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# Chapter 17 - Manifest Destiny and Its Legacy

## I. The Accession of “Tyler Too”

1. The Whig leaders, namely Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, had planned to control newly elected President William H. Harrison, but their plans hit a snag when he contracted pneumonia and died—only four weeks after he came to the White House.
2. The new president was John Tyler, a Virginian gentleman who was a lone wolf.
  - He did not agree with the Whig party, since the Whigs were pro-bank and pro-protective tariff, and pro-internal improvements, but hailing from the South, he was not. Tyler was really more of a Democrat.

## II. John Tyler: A President Without a Party

1. After their victory, the Whigs unveiled their platform for America:
  - Financial reform would come in the form of a law ending the independent treasury system; Tyler agreeably signed it.
  - A new bill for a new Bank of the U.S. was on the table, but Clay didn't try hard enough to conciliate with Tyler and get it passed, and it was vetoed.
2. Whig extremists now started to call Tyler “his accidency.”
  - His entire cabinet resigned, except for Webster.
3. Also, Tyler vetoed a proposed Whig tariff.
4. The Whigs redrafted and revised the tariff, taking out the dollar-distribution scheme and pushing down the rates to about the moderately protective level of 1832 (32%), and Tyler, realizing that a tariff was needed, reluctantly signed it.

## III. A War of Words with England

1. At this time, anti-British sentiment was high because the pro-British Federalists had died out, there had been two wars with Britain, and the British travelers in America scoffed at the “uncivilized” Americans.
2. American and British magazines ripped each other's countries, but fortunately, this war was only of words and not of blood.
3. In the 1800s, America with its expensive canals and railroads was a borrowing nation while Britain was the one that lent money, but when the Panic of 1837 broke out, the Englishmen who lost money assailed their rash American borrowers.
4. In 1837, a small rebellion in Canada broke out, and Americans furnished arms and supplies.
5. Also in 1837, an American steamer, the *Caroline*, was attacked in N. and set afire by a British force.
6. Tensions were high afterwards, but later calmed; then in 1841,

British officials in the Bahamas offered asylum to some 130 revolting slaves who had captured the ship *Creole*.

#### **IV. Manipulating the Maine Maps**

1. Maine had claimed territory on its northern and eastern border that was also claimed by England, and there were actually small skirmishes in the area (the "Aroostook War" of feuding lumberjacks).
2. Luckily, in 1842 Britain sent Lord Ashburton to negotiate with Daniel Webster, and after talks, the two agreed to what is now called the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, which gave Britain their desired Halifax-Quebec route for a road while America got a bit more land north of Maine.
3. The U.S. also got, as a readjustment of the U.S.—Canadian border, the unknowingly priceless Mesabi Range of iron ore up in Minnesota. It later provided the iron for steel in the boom of industry.

#### **V. The Lone Star of Texas Shines Alone**

1. Ever since it had declared independence in 1836, Texas had built up reinforcements because it had no idea if or when Mexico would attack again to reclaim her "province in revolt." So, Texas made treaties with France, Holland, and Belgium. These alliances worried the U.S. because...
2. If Texas "buddied up" to Europe, Britain especially, it'd cause big problems for America, such as...
  - The Monroe Doctrine (where Europe was told to "stay away") would be undermined if England had a buddy over here in Texas.
  - The dominant Southern cotton economy would also be undercut by Texas cotton shipping to England.
3. The U.S. was at a stand-still over what to do with Texas.
  - The North decried the Southern "slavocracy" (a supposed Southern conspiracy to always gain more slave land).
  - America could not just boldly annex Texas without a war with Mexico.
  - Overseas, Britain wanted an independent Texas to check American expansionism.
  - Yet, Texas would be good boost for American cotton production and provide tons more land. What to do?!

