Crucible of Struggle
A History of Mexican Americans from Colonial Times to the Present Era

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CHAPTER 3

Mexican Americans in the Era of War and American Westward Expansion

The dispute over the boundary separating Mexico and the newly annexed Republic of Texas was the main issue that drove Mexico and the United States to war in 1846. The United States claimed as its territory the land between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande by virtue of prior claim to the Rio Grande as its border with Mexico. By 1841, more than twenty-one thousand Americans were living in Texas, and they outnumbered the Tejanos five to one. However, Mexico refused to recognize Texas independence, and although the United States was obligated to defend Texas, it asserted that the annexation of Texas gave the new republic title to what is now the eastern half of present-day New Mexico. Mexico protested this claim, but it was politically divided and militarily ill prepared to endure a protracted struggle with the United States. Despite its defiance, Mexico’s internal divisions condemned it to face the United States in the inevitable war to come. America had a booming economy; in contrast, Mexico had a stagnant economy and was a debtor nation, owing England nearly fifty million pesos. Moreover, the United States was aggressive and land hungry, and it embraced racial superiority, notwithstanding the ongoing moral and political debate over slavery that resulted in sectionalism. Concerned over America’s lust for its northern territories, Mexico chose to resist and fight a superior force rather than recognize the annexation of Texas and cede New Mexico and a portion of California to the United States. The loyalties of Mexico’s citizenry on the northern frontier were split between centralist and liberal factions over the extent of their government’s involvement in their local and state affairs. These factors served as a backdrop for the Texas Revolt of 1836, New Mexico’s Chimaya Rebellion, and now the Mexican War itself.

In New Mexico, a privileged class of landholders ruled the department. Their ambivalent loyalties to Mexico were the result of their reliance on the United States for trade and money derived from tariffs, combined with the presence and influence of Americans in local society. The Santa Fe trade produced dramatic change in the region’s economy and politics and had brought wealth to the ricos, many of whom had been co-opted by the Americans. In contrast, although poor and largely illiterate, much of New Mexico’s Spanish-speaking and Indian population sided with Mexico. They were opposed to the United States conquest and in 1847 rose
up in rebellion in Taos. Abuse at the hands of the ruling elite, who feared the poorer classes and the American military invasion, was at the heart of the uprising that was put down by soldiers of Stephen Watts Kearny's Army of the West.

In California, the way of life of the 6,500 to 7,000 Californios was cattle ranching, now realigned and largely integrated into the market economy of the United States. The wealth of the Spanish-speaking cattle barons was based on the exploitation of their Indian and Mexican workers in a way that gave the ranches the feel of a plantation. As was the case for Texas and New Mexico, those Californios dependent on the United States cash economy grew more wealthy and forged alliances with the Americans. There was much infighting among the ruling Californios owing to factionalism, and Mexico was unable to govern California. When war between the United States and Mexico broke out, the Californios lacked weapons and an army to battle the American invaders who took possession of California. In the summer of 1846, American forces encountered no resistance in taking California. However, a revolt broke out among the Mexican Californio rancheros against the U.S. occupation. The fighting was confined to guerilla attacks by poorly armed militias and volunteers against better armed Americans. The Californios fought heroically and well, but in vain. The Mexican American War (1846–1848) resulted in the defeat of Mexico and the loss of its northern territories, ceded to the United States by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.
THE SOUTHWEST ON THE EVE OF THE MEXICAN WAR

In New Mexico the ricos prospered and retained their elite legitimacy while life was hard for the majority of New Mexico's poor. There was an obvious rift between class and national interest. The centralists defended Mexico and would instigate the lower classes to oppose the American invasion. Because of their preferential access to trade, some ricos would eventually aid the American war effort. Those who were liberals were disappointed at their state's mismanagement and neglect by Mexico. On May 15, 1844, showing his cowardice in a citizens' campaign against Texans, Manuel Armijo was replaced as New Mexico's governor by General Mariano Martínez de Lejanza, who tried but failed to enforce taxation on the New Mexicans. Martínez left New Mexico in 1846 after finishing his term, and Manuel Armijo again became governor. The ambitious Armijo manipulated his fellow citizens for his own interests, namely remaining dependent on trade with the United States. New Mexico's confidence in Mexico was further weakened by rumors that it had agreed to sell the territory to the United States. A group of New Mexicans drafted a protest against Mexico's right to sell New Mexico and called for independence. Nothing came of this plan.

Separatist sentiment was similarly present in California. The landowning class was the principal social base from which California's rulers emerged. The entrenched landowning and military elites were all interrelated through family networks and looked after one another's interests. Those who were liberals struggled against the autocratic rule of Mexican-appointed governors. They organized themselves behind the banner of autonomy for California, for they wanted independence from Mexico. A small minority even favored American annexation. In August 1844, they held a secret meeting in Monterey with the British counsel. They told him they were ready to drive Governor Micheltorena out of California, declare independence, and ask for British protection.

The Californios resented General Micheltorena, California's new governor and friend of Santa Anna, and his army of convict soldiers. Though at odds, northern and southern Californios joined forces in November 1844 and initiated a revolt. Led by José Castro, the northern rebels captured San Juan mission and its ammunition cache. Micheltorena forced the insurgents to withdraw to San Jose, where his soldiers defeated them. The Californios persevered. Micheltorena at the head of four hundred soldiers marched south to Los Angeles, where several hundred Californios led by Juan Bautista Alvarado, representing the southern faction, waited. In February 1845, the Californios defeated Micheltorena in a bloodless battle at Cahuenga and forced him to leave California, taking his army with him.

Mexico's hold on California ended. It did not appoint another governor to replace Micheltorena. Instead, the mulatto Pío de Jesús Pico, soldier, rancher, and senior member of the California legislature, was named governor and made Los Angeles the capital. José Castro became military governor of the territory. He remained in the north at Monterey, where he controlled the customhouse. Californios wanted to maintain their autonomy in the face of pressure from the United States. They remained fearful that Mexico would sell California to Britain, America's main rival for the Asian trade. California's ports, particularly the choice harbor of San Francisco, would help increase America's share of the Pacific trade.
San Diego was likewise desirable because of its harbor, in addition to its central role in the lucrative hide and tallow trade. California’s fertile valleys were also attractive, as was other Mexican territory.

The vast Mexican lands between newly annexed Texas and the Pacific coast showed great promise for the United States. Believing they should fulfill their Manifest Destiny, many Americans thought their country should settle lands west of the Mississippi claimed by Mexico, England, and the array of Indian nations. Newspapers supported the idea of Manifest Destiny. In 1842, John L. O’Sullivan, Jacksonian editor of the Washington, DC, monthly the United States Magazine and Democratic Review, coined the term Manifest Destiny in articulating the prevailing national sentiment for United States territorial expansion from the Atlantic to the Pacific into Texas, Oregon, and Mexico. O’Sullivan’s publication was a staunch defender of Democratic Party positions on slavery, states’ rights, Indian removal, and soon the Mexican War. The Texas rebellion set a pattern of racist attitudes toward Mexicans that later drew on cordial relationships between Anglos and Mexicans in New Mexico and California to denigrate Mexicans. Political publicists started to describe Mexicans as racially inferior to Anglo Saxons, an idle people incapable of self-government. Other aggressive American nationalists added their voices to that of O’Sullivan.

Territorial expansion was a contentious issue for the United States. A sectional confrontation between the North and South occurred through all of the West. Proslavery forces demanded the acquisition of new territory and had vilified Mexico during the 1830s debate over annexing Texas. The opponents of slavery, on the other hand, were strongly against expansionism because they believed it would add new slaveholding states to the Union, thereby upsetting the balance of power between North and South.

In the wake of the Oregon territorial boundary dispute with Great Britain, the American national debate over westward expansion settled on the Texas Republic. With its government and citizens committed to slavery, Texas continued to seek annexation. Through annexation, Texas would enter the Union as a slave state and give proslavery forces an advantage in the House and the Senate. Vigorous opposition by northern antislavery forces, combined with the desire to avoid conflict with Mexico, led the United States to delay the request for Texas annexation. However, as abolitionist power increased, it became imperative for the South to bring Texas into the Union as a slave state, for it represented a deterrent to any congressional vote to abolish slavery. For Mexico, the annexation of Texas constituted another brazen act of American aggression against its sovereignty.

