

OCCUPATION OF THE WEST AND THE MEXICAN WAR 1821-1848

The annexation of Texas was delayed only by the touchy question of allowing a slave state into the Union without a free state to counteract it. However, the possibility of a British foothold in Texas and the election of James Polk brought the immediate annexation of Texas.

BRITISH INTEREST IN TEXAS

The interests of Great Britain favored close ties with Texas. An independent Texas could be used to counter-balance the power of the United States. Since Britain and Texas both favored a free trade policy (no tariffs), Britain could exchange her manufactures for Texas cotton without the heavy tariff. Abolitionists in England (England abolished slavery in its empire in 1820), hoped that Texas would drop slavery in return for a large low-interest loan. Then, Texas could become the base of operations against slavery in the United States. In 1843 Britain and France negotiated a truce between Mexico and Texas to halt Mexican plans to reconquer Texas. Without the threat of Mexican invasion, Texas informed Washington that Texas was no longer interested in discussing annexation.

FRICTION WITH MEXICO

In 1843 Mexico had a growing concern with the expansion of the United States, especially in California and Oregon, Mexican territories, and were hoping to avoid a situation of Americans revolting against Mexican rule, which had happened in Texas. President Santa Anna of Mexico notified the United States that Mexico would declare war if the United States annexed Texas, which would give Americans in California and Oregon reason to rebel against Mexico. In 1843, Secretary of State John C. Calhoun notified Texas that the United States wished to reopen negotiations for annexation. The reasons being 1) the United States wanted to expand to the Pacific Ocean and this would give them an excuse to conquer this land, which Mexico owned, and 2) the Americans did not want to back down and act scared of Santa Anna.

President of Texas, John Houston, proceeded cautiously to avoid offending Britain but agreed to proposals early in 1844 on condition the United States provide military and naval protection. A treaty was drawn up but rejected in the Senate, it needed a two-thirds majority, when the slavery question was asked. President Tyler tried to get Congress to pass a joint resolution of annexation, which would require only a majority vote in both houses, but Congress adjourned for the upcoming elections. Thus, the question of annexation became the main issue of the election of 1844.

THE ELECTION OF 1844

The Democrats refused to nominate Van Buren who had taken a stand against the annexation of Texas. Instead, James K. Polk, a Jacksonian Democrat from Tennessee and a slave-owner, was nominated. Clay won the Whig nomination. At first, Clay was opposed to the annexation of Texas, but later changed his mind. This offended the anti-slavery northerners in the Whig Party who left and supported James G. Birney of the Liberty Party.

The popularity of the Democratic platform of "the reoccupation of all of Oregon, California and Texas" was extremely popular with the people of the United States regardless of the slavery question. With the Whig Party split, Polk won the election easily and the Democrats took control of both houses of Congress. It was clearly a mandate from the people for territorial expansion of the United States.

THE ANNEXATION OF TEXAS

When Congress convened in December 1844, outgoing President Tyler again recommended the annexation of Texas. In February 1845, the Senate and the House approved a joint resolution, which required only a simple majority vote, empowering the President to negotiate a new treaty with Texas for annexation. The resolution provided 1) Texas was to be admitted without a preliminary period of territorial status, 2) Texas might be divided into as many as five states, 3) Texas would pay her own debt, 4) Texas could keep its public lands and 5) the application of the Missouri Compromise line would permit slavery in

Texas. The resolution easily passed Congress, and Tyler signed it three days before his term expired. Texas was admitted December 1845, and formally installed her state government in February 1846. In April 1846, Polk negotiated a treaty with Britain for the Oregon Territory with the 49th parallel being a boundary between the United States and British Canada. The territorial expansion was definitely underway. Polk now turned his attention to the Southwest and the protection of the growing number of American settling in the area.

THE MEXICAN WAR 1846-1848

Trouble between Mexico and the United States began after Texan independence. New Mexico and California were acquired as a result of the Mexican War.

CAUSES OF THE MEXICAN WAR

.1) Ineffective government in Mexico made it difficult for her to meet her financial obligations and protect lives and property of Americans during her recurring revolutions. Polk was unable to secure payment of damage claims of American citizens against Mexico. 2) Mexico considered the annexation of Texas a hostile act and had warned it would lead to war. Attempts at annexation deeply offended Mexico. 3) Both sides disagreed on the southern boundary of Texas. Mexico claimed it was the Nueces River, which was the boundary agreed to when it agreed to Texan independence as a result of British negotiations. However, the United States claimed the border to be the Rio Grande. 4) American intrusions in California alarmed Mexico. In 1842, Commodore Thomas Cateby Jones of the American navy, excited by rumors and thinking war had broken out with Mexico, seized Monterey. After he realized his mistake, Jones apologized and withdrew, but his actions revealed to Mexico the American desire to take California. In 1843 Mexico ordered the expulsion of American citizens from California and the exclusion of further immigration. Americans in California asked for American protection against the decision of Mexico.

