

Expanding West

1800–1855



Video



Chapter Summary



Spanish Chapter Summary

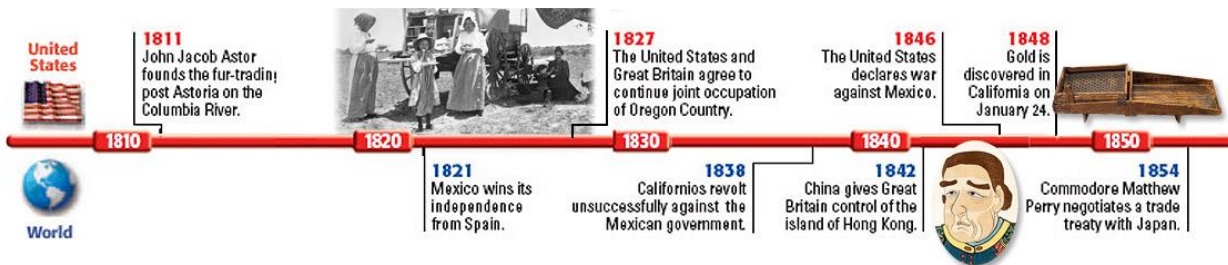


Chapter Time Line



What You Will Learn...

In this chapter you will learn about how the United States expanded west. The country acquired vast amounts of territory in a short time. Lured by land and gold, hundreds of thousands Americans followed trails west in search of a better life. However, many California families, like the one pictured here, had already lived in California for generations.



Section 1

Trails to the West

If YOU were there...

You live in Ohio in 1840. A few months ago, you and your family heard stories about a wonderful land in the Northwest, with sparkling rivers and fertile valleys. You all decide to pull up stakes and head West. You travel to Independence, Missouri, planning to join a wagon train on the Oregon Trail. In Missouri, you're surprised to find hundreds of other people planning to make the trip.

What would you expect your journey West to be like?

BUILDING BACKGROUND Many Americans in the Jacksonian Era were restless, curious, and eager to be on the move. The American West drew a variety of settlers. Some looked for wealth and adventure. Others, like this family on its way to the Northwest, dreamed of rich farmland and new homes.