An embittered Mexico still claimed Texas; it refused to recognize Texas independence. Moreover, the pretext for war between Mexico and the United States was the long-standing dispute over the international boundary between the two nations. The United States supported Texas’s claim of the Rio Grande as the boundary, but Mexico raised heated objections to America’s presumptuous claims, steadfastly maintaining that the boundary was the Nueces River. The United States wanted the Rio Grande as the border because it would place Santa Fe with its profitable trade inside the United States. The Nueces strip, the one-hundred-mile area between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande extending from the Texas Gulf
coast to eastern Colorado, was claimed by both Texas and Mexico. Texas declared that its border encompassed the Nueces area, reaching to the Río Grande, whereas Mexico wanted all of Texas to the Sabine River.9

Annexation of Texas became the central campaign issue of the 1844 presidential election. The election of the expansionist candidate James K. Polk, a westerner and a devotee of agrarianism, was a victory for the American expansionists who coveted Texas and California. In Mexico, the nation's liberal wing considered the United States a model for Mexico's development, whereas Mexican conservatives feared American Manifest Destiny and expansionism. Tensions rose among liberals and conservatives alike in Mexico after Polk's election in 1844 because of his apparent intent to make the acquisition of Mexico the primary objective of war. Mexico's acting president General José Joaquín de Herrera faced a daunting challenge. Herrera wanted conciliation with the United States. Though fearing that Mexico's loss of Texas would precipitate loss of its northern provinces, and aware that Mexico could not risk war with the United States, Herrera's short-lived liberal government proposed a peaceful settlement to the issue of Texas annexation. Britain advised Herrera to recognize the independence of the Republic of Texas on condition that Texas agreed not to be annexed by any country. However, to appease Mexico's ruling military elite, who considered him weak-willed, Herrera declared that any attempt to annex Texas would be considered an act of war. On February 27, 1845, the U.S. Senate voted to annex the Republic of Texas, and a few days later the U.S. Senate voted in favor of statehood for Texas. Texas entered the Union as the twenty-eighth state. Mexico City learned of this in mid-March, and the response in Mexico was immediate hostility toward the United States and a call for war. Mexico promptly ordered its foreign minister to tell the American ambassador that relations between the two nations were terminated.10 Interpreting American annexation of Texas as a violation of Mexico's 1828 border treaty, Herrera went before the Mexican Congress to request mortgaging one-fourth of Catholic Church property to raise four million pesos to defend Mexico's territorial integrity.11

President Polk was intent on defending the boundary claims made by Texas and on precluding a possible invasion by Mexico before annexation of Texas could be completed. America's military intrusion onto contested Mexican soil furnished perfect evidence of a continued American political plot aimed at provoking Mexico into war and taking possession of the region. On July 1, 1845, the President ordered 1,500 American soldiers deployed to Texas near Corpus Christi. The next month, Polk doubled the number of American troops in Texas, and he sent newly appointed minister to Mexico John Slidell to Mexico City. Slidell was instructed to settle the Texas-Mexico boundary dispute, negotiate outstanding debts of United States citizens against Mexico, and offer Mexico four boundary adjustments in lieu of cash payments of $50 million for California and New Mexico. Slidell arrived in Mexico City in December. Herrera refused to accept the American minister's credentials for fear that receiving the American diplomat would lead to a popular uprising.12

Mexican President Herrera was assailed by his nation's archconservatives, as well as by the liberals led by Valentín Gómez Farías, for his lack of political
leadership. Disunity provided opportunity for Mexico's archconservatives. On January 2, 1846, General Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga and his Army of the North, the largest in Mexico, entered Mexico City and ousted Herrera from office, claiming that Herrera was compromising Mexico's honor by "conspiring with the enemy" concerning Texas. Paredes called his like-minded generals together, and the junta selected him as president of Mexico. This abrupt change in government ended work in the Mexican Congress on the proposal to mortgage Church property to defend the nation's northern territories. The armed demonstrations and further diplomatic bickering between Mexico and the United States that preceded open hostilities ended as Paredes plunged Mexico into war.13

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

On January 13, 1846, President Polk, after months of negotiations with Mexico to buy Texas, ordered General Zachary Taylor to advance to the Rio Grande. Taylor, who had fought with distinction in the War of 1812, ordered his three-thousand-strong army of occupation encamped near Corpus Christi to assert American sovereignty over the disputed Nueces strip at Laredo, near to present-day Brownsville opposite Matamoros, Mexico. On March 27, Taylor set his troops to building an earthen fortress named Fort Texas. The news of the American invasion of Mexico set off an intense nationalist response among Mexico's liberals and conservatives. They saw this action as an invasion of Mexican territory. President Paredes refused to meet Slidell, who was asked to leave Mexico. The Mexican president then ordered five thousand Mexican soldiers commanded by General Mariano Arista north to Matamoros.14

On April 23, Paredes announced that Mexico had begun a defensive war against the United States. Two days later, on the twenty-fifth, General Arista dispatched 1,600 Mexican soldiers on patrol across the Rio Grande. The Mexicans encountered a company of U.S. dragoons led by Captain Seth Thornton. A firefight broke out in which American soldiers rode into an ambush and were cut to pieces. Sixteen Americans were killed. Greatly outnumbered by the Mexicans, the remainder of the Americans surrendered, including Captain Thornton. The Mexicans took the American officer and his men prisoner and held them in Matamoros. The subsequent Thornton Affair, or Thornton Skirmish, became the primary reason that President Polk asked for a state of war against Mexico. Taylor sent a message to Washington that war with Mexico had begun. Mexico had invaded American territory; rather, the United States had provoked an attack in territory it claimed.15 Once on the battlefield the Americans would deliver heavy volumes of lethal artillery fire and every time outmaneuver the numerically superior Mexican forces.

On the morning of May 3, Mexican artillery batteries in Matamoros began bombarding Fort Texas. The subsequent battles of Palo Alto north of Brownsville and Resaca de la Palma opposite of Matamoros were the first real challenges of the Americans and were easily won by them. At Palo Alto Taylor's huge cannons tore at the Mexican lines, causing numerous casualties, and at the Battle of Resaca American troops engaged Mexican soldiers in furious hand-to-hand combat and
In politically tumultuous Mexico, dissensions stirred against Paredes. On May 7 at the Mexican Pacific port of Mazatlan, an expeditionary force scheduled for duty in California had been swept up in the anti-Paredes rebellion led by liberals calling for a return of Santa Anna, who was in Cuba. On May 20, the pro-liberal military commander at Guadalajara joined the rebellion. Liberals also organized against Paredes in the states of Guanajuato, Zacatecas, Durango, and Puebla.

Mexico broke off diplomatic relations with the United States, and President Polk used this snub as a cause for war. On May 7, one day after meeting with John Slidell, the president received General Taylor’s report that American soldiers had been killed by Mexican troops near Matamoros. Polk now had his reason for war. On the eleventh, the president’s message asked for a declaration of war in response to Mexico’s initiation of hostilities. “Mexico has invaded our territory and shed American blood on the American soil,” the president asserted. Two days later, on May 13, the U.S. Congress declared war on Mexico. Anti-expansionists were outraged at the turn of events; they believed the United States was bullying a weak neighbor and making a blatant land grab. Their voices were quickly drowned out by the overwhelming support from Americans who rallied behind Polk’s war of conquest.

THE AMERICAN OCCUPATION OF NEW MEXICO

The territorial claim of the United States to New Mexico was strategic; trade with Mexico’s interior provinces passed through it, and New Mexico also provided an overland connection to California’s Pacific ports. Unlike California and Texas, New Mexico had large Mexican and Indian populations. Political factionalism along conservative and liberal lines also characterized New Mexico. Because of its dependence on American trade, money, and arms in fighting nomadic Indians, the pro-American faction at first offered little resistance to the American armies when they arrived in New Mexico in 1846. On the other hand, mostly poor Spanish-speaking and Indian residents made up the conservative faction who wanted no foreign intervention in New Mexico’s internal affairs. This anti-American group produced the only organized resistance in Mexico’s northern territories against the American army of occupation.

New Mexico’s sixty-five thousand Spanish-speaking and Indian population was concentrated along the Rio Grande. The Rio Abajo, New Mexico’s southern region, was home to the ricos. These elites controlled most of the land, the livestock, and a considerable portion of the Santa Fe trade. The inhabitants of the Rio Arriba, New Mexico’s northern region, were poor subsistence farmers and ciboleros—the vecinos, who traded with various Indian groups. Unlike California, the division of the more populous New Mexico into the Rio Arriba and Rio Abajo and the disparities between rich and poor were based essentially on distinct class differences and on a cash nexus. In any case, the Americans, as did...
their national leaders, looked down on and despised all the Mexicans as an inferior race, because the whole concept of Manifest Destiny rested on a foundation of racism. Many New Mexico ricos had become less dependent on Mexico than on Americans for trade, of which they controlled over one-third. Their wealth was derived from tax revenues totaling more than 70 percent of New Mexico's budget, assessed on the annual half-million-dollar Santa Fe trade, or else came from the production of trade goods. American traders complained to Washington about the import duties on goods, as well as the special taxes and forced loans. They filed claims against the Mexican government despite the fact that some averted taxes because they had become Mexican citizens, formed partnerships with New Mexico's ricos, or married into the ricos families. The ricos profited from the growth of American trade, but that trade had eroded the economic standing of the vecinos. 

Beat men by poverty, the vecinos produced market goods and traded with the Indians while their women worked for wealthy New Mexicans and American households as servants, laundresses, and seamstresses. Moreover, although lacking weapons and horses, the vecinos were the main offense against Indian raids. They were alienated by the elite, who could not be entirely trusted, and bitter at their treatment by these privileged members of New Mexican society. Pueblo Indian resentment had likewise been growing.

