

# Chapter 17: Manifest Destiny and Its Legacy (1841—1848)

## The Accession of "Tyler Too"

- a bunch of rowdy adults clamored for spoils of office from President Harrison in 1841
- Daniel Webster and Henry Clay would take control of the Whig party
  - they wanted to use President Harrison as a figurehead so they could control the government, but Harrison contracted pneumonia
  - Harrison died and John Tyler became president
- enemies accused Tyler of being a Democrat in Whig clothing
  - he was the opposite of Harrison
  - "Tyler too" rhymed with "Tippecanoe" (?)

## John Tyler: A President Without a Party

- Clay brought his plan out of his pocket and outlined a strongly nationalistic program
  - Whig Congress passed a law ending the independent treasury system
  - created a "fiscal bank" which would be the new Bank of the United States
- Tyler vetoed the bank and Whigs were stunned
  - vetoed the second attempt called a "Fiscal Corporation"
  - Democrats cheered because pneumonia saved them from another financial "monster"
- Whig extremists called Tyler as "His Accidency" and an "Executive Ass"
  - burned in effigy and received death threats
- Tyler expelled from his Whig party and his entire cabinet resigned except for Secretary of State Webster who had to maneuver negotiations with England
- Clayites tried again with their tariff bill and made it about the same protective level of 1832
  - Tyler didn't want to, but he signed the **Tariff of 1842** anyway

## A War of Words with Britain

- hatred of Britain by 1842
  - anti-British passions pushed by two Anglo-American wars, really annoying Jacksonian Democrats, British travelers who sneered at American style
  - British magazines talked about Yankee shortcomings
    - Americans struck back with "you're another" arguments
- fought a war over pen and paper and literary genius
  - foreigners didn't have copyright in America for foreigners yet
- America was a borrowing nation, while Britain was a lending nation
- 1837 Americans wanted to establish dominance over Britain and Canada had a brief insurrection, which Americans furiously supported

- Washington government tried to maintain neutrality
- American steamer **Caroline** was traveling to Niagara Falls when it was attacked by a British force from New York, which set the boat on fire
  - propaganda against the British, even though only one American was actually killed
- A Canadian that took part in the *Caroline* raid boasted about it in a New York tavern, and was arrested and indicted of murder
  - Britain made it clear that executing them for murder would be a declaration of war
- tensions cooled until British officials offered asylum to 130 Virginian slaves who had rebelled aboard the American ship **Creole**
  - Britain had already abolished slavery, leading southerners to fear that the Caribbean would become a haven for escaped slaves

## Manipulating the Maine Maps

- Maine boundary dispute in 1840s
  - British wanted to build a road from Halifax to Quebec, but it ran through claimed territory
  - Maine and Canada entered the Aroostook Valley fight which summoned local militias
    - small clash became the **Aroostook War**
- London Foreign Office sent Lord Ashburton, whose wife was an American, and established relations with Secretary Webster
  - agreed to compromise on the Maine boundaries
    - Americans got more land, but Britains got their Halifax-Quebec route
    - British accidentally surrendered too much land which eventually was found to contain Mesabi iron ore

## The Lone Star of Texas Shines Alone

- Mexico refused to recognize Texas' independence and wanted to reconquer the area later
  - Texans put up a costly military establishment, not knowing when the Mexicans would invade
    - Mexico only made two half-hearted raids
  - afraid for more conflict, Texas went to negotiate with Britain and France
    - in 1839 and 1849, Texans concluded treaties with France, Holland, and Belgium
- Britain had interest in Texas because they could control part of the US through influence
  - French schemers had similar ideas, hoping the split America from the inside
- British abolitionists wanted to free a few black slaves and hoped that would spread to the rest of the slave south
  - Texas was an important trade area, free from tariffs
  - independent Texas would relieve Britain of their reliance on American cotton

## The Belated Texas Nuptials

- Texas became a leading political issue in the 1844 election
  - Democrats rallied under James K. Polk while Whigs went with Henry Clay
  - Tyler still won
- Tyler knew that 2/3 Congress vote would not happen, so he arranged for annexation by a joint resolution, which only required 1/2 vote in both houses
  - passed in early 1845 under Polk and Texas became the 28th state
- Mexico said that Americans despoiled their land, but they could already see that they would never take back Texas anyway
- existence of Texas threatened to throw America into war

## Oregon Fever Populates Oregon

- Oregon Country was a huge wilderness going from the Rockies to the Pacific Ocean, north of California and to the 54 40 line
  - Spain, Russia, Britain, or the US once held control of these areas
    - Spain bartered away its territory in the Florida Treaty of 1819
    - Russia retreated after making treaties with America and Britain
- Britain initially claimed the area north of the Columbia River
- American Captain Robert Gray first stumbled upon the Columbia River in 1792 and his claim was bolstered by missionaries and other settlers, eventually reaching Willamette River valley
  - men and women of God, Indians, claimed the Oregon soil for the US
  - American and British settlers lived side by side until the Anglo-American Convention of 1818, where Britain stated they didn't want to give up this territory
- Americans in Willamette Valley started to multiply early 1840s and travel in hoards along the Oregon Trail
  - British could not get enough settlers together and sought to peacefully negotiate before they were overwhelmed by Americans
- Britain and America caught on drawing the line at the Columbia River or the 49th parallel
  - hot topic for the next presidential election

