

Chapter 13: Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860 Chapter Contents
Book Title: Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People
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Chapter 13

Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860

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Chapter 13: Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860 Chapter Introduction

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Chapter Introduction

War News from Mexico

Richard Caton Woodville's 1848 painting captures the excitement felt by some Americans as they read newspaper accounts of the Mexican War (1846–1848). But notice that the African American man and child, dressed in rags, are not part of the celebratory group gathered on the porch of the allegorical "American Hotel," although they appear interested in the war news. The painting reminds us that an underlying question of the Mexican War was whether slavery would be extended into new territory; it also reminds us that African Americans were not equal members of the American nation. At the far right we can see that an old woman peers out the window to see what is going on; she, too, is not part of the main group at the heart of the painting—just as women were not yet voting citizens of the American republic. The strong narrative thrust of Woodville's painting marks it as one of many "genre paintings" that in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s depicted ordinary Americans and often told allegorical stories of daily life and politics.



AP Images/National Portrait Gallery

AP Images/National Portrait Gallery

THE UNITED STATES became a transcontinental nation between 1845 and 1848, increasing in size by 50 percent. Through annexation, negotiation, and war, the United States gained more than 1 million square miles, with western migration and settlement playing an important role in making this territorial acquisition desirable. Many Americans enthusiastically supported expansionism and celebrated the creation of an American empire. But expansionism aroused opposition as well. On both sides of the debate, the nation's politicians and citizens worried over an increasingly fraught question: Was this new empire for liberty—or for slavery? The acquisition of vast new stretches of land reopened the issue of slavery's expansion and planted the bitter seeds of civil war.

Chapter 13: Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860: 13-1 Growth as the American Way

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13-1 Growth as the American Way

By 1850, older Americans had seen the area of the United States quadruple in their lifetime. Since the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the American population had also quadrupled. Many Americans in 1850 considered this evidence of God's beneficence to this virtuous republic. During the 1840s, a group of expansionists affiliated with the Democratic Party began to call themselves the **Young America movement** (A group of men affiliated with the Democratic Party in the 1840s who sought the expansion of the United States across the continent.) . They proclaimed that it was the **Manifest Destiny** (The belief that the United States was destined to grow from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the Arctic to the tropics. Providence supposedly intended for Americans to have this area for a great experiment in liberty.) of the United States “to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty,” as John L. O’Sullivan, editor of the *Democratic Review*, wrote in 1845.

Focus Question

What impulses lay behind the “Manifest Destiny” of America’s westward expansion?

For Native Americans, however, Manifest Destiny was a story of defeat and contraction. By

1850, the diseases and guns first introduced by whites had reduced the Indian population north of the Rio Grande to fewer than half a million, a fraction of the population of two or three centuries earlier. The relentless westward march of white settlements had pushed all but a few thousand Indians beyond the Mississippi. In the 1840s, the U.S. government decided to create a “permanent Indian frontier” at about the 95th meridian (roughly the western borders of Iowa, Missouri, and Arkansas). But white emigrants were already violating that frontier on the overland trails to the Pacific, and settlers were pressing against the borders of Indian Territory. In little more than a decade, the idea of “one big reservation” in the West would give way to the policy of forcing Indians onto small reservations. The government “negotiated” with Indian chiefs for vast cessions of land in return for annuity payments that were often extracted by shrewd or corrupt traders. Many Indians perished of disease, malnutrition, and alcohol—first introduced by whites—and in futile efforts to break out of the reservations and regain their land.

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13-1a Manifest Destiny and Slavery

By 1846, the empire for liberty that Thomas Jefferson had envisioned for the Louisiana Purchase seemed more an empire for slavery. Territorial acquisitions since 1803 had brought into the republic the slave states of Louisiana, Missouri, Arkansas, Florida, Texas, and parts of Alabama and Mississippi. Only Iowa, admitted in 1846, had joined the ranks of the free states.

Although the division between slavery and freedom in the rest of the Louisiana Purchase had supposedly been settled by the Compromise of 1820, the expansion of slavery into new territories instead became an explosive issue. The issue first arose with the annexation of Texas, which helped provoke war with Mexico in 1846—a war that many antislavery northerners considered an ugly effort to expand slavery.

Chronology

-
- 1844** Senate rejects Texas annexation • James K. Polk elected president
-
- 1845** Congress annexes Texas • Mexico spurns U.S. bid to buy California and New Mexico
-
- 1846** United States declares war on Mexico • United States and Britain settle Oregon boundary dispute • United States occupies California and New Mexico • House passes Wilmot Proviso • U.S. forces under Zachary Taylor capture Monterrey, Mexico
-
- 1847** Americans win Battle of Buena Vista • U.S. Army under Winfield Scott lands at Veracruz • Mexico City falls
-
- 1848** Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ends Mexican War, fixes Rio Grande as border, cedes New Mexico and California to United States • Gold discovered in California • Spain spurns Polk's offer of \$100 million for Cuba • Zachary Taylor elected president
-
- 1849** John C. Calhoun pens "Address of the Southern Delegates" • California seeks admission as a free state
-
- 1850** Taylor dies; Millard Fillmore becomes president • Bitter sectional debate culminates in Compromise of 1850 • Fugitive Slave Law empowers federal commissioners to recover escaped slaves
-
- 1851** Fugitive Slave Law provokes rescues and violent conflict in North • American filibusters executed in Cuba
-
- 1852** *Uncle Tom's Cabin* becomes best seller • Franklin Pierce elected president
-

1854	Anthony Burns returned from Boston to slavery • William Walker's filibusters invade Nicaragua • Pierce tries to buy Cuba • Ostend Manifesto issued
1856	William Walker legalizes slavery in Nicaragua
1860	William Walker executed in Honduras

Map 13.1

Free and Slave States and Territories, 1848

Two developments of critical importance to the controversy over the expansion of slavery in the 1840s and 1850s are illustrated by this map: the larger number of slave than free states entering the Union from the territories acquired from France (Louisiana Purchase) and Spain (Florida) and the huge amount of new territory added by the acquisition of Texas and the Southwest from Mexico and the settlement of the Oregon boundary in the 1840s.



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Chapter 13: Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860: 13-1b The Expansionist Impulse

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13-1b The Expansionist Impulse

Many Americans of European descent saw their future in the West. In the 1840s, newspaper editor Horace Greeley urged, “Go west, young man.” And to the West they went in unprecedented numbers, driven in part by the depression of 1837–1843 that prompted thousands to search for cheap land and better opportunity.

An earlier wave of migration had populated the region between the Appalachians and the

Missouri River, bringing a new state into the Union on an average of every three years. Reports from explorers, fur traders, missionaries, and sailors filtered back from California and the Pacific Northwest, describing the bounteous resources and benign climates of those wondrous regions. Guidebooks rolled off the presses describing the boundless prospects that awaited settlers who would turn “those wild forests, trackless plains, untrodden valleys” into “one grand scene of continuous improvements, universal enterprise, and unparalleled commerce.”

Chapter 13: Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860: 13-1c New Mexico and California

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13-1c New Mexico and California

By the time Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, some 80,000 Mexicans lived in portions of the region west of the 98th meridian. Three-fourths of them had settled in the Rio Grande Valley of New Mexico and most of the rest in California. Centuries earlier, the Spaniards had introduced horses, cattle, and sheep to the New World. These animals became the economic mainstay of Hispanic society along New Spain’s northern frontier. Later, Anglo-Americans would adopt Hispanic ranching methods to invade and subdue the lands of the arid western plains. Spanish words still describe the tools of the trade and the land: *bronco*, *mustang*, *lasso*, *rodeo*, *stampede*, *canyon*, *arroyo*, *mesa*.

Colonial society on New Spain’s northern frontier had centered on the [missions \(Outposts established by the Spanish along the northern frontier to aid in Christianizing the native peoples. They also were used to exploit these peoples’ labor.\)](#) and the [presidios \(Military posts constructed by the Spanish to protect the settlers from hostile Indians. They also were used to keep non-Spanish settlers from the area.\)](#). Intended to Christianize Indians, the missions also became an instrument to exploit their labor, while the presidios (military posts) protected the settlers from hostile Indians. By the late 18th century, the mission system had fallen into decline, and 15 years after Mexican independence in 1821, it collapsed entirely. The presidios, underfunded and understaffed, also declined, so that the defense of Mexico’s far northern provinces increasingly fell to the residents. But by the 1830s, many residents of New Mexico and California were more interested in bringing American traders in than in keeping American settlers out. A flourishing trade over the Santa Fe Trail from Independence, Missouri, brought American manufactured goods to

Santa Fe, New Mexico (and points south), in exchange for Mexican horses, mules, beaver pelts, and silver. New England ships carried American goods all the way around the horn of South America to San Francisco and other California ports in exchange for tallow and hides produced by *californio* ranchers. This trade linked the economies of New Mexico and California more closely to the United States than to the Mexican heartland.

Interpreting the Visual Past

Manifest Destiny

John Gast's 1872 painting, *American Progress*, offers a detailed allegory of Manifest Destiny: It is meant to teach viewers the meanings of western expansion. Visual allegories of nationhood in the 19th century often centered around female figures as embodiments of civilization: At the center of this painting is the figure of American Progress (Columbia), with the star of empire on her forehead. Precariously clad in a diaphanous gown, she strides westward, with coils of telegraph wire draped over her right arm, and a clearly labeled "School Book" in her right hand: She is bringing both technology and education to the West. The figures on the ground also tell a careful story of progress, involving not only different technologies but also different types of settlers. Ultimately, the painting offers a benevolent view of what was often a violent process of conquering territory.



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

Q

What stories does this painting tell regarding technologies of white civilization such as the railroad?

Q

How does the painting organize a visual narrative of settlement moving from

east to west? Does it represent such settlement as inevitable? Why or why not?

Q

How does the painting view Native Americans? How do they respond to “American Progress”?