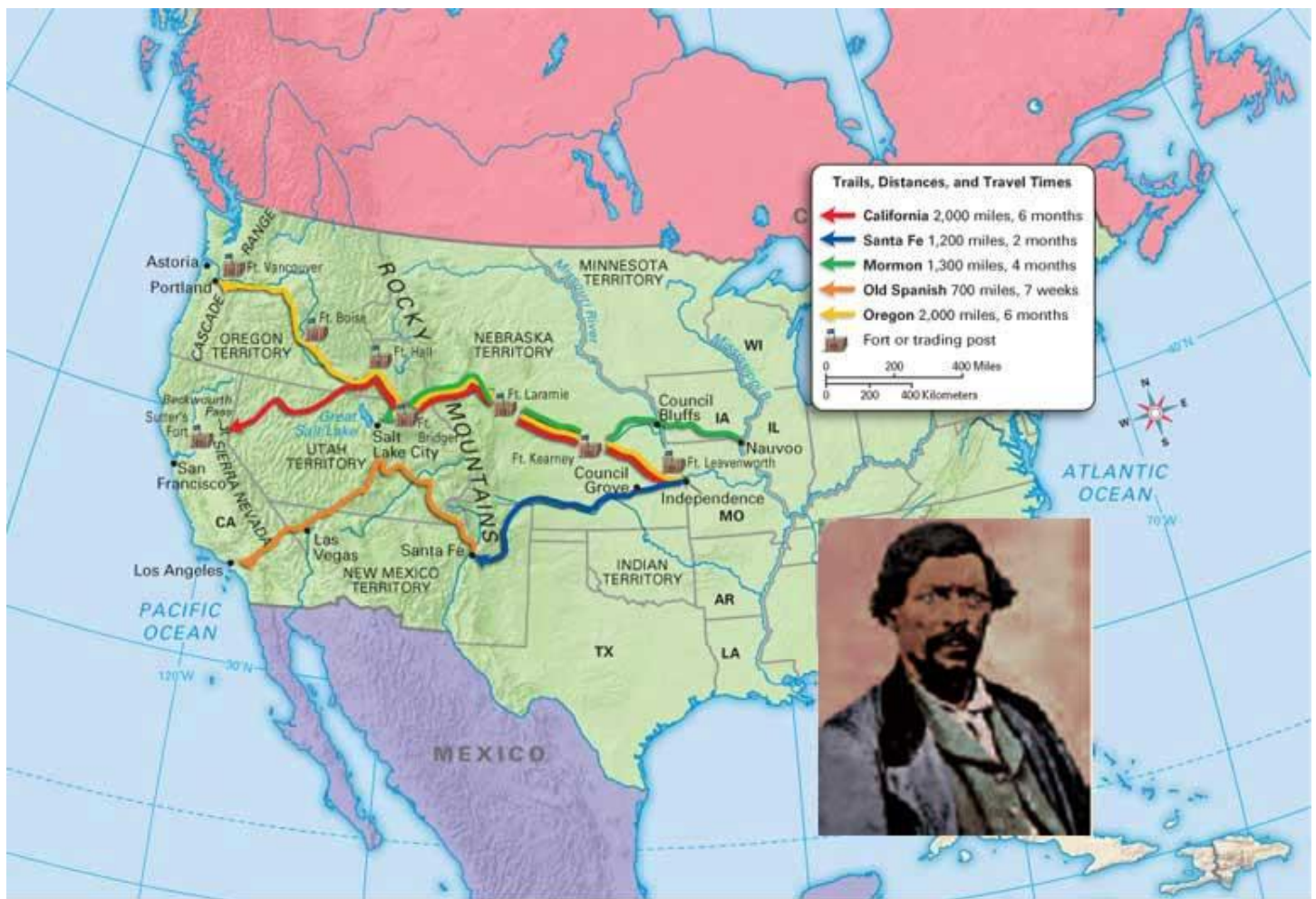
Americans Move West

In the early 1800s, Americans pushed steadily westward, moving even beyond the territory of the United States. They traveled by canoe and flatboat, on horseback, and by wagon train. Some even walked much of the way.

The rush to the West occurred, in part, because of a hat. The “high hat,” made of water-repellent beaver fur, was popular in Europe. While acquiring fur for the hats, French, British, and American companies gradually killed off the beaver population in the East. Companies moved west in search of more beavers. Most of the first non-Native Americans who traveled to the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Northwest were fur traders and trappers.

American merchant [John Jacob Astor](#) created one of the largest fur businesses, the American Fur Company. His company bought skins from western **fur traders and trappers who become known as [mountain men](#)**. These adventurers were some of the first easterners to explore and map the Rocky Mountains and lands west of them. Mountain men lived lonely and often dangerous lives. They trapped animals on their own, far from towns and settlements.

Trails Leading West



(inset) **Jim Beckwourth** was an African American fur trapper and explorer of the West in the early 1800s.

Mountain men such as Jedediah Smith, Manuel Lisa, Jim Bridger, and Jim Beckwourth survived many hardships during their search for wealth and adventure. To survive on the frontier, mountain men adopted Native American customs and clothing. In addition, they often married Native American women. The Indian wives of trappers often worked hard to contribute to their success.

Pioneer William Ashley saw that frequently bringing furs out of the Rocky Mountains was expensive. He asked his traders to stay in the mountains and meet once a year to trade and socialize. This practice helped make the fur trade more profitable. The yearly meeting was known as the rendezvous. At the rendezvous, mountain men and Native American trappers sold their fur to fur-company agents. It was thus important to bring as many furs as possible. One trapper described the people at a typical rendezvous in 1837. He saw Americans, Canadian French, some Europeans, and “Indians, of nearly every tribe in the Rocky Mountains.”

The rendezvous was filled with celebrating and storytelling. At the same time, the meeting was also about conducting business. Western artist Alfred Jacob Miller described how trade was begun in the rendezvous camp.

“The Fur Company’s great tent is raised; the Indians erect their picturesque [beautiful] white lodges; the accumulated [collected] furs of the hunting season are brought forth and the Company’s tent is a...busy place.”

