

## Chapter 17- Manifest Destiny and Its Legacy

### 1841-1848

#### A. The Accession of “Tyler Too”

1. A horde descended upon Washington early in 1841, clamoring for the spoils of office; newly elected President Harrison was almost hounded to death by Whig spoilsmen
  1. The real leaders of the Whig party regarded “Old Tippecanoe” as just an impressive figurehead; Daniel Webster, as secretary of state, and Henry Clay, the uncrowned king of the Whigs and ablest spokesman in the Senate, would grasp the helm
  2. The aging general was finally forced to rebuke the overzealous Clay and pointedly remind him that he, William Henry Harrison, was president of the United States
  3. Unluckily for Clay and Webster, the new term had barely started, Harrison contracted pneumonia; wearied by official functions and plagued by office seekers, the old warrior died after only four weeks in the White House (longest inaugural address)
2. The “Tyler too” part of the Whig ticket, hitherto only a rhyme, now claimed the spotlight
  1. John Tyler was a Virginia gentleman of the old school—gracious and kindly, yet stubbornly attached to principle; he had earlier resigned from the Senate, quite unnecessarily, rather than accept distasteful instructions from the Virginia legislature
  2. He had forsaken the Jacksonian Democratic fold for that of the Whigs, largely because he could not stomach the dictatorial tactics of Andrew Jackson
3. Tyler’s enemies accused him of being a hidden Democrat, but this charge was only half true; the Whig party, like the Democratic part, was a catchall, and the accidental president belonged to the minority wing, which embraced Jeffersonian states’ righters
4. Tyler had in fact been put on the ticket partly to attract the vote of this fringe group, many of these people were part of the influential southern gentry
5. Yet Tyler should never have consented to run; although the dominant Clay-Webster group had published no platform, an alert politician knew what the unpublished platform contained; on virtually every major issue, the Virginian was at odds with the majority of his Whig party, which was pro-bank, pro-protective tariff, and pro-internal improvements
6. Tyler too” rhymed with “Tippecanoe,” but there the harmony ended

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

1. After their hard-won, hard-cider victory, the Whigs brought their not-so-secret platform out of Clay’s pocket; to the surprise of no one, it outlined a strongly nationalistic program

1. Financial reform came first; the Whig Congress hastened to pass a law ending the independent treasury system, and President Tyler, disarmingly agreeable, signed it
2. Clay next drove through Congress a bill for a "Fiscal Bank," which would established a new Bank of the United States, an institution that the Jacksonians had fought before
3. Tyler's hostility to a centralized bank was notorious and Clay would have done well to conciliate him but the Kentuckian, robbed of the presidency once again, was in an imperious mood and riding for a fall; when the bill reached the presidential desk, Tyler flatly vetoed it on both practical and constitutional grounds (mob gathered)
4. Striving to pacify Tyler's objections to a "Fiscal Bank," they passed another bill providing for a "Fiscal Corporation"; but the president vetoed the offensive substitute
5. The Democrats had been saved from a financial "monster" only by Harrison's death
2. Whig extremists condemned Tyler as "His Accidency" and he received letters threatening him; a wave of influenza then sweeping the country was called the "Tyler grippe"
3. To the delight of Democrats, the stiff-necked Virginian was formally expelled from his party by a caucus of Whig congressman and a serious attempt to impeach him was broached in the House of Representatives; his entire cabinet resigned in a body, except Secretary of State Webster, who was in the midst of delicate negotiations with England
4. The proposed Whig tariff also felt the prick of the president's well-inked pen
  1. Tyler appreciated necessity of additional revenue to the Treasury; but the Democrat looked with a frosty eye on the major tariff scheme of the Whigs because it provided for a distribution among the states revenue from the sale of public lands in the West
  2. Tyler could see no point in squandering federal money when the federal Treasury was not overflowing, and he again wielded an emphatic veto
5. Chastened Clayites redrafted their tariff bill; they chopped out the offensive dollar-distribution scheme and pushed down the rates to about the moderately protective level of 1832, roughly 32 percent on dutiable goods; Tyler had no fondness for a protective tariff, but realizing the need for additional revenue, he reluctantly signed the law of 1842
6. In subsequent months the pressure for higher customs duties slackened as the country gradually edged its way out of the depression; Democrats were unhappy about the law