Map 13.2

Overland Trails, 1846

The Santa Fe Trail was mainly a route for trade between the United States and the Mexican province (before 1848) of New Mexico. The other three trails carried hundreds of thousands of Americans to new homes in the West.



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13-1d The Oregon and California Trails

At the depth of the economic depression in 1842 and 1843, Oregon fever swept the Mississippi Valley. Thousands of farm families sold their land, packed their worldly goods in covered wagons along with supplies for five or six months on the trail, hitched up their oxen, and headed out from Independence or St. Joseph, Missouri, for the trek of almost

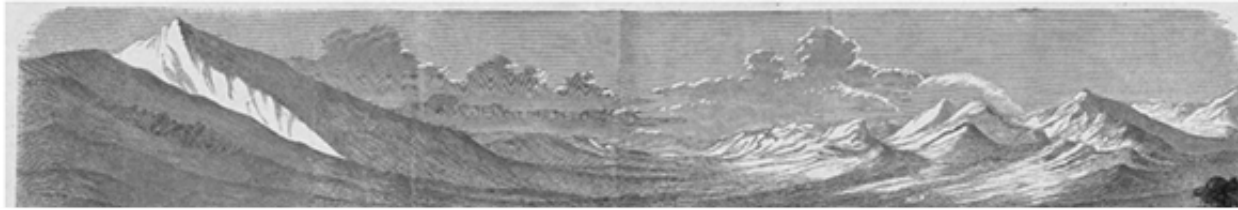
2,000 miles to the river valleys of Oregon or California. From 1840 to 1869, an estimated 50,000 emigrants made the trek to Oregon.

Adult men outnumbered women by more than 2 to 1 on the western trails before the gold rush. Many women were reluctant emigrants, and their diaries testified to their unhappiness: “What had possessed my husband, anyway, that he should have thought of bringing us away out through this God-forsaken country?” wrote one woman. She was sorry she had ever consented “to take this wild goose chase.” For some families it did turn out to be a wild goose chase, but for many of those who stayed the course and settled in the far West, it was a success story in which women were critical in transforming settlements into communities.

On the way west, migrants passed through regions claimed by three nations—the United States, Mexico, and Britain—and they settled on land owned by Mexico (California) or claimed jointly by the United States and Britain (Oregon, which then stretched north to the border of Russian Alaska). But no matter who claimed it, the land was inhabited mostly by Indians. Few emigrants thought about settling down along the way, for this vast reach of arid plains, forbidding mountains, and burning wastelands was then known as the [Great American Desert \(The treeless area in the plains that most Americans considered unsuitable for settlement. It generally was passed over by settlers going to the Pacific Coast areas.\)](#). Whites considered it suitable only for Indians and a disappearing breed of fur trappers. But one group did find its new home at the edge of the Great Salt Lake.

Salt Lake City, Utah, 1858

This idealized 1858 *Harper's Weekly* image of Salt Lake City underscores contemporary fascination with Mormon settlement at a time of significant tension between Mormons and the U.S. government. “The scene is of peculiar interest at the present time,” the accompanying article dated May 15th explained, “as we may expect at any moment to hear of the occupation of the city by the United States troops.”



Harper's Weekly

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13-1e The Mormon Migration

Subjected to persecution that drove them from their original home in western New York to Ohio, Missouri, and eventually to Illinois, the [Mormons \(Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, founded by Joseph Smith in 1830; the *Book of Mormon* is their Bible.\)](#) established Nauvoo, Illinois, a thriving community of 15,000 souls, based on collective economic effort and theocratic discipline imposed by their founder and prophet, Joseph Smith. But the people of Illinois proved no more hospitable to the Mormons than the sect's previous neighbors. Smith provoked hostility with his insistence that God spoke through him, his autocratic suppression of dissent, and his assertion that the Mormons were the only true Christians and would inherit the earth. When a dissident faction of Mormons published Smith's latest revelation, which sanctioned polygamy, he ordered their printing press destroyed. The county sheriff arrested him, and in June 1844, a mob broke into the jail and killed him.

Smith's martyrdom prompted yet another exodus. His successor, Brigham Young, led the Mormons on the long trek westward. A man of iron will and administrative genius, Young organized the migration down to the last detail. Arriving with the advance guard of

Mormon pioneers at a pass overlooking the Great Salt Lake Basin on July 24, 1847, Young, who was ill with tick fever, struggled from his wagon and stared at the barren desert and mountains surrounding the lake. “This is the right place,” he declared. Here the Mormons could create their Zion undisturbed.

They built a flourishing community, making the desert bloom with grain and vegetables irrigated by water they ingeniously diverted from mountain streams. Young reigned as leader of the church, and from 1850 to 1857 as governor of the newly created Utah Territory.

Zion, however, did not remain undisturbed. Relations with the government in Washington, D.C., and with territorial officials were never smooth, especially after Young’s proclamation in 1852 authorizing polygamy. When conflict between the Mormons and the U.S. Army broke out in 1857, Young surrendered his civil authority and made an uneasy peace with the government.

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13-1f The Republic of Texas

As the Mormons were starting west, a crisis between Mexico and the United States was coming to a boil. The United States had renounced any claim to Texas in a treaty with Spain negotiated in 1819. By the time the treaty was ratified in 1821, Mexico had won its independence from Spain. The new Republic of Mexico, seeking to develop its northern borderlands in Texas, gave Stephen F. Austin, a Missouri businessman, a large land grant to settle 300 American families there. Despite their pledge to become Roman Catholics and Mexican citizens, these immigrants and many who followed remained Protestants and Americans at heart. They also brought in slaves, in defiance of a recent Mexican law abolishing slavery. Despite Mexican efforts to ban any further immigration, 30,000 Americans lived in Texas by 1835, outnumbering Mexicans 6 to 1.

American settlers, concentrated in east Texas, initially had little contact with Mexican [tejanos \(Spanish-speaking settlers of Texas. The term comes from the Spanish word *Tejas* for Texas.\)](#) (Texans), whose settlements were farther south and west. But political events in

Mexico City in 1835 had repercussions on the northern frontier. A new conservative national government seemed intent on consolidating its authority over the northern territories. In response, Anglo-American settlers and *tejanos* forged a political alliance to protest any further loss of autonomy in their province. When the Mexican government responded militarily, many Texans—both Anglo and Mexican—fought back. In March 1836, delegates from across Texas met at a village appropriately called Washington. They declared Texas an independent republic and adopted a constitution based on the U.S. model.

The American Revolution had lasted seven years; it took the Texans less than seven months to win and consolidate their independence. Mexican general Antonio López de Santa Anna led the Mexican army that captured the [Alamo \(Battle between Texas revolutionaries and the Mexican army at the San Antonio mission called the Alamo on March 6, 1836, in which all 187 Texans were killed.\)](#) (a former mission converted to a fort) in San Antonio on March 6, 1836, killing all 187 of its defenders, including the legendary Americans Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie. Rallying to the cry “Remember the Alamo!” Texans swarmed to the revolutionary army commanded by Sam Houston. When the Mexican army slaughtered another force of more than 300 men after they had surrendered at Goliad on March 19, the Texans became further inflamed. A month later, Houston’s army, aided by volunteers from southern U.S. states, routed a larger Mexican force on the San Jacinto River (near present-day Houston) and captured Santa Anna. Under duress, he signed a treaty granting Texas its independence. The Mexican congress later repudiated the treaty but could not muster enough strength to reestablish its authority north of the Nueces River. The victorious Texans elected Sam Houston president of their new republic and petitioned for annexation to the United States.

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13-1g The Annexation Controversy

President Andrew Jackson, wary of provoking war with Mexico or quarrels with antislavery northerners, rebuffed the annexationists. So did his successor, Martin Van Buren. Although disappointed, the Texans turned their energies to building their republic. The British government encouraged the Texans, in the hope that they would stand as a

buffer against further U.S. expansion. Texas leaders made friendly responses to some of the British overtures, probably in the hope of provoking American annexationists to take action. They did.

Vice President John Tyler had unexpectedly become president after the death of President William Henry Harrison from pneumonia in 1841, only weeks after his inauguration as the first Whig president. Tyler was nominally a Whig—but he soon broke with the Whig Party that had elected him. A states-rights Virginian who sought to create a new coalition to reelect him in 1844, Tyler seized on the annexation of Texas as “the only matter that will take sufficient hold of the feelings of the South to rally it on a southern candidate.”

Tyler’s secretary of state, John C. Calhoun, negotiated a treaty of annexation with the eager Texans, but then he made a mistake: He released to the press his letter informing the British minister to the United States that, together with other reasons, Americans wanted to annex Texas in order to protect slavery. This seemed to confirm abolitionist charges that annexation was a pro-slavery plot. Northern senators of both parties defeated the treaty in June 1844.

By then, Texas had become the main issue in the forthcoming presidential election. Whig candidate Henry Clay had come out against annexation, as had the leading contender for the Democratic nomination, former president Martin Van Buren. Van Buren’s stand ran counter to the rising tide of Manifest Destiny sentiment within the Democratic Party. It also angered southern Democrats, who were determined to have Texas. Through eight ballots at the Democratic National Convention, they blocked Van Buren’s nomination; on the ninth, the southerners broke the stalemate by nominating one of their own, James K. Polk of Tennessee. Polk’s nomination undercut President Tyler’s forlorn hope of being reelected on the Texas issue, so he bowed out of the race.

Polk ran on a platform that called for not only the annexation of Texas but also the acquisition of all of Oregon up to **54°40′** (the Alaskan border). That demand was aimed at voters in the western free states, who believed that bringing Oregon into the Union would balance the expansion of slavery into Texas. Polk was more than comfortable with this platform. In fact, he wanted not only Texas and Oregon, but California and New Mexico as well.

