



# U. S. History: From the Colonial Period to 1877

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## 14.3 THE WAR WITH MEXICO

<p><b>MEXICAN WAR</b></p> <p><b>Skirmish in Disputed Land Between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande</b></p> <p><b>Declaration of War</b></p>	<p>When the United States annexed Texas, TENSIONS BETWEEN THE TWO NATIONS ESCALATED, but it was President Polk's insistence on acquiring Mexico's other northern provinces that made war between the two countries inevitable. Initially, Polk had hoped to buy Mexico's northern territory, but his envoy was rudely rebuffed by the Mexicans. The president decided that completing his expansionist agenda would require military action and ORDERED GENERAL ZACHARY TAYLOR TO MOVE AMERICAN TROOPS INTO THE DISPUTED LAND between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande, which was claimed by both Mexico and the United States. A SKIRMISH RESULTING IN AMERICAN CASUALTIES gave Polk the pretext he needed, and on May 13, 1846, CONGRESS OFFICIALLY DECLARED WAR ON MEXICO.</p>
<p><b>Annexation of New Mexico</b></p> <p><b>Conquest of California</b></p>	<p>The war had many opponents in the United States. Whig critics charged that from the beginning Polk had contrived the whole affair and that the war amounted to bullying of a weak nation by its greedy imperialist neighbor. Polk believed that the United States would occupy Mexican territory and force the Mexicans to sue for peace quickly. In May 1846, POLK ORDERED TAYLOR TO CROSS THE RIO GRANDE AND SEIZE PARTS OF NORTHEASTERN MEXICO, which he did. In the meantime, other offensives were taking place against New Mexico and California. In the summer of 1846, a small army under Colonel Stephen W. Kearny occupied the town of Sante Fe with no opposition and proclaimed the ANNEXATION OF NEW MEXICO. Kearny proceeded on to California, where he joined a conflict already in progress, the Bear Flag Revolt, led by John C. Frémont. The United States now controlled the two territories for which it had gone to war. By the time of the American CONQUEST OF CALIFORNIA, Taylor had driven deep into Mexico's interior. On Washington's birthday 1847, Taylor's army met Mexican troops commanded by Santa Anna at Buena Vista and won another American victory. The series of victories gave the American troops a sense of superiority, but they worried about other hazards, especially the disease that killed far more soldiers than battle wounds did.</p>
<p><b>Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: Mexico Ceded California &amp; New Mexico</b></p>	<p>Even though the United States controlled all the borderlands and much of northern Mexico, Mexico still refused to end the hostilities or cede the conquered territories. At this juncture, Polk and General Winfield Scott, the commanding general of the army, launched a bold new campaign. Scott staged an amphibious landing at Veracruz on the coast and fought his way west toward Mexico City, reaching its outskirts in August 1847. After a hard fight, Americans occupied the city. Polk's peace emissary concluded the TREATY OF GUADALUPE HIDALGO, under which Mexico agreed to cede California and New Mexico and to recognize the Rio Grande and the Texas border. The United States agreed to assume \$3.25 million in American claims against Mexico and to pay the Mexicans \$15 million. The war was over and the United States had gained a vast new territory. But it had also acquired a new set of troubling and divisive issues.</p>
<p><b>Geographical Expansion Underscored Sectional Differences</b></p>	<p>Americans saw the geographical expansion of the 1840s as a natural corollary to the nation's economic transformation. To NORTHERNERS, industrial expansion confirmed the SUPERIORITY OF THE FREE-LABOR SYSTEM, in which individuals could choose to exert themselves and succeed. Since northerners believed that failure was self-induced, they celebrated the system. But SOUTHERNERS argued that SLAVERY WAS A BETTER SYSTEM; they claimed that slaves did not suffer and that their society was more advanced than that of the North. The division between the northern and southern labor systems increasingly meant that their ECONOMIC INTERESTS, CULTURAL VALUES, AND POLITICAL AIMS WERE ANTITHETICAL. The victory in Mexico was not sufficient to bridge the differences between the sections.</p>

<b>DISCUSSION QUESTIONS</b>	<b>Why did the United States and Mexico go to war in 1846? Why did the war arouse bitter controversy?</b>
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