

SECTION 3

War with Mexico

Guide to Reading

Main Idea

American settlement in the Southwest led to conflict with Mexico.

Key Terms

rancho, rancho, Californios, cede

Reading Strategy

Taking Notes As you read the section, describe the actions and achievements of each of the individuals in the table.

	Actions taken
William Becknell	
Jedediah Smith	
John C. Frémont	

Read to Learn

- why Americans began to settle in the Southwest.
- how the United States acquired New Mexico and California.

Section Theme

Culture and Traditions New Mexico, California, and Texas were Spanish lands with Spanish cultures and traditions.



Preview of Events



Wagon wheel

AN American Story

Long lines of covered wagons stretched as far as the eye could see. "All's set!" a driver called out. "All's set!" everyone shouted in reply.

"Then the 'Heps!' of drivers—the cracking of whips—the trampling of feet—the occasional creak of wheels—the rumbling of wagons—form a new scene of [intense] confusion," reported Josiah Gregg. Gregg was one of the traders who traveled west on the Santa Fe Trail in the 1830s to sell cloth, knives, and other goods in New Mexico.

The New Mexico Territory

In the early 1800s, **New Mexico** was the name of a vast region sandwiched between the Texas and California territories. It included all of present-day New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and Utah and parts of Colorado and Wyoming.

Native American peoples had lived in the area for thousands of years. Spanish conquistadors began exploring there in the late 1500s and made it part of Spain's colony of Mexico. In 1610 the Spanish founded the settlement of **Santa Fe**. Missionaries followed soon after.

When Mexico won its independence in 1821, it inherited the New Mexico province from Spain. The Mexicans, however, had little control over the distant province. The inhabitants of New Mexico mostly governed themselves.

The Spanish had tried to keep Americans away from Santa Fe, fearing that Americans would want to take over the area. The Mexican government changed this policy, welcoming American traders into New Mexico. It hoped that the trade would boost the economy of the province.

The Santa Fe Trail

William Becknell, the first American trader to reach Santa Fe, arrived in 1821 with a pack of mules loaded with goods. Becknell sold the merchandise he brought for many times what he would have received for it in St. Louis.

Becknell's route came to be known as the **Santa Fe Trail**. The trail left the Missouri River near Independence, Missouri, and crossed the prairies to the Arkansas River. It followed the river west toward the Rocky Mountains before turning south into New Mexico Territory. Because the trail was mostly flat, on later trips Becknell used wagons to carry his merchandise.

Other traders followed Becknell, and the Santa Fe Trail became a busy trade route for hundreds of wagons. Americans brought cloth and firearms, which they exchanged in Santa Fe for silver, furs, and mules. The trail remained in use until the arrival of the railroad in 1880.

As trade with New Mexico increased, Americans began settling in the region. In the United States, the idea of Manifest Destiny captured the popular imagination, and many people saw New Mexico as territory worth acquiring. At the

same time, they eyed another prize—the Mexican territory of California, which would provide access to the Pacific.

 **Reading Check** **Describing** Where did the Santa Fe Trail end?

California's Spanish Culture

Spanish explorers and missionaries from Mexico had been the first Europeans to settle in California. In the 1760s Captain Gaspar de Portolá and Father Junípero Serra began building a string of missions that eventually extended from San Diego to Sonoma.

The mission system was a key part of Spain's plan to colonize California. The Spanish used the missions to convert Native Americans to Christianity. By 1820, California had 21 missions, with about 20,000 Native Americans living in them.

In 1820 American mountain man Jedediah Smith visited the San Gabriel Mission east of present-day Los Angeles. Smith reported that the Native Americans farmed thousands of acres and worked at weaving and other crafts. He described the missions as “large farming and grazing establishments.” Another American in Smith's party called the Native Americans “slaves in every sense of the word.”



History Through Art

Vaqueros in a Horse Corral by James Walker

Mexican American cowhands, or vaqueros, work on a ranch in the Southwest. **Why did the number of ranchos grow in the 1820s and 1830s?**



California After 1821

After Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821, **California** became a state in the new Mexican nation. At the time only a few hundred Spanish settlers lived in California, but emigrants began arriving from Mexico. The wealthier settlers lived on ranches devoted to raising cattle and horses.

In 1833 the Mexican government passed a law abolishing the missions. The government gave some of the lands to Native Americans and sold the remainder. Mexican settlers bought these lands and built huge properties called **ranchos**.

The Mexican settlers persuaded Native Americans to work their lands and tend their cattle in return for food and shelter. The California ranches were similar to the plantations of the South, and the **rancheros**—ranch owners—treated Native American workers almost like slaves.

Manifest Destiny and California

Americans had been visiting California for years. Most arrived on trading or whaling ships, although a few hardy travelers like Jedediah Smith came overland from the East. Soon more began to arrive.