#### **VI. The Belated Texas Nuptials**

1. James K. Polk and his expansionist ideas won the election of 1844. His election was seen as a "mandate for manifest destiny," so the following year, Texas was formally invited to become the 28th state of the Union.
2. Mexico complained that Americans had despoiled it of Texas, which was partly true, but as it turned out, Mexico would not have been able to reconquer their lost province anyway.

#### **VII. Oregon Fever Populates Oregon**

1. Oregon was a great place, stretching from the northern tip of California to the 54° 40' line.
2. Once claimed by Russia, Spain, England, and the U.S., now, only the latter two claimed it; England had good reasons for its claims north of the Columbia River, since it was populated by British and by the Hudson's Bay Company.
3. However, Americans had strong claims south of the Columbia River (named after his ship by Robert Gray when he discovered the river),

since they populated it much more. Plus, the Americans occupied and had explored the interior of the land, thanks to Lewis and Clark.

4. The Oregon Trail, an over 2000-mile trail across America, was a common route to Oregon during the early 1840s.

## **VIII. A Mandate (?) for Manifest Destiny**

1. In 1844, the two candidates for presidency were Henry Clay, the popular Whig who had been defeated twice before, and a dark-horse candidate, James K. Polk, who had been picked because the Democrats couldn't agree on anyone else.
2. Polk, having been Speaker of the House for four years and governor of Tennessee for two terms. He was no stranger to politics, was called "Young Hickory" (in fact, Polk was born in Pineville, N.C., only some 15 miles from Jackson's birthplace) and Polk was even sponsored by former president Andrew Jackson.
3. He and the Democrats advocated "Manifest Destiny", a concept that stated that the U.S. was destined to expand across the continent and get as much land as possible.
4. On the issue of Texas, Clay tried to say two things at once, and thus, it cost him, since he lost the election (170 to 105 in the Electoral; 1,338,464 to 1,300,097 in the popular) by 5000 votes in New York.

## **IX. Polk the Purposeful**

1. Polk laid out a 4-point mission for himself and the nation (then achieved all 4 points in 4 years)
  - Lower the tariff
  - Restore the independent treasury (put U.S. money into non-government banks)
  - Clear up the Oregon border issue
  - Get California
2. One of Polk's acts was to lower the tariff, and his secretary of the treasury, Robert J. Walker, did so, lowering the tariff from 32% to 25% despite complaints by the industrialists.
  - Despite warnings of doom, the new tariff was followed by good times.
3. He also restored the independent treasury in 1846 and wanted to acquire California and settle the Oregon dispute.
4. Under Polk, the Oregon border issue was settled.
  - While the Democrats had promoted acquiring all of Oregon during their campaign, after the annexation of Texas, the Southern Democrats didn't much care anymore.
  - England and the U.S. had been bargaining for Oregon land to answer, "Where is the border of Oregon?"
    - England first answered 42° latitude; then said the Columbia River
    - The U.S. first answered 54°40' latitude; then said 49° latitude
    - Things were tense for a while, but England realized there were more Americans in Oregon than Brits—their leverage was small.
  - So, the British proposed a treaty that would separate British and American claims at the \*\*49<sup>th</sup> parallel (excluding Vancouver), a proposal that Polk threw to the Senate, and which accepted.
  - The U.S. got the better of the deal since
    - the British second-choice was rejected but the Americans' second-choice was accepted and
    - as with the Maine treaty, the U.S. got a bit more land than England did
  - Those angry with the deal cried, "Why all of Texas but not all of Oregon?" The cold, hard answer was that because Mexico was

weak and that England was strong.

## **X. Misunderstandings with Mexico**

1. Polk wanted California, but this was difficult due to strained U.S.-Mexican relations.
  - After the annexation of Texas, Mexico had recalled its foreign minister, and before, it had been forced to default on its payments of \$3 million to the U.S.
  - Also, when Texas claimed its southern boundary to be the Rio Grande and not the Nueces River like Mexico said, Polk felt that he had to defend Texas and did so.
2. The U.S. then sent John Slidell to Mexico City as an envoy instructed to buy California for \$25 million, however, once he arrived, the Mexican government, pressured by its angry people, refused to see him, thus "snubbing" him.

