

Chapter 11

MANIFEST DESTINY: EXPANDING THE NATION, 1830–1853

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Objective: Demonstrate an understanding of how the idea of Manifest Destiny and the policies of the Polk administration almost doubled the size of the United States in twelve years in spite of opposition from many people in the country.

11.1. Manifest Destiny—The Importance of an Idea

The Birth of the Texas Republic

Distant California

Manifest Destiny and American Presidential Politics

54°40' or Fight—The United States and Oregon

11.2. The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846–1848

Fighting the War in Texas and Mexico, Responding to Resistance

From New Mexico to Alta California and the Bear Flag Revolt

Negotiating the Peace, Defining the Borders

11.3. West into the Pacific

The Gold Rush to California

Whaling in the Pacific Ocean

The Navy and Diplomacy across the Pacific

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Between 1845 and 1848, the United States nearly doubled in size, thanks in part to the doctrine of **Manifest Destiny**. Coined by New York newspaperman John L. O'Sullivan, the term gave voice to old ideas about spreading democracy and Protestant Christianity across the American continent, along with the notion that the spread was divinely ordained. Yet not all supporters of Manifest Destiny had such lofty ideals. Some were railroad promoters who hoped for profit in extending the railroad network westward. Others were failed farmers who sought a chance to start over and reinvent themselves in the process.

There were also a number of voices opposed to manifest destiny, including many Whigs. Led by Henry Clay, the Whigs sought a more-well-developed existing nation, complete with roads, canals, railroads, and industries. Antislavery advocates, too, opposed the addition of new territory; concerned that this would give new weight and power to the slave states. And some simply saw expansion by violence as morally wrong. Yet as the debate continued, many Americans simply voted with their feet, moving into new regions further west.

Meanwhile, tensions had been growing in Texas, where the Americans who lived there increasingly found themselves at odds with the Mexican government. In the early 19th century, a number of Americans had crossed the Sabine River, settling in disputed territory that was claimed by Spain but the United States had been led to believe might be theirs by virtue of the Louisiana Purchase. Shortly after the **Adams-Onís** Treaty (1819) was signed, which included recognition of the Sabine River as the border between U.S. Louisiana and Spanish Texas, a revolutionary uprising began in Mexico. The Mexican revolution would last for eleven long and bloody years, decimating the Mexican economy. The Mexican population, called **Tejanos**, fell to nearly half its pre-revolution size in 1800. But in 1821, Mexico was finally independent.

Even before Mexican independence, Spain allowed Missouri merchant **Moses Austin** to start a colony in Texas, hoping to stabilize the border there. His son **Stephen Austin** began building a settlement in 1821, along with the liberal Tejano **Erasmus Seguin**. Two years later, the Mexican government empowered Austin to act as an *emprazario*, or colonizing agent for the territory. By 1830, 20,000 American colonists had arrived, bringing 2000 slaves with them. Generally, the Americans ignored the rules that had been laid down by the Mexican government, refusing to convert to Catholicism as promised or to free their slaves. (Mexico had banned the institution.) That year, concerned by ever-increasing numbers and the Americans' tendency to flout the rules, Mexico closed Texas to further American immigration. After the government re-routed trade routes away from American communities and stationed more soldiers in Texas, revolts broke out, some assisted by Tejanos.

In October of 1832, a group of American colonists called for autonomy within the Republic of Mexico. That next year, they organized an army under the command of **Sam Houston** and sent Austin to Mexico City to negotiate. After Austin was arrested and jailed for nearly two years, he—and others—determined that war was the only recourse. Throughout 1835–1836, Texians (as the Americans in Texas were called) fought pitched battles with Mexican troops, taking command of the Alamo fortress in 1835 and occupying the town of Goliad. Meanwhile, Texian envoy James Fannin traveled to Washington, D.C. to try to secure American support for the insurrection.

In response, Mexican president **Santa Anna** sent the Mexican army to put down the rebellion, capturing the Alamo and killing its defenders in March 1836. “Remember the

Alamo” became a rallying cry for Texas independence, and later in the war with Mexico. Later that month, Goliad surrendered as well, with all troops there executed as well.

By that time, Texian leaders had already declared the Republic of Texas independent and adopted a constitution. In April, Houston defeated Santa Anna at the **Battle of San Jacinto**, executing hundreds of Mexican prisoners. The next day, Santa Anna was captured and forced to sign the **Treaty of Veasco**, promising to end the war and recognize Texas independence. Sam Houston was elected president of the new republic; Austin became secretary of state.