Texas fever swept the South during the campaign. So powerful was the issue that Clay began to waver, stating that he would support annexation if it could be done without

starting a war with Mexico. This concession won him a few southern votes but angered northern antislavery Whigs. Many of them voted for James G. Birney, candidate of the Liberty Party, which opposed adding any more slave territory. Birney probably took enough Whig votes from Clay in New York to give Polk victory there and in the Electoral College.

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13-1h Acquisition of Texas and Oregon

Although the election was extremely close (Polk won only a plurality of 49.5 percent of the popular vote), Democrats regarded it as a mandate for annexation. Congress passed a joint resolution of annexation in March 1845, and Texas became the 15th slave state. Backed now by the United States, Texans claimed a southern and western border beyond the Nueces River all the way to the Rio Grande, which nearly tripled the area that Mexico had formerly defined as Texas. Mexico responded by breaking off diplomatic relations with the United States.

History Through Film

***The Alamo* (1960)**

Directed by John Wayne.

Starring John Wayne (Davy Crockett), Richard Widmark (Jim Bowie), Laurence Harvey (William Travis).

The legendary actor John Wayne worked a decade to obtain backing for an epic film about the heroic but doomed defense of the Alamo. When the movie was finally released in 1960, Wayne not only played the lead role as Davy Crockett, but he was also the producer and director. Out of his depth in this last role, he received advice from the director of Wayne's best movies, John Ford, which helped overcome some but not all of the awkward, sentimental scenes in the film.

Three hours long, *The Alamo* begins with General Sam Houston, commander of the Texas revolutionary army, ordering Colonel William Travis to delay the Mexican regulars commanded by Santa Anna at the Alamo long enough for Houston to organize his ragtag volunteers in east Texas into an effective fighting force. Colonel Jim Bowie, a rival of Travis for command of the garrison, considers the Alamo (a mission converted into a fort) a trap and wants to pull out, because the Mexican army outnumbers the Texans 20 to 1.

Right away, Hollywood departs from historical reality. Houston had actually ordered Bowie to blow up the Alamo and retreat to join him, but Bowie and Travis agreed to stay and fight, supported by Davy Crockett and his fellow Tennessee volunteers who had come to Texas looking for excitement. The tension between Travis and Bowie (with Crockett as a mediator) was real and is vividly portrayed, if sometimes overdramatized, in the film, but the tension concerned their relative authority, not strategy.

In wide-screen splendor, the film depicts the approach of the Mexican army, the artillery duels between the garrison and the Mexicans, and the infantry assaults that finally overpower the garrison after 13 days of resistance, killing them to the last man, sparing only the wife and child of a Texas lieutenant. The combat footage in the final attack is spectacular. Mexican artillery bombards the Alamo; infantrymen move forward, taking heavy casualties, swarm over the wall, and overwhelm the doomed defenders. Bowie is wounded early in the fight and sent to an improvised hospital in the chapel, where he dies fighting from his bed. Travis is killed at the gate after dispatching several Mexicans with his sword. Crockett fights with fury until he is impaled by a Mexican lancer, but lives long enough to throw a torch into the powder magazine, blowing up the fort and hundreds of Mexicans.

In reality, none of it happened this way. Bowie had gone to bed with typhoid fever early in the siege; Travis was killed early in the final assault with a bullet through his head; and Crockett, along with a few others, surrendered but were executed on Santa Anna's orders. For Hollywood, and perhaps for most Americans, however, history is less important than legend. The Alamo became a heroic legend, a rallying cry for Texans in 1836, and a powerful symbol ever since. The film version dramatizes the legend better than an accurate version could have done.

The movie also reflects the cold-war mentality of the 1950s and Wayne's own full-

blooded anticommunist stance. Crockett's windy speeches about freedom and individual rights evoke the 1950s rhetoric of "better dead than red." Ironically, the Texans were fighting for an independent republic with slavery, in defiance of Mexico's recent abolition of the institution—an issue that the film virtually ignores.

Although *The Alamo* might have carried more punch if it had been edited down to two hours, it nevertheless is visually powerful. It received seven Academy Award nominations, including one for Best Picture, but received only one Oscar—for sound.

John Wayne in a Poster Advertising *The Alamo*.



Everett Collection

Meanwhile, Polk lost no time in addressing his promise to annex Oregon. "Our title to the country of the Oregon is 'clear and unquestionable,'" he said in his inaugural address. The problem was to persuade Britain to recognize the title. Both countries had jointly "occupied" Oregon since 1818, overseeing the fur trade carried on by British and American companies. Chanting the slogan "Fifty-four forty or fight!" many Americans in 1845

demanding all of Oregon, as pledged in the Democratic platform. But Polk proved unwilling to fight for $54^{\circ}40'$. So far, Americans had settled only in the region south of the Columbia River, at roughly the 46th parallel. In June 1846, Polk accepted a compromise treaty that split the Oregon country between the United States and Britain at the 49th parallel. Several Democratic senators from the Old Northwest accused Polk of betrayal and voted against the treaty. They had supported Texas to the Rio Grande, and they had expected Polk to support Oregon to $54^{\circ}40'$. A sectional breach had opened in the Democratic Party that would soon grow wider.

Map 13.3

Settlement of the Oregon Boundary Dispute, 1846

Before the 1840s, the only white residents of the Oregon Country were fur traders and missionaries. Migration of Americans over the Oregon Trail created pressures to make all of Oregon part of the United States, but President Polk was not willing to go to war for the boundary of $54^{\circ}40'$.



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13-2 The Mexican War

Having avoided a war with Britain, Polk provoked one with Mexico. In 1845, he sent a special envoy to Mexico City with an offer to buy California and New

Focus Question

What were the causes and consequences of

the Mexican War?

Mexico for \$30 million. To help Mexico make the right response, he ordered federal troops to the disputed border area between Mexico and Texas, dispatched a naval squadron to patrol the Gulf Coast of Mexico, and instructed the American consul at Monterey (the Mexican capital of California) to stir up annexation sentiment among settlers there. These strong-arm tactics provoked a political revolt in Mexico City that brought a militant anti-American regime to power.

Polk responded in January 1846 by ordering 4,000 soldiers under General Zachary Taylor to advance all the way to the Rio Grande. Recognizing that he could achieve his goals only through armed conflict, Polk waited for news from Texas that would justify a declaration of war. Finally, on May 9, 1846, word arrived that two weeks earlier Mexican troops had crossed the Rio Grande and attacked an American patrol, killing 11 soldiers. Polk had what he wanted and sent a war message to Congress on May 11. Most Whigs opposed war with Mexico, but in the end, not wanting to be branded unpatriotic, all but a handful of them voted for what they called “Mr. Polk’s War.”

The United States went to war with a tiny regular army of fewer than 8,000 men, supplemented by 60,000 volunteers in state regiments, and an efficient navy that quickly established domination of the sea-lanes. Mexican soldiers outnumbered American in most of the battles, but the Americans had higher morale, better leadership, better weapons (especially artillery), and the backing of a more determined, stable government and a far stronger economy. The U.S. forces won every battle—and the war—in a fashion that humiliated Mexico and left a legacy of national hostility and border violence.

Chapter 13: Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860: 13-2a Military Campaigns of 1846
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13-2a Military Campaigns of 1846

The Mexican War’s first phase was carried out by Zachary Taylor, whose 4,000 regulars routed numerically superior Mexican forces on the Rio Grande in early May, even before Congress had declared war. Those victories made “Old Rough and Ready” Taylor a hero, a reputation he rode to the presidency two years later. Reinforced by several thousand

volunteers, Taylor pursued the retreating Mexicans 100 miles south of the Rio Grande to the heavily fortified Mexican city of Monterrey, and took the city after four days of fighting in September 1846. Mexican resistance in the area crumbled, and Taylor's force settled down as an army of occupation.

Meanwhile, the second phase of American strategy had gone forward in New Mexico and California. In June 1846, General Stephen Watts Kearny led an army of 1,500 tough frontiersmen and regulars west from Fort Leavenworth toward Santa Fe. Kearny's army occupied Santa Fe on August 18 without firing a shot. With closer economic ties to the United States than to their own country, which taxed them well but governed them poorly, many New Mexicans seemed willing to accept American rule.

After receiving reinforcements, Kearny sent part of his army into the Mexican province of Chihuahua. In the most extraordinary campaign of the war, these troops marched 1,500 miles, foraging supplies along the way; fought and beat two much larger enemy forces; and finally linked up with Zachary Taylor's army near Monterrey in spring 1847.

American Forces in Saltillo, Mexico

This posed photograph of General John E. Wool and his staff, members of Zachary Taylor's army on its march southward from Monterrey through Saltillo in November 1846, is the earliest known photograph of an American military force. Photography had recently been invented, and pictures such as this one were extremely rare before the 1850s.

Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Kearny led another contingent across deserts and mountains to California. Events there had anticipated his arrival. In June 1846, a group of American settlers backed by Captain John C. Frémont, a renowned western explorer with the army topographical corps, captured Sonoma and raised the flag of an independent California, displaying the silhouette of a grizzly bear. This “bear-flag revolt” paved the way for the conquest of California by the *americanos*. The U.S. Pacific Fleet seized California’s ports and the capital at Monterey; sailors from the fleet and volunteer soldiers under Frémont subdued Mexican resistance. Kearny’s weary and battered force arrived in December 1846, barely in time to help with the mopping up.

Chapter 13: Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860: 13-2b Military Campaigns of 1847

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13-2b Military Campaigns of 1847

The Mexican government refused to admit that the war was lost. Early in 1847, Santa Anna raised new levies and marched north to attack Taylor's army near Monterrey. Taylor, 62 years old, was still rough but not as ready to withstand a counteroffensive as he had been a few weeks earlier. After capturing Monterrey in September 1846, he had let the defeated Mexican army go and had granted an eight-week armistice in the hope that it would allow time for peace negotiations. Angry at Taylor's presumption in making such a decision and suspicious of the general's political ambitions, Polk canceled the armistice and named General-in-Chief Winfield Scott to command the third phase of the war. A large, punctilious man, Scott acquired the nickname "Old Fuss and Feathers" for a military professionalism that contrasted with the homespun manner of "Rough and Ready" Zach Taylor. Scott decided to invade Mexico from a beachhead at Veracruz and in January 1847 ordered the transfer of more than half of Taylor's troops to his own expeditionary force.