#### C. A War of Words with Britain

1. Hatred of Britain during the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to a head periodically and had to be lanced by treaty settlement or by war; the poison had festered ominously by 1842
  1. Anti-British passions were composed of many ingredients; at bottom lay the bitter memories of the two Anglo-American wars; in addition, the pro-British Federalists had died out, eventually yielding to the boisterous Jacksonian Democrats

2. British travelers, sniffing with aristocratic noses at the crude scene, wrote of American tobacco spitting, slave auctioneering, lynching, eye gouging, and other unsavory features of the rustic Republic (travel books stirred up outbursts in America)
2. But the literary fireworks did not end; British magazines added fuel to the flames when, enlarging on the travel books, they launched sneering attacks on Yankee shortcomings
  1. American journals struck back with “you’re another” arguments, thus touching off the “Third War with England”; fortunately this British-American was fought with paper broadsides, and only ink was spilled; British authors entered the fray for they were being denied rich royalties by the absence of an American copy-right law
  2. Not until 1891 did Congress extend copyright privileges to foreign authors
3. Sprawling America, with expensive canals to dig and railroads to build, was a borrowing nation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; imperial Britain, with its flowing treasury, was a lending nation
4. When the panic of 1837 broke and several states defaulted on their bonds or repudiated them openly, honest Englishmen assailed Yankee trickery
5. More dangerous troubles came closer to home in 1837, when a short-lived insurrection erupted in Canada; it was supported by such a small minority of Canadians that it never had a chance of success; hundreds of Americans, hoping to strike a blow for freedom against the hereditary enemy, furnished military supplies/volunteered for armed service
  1. The Washington regime tried to uphold its weak neutrality regulations; but in the case of Texas, it simply could not enforce unpopular laws in the face of popular opposition
  2. A provocative incident on the Canadian frontier brought passions to a boil in 1837; an American steamer, the *Caroline*, was carrying supplies to the insurgents across the swift Niagara River; it was finally attacked on the New York shore by British force
  3. Lurid American illustrators showed the flaming ship plummeting over Niagara Falls but in fact the craft in fact sank short of the plunge, and only one American was killed
6. This unlawful invasion of American soil—a counterviolation of neutrality—had alarmed aftermaths; Washington officials lodged vigorous but ineffective protests
7. Three years later, in 1840, the incident was dramatically revived in the state of New York
  1. A Canadian named McLeod, after allegedly boasting in a tavern of his part in the *Caroline* raid, was arrested and indicted for murder; the London Foreign Office, which regarded the *Caroline* raiders as members of a sanctioned armed force and not as criminals, made clear that this execution would mean war
  2. Fortunately, McLeod was freed after establishing an alibi; it must have been airtight for it was good enough to convince a New York jury; the tension forthwith eased, but

it snapped taut again in 1841, when British officials in the Bahamas offered asylum to 130 Virginia slaves who had rebelled and captured the American ship *Creole*

#### D. Manipulating the Maine Maps

1. An explosive controversy of the early 1840s involved the Maine boundary dispute
  1. The St. Lawrence River is icebound several months of the year, as the British, remembering the War of 1812, well knew; they were determined, as a defensive precaution against the Yankees, to build a road westward from Halifax to Quebec
  2. But the proposed route ran through disputed territory—claimed also by Maine under the misleading peace treaty of 1783; lumberjacks from both Maine and Canada entered the disputed no-man’s-land of the tall-timbered Aroostook River Valley
  3. Ugly fights flared up, and both sides summoned the local militia; the small-scale lumberjack clash, which was dubbed the “Aroostook War,” threatened war
2. As the crisis deepened in 1842, the London Foreign Office took an unusual step; it sent to Washington a nonprofessional diplomat, the conciliatory finance Lord Ashburton
  1. He established relations with Secretary Webster, who had recently been lionized during a visit to Britain; the two statesmen, nerves frayed by protracted negotiations in the heat of a Washington summer, agreed to compromise on the Maine boundary
  2. On the basis of a split-the-difference arrangement, the Americans were to retain some 7,000 square miles of the 12,000 square miles of wilderness in dispute; the British got less land but won desired Halifax-Quebec route (diplomacy helped patch relations)
  3. An overlooked bonus sneaked by in the small print of the same treaty: the British, in adjusting the U.S.-Canadian boundary farther west, surrendered 6,500 square miles; the area was later found to contain the priceless Mesabi iron ore of Minnesota