Upon the initiation of hostilities with Mexico, President Polk assigned General Stephen Watts Kearny to command the newly created Army of the West. Kearny's orders were clear: march to Santa Fe, secure the territory and establish a garrison and civil government, and then march on to California, where he was to follow the same process. The Americans in California were "well disposed towards the United States," claimed Secretary of War William L. Marcy and other officials in Washington. Their assertions were based on the fact that the United States helped the Americans in California to revolt (the Bear Flag Rebellion) and proclaim themselves a republic, as the Americans had done in Texas. And, like the Americans in Texas, many in the California territory were there illegally, did not partake in California's social and political life, and as a white race believed they were inherently superior to the California Mexicans and Indians, who soon became targets of escalating Anglo racism.

James W. Magoffin, Kearny's civilian agent, was sent to New Mexico one week ahead of the American troops to arrange a treaty with the ruling New Mexicans. Magoffin was accompanied by Lieutenant Phillip St. George Cook and a small dragoon escort. A successful Santa Fe merchant and close friend of Governor Manuel Armijo, Magoffin had been instructed to convince Armijo, Diego Archuleta, and other New Mexican officials to surrender. Merchant Manuel Alvarez, American consul and commercial agent, also spoke with Armijo to persuade him to surrender. American newspapers had started a black propaganda campaign against Governor Armijo aimed at persuading the American public that he was the typical dishonest, depraved, gutless Mexican. Magoffin offered the governor a large sum of money as an incentive to hand over New Mexico to the United States. Armijo, waiting for Mexican reinforcements from Durango and Chihuahua, balked.
The American occupation of New Mexico met immediate resistance from the New Mexicans, as they rose up when American forces arrived. Up to four thousand Spanish-speaking and Indian volunteers, draftees, and professional soldiers had converged on Santa Fe to fight the Yankee invaders but then suddenly dispersed. The reason was that Governor Armijo stifled resistance, even though he had publicly declared he would meet and battle the Army of the West at Apache Canyon, east of the capital at Santa Fe. Armijo assembled his militia, presidial troops, and a squadron from Veracruz, but he lost the will to fight the Americans, claiming that they were too powerful and that it would be futile to engage them. Armijo then fled to Albuquerque and from there to El Paso and on to Mexico City. Prior to his departure, the shrewd and greedy coward sold all his business interests and confiscated the Church’s treasury funds. General Kearny took possession of Santa Fe without firing a shot.

The Army of the West under Kearny’s command marched into New Mexico unopposed and raised the stars and stripes. Kearny established a military command and promised the New Mexicans to honor their civil and religious rights. The general proclaimed, “It is enjoined on the citizens of New Mexico to . . . pursue uninterrupted their peaceful avocations. So long as they continue in such pursuits they . . . will be protected . . . in their property, their persons, and their religion.” The United States easily took possession of territory it had wanted to buy from Mexico. All ties between Mexico and New Mexico were now severed. Many contemporary observers complained that the American soldiers from Missouri did not make a good impression on the New Mexicans because of their public drunkenness and violent behavior. Unruly drunken soldiers roamed the streets of Santa Fe terrorizing the panic-stricken residents. These experiences were not very reassuring to the New Mexicans who had just come under American occupation.

So as to diminish hostility to United States rule, Kearny toured New Mexico announcing to local authorities that the Army of the West had not come as conquerors but to protect and liberate their new subjects. Kearny, however, had to exert control over his men; many remembered the outrages committed five years earlier on the Texans who were part of the disastrous Santa Fe expedition and contemplated inflicting vengeance on the New Mexicans. Kearny promised United States citizenship to all New Mexicans but sternly warned that whosoever took up arms would be hanged. On September 22, 1846, the American general instituted the Kearny Code to govern New Mexico and retained local New Mexicans who swore loyalty to the United States to administer these laws. From this pro-American faction, he appointed American trader Charles Bent as governor, Diego Archuleta as lieutenant governor, Antonio José Otero as chief justice, and Donaciano Vigil as territorial secretary. To protect the New Mexicans from Indian attacks, Kearny sent troops to the Apache, Navajo, and Ute tribes to negotiate peace. He then divided his command into three groups: one under Colonel Sterling Price to occupy New Mexico, a second under Colonel Alexander William Doniphan to take Chihuahua, and the third under his own command headed for California.

In October 1846, Doniphan’s forces headed south to link up with General John E. Wool in Chihuahua, along the way fighting both Indians and Mexicans.
On reaching Brazito on Christmas Day 1846, Doniphan's Missouri troops engaged a Mexican battalion and militia sent from El Paso del Norte to stop their advance. Although outnumbered, the Americans soundly defeated the Mexicans. The half-hour battle won by the Americans gave the United States legal claim to New Mexico. Doniphan's troops took El Paso del Norte and the rest of Chihuahua and then joined forces with General Wool.

Kearny set out for California, leaving Colonel Doniphan in charge in New Mexico to maintain the peace until the arrival of Colonel Price. On October 6, 1846, Kearny met up with Kit Carson, who informed the general that California had already fallen with little opposition to American forces commanded by Robert F. Stockton and aided by John C. Frémont's Volunteer Battalion. Ordering two hundred of his men back to Santa Fe, Kearny pushed on toward California. On November 23, he learned that a revolt had broken out in California in which Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, San Diego, Santa Inés, and San Luis Obispo had fallen to the Mexican Californio rebels, who once more were in control of the whole of southern California. Unfazed by the news, Kearny pushed on. He believed the Californios not to be determined adversaries but poor fighters.

THE 1847 TAOS REVOLT AGAINST AMERICAN OCCUPATION OF NEW MEXICO

Despite their apparent apathy, native New Mexicans and Indians of the Rio Arriba area, resentful of the American occupation and the loss of sovereignty and contact with Mexico, began holding secret meetings to resist the invaders through a general uprising that took shape on December 12, 1846. The conspirators were led by Pablo Montoya and the Indian Tomás Romero. These northern New Mexicans, many who had fought nine years earlier against Mexican governor Albino Pérez to maintain their autonomy, regretted that nothing had been done to stop the American advance. At the core of the unrest was the fear of the insurgents that the registration of land titles would result in further taxation and eventual confiscation of their lands. Moreover, the American merchants Charles Bent and Carlos Beaubien had antagonized the Taos Pueblo Indians with the settlement and development of the Pueblos' communal grazing and hunting lands along the Santa Fe Trail—the Beaubien-Miranda grant—and by trading with the Pueblos' enemies, the Utes, who raided the Pueblos for plunder. Believing the two foreigners, who had purchased large parcels of land, would check their power and privileges, the Catholic clergy urged the rebels to carry out their revolt. December 19 was set as the date to kill Charles Bent and Colonel Sterling Price and drive the Americans from New Mexico. Seizing the artillery at Santa Fe would be the signal for the general revolt. Delays in communication to the outlying areas pushed the day of the revolt to Christmas Eve.

However, New Mexico Secretary Donaciano Vigil, a pro-American, foiled this plan to kill Governor Bent. Conservatives Diego Archuleta and Tomás Ortiz were discovered as the plotters of the murder plan. Archuleta was a military officer and son of Juan Andrés Archuleta, the former military commander of New Mexico;
Ortiz was the brother of the vicar of Santa Fe, Father Juan Felipe Ortiz, and a former mayor of the town. Both men escaped, but the Pino brothers and Manuel Chavez, part of the anti-American cabal, were arrested and later released. On January 5, 1847, Governor Bent issued a proclamation condemning Archuleta and Ortiz and warned residents against further treasonous acts. Bent carefully explained to New Mexicans that private lands were not going to be taxed, stressing that the land registration was intended to make titles more secure, not to rob owners of their property. To emphasize that resistance was futile, the governor announced that Colonel Doniphan had defeated Mexican troops at Brazito. The plotters had been counting on rumors of Mexican victories in Chihuahua, which they thought would bring a sizable force of Mexican soldiers north to New Mexico.

Though Bent quelled the initial revolt, he ignored the growing anti-American sentiment. Unaccompanied by American soldiers, the governor left for Taos, where he met resistance that soon proved fatal to him. Area New Mexicans organized a secret revolt on January 19, 1847, to kill Americans and anyone who collaborated with the occupying forces. The previous night the rebels had murdered and then scalped sheriff Stephen Luis Lee, judge Cornelio Vigil, attorney James W. Leal, and Carlos Beaubien's son Narciso. "It appeared," wrote Colonel Price, "to be the object of the insurrectionists to put to death every American and every Mexican who had accepted office under the American government." The rebels then came after Governor Bent. Lead by Tomás Romero, they went to the governor's house and pounded on the door. Bent asked the angry men what they wanted. They responded: "We want your head, gringo. We do not want for any of you gringos to govern us, as we have come to kill you." Bent begged the insurgents to leave but they ignored his pleas. The rebels wounded Bent, threw him to the floor, scalped him alive in front of his wife and children, and then cut off his head. By ringing the mission church bell at the Taos pueblo, the revolutionists without knowing alerted the Americans to their location.