Left with fewer than 5,000 men, most of them untried volunteers, Taylor complained bitterly of political intrigue and military favoritism. Nevertheless, he marched out to meet Santa Anna's army of 18,000. In a two-day battle on February 22 and 23 at Buena Vista, Taylor's force inflicted twice as many casualties as they suffered in a fierce struggle highlighted by the brilliant counterattack of a Mississippi regiment commanded by Jefferson Davis. The bloodied Mexican army retreated toward the capital. When news of the victory reached the East, Taylor's popularity soared to new heights. If Polk had wanted to quash a political rival by taking away most of his troops—as Taylor believed—he had achieved just the opposite.

Map 13.4

Principal Campaigns of the Mexican War, 1846–1847

This map provides a graphic illustration of the vast territory over which the Mexican War was fought; the distance from Veracruz to San Francisco is 2,500 miles.

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But it was General Scott who actually won the war. With a combined army–navy force, he took the coastal fortress at Veracruz in March 1847. Over the next five months, his army, which never totaled more than 14,000 men, marched and fought its way over more than

200 miles of mountains and plains to Mexico City. Scott's outnumbered forces captured Mexico City on September 14, after fierce hand-to-hand combat in the battles of Contreras, Churubusco, Molino del Rey, and Chapultepec.

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13-2c Antiwar Sentiment

The war had enthusiastic support in the South and West and among Democrats, but Whigs and many people in the Northeast, especially in New England, considered it “a wicked and disgraceful war.” Democrats and Whigs had different notions of progress. Democrats believed in expanding American institutions over *space*—in particular, the space occupied by Mexicans and Indians. Whigs, on the other hand, believed in improving American institutions over *time*. “Opposed to the instinct of boundless acquisition stands that of Internal Improvement,” said Horace Greeley. “A nation cannot simultaneously devote its energies to the absorption of others’ territories and the improvement of its own.”

Antislavery people raised their eyebrows when they heard Manifest Destiny rhetoric about “extending the blessings of American liberty” to benighted regions. They suspected that the real reason was the desire to extend slavery. Hosea Biglow, the rustic Yankee philosopher created by the abolitionist poet James Russell Lowell, observed:

They jest want this Californy
So’s to lug new slave-states in
To abuse ye an’ to scorn ye,
And to plunder ye like sin

Chapter 13: Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860: 13-2d The Wilmot Proviso
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13-2d The Wilmot Proviso

The slavery issue overshadowed all others in the debate over the Mexican War. President Polk could not understand the reason for the fuss. “There is no probability,” he wrote in his diary, “that any territory will ever be acquired from Mexico in which slavery would ever exist.” But other Americans were less sure. Many southerners hoped that slavery would spread into the fertile lowlands of Mexican territory. Many northerners feared that it might. The issue came to a head early in the war. On August 8, 1846, Pennsylvania Democratic congressman David Wilmot offered an amendment to an army appropriations bill: “... that, as an express and fundamental condition of the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico ... neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of said territory.”

This famous [**Wilmot Proviso**](#) (Famous proviso made by Congressman David Wilmot regarding an amendment to an army appropriations bill that framed the national debate over slavery for the next 15 years.) framed the national debate over slavery for the next 15 years. The House passed the amendment. Nearly all northern Democrats joined all northern Whigs in the majority, while southern Democrats and southern Whigs voted almost unanimously against it. In the Senate, greater southern strength defeated the proviso. This outcome marked an ominous wrenching of the party division between Whigs and Democrats into a *sectional* division between free and slave states. It was a sign that the two-party system might not successfully contain the convulsive question of slavery expansion.

13-6 Runaway Slave Advertisement, 1847

This 1847 advertisement by a slaveowner near St. Louis, Missouri reveals the desperate attempt of a family of five slaves—a husband, wife, and three children—to free themselves by escaping north. The slaveowner assumes that they are on their way to Chicago, where, despite being in a “free” state, they would not be safe from slavecatchers under federal law.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-62797]

Several factors underlay the split of northern Democrats from their own president on this issue. Ever since southern Democrats had blocked Van Buren's nomination in 1844, resentment had been growing in the party's northern wing. Polk's acceptance of 49° latitude for Oregon's northern boundary exacerbated this feeling. "Our rights to Oregon have been shamefully compromised," fumed an Ohio Democrat. "The administration is Southern, Southern, Southern! ... Since the South have fixed boundaries for free territory, let the North fix boundaries for slave territories." The reduced rates of the Walker tariff in 1846 (sponsored by Robert J. Walker of Mississippi, Polk's secretary of the treasury) dismayed Democrats from Pennsylvania's industrial districts. Polk further angered

Democrats from the Old Northwest by vetoing a rivers and harbors bill that would have provided federal aid for transportation improvements in their districts. The Wilmot Proviso was in part the product of these pent-up frustrations over what northerners were increasingly calling “the slave power.” “The time has come,” said a Democratic congressman in 1846, “when the Northern Democracy should make a stand. Every thing has taken a Southern shape and been controlled by Southern caprice for years We must satisfy the Northern people ... that we are not to extend the institution of slavery as a result of this war.”

The slavery issue hung like the sword of Damocles over Polk’s efforts to negotiate peace with Mexico. Polk also came under pressure from expansionist Democrats who, excited by military victory, wanted more Mexican territory, perhaps even “all Mexico.” Polk had sent diplomat Nicholas Trist with Scott’s army to negotiate the terms of Mexican surrender. Authorized to pay Mexico \$15 million for California, New Mexico, and a Texas border on the Rio Grande, Trist worked out such a treaty. In the meantime, though, Polk had succumbed to the “all Mexico” clamor. He ordered Trist back to Washington, intending to replace him with someone who would exact greater concessions from Mexico. Trist ignored the recall, signed the **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo** ([Treaty that authorized the purchase of California, New Mexico, and a Texas border on the Rio Grande from Mexico for 15 million dollars.](#)) on February 2, 1848, and sent it to Washington. Although angered by Trist’s defiance, Polk nonetheless decided to end the controversy by submitting the treaty to the Senate, which approved it on March 10 by a vote of 38 to 14. Half the opposition came from Democrats who wanted more Mexican territory and half from Whigs who wanted none. As it was, the treaty sheared off half of Mexico and increased the size of the United States by one-fourth.

Chapter 13: Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860: 13-3 The Election of 1848

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13-3 The Election of 1848

The treaty did nothing to settle the question of slavery in the new territory, however. Mexico had abolished the

Focus Question

institution two decades earlier; would the United States reintroduce it? Many Americans looked to the election of 1848 to decide the matter. Four positions on the issue emerged, each identified with a candidate for the presidential nomination.

How did the question of slavery affect the election of 1848?

The Wilmot Proviso represented the position of those determined to bar slavery from all territories. The Liberty Party endorsed the proviso and nominated Senator John P. Hale of New Hampshire for president. Southern Democrat John C. Calhoun formulated the “southern-rights” position. Directly challenging the Wilmot Proviso, Calhoun introduced resolutions in the Senate in February 1847 affirming the right of slave owners to take their human property into any territory. The Constitution protected the right of property, Calhoun pointed out; Congress could no more prevent a settler from taking his slaves to California than it could prevent him from taking his horses there.

Although most southerners agreed with Calhoun, the Democratic Party sought a middle ground. The Polk administration endorsed the idea of extending the old Missouri Compromise line of **36°30'** to the Pacific. This would have excluded slavery from present-day Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, and the northern half of California, but would have allowed it in present-day New Mexico, Arizona, and southern California. Secretary of State James Buchanan, also a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination (Polk did not seek renomination), embraced this position.

Another compromise position became known as “**popular sovereignty.**” (The concept that settlers of each territory would decide for themselves whether to allow slavery.) Identified with Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan, yet another contender for the Democratic nomination, this concept proposed to let the settlers of each territory decide for themselves whether to permit slavery. This solution contained a crucial ambiguity: It did not specify *at what stage* the settlers of a territory could decide on slavery. Most northern Democrats assumed that a territorial legislature would make that decision as soon as it was organized. Most southerners assumed that the decision would not be made until the settlers had drawn up a state constitution. That would normally happen only after several years as a territory, during which time slavery might well have taken deep enough root to be implanted in the state constitution. So long as neither assumption was tested, each faction could support popular sovereignty.

The Democratic convention nominated Cass for president, thereby seeming to endorse popular sovereignty. In an attempt to maintain party unity, however, the platform made no mention of the matter. The attempt was not entirely successful: Two Alabama delegates walked out when the convention refused to endorse Calhoun's southern-rights position, and an antislavery faction from New York walked out when it failed to win a credentials fight.

The Whig convention tried to avoid a similar schism by adopting no platform at all, but the slavery issue would not die. In the eyes of many antislavery delegates who styled themselves **Conscience Whigs** (A group of antislavery members of the Whig Party.), the party made itself ridiculous by nominating Zachary Taylor for president. Desperate for victory, the Whigs chose a hero from a war that most of them had opposed. But the fact that Taylor was also a large slaveholder who owned several plantations in Louisiana and Mississippi was too much for the Conscience Whigs. They bolted from the party and formed a coalition with the Liberty Party and antislavery Democrats.

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13-3a The Free Soil Party

These **Free-Soilers** (A term used to describe people who opposed the expansion of slavery into the territories. It came from the name of a small political party in the election of 1848.) met in convention in August 1848 and nominated former president Martin Van Buren. The meeting resembled a religious camp meeting more than a political gathering. Speakers proclaimed slavery “a great moral, social, and political evil—a relic of barbarism which must necessarily be swept away in the progress of Christian civilization.” The convention did not say how that would be done, but it did adopt a platform calling for “no more Slave States and no more Slave Territories.”