Texian political leaders were not seeking long-term independence but hoped for annexation by the United States. The U.S., however, was wary. Many Americans worried about the consequences of the addition of what would almost certainly be a powerful slave state, and they were concerned as well about the interference in Mexican-American trade. The U.S. recognized the Republic, but that was all.

Meanwhile, **Alta California** (as distinguished from Baja California to the south) was a place with wonderful harbors, but too far away from either Mexico or the U.S. to cause much of a stir. In the 1830s, the population there included Mexicans and a smaller number of Americans; neither group was thinking seriously about independence.

European settlement of the California coast began in the mid-18th century when the Franciscan priest, **Junipero Serra**, founded a chain of missions that eventually stretched from San Diego to San Francisco. Conversion of local Indians was a stated aim, but so too was the ability to use them as a labor force. When Serra arrived in California, there were probably 300,000 Indians in the area, but by the time Spanish rule ended in 1821, that number had been reduced to 200,000. In 1833, the Mexican government transferred ownership of California's missions from church to state and eventually to private hands. Missions were sold off or awarded to powerful ranchers. Most of the Americans arriving before 1840 converted to Catholicism, learned Spanish, and became part of the local culture.

After 1840, the situation changed, as a new kind of immigrant from the U.S. began to arrive. These were more interested in imposing their own culture than they were in assimilating into the already-existing one, and they hoped to make California part of the United States. Already, those in Washington, including President Polk, were eyeing California's harbors with an interest in extending the Pacific trade. The commander of the U.S. Pacific squadron was ordered to the California coast in the event of war. Meanwhile, U.S. Army Captain **John C. Fremont** led a “map-making” expedition into California. He was actually expecting orders to stir up a pro-American revolt there. These came in April of 1846.

During this time, the twin pillars of the Democratic Party were a small federal government and Manifest Destiny. Martin Van Buren, who had built on the base of the older Democratic-Republicans to create the new Democratic Party, believed in the necessity of political parties and took steps to organize them further. He and Jackson called the first national political convention to be held by major political party, borrowing the idea from the much-smaller Anti-Masonic Party, who had held the first nominating convention in Baltimore in 1835. When the Democrats did convene prior to the 1836 election, they nominated, not surprisingly, Martin Van Buren.

The core principle of the emerging Whig party was opposition to Jackson, although it also advocated for a stronger federal government and internal improvements. The Whigs disliked the idea of political parties and so were not as tightly organized as the Democrats under Van Buren. They nominated a popular hero of the Indian Wars, William Henry

Harrison, but Southern Democrats nominated another candidate, and New England Whigs went with Daniel Webster. Van Buren won.

As president, Van Buren faced a number of challenges, including dealing with the final stages of Indian removal, the Seminole War, and the threat of war with Britain along the Canadian Border. Issues of nullification and abolition also continued unresolved. Van Buren supported the imposition of the **gag rule** in Congress, a procedural rule that prevented discussion of antislavery petitions. Although the rule was passed, John Quincy Adams actively campaigned to overturn it. Meanwhile, Van Buren had to deal with the **Panic of 1837**, which was unleashed after a sudden drying up of credit caused a number of cotton brokers, banks, and other financial institutions to fail. Andrew Jackson's issuing of the **Specie Circular** in 1836, requiring payment for federal land in gold or silver, not bank notes. Jackson's earlier manipulations to kill the Second Bank of the United States now came back to haunt the country, infecting the population with a distrust of banking institutions in general, causing the downfall of yet more banks. In 1839, a second panic hit, resulting from over-speculation in cotton and cotton-producing land. Northern textile and shoe industries laid off thousands of workers, and still more banks closed. Overall, the panic lasted to 1843.

Van Buren's many challenges effectively doomed his presidency to one term. In 1840, the Whigs pinned their hopes on the aging war hero **William Henry Harrison**, and selected **John Tyler** of Virginia to balance the ticket. "Tippecanoe and Tyler, too" was a catchy slogan, and the Whigs went on to win. But Harrison would not enjoy his victory for very long, catching pneumonia as he delivered his inaugural address and dying a month later. His successor, John Tyler, posed new problems for the Whigs. Politically, Tyler leaned more to the Democratic than the Whig agenda; he vetoed a number of pieces of legislation sent to him by the Whig-dominated Congress, including a recreation of the Bank of the United States that could have eased economic conditions in the country. In September 1841, his entire cabinet (except for Secretary of State Daniel Webster) resigned, and the Whig congressional caucus expelled him from the party.