—Alfred Jacob Miller, quoted in *The Fur Trade of the American West*, by David J. Wishart

In 1811, John Jacob Astor founded a fur-trading post called Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia River. Astoria was one of the first American settlements in what became known as Oregon Country. American Indians

occupied the region, which was rich in forests, rivers, and wildlife. However, Britain, Russia, Spain, and the United States all claimed the land. The United States based its claim on the exploration of merchant captain Robert Gray, who had reached the mouth of the Columbia River in 1792.

Mormon Pioneers



This Mormon family left Iowa in 1856 and took the Mormon Trail to Utah. The children walked 1,200 miles on this long and difficult journey.

Recognizing the huge economic value of the Pacific Northwest, the United States made treaties in which Spain and Russia gave up their claims to various areas. The United States also signed treaties with Britain allowing both countries to occupy Oregon Country, the Columbia River, and its surrounding lands.

By the 1840s, the era of American fur trading in the Pacific Northwest was drawing to a close. The demand for beaver furs had fallen because fashions changed. Too much trapping had also greatly reduced the number of beavers. Some mountain men gave up their work and moved back east. Their daring stories, however, along with the treaties made by the U.S. government, inspired other Americans to move West. Lured by rich resources and a mild climate, easterners poured into Oregon Country in the 1840s. These new settlers soon replaced the mountain men on the frontier.

The Oregon Trail

Many settlers moving to Oregon Country and other western areas followed the **2,000-mile-long Oregon Trail, which stretched from places such as Independence, Missouri, or Council Bluffs, Iowa, west into Oregon Country.** The trail followed the Platte and Sweetwater Rivers over the Plains. After it crossed the Rocky Mountains, the trail forked. The northern branch led to the Willamette Valley in Oregon. The other branch went to California and became known as the California Trail.

Traveling the trail challenged the strength and determination of pioneer families. The journey usually began after the rainy season ended in late spring and lasted about six months. The cost, about \$600 for a family of four, was high at a time when a typical worker usually made about \$1.50 per day. Young families made up most groups of settlers. They gathered in wagon trains for the trip. There could be as few as 10 wagons or as many as several dozen in a wagon train.

The wagons were pulled by oxen, mules, or horses. Pioneers often walked to save their animals' strength. They kept up a tiring pace, traveling from dawn until dusk. Settler Jesse Applegate recalled the advice he received from an experienced Oregon pioneer: "Travel, *travel*, TRAVEL...Nothing is good that causes a moment's delay."

Some pioneers brought small herds of cattle with them on the trail. They faced severe hardships, including shortages of food, supplies, and water. Rough weather and geographic barriers, such as rivers and mountains, sometimes forced large numbers of pioneers to abandon their wagons. In the early days of the Oregon Trail, many Native Americans

helped the pioneers, acting as guides and messengers. They also traded goods for food. Although newspapers sometimes reported Native American “massacres” of pioneers, few settlers died during Indian attacks.

The settlers who arrived safely in Oregon and California found generally healthy and pleasant climates. By 1845 some 5,000 settlers occupied the Willamette Valley.

The Santa Fe Trail

The [Santa Fe Trail](#) was another important path west. It led from Independence, Missouri, to Santa Fe, New Mexico. It followed an ancient trading route first used by Native Americans. American traders loaded their wagon trains with cloth and other manufactured goods to exchange for horses, mules, and silver from Mexican traders in Santa Fe.

The long trip across blazing deserts and rough mountains was dangerous. But the lure of high profits encouraged traders to take to the trail. One trader reported a 2,000 percent profit on his cargo. The U.S. government helped protect traders by sending troops to ensure that Native Americans were not a threat.

Mormons Travel West

One large group of settlers traveled to the West in search of religious freedom. In 1830 a young man named Joseph Smith founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in western New York. **The members of Joseph Smith’s church became known as [Mormons](#).** Smith told his followers that he had found and translated a set of golden tablets containing religious teachings. The writings were called the *Book of Mormon*.

Church membership grew rapidly, but certain beliefs and practices caused Mormons to be persecuted. For example, beginning in the 1850s some Mormon men practiced polygamy—a practice in which one man is married to several women at the same time. This practice was outlawed by the church in 1890.