The campaign was marked by the futile efforts of both major parties to bury the slavery issue. Free Soil pressure compelled both northern Democrats and Whigs to take a stand against slavery in the territories. Whigs pointed to their earlier support of the Wilmot Proviso, while Democrats said popular sovereignty would keep the territories free. In the South, though, the two parties presented other faces. There, the Democrats pointed with

pride to their expansionist record that had brought to the nation hundreds of thousands of square miles of territory—into which slavery might expand. But Taylor proved the strongest candidate in the South because he was a southerner and a slaveholder. “Will the people of [the South] vote for a Southern President or a Northern one?” asked southern newspapers. “We prefer Old Zack with his sugar and cotton plantations and four hundred negroes to all their compromises.”

Taylor carried 8 of the 15 slave states and increased the Whig vote in the South by 10 percent over 1844, while the Democratic vote declined by 4 percent. Although he did less well in the North, he carried New York and enough other states to win the election. The Free-Soilers won no electoral votes but polled 14 percent of the popular vote in the North. They also elected nine congressmen along with two senators who would be heard from in the future: Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, architect of the Free Soil coalition in 1848, and Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, leader of the Conscience Whigs.

Chapter 13: Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860: 13-3b The Gold Rush and California Statehood
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13-3b The Gold Rush and California Statehood

In 1848, workers building a sawmill on the American River near Sacramento discovered flecks of gold in the riverbed. The word gradually leaked out, reaching the East in August 1848, where a public that had been surfeited with tall tales out of the West greeted this news with skepticism. But in December, Polk’s final message to Congress confirmed the “extraordinary” discoveries of gold. Two days later, a tea caddy containing 320 ounces of pure gold from California arrived in Washington. Now all doubts disappeared. By spring 1849, 100,000 gold-seekers were poised to take off by foot on the overland trail or by ship—either around Cape Horn or to the isthmus of Central America, where, after a land crossing, they could board another ship to take them up the Pacific Coast. Eighty thousand actually made it that first year (5,000 succumbed to a cholera epidemic).

San Francisco became a boomtown and a new center of Pacific trade, with ships arriving filled with cargos of wheat, coffee, sugar, rice, and other commodities from Chile, Australia, China, and Alaska. Men and women (outnumbered 10 to 1 by men) rushed to California from Chile, Mexico, Peru, France, Belgium, and China. African Americans and Miwok

Indians also worked as miners—although they were quickly pushed aside by land-hungry Anglo-Americans, who in 1850 instituted discriminatory laws that not only privileged whites but forced the expulsion of Mexicans—many of whom were American citizens under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. While a few miners struck it rich, most instead earned a bare pittance—and soon raced off to new gold rushes in British Columbia, Colorado, and Nevada.

The California Gold Rush

Prospectors for gold in the foothills of California's Sierra Nevada came from all over the world, including China. This photograph shows American-born and Chinese miners near Auburn, California, a year or two after the initial gold rush of 1849. It illustrates the original technology of separating gravel from gold by panning or by washing the gravel away in a sluice box, leaving the heavier gold flakes behind.

Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

The population increase meant that the political organization of California could not be postponed: Miners needed law and order; settlers needed courts, land and water laws, mail service, and other amenities of established government. In New Mexico, the 60,000 former Mexican citizens, now Americans, also needed a governmental structure for their new allegiance. Nor could the growing Mormon community at Salt Lake be ignored.

Still, the slavery question paralyzed Congress. In December 1848, lame-duck president Polk recommended extension of the Missouri Compromise **36°30"** line to the Pacific. The Whig-controlled House defied him, reaffirmed the Wilmot Proviso, drafted a bill to organize California as a free territory, and debated abolishing the slave trade and even slavery itself in the District of Columbia. Fistfights flared in Congress; southerners declared that they

would secede if any of those measures became law; the Democratic Senate quashed all the bills. A southern caucus asked Calhoun to draft an address setting forth its position. He eagerly complied, producing in January 1849 a document that breathed fire against “unconstitutional” northern efforts to keep slavery out of the territories. Calhoun reminded southerners that their “property, prosperity, equality, liberty, and safety” were at stake and prophesied secession if the South did not prevail.

But Calhoun’s firebomb fizzled. Only two-fifths of the southern congressmen and senators signed it. Southern Whigs wanted nothing to do with it. They looked forward to good times in the Taylor administration and opposed rocking the boat.

They were in for a rude shock. Taylor viewed matters as a nationalist, not as a southerner. He proposed to admit California and New Mexico (the latter comprising present-day New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and part of Colorado) immediately as *states*, skipping the territorial stage.

From the South came cries of outrage. Immediate admission would bring in two more free states because slavery had not existed under Mexican law, and most of the 49ers were Free Soil in sentiment. With the administration’s support, Californians held a convention in October 1849, drew up a constitution excluding slavery, and applied to Congress for admission as a state. Taylor’s end run would tip the existing balance of 15 slave and 15 free states in favor of the North, probably forever. The South would lose its de facto veto in the Senate. “For the first time,” said freshman senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, “we are about permanently to destroy the balance of power between the sections.” Davis insisted that slave labor was suitable to mining and that slavery should be permitted in California. Southerners vowed never to “consent to be thus degraded and enslaved” by such a “monstrous trick and injustice” as admission of California as a free state.

Chapter 13: Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860: 13-4 The Compromise of 1850

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13-4 The Compromise of 1850

California and New Mexico became the focal points of a cluster of slavery issues that faced the Congress of 1849–1850. An earlier

Supreme Court decision (*Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, 1842) had relieved state officials of any obligation to enforce the return of **fugitive slaves (Runaway slaves who escaped to a free state.)** who had escaped into free states, declaring that this was a federal responsibility. Southerners therefore demanded a strong national fugitive slave law (in

utter disregard of their oft-stated commitment to states' rights); antislavery northerners, on the other hand, were calling for an end to the disgraceful buying and selling of slaves in the national capital; and in the Southwest, a shooting war threatened to break out between Texas and New Mexico. Having won the Rio Grande as their southern border with Mexico, Texans insisted that the river must also mark their western border with New Mexico. (That would have given Texas more than half of the present state of New Mexico.) This dispute also involved slavery because the terms of Texas's annexation authorized the state to split into as many as five states, and the territory it carved out of New Mexico would create the potential for still another slave state.

Focus Question

What issues were at stake in the congressional debates that led to the Compromise of 1850? How successfully did the compromise resolve these issues?

These problems produced both a crisis and an opportunity. The crisis lay in the threat to break up the Union. Southern states agreed to meet at Nashville in June 1850 "to devise and adopt some mode of resistance to northern aggression." Few doubted that the mode would be secession unless Congress met southern demands at least halfway, but Congress got off to an unpromising start. Sectional disputes prevented either major party from commanding a majority in electing a Speaker of the House. Through three weeks and 62 ballots, the contest went on while tempers shortened. Northerners and southerners shouted insults at each other, fistfights broke out, and a Mississippian drew a revolver during one heated debate. Southern warnings of secession became a litany: "If, by your legislation, you seek to drive us from the territories of California and New Mexico," thundered Robert Toombs of Georgia, "*I am for disunion.*" On the 63rd ballot, the exhausted legislators finally elected Howell Cobb of Georgia as Speaker by a plurality rather than a majority.

13-4a The Senate Debates

As he had in 1820 and 1833, Henry Clay hoped to turn the crisis into an opportunity. Seventy-two years old, a veteran of 30 years in Congress, three times an unsuccessful candidate for president, Clay was the most respected and still the most magnetic figure in the Senate. A nationalist from the border state of Kentucky, he hoped to unite North and South in a compromise. On January 29, 1850, he presented eight proposals to the Senate and supported them with an eloquent speech, the first of many to be heard in that body during what turned out to be the most famous congressional debate in U.S. history. Clay grouped the first six of his proposals into three pairs, each pair offering one concession to the North and one to the South. The first pair would admit California as a free state but would organize the rest of the Mexican cession without restrictions against slavery. The second would settle the Texas boundary dispute in favor of New Mexico but would compensate Texas to enable the state to pay off bonds it had sold when it was an independent republic. (Many holders of the Texas bonds were southerners.) The third pair of proposals would abolish the slave trade in the District of Columbia but would guarantee the continued existence of slavery there unless both Maryland and Virginia consented to abolition. Of Clay's final two proposals, one affirmed that Congress had no jurisdiction over the interstate slave trade; the other called for a strong national fugitive slave law.

At the end of a long, grueling bargaining process, the final shape of the **Compromise of 1850** (Series of laws enacted in 1850 intended to settle all outstanding slavery issues.) closely resembled Clay's package. The public face of this process featured set speeches in the Senate, the most notable of which were those of John C. Calhoun, Daniel Webster, and William H. Seward, a rising star of the new generation. Each spoke for one of the three principal viewpoints on the issues.

On March 4, Calhoun, suffering from consumption (he would die within a month), sat shrouded in flannel as a colleague read his speech to a rapt audience. Unless northerners returned fugitive slaves in good faith, Calhoun warned, unless they consented to the expansion of slavery into the territories, the South might not remain in the Union.

Webster's speech three days later was both a reply to Calhoun and an appeal to the North for compromise. "I wish to speak today, not as a Massachusetts man, nor as a Northern man, but as an American," he said. "I speak to-day for the preservation of the Union. Hear me for my cause." Although Webster had voted for the Wilmot Proviso, he now urged Yankees not to insist upon it. Nature would exclude slavery from New Mexico. He even

endorsed a fugitive slave law.

On March 11, Seward expressed the antislavery position. Both slavery and compromise were “radically wrong and essentially vicious,” he said. In reply to Calhoun’s arguments for the constitutional protection of slavery in the territories, he invoked the law of God in whose sight all persons were equal. Instead of legislating the expansion of slavery or the return of fugitive slaves, he said, the country should be considering how to bring slavery peacefully to an end, for “you cannot roll back the tide of social progress.”