The four-day open revolt against American occupation spread to longtime resident Simon Turley's distillery near Arroyo Hondo, twelve-miles north of Taos, and it would eventually engulf all of northern New Mexico. Violence between the contending groups of vecinos and Indians and the Americans turned the countryside into a war zone. Fighting commenced on January 20, when the rebels seized the distillery and killed several Americans, including Turley. Terrified, the survivors of the massacre fled and took refuge at the house of the Catholic priest Antonio José Martínez. The report that 1,500 armed New Mexicans and Indians, determined to force a showdown, were advancing on Santa Fe triggered a call to action by the American army and its sympathizers. However, very few American troops were in Santa Fe. Colonel Price, in command of Santa Fe, sent for reinforcements from Albuquerque, calling on Captain Witham Angney's Missouri battalion and a company of New Mexico volunteers led by Colonel Ceran St. Vrain.

By now, Colonel Price had information on the insurgents' movements. Price quickly left Santa Fe with four howitzers, the 1st U. S. Dragoons, the 2nd Missouri Infantry, and the company of New Mexico volunteers to attack Taos. Only the volunteers had mounts. Eighty American troops under the command of Captain Israel R. Hendley defeated two hundred of the popular insurrectionists, led by
local vecino Manuel Cortez at Mora. Hendley was killed in the three-hour battle that claimed the lives of twenty-five insurgents. About two hundred American soldiers, armed with two howitzers under Captain Jesse I. Morin's command, returned to Mora on February 1. In retaliation for rebelling against the new government, the American officer ordered his troops to destroy the village of Mora and burn the surrounding wheat fields. According to the Niles' National Register, "Capt. Mor[n] ... burnt to ashes every house town, and rancho in his path. The inhabitants fled to the mountains. . . ." Another battle took place at La Cañada, where American soldiers killed thirty-six rebels and drove the rest before them to Embudo, twenty-three miles south of Taos. At Embudo the insurgents made another stand but were driven out, sustaining many casualties, including the death of one of their leaders. Between six hundred and seven hundred rebels were concentrated at Taos Pueblo in the mission church, where they fortified themselves against attack.34

Meanwhile, the reinforced American assault force arrived at Taos and immediately launched an attack to break the siege. The American troops cornered the rebels in the Mission Church of San Gerónimo. On February 3, nearly two weeks into the rebellion, artillery pieces opened fire on the mission. The New Mexicans pushed the Americans back. After two hours of shelling, taunted and jeered at by the rebels, the Americans rested and regrouped. Early the next morning, they advanced again.35

Colonel Price posted Captain John Burgwin's dragoons about 260 yards from the western flank of the church. Next, Price ordered the New Mexican volunteers to the opposite side of Taos to prevent the rebels from escaping. The rest of the American troops took positions about three hundred yards from the north wall of the church.36 The artillery batteries pounded away at the enemy. Price ordered the men commanded by Captains Burgwin and Samuel H. McMillan to storm the building. Advancing against heavy fire, the American soldiers climbed onto the church roof and set it on fire. Leading a small team of soldiers, Captain Burgwin entered the corral in front of the church, attempted to force the door open, and was mortally wounded.37

In the meantime, the Americans cut small holes in the western wall of the church and rolled in bombs. Undaunted, the rebels kept up their fire on the Americans. Following an artillery barrage, American soldiers stormed into the smoke-filled building. The rebels were gone. Fifty insurgents who tried to escape capture were shot dead.38

The fighting was constant for a day and a half. Finally on February 5 the guerrilla force broke up and scattered in all directions. One hundred and fifty rebels lay dead and an untold number had been wounded. Fifty-one rebels who attempted to escape were run down and killed by Ceran St. Vrain's "emergency brigade" in fierce, hand-to-hand combat. Price's troops suffered fifty-two casualties. Of the rebel leaders, Tomás Romero and Pablo Montoya were later tried by the American military court for bearing arms against the United States. They were found guilty of treason and received the sentence of death by hanging in accordance with martial law. One of the defendants, Antonio María Trujillo, argued at trial that Colonel Sterling Price had no right to prosecute the insurgents for treason because they
THE AMERICAN OCCUPATION OF CALIFORNIA

The United States had long been interested in acquiring California. This attention took the form of a diplomatic campaign to negotiate purchase of the territory from Mexico to prevent it from selling California to Britain. The sea otter trade, whaling, fine ocean ports, and fertile land generated much American interest in California. In addition, there was the lucrative hide and tallow industry. The years between 1826 and 1848 were exceptionally profitable ones. Six million hides and seven thousand tons of tallow were shipped from California to Boston. The hide trade was centered at San Diego, so its choice harbor was particularly desirable. American interest in California thus rested in its potential to help American merchants gain a greater foothold in the Asian Pacific trade, and this became a primary impetus for California’s contribution to the start of the Mexican War. Settlement of California by Americans was key to its conquest by the United States. These American arrivals began calling for United States intervention to take California away from the indolent Mexicans.

On September 5, 1842, U.S. Naval Captain Thomas C. Jones, stationed offshore at Callao, Peru, received a false message that war with Mexico over Texas had broken out. Jones learned that Mexico had ceded California to England for $7 million, in violation of the Monroe Doctrine, to keep it out of American hands. Concerned that the British would occupy Mexico if rumors about war proved true, Jones sailed for Monterey to stop such an incident. The U.S. naval officer took his fleet north to California, sailing into Monterey Harbor on October 19. Marching to the tunes of “Yankee Doodle” and “The Star Spangled Banner,” the men under Jones’s command seized the presidio and customhouse and took occupation of Monterey, summoning acting civil governor José Alvarado to surrender. Jones’s capture of Monterey was the first action taken to apply the Monroe Doctrine. The next day, Thomas Oliver Larkin, a longtime American resident of Monterey and a future U.S. agent, convinced Captain Jones that the United States and Mexico were not at war. Jones hauled down the U.S. flag, apologized to Mexican authorities, and departed. The fiasco broke up talks between Mexico, the United States, and England concerning California’s international boundaries.

Larkin was under orders from President Polk to encourage the Californios to look to the United States rather than to England and France to best serve their interests. The Yankee merchant and former American consul in California easily won
over Mariano Vallejo and General José María Castro to his cause of making California an American protectorate. California's ranching aristocracy concurred that their future rested with the United States, and together they plotted to make California an independent republic managed by it. This change in Californio sentiment came in response to the activities of John C. Frémont, who was leading an armed topographical corps into California, and to the short-lived Bear Flag Rebellion. Frémont's father-in-law was the powerful senator Thomas Hart Benton of Indiana, an outspoken western expansionist. Frémont had been instructed by President Polk that if war broke out with Mexico he was supposed to secure California for the United States.42

News that the United States had declared war with Mexico arrived late in California, but already there was apprehension that open armed conflict was imminent. In April 1846 a rumor spread among Americans in the Sacramento Valley that several hundred Mexican soldiers were pushing through the area, laying waste to homes, destroying crops, and scattering cattle. On June 10, American settlers from Sutter's Fort revolted against the Mexican government of California. The Bear Flag Rebellion was an attempt to repeat the 1836 Texas revolt and subsequently gain American annexation. Frémont, who had returned to California from Oregon, had organized the rebellion. The Americans invaded the home of Mariano Vallejo, the commandant at Sonoma. The wealthy grantee of the Petaluma and Suscol ranches that took up much of the land between the San Francisco Bay and Sonoma, General Vallejo wanted to break with Mexico. He immediately offered his services to the Americans, but they took him and three other Californio officials to Sutter's Fort, where they were imprisoned for several months under very poor conditions. The rampaging Americans then seized 150 horses from General Castro and proceeded to the town of Sonoma. Joined by additional Americans,
the rebels took more than a dozen inhabitants prisoner and confiscated 18 cannons, 750 arms, and 250 horses, all the while ransacking the homes of California Mexicans and killing some of them. Then, hoisting their makeshift flag with a crudely drawn bear and a star, the Americans proclaimed the "Bear Flag Republic of Independent California."43

Desperately needing money to finance the war against the United States, Mexico authorized Governor Pío de Jesús Pico to borrow $14,000 from the Spaniard Eulogio de Célibis of Los Angeles. Although Californios such as Mariano Vallejo actively supported the Americans, many Californios considered themselves patriotic Mexicans and cast their lot with Mexico. One of these patriots was Andrés Pico, who would lead the fight against the Americans in California. In July 1846, Pico asked the California deputy chamber to give him permission to take command of forces to fight the American invaders. The chamber refused. Issuing orders from Santa Barbara that all citizens in the territory take up arms, Pico raised almost one hundred men and met Castro and his army north of San Luis Obispo. Putting their regional differences aside, the Californios, most notably José María Flores and Andrés Pico, led the resistance against superior American forces.44

Pablo de la Guerra, Salvador Vallejo, and Andrés Pico, n.d.