In the early 1830s Smith and his growing number of converts left New York. They formed new communities, first in Ohio, then in Missouri, and finally in Illinois. All three communities eventually failed, and an anti-Mormon mob murdered Smith in 1844. Following Smith’s murder, [Brigham Young](#) became head of the Mormon Church. Young chose what is now Utah as the group’s new home, and thousands of Mormons took the Mormon Trail to the area near the Great Salt Lake, where they prospered. By 1860 there were about 40,000 Mormons in Utah.

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW Some of the first Americans to move West were fur traders and trappers. Settlers soon followed. In the next section you will learn about the Texas Revolution.

Section 2

The Texas Revolution

If YOU were there...

You are the father of a large farm family in Missouri. There is not enough land for everyone, so you're looking for another opportunity. One day, a Mexican government official comes to town. He is looking for people to settle in Texas. The Mexican government is offering generous tracts of land to colonists. However, you have to become a citizen of Mexico and follow Mexican laws.

Would you decide to move your family to Texas? Why?

BUILDING BACKGROUND Spain controlled a vast amount of territory in what would later become the American Southwest. The Spanish built missions and forts in Texas to establish control of that region. But the settlements were far apart, and conflicts with Native Americans discouraged Spanish settlers from moving to Texas. When Mexico became an independent republic, it actively looked for more settlers.