What They Said

The Senate Debates over the Compromise of 1850

Two of the most notable Senate speeches during the debates over the Compromise of 1850 were delivered by Daniel Webster and William H. Seward. Many of Webster’s former antislavery admirers repudiated him after his much-anticipated speech. Seward, by contrast, was catapulted into renown because of what became known as his “higher law” speech. In these selections Webster and Seward reveal their differences regarding a fugitive slave law as part of the compromise.

Daniel Webster

But I will state ... one complaint of the South, which has in my opinion just foundation; and that is, that there has been found at the North, among individuals and among the Legislatures of the North, a disinclination to perform, fully, their constitutional duties, in regard to the return of persons bound to service, who have escaped into the free States. In that respect, it is my judgement that the South is right, and the North is wrong. Every member of every northern Legislature is bound, by oath, like every other officer in the country, to support the Constitution of the United States; and this article of the Constitution, which says to these States, they shall deliver up fugitives from service, is as binding in honor and conscience as any other article. No man fulfills his duty in any Legislature who sets himself to find excuses, evasions, escapes from the constitutional obligation ...

I say that the South has been injured in this respect, and has a right to complain. Then, sir, there are those abolition societies, of which I am unwilling to speak, but in regard to which I have very clear notions and opinions. I do not think them

useful. I think their operations for the last twenty years have produced nothing good or valuable ... I cannot but see what mischiefs their interference with the South has produced. And is it not plain to every man?

William H. Seward

We deem the principle of the law for the recapture of fugitives ... unjust, unconstitutional, and immoral ... Your Constitution and laws convert hospitality to the refugee, from the most degrading oppression on earth, into a crime, but all mankind except you esteem that hospitality a virtue. The right of extradition of a fugitive from justice, is not admitted by the law of nature and of nations, but rests in voluntary compacts ...

I know that there are laws of various sorts which regulate the conduct of men. There are constitutions and statutes, codes mercantile and codes civil; but when we are legislating for States, especially when we are founding States, all these laws must be brought to the standard of the laws of God, and must be tried by that standard, and must stand or fall by it ...

The Constitution regulates our stewardship; the Constitution devotes the domain to union, to justice, to defence, to welfare, and to liberty.

But there is a higher law than the Constitution, which regulates our authority over the domain, and devotes it to the same noble purposes. The territory is a part—no inconsiderable part—of the common heritage of mankind, bestowed upon them by the Creator of the Universe. We are his stewards, and must so discharge our trust so as to secure, in the highest attainable degree, their happiness

Q

How do Webster's and Seward's views of the Constitution differ? How does Webster justify returning fugitive slaves to slavery? On what grounds does Seward justify not enforcing a fugitive slave law?

Sources: (top) Daniel Webster's congressional speech March 7, 1850. From Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 31st Congress, 1st Session, vol. XXII, pt. 1 (1850), 269, 274–276; (bottom) William H. Seward's congressional

speech March 11, 1850. From Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 31st Congress, 1st Session, vol. XXII, pt. 1 (1850), 262, 263, 265, 266, 268.

Chapter 13: Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860: 13-4b Passage of the Compromise

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13-4b Passage of the Compromise

While these speeches were being delivered, committee members worked ceaselessly behind the scenes to fashion compromise legislation. But in reaching for a compromise, Clay chose what turned out to be the wrong tactic. He lumped most of his proposals together in a single bill, hoping that supporters of any given part of the compromise would vote for the whole in order to win the part they liked. Instead, most senators and representatives voted against the package in order to defeat the parts they disliked. President Taylor continued to insist on the immediate admission of California (and New Mexico, when it was ready) with no quid pro quo for the South. Exhausted and discouraged, Clay fled Washington's summer heat, leaving a young senator from Illinois, Stephen A. Douglas, to lead the forces of compromise.

Another rising star of the new generation, Douglas reversed Clay's tactics. Starting with a core of supporters made up of Democrats from the Old Northwest and Whigs from the upper South, he built a majority for each part of the compromise by submitting it separately and adding its supporters to his core: northerners for a free California, southerners for a fugitive slave law, and so on. This effort benefited from Taylor's sudden death on July 9 (of gastroenteritis, after consuming large quantities of iced milk and cherries on a hot Fourth of July). The new president, Millard Fillmore, was a conservative Whig from New York who gave his support to the compromise. One after another, in August and September, the separate measures became law: the admission of California as a free state; the organization of the rest of the Mexican cession into the two territories of New Mexico and Utah without restrictions against slavery; the settlement of the Texas–New Mexico border dispute in favor of New Mexico and the compensation of Texas with \$10 million; the abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia and the guarantee of slavery there; and the passage of a new fugitive slave law. When it was over, most

Americans breathed a sigh of relief, and President Fillmore christened the Compromise of 1850 “a final settlement” of all sectional problems. Calhounites in the South and antislavery activists in the North branded the compromise a betrayal of principle, but for the time being they seemed to be in a minority.

The compromise produced consequences different from what many anticipated. California came in as the 16th free state, but its senators during the 1850s were in fact conservative Democrats who voted with the South on most issues. California law even allowed slave owners to keep their slaves while sojourning in the state. The territorial legislatures of Utah and New Mexico legalized slavery, but few slaves were brought there. And the fugitive slave law generated more trouble and controversy than all the other parts of this final settlement combined.

Chapter 13: Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860: 13-4c The Fugitive Slave Law
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13-4c The Fugitive Slave Law

The Constitution required that a slave who escaped into a free state must be returned to his or her owner, but it failed to specify how that should be done. Under a 1793 law, slave owners could take their recaptured property before any state or federal court to prove ownership. This procedure worked well enough so long as officials in free states were willing to cooperate. But as the antislavery movement gained momentum in the 1830s, some officials proved uncooperative. And professional slave-catchers sometimes went too far—kidnapping free blacks, forging false affidavits to “prove” they were slaves, and selling them south into bondage. Several northern states responded by passing antikidnapping laws that gave alleged fugitives the right of trial by jury. The laws also prescribed criminal penalties for kidnapping. The U.S. Supreme Court declared Pennsylvania’s antikidnapping law unconstitutional. But the Court also ruled that enforcing the Constitution’s fugitive slave clause was entirely a federal responsibility, thereby absolving the states of any need to cooperate in enforcing it. Nine northern states thereupon passed **personal liberty laws** ([Laws enacted by nine northern states to prohibit the use of state law facilities such as jails or law officers in the recapture of fugitive slaves.](#)) prohibiting the use of state facilities (courts, jails, police or sheriffs, and so on) in the recapture of fugitives.

Fugitive slaves vividly dramatized the poignancy and cruelties of bondage. A man or woman risking all for freedom was not an abstract issue but a real human being whose plight invited sympathy and help. Consequently, many northerners who were not necessarily opposed to slavery in the South nonetheless felt outrage at the idea of fugitives being seized in a land of freedom and returned to slavery. The **“underground railroad”** (A small group who helped slaves escape bondage in the South. It took on legendary status, and its role was much exaggerated.) that helped spirit slaves out of bondage took on legendary status. Stories of secret chambers where fugitives were hidden, dramatic trips at night between stations on the underground, and clever or heroic measures to foil pursuing bloodhounds exaggerated the legend.

Probably fewer than 1,000 of a total 3 million slaves actually escaped to freedom each year. But to southerners the return of those fugitives—like the question of the legality of slavery in California or New Mexico—was a matter of *honor* and *rights*. “Although the loss of property is felt,” said Senator James Mason of Virginia, sponsor of the Fugitive Slave Act, “the loss of honor is felt still more.” The fugitive slave law, said another southern politician, was “the only measure of the Compromise [of 1850] calculated to secure the rights of the South.” Southerners therefore regarded obedience to the fugitive slave law as a test of the North’s good faith in carrying out the compromise.

The provisions of that law were extraordinary. It created federal commissioners who could issue warrants for arrests of fugitives and before whom a slaveholder would bring a captured fugitive to prove ownership. All the slaveholder needed for proof was an affidavit from a slave-state court or the testimony of white witnesses. The fugitive had no right to testify on his or her own behalf. The commissioner received a fee of \$10 if he found the owner’s claim valid, but only \$5 if he let the fugitive go. (The difference was supposedly justified by the larger amount of paperwork required to return the fugitive to slavery.) The federal treasury would pay all costs of enforcement. The commissioner could call on federal marshals to apprehend fugitives, and the marshals in turn could deputize any citizen to help. A citizen who refused could be fined up to \$1,000, and anyone who harbored a fugitive or obstructed his or her capture would be subject to imprisonment.

13-4d The Slave-Catchers

Abolitionists denounced the law as draconian, immoral, and unconstitutional. They vowed to resist it. Opportunities soon came, as slave owners sent agents north to recapture fugitives, some of whom had escaped years earlier (the act set no statute of limitations). In February 1851, slave-catchers arrested a black man living with his family in Indiana and returned him to an owner who said he had run away 19 years before. A Maryland man tried to claim ownership of a Philadelphia woman who he said had escaped 22 years earlier; he also wanted her six children, all of whom were born in Philadelphia. In this case, the commissioner disallowed his claim to both mother and children, but statistics show that the law was rigged in favor of the claimants. In the first 15 months of its operation, 84 fugitives were returned to slavery and only 5 were released. (For the entire decade of the 1850s, the ratio was 332 to 11.)

Two of the most famous of these fugitive slaves were William and Ellen Craft, whose successful struggle for liberty inspired other slaves and abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic. Both born in slavery, William and Ellen were married in Georgia in 1846. Unwilling to give birth to children who might be sold away from her, Ellen plotted with her husband to escape to the North. Light enough to pass for white (she was the daughter of her master and his light-skinned concubine), Ellen sewed herself a pair of trousers and posed as a deaf-mute invalid young man traveling to Philadelphia for medical treatment attended by “his” slave William. After some close calls, they made it to Philadelphia at the end of 1848 and moved on to Boston in 1849.

After passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, however, two agents from Georgia appeared in Boston to recapture the Crafts. Local abolitionists spirited them away to Canada and then to England, where the Crafts lived for the next 19 years and had five children.

Kidnapping Again!

This is a typical poster printed by abolitionist opponents of the Fugitive Slave Law. It was intended to rally the citizens of Boston against the recapture and reenslavement of Anthony Burns, a fugitive slave from Virginia seized in Boston in May 1854.

Courtesy of The Trustees of Boston Public Library

Unable to protect their freedom through legal means, many other blacks, with the support of white allies, also resorted to flight and resistance. Thousands of northern blacks fled to Canada—3,000 in the last three months of 1850 alone. In February 1851, slave-catchers arrested a fugitive who had taken the name Shadrach when he escaped from Virginia a year earlier. They rushed him to the federal courthouse, where a few deputy marshals held him, pending a hearing. But a group of black men broke into the courtroom, overpowered the deputies, and spirited Shadrach out of the country to Canada. This was too much for the Fillmore administration. In April 1851, another fugitive, Thomas Sims, was arrested in Boston, and the president sent 250 soldiers to help 300 armed deputies enforce the law and return Sims to slavery.

Continued rescues and escapes kept matters at fever pitch for the rest of the decade. In the

fall of 1851, a Maryland slave owner and his son accompanied federal marshals to Christiana, Pennsylvania, a Quaker village, where two of the man's slaves had taken refuge. The hunters ran into a fusillade of gunfire from a house where a dozen black men were protecting the fugitives. When the shooting stopped, the slave owner was dead and his son was seriously wounded. Three of the blacks fled to Canada. This time Fillmore sent in the marines. They helped marshals arrest 30 black men and half a dozen whites who were indicted for treason. But the U.S. attorney dropped charges after a jury acquitted the first defendant, a Quaker.

Two of the most famous fugitive slave cases of the 1850s ended in tragedy. In spring 1854, federal marshals in Boston arrested a Virginia fugitive, Anthony Burns. Angry abolitionists poured into Boston to save him. Some of them tried to attack the federal courthouse, where a deputy was killed in an exchange of gunfire. But the new president, Franklin Pierce, was determined not to back down. "Incur any expense," he wired the district attorney in Boston, "to enforce the law." After every legal move to free Burns had failed, Pierce sent federal troops. While thousands of angry Yankees lined the streets under American flags hanging upside down to signify the loss of liberty in the cradle of the Revolution, 200 marines and soldiers marched this lone black man back into bondage.

Two years later, Margaret Garner escaped from Kentucky to Ohio with her husband and four children. When a posse of marshals and deputies caught up with them, Margaret seized a kitchen knife and tried to kill her children and herself rather than return to slavery. She managed to cut her three-year-old daughter's throat before she was overpowered. After complicated legal maneuvers, the federal commissioner remanded the fugitives to their Kentucky owner. He promptly sold them down the river to Arkansas, and, in a steamboat accident along the way, one of Margaret Garner's sons drowned in the Mississippi.

Harriet Tubman

Born into slavery in Maryland around 1822, Harriet Tubman escaped to freedom in 1849, settling at first in Philadelphia. Despite the many dangers she faced, Tubman returned to the South over and over in the years before the Civil War, helping her own relatives as well as dozens of other slaves to escape north. Wanted posters throughout the upper South described this "Moses," as Tubman was called, but she

eluded capture. During the Civil War the intrepid Tubman worked for the Union army as a nurse and cook, as well as a scout and spy in Confederate territory. Tubman was also active in the woman suffrage movement late in the century. Working by necessity in secret before the Civil War, today Tubman is remembered, along with Frederick Douglass, as one of the most prominent abolitionists of the 19th century.

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Such events had a profound impact on public emotions. Most northerners were not abolitionists, and few of them regarded black people as equals, but millions of them moved closer to an antislavery—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say anti-southern—position in response to the shock of seeing armed slave-catchers on their streets. “When it was all over,” agreed two previously conservative Whigs in Boston after the Anthony Burns affair, “I put my face in my hands and wept I could do nothing less We went to bed one night old-fashioned, conservative, compromise Union Whigs and waked up stark mad Abolitionists.”

Several northern states passed new personal liberty laws in defiance of the South. Although those laws did not make it impossible to recover fugitives, they made it so difficult, expensive, and time consuming that many slave owners gave up trying. The failure of the North to honor the Fugitive Slave Law, part of the Compromise of 1850, was one of the South’s bitter grievances in the 1850s. Several southern states cited it as one of their reasons for seceding in 1861.

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13-4e Uncle Tom’s Cabin

A novel inspired by the plight of fugitive slaves further intensified public sentiment. Harriet Beecher Stowe was a member of a prominent New England family of clergymen and writers, and was herself a short story writer. In the 1840s, while living in Cincinnati with her husband, a minister, she became acquainted with fugitive slaves who had escaped across the Ohio River. Outraged by the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, in 1851 she began to write a new piece of fiction—managing to write a chapter a week after she had put her children to bed.

Harriet Beecher Stowe and Family

Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, was part of a large and influential family. In this formal 1850 photograph, Stowe is seated on the far right in the first row; her father, Lyman Beecher, one of the most prominent ministers in American history, is seated in the middle of the row. Left of Lyman Beecher is Harriet Beecher Stowe's sister Catherine Beecher, influential both as an educator and for her books on household management that expounded the national importance of women in their domestic roles. In the back row, on the right, stands Stowe's brother Henry Ward Beecher, widely regarded as the most inspiring and influential preacher of the post-Civil War era. While Harriet's father Lyman had been a stern, Calvinist-inspired minister demanding individual repentance during numerous religious revivals before the Civil War, his son Henry instead emphasized the importance of the heart and individual responsibility in his own preaching. We can see that same emphasis on the central importance of emotion and "right feeling" in Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolitionist writings.

Bettmann/Historical/Corbis

Uncle Tom's Cabin became a runaway best seller, and was eventually translated into 20 languages. The novel's powerful central theme was the tragedy of the breakup of families by slavery—dramatized in scenes that would become an important part of American popular culture, such as the slave Eliza's escape across the ice-choked Ohio River to save her son from a slave trader. Throughout the novel Stowe spoke directly to white women readers, asking them to imagine being torn from their own children. Yet, it was not just women who responded to her calls to end slavery: Men, too, wrote of being deeply affected by the tragic story she told.

Although banned in some parts of the South, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* found a wide but hostile

readership there. Pro-slavery authors rushed into print with more than a dozen novels challenging Stowe's themes, but all of them together made nothing like the impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The book helped shape a whole generation's view of slavery.

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13-5 Filibustering

If the prospects for slavery in New Mexico appeared unpromising, southerners could contemplate a closer region where slavery already existed—Cuba. Enjoying an economic boom based on slave-grown sugar, this Spanish colony only 90 miles from American shores had nearly 400,000

slaves in 1850—more than any American state except Virginia. President Polk, his appetite for territory not yet sated by the acquisition of Texas, Oregon, and half of Mexico, offered Spain \$100 million for Cuba in 1848. The Spanish foreign minister spurned the offer, stating that he would rather see the island sunk in the sea than sold.

Focus Question

How was filibustering related to demands for the expansion of slavery?

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13-5a Cuba

If money did not work, revolution might. Cuban planters, restive under Spanish rule, intrigued with American expansionists in the hope of fomenting an uprising on the island. Their leader was Narciso López, a Venezuelan-born Cuban soldier of fortune. In 1849, López recruited several hundred American adventurers for the first **“filibustering”** [\(Congressional delaying tactic involving lengthy speeches that prevent legislation from](#)

being enacted.) expedition against Cuba (from the Spanish *filibustero*, a freebooter or pirate). When President Taylor ordered the navy to prevent López's ships from leaving New York, López shifted his operations to the friendlier environs of New Orleans, where he raised a new force of filibusters, many of them Mexican War veterans. Port officials in New Orleans looked the other way when the expedition sailed in May 1850, but Spanish troops drove the filibusters into the sea after they had established a beachhead in Cuba.

Undaunted, López escaped and returned to a hero's welcome in the South, where he raised men and money for a third try in 1851. This time, William Crittenden of Kentucky, nephew of the U.S. attorney general, commanded the 420 Americans in the expedition, but the invasion ended in fiasco and tragedy. Spanish soldiers suppressed a local uprising timed to coincide with the invasion and then defeated the filibusters, killing 200 and capturing the rest. López was garroted in the public square of Havana. Then 50 American prisoners, including Crittenden, were lined up and executed by firing squad.

These events dampened southerners' enthusiasm for Cuba, but only for a time. "Cuba must be ours," declared Jefferson Davis, in order to "increase the number of slave-holding constituencies." In 1852, the Democrats nominated Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire for president. Although a Yankee, Pierce had a reputation as a "doughface"—a northern man with southern principles. Southern Democrats were delighted with his nomination. Pierce was "as reliable as Calhoun himself," wrote one, while another said that "a nomination so favorable to the South had not been anticipated." Especially gratifying was Pierce's support for annexing Cuba, which he made one of the top priorities of his new administration after winning a landslide victory over a demoralized Whig Party weakened by schism between its northern and southern wings.

Pierce covertly encouraged a new filibustering expedition to Cuba. This one was to be led by former governor John Quitman of Mississippi. While Quitman was recruiting hundreds of volunteers, southerners in Congress introduced a resolution to suspend the neutrality law that prohibited American interference in the internal affairs of other countries. But at the last moment Pierce backed off, fearful of political damage in the North if his administration became openly identified with filibustering. The Quitman expedition never sailed.

