo**, p. 361
- **Gadsden Purchase**, p. 361

**If YOU were there…**

Your family are Californios, Spanish settlers who have lived in California for many years. You raise horses on your ranch. So far, you have gotten along with American settlers. But it has become clear that the American government wants to take over California. You hear that fighting has already started.

**How might life change under American rule?**

**BUILDING BACKGROUND**

Mexican independence set the stage for conflict and change in the West and Southwest. At the same time, Americans continued to move westward, settling in the Mexican territories of Texas, New Mexico, and California. American ambitions led to clashes with Mexico and the people who already lived in Mexico’s territories.

**Manifest Destiny**

“We have it in our power to start the world over again.”

—Thomas Paine, from his pamphlet *Common Sense*

Americans had always believed they could build a new, better society founded on democratic principles. In 1839 writer John O’Sullivan noted, “We are the nation of human progress, and who will, what can, set limits to our onward march?”

Actually, there was one limit: land. From the beginnings of the colonies, Americans had been moving west in search of land and economic opportunity. At the end of the Revolution, the Land Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 established the method for dividing and governing new territories. By the 1840s the United States had a booming economy and population. Barely 70 years old, the nation needed even more room for farms, ranches, businesses, and ever-growing families. Americans looked West to what they saw as a vast wilderness, ready to be taken. The regions of Oregon, New Mexico, and Texas were being settled by Americans, and the national government worked to annex those lands to the United States.
Some people believed it was America’s **manifest destiny**, or obvious fate, to settle land all the way to the Pacific Ocean in order to spread democracy. O’Sullivan coined the term in 1845. He wrote that it was America’s “manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole continent which Providence [God] has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty . . .”

In the 1840s and 1850s, manifest destiny was tied up with the slavery issue. If America expanded, would slavery be allowed in the new territories? Several presidents became involved in the difficult issue. Among them was President John Tyler. A pro-slavery Whig, Tyler wanted to increase the power of the southern slave states by annexing Texas. His fellow Whigs disagreed.

In 1844, the Whig Party passed up Tyler and chose Senator Henry Clay as its presidential candidate. At first opposing annexation, Clay changed his mind due to pressure from southern politicians. The Democratic Party chose former Tennessee governor **James K. Polk** to oppose Clay. Both candidates strongly favored acquiring Texas and Oregon.

Southerners feared the loss of Texas, a possible new slave state. Others worried that Texas might become an ally of Britain. These concerns helped Polk narrowly defeat Clay.

**Acquiring New Territory**

President Polk quickly set out to fulfill his promise to annex Oregon and Texas. Russia and Spain had given up their claims to Oregon Country. Britain and the United States had agreed to occupy the territory together.

As more Americans settled there, they began to ask that Oregon become part of the United States. Polk wanted to protect these settlers’ interests. Some politicians noted that Oregon Country would provide a Pacific port for the growing U.S. trade with China.

Meanwhile, Britain and the United States disagreed over how to draw the United States–Canadian border. American expansionists cried, “Fifty-four forty or fight!” This slogan referred to 54°40’ north latitude, the line to which Americans wanted their northern territory to extend.

Neither side really wanted a war, though. In 1846 Great Britain and the United States signed a treaty that gave the United States all Oregon land south of the forty-ninth parallel. This treaty drew the border that still exists today. Oregon became an organized U.S. territory in February 1848.
By March 1845, Congress had approved the annexation of Texas and needed only the support of the Republic of Texas. Americans continued to pour into Texas. Texas politicians hoped that joining the United States would help solve the republic’s financial and military problems. The Texas Congress approved annexation in June 1845. Texas became part of the United States in December. This action angered the Mexican government, which considered Texas to be a “stolen province.”

The Mexican Borderlands
Though it had lost Texas, Mexico still had settlements in other areas of the present-day Southwest to govern. New Mexico, with its capital at Santa Fe, was the oldest settled area and had the most people. Mexico also had settlements in present-day Arizona, Nevada, and California.

During early Spanish rule, the mission system had dominated much of the present-day American Southwest. Over time, it had become less important there, especially in New Mexico, where settlers lived in small villages. In California, however, missions remained the focus of everyday life. Missions under later Spanish rule carried out huge farming and ranching operations using the labor of Native Americans. Some of the Indians came willingly to the missions. Others were brought by force. Usually, they were not allowed to leave the mission once they had arrived. They had to adopt the clothing, food, and religion of the Spaniards. As a result, some Native American groups moved and settled in different areas to avoid being controlled by the missions. One effect of these migrations was more conflicts over land.