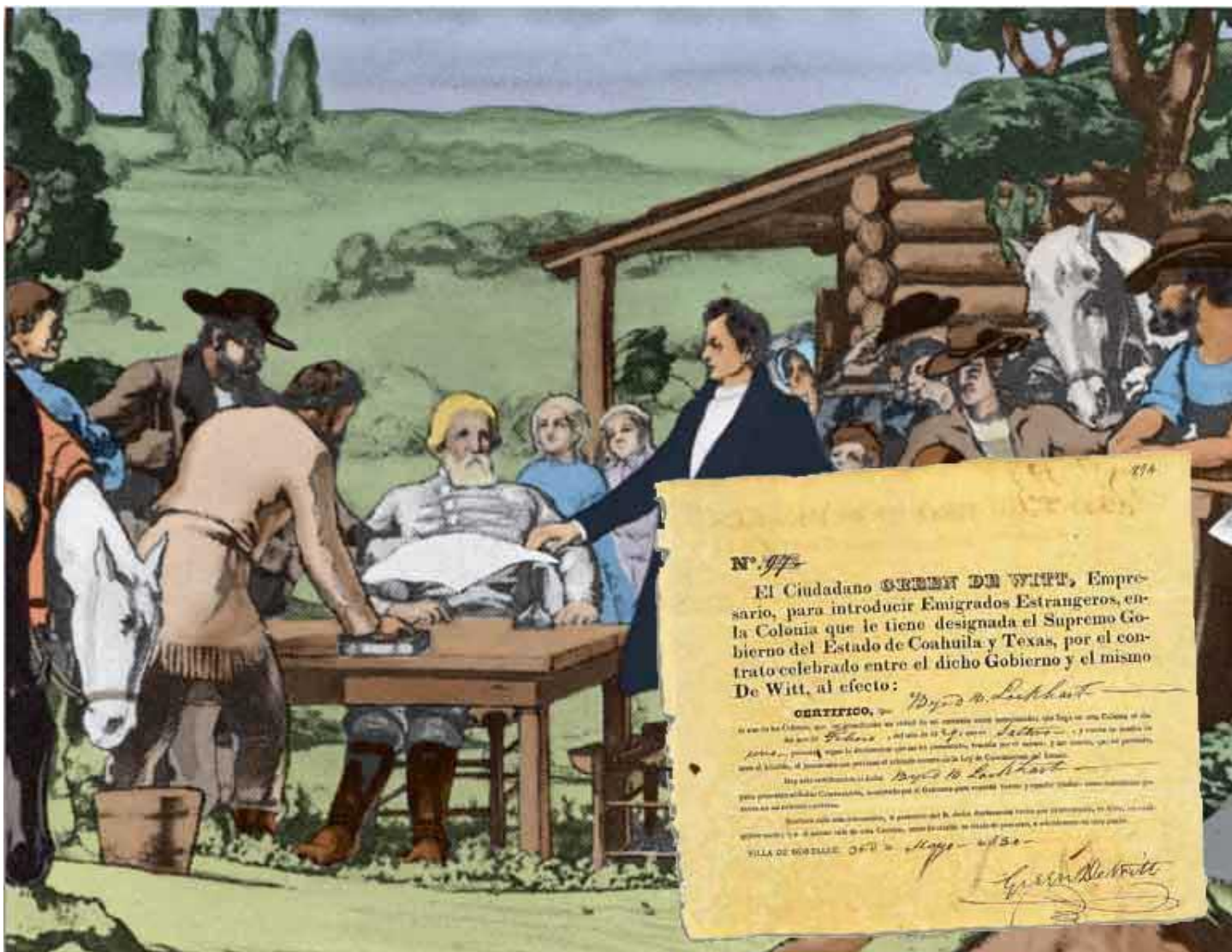
American Settlers Move to Texas

Mexico had a long, unprotected border that stretched from Texas to California. Mexico's Spanish rulers worried constantly about attacks from neighbors. They also were concerned about threats from within Mexico.

Their fears were justified. Mexicans moved to overthrow Spanish rule in the early 1800s. In September 1810 [Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla](#), a Mexican priest, led a rebellion of about 80,000 poor Indians and mestizos, or people of Indian and Spanish ancestry. They hoped that if Mexico became independent from the Spanish monarchy, their lives would improve.

Hidalgo's revolt failed, but the rebellion he started grew. In 1821 Mexico became independent. In 1824, it adopted a republican constitution that declared rights for all Mexicans. The new Mexican government hired [empresarios](#), or agents, to bring settlers to Texas. They paid the agents in land.

Settling Texas



Stephen F. Austin (standing, in black coat) and other settlers were empresarios—they received land from the Mexican government for the purpose of bringing settlers to Texas. Their holdings were guaranteed with a contract like the one below

In 1822, one young agent, [Stephen F. Austin](#), started a Texas colony on the lower Colorado River. The first 300 families became known as the Old Three Hundred. Austin's successful colony attracted other agents, and American settlers flocked to the region.

In exchange for free land, settlers had to obey Mexican laws. But some settlers often **explicitly** ignored these laws. For example, despite the ban on slavery, many brought slaves. Concerned that it was losing control to the growing American population, Mexico responded. In 1830, it banned further settlement by Americans. Angry about the new law, many Texans began to think of gaining independence from Mexico.

Meanwhile, Mexico had come under the rule of General [Antonio López de Santa Anna](#). He soon suspended Mexico's republican constitution and turned his attention to the growing unrest in Texas.

Texans Revolt against Mexico

In October 1835 the Mexican army tried to remove a cannon from the town of Gonzales, Texas. Rebels stood next to the cannon. Their flag read, "Come and take it." In the following battle, the rebels won. The Texas Revolution, also known as

the Texas War for Independence, had begun.

Texas Independence

On March 2, 1836, Texans declared their independence from Mexico. The new Republic of Texas was born. Both the declaration and the constitution that shortly followed were modeled after the U.S. documents. The Texas constitution, however, made slavery legal.

Delegates to the new Texas government chose politician David Burnet as president and Lorenzo de Zavala as vice president. Another revolutionary, Sam Houston, was named to head the Texas army. Austin went to the United States to seek money and troops.

Battle at the Alamo

The Texans' actions angered Santa Anna. He began assembling a force of thousands to stop the rebellion.

A hastily created army of Texas volunteers had been clashing with Mexican troops for months. Under Colonel William Travis, a small force took the town of San Antonio. It then occupied the [Alamo](#), an abandoned mission near San Antonio that became an important battle site in the Texas

Revolution. **Focus On Reading** Volunteers from the United States, including frontiersman Davy Crockett and Colonel Jim Bowie, joined the Alamo's defense.

The rebels, numbering less than 200, hoped to stall the huge Mexican force while a larger Texas army assembled. For almost two weeks, from February 23 to March 6, 1836, the Texans held out. Travis managed to get a message to other Texans through enemy lines:

"I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism, and everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid with all dispatch [speed]...VICTORY OR DEATH."