Pierce again tried to buy Cuba, instructing the American minister in Madrid to offer Spain \$130 million. The minister was Pierre Soulé, a flamboyant Louisianan who managed to alienate most Spaniards by his clumsy intriguing. Soulé's crowning act came in October

1854 at a meeting with the American ministers to Britain and France in Ostend, Belgium. He persuaded them to sign what came to be known as the Ostend Manifesto. “Cuba is as necessary to the North American republic as any of its present ... family of states,” declared this document. If Spain persisted in refusing to sell, then “by every law, human and divine, we shall be justified in wresting it from Spain.”

This “manifesto of the brigands,” as antislavery Americans called it, caused an international uproar. The administration repudiated the Ostend Manifesto and recalled Soulé. Nevertheless, acquisition of Cuba remained an objective of the Democratic Party. The issue played a role in both the 1860 presidential election and the secession controversy during 1860 and 1861. Meanwhile, American filibustering shifted its focus 750 miles south of Havana to Nicaragua. There, the most remarkable of the *filibusteros*, William Walker, had proclaimed himself president and restored the institution of slavery.

Chapter 13: Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860: 13-5b The Gray-Eyed Man of Destiny

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13-5b The Gray-Eyed Man of Destiny

A native of Tennessee and a brilliant, restless man, Walker had earned a medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania and studied and practiced law in New Orleans before joining the 1849 rush to California. Weighing less than 120 pounds, Walker seemed an unlikely fighter or leader of men, but he fought three duels, and his luminous eyes, which seemed to transfix his fellows, won him the sobriquet “gray-eyed man of destiny.”

Walker found his true calling in filibustering. At the time, numerous raids were taking place back and forth across the border with Mexico, some of them staged to seize more of that country for the United States. In 1853, Walker led a ragged “army” of footloose 49ers into Baja California and Sonora and declared the region an independent republic. Exhaustion and desertion depleted his troops, however, and the Mexicans drove the survivors back to California.

Walker decided to try again, with another goal. Many southerners eyed Nicaragua’s potential for growing cotton, sugar, coffee, and other crops. The unstable Nicaraguan government offered a tempting target. In 1854, Walker signed a contract with rebel leaders

in the civil war of the moment. The following spring, he led an advance guard of filibusters to Nicaragua and proclaimed himself commander-in-chief of the rebel forces. At the head of 2,000 American volunteers, he gained control of the country and named himself president in 1856. The Pierce administration extended diplomatic recognition to Walker's regime.

The other Central American republics soon formed an alliance to invade Nicaragua and overthrow Walker. To win greater support from the southern states, Walker issued a decree in September 1856 reinstituting slavery in Nicaragua. A convention of southern economic promoters meeting in Savannah praised Walker's efforts "to introduce civilization in the States of Central America, and to develop these rich and productive regions by slave labor." Boatloads of new recruits arrived in Nicaragua from New Orleans, but in spring 1857, they succumbed to disease and to the Central American armies.

Walker escaped to New Orleans, where he was welcomed as a hero. He had no trouble recruiting men for another attempt, but the navy stopped him in November 1857. Southern congressmen condemned the naval commander and encouraged Walker to try again. He did, in December 1858, after a New Orleans jury refused to convict him of violating the neutrality law. On this third expedition, Walker's ship struck a reef and sank. Undaunted, he tried yet again. He wrote a book to raise funds for another invasion of Nicaragua, urging "the hearts of Southern youth to answer the call of honor The true field for the expansion of slavery is in tropical America." A few more southern youths answered the call, but they were stopped in Honduras. There, on September 12, 1860, the gray-eyed man met his destiny before a firing squad.

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13-6 Conclusion

Within the three-year period from 1845 to 1848, the annexation of Texas, the settlement of the Oregon boundary dispute with Britain, and the acquisition by force of New Mexico and California from Mexico added 1,150,000 square miles to the United States. This expansion was America's "Manifest Destiny," according to Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois. He

further proclaimed:

Increase, and multiply, and expand, is the law of this nation's existence. You cannot limit this great republic by mere boundary lines. Any one of you gentlemen might as well say to a son twelve years old that he is big enough, and must not grow any larger, and in order to prevent his growth put a hoop around him and keep him to his present size. Either the hoop must burst and be rent asunder, or the child must die. So it would be with this great nation.

But other Americans feared that the country could not absorb such rapid growth without strains that might break it apart. At the outbreak of the war with Mexico, Ralph Waldo Emerson predicted that “the United States will conquer Mexico, but it will be as the man swallows the arsenic, which brings him down in turn. Mexico will poison us.” Emerson proved correct. The poison was the reopening of the question of slavery’s expansion, which had supposedly been settled by the Missouri Compromise in 1820. The admission of Texas as a huge new slave state and the possibility that more slave states might be carved out of the territory acquired from Mexico provoked northern congressmen to pass the Wilmot Proviso. Southerners bristled at this attempt to prevent the further expansion of slavery. Threats of secession and civil war poisoned the atmosphere in 1849 and 1850.

The Compromise of 1850 defused the crisis and appeared to settle the issue once again, but events would soon prove that this compromise had merely postponed the crisis. The fugitive slave issue and filibustering expeditions to acquire more slave territory kept sectional controversies smoldering. In 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act would cause them to burst into a hotter flame than ever.

Chapter 13: Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860: 13-7 Chapter Review
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13-7 Chapter Review

13-7a Review

1. What impulses lay behind the “Manifest Destiny” of America’s westward expansion?
2. What were the causes and consequences of the Mexican War?
3. How did the question of slavery affect the election of 1848?
4. What issues were at stake in the congressional debates that led to the Compromise of 1850? How successfully did the compromise resolve these issues?
5. How was filibustering related to demands for the expansion of slavery?

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Chapter Review

13-7b Critical Thinking

1. Between 1803 and 1845, the territorial size of the United States increased by only 5 percent (with the acquisition of Florida in 1819). Yet, in the three years from 1845 to 1848, the size of the United States mushroomed by another 50 percent. How do you explain this remarkable phenomenon?
2. Why was the issue of slavery in the territories so important and controversial in the 1840s and 1850s when slavery already existed in half of the states?

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Chapter Review

13-7c Identifications

Review your understanding of the following key terms, people, and events for this chapter.

- **Young America movement** (A group of men affiliated with the Democratic Party in the 1840s who sought the expansion of the United States across the continent.)
- **Manifest Destiny** (The belief that the United States was destined to grow from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the Arctic to the tropics. Providence supposedly intended for Americans to have this area for a great experiment in liberty.)
- **missions** (Outposts established by the Spanish along the northern frontier to aid in Christianizing the native peoples. They also were used to exploit these peoples' labor.)
- **presidios** (Military posts constructed by the Spanish to protect the settlers from hostile Indians. They also were used to keep non-Spanish settlers from the area.)
- **Great American Desert** (The treeless area in the plains that most Americans considered unsuitable for settlement. It generally was passed over by settlers going to the Pacific Coast areas.)
- **Mormons** (Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, founded by Joseph Smith in 1830; the *Book of Mormon* is their Bible.)
- **tejanos** (Spanish-speaking settlers of Texas. The term comes from the Spanish word *Tejas* for Texas.)

- **Alamo** (Battle between Texas revolutionaries and the Mexican army at the San Antonio mission called the *Alamo* on March 6, 1836, in which all 187 Texans were killed.)
- **Wilmot Proviso** (Famous proviso made by Congressman David Wilmot regarding an amendment to an army appropriations bill that framed the national debate over slavery for the next 15 years.)
- **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo** (Treaty that authorized the purchase of California, New Mexico, and a Texas border on the Rio Grande from Mexico for 15 million dollars.)
- **popular sovereignty** (The concept that settlers of each territory would decide for themselves whether to allow slavery.)
- **Conscience Whigs** (A group of antislavery members of the Whig Party.)
- **Free-Soilers** (A term used to describe people who opposed the expansion of slavery into the territories. It came from the name of a small political party in the election of 1848.)
- **fugitive slaves** (Runaway slaves who escaped to a free state.)
- **Compromise of 1850** (Series of laws enacted in 1850 intended to settle all outstanding slavery issues.)
- **personal liberty laws** (Laws enacted by nine northern states to prohibit the use of state law facilities such as jails or law officers in the recapture of fugitive slaves.)
- **underground railroad** (A small group who helped slaves escape bondage in the South. It took on legendary status, and its role was much exaggerated.)
- **filibustering** (Congressional delaying tactic involving lengthy speeches that prevent legislation from being enacted.)

Chapter Review

13-7d Suggested Readings

On Manifest Destiny and filibustering, see **Amy S. Greenberg**, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (2005). For an excellent account of the history of the West, see **Robert V. Hine** and **John Mack Faragher**, *The American West: An Interpretive History* (2000). A fine introduction to the impact of American expansion on the Indians of the West is **Philip Weeks**, *Farewell, My Nation: The American Indian and the United States 1820–1890* (rev. ed., 2000). The political polarization produced by the controversy over the annexation of Texas is clearly laid out by **Joel H. Silbey**, *Storm over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to Civil War* (2005). For the Mexican War, a good narrative is **John S. D. Eisenhower**, *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico 1846–1848* (1989). Opposition to and support for the war by different elements of the public are chronicled in **Robert W. Johannsen**, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (1985). On the gold rush, see **Malcolm J. Rohrbough**, *Days of Gold: the California Gold Rush and the American Nation* (1997); **Susan Lee Johnson**, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (2000); and **Elliott West**, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (1998). For the conflict provoked by the issue of slavery's expansion into territory acquired from Mexico, a classic is **David M. Potter**, *The Impending Crisis 1848–1861* (1976); see also **Michael A. Morrison**, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (1997); and **Leonard D. Richards**, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780–1860* (2000). The partisan roots of sectional conflict are emphasized in **Michael F. Holt**, *The Fate of Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War* (2004). On filibustering, see **Robert E. May**, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (2004).

Chapter 13: Manifest Destiny: An Empire for Liberty—or Slavery? 1845–1860: 13-7d Suggested Readings

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