#### E. The Lone Star of Texas Shines Alone

1. During the uncertain eight years since 1836, Texas had led a precarious existence
  1. Mexico, refusing to recognize Texas’s independence, regarded the Lone Star Republic as a province in revolt, to be reconquered in the future; Mexican officials loudly threatened war if the America should annex the fledgling republic
  2. The Texans were forced to maintain a costly military establishment; vastly outnumbered by their Mexican foe, they could not tell when he would strike again; Mexico actually did make two half-hearted raids that, through ineffectual, foreshadowed more fearsome efforts; confronted with such perils, Texas was driven to open negotiations with Britain and France in search of a protectorate
  3. In 1839 and 1840, the Texans concluded treaties with France, Holland, and Belgium

2. Britain was interested in an independent Texas and such a republic would check the southward surge of the American colossus, whose bulging biceps posed a constant threat to nearby British possessions in the New World (Texas could be turned upon Yankees)
  1. Subsequent clashes would create a smoke-screen diversion, behind which foreign powers could move into the Americas and challenge the insolent Monroe Doctrine
  2. French schemers were likewise attracted by the hoary game of divide and conquer; these actions would result in the fragmentation and militarization of America
3. Dangers threatened from other foreign quarters; British abolitionists were busily intriguing for a foothold in Texas; if successful in freeing the few blacks there, they presumably would inflame the nearby slaves of the Southern regions of America
4. In addition, British merchants regarded Texas as a potentially important free-trade area—an offset to the tariff-walled United States; British manufacturers like perceived that those vast Texas plains constituted one of the great cotton-producing areas of the future
5. An independent Texas would relieve British looms of their chronic dependent on America fiber—a supply that might be cut off in time of crisis by embargo or war

#### F. The Belated Texas Nuptials

1. Partly because of the fears aroused by British schemers concerning territories, Texas, became a leading issue in the presidential campaign of 1844; the foes of expansion assailed annexation, while the southern hotheads cried, “Texas or Disunion”
  1. The pro-expansion Democrats under James K. Polk, finally triumphed over the Whigs under Henry Clay; president Tyler thereupon interpreted the narrow Democratic victory, with dubious accuracy, as a “mandate” to acquire Texas
  2. Eager to crown his troubled administration with this prize, Tyler deserves credit
  3. Many Whigs feared that Texas in the Union would help the “slave power” and aware of their opposition, Tyler despaired of securing the needed two-thirds vote for a treaty in the Senate; he there arranged for annexation by a joint resolution
  4. The solution required only a simple majority in both houses of Congress and the resolution was passed early in 1845 and Texas was invited to become the 28<sup>th</sup> state
2. Mexico angrily charged that the Americans had despoiled it of Texas but in 1845, the area of was longer Mexico’s and as the years passed, it was clear; Mexico left the Texans dangling by denying their right to dispose of themselves as they chose
3. By 1845 the Lone Star Republic had become a danger spot, inviting foreign intrigue that menaced the American people; the continued existence of Texas as an independent nation threatened to involve the United States in a series of wars, both in America and in Europe
4. What other power would have spurned the imperial domain of Texas?

5. What the peculiar circumstances of the Texas revolution, the United States can hardly be accused of unseemly haste in achieving annexation (nine long years)