—William Travis, from a letter written at the Alamo, 1836

Before dawn on March 6, the Mexican army attacked. Despite heavy losses, the army overcame the Texans. All the defenders of the Alamo were killed, though some civilians survived. Following a later battle, at Goliad, Santa Anna ordered the execution of 350 prisoners who had surrendered. Texans were enraged by the massacres.

Battle of San Jacinto

Santa Anna now chased the untrained forces of Sam Houston. Outnumbered, the Texans fled east. Finally, they reorganized at the San Jacinto River, near Galveston Bay. There, the Texans took a stand.

Santa Anna was confident of victory, but he was careless in choosing the site for his camp. On the afternoon of April 21, 1836, while Mexican troops were resting, Houston's forces swarmed the camp, shouting, "Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!"

The fighting ended swiftly. Santa Anna's army was destroyed. **In the [Battle of San Jacinto](#), the Texans captured Santa Anna and forced him to sign a treaty giving Texas its independence.**

The Texas Revolution



An Independent Nation

Sam Houston was the hero of the new independent nation of Texas. The republic created a new town named Houston and made it the capital. Voters elected Sam Houston as president. Stephen F. Austin became secretary of state.

To increase the population, Texas offered land grants. American settlers came from nearby southern states, often bringing slaves with them to help grow and harvest cotton.

Most Texans hoped that the United States would annex, or take control of, Texas, making it a state. The U.S. Congress also wanted to annex Texas. But President Andrew Jackson refused. Jackson was concerned that admitting Texas as a slave state would upset the fragile balance of free and slave states. The President also did not want to have a war with Mexico over Texas.

Finally, Jackson did recognize Texas as an independent nation. France did so in 1839. Britain, which wanted to halt U.S. expansion, recognized Texas in 1840.

The Mexican government, however, did not recognize Santa Anna's forced handover of Texas. For this reason, in 1837 the republic organized the Texas Rangers to guard its long frontier from Mexican and Native American attacks. Finally, in 1844 Texas and Mexico signed a peace treaty.



On March 6, 1836, Texans fought and lost the Battle of the Alamo. A rallying cry for the Texans at the Battle of San Jacinto was "Remember the Alamo!" The single star of the flag represents the Republic of Texas, also called the Lone Star Republic.

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW American settlers in Texas challenged the Mexican government and won their independence. In the next section you will learn about the war between Mexico and the United States.

Section 3

The Mexican-American War

If YOU were there...

Your family are Californios, Spanish settlers who have lived in California for many years. You raise horses on your ranch. So far, you have gotten along with American settlers. But it has become clear that the American government wants to take over California. You hear that fighting has already started between American and Mexican troops.

How might life change under American rule?

BUILDING BACKGROUND Mexican independence set the stage for conflict and change in the West and Southwest. At the same time, American settlers continued to move westward, settling in the Mexican territories of Texas and California. American ambitions led to clashes with Mexico and the people who already lived in Mexico's territories.

Manifest Destiny

“We have it in our power to start the world over again.”

—Thomas Paine, from his pamphlet *Common Sense*

Americans had always believed they could build a new, better society founded on democratic principles. In 1839, writer John O’Sullivan noted, “We are the nation of human progress, and who will, what can, set limits to our onward march?”

Actually, there was one limit: land. By the 1840s the United States had a booming economy and population. Barely 70 years old, the nation already needed more room for farms, ranches, businesses, and ever-growing families. Americans looked west to what they saw as a vast wilderness, ready to be taken.

Some people believed it was America’s **manifest destiny, or obvious fate, to settle land all the way to the Pacific Ocean in order to spread democracy.** O’Sullivan coined the term in 1845. He wrote that it was America’s “manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole continent which Providence [God] has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty...”

Manifest Destiny



John Gast's 1872 painting *American Progress* shows the spirit of manifest destiny leading settlers westward.

In the 1840s and 1850s, manifest destiny was tied up with the slavery issue. If America expanded, would slavery be allowed in the new territories? Several presidents became involved in the difficult issue. Among them was President John Tyler. A pro-slavery Whig, Tyler wanted to increase power of the southern slave states by annexing Texas. His fellow Whigs disagreed.