Webster decided to stay the course primarily because he was in the process of negotiating the **Webster-Ashburton Treaty** with Britain. For years, a border dispute over where to locate the dividing line between Maine and Canada had come dangerously close to war; the 1842 treaty resolved the border as far west as Minnesota.

Tyler's priority was the annexation of Texas, and he began secret negotiations with Texas. In April of 1844, John C. Calhoun, now a Whig because of his hatred for Jackson, presented a treaty of annexation to the senate in his capacity as Secretary of State. Calhoun justified the treaty in explicitly proslavery terms, noting that Britain would take over and end slavery there if the United States did nothing. Both Henry Clay and Martin Van Buren announced their opposition, largely because of the slavery issue. The treaty failed by an overwhelming vote.

In 1844, the Democrats went with an unexpected candidate, **James K. Polk**. As a "dark horse," Polk was virtually unknown as a presidential candidate. The Democratic Party platform called for the "reoccupation of Oregon and the re-annexation of Texas." With Polk, the Democrats could focus on Manifest Destiny, claiming they were the party of national expansion. Catholics, who saw the Whigs as a Protestant party, also supported Polk. In the end, Polk won, defeating the Whig candidate, Henry Clay.

In the four months between the election and the inauguration, John Tyler resolved to admit Texas as a state, using a joint resolution of Congress to do so rather than an annexation treaty. With four days to go, Tyler signed the resolution admitting Texas.

Meanwhile, Americans in the mid-1830s began to show a new interest in Oregon, when a group including Protestant missionaries Marcus and Narcissa Whitman settled in the fertile farming areas of the Willamette Valley. The Whitmans' letters about the beauties of Oregon did much to attract further American settlement, although the territory itself had been shared by Britain and the U.S. By the 1840s, both governments were ready to resolve the border and end joint ownership. The Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842 negotiated the border at the 49th parallel; Polk wanted more. During his 1844 campaign, Polk promised to win all of Oregon up to the Alaskan border at the 54°40' latitude line. Both nations now claimed a "disputed triangle" of land. In the spring of 1846, the two administrations settled along the 49th parallel, the current border.

By that time, Polk was much more concerned with expansion into Mexico than he was into British controlled territory. Tensions were already high regarding the acquisition of Texas, which the Mexican government did not recognize. Here, too, there was a dispute about the border, with the United States claiming the Rio Grande as the border, and Mexico claiming the Nueces River. It was into the territory between these two rivers that Polk ordered troops under the command of General **Zachary Taylor**. On April 25, 1846, Taylor's troops engaged with Mexican soldiers who had crossed the Rio Grande; 11 Americans were killed. Polk went to Congress for a declaration of war, claiming that Mexico had invaded and shed blood on American soil. Congress was hardly united on the question, with many Whigs opposed to war even as they sought to support American troops. Eventually, Polk got what he asked for.

The war provoked strong opposition, including John Quincy Adams and a young congressman, **Abraham Lincoln** of Illinois, who had strong suspicions about the disputed territory where the original clash had occurred. Perhaps the most influential response to the war, though, came from **Henry David Thoreau**, a New England transcendentalist poet who saw the conflict as immoral. In *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau outlined his belief that his opposition to the war prevented him from paying his taxes, since a portion of these would go to supporting the war effort. His willingness to face arrest made him a model of civil disobedience for generations to come.

In the initial battles of the war, Taylor often defeated larger Mexican forces thanks to superior technology. Still, heat and disease took a toll on U.S. troops. In September 1846, Taylor defeated a larger Mexican force and captured the strategically important town of **Monterrey**. Santa Anna marched north to engage Taylor and the two armies met at the **Battle of Buena Vista**, the largest single engagement of the war, which ended in a draw. Polk then turned to the experienced soldier **Winfield Scott** to plan an invasion of Mexico. In March 1847, Scott landed troops at Veracruz, the largest amphibious operation of U.S. troops before D-Day. Scott's army took Mexico City that September.

Meanwhile, smaller engagements took place in California and New Mexico. Troops under General Stephen Kearney took Santa Fe in the summer of 1846. In Sonoma, a group of armed American immigrants arrested General Mariano Vallejo, and jailed him near Sacramento. They went on to organize what they called the **Bear Flag Republic**. After the U.S. Navy sailed into Monterrey Bay and proclaimed U.S. conquest of California, the rebels simply replaced the Bear Flag with the Stars and Stripes.

Because the Mexican government was far less interested in California than in Texas, a unique California culture had developed, and citizens were divided in allegiance, although many saw the Americans as invaders. Many of the Mexican leaders in California were actually hoping for an American takeover to restore law and order. Later the **Californios**

suffered greater losses in property and their way of life as more and more Americans settled in the region.