CREDIT: Original daguerreotype in possession of Mrs. McGethigan, S.F. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California.
After Mexico broke off diplomatic relations with the United States, several American naval ships under the command of Commodore John D. Sloat arrived off the coast of California, ending Frémont's Bear Flag Revolt. Sloat's orders were to seize and blockade California's ports once war between Mexico and the United States commenced. On July 2, Sloat led his five warships into Monterey Bay. Learning that the Bear Flag Republic had been declared with likely authority from Washington, on July 6 Sloat ordered sailors and Marines from his warships to land onshore at Monterey. Meeting no resistance, the landing party raised the American flag over the customhouse. In declaring the American occupation of California, Sloat promised protection for the rights of the Californios. Two days later, seventy Marines and sailors from the U.S.S. Portsmouth marched north to Sonoma and declared the annexation of California. The men raised the American flag and then hiked to Sutter's Fort. Sloat sent a message to Governor Pio Pico in Los Angeles. Describing himself as "the best friend of California," Sloat invited "his Excellency" to meet him in Monterey.45

Taking over command from Sloat, Commodore Stockton's naval squadron dropped anchor at other locations off California's coast. On August 17, after receiving news of war between the United States and Mexico, Stockton claimed the towns of San Diego, Los Angeles, and Santa Barbara for the United States.46

THE BATTLES AT MONTERREY AND BUENA VISTA

On July 6 and 7, 1846, as American forces landed in California, U.S. Agent Alexander MacKenzie met with Antonio López Santa Anna in Cuba. MacKenzie told the Mexican general that the United States wanted to buy New Mexico and California. Santa Anna, the consummate dealmaker, said he wanted peace but added that if the United States helped him return to power in Mexico he would agree to the sale. President Polk ordered the U.S. Navy to allow Santa Anna, aboard the British steamer Arab, to cross the blockade and enter Mexico. Veracruz received Santa Anna as a hero, and the savior of the nation proceeded to Mexico City.47

Meanwhile, as American troops were advancing on Monterrey, Mexico, political chaos broke out once more in Mexico City. In August 1846, President Paredes was overthrown and replaced by a coalition of liberals and moderates awaiting Santa Anna's arrival.48

On September 14, 1846, Santa Anna entered Mexico City. One week later, General Zachary Taylor's army of occupation took control of Monterrey. The taking of this Mexican city resounded with the evil of massacre as Texas Rangers systematically slaughtered its Mexicans. Following the American army's victory, volunteer Texas Rangers went through the city and murdered more than one hundred innocent civilians in cold blood. On the heels of this serial massacre and terror, more Ranger atrocities took place. A group of Texans rode into Rancho de San Francisco and selected and bound thirty-six men, and the killing squads executed them with shots through their heads. The Texans enjoyed the violence that they would never consider doing to whites because racism played an integral part in
CHAPTER 3 • Mexican Americans in the Era of War 95

these actions. Notwithstanding this ruthless Texas Ranger conduct, Taylor now held Monterrey and Saltillo, and Mexico’s northern region was under American control.49 When Mexico did not sue for peace after the American victory at Monterrey, Polk responded with a plan for an invasion of Mexico to be led by General Winfield Scott, the great strategist and field commander who had been general in chief of the U.S. Army in 1841. In contrast, although commanding numerically superior forces, Santa Anna was no military strategist and ignored the advice of others. The Mexican general consequently would be outmaneuvered and outfought by the Americans. Santa Anna organized an army, and on September 28 he led 2,500 troops on a 327-mile forced march to San Luis Potosí, where four thousand other Mexican troops were staged. The poorly trained Mexican soldiers had no uniforms, possessed inferior weapons, and had little food. Nearly one-fourth of the Mexican troops had died of hunger, thirst, and exhaustion during their march to Saltillo. Santa Anna’s starving and bedraggled army reached San Luis Potosí on October 8 to face Taylor’s 5,000-man army that arrived nine days later near Saltillo. Santa Anna’s plan was to confront Taylor’s force near Saltillo.50

Additional Mexican troops arrived at San Luis Potosí as part of Santa Anna’s plan to capture Taylor’s army provisions. On February 22 the Battle of Buena Vista began, and by the end of the second day of intense fighting, Taylor had annihilated Santa Anna’s army, forcing them to withdraw in defeat after losing about 2,100 men. Taylor lost 678 men and had 1,500 desertions. In the march back to San Luis Potosí, Santa Anna lost most of his army of 20,000 troops. A Mexican victory at Buena Vista would have allowed the Mexican general to push on to the Rio Grande and perhaps even to the Nueces River, thereby nullifying all American gains of the war. Northern Mexico was now in the possession of American forces.51

On August 7, 1846, Mexican commandant José Castro wrote Commodore Stockton expressing his desire to hold a conference to end hostilities in California. Stockton agreed on the condition that Castro raise the American flag over Los Angeles, declaring the territory under American protection and thus independent of Mexico. Castro refused and ordered the evacuation of the pueblo. Then, on the tenth, Castro and Pio Pico fled for Mexico to get money, reinforcements, and weapons to return California to Mexico. Los Angeles was in the hands of the Americans. Stockton declared martial law and appointed Captain Archibald H. Gillespie military commandant of Los Angeles. Gillespie did not like the Californios; the American officer, who had been with Frémont in northern California, deemed them inferior and cowardly. Gillespie conducted house searches, seized goods, detained residents, and arrested many others for minor offenses. The town’s Mexicans quickly grew to dislike Gillespie’s harsh measures in carrying out martial law in the region. Frémont’s California Battalion of Volunteers’ pillaging as they made their way down to southern California also outraged the Californios.52

The United States had committed only a few men to the occupation of southern California; a forty-eight-man American garrison was stationed at Los Angeles, and there were nineteen American soldiers at San Diego. On September 23, a small force of twenty California Mexicans attacked the American barracks at Los
Angeles. The Mexicans were driven off, but the attack inspired other Mexicans at ranches away from the towns to join the patriotic cause with some fighting on its behalf. The next day a proclamation was issued and signed in Los Angeles by three hundred residents charging that Americans subjugated and oppressed them “worse than slaves.” The proclamation was a call for Californios to take up arms, which they did; they chose Sérbulo Varela and Captain José María Flores as their leaders. The Californios rebelled in the last week of September, forcing Gillespie’s troops to surrender and abandon Los Angeles. A group of Mexican women who had witnessed their families and community repeatedly humiliated by the American soldiers presented the departing and defeated Gillespie with a basket of peaches rolled in cactus needles. The women not only hurled insults at the Americans but also showered them with rage at being abused by the intruders. As commander in chief and governor of California, Flores issued a proclamation calling on all male citizens between the ages of fifteen and sixty to appear for military duty. For their part, women hid Californio soldiers or refused to give information to the American enemy about the whereabouts of others.53

In San Pedro, Gillespie, with a combined force of sailors, Marines, and volunteers, marched back to retake Los Angeles. The Mexican Californios under José María Flores and José Antonio Carrillo constantly harassed the American forces. They killed four Americans and wounded several others in what became known as the Battle of San Pedro. The Americans gave way to the Californios. Meanwhile in Santa Barbara, a band of California Mexicans drove a nine-man American force out of the town.54

The Battle of Dominguez Ranch took place on October 8–9, 1846, when a small force of Californio troops led by José María Flores held off the invasion of Los Angeles by American Marines commanded by Captain William Mervine. The American forces were without artillery or horses and lacked the means for resupply. By running horses across the dusty hills out of gun range and dragging a single small cannon to various sites, Flores and his troops fooled the Americans into thinking they had encountered a large enemy force. The Californios engaged the Americans and killed four and wounded ten others.55

On November 16, American and Mexican forces clashed near Salinas ten miles inland from Monterey Bay, and other small battles broke out elsewhere in northern California. All were won by the Americans. Meanwhile, Kearny’s forces, guided by Kit Carson, arrived in California and took command of the territory.56

The United States had so far encountered relatively little opposition in California. However, the badly outmanned California Mexicans were bent on defending their homeland. On December 6, Andrés Pico’s Presidial Lancers fought Kearny’s tired, unprepared First Dragoons at the Indian village of San Pasqual. The Californios had a small number of firearms acquired from the British; however, it was their famed skills as lancers and their superior horsemanship that helped them defeat the Americans in hand-to-hand combat in the biggest battle of the war in California.57

Kearny dispatched three dragoons to scout Pico’s position in an Indian village in the San Pasqual Valley, led by Lieutenant Thomas C. Hammond and Gillespie’s guide Rafael Machado, a Californio deserter. An Indian approached the
American and told them the whereabouts of Andrés Pico and his men. Alerted to the Americans' presence by an Indian sentry, Pico mobilized his Presidial Lancers for battle. The next day, Kearny headed for the San Pasqual Valley to engage the Californios, who by now numbered 160 men.58

Moving his men to the valley's south rim and aligned with Captain Benjamin D. Moore's squad, Gillespie engaged the Californios. The latter pushed back the American dragoons, captured one of the American artillery pieces, and defeated the Americans in the Battle of San Pasqual. They killed seventeen American soldiers, officers Moore and Hammond, and wounded eighteen others, including Kearny and Gillespie. The Californios suffered eleven wounded and no dead. Realizing that more Americans would soon arrive, Pico quickly moved his men to the western end of the Pasqual Valley.59

The next day, Kearny led his men west along the hillsides to avoid attack by the Californios. In the afternoon the Americans came upon several Indians, who told Kearny that the Californios had just left with their wounded. As Kearny and his men rode away, between thirty and forty of Andrés Pico's men attacked them, but the Americans escaped. On December 8, the Californios agreed on a truce. Pico wanted to exchange an American prisoner for a captured Californian, Pablo Vejar, and Kearny agreed.60

With the Californios cutting off Kearny's path from Stockton's forces at San Diego, Kit Carson and another American volunteered to go to San Diego for aid. Meanwhile, Kearny was in a standoff with the Californios and planned to shoot his way out. As the haggard Americans prepared for battle, they heard Stockton's army approaching and shouting "Americans!" The Californios also heard the reinforcements arrive, and, firing one last shot, they disappeared. This symbolized the end
of the battle, the worst defeat for American forces during the Mexican-American War. Kearny, in his report to the army adjutant general in Washington, praised the Californios as “well mounted and among the best horsemen in the world....” Kearny and his troops marched to San Diego and entered the town on December 12, 1846. Without delay, Kearny and Stockton began planning the reconquest of California.  