In 1844, the Whig passed up Tyler and chose Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky as their presidential candidate. At first opposing annexation, Clay changed his mind due to pressure from southern politicians. The Democratic Party chose former Tennessee governor [James K. Polk](#) to oppose Clay. Both candidates strongly favored acquiring Texas and Oregon.

Southerners feared the loss of Texas, a possible new slave state. Others worried that Texas might become an ally of Britain. These concerns helped Polk narrowly defeat Clay.

Acquiring New Territory

President Polk quickly set out to fulfill his campaign promise to annex Oregon and Texas. By the 1820s, Russia and Spain had given up their claims to Oregon Country. Britain and the United States had agreed to occupy the territory together.

As more Americans settled there, they began to ask that Oregon become part of the United States. Polk wanted to protect these settlers' interests. Some politicians noted that Oregon Country would provide a Pacific port for growing United States trade with China.

Meanwhile, Britain and the United States disagreed over how to draw the United States–Canadian border. American expansionists cried "Fifty-four forty or fight!" This slogan referred to the 54°40' north latitude, the line to which Americans wanted their northern territory to extend.

Neither side really wanted a war, though. In 1846 Great Britain and the United States signed a treaty that gave the

United States all Oregon land south of the forty-ninth parallel. This treaty drew the border that still exists today. Oregon became an organized U.S. territory in February 1848.

Texas came next. By March 1845, Congress had approved annexation and needed only the support of the Republic of Texas. Americans continued to pour into Texas. Texas politicians hoped that joining the United States would help solve the republic's financial and military problems. The Texas Congress approved annexation in June 1845. Texas became part of the United States in December. This action angered the Mexican government, which considered Texas to be a "stolen province."

California under Mexico

Though it had lost Texas, Mexico still had settlements in other areas of the present-day Southwest to govern. New Mexico was the oldest settled area, with its capital at Santa Fe. Mexico also controlled present-day Arizona, Nevada, and California.

During early Spanish rule, the mission system had dominated much of the present-day Southwest. Over time, it had become less important there, especially in New Mexico, where settlers lived in small villages. In California, however, missions remained the focus of everyday life. Missions under later Spanish rule carried out huge farming and ranching operations using the labor of Native American. Some of the Indians came willingly to the missions. Others were brought by force. Usually, they were not allowed to leave the mission once they had arrived. They had to adopt the clothing, food, and religion of the Spanish priests.

Missions often sold their goods to local pueblos, or towns, that arose near the missions and presidios. One wealthy California settler, Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, remembered the early days.

"We were the pioneers of the Pacific coast, building towns and missions while General [George] Washington was carrying on the war of the Revolution."

—Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, quoted in *Eyewitnesses and Others*



Ranch Life

Spanish and Mexican *vaqueros*, or cowboys, were expert horseriders. They used their horses to herd cattle on the ranches of the Spanish Southwest.

After winning independence from Spain in 1821, Mexico began to change old Spanish policies toward California and Texas. In 1833, for example, Mexico ended the mission system in California. Mission lands were broken up, and huge grants were given to some of the wealthiest California settlers, including Vallejo. They created vast ranchos, or ranches, with tens of thousands of acres of land. **Vaqueros, or cowboys, managed the large herds of cattle and sheep.** Cowhides were so valuable that they were called “California banknotes.” Hides were traded for household items and luxury goods with ship captains from the eastern United States. Some settlers also made wine and grew citrus fruits.

Although they had been freed from the missions, for most California Indians the **elements** of life changed very little. They continued to herd animals and do much of the hard physical labor on ranches and farms. Some, however, ran away into the wilderness or to the nearby towns of San Diego and Los Angeles.

The Californios

Because of the great distance between California and the center of Mexico's government, by the early 1820s California had only around 3,200 colonists. **These early California settlers, called Californios,** felt little connection to their faraway government.

Californios developed a lasting reputation for hospitality and skilled horse riding. In *Two Years Before the Mast*, American novelist Richard Henry Dana Jr. wrote about his encounters with Californio culture. He described, for example, what happened after a Californio served a feast to Dana and a friend.