#### **G. Oregon Fever Populates Oregon**

1. The Oregon Country was an enormous wilderness that sprawled west magnificently west of the Rockies to the Pacific Ocean, and north of California to the line of 54° 40'; part of this area was claimed at one time or another by Spain, Russia, Britain, and the US
  1. Two claimants dropped out of the scramble; Spain, though the first to raise its banner in Oregon, bartered away its claims to the United States in the Florida Treaty of 1819
  2. Russia retreated to the line of 54° 40' by the treaties of 1824 and 1825 with America and Britain; these two remaining rivals now had the field to themselves
2. British claims to Oregon were strong—at least to that portion north of the Columbia River; they were based squarely on prior discovery and exploration, on treaty rights, and on actual occupation—the most important colonizing agency was the Hudson's Bay Company, which was trading profitably with the Indians of the Pacific Northwest for furs
3. Americans, could also point to exploration and occupation; Captain Robert Gray in 1792 had stumbled upon the majestic Columbia River, and the famed Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804-1806 had ranged overland through the Oregon Country to the Pacific
  1. This shaky American toehold was ultimately strengthened by the presence of missionaries and other settlers of whom reached the Willamette River valley (1830s)
  2. The men and women of God, in saving the soul of the Indians, were instrumental in saving the soil of Oregon for the United States—stimulated interest in a faraway domain that countless Americans had assumed would not be settled for centuries
4. Scattered American and British pioneers in Oregon continued to live peacefully side by side; at the time of negotiating the Treaty of 1818, the United States had sought to divide the vast domain at the forty-ninth parallel; British unwilling to give up Columbia River; a scheme for peaceful "joint occupation" was thereupon adopted, pending future settlement
5. The handful of Americans in the Willamette Valley when "Oregon fever" seized hundreds of restless pioneers; in increasing numbers, their creaking covered wagons jolted over the two-thousand mile Oregon Trail as the human rivulet widened into a stream
  1. The average rate of progress in covered wagons was one to two miles an hour and this amounted to about 100 miles a week or about five months for the entire journey
  2. Thousands of humans, horses, and oxen died en route and there is one estimate that for every mile there were seventeen deaths for men, women, and children
  3. By 1846, about five thousand Americans had settled south of the Columbia River, some of them tough "border ruffians," expert with bowie knife and "revolving pistol"

6. The British in the face of this rising humanity, could muster only seven hundred or so subjects north of the Columbia; losing in the population race, they were beginning to see the wisdom of arriving at a peaceful settlement before being engulfed by their neighbors
7. Only a relatively small segment of the Oregon Country was in actual controversy by 1845; the area in dispute consisted of the rough quadrangle between the Columbia River on the south and east, the forty-ninth parallel on the north, and the Pacific Ocean on west
8. Britain had repeatedly offered the line of the Columbia; America had repeated offered the forty-ninth parallel; the issue was now tossed into the presidential election of 1844, where it was largely overshadowed by the question of annexing Texas or not

#### H. A Mandate (?) for Manifest Destiny

1. The two major parties nominated their presidential standard-bearers in May 1844
  1. Ambitious Henry Clay, easily the most popular man in the country, was enthusiastically chosen by the Whigs at Baltimore and the Democrats
  2. The Democrats, meeting in Baltimore later, seemed hopelessly deadlocked; expansionists, dominated by pro-Texas southerners, nominated James K. Polk of Tennessee, America's first "dark-horse" or "surprise" presidential candidate
2. Polk may have been a dark horse but he was hardly an unknown or decrepit nag; speak of the House of Representatives for four years and governor of Tennessee for two terms, he was a determined, industrious, ruthless, and intelligent public servant
  1. Sponsored by Andrew Jackson, Polk was rather implausibly touted by Democrats as yet another "Young Hickory"; Whigs attempted to jeer him into oblivion
  2. The campaign of 1844 was an expression of emotional upsurge known as Manifest Destiny; citizens in the 1840s and 1850s, feeling a sense of mission, believed that God had "manifestly" destined the American people for a hemispheric career
  3. They would spread their uplifting and ennobling democratic institutions over at least the entire continent and possibly over South America as well; land greed and ideals—"empire" and "liberty"—were thus conveniently conjoined in the Manifest Destiny
3. Expansionist Democrats were strongly swayed by the intoxicating spell of Manifest Destiny and came out in their platform for the "Re-annexation of Texas" and the "Reoccupation of Oregon," all the way to 54° 40'; outbellowing the Whig log-cabinites, they shouted "All of Oregon or None" and condemned Clay as a "corrupt bargainer"
4. The Whigs countered with such slogans as "Hooray for Clay" and "Polk, Slavery, and Texas, or Clay, Union, and Liberty"—spread rumor that Tennessee slaves were branded
5. On the crucial issue of Texas, Clay appeared to have compromised away the presidency when he wrote a series of confusing letters; they seemed to say that while he personally

avored annexing slaveholding Texas, he also favored postponement (it was both an appeal to the South and the North but he alienated the more ardent antislaveryites)

6. Dark Horse Polk beat Henry Clay 170 to 105 votes in Electoral College (PV very close)

1. Clay would have won if he had not lost New York by 5,000 votes and the antislavery Liberty party absorbed nearly 16,000 votes, which would have all gone to Clay
2. The anti-Texas Liberty party, by spoiling Clay's chances and helping to ensure the election of pro-Texas Polk, hastened the annexation of Texas; land-hungry Democrats flushed with victory proclaimed that they had received a mandate to take Texas
3. However, it was not a clear-cut mandate but this unclear "mandate" was interpreted by President Tyler as a crystal-clear charge to annex Texas (signed joint resolution three days before leaving the White House after he had completed his term)

