

Manifest Destiny & The Impending Crisis

In the thirty year period after the Missouri Compromise Americans were on the move. Thousands crossed the Mississippi River and settled in farmland in a band from Minnesota to Louisiana. Missionaries, mountain men, prospectors, and some farmers moved even farther westward following the path of Lewis and Clark and going into Oregon, or pressing into sparsely-settled northern Mexico. Some sought the lack of restrictions of the frontier, some hoped to convert the Indians to Christianity, some looked for new profitable challenges, but all of them sought to improve their lives. Advances in technology, machinery, weaponry, canals, steamships, railroads, and the telegraph sped up the westward movement so rapidly that it seemed to most Americans, as newspaper editor John L. O'Sullivan put it in 1845 that it was "our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions."

By the 1830s expansion fever was running rampant in the United States. Texas, as well as the vast Oregon territory spanning an area along the Pacific Coast from California to Alaska, seemed ripe for the taking.

And by the 1840s Americans were looking with covetous eyes at the Mexican provinces of New Mexico and California. When James Knox Polk was elected eleventh president of the United States in 1844 it became clear that Manifest Destiny would soon be a reality.

But not everyone was so enthusiastic about expansion. For many northerners, especially abolitionists, the quest for more land appeared to be a plot by southern slave holders to expand the peculiar institution.

Many northerners were already wary of southern dominance in the American government, after all seven of the first ten presidents were slaveholders, and when southerners began migrating to the Mexican province of *Tejas* seeking more land for growing cotton it seemed further proof that southerners were attempting to dominate national politics.

Texas

“Remember the Alamo!”

In 1821 Mexico gained independence

Northern province *Tejas* was sparsely populated

Mexicans feared American expansionism, thus, in order to build up the population they enticed immigrants to settle in *Tejas* by offering them free land. Requirement was to convert to Roman Catholicism and become Mexican citizens.

***Empresarios* who paid new settlers’ expenses to relocate in the province would receive additional land for each person they brought in.
Stephen F. Austin of St. Louis**

By 1830 American settlers outnumbered the Tejanos in what they now called Texas by more than three to one (16,000 to 5,000). Many settlers had become Mexican citizens, but many others did not, and most resisted converting to Catholicism.

As a result Mexico City had serious misgivings about the influx of so many Americans more loyal to the United States than to Mexico and so it reneged on the land grants, and, in 1830, abolished slavery. Still Americans flocked into the country, primarily from the southern states

When General Antonio López de Santa Anna seized the government many Texans, fearing a stricter enforcement of the laws they detested and further restrictions on their rights, took up arms in resistance. For them it was a fight against an oppressive government that would take away their civil liberties and their land; it was simply a clear-cut fight to preserve liberty and freedom.

Open hostilities broke out in October 1835

To quell the rebellion Santa Anna led an army of 6,000 into Texas where he besieged a small band of 187 rebels at the Alamo in San Antonio.

The defenders were not just white Americans; there were also a large number of Tejanos among them.

Davey Crockett did not fight to the death taking as many Mexicans with him as possible; he was captured (along with several others) and executed.

Later that month – Goliad

San Jacinto, April 21, Sam Houston, led a successful attack on the Mexicans that utterly surprised, and utterly defeated them.

26 American casualties, 630 Mexicans dead

Santa Anna, threatened with immediate execution, was forced to sign a document of surrender granting Texas independence.

Despite the heroism and sacrifice of the defenders of the Alamo, and despite the embellished newspaper accounts of the day that they gave “their lives that the spark of freedom might blaze into a roaring flame,” they did not die for “liberty” or “freedom” in the way we understand those terms today.

What inspired their fight for freedom was the economic motive. They wanted the freedom to own land, plant cotton, and maximize profits through slave labor.

They operated under the prevalent 19th-century assumptions that elevated the common white man, but had not yet developed sufficiently to include minority groups, and to criticize them because they did not have the expansive view of human rights as we do today is the fallacy of “presentism.” Still, it is well to ask what “freedom” means, what “liberty” means; and it is well to ask if property rights trump human rights. In the mid-19th century, in the United States, property rights *did* trump human rights. It was the debate over this issue that led, eventually, to disunion and civil war.

The Lone Star Republic

13/13 split between slave and free states

Texas turned down

In 1843 southern congressmen, angered by escalating abolitionist attacks on slavery and pressed by their constituents for the expansion of the cotton kingdom, resurrected the issue of Texas.

President John Tyler, out-of-favor with both the Whigs and the Democrats and looking for an issue that would secure him the presidential nomination as an Independent in 1844, also came out in favor of Texas annexation.

Whigs nominated Henry Clay on an anti-expansionist platform

Democrats nominated James Knox Polk and called for the annexation of both Texas and Oregon.

Tyler withdrew from the race

On March 1, 1845, with only three days left in his term before Polk's inauguration, President Tyler signed a congressional act authorizing the United States to annex Texas

Polk and Oregon

"Fifty-Four Forty or Fight!"

Compromised on the 49th parallel 1846

The Mexican War

Nueces River 150 miles north of the Rio Grande.

Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor and the army he had sent to the Nueces River a few months earlier, to advance into the disputed area between the Nueces and the Rio Grande.

As far as Mexico was concerned, this was a blatant act of aggression.

Taylor marched his 3500 troops to the Rio Grande and set up an encampment near Matamoros.

One of the American officers, General Taylor's aide Colonel Hitchcock, confided to his diary:

I have said from the first that the United States are the aggressors. . . . We have not one particle of right to be here. . . . It looks as if the government sent a small force on purpose to bring on a war, so as to have a pretext for taking California and as much of this country as it chooses, for, whatever, becomes of this army, there is no doubt of a war between the United States and Mexico My heart is not in this business . . . but, as a military man, I am bound to execute orders.