THE SLIDELL MISSION

Polk dispatched John Slidell to Mexico City in November 1845, to offer a settlement by which the United States would 1) assume claims of American citizens against Mexico in return for recognition of the Rio Grande boundary; 2) offer \$5,000,000 for New Mexico; and 3) offer \$20,000,000 for California. Political turmoil in Mexico made Slidell's negotiations impossible. Mexican presidents did not dare offend Mexican public opinion against the United States by receiving Slidell.

OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES

The refusal of Mexico to negotiate convinced Polk that war was justified. He ordered General Zachary Taylor into the disputed territory just north of the Rio Grande. He expected hostilities that would more fully justify a declaration of war. Mexican troops crossed to the north of the river and attacked American troops in April 1846. When Polk received the message he secured the declaration of war from Congress on May 12, 1846.

Many northerners opposed the war, considering the war to be an act of a slaveholder to gain more land to expand slavery in the United States. The war was fought primarily by volunteers from the Mississippi Valley, Texans and the Southwest.

CAMPAIGNS OF THE MEXICAN WAR

The war was fought in three main campaigns: 1) General Zachary Taylor's invasion of northern Mexico, 2) the conquest of New Mexico and California under the leadership of General Kearney, and 3) General Scott's march to Mexico City.

TAYLOR'S CAMPAIGN

General Zachary Taylor crossed the Rio Grande into Mexico at Matamoros in May 1846. Marching to the southwest, he captured Monterey in September and, in February 1847, won the Battle of

Buena Vista against a force under General Santa Anna more than twice as large as his own force. These victories meant little as more than 300 miles of arid, mountainous terrain stood between Taylor and Mexico City. Political factors intruded as it was no secret of Taylor's wish to eventually become a Whig candidate for President. Taylor's popularity was growing and Polk did not want to inflate the popularity of a possible Whig Presidential candidate. Therefore, Taylor spent the rest of the war securing northern Mexico for the United States.

KEARNEY IN NEW MEXICO AND CALIFORNIA

In June 1846, Colonel Stephen W. Kearney, in command of an expedition to take California, marched over the Santa Fe trail and along the Gile River to take charge in California. The war had begun there when the Bear Flag Republic was proclaimed. Captain John C. Fremont's presence at the head of a surveying expedition apparently encouraged the revolt. When news of the war arrived in California, Fremont took over the leadership of the Republic and marched his men to conquer southern California and remove the Mexicans. When General Kearney arrived, he took over control and arranged for the capturing of San Francisco, Monterrey (CA) and Los Angeles. When the Americans conquered San Diego, Mexican forces were forced to leave California.

SCOTT'S MARCH TO MEXICO CITY

Late in 1846 General Winfield Scott was ordered to land his army at Vera Cruz to begin the conquest of Mexico City. The able leader won brilliant victories in hard fought engagements against valiant Mexican defenders. Santa Anna's forces, however, were forced to surrender Mexico City in September 1847. To draft a peace treaty Polk sent with Scott's forces Nicholas Trist, the chief clerk of the State Department who had learned Spanish well in Cuba. Trist, after being recalled to Washington, undertook his own initiative upon his own initiative to draft a treaty according to his original instructions. Meanwhile, enlarged American ambitions were ready to take much more of Mexico, if not all. When Trist's treaty arrived in Washington, Polk reluctantly accepted the accomplished fact of a signed treaty. The threat of protesting abolitionists in the North because of new territory being added south of the Missouri Compromise line, suggested the treaty should be accepted, which Polk, who want all of Mexico, reluctantly did.

THE TREATY OF GUADALUPE HIDALGO (FEBRUARY 1848)

The terms of the treaty provided that 1) Mexico cede New Mexico and California and recognize the Rio Grande as the boundary of Texas; 2) the United States pay Mexico \$15,000,000 for New Mexico and California and assume the claim of American citizens against Mexico.

THE ELECTION OF 1848

Although the outbreak of the Mexican War aroused congressional debate over the slavery question, both major parties refused to inject this into the campaign. (Polk had declared after the disappointment of not conquering all of Mexico he would not seek another term.) The Democrats chose Lewis Cass of Michigan. The Whigs chose the popular hero of the Mexican War, General Zachary Taylor, a slaveowner from Louisiana. Millard Fillmore from New York became the Whig candidate for Vice President.

A third party entered the contest, the Free Soil Party. Its main issue was the non-expansion of slavery into newly acquired territories of the United States from Mexico, the Wilmot Proviso. The party also advocated free homesteads to anti-slavery settlers in the new territory. It nominated Martin Van Buren. The party split the Democrats. When Cass announced the citizens of the territory should have the right decide if slavery should be accepted in the territory, many anti-slavery northerners, the Barnburners, and those still associating Van Buren with Jackson joined the Free Soilers.

When many New Yorkers refused to support Cass because of his "popular sovereignty" platform, the Democrats could not carry the state, which voted for Taylor. This swing gave Taylor a majority in the Electoral College and the Presidency.