I. Polk the Purposeful

1. "Young Hickory" Polk, unlike "Old Hickory" Jackson was not an impressive figure and he took life seriously and drove himself mercilessly into a premature grave
  1. His burdens were increased by an unwillingness to delegate authority; "What he went for he fetched," wrote a contemporary—he developed a positive four-point program and with remarkable success achieved it completely in less than four years
  2. One of Polk's goals was a lowered tariff; his secretary of the Treasury, Robert J. Walker, devised a tariff-for-revenue bill that reduced the average rates of the Tariff of 1842 from about 32% to 25%; with strong support of low-tariff southern people, Walker lobbied the measure through Congress, not without complaints from Clayites
  3. The Walker Tariff of 1846 proved to be an excellent revenue producer, largely because it was followed by boom times and heavy imports to the United States
2. A second objective of Polk was restoration of the independent treasury, unceremoniously dropped by the Whigs in 1841; Pro-bank Whigs in Congress raised a storm of opposition, but victory at last rewarded the president's efforts in 1846; the third and fourth points on Polk's "must list" were the acquisition of California and settlement of the Oregon dispute
  1. Reoccupation" of the "whole" of Oregon had been promised northern Democrats in the campaign of 1844; but southern Democrats, once they had annexed Texas, rapidly cooled off; Polk had no intention of insisting on the 54° 40' pledge on his platform
  2. But feeling bound by the three offers of his predecessors to London, he again proposed the compromise line of 49°; the British minister in Washington, spurned it
3. The next move on the Oregon chessboard was up to Britain; fortunately for peace, the ministry began to experience a change of heart—British anti-expansionists were now persuaded that the Columbia River was not after all the St. Lawrence of the West and that the turbulent American hordes might one day seize the Oregon Country



4. Early in 1846 the British came around and themselves proposed the line of 49°
  1. President Polk threw the decision squarely into the lap of the Senate; the senators speedily accepted the offer and approved the subsequent treaty (few diehards)
  2. The US was then a month deep in a war with Mexico doubtless influenced the vote
5. Satisfaction with the Oregon settlement among Americans was not unanimous; the northwestern states joined the antislavery forces in condemning what they regarded as a base betrayal by the South; why all of Texas but not all of Oregon?
6. So Polk, despite all the campaign bluster, got neither “fifty-four forty” nor a fight but he did get something that in the long run was better (reasonable compromise without war)

**J. Misunderstandings with Mexico**

1. Polk and other disciples of Manifest Destiny had long coveted California’s verdant valleys and especially the spacious bay of San Francisco (future gateway to Pacific)
2. The population of California in 1845 was curiously mixed; it consisted of perhaps thirteen thousand Spanish-Mexicans and as many as seventy-five thousand dispirited Indians; there were fewer than a thousand “foreigners” mostly Americans
3. Polk was eager to buy California from Mexico but relations with Mexico City were dangerously embittered; the United States had claims against the Mexicans for some \$3 million in damages to American citizens and their property (agreed to assume debt)
4. A more serious bone of contention was Texas; the Mexican government, after threatening war if the United States should acquire the Lone Star Republic, had recalled its minister from Washington following annexation—diplomatic relations were completely severed
  1. Deadlock with Mexico over Texas was further tightened by a question of boundaries
  2. During the long era of Spanish-Mexican occupation, the south-western boundary of Texas had been the Nueces River but the expansive Texans were claiming the more southerly Rio Grande instead (Polk felt obligation to defend Texas in its claim)
5. In Mexicans’ eyes all of Texas was still theirs, although temporarily in revolt, and a dispute over the two rivers seemed pointless; yet Polk was careful to keep American troops out of the explosive no-man’s-land between the Nueces and the Rio Grande
6. The golden prize of California continued to cause Polk much anxiety; disquieting rumors were circulating that Britain was about to buy or seize California—a grab that Americans could not tolerate under the Monroe Doctrine (Polk dispatched John Slidell to Mexico City as minister late in 1845 and was instructed to offer a maximum of \$25 million for California and territory to the east but the proud Mexican people didn’t even accept him)

