Texas and the Mexican-American War

Objectives
- Explain how Texas won independence from Mexico.
- Analyze the goals of President Polk.
- Trace the causes and outcome of the Mexican-American War.

Terms and People
Stephen F. Austin, Antonio López de Santa Anna, James K. Polk, Zachary Taylor, Sam Houston, Alamo, Texas Wins Independence.

Why It Matters
With American expansionists seeking new territory and Mexico in control of most of the land to the south and west, conflict between the two nations seemed almost inevitable. The flashpoint for conflict became Texas. In time, that conflict would lead to a war that would vastly increase the size of the United States.

Texas Wins Independence
Of all the Mexican provinces, Texas was most vulnerable to U.S. expansion. Offering abundant, fertile land, Texas lay closest to the United States. And it had only a small Hispanic population, known as Tejanos, to defend the province. In 1832, only about 4,000 Tejanos lived in Texas.

Americans Migrate to Texas
To develop and defend the province, Mexico adopted a risky strategy: It agreed to allow Americans to settle in Texas. In return for cheap land grants, Americans had to agree to become Mexican citizens, to worship as Roman Catholics, and to accept the Mexican constitution, which banned slavery. Mexico hoped this strategy would convert American settlers from a potential threat to an economic asset.

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Vocabulary Builder
Use the information below and the following resource to teach students the high-use words from this section. Teaching Resources, Vocabulary Builder, p. 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High-Use Word</th>
<th>Definition and Sample Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>reluctant</td>
<td>adj. unwilling; marked by mental hesitation or reservations. Until he had more information about the enemy’s numbers, the captain was reluctant to lead his troops into the valley.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adjacent</td>
<td>adj. neighboring; nearby. The settlers were happy to find that their land was adjacent to that of another family from Boston.</td>
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WITNESS HISTORY
A Child at the Alamo
In March 1836, Mexican troops attacked the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas. Among those inside the old mission was eight-year-old Enrique Esparza. His father, Gregorio, was one of a group of Texans engaged in a struggle to win independence from Mexico. Some 70 years later, Esparza recalled hearing sounds of shooting at two in the morning:

“I heard my mother say: ‘Gregorio, the soldiers have jumped the wall. The fight’s begun.’ He got up and picked up his arms and went into the fight. I never saw him again... it was so dark that we couldn’t see anything, and the families that were in the quarters just huddled up in the corners. My mother’s children were near her. Finally they began shooting through the dark into the room where we were. A boy who was wrapped in a blanket in one corner was hit and killed.”

—Enrique Esparza, San Antonio Express, 1907
Texas Wins Independence

Instruct

- Introduce: Key Terms Have students locate and write down each key term or person below this blue heading. Then, as they read, ask students to write a definition or identification explaining how each term or person relates to Texas independence.

- Teach Display Color Transparency: Texas War for Independence. Discuss with students how the situation that developed in Texas, a Mexican territory, led the United States to war. Ask Why did Mexico invite Americans to settle in Texas? (to develop the territory’s economy and to defend the province) What did the settlers have to promise in exchange for land? (to become Mexican citizens, to practice Catholicism, to accept the Mexican constitution) For what reasons do you think the Texans did not honor their agreement with Mexico? (Sample response: They probably did not want to change their ways or religion and did not feel real allegiance to Mexico.) Have students discuss the major conflicts that took place as the Texans revolted. Ask Why did the Mexican government refuse to honor Santa Anna’s agreement with the Texans? (because Santa Anna was forced to sign it in fear for his life)

- Quick Activity Have students read the History Makers feature about Sam Houston and complete Biography: Sam Houston. Teaching Resources, p. 16

Independent Practice

- Show students The Alamo from the Witness History DVD. After they watch the video, have students write a viewer’s response that answers this question: What was the significance of the battle of the Alamo at the time, and is it today?

Monitor Progress

As students fill in their flowcharts, circulate to make sure that they understand the sequence of events that led to war with Mexico. For a completed version of the flowchart, see Note Taking Transparencies, B-48.

Teach

WITNESS HISTORY DVD

Watch The Alamo on the United States Witness History DVD to explore one of the key battles of the Texas war for independence.

Texas Revolt In 1835, the Texans rebelled against Mexican rule. They seized the Mexican garrisons at Goliad and San Antonio. A year later, the Texans declared their independence and adopted a republic constitution. Their new nation became known as the Lone Star Republic because of the single star on its flag.