On April 24, 1846, Mexican forces crossed to the north side of the river

Polk declared Mexico had “invaded our territory and shed American blood on American soil.”

Spot Resolution

Taylor’s army crossed the Rio Grande and took Matamoros.

In September, Taylor marched on Monterey and laid siege to the city.

In early 1847 the bloodiest battle of the war took place at Buena Vista where Taylor led an American army of 5,000 against an army of 15,000 under the command of Santa Anna. After two days of fighting the Mexicans withdrew and Taylor claimed Buena Vista an American victory.

Major General Winfield Scott took the port city of Veracruz on the Gulf of Mexico and launched an invasion into the heart of Mexico to seize Mexico City.

In September the Americans captured the fortress Chapultepec and then fought through the gates of Mexico city. Santa Anna and the Mexican army fled, Scott marched triumphantly into the central plaza, and a contingent of United States Marines raised the flag over the “Halls of Montezuma.”

February 2, 1848 -- Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo

Mexico received \$15 million as compensation for the territory lost

Antiwar Dissent -- patriotism and enthusiasm was high at the beginning of the conflict, but there was also considerable antiwar opposition.

Horace Greeley opposed the war on the grounds that it was contrary to the basic notions of American democracy, that a war for expansion was turning the nation into an imperial power. He wrote in the *New York Tribune* that

We can easily defeat the armies of Mexico, slaughter them by thousands, and pursue them perhaps to their capital; we can conquer and “annex” their territory; but what then? Have the histories of the ruin of Greek and Roman liberty consequent on such extensions of empire by the sword no lesson for us? Who believes that a score of victories over Mexico, the “annexation” of half her provinces, will give us more Liberty, a purer Morality, a more prosperous Industry, than we now have? . . . Is not Life miserable enough, comes not Death soon enough, without resort to the hideous enginery of War?

Thousands of soldiers (one-third) showed their dissent by deserting.

Some soldiers mutinied against their officers and in some cases join the enemy.

Because the United States was fighting against Catholic Mexico, anti-Catholic feeling ran high among the rank and file and was turned against Irish-American soldiers.

200 of these Irish-American soldiers deserted and went over to fight on the side of the Mexicans where they were formed into the Batallón San Patricio—the Saint Patrick’s Battalion. When members of this battalion were captured later in the war they were court-martialed and fifty of them were executed.

Civilians protested the war: one young man wrote: “Neither have I the least idea of ‘joining’ you, or in any way assisting the unjust war waging against Mexico. I have no wish to participate in such “glorious” butcheries of women and children as were displayed in the capture of Monterey, etc. Neither have I any desire to place myself under the dictation of a petty military tyrant, to every caprice of whose will I must yield implicit obedience. No sir-ee!

As long as I can work, beg, or go to the poor house, I won't go to Mexico, to be lodged on the damp ground, half starved, half roasted, bitten by mosquitoes and centipedes, stung by scorpions and tarantulas—marched, drilled, and flogged, and then stuck up to be shot at, for eight dollars a month and putrid rations. Well, I won't. . . . Human butchery has had its day. . . . And the time is rapidly approaching when the professional soldier will be placed on the same level as a bandit, the Bedouin, and the Thug.

Theodore Parker declared that “if the war be right then Christianity is wrong, a falsehood, a lie.”

Angelina Grimké:

Heard you not the thunders of Divine anger, as the distant roar of the cannon came rolling onward, from the Texian country, where Protestant American Rebels are fighting with Mexican Republicans—for what? For the re-establishment of *slavery*; yes! of American slavery

Henry David Thoreau.

When the United States is pursuing a war against a neighbor solely to expand slavery and increase the nation's wealth, it compels the individual to examine his or her conscience.

“How does it become a man to behave toward the American government today? I answer, that he cannot without disgrace be associated with it. I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as my government which is the slave's government also.”

To those who argue that we must obey the law, Thoreau draws a distinction between just and unjust laws. Unjust laws attempt to withdraw natural rights from an individual, just laws protect those natural rights.

Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once?

If the injustice is . . . of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn. . . .

Under a government which imprisons unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison. The proper place today, the only place which Massachusetts has provided for her freer and less despondent spirits, is in her prisons, to be put out and locked out of the State by her own act, as they have already put themselves out by their principles. It is there that the fugitive slave, and the Mexican prisoner on parole, and the Indian come to plead the wrongs of his race should find them; on that separate but more free and honorable ground, where the State places those who are not with her, but against her--the only house in a slave State in which a free man can abide with honor. . . .

I have paid no poll tax for six years. I was put into a jail once on this account, for one night; and, as I stood considering the walls of solid stone, two or three feet thick, the door of wood and iron, a foot thick, and the iron grating which strained the light, I could not help being struck with the foolishness of that institution which treated me as if I were mere flesh and blood and bones, to be locked up. I wondered that it should have concluded at length that this was the best use it could put me to, and had never thought to avail itself of my services in some way. I saw that, if there was a wall of stone between me and my townsmen, there was a still more difficult one to climb or break through before they could get to be as free as I was. I did not for a moment feel confined, and the walls seemed a great waste of stone and mortar. . . . I saw that the State was half-witted, that it was timid as a lone woman with her silver spoons,

**and that it did not know its friends from its foes, and I lost
all my remaining respect for it, and pitied it. . . .**

The California Gold Rush

Zion

**Imagine the Mormons' surprise when they discovered that only four
years after their finding sanctuary in Utah far from American
jurisprudence they were back inside the US**

Compromise of 1850

Kansas-Nebraska Act

Formation of Republican Party

Harriet Beecher Stowe

John Brown and Bleeding Kansas

Charles Sumner and Preston Brooks -- 1856

Dred Scott Decision

Lincoln-Douglas Debates

Harper's Ferry