**K. American Blood On American (?) Soil**

1. A frustrated Polk was now prepared to force a show-down; on January 13, 1846 he ordered four thousand men, under General Zachary Taylor, to march from the Nueces River to the Rio Grande, provocatively near Mexican forces
  1. Polk expected at any moment to hear of a clash but when none occurred after an anxious wait, he informed his cabinet on May 9, 1846, that he proposed to ask Congress to declare war on the basis of unpaid claims and Slidell's rejection
  2. That very evening, news of bloodshed arrived; on April 25, 1846, Mexican troops had crossed the Rio Grande and attacked General Taylor's command (loss of sixteen)
  3. Polk sent a vigorous war message to Congress declaring that despite "all our efforts" to avoid a clash, hostilities had been forced upon the country by the shedding of "American blood upon American soil"—a patriotic Congress voted overwhelmingly for war, and antislavery Whig bastions melted and joined the rest of the nation
2. In his message to Congress, Polk was making history; a Whig congressman from Illinois, Abraham Lincoln, requested information as to the precise "spot" on American soil where American blood had been shed—it could have been considered Mexican soil
3. The more extreme antislavery agitators of the North, many of them Whigs, branded the president a liar—"Polk the Mendacious" but did Polk provoke war?
  1. California was an imperative point in his program and Mexico would not sell it at any price; the only way to get it was to use force or wait for an internal American revolt
  2. Delay seemed dangerous as the British might have seized California and grievances against Mexico were annoying yet tolerable (Americans endured worse later)
  3. By 1846 patience had ceased to be a virtue, as far as Polk was concerned; but on grasping California by fair or foul means, he pushed the quarrel to bloody showdown
4. Both sides were spoiling for a fight; feisty Americans, especially southwestern expansionists, were eager to teach the Mexicans a lesson and the Mexicans, in turn, were burning to humiliate the "Bullies of the North," in other words, the United States
5. Possessing a considerable standing army, heavily overstaffed with generals, they boasted of invading the United States, freeing the black slaves, and lassoing whole regiments of Americans—they were hoping that the quarrel with Britain over Oregon would mean war
6. A conquest of Mexico's vast and arid expanses seemed fantastic, especially in view of the bungling American invasion of Canada in 1812; both sides were fired by moral indignation; Mexican people and Americans thought they could fight with righteousness

#### L. The Mastering of Mexico

1. Polk wanted California—not war; but when war came, he hoped to fight it on a limited scale then pull out when he had captured the prize; the dethroned Mexican dictator Santa

Anna, then exiled to Cuba, let it be known that if the blockading squadron would permit him to slip into Mexico, he would sell out his country; Polk agreed to this intrigue

2. Once Santa Anna returned to Mexico, he proceeded to rally his countrymen to a defense
3. American operations in the Southwest and in California were completely successful
  1. In 1846 General Stephen W. Kearny led a detachment of seventeen hundred troops over the Santa Fe Trail from Fort Leavenworth and captured Santa Fe
  2. When war broke out, Captain John C. Fremont just happened to be there with several dozen well-armed men and in helping to overthrow Mexican rule in 1846, he collaborated with American naval officers with the local Americans
  3. General Zachary Taylor had been spearheading the main thrust; known as “Old Rough and Ready” because of his iron constitution and incredibly unsolder-like appearance, he fought his way across the Rio Grande into Mexico
  4. After several gratifying victories, he reached Buena Vista where on February 22-23, 1847, his weakened force of five thousand men was attacked by some twenty thousand march-weary troops under Santa Anna; the Mexicans were finally repulsed and overnight Zachary Taylor became the “Hero of Buena Vista” (president)
4. Sound American strategy now called for a crushing blow at the enemy’s vitals—Mexico City; General Taylor could not win decisively in the semi-deserts of northern Mexico and the command of the main expedition, which pushed inland from Vera Cruz early in 1847, was entrusted to general Winfield Scott, a hero from the War of 1812 (strict discipline)
5. General Winfield Scott was severely handicapped in the Mexican campaign by inadequate numbers of troops, by expiring enlistments, by a more numerous enemy, by mountainous terrain, by disease, and by political backbiting at home
6. Yet he succeeded in battling his way up the Mexico City by September 1847 in one of the most brilliant campaigns in American military annals (most distinguished general)