To crush the rebellion, Santa Anna led his army north into Texas. In March 1836, his forces attacked the small Texan garrison at the Alamo, a fortified former mission in San Antonio. After 12 days of cannon fire, Mexican troops overran the walls of the Alamo. Refusing to keep prisoners, Santa Anna ordered the defenders slaughtered. The victims included Anglo-Texans Jim Bowie and Davy Crockett, as well as a dozen Tejanos. A few weeks later, Santa Anna ordered a similar mass execution of Texas prisoners who had surrendered at Goliad.

Santa Anna expected the slaughter to frighten other Texans into surrendering. Instead, the fallen defenders of the Alamo became martyrs to the cause of Texan independence. The slogan “Remember the Alamo” rallied the Texans and attracted volunteers to their cause from the southern United States.

Led by Sam Houston, the Texans drew Santa Anna eastward into a trap. In April, they surprised and crushed the Mexican army at the Battle of San Jacinto. Houston’s men killed 630 and captured 730 Mexicans, including Santa Anna himself, while suffering only 32 casualties.

Fearing execution, Santa Anna signed a treaty recognizing Texan independence. He conceded generous boundaries that stretched the new republic south and west to the Rio Grande. On paper, Texas even got half of New Mexico, including its capital of Santa Fe. Of course, the government in Mexico City refused to honor a treaty forced on a captured and disgraced...
From the time it achieved independence, Texas sought U.S. statehood. America's leaders had to decide whether to annex Texas. The 1844 presidential rival James Polk and Henry Clay disagreed on the issue. Read their views below. Then, you make the call.

You Decide

1. Why did Polk think annexation would promote peace?
2. Why did Clay think annexation would lead to war?
3. What decision would you have made? Why?

Answers

1. Polk believed that if the United States did not annex Texas, Texas and Mexico would be perpetually at war.
2. Clay knew that Mexico would not allow the annexation of Texas.
3. Sample response: I would have voted against annexation because, like Clay, I do not think acquisition of Texas was worth a war with Mexico.

The Anglo-Texans and Tejanos were unsatisfied with the unstable Mexican government, and later, with Santa Anna’s centralized dictatorship.
Instruct

- Introduce: Vocabulary Builder
  Have students locate the vocabulary term adjacent in the text, and then direct them to the map on the next page. Ask them to identify two U.S. states that were adjacent to Texas at the time of the annexation.

- Teach
  Discuss with students the causes and effects of the Mexican-American War. Ask Why did Polk send U.S. troops to Texas? (to occupy the contested lands south and west of the Nueces River) Ask a volunteer to read aloud the Primary Source excerpt from Polk's war message to Congress. Ask Do you think that the United States made “every effort at reconciliation”? Explain. Sample response: No, it did not. Sending troops into a contested area would incite war, not prevent it. Why did antiwar Whigs not oppose the war publicly? The war was popular, and the Whigs were afraid that their public opposition would lose them votes. What was the outcome of the Mexican-American War? (The Americans, with a larger, better-trained army and navy, achieved an overwhelming victory, conquering all of Texas, New Mexico, and California.) What factors contributed to the U.S. victory? (In addition to its military advantages, the United States was wealthier and more populous than Mexico. The United States also had industries that could quickly supply Americans with arms and ammunition.)

Answer

- They split the Oregon Territory at the 49th parallel of latitude; the United States obtained the future states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho; Britain kept modern-day British Columbia.

The Mexican-American War

A month before Polk took office, Congress narrowly voted to annex Texas, which entered the Union as a slave state in December 1845. Annexation inflamed the long-standing border dispute between Texas and Mexico. Polk endorsed the Texan claim to the land south and west of the Nueces River as far as the Rio Grande. This claim tripled the traditional size of Texas. Outraged, the Mexicans refused to recognize the annexation.

Congress Declares War

Polk sent American troops led by General Zachary Taylor to occupy the contested borderland between the two rivers. While waiting for the inevitable conflict, Polk drafted a declaration of war. He did not have to wait long. In May 1846, a Mexican patrol clashed with American soldiers, killing eleven. Polk rushed his war message to Congress:

Primary Source

“We have tried every effort at reconciliation... But now, after reiterated menaces, Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil.”

—James K. Polk, war message to Congress, May 11, 1846

Of course, the Mexicans saw the clash differently: To them it was an American invasion that shed Mexican blood on Mexican soil.