American forces left San Diego on December 29, 1846, and marched on Los Angeles to end the revolt. U.S. naval vessels blockaded Mexican ports. On January 8 and 9, 1847, Commodore Stockton, with six hundred sailors, Marines, and volunteers that included General Kearny’s men, fought five hundred Californio Mexicans at the San Gabriel River twelve miles south of Los Angeles. After ninety minutes of ineffective artillery fire and several unsuccessful cavalry attacks against lethal American artillery, Flores conceded the battle and withdrew. The Californios had killed or wounded sixty Americans while losing only seven men.  

On January 9, California Mexicans led by Flores fought the Americans in the Battle of La Mesa. The Mexicans, armed only with lances, almost managed to surround the American force; however, Flores’s cavalry attacks and artillery once again could not stop the advance, and he gave up Los Angeles. Stockton’s combined force of soldiers, Marines, and sailors entered Los Angeles on January 10. Aware of the outcome, a deputation of California Mexicans from Los Angeles approached Stockton’s camp the next morning. The group told Stockton that they would surrender the town to the Americans if Californio property and persons would be respected.  

Flores learned that American forces commanded by Frémont were marching southward to link up with Stockton and Kearny. On January 11, the Americans arrived in the San Fernando Valley and occupied Mission San Fernando. Frémont dispatched Jesús Pico, a cousin of Andrés Pico, to persuade Flores and Manuel Castro to surrender. The two Mexicans responded by turning over command of about one hundred men to Andrés Pico and fleeing to Sonora, Mexico. The Americans were now in control of California and all of northern Mexico.  

On January 13, Andrés Pico met with Frémont at a ranch in Cahuenga Pass, discussed the terms for surrender, and signed the Articles of Capitulation. The Treaty of Cahuenga ended the war in California, surrendered all of California to the United States, and promised to protect the property rights of the California Mexicans. The treaty forgave past hostilities and allowed all the Mexicans to return home on surrendering their arms. It also bestowed American citizenship on the California Mexicans once a treaty of peace was signed by both countries and granted permission to leave to those who wished to go to Mexico. Kearny established a provisional government in California. The Americans were now in possession of all its vital bays and harbors.  

In December 1846, Alexander Doniphan and over eight hundred soldiers left Santa Fe for Chihuahua, Mexico. On February 28, 1847, Doniphan’s soldiers fought and defeated a Mexican force of eight hundred men and the next day marched into Chihuahua unopposed and formally took over the city. In late May, Doniphan’s men joined General Taylor’s forces. Fighting was unduly brutal because
of the criminal conduct of the Texas Rangers, who also hit at the city’s inhabitants and torched and plundered their homes. The pillaging had no purpose other than punishment and terror; it afforded Texans the opportunity to avenge the Alamo and Goliad and to release other strong feelings of resentment against Mexico. Contemptuous of the Mexicans, the Texas Rangers, called los diablos tejanos (Texas devils) by the Mexicans, used vicious guerrilla tactics that showed little regard for civilian lives or property. Commenting on the relentless butchery committed by the Texas Rangers, a contemporary observer noted: “the bushes, skirting the road from Monterrey southward, are strewed with the skeletons of Mexicans sacrificed by these desperados.”

Desperately short of money, Mexico could not continue the war effort without financial help from the Catholic Church. Amid protests from priests and lay people, the Mexican Congress passed two laws to seize Church property. With the support of the Church, creole regiments revolted in what became known as the Polka Rebellion, which was put down by acting president Valentín Gómez Farías. The Polkas refused orders to go to Veracruz to prepare for its defense against a United States invasion. Moderates joined the opposition, but the government imprisoned its leader, Gómez Pedraza. Santa Anna, who had returned to Mexico City, ordered an end to the hostilities. Farías resigned, and Pedro Anaya, one of Santa Anna’s henchmen, replaced him as Mexico’s provisional president. The Catholic Church gave Santa Anna twenty million pesos in exchange for the repeal of the two anticlerical laws.

By now the storm center of the war had shifted from Mexico’s northern provinces to an invasion of Mexico from the east at Veracruz. On March 9, twelve thousand American troops commanded by General Winfield Scott landed south of Veracruz City unopposed. The United States pulverized Veracruz with four days of artillery barrages, and on March 29 the Mexicans surrendered the battered city to the Americans. Mexico gave no sign of a desire for peace, however. News of the American invasion reached Mexico City and triggered a wave of patriotism and calls for national unity. The focus of the war was now on Mexico City and entered its final phase. Santa Anna, the self-styled Napoleon of the West, massed his forces for the defense of the capital.

Skillfully executing his Mexico City campaign, General Scott marched his army toward the capital. On April 17, the Americans met the careless and overconfident Santa Anna and his sick and exhausted army at a narrow pass by the town of Cerro Gordo. The Battle of Cerro Gordo, the quick but messy finale of Santa Anna’s ignominious defeat, saw some of the most destructive fighting of the war. The Americans delivered withering fire into the ranks of the Mexicans, who sustained heavy casualties; Scott’s army killed or wounded about one thousand Mexicans and took three thousand others prisoner. The remainder of Santa Anna’s mauled army fled in disorder, abandoning the dead and wounded. Sixty-three Americans were killed and 353 were wounded. Returning to Mexico City, Santa Ana learned that Mexican forces had been soundly defeated at the Battle of Buena Vista. The Americans tightened the noose on Santa Anna. As the U.S. Army marched toward Mexico City, its residents grew alarmed at the government’s failure to protect the city.
In June, a British delegation arrived at General Scott's headquarters and announced that Santa Anna agreed to surrender and bring an end to the war on the condition that the United States halt its advance on Mexico City and send him $10,000 to bribe members of the Mexican government. Santa Anna decided to dupe the Americans; the opportunist and wily Mexican general received the money but had other plans.58

On August 7, General Scott started for Mexico City with 10,700 men, half of whom were untrained volunteers. Santa Anna, leading a tattered army of 7,000 soldiers and volunteers, marched to a fortified hill seven miles east of Mexico City. On August 20, a major battle unfolded. Scott launched his attack, and the victorious Americans inflicted heavy losses on the Mexicans; they killed 700 and took more than 800 prisoners, including four generals, while losing only 60 dead or wounded.71

Flush with victory, General Scott's army reached Chapultepec Castle two miles southwest of Mexico City on September 12 and began shelling it. The next day the fierce artillery bombardment resumed, followed by an assault to drive the Mexicans from the summit. The Americans poured fire into the Castle. More than eight hundred Mexican soldiers, joined by forty-three young academy cadets, made a valiant stand. Rather than surrender, the cadets, in hand-to-hand combat, fought to their deaths. This disastrous defeat put Mexico firmly under American control. The Mexico City Council summoned General Scott to parlay for the safety of the city's residents. After Mexico surrendered on September 13, the people staged a popular uprising against the American occupiers. Outraged Mexicans armed mostly with stones attacked American forces as they entered the city, which was captured on September 15. Sixteen months after the United States declared war on Mexico, the American army occupied Mexico City. The army remained there for nine months during the peace negotiations between the United States and Mexico. In a final act of defiance, General Santa Anna opened all the jails upon leaving Mexico City, resulting in total chaos and pillaging. Following the government's abandonment of Mexico City, many of its populace began to see the American occupation force as a protector. Some Mexicans cursed Santa Anna with almost as much vehemence as they had damned the Americans with.72

Santa Anna, at the head of an army of around 5,700 men, fled Mexico City. His exhausted and frightened army disintegrated before he reached Puebla, and Santa Anna took up residence in the town of Tehuacán. On January 23, 1848, Texas Rangers arrived to capture the Mexican general, but he had slipped away two hours earlier. The United States gave Santa Anna safe passage to Jamaica and exile. The two-year war between the United States and Mexico was over. Mexico suffered tremendous casualties, an estimated 20,000 soldiers killed. The United States lost 1,721 men killed in combat and tallied 11,550 deaths from other causes, mainly disease. A peace treaty was signed by Nicolas P. Trist with Mexican officials at the town of Guadalupe Hidalgo outside Mexico City on February 2, 1848. However, the last confrontation between American and Mexican forces took place on March 16, 1848. Disregarding reports of the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo as insufficient evidence that the Mexican War had ended, General Sterling Price moved his Missouri Volunteers to Santa Cruz de Rosales in Chihuahua,
CHAPTER 3 • Mexican Americans in the Era of War 101