## **XI. American Blood on American (?) Soil**

1. A frustrated Polk now forced a showdown, and on Jan. 13, 1846, he ordered 4000 men under Zachary Taylor to march from the Nueces River to the Rio Grande, provocatively near Mexican troops.
2. As events would have it, on April 25, 1846, news of Mexican troops crossing the Rio Grande and killing or wounding 16 Americans came to Washington, and Polk pushed for a declaration of war
  - A group of politicians, though, wanted to know where exactly was the spot of the fighting before committing to war; among them was Abraham "Spotty" Lincoln because of his "Spot Resolution."
  - Pushed by Polk, Congress declared war, and so began the Mexican-American War.

## **XII. The Mastering of Mexico**

1. Polk hoped that once American had beaten Mexico enough, he could get California and end the war, and the recently dethroned Santa Anna told the U.S. that if he could return to Mexico, he would take over the government, end the war, and give California to the U.S. He lied.
2. In the Southwest, U.S. operations led by Stephen W. Kearny (led 1700 troops from Leavenworth to Santa Fe) and John C. Fremont (leader of the Bear Flag Revolt in California) were successful.
3. "Old Rough and Ready" Zachary Taylor, a general, he fought into Mexico, reaching Buena Vista, and repelled 20,000 Mexicans with only 5000 men, instantly becoming a hero.
4. General Winfield Scott led American troops into Mexico City.

## **XIII. Fighting Mexico for Peace**

1. Polk sent Nicholas Trist to negotiate an armistice with Mexico at a cost of \$10,000 (Santa Anna took the bribe and then used it for his defenses).
2. Afterwards, Trist was recalled, but he refused to leave.
3. He negotiated the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848, which...
  - Gave to America all Mexican territory from Texas to California that was north of the Rio Grande. This land was called the Mexican Cession since Mexico ceded it to the U.S.
  - U.S. only had to pay \$15 million to Mexico for it.
  - \$3.5 million in debts from Mexico to the U.S. were absolved as well.
  - In essence, the U.S. had forced Mexico to "sell" the Mexican Cession lands.

4. In America, there were people clamoring an end to the war (the Whigs) and those who wanted all of Mexico (but the leaders of the South like John C. Calhoun realized the political nightmare that would cause and decided not to be so greedy), so Polk speedily passed the bill to the Senate, which approved it, 38 to 14.
5. Polk had originally planned to pay \$25 million just for California, but he only paid \$18,250,000; some people say that American paid even that much because it felt guilty for having bullied Mexico into a war it couldn't win.

#### **XIV. Profit and Loss in Mexico**

1. In the war, America only had 13,000 dead soldiers, most taken by disease, and the war was a great practice for the Civil War, giving men like Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant invaluable battle experience.
2. Outside countries now respected America more, since it had made no major blunders during the war and had proven its fighting prowess.
3. However, it also paved the way to the Civil War by attaining more land that could be disputed over slavery.
4. David Wilmot of Pennsylvania introduced his Wilmot Proviso (a provision or amendment), which stated that slavery should never exist in any of the Mexican Cession territories that would be taken from Mexico; the amendment was passed twice by the House but it never got passed the Senate (where southern states equaled northern).
  - Although it failed, the importance of the Wilmot Proviso lay in the fact that it opened old wounds—those of slavery.
  - In other words, it opened a "can of worms" by raising the question, "Will we have slavery in the Mexican Cession lands?"
  - It's this question that starts the Civil War in 1861, only 13 years later.
5. Bitter Mexicans, resentful of the land that was taken from them, land that halved their country's size while doubling America's. They took small satisfaction when the same land caused disputes that led to the Civil War, a fate called "Santa Anna's Revenge".

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