In February of 1848, American diplomat Nicholas Trist and Mexican commissioners signed the **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo**, granting the U.S. control of all of Texas, New Mexico, and California. Mexico was paid \$15 million; the U.S. gained 90,000 new citizens and a reshaped nation. In 1853, the **Gadsden Purchase** added a strip of land south of Arizona and New Mexico in the final extension of U.S. territory within what would be the contiguous 48 states.

Polk sought no second term. Instead, the Democrats nominated Lewis Cass, while the Whigs went to the war hero Zachary Taylor. Taylor was a slaveholder, and Cass an expansionist, so some Northerners felt there was no choice at all. Instead, they started the **Free Soil Party**, committed to ensuring that all new territories would be free from slavery. Former President Martin Van Buren was their nominee. In the end, Taylor won a solid victory but died just a little over a year into his term, and was succeeded by Vice President **Millard Fillmore**.

The **Mexican Cession**, which gained California for the U.S., also enabled it to operate several Pacific coast ports. During the 1840s, American whaling ships led all other nations in Pacific whaling, helping lead the way for the nation to become a dominant player all across the Pacific.

Meanwhile, the discovery of gold in California in January of 1848 unleashed a rush of individuals to the region that had unparalleled effects. Prospective miners from everywhere, including far-flung regions of the world, poured in. Ten million dollars in gold was produced in California in 1848 and within three years that figure had grown to \$220 million. Thousands of people who hoped to “strike it rich” made their way to California despite the hardship of the journey. There was a choice of one of three routes; a slow, long, and expensive trip around the tip of South America, a shorter but far more dangerous voyage across the isthmus and then up to San Francisco, or an overland journey across the North American continent.

The **California Gold Rush** came at a terrible cost for California Indians, whose population declined much more rapidly after 1848 because of disease and outright murder. Chinese and South American miners also faced intimidation and violence. Initially, few women came to California, and those who did were often forced or tricked into prostitution to pay for their passage. By 1851, however, the opportunities for the type of mining practiced by the individual miners had dwindled; now, mining operations were controlled by large companies using new and expensive equipment, which contracted with miners to work for them.

Some individuals who had failed in the gold fields hoped to strike it rich another way, through the American whaling industry. **The Golden Age of Whaling** (1814–1861) was upon them, with whale products providing lamp oil as well as products for the industrial revolution and bone for the hoop skirts and corsets prized by fashionable women of the era. A few African Americans, including Paul Cuffee and Absalom F. Boston, became captains, and mixed-race crews came from every corner of the globe. Indeed, whaling was one of the few occupations where blacks were paid the same as whites.

Whaling ships also explored new parts of the world. Almost a decade before Commodore Perry's famous voyage to Japan in 1853–1854, American whalers entered Tokyo harbor to return shipwrecked Japanese sailors. Whaling ships also explored the Arctic Ocean, much of the South Pacific, and Antarctica. Honolulu and San Francisco became major American ports.

The acquisition of those ports expanded U.S. interest in the Pacific and beyond. Central to the command of the Pacific was securing U.S. influence in Hawaii, where the U.S. already had a major presence through Protestant missionaries, merchants, and whalers. In 1842, Secretary of State Daniel Webster added Hawaii to the protections of the Monroe Doctrine, and in 1851 negotiated a secret treaty that would make Hawaii a U.S. protectorate in the event of war. Webster was especially concerned with making Hawaii a useful trading and refueling point on the trade route to Asia.

Meanwhile, Britain was forcing China to open to the West, importing opium and then negotiating a series of treaties that benefited Britain and its trade. In 1844, the U.S. negotiated the Treaty of Wang-hsia, which gained the U.S. the same trade rights as the British. In July of 1853, Commodore **Matthew Perry** led four large warships into Tokyo Bay and began negotiations with Japan. He returned a year later with an even larger force, and the Japanese grudgingly agreed to the **Kanagawa Treaty**, opening two relatively isolated ports to the U.S.

CHAPTER LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 11.1 Explain what Manifest Destiny meant and how it led the United States to involvement in Texas, California, and Oregon.
- 11.2 Analyze the causes, strategies, and outcomes of the U.S. war with Mexico.
- 11.3 Analyze the causes and outcomes of U.S. expansion in California and into the Pacific region, including establishing new relationships with Hawaii, China, and Japan.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How did the outcome of the War with Mexico change America politically, economically, and culturally?
- What were the origins and major planks of the Free Soil Party?
- What was the outcome of the Texas Revolt of 1836?
- Why didn't the U.S. immediately annex Texas?