Mexico. Here, American soldiers disobeyed Price’s order to cease their fire and, driven by racism, savaged the Mexicans.73

THE ENDURING PARADOX: THE TREATY OF GUADALUPE HIDALGO

With the war ended, Mexico established a provisional government at Querétaro. Many Mexicans wanted to continue fighting the United States so as to destroy the Mexican army, discredit the Catholic Church, and thereby institute social reforms. In November, Mexico’s government had enough support to establish its legitimacy. Receiving word that the United States was proposing a total annexation of Mexico, the Mexican nation’s newly elected president, Pedro María Anaya, commenced negotiations with the United States.74

Since the summer of 1847, the debate in the United States had centered on how much of Mexico to annex. An unbounded jingoism by journalists and politicians underscored a strong “all Mexico” movement, demanding the annexation of all of Mexico. Abolitionists fought for the exclusion of slavery from any territory. The Wilmot Proviso stipulated that none of the territory acquired from Mexico should be open to slavery or involuntary servitude. A late attempt to add the Wilmot Proviso to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was blocked, however. American racism saved Mexico. Senator’s members responded to aroused racist passions: the United States should not admit more Indians or mixed-race Mexican Catholics into the American body politic. “Ours is the government of the White man,” John C. Calhoun told the Congress. Calhoun, a state’s-rights champion and ardent expansionist who as U.S. Secretary of State in 1845 helped secure the annexation of Texas, added that to place nonwhites on an equal footing with white Americans would be a “fatal error.” Congress backed the call for the United States to take over Mexico’s northern territories because of their sparse population of nonwhites. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo would be ratified without calling for the annexation of additional Mexican territory populated by people deemed a mongrel race.75

Negotiations between the United States and Mexico took place from February 1847 to February 1848. The two countries agreed that the international boundary would follow the course of the Rio Grande from the Gulf of Mexico to present El Paso. From El Paso the boundary would go up to the Gila River and then to the Colorado River. From that point the international boundary ran straight across to the Pacific Ocean at the thirty-second parallel.76 The United States agreed to pay Mexico $15 million for New Mexico and California, to assume responsibility for $3 million dollars in claims by U.S. citizens against Mexico, and to relieve Mexico’s debt to the United States. Mexico turned over 55 percent of its land and was given a guarantee of rights for its citizens who had been living in these areas and assured that the United States would prevent Indian attacks across the new border into Mexico. It was the largest land grab since the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. President Polk received the treaty on February 19, 1848, which the U.S. Senate ratified on March 10 after considerable contentious debate. Mexico’s Congress ratified the treaty on March 30, though after much deliberation; no Mexican official wanted to
be held responsible for the loss of so much of Mexico’s territory through war. The United States had fulfilled its Manifest Destiny. 77

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo stipulated that all the estimated one hundred thousand non-Indian inhabitants who did not leave Mexico’s former northern territory within one year would become American citizens. Although some Mexicans returned to Mexico, most chose to remain in the United States. Articles 8 and 9 of the treaty obliged the United States to protect these new American citizens and guarantee their civil rights, including their right to retain their language, religion, and culture. 78

The Mexican War and the impact of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo resulted in further losses of land and civil rights by Tejanos. Things proved much worse for New Mexicans, though the treaty clearly guaranteed that all of the land rights enjoyed by its Spanish-speaking inhabitants under Mexican rule would be respected by the United States. Much of the land in New Mexico was reserved as commons. Through the U.S. Senate’s elimination of Article 10, related to the validity of Mexican land grants, many inhabitants of the newly acquired territory lost their lands held in common. Moreover, neither the territorial courts of New Mexico nor the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the common property rights of New Mexicans under the treaty. 79 The American system of land ownership involved accurate surveys and detailed titles and deeds of transfer. In contrast, the Mexican land system was imperfect or unsubstantiated by legal documents, and land grant titles were deposited and recorded in Mexico or in Spain. 80 Consequently, many Mexican Americans could not produce legal title to the lands they owned. The United States established a land claims court, but much of the lands owned by Mexican Americans passed into the public domain for lack of adequate documentation of ownership. The story was the same throughout the Southwest. Utilizing both legal and illegal means, Americans soon dispossessed-Mexican Americans of their land. Furthermore, disputed land claims were tied up in the courts for decades and were often decided in favor of Anglo ranching and mining interests. 81

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo officially ended the war, but it failed to protect Californio property rights as the Treaty of Cahuenga had promised. Moreover, California beckoned: several weeks before Mexico relinquished California to the United States, gold was discovered at John Sutter’s mill in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. The gold discovery brought thousands of Americans and Mexicans, in addition to interlopers from around the world, to northern California. Racist mob violence broke out as Yankee gold seekers descended on the diggings. The California gold rush produced a decade of turbulence and bloodshed. Anglo-American xenophobia, nativism, and racism were a result of the recent war with Mexico, widespread anti-Catholicism, and competition between American miners and the more experienced polyglot mixture of South American, Mexican, and Chinese miners. Vigilante justice was meted out through hangings, floggings, ear cropping, head shaving, branding, and banishment. The gold rush coincided with industrialization and the formation of the working class in the United States. Anglo-American resentment against slavery as unfair competition with free labor was played out in campaigns against the Mexican miners, whose servitude to their creditors was associated with the master-slave relation. Despite protests by
In April 1851, under the Compromise of 1850, the New Mexico and Utah territories were formed from the rest of the Mexican cession. Because the Spanish-speaking New Mexicans were residents of a United States territory, they were denied full citizenship rights: they could not vote for their governor or for the President of the United States, decisions by the elected officials required federal approval, and they lacked an independent judiciary. Texas gained thirty-three thousand square miles of New Mexico territory and gave up its claims to New Mexico in exchange for the payment of its national debt by the United States government.

A mapping error resulted in a dispute between the United States and Mexico over the location of the border between New Mexico and Mexico. President Franklin Pierce, an expansionist who favored southern interests, had secretly instructed U.S. Minister to Mexico James Gadsden, a South Carolina railroad president, to buy enough territory from Mexico for a railroad to the Gulf of California. Under the treaty provisions a joint Mexican-American commission undertook the task of establishing an international boundary for the two nations. John B. Weller was chief U.S. delegate to the boundary commission. Before meeting with Mexican boundary officials in San Diego, Weller collected information on the metals and flora and fauna in the disputed territory. He had also been instructed to map and recommend future sites for a railroad, road, or canal. United States topographical engineers advised Gadsden that the most direct route for a transcontinental railroad line would be south of the United States boundary. Gadsden began to plan to have the federal government acquire title to the necessary territory from Mexico.

After the war the Mexicans of the Southwest experienced an increase in violence as Comanches, Kiowas, Apaches, and other Indians attacked Mexican settlements in cross-border raids. For example, in 1850, eight hundred Comanches raided Laredo, Texas. Raids claimed thousands of lives and depopulated much of the countryside. Despite diplomacy and the stationing of two thousand American soldiers in the Southwest, Indian marauding could not be controlled. Texas eventually drove all the Indians into the Oklahoma Indian Territory. In New Mexico and Arizona, the Navajo, Apache, and other Indian groups survived, whereas in California, disease, battles, and genocide eliminated most of the Indian population. Those California Indians who survived faced virtual enslavement because they were bound to compulsory labor through the 1850 Act for the Government and Protection of Indians. Contributing to the instability of Indian–Mexican relations was the migration to Indian lands of Americans, many of them avowed Indian haters.

The difficult task of regulating the hostile Indian frontier was a matter of importance. Many Mexicans in the north had favored annexation to the United States because American forces were protecting their properties from the incursion of Apaches, Comanches, and Navajos. Long and bloody warfare between New Mexicans and Indians in the territory marked the nineteenth century. The Indians had taken advantage of the chaos caused by the Mexican War and the transfer afterward of New Mexico territory to the United States to once more savage their old enemies and enjoy the spoils of raiding. Despite U.S. protection, native New Mexicans succumbed to the increased Indian raiding that extended into Mexico.
CHAPTER 3 • Mexican Americans in the Era of War

In the 1840s, sectionalism between slave and free states dominated American politics, as did an overriding ideology of expansionism. The United States claimed to be destined by divine Providence itself. The presumption of Manifest Destiny was the orienting principle of American foreign policy. The United States would employ military aggression against Mexico, a nation of darker breeds that dared oppose its territorial imperial design. As one historian noted, the Mexican War “provided America with a venue to confront their own internal conflicts as they fought a war ... in the name of white, Anglo-Saxon supremacy.”

