

# War With Mexico

SS.8.A.4.1; SS.8.A.4.3; SS.8.A.4.4; SS.8.A.4.8; SS.8.G.2.2; SS.8.G.4.4

## ANALYZING MAPS

1. Study the paths of the Mountain and Cimarron Routes on the Santa Fe Trail map. What might have been the advantages and disadvantages of each route for traders in the 1800s?

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## The New Mexico Territory

In the early 1800s, the New Mexico Territory was a vast region between Texas and California. It included all of the present-day states of New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and Utah, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming. Native Americans had lived in New Mexico for thousands of years. In the late 1500s, Spanish conquistadors claimed it for Spain, and Spanish missionaries soon followed. Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821, and the New Mexico Territory became part of Mexico.

The Mexican government welcomed American traders to New Mexico, hoping more trade would boost the economy. In 1821 William Becknell became the first American trader to reach Santa Fe, a settlement founded more than two hundred years earlier by the Spanish. Becknell's route became known as the Santa Fe Trail.

The Santa Fe Trail soon became a busy trade route. As trade increased, more and more Americans settled in New Mexico. Some began to believe that acquiring New Mexico for the United States was part of the nation's Manifest Destiny.



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LESSON 3 SUMMARY, *continued*

## California’s Spanish Culture

Spanish explorers and missionaries settled California in the 1700s. The Spanish built a chain of missions along the coast. They wanted to convert Native Americans to Christianity and the Spanish way of life. Native Americans on the missions farmed and worked at weaving and other crafts.

After Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821, California became a part of Mexico. Mexican settlers bought mission lands and set up huge ranches called **ranchos**. Native Americans worked the land in return for food and shelter, but the ranch owners, called **rancheros**, treated them very poorly.

An American army officer named John C. Frémont traveled to California in the 1840s. After Frémont wrote about the region’s mild climate and vast natural resources, more Americans came to California. Many began to talk about adding California to the Union. If California became a state, the Pacific Ocean would become the nation’s western border. For many Americans, it seemed clear that California was a part of the nation’s Manifest Destiny.

## Conflict Begins

President James K. Polk was determined to get both the New Mexico and California territories from Mexico. Relations between the United States and Mexico, however, were not friendly. A major problem was a dispute over the border between Texas and Mexico. The United States said the border was the Rio Grande, the river to the south. Mexico said it was the Nueces River, 150 miles farther north.

Polk sent a representative to Mexico to propose a deal. The United States would pay \$30 million to buy New Mexico and California as long as Mexico accepted the Rio Grande as the Texas border. Mexican leaders refused to discuss the offer. Instead, they declared that they intended to reclaim Texas for Mexico.

To pressure Mexico, Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor to lead U.S. troops into the disputed territory near the Rio Grande. Mexican leaders viewed this action as an invasion of their country. Polk hoped that Mexican soldiers would fire first. They did. On May 13, 1846, Congress passed a declaration of war against Mexico.

### 2. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

What would be the advantages of having the Pacific Ocean as the nation’s western border?

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### 3. IDENTIFYING POINTS OF VIEW

How did the U.S. interpret the skirmish that took place when General Zachary Taylor led troops into the disputed territory near the Rio Grande?

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How did Mexico interpret the action?

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**LESSON 3 SUMMARY, continued**

**ANALYZING MAPS**

4. Although President Polk and many Democrats supported the war, many other Americans did not. Look at the map and the lands the United States stood to gain. Why do you think many Northerners were against the war?

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**ANALYZING MAPS**

5. Refer to the map of the war with Mexico. Which route did General Kearny follow from Missouri to Santa Fe?

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**A War Plan**

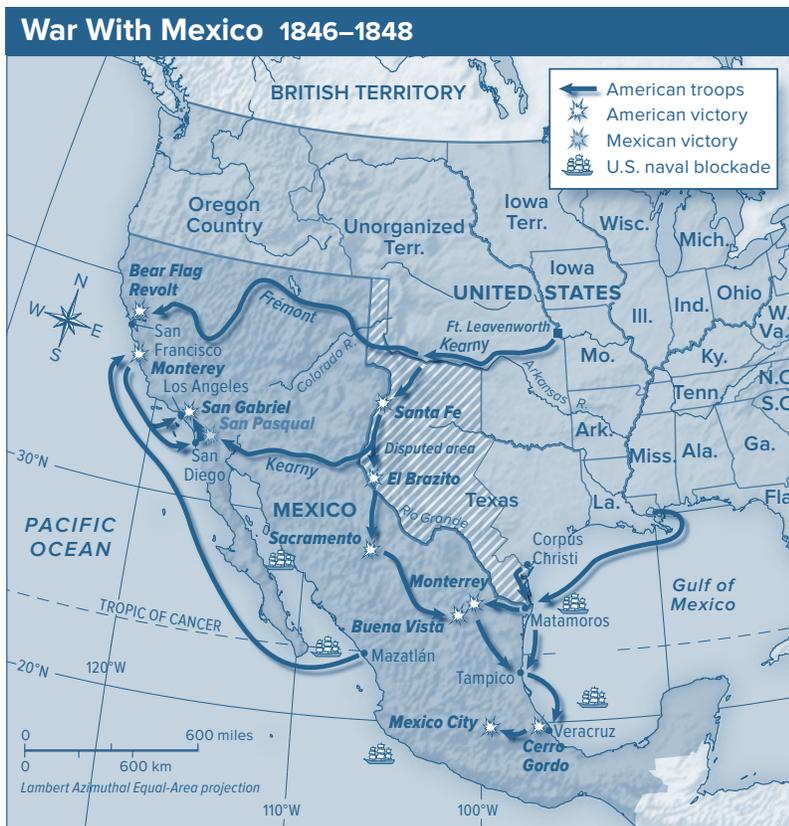
Polk planned to win the war by accomplishing three goals:

1. Drive Mexican forces out of Texas
2. Take control of New Mexico and California
3. Capture Mexico City

By 1847, Zachary Taylor had accomplished the first goal in Texas. General Stephen Kearny made progress toward the second goal by capturing Santa Fe and then heading toward California.

**California Uprising**

Even before the war officially began, American settlers in California had begun a revolt against Mexico. Led by General John C. Frémont, the settlers quickly drove Mexican officials from the area and declared independence. They renamed California the Bear Flag Republic. Within a month, American warships sailed into the ports of San Francisco and San Diego and claimed the republic for the United States.



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**LESSON 3 SUMMARY, *continued***

Despite huge losses, Mexico refused to surrender. President Polk then sent General Winfield Scott and his troops to attack Mexico City, the nation's capital. Scott landed at Veracruz and fought his way to Mexico City, capturing it in September 1847. Polk's plan for winning the war had succeeded.

**Peace Terms**

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on February 2, 1848, officially ended the war. With the lands gained under the treaty, the dream of Manifest Destiny was now complete.