Democrats, especially those from the South, were enthusiastically in favor of war with Mexico. Most Whigs, especially those from the North, opposed war. They believed that Polk had deliberately provoked the war by sending troops to Texas. Whigs also feared that Polk would not settle for even the biggest version of Texas but planned to annex the adjacent northern Mexican provinces, including New Mexico and California. The conquered territories might then become slave states, increasing southern power in Congress.

Despite their suspicions, most Whigs did not dare block the declaration of war. They knew that the war had wide popular support—and they remembered the demise of the Federalist Party after it had opposed the War of 1812. On May 13, Congress voted overwhelmingly to declare war on Mexico.

U.S. Forces Sweep to Victory

In the war, the United States had great advantages. It was much larger, wealthier, and more populous than Mexico. The Mexicans lacked the industries that so quickly and abundantly supplied the Americans with arms and ammunition. The Americans also had a larger and better navy and more advanced artillery. Above all, the United States enjoyed superior officers, well trained at the military academy at West Point. Generals Zachary Taylor and...
The Mexican-American War

Map Skills The Mexican-American War of 1846–1847 began in Texas. During the war, the United States won every major battle.

1. Locate: (a) Nueces River, (b) Rio Grande, (c) California, (d) Monterey, (e) Veracruz, (f) Mexico City

2. Region What region on the map was the subject of the land dispute that sparked the war?

3. Synthesize Information Use the map and chart to describe U.S. troop movements in the final month of the war.

Connect to Your World

The United States and Mexico Today Although relations have often been strained, and many Mexicans still bitterly recall the results of the Mexican-American War—as recently as 1994, Mexican President Salinas referred to it in a speech—today the two countries are friendly. Partly, this is the result of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). However, the United States and Mexico have always been important to each other as trade partners and because of the extensive national border they share. The United States is Mexico’s primary trade partner in both exports and imports. In turn, Mexico is the second-largest buyer of U.S. imports and is the third-largest provider of foreign goods to the United States. Mexico is also one of the most important sources of oil for the United States. Currently, the main areas of conflict and cooperation between the two nations are the drug trade and illegal immigration. Mexico, with U.S. aid and guidance, has been working to resist the establishment of drug cartels in the nation and to monitor the flow of illegal narcotics. Mexico has also cooperated extensively on border issues, such as human trafficking and the movements of suspected terrorists.

Answers

Map Skills

1. Review locations with students.
2. the region between the Rio Grande and Nueces River, west to El Paso and north to the Unorganized Territory
3. Troops landed at Veracruz and marched inland to fight battles at Chapultepec and Mexico City.
Winfield Scott received exceptional support from their junior officers, including Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant, and William T. Sherman. (All these men would later play key roles in the U.S. Civil War.) Meanwhile, Mexicans were bitterly divided because Santa Anna had resumed his dictatorship.

In this one-sided war, the United States won every major battle. During the summer of 1846, General Stephen W. Kearny quickly conquered New Mexico. Meanwhile, the U.S. Navy helped American settlers, led by explorer John C. Frémont, to seize control of California. Until they could legally join the United States, these rebels organized the short-lived Bear Flag Republic. Frémont joined forces with Kearny to bring all of California under American control.

Taylor led another army deeper into northern Mexico, seizing the city of Monterey in September. In February 1847, Santa Anna tried to retake the city. But Taylor’s small army defeated the more numerous Mexicans at the bloody Battle of Buena Vista.

By early 1847, American forces had achieved all of Polk’s war goals—but he wanted more. A New England critic of the war complained that with every victory, “Our Manifest Destiny higher and higher kept mounting.” In March, the navy carried another American army, commanded by Winfield Scott, to the Mexican port city of Veracruz. After seizing the port, Scott boldly marched his men through 200 miles of rugged terrain to Mexico City.

Scott faced bitter resistance at Chapultepec (chap yool tep kuhk), a fortress above Mexico City. The defenders included six young Mexican cadets—ranging in age from 13 to 19—who fought to the death. Today, Mexico honors the cadets who fell at Chapultepec as Los Niños Héroes, or the Child Heroes.

In September 1847, Scott captured Mexico City. After little more than a year and a half of fighting, the Mexican-American War had ended in a thorough American victory.

**Checkpoint** What advantages did the United States have in the Mexican-American War?