Missions often sold their goods to local pueblos, or towns, that arose near the missions and presidios. One wealthy California settler, Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, remembered the early days.

“We were the pioneers of the Pacific coast, building towns and missions while General [George] Washington was carrying on the war of the Revolution.”

—Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, quoted in Eyewitnesses and Others

Ranch Life

Spanish and Mexican *vaqueros*, or cowboys, were expert horse riders. They used their horses to herd cattle on the ranches of the Spanish Southwest.

Vaqueros were known for their specially designed hats that protected them from the harsh sun and rain.

Saddles like these were highly prized by *vaqueros* and became the model for the Western saddle we know today.

Leather chaps protected riders from dust and scrapes.

What features of the *vaqueros*’ life are shown in this painting?
After winning independence from Spain in 1821, Mexico began to change old Spanish policies toward California and Texas. By the 1830s, Mexico ended the mission system in the region. In California, mission lands were broken up, and huge grants were given to some of the wealthiest settlers, including Vallejo. They created vast ranchos, or ranches, with tens of thousands of acres of land. Vaqueros, or cowboys, managed the large herds of cattle and sheep. Cowhides were so valuable that they were called “California banknotes.” Hides were traded for household items and luxury goods with ship captains from the eastern United States. Some settlers also made wine and grew citrus fruits.

Although they had been freed from the missions, for most California Indians the elements of life changed very little. They continued to herd animals and do much of the hard physical labor on ranches and farms. Some, however, ran away into the wilderness or to the nearby towns of San Diego and Los Angeles.

The Californios

Because of the great distance between California and the center of Mexico’s government, by the early 1820s California had only around 3,200 colonists. These early California settlers, called Californios, felt little connection to their faraway government.

Californios developed a lasting reputation for hospitality and skilled horse riding. In Two Years Before the Mast, American novelist Richard Henry Dana Jr. wrote about his encounters with Californio culture. He described, for example, what happened after a Californio served a feast to Dana and a friend.

“We took out some money and asked him how much we were to pay. He shook his head and crossed himself, saying that it was charity—that the Lord gave it to us.”

—Richard Henry Dana Jr., from Two Years Before the Mast

In addition to traders and travelers, a small number of settlers also arrived from the United States. They were called Anglos by the Californios. Although there were few Anglo settlers in California, their calls for independence increased tensions between Mexico and the United States.

**Diplomatic relations between Mexico and the United States became increasingly strained. U.S. involvement in California and Texas contributed to this tension.**

**Conflict Breaks Out**

Mexico had long insisted that its northern border lay along the Nueces River and refused to accept the U.S. annexation of Texas. The United States said the border was farther south, along the Rio Grande. In June 1845 President Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor to lead an army into the disputed region.
Polk sent diplomat John Slidell to Mexico City to try to settle the border dispute. Slidell came with an offer to buy New Mexico and California for $30 million. Mexican officials refused to speak to him.

In March 1846, General Taylor led his troops to the Rio Grande. He camped across from Mexican forces stationed near the town of Matamoros, Mexico. In April, the Mexican commander told Taylor to withdraw from Mexican territory. Taylor refused. The two sides clashed, and several U.S. soldiers were killed.

In response, Polk said to Congress:

“Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory, and shed American blood upon the American soil... The two nations are now at war.”
—James K. Polk, from his address to Congress, May 11, 1846

Polk’s war message was persuasive. Two days later, Congress declared war on Mexico.

**War Begins**

At the beginning of the war with Mexico, the U.S. Army had better weapons and equipment. Yet it was greatly outnumbered and poorly prepared. The government put out a call for 50,000 volunteers. About 200,000 responded. Many were young men who thought the war would be a grand adventure in a foreign land.

On the home front, many Americans supported the war. However, many Whigs thought the war was unjustified and avoidable. Northern abolitionists also opposed the conflict. They feared the spread of slavery into southwestern lands.

While Americans debated the war, fighting proceeded. General Taylor’s soldiers won battles south of the Nueces River. Taylor then crossed the Rio Grande and occupied Matamoros, Mexico. While Taylor waited for more men, Polk ordered General Stephen Kearny to attack New Mexico. On August 18, 1846, Kearny took Santa Fe, the capital city, without a fight. He claimed the entire province of New Mexico for the United States and marched west to California, where another conflict with Mexico was already under way.