At first the Mexican authorities welcomed Americans in California. The newcomers included agents for American shipping companies, fur traders from Oregon, and merchants from New Mexico. In the 1840s families began to arrive in California to settle. They made the long journey from Missouri on the Oregon Trail and then turned south after crossing the Rocky Mountains. Still, by 1845 the American population of California numbered only about 700. Most Americans lived in the Sacramento River valley.

Some American travelers wrote glowing reports of California. **John C. Frémont**, an army officer who made several trips through California in the 1840s, wrote of the region's mild climate, scenic beauty, and abundance of natural resources.

Americans began to talk about adding California to the nation. Shippers and manufacturers hoped to build ports on the Pacific coast for trade with China and Japan. Many Americans



John C. Frémont's strong belief in westward expansion advanced the cause of Manifest Destiny.

saw the advantage of extending United States territory to the Pacific. That way the nation would be safely bordered by the sea instead of by a foreign power. In 1845 Secretary of War William Marcy wrote that

“if the people [of California] should desire to unite their destiny with ours, they would be received as brethren [brothers].”

President James Polk twice offered to buy California and New Mexico from Mexico, but Mexico refused. Soon, the United States would take over both regions by force.

✓ Reading Check **Examining** What was the purpose of the California missions?

War With Mexico

President James K. Polk was determined to get the California and New Mexico territories from Mexico. Their possession would guarantee that the United States had clear passage to the Pacific Ocean—an important consideration because the British still occupied part of Oregon. Polk's main reason, though, involved fulfilling the nation's Manifest Destiny. Like many Americans, Polk saw California and New Mexico as rightfully belonging to the United States.



Geography Skills

War between the United States and Mexico broke out in 1846 near the Rio Grande.

- 1. Location** Which battle occurred farthest north?
- 2. Making Inferences** What information on the map can you use to infer which side won the war?

After Mexico refused to sell California and New Mexico, President Polk plotted to pull the Mexican provinces into the Union through war. He wanted, however, to provoke Mexico into taking military action first. This way Polk could justify the war to Congress and the American people.

Relations between Mexico and the United States had been strained for some years. When the United States annexed Texas in 1845, the situation worsened. Mexico, which had never recognized the independence of Texas, charged that the annexation was illegal.

Another dispute concerned the Texas-Mexico border. The United States insisted that the **Rio Grande** formed the border. Mexico claimed that the border lay along the **Nueces (nu•AY•suhs) River**, 150 miles farther north. Because of this dispute, Mexico had stopped payments to American citizens for losses suffered during Mexico’s war for independence.

Polk sent an agent, John Slidell, to Mexico to propose a deal. Slidell was authorized to offer \$30 million for California and New Mexico in return for Mexico’s acceptance of the Rio Grande as the Texas boundary. In addition, the United States would take over payment of Mexico’s debts to American citizens.

Conflict Begins

The Mexican government refused to discuss the offer and announced its intention to reclaim Texas for Mexico. In response Polk ordered **General Zachary Taylor** to march his soldiers across the disputed borderland between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande. Taylor followed the order and built a fort there on his arrival. On April 24, Mexican soldiers attacked a small force of Taylor’s soldiers. Taylor sent the report the president wanted to hear: “Hostilities may now be considered as commenced.”

Polk called an emergency meeting of his cabinet, and the cabinet agreed that the attack was grounds for war with Mexico. On May 11, 1846, the president told Congress that Mexico had “invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil.” Congress passed a declaration of war against Mexico.

American Attitudes Toward the War

The American people were divided over the war with Mexico. Polk's party, the Democrats, generally supported the war. Many Whigs opposed it, calling Polk's actions aggressive and unjust. Northerners accused Democrats of waging the war to spread slavery.

Illinois congressman Abraham Lincoln demanded to know the exact spot where the first attack against American troops had occurred. Lincoln, like many who opposed the war, claimed that the spot was clearly in Mexico and that Polk therefore had no grounds for blaming the war on Mexico.

Frederick Douglass, an African American leader in the antislavery movement, called the war "disgraceful" and "cruel." Douglass shared the belief that if the United States expanded into the West, the Southern states would carry slavery into the new territories.

Newspapers generally supported the war, and volunteers quickly signed up for military service. As time went on, however, antiwar feeling grew, particularly in the North.

Polk's War Plan

President Polk had a three-part plan for the war with Mexico. First, American troops would drive Mexican forces out of the disputed border region in Texas and make the border secure. Second, the United States would seize New Mexico and California. Finally, American forces would take **Mexico City**, the capital of Mexico.

Zachary Taylor accomplished the first goal. His army captured the town of Matamoros in May 1846 and **Monterrey** in September 1846. The Americans pushed forward and entered the bishop's palace. The Mexican flag was lowered, and a mighty cheer erupted from American forces remaining on the plain below. In February 1847, Taylor defeated the Mexicans again at Buena Vista. The Texas border was secure.