#### **M. Fighting Mexico for Peace**

1. Polk was anxious to end shooting after securing his territorial goals; he sent along with Scott’s invading army the chief clerk of the State Department, Nicholas P. Trist
  1. Trist and Scott arranged for an armistice with Santa Anna, at a cost of \$10,000; the wily dictator pocketed the bribe and then used the time to bolster his defenses
  2. Negotiating a treat with a sword in one hand and a pen in the other was ticklish business; Polk disgusted with his blundering envoy, abruptly recalled Trist but the wordy diplomat dashed off a 65-page letter explaining why he was not coming back
2. Grasping a fleeting opportunity to negotiate, Trist signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848, and forwarded it to Washington

1. The terms of the treaty confirmed the American title to Texas and yielded the enormous area stretching westward to Oregon and the ocean and embracing coveted California; this total expanse, including Texas, was about one-half of Mexico
2. The United States agreed to pay \$15 million for the land and to assume the claims of its citizens against Mexico in the amount of \$3,250,000
3. Polk submitted the treaty to the Senate and Trist had succeeded—speed was imperative
  1. The antislavery Whigs (“Mexican Whigs”) in Congress were denouncing this “damnable war” with increasing heat; having secure control of the House in 1847, they were even threatening to vote down supplies for the armies in the field
  2. They had done so, Scott would have been forced to retreat
  3. A swelling group of expansionists, intoxicated by Manifest Destiny, was clamoring for all of Mexico; if America had seized it the nation would have been saddled with an expensive and vexatious policing problem—South should not be too greedy
  4. The treaty was finally approved by the Senate, 38 to 14 and it was condemned both by those opponents who wanted all of Mexico and by opponents who wanted none
4. Victors rarely pay an indemnity, especially a costly conflict that had been “forced”
5. Yet, Polk arranged to pay over \$18 million and cynics have charged that the Americans were pricked by guilty conscience; apologist shad pointed to “spirit of fair play”
6. A decisive factor was the need for haste, while there was still a responsible Mexican government to carry out the treaty and before political foes in the United States, notably the antislavery zealots, sabotaged Polk’s expansionist program

#### N. Profit and Loss in Mexico

1. The Mexican War was a small one that cost some thirteen thousand American lives, most of them taken by disease but the fruits of the fighting were enormous
  1. America’s total expanse was increased by about one-third an addition even greater than that of the Louisiana Purchase; a sharp stimulus was given to the spirit of Manifest Destiny, for as the proverb has it, the appetite comes with eating
  2. The Mexican War was the blood-spattered schoolroom of the Civil War
  3. The campaigns provided field experience for most of the officers destined to become leading generals in the forthcoming conflict, including Robert Lee and Ulysses Grant
  4. The Military Academy at West Point, founded in 1802, fully justified its existence through the well-trained officers; useful also was the navy which did valuable work in throwing a crippling blockade around Mexican ports (Marine Corps)

2. The army waged war without defeat and without a major blunder, despite formidable obstacles and a half-dozen or so aching long marches (Yankee military prowess)
3. Opposing armies emerged with increased respect for each other as the Mexicans, though poorly led, fought heroically—Mexicans have never forgotten that their northern enemy tore away about half of their country; they had been paid something for the land
4. The war also marked an ugly turning in the relations between the United States and Latin America as a whole; he was increasingly feared as the “Colossus of the North”
5. The war re-aroused the slavery issues; abolitionists assailed the Mexican conflict as one provoked by the southern “slavocracy” for its evil purposes; bulk of American volunteers were admittedly from the South and the Southwest (proximity not conspiracy)
6. Quarreling over slavery extension also erupted on the floors of Congress
  1. In 1846, Polk had requested an appropriation of \$2 million with which to buy a peace;
  2. Representative David Wilmot of Pennsylvania, fearful of the southern “slavocracy” introduced an amendment which stipulated that slavery should never exist in any of territory to be wrested from Mexico (amendment twice passed in House not Senate)
  3. Southern members, unwilling to be robbed of prospective slave states fought restriction and antislavery men battled no less bitterly for the exclusion of slaves
  4. The “Wilmot Proviso” eventually endorsed by the legislatures of all but one of the free states soon came to symbolize the burning issue of slavery in the territories
7. The opening shots of the Mexican War were effectively the opening shot of the Civil War
  1. President Polk left the nation the splendid physical heritage of California and the Southwest but also the ugly moral heritage of an embittered slavery dispute
  2. Mexicans could later take some satisfaction in knowing that the territory had proved to be a venomous apple of discord that could well be called Santa Anna’s revenge