**The Bear Flag Revolt**

In 1846, only about 500 Americans lived in the huge province of California, in contrast to about 12,000 Californios. Yet, in the spirit of manifest destiny, a small group of American settlers seized the town of Sonoma, north of San Francisco, on June 14. Hostilities began between the two sides when the Americans took some horses that were intended for the Mexican militia. In what became known as the **Bear Flag Revolt**, the Americans declared California to be an independent nation. Above the town, the rebels hoisted a hastily made flag of a grizzly bear facing a red star. Californios laughed at the roughly-made bear, thinking it “looked more like a pig than a bear.”

John C. Frémont, a U.S. Army captain, was leading a mapping expedition across the Sierra Nevada when he heard of the possible war with Mexico. Frémont went to Sonoma and quickly joined the American settlers in their revolt against the Californios. Because war had already broken out between the United States and Mexico, Frémont’s actions were seen as beneficial to the American cause in the region. His stated goal, however, was Californian independence, not to annex California to the United States. During the revolt, several important Californios were taken prisoner, including Mariano Vallejo. Governor Vallejo and his brother were held at an Anglo settlement for two months without any formal charges being brought against them. Long after his release, Vallejo wrote a history of California that included an account of his time as a bear flag prisoner.

But the bear flag was quick to fall. In July, U.S. naval forces came ashore in California and raised the stars and stripes. Kearny’s army arrived from the East. The towns of San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco fell rapidly. In August, U.S. Navy commodore Robert Stockton claimed California for the United States. Some Californios continued to resist until early 1847, when they surrendered.
The Bear Flag Revolt
American settlers took over Sonoma, the regional headquarters of the Mexican army. They captured Mexican general Mariano Vallejo and declared California a new country: the California Republic. The United States never recognized the new nation, however.

End of the War
General Winfield Scott landed at Veracruz and defeated troops in the Mexican fortress there. He then marched inland, toward Mexico City. Scott’s capture of the Mexican capital led to the end of the war.

1. Location What Mexican city did Scott’s forces attack in March 1847?
2. Movement Which U.S. commander led forces from Santa Fe to San Diego?
War’s End
In Mexico General Taylor finally got the reinforcements he needed. He drove his forces deep into enemy lands. Santa Anna, thrown from office after losing Texas, returned to power in Mexico in September 1846. He quickly came after Taylor.

The two armies clashed at Buena Vista in February 1847. After a close battle with heavy casualties on both sides, the Mexican Army retreated. The next morning, the cry went up: “The enemy has fled! The field is ours!”

Taylor’s success made him a war hero back home. The general’s popularity troubled President Polk, and when Taylor’s progress stalled, Polk gave the command to General Winfield Scott. A beloved leader, he was known by his troops as “Old Fuss and Feathers” because of his strict military discipline.

Scott sailed to the port of Veracruz, where the strongest fortress in Mexico was located. On March 29, after an 88-hour artillery attack, Veracruz fell. Scott moved on to the final goal, Mexico City, the capital. Taking a route similar to one followed by Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés in 1519, the Americans pushed 200 or so miles inland. Santa Anna tried to stop the U.S. forces at Cerro Gordo in mid-April, but failed. By August 1847, U.S. troops were at the edge of Mexico City.

After a truce failed, Scott ordered a massive attack on Mexico City. Mexican soldiers and civilians fought fierce battles in and around the capital. At a military school atop the steep, fortified hill of Chapultepec, young Mexican cadets bravely defended their hopeless position. At least one soldier jumped to his death rather than surrender to the invading forces. Finally, on September 14, 1847, Mexico City fell. Santa Anna soon fled the country.

Reading Check Sequencing In chronological order, list the key battles of the Mexican-American War.
American Settlement in the Mexican Cession

The war ended after Scott took Mexico City. In February 1848, the United States and Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which officially ended the war and forced Mexico to turn over much of its northern territory to the United States. Known as the Mexican Cession, this land included the present-day states of California, Nevada, and Utah. In addition, it included most of Arizona and New Mexico and parts of Colorado and Wyoming. The United States also won the area claimed by Texas north of the Rio Grande. The Mexican Cession totaled more than 500,000 square miles and increased the size of the United States by almost 25 percent.

Agreements and Payments

In exchange for this vast territory, the United States agreed to pay Mexico $15 million. In addition, the United States assumed claims of more than $3 million held by American citizens against the Mexican government. The treaty also addressed the status of Mexicans in the Mexican Cession. The treaty provided that they would be “protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty and property, and secured in the free exercise of their religion.” The Senate passed the treaty in March 1848.

After the war with Mexico, some Americans wanted to guarantee that any southern railroad to California would be built completely on American soil. James Gadsden, U.S. minister to Mexico, negotiated an important agreement with Mexico in December 1853. Under the terms of the Gadsden Purchase, the U.S. government paid Mexico $10 million. In exchange, the United States received the southern parts of what are now Arizona and New Mexico. With this purchase, the existing boundary with Mexico was finally fixed.