Mexico did not enthusiastically support the war because its citizenry seemed more concerned with state versus national citizenship. Lacking a sense of nationalism made it difficult to raise military troops. Mexicans eventually fought for a nation that was weak and whose government was riven by factional intrigue. Moreover, regions most distant from Mexico City, such as Alta California and New Mexico, offered little opposition to the American invading forces during the war. Some lost faith that Mexico’s leadership would ever be able to govern and believed that the United States was stronger and hence more likely to provide security. The reason was that regional economies by now were dependent on competition over land and livestock grazing versus buffalo hunting placed pressure on many nomadic Indian tribes, forcing them to raid or starve. The use of volunteer forces to carry out U.S. Indian extermination policy worsened conditions further. These volunteers were paid with Indian captives, which only prolonged the fighting. Native New Mexicans in the territorial militia did most of the fighting against the Ute and Jicarilla Apache Indians in the north, the Navajos to the west, and the Gila Apaches in the south. A similar situation existed in the territory of present-day Arizona. The United States asked Mexico to participate in the pacification of the Indians because some of the tribes used Mexico as a safe haven to run raids across the borders. The Indian threat strained relations between the two nations until the 1870s.

Mexico remained in political turmoil. Its army destroyed, the nation suffered from economic deprivation and was wracked by widespread Indian attacks, banditry, raids by American fortune seekers, racial warfare in the Yucatán, and more rebellions and threats of secession. Conservatives in Mexico called for General Antonio López Santa Anna, still viewed by many Mexicans as a hero, to return and restore order. In 1853, Santa Anna became President of Mexico for the eleventh time, but his stay in office would be short.

War-torn Mexico urgently needed money and wanted a settlement of its Indian claims against the United States. In 1853, James Gadsden paid Santa Anna $10 million for a narrow strip of land south of the Gila River in what is now southwestern New Mexico and southern Arizona. It included the rich Santa Rita mines. By a narrow margin, the Senate ratified the Gadsden Purchase in June 1854. The United States acquired nearly thirty million acres for about thirty-three cents an acre. The deal was so unpopular in Mexico that it forced Santa Anna into exile.

CONCLUSION

In the 1840s, sectionalism between slave and free states dominated American politics, as did an overriding ideology of expansionism. The United States claimed to be destined by divine Providence itself. The presumption of Manifest Destiny was the orienting principle of American foreign policy. The United States would employ military aggression against Mexico, a nation of darker breeds that dared oppose its territorial imperial design. As one historian noted, the Mexican War “provided America with a venue to confront their own internal conflicts as they fought a war ... in the name of white, Anglo-Saxon supremacy.”

Mexico did not enthusiastically support the war because its citizenry seemed more concerned with state versus national citizenship. Lacking a sense of nationalism made it difficult to raise military troops. Mexicans eventually fought for a nation that was weak and whose government was riven by factional intrigue. Moreover, regions most distant from Mexico City, such as Alta California and New Mexico, offered little opposition to the American invading forces during the war. Some lost faith that Mexico’s leadership would ever be able to govern and believed that the United States was stronger and hence more likely to provide security. The reason was that regional economies by now were dependent on...
international trade. New Mexico was a by-product of a quarter century of trade with Americans. Local elites such as New Mexico’s Manuel Armijo sought to maintain trade with United States markets. Armijo and other ricos collaborated with the Americans and rejected attempts at popular resistance.94

American immigration accounted for population growth in the newly acquired territory. The military conquest of sparsely settled New Mexico and California was easily accomplished. In California, there was little resistance to American conquest and eventual annexation, because the general belief was that nothing would be lost in severing ties with Mexico. Moreover, many Californio elites thought positively of the American democratic form of government. Ultimately, the Californios failed to stop American immigration to California, to take control of the Indians, or to secure money, arms, and troops from Mexico to fight the war against the United States. The gold rush was the first real contest for California. A northern and southern phase of land dispossession took place in the breakup of the California ranches. The Mexicans of California were brought under the heel of Yankee power, prejudice, and vigilantism and ultimately fell into “legislative and political decline.”95 Texas withdrew its claims to the Rio Grande as its western boundary in return for the United States assuming its $10 million debt.

The end of the Mexican War and implementation of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 ended the era of the Spanish and Mexican frontier. The American conquest of the Southwest produced local, regional, and national patterns of change and development, but it took the United States a long time to consolidate its victory. Control over Texas and California had to be affirmed; there was the question of settling the deepening sectional controversy; and the numerous warring Indian nations had to be subdued. California was admitted as a free state to offset the earlier annexation of Texas, a slave state, whereas the New Mexico Territory soon became embroiled in the sectional controversy.96

California and Texas developed rapidly, whereas New Mexico and Arizona would remain territories for a longer period owing to the large Mexican American and Indian populations deemed unfit for American citizenship. New forms of government were put in place in the former Mexican territories, and new patterns of commerce replaced the older ones. The Southwest was remade in profound ways after the Mexican War’s end. The war had disrupted old ways of life and replaced them with new social relationships. One thing was certain. The Mexican Americans of the Southwest found themselves strangers in a strange land, a minority struggling for social acceptance in a sea of Americans.

NOTES

3. Ibid., 243–244, 249; Weber, Mexican Frontier, 272. The secessionists named their separate nation La república mexicana del norte (the Mexican Republic of the North). Its
CHAPTER 3 • Mexican Americans in the Era of War 107


24. Reséndez, Changing National Identities, 239, 251–252; Richard Bruce Winders, Crisis in the Southwest: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle over Texas (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2002), 102; Eisenhower, So Far from God, 209; Lamar, Far Southwest, 1846–1912, 54–55; Simmons, Little Lion of the Southwest, 91–93.


32. Reséndez, Changing National Identities, 254; Eisenhower, So Far from God, 237; Lamar, Far Southwest, 1846–1912, 60.


34. Niles’ National Register, April 10, 1847; Eisenhower, So Far from God, 231–238; U.S. Congress, Message from the President of the United States to the Two Houses of Congress, 521–522; Lamar, Far Southwest, 1846–1912, 60; Simmons, Little Lion of the Southwest, 104–105.

35. Eisenhower, So Far from God, 238; Simmons, Little Lion of the Southwest, 105.

36. Eisenhower, So Far from God, 238.

37. Ibid., 238–239; Simmons, Little Lion of the Southwest, 105.

38. Eisenhower, So Far from God, 239.

39. Reséndez, Changing National Identities, 39–40; Eisenhower, So Far from God, 239–240; Michael McNierney, Taos, 1847: The Revolt in Contemporary Accounts (Boulder, CO:
CHAPTER 3 • Mexican Americans in the Era of War 109


47. Ibid., 115.

48. Ibid., 114.


56. Ibid., 222; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 179, 225.


67. Henderson, Glorious Defeat, 162; Eisenhower, So Far from God, 270–271.


70. Henderson, Glorious Defeat, 169.

71. Ibid., 165–170. With Santa Anna's forces were 204 deserters from the U.S. army. The deserters were mostly Irish Catholics who had decided that the war with Mexico was in part a religious war of Catholics against Protestants. The Irish formed the Batallón San Patricio (Saint Patrick's Battalion). Among the prisoners taken at the Battle of Chapultepec were men of the St. Patrick's Battalion. Military trials were held, and fifty of them were sentenced to death. General Scott pardoned five of the Irish recruits and reduced the sentences of fifteen others to fifty lashes and the letter D (for desertion) branded on the cheek. The remaining thirty were hanged on September 12. Eisenhower, So Far from God, 341–342.


73. Henderson, Glorious Defeat, 171, 177, 179; Eisenhower, So Far from God, 347, 363, 368. Negotiations for peace actually began before the last battles of the Mexican War were fought. See William Gorenfeld, "The Cowpen Slaughter: Was There a Massacre of Mexican Soldiers at the Battle of Santa Cruz de Rosales? " New Mexico Historical Review 81, no. 4 (2006): 413–440.


78. Henderson, Glorious Defeat, 182; Ceballos-Ramírez and Martínez, "Conflict and Accommodation," 147.


CHAPTER 3 • Mexican Americans in the Era of War  

81. Henderson, Glorious Defeat, 182. In 1904, the Court of Private Land Claims approved only 2 million of the more than 35 million acres of land Mexicans claimed under land titles.
82. Henderson, Glorious Defeat, 182; Griswold del Castillo, Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 67–68; Pitt, Decline of the Californios, 50; Harlow, California Conquered, 281; John Boessenecker, Gold Dust and Gunsmoke (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 1999), 22. In 1849, seven hundred Chinese were in California. By 1850 this number had grown to three thousand, and to ten thousand two years later.
84. The U.S. Congress failed to provide a civil government for California following the end of the Mexican War. A longer period of military government ensued in California before a civil administration could assume control.
86. Harlow, California Conquered, 318.
90. Ceballos-Ramirez and Martinez, "Conflict and Accommodation," 143; Truett, Fugitive Landscapes, 47–48; Hall, Social Change in the Southwest, 215, 217; Simmons, Little Lion of the Southwest, 111–112. Americans didn’t like Article XI of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which held the United States financially liable for Indian raids in Mexico.
94. Francaviglia and Richmond, Dueling Eagles, 99.
95. Haas, "War in California," 341, 344; Pitt, Decline of the Californios, 197.