While Taylor made progress in northern Mexico, American forces also advanced farther west. General **Stephen Watts Kearny** led his troops to New Mexico and California. In the summer of 1846, Kearny led about 1,500 cavalry soldiers along the Santa Fe Trail from Fort Leavenworth to

New Mexico. The Mexican governor fled, allowing the Americans to capture New Mexico's capital, Santa Fe, on August 18, 1846, without firing a shot. Kearny and his army then headed across the deserts of New Mexico and Arizona to California.

California and the Bear Flag Republic

In June 1846, a small group of Americans had seized the town of Sonoma north of San Francisco and proclaimed the independent Republic of California. They called the new country the **Bear Flag Republic** because their flag showed a bear and a star on a white background. John C. Frémont and mountain man **Kit Carson**, who were already out West on a military expedition in California, joined the Americans in Sonoma.

Though unaware of the outbreak of war with Mexico, Frémont declared that he would conquer California. Frémont's actions outraged many **Californios**, the Mexicans who lived in California. They might have supported a revolt for local control of government, but they opposed what looked like an attempt by a band of Americans to seize land.

Naval Intervention

In July 1846, a United States Navy squadron under Commodore John Sloat captured the ports of Monterey and San Francisco. Sloat declared California annexed to the United States, and the American flag replaced the Bear Flag in California.

Sloat's fleet sailed for San Diego, carrying Frémont and Carson. The Americans captured San Diego and moved north to Los Angeles. Carson



California Bear Flag

headed east with the news of California's annexation. On his way he met and joined Kearny's force, marching west from Santa Fe.

After Sloat's ships left, many Californios in San Diego rose up in arms against the Americans who had taken over the city. General Kearny and his troops arrived in the midst of the rebellion. They faced a stiff fight but eventually won. By January 1847, California was fully controlled by the United States.

The Capture of Mexico City

With their victories in New Mexico and California, the Americans met their first two goals in the war. President Polk then launched the third part of his war plan—an attack on Mexico City.

Polk gave the task of capturing Mexico City to General **Winfield Scott**. In March 1847, Scott's army landed on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, near the Mexican port of **Veracruz**. Scott captured Veracruz after a three-week siege and then set out to march the 300 miles to Mexico City.

The Americans had to fight their way toward Mexico City, battling not only the Mexican army but also bands of armed citizens. Scott reached the outskirts of Mexico City with his troops towards the end of August 1847. By mid-September the Americans had taken Mexico City. The Mexican government surrendered.

The United States lost 1,721 men to battle and more than 11,000 to disease in the war with Mexico. Mexico's losses were far greater. The war cost the United States nearly \$100 million, but here, too, Mexico paid a higher price. The war would cost Mexico half its territory.

The Peace Treaty

Peace talks between the United States and Mexico began in January 1848. The **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo** (GWAH•duhl•OOP hih•DAL•goh) was signed in February 1848.

In the treaty Mexico gave up all claims to Texas and agreed to the Rio Grande as the border between Texas and Mexico. Furthermore, in what was called the **Mexican Cession**, Mexico **ceded**—gave—its provinces of California and New Mexico to the United States. In return the United States gave Mexico \$15 million.

In 1853 the United States paid Mexico an additional \$10 million for the **Gadsden Purchase**, a strip of land along the southern edge of the present-day states of Arizona and New Mexico. With the Gadsden Purchase, the United States mainland reached its present size. All that remained was to settle the newly acquired territories.

 **Reading Check** **Describing** What lands did Mexico cede to the United States?

SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT



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Checking for Understanding

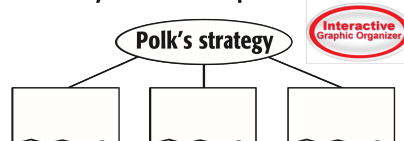
- Key Terms** Write a short paragraph in which you use the following terms: **rancho**, **ranchero**, **Californios**, **cede**.
- Reviewing Facts** According to the Mexican government, where did the border between Texas and Mexico lie?

Reviewing Themes

- Culture and Traditions** Why did the Spanish establish missions in the Southwest? What happened to the mission land after Mexico gained its independence?

Critical Thinking

- Analyzing Primary Sources** Explain the meaning of this sentence in your own words: "If the people [of California] should desire to unite their destiny with ours, they would be received as brethren [brothers]."
- Categorizing Information** Re-create the diagram below and describe the three parts of Polk's strategy and how they were accomplished.



Analyzing Visuals

- Geography Skills** List the battles that appear on the map on page 372 in order from first to last. Identify whether each was a Mexican victory or a U.S. victory.

Interdisciplinary Activity

Science Settlers traveling west encountered new wildlife, vegetation, and landforms. Choose one region of the west and investigate as a traveling scientist would. List plants and animals you would see there. Write a report summarizing what you have observed.