Surge of American Settlers

After the Mexican-American War, a flood of Americans moved to the Southwest. American newcomers struggled against longtime residents to control the land and other valuable resources, such as water and minerals. Most Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans faced legal, economic, and social discrimination. As a result, they found it difficult to protect their rights.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo promised to protect Mexican American residents’ property rights. Yet differences between Mexican and U.S. land laws led to great confusion. The U.S. government often made Mexican American landowners go to court to prove that they had titles to their land. Landowners had to pay their own travel costs as well as those of witnesses and interpreters. They also had to pay attorneys’ and interpreters’ fees. These legal battles often bankrupted landowners. New settlers also tended to ignore Mexican legal concepts, such as community property or community water rights.
Mexican holidays like Cinco de Mayo and Día de los Muertos are still popular holidays in the Southwest.

White settlers also battled with American Indians over property rights. In some areas, new white settlers outnumbered Native Americans. Anglo settlers often tried to take control of valuable water resources and grazing lands. In addition, settlers rarely respected Indian holy places. Native American peoples such as the Navajo and the Apache tried to protect their land and livestock from the settlers. Indians and settlers alike attacked one another to protect their interests.

**Cultural Encounters**

Despite conflicts, different cultures shaped one another in the Southwest. In settlements with large Mexican populations, laws were often printed in both English and Spanish. Names of places—such as San Antonio, San Diego, and Santa Barbara—show Hispanic heritage. Other place-names, such as Taos and Tesuque, are derived from Native American words. Communities throughout the Southwest regularly celebrated both Mexican and American holidays.

Mexican and Native American knowledge and traditions also shaped many local economies. Mexican Americans taught Anglo settlers about mining in the mountains. Many ranching communities were first started by Mexican settlers. They also introduced new types of saddles and other equipment to American ranchers. Adobe, developed by the Anasazi Indians, was adopted from the Pueblo people by the Spanish. It is still commonly used by American residents in New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

**Mexican Americans Today**

Today Mexican Americans make up about 11 percent of the U.S. population, or just over 34 million people. Mexican Americans live in all 50 states, though most live in the West and Southwest. Many Mexican Americans in these areas are descended from people who lived there long before the region became part of the United States.
Trade also changed the Southwest. For example, the Navajo created handwoven woolen blankets to sell to Americans. Americans in turn brought manufactured goods and money to the Southwest. Due to exchanges like these, the economies of many Mexican American and Native American communities in the Southwest began to change.

**Water Rights**

Eastern water-use laws commonly required owners whose land bordered streams or rivers to maintain a free flow of water. These restrictions generally prevented landowners from constructing dams because doing so would infringe upon the water rights of neighbors downstream.

In the typically dry climate of the West, large-scale agriculture was not possible without irrigation. Dams and canals were required to direct scarce water to fields. This need conflicted with the accepted eastern tradition of equal access to water.

Brigham Young established a strict code regulating water rights for the Mormon community. In any dispute over water use, the good of the community would outweigh the interests of individuals. Young’s approach stood as an example for modern water laws throughout the West.

**REVIEWING IDEAS, TERMS, AND PEOPLE**

1. **Analyze** What was manifest destiny and how did it influence westward expansion?
   **Explain** What plan did new territories and states follow to establish their political structures?
   **Make Inferences** Why was westward expansion such an important issue in the election of 1844?
   **Evaluate** Do you think California benefited from Mexican independence? Why or why not?

2. **Recall** Why did the United States declare war on Mexico?
   **Summarize** What was General Winfield Scott’s strategy for winning the war with Mexico?
   **Elaborate** Would you have sided with those who opposed the war with Mexico or with those who supported it? Why?

3. **Define** What was the Mexican Cession? Where was it located?
   **Describe** What conflicts did American settlers, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans in the Mexican Cession experience? How were these resolved?
   **Draw Conclusions** What were the cultural differences between the eastern United States and the American Southwest? What were the economic differences?

**SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT**

**Critical Thinking**

4. **Identifying Cause and Effect** Review your notes on manifest destiny and U.S. territorial expansion. Then use the graphic organizer below to show how Americans’ expansion into California caused war, as well as the effects of the war.

5. **Explaining the Mexican-American War** How will you convey ideas, such as manifest destiny, in a film? How will you explain to your audience the Mexican-American War’s role in expansion of the United States? Consider these questions and make a note of your answers.