## A Mandate (?) for Manifest Destiny

- Whigs nominated Henry Clay; Democrats James K. Polk
  - Polk already had a lot of experience in politics and he was sponsored by Andrew Jackson
- campaign of 1844 took expressed **Manifest Destiny**, the American belief that they were destined to spread their ways across the hemisphere
  - taking land and killing Native populations
  - expansionist Democrats really wanted to get all of Oregon
    - "Fifty-four forty or fight"
- Whigs spread lies about Polk surrounding slavery

- Clay tried to appeal to both the North and South, saying he wanted to annex Texas but also wanted to postpone it
  - Polk won 170:105 ECV
  - antislavery **Liberty party** absorbed about 16,000 votes

## Polk the Purposeful

- Polk wanted to lower tariffs, and sent a **Walker Tariff** bill through Congress with the support of low-tariff southerners
  - reduced tariff rate from 32 to 25 percent from Tariff of 1842
  - really good for revenue
- restoration of the independent treasury, dropped by Whigs in 1841
  - pro-bank Whigs caused a fuss but this was eventually achieved
- acquire California and the settlement of the Oregon dispute
  - proposed to the 49 line instead of 54
  - London eventually agreed and Polk gave the decision to Congress, who also approved despite some extremists still demanding 54

## Misunderstandings with Mexico

- wanted to expand to California for Pacific Ocean
  - early Californian population was mixed, with Spanish Mexicans and dispirited Natives
- Polk wanted to buy California from Mexico but tensions with Mexico was rough
  - they owed \$3 million in damages to Americans and recalled its diplomatic minister from Washington after Texas was annexed, so there was no way of communication
- Mexicans still saw Texas as theirs, although Polk was to defend it still
- Polk started hearing rumors that Britain wanted to buy or seize California
  - Polk sent John Slidell to Mexico City with \$25 million to buy California, but Mexicans would not even let him present that idea

## American Blood on American (?) Soil

- January 13, 1846, Polk ordered 4,000 men under General Zachary Taylor to march from the Nueces River to the Rio Grande
  - no conflicts flared up but Polk asked Congress to declare war over unpaid claims and Slidell's rejection
    - Congress said it would be better to let Mexicans fire the first shot
- April 25, 1846, Mexican troops crossed the Rio Grande and attacked General Taylor's command, with 16 Americans dead or wounded
- Polk sent Congress a war request and the patriotic Congress agreed, declaring war on Mexico
  - some people, Abraham Lincoln, wanted to know which exact spot that American blood was shed on American soil

- Polk was still worried about Britain taking California, so he pushed the war further
- Mexicans boasted on invading the US, freeing black slaves, and taking down whole regiments of US troops

## The Mastering of Mexico

- Polk wanted California, not war
- Santa Anna, dethroned Mexican dictator, told Polk that if he were let back into Mexico, he would sell out his country
  - he lied and went to rally his troops for desperate defense
- 1846 General Stephen W. Kearny lead 1,700 troops to Santa Fe and easily captured it
- Captain John C. Fremont was already in California with a few well-armed men, and collaborated with naval officers to hoist the **California Bear Flag Republic**
- General Zachary Taylor fought his way across the Rio Grande into Mexico and reached **Buena Vista**
  - 5,000 of his men were met with 20,000 march-weary troops of Santa Anna, and repelled with extreme difficulty
  - Taylor became the "Hero of Buena Vista"
- Americans wanted to go for Mexico City
- General Winfield Scott battled his way up to Mexico City in September 1847 and was the most distinguished general between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars

## Fighting Mexico for Peace

- Polk wanted to stop fighting as soon as he got California
  - negotiated with Santa Anna with \$10,000, only for Santa Anna to pocket the bribe and spend it to bolster his own defenses
- Polk wanted to recall an envoy, Nicholas P. Trist, but Trist had signed the **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo**
  - confirmed American title to Texas and yielded land westward Oregon to the ocean, including California
  - the US had to pay \$15 million plus claim its new citizens
  - Congress quickly signed it
    - "**Conscience Whigs**", Mexican Whigs, antislavery Whigs
- extreme expansionists wanted all of Mexico

## Profit and Loss in Mexico

- Mexican War, in terms of casualties, was quite small
  - but territory gain was huge, increase by about 1/3 including Texas
- Mexican War was like a training ground for up-and-coming generals of the Civil War, including Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant
- the navy got better and in this war, crippled Mexican ports
- opposing armies gained more respect for each other
  - Mexicans, although poorly led, fought heroically

- Mexicans never forget that Americans tore away the North of their country
  - that war marked a turning point between the United States and Latin America as a whole
- the war did not stop the slavery issue until it had been drowned out by the blood of the Civil War
- Representative David Wilmot of Pennsylvania introduced that slavery should not exist in any territory taken from Mexico
  - passed the House, but not the Senate
  - **Wilmot Proviso** was never passed but endorsed by all free states except for one
- Mexican War essentially started the Civil War
  - Mexicans got their satisfaction in knowing that the territory taken from them would start a war which might as well have been Santa Anna's revenge