“We took out some money and asked him how much we were to pay. He shook his head and crossed himself, saying that it was charity—that the Lord gave it to us.”

—Richard Henry Dana, Jr., from *Two Years before the Mast*

In addition to traders and travelers, a small number of settlers also arrived from the United States. They were called Anglos by the Californios. Although there were few Anglo settlers in California, their calls for independence increased tension between Mexico and the United States.



Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo

1808–1890

Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo was born to an influential Californio family in Monterey. He joined the Mexican army shortly after Mexico's independence from Spain. He was soon put in charge of Mexico's efforts to increase settlement in northern

California. Vallejo eventually became the richest man in California, owning enormous amounts of land and livestock. He welcomed American rule of California, believing it would result in self-government for Californios. Vallejo served at the state constitutional convention, as well as on the first state senate.

Mexican-American War

Diplomatic relations between Mexico and the United States became increasingly strained. U.S. involvement in California and Texas contributed to this tension.

Conflict Breaks Out

Mexico had long insisted that its northern border lay along the Nueces River. The United States said the border was farther south, along the Rio Grande. In June 1845 President Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor to lead an army into the disputed region.

Polk sent diplomat John Slidell to Mexico City to try to settle the border dispute. Slidell came with an offer to buy New Mexico and California for \$30 million. Mexican officials refused to speak to him.

In March 1846, General Taylor led his troops to the Rio Grande. He camped across from Mexican forces stationed near the town of Matamoros, Mexico. In April, the Mexican commander told Taylor to withdraw from Mexican territory. Taylor refused. The two sides clashed, and several U.S. soldiers were killed.

In response, President Polk said to Congress:

“Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory, and shed American blood upon the American soil... The two nations are now at war.”

—James K. Polk, from his address to Congress, May 11, 1846

Polk’s war message was persuasive. Two days later, Congress declared war on Mexico.

War Begins

At the beginning of the war with Mexico, the U.S. Army had better weapons and equipment. Yet it was greatly outnumbered and poorly prepared. The government put out a call for 50,000 volunteers. About 200,000 responded. Many were young men who thought the war would be a grand adventure in a foreign land.

On the home front, many Americans supported the war. However, many Whigs thought the war was unjustified and avoidable. Northern abolitionists also opposed the conflict. They feared the spread of slavery into southwestern lands.

While Americans debated the war, fighting proceeded. General Taylor’s soldiers won battles south of the Nueces River. Taylor then crossed the Rio Grande and occupied Matamoros, Mexico. While Taylor waited for more men, Polk ordered General Stephen Kearny to attack New Mexico. On August 18, 1846, Kearny took Santa Fe, the capital city, without a fight. He claimed the entire province of New Mexico for the United States and marched west to California, where another conflict with Mexico was already under way.

The Bear Flag Revolt

In 1846, only about 500 Americans lived in the huge province of California, in contrast to about 12,000 Californios. Yet, in the spirit of manifest destiny, a small group of American settlers seized the town of Sonoma, north of San Francisco, on June 14. Hostilities began between the two sides when the Americans took some horses that were intended for the Mexican militia. **In what became known as the [Bear Flag Revolt](#), the Americans declared California to be an independent nation.** Above the town, the rebels hoisted a hastily made flag of a grizzly bear facing a red star. Californios laughed at the roughmade bear, thinking it “looked more like a pig than a bear.”

John C. Frémont, a U.S. Army captain, was leading a mapping expedition across the Sierra Nevadas when he heard of the possible war with Mexico. Frémont went to Sonoma and quickly joined the American settlers in

their revolt against the Californios. Because war had already broken out between the United States and Mexico, Frémont's actions were seen as beneficial to the American cause in the region. His stated goal, however, was Californian independence, not to annex California to the United States. During the revolt, several important Californios were taken prisoner, including Mariano Vallejo. Vallejo and his brother were held at an Anglo settlement for two months without any formal charges being brought against them. Long after his release, Vallejo wrote a history of California that included an account of his time as a bear flag prisoner.

But the bear flag was quick to fall. In July, U.S. naval forces came ashore in California and raised the stars and stripes. Kearny's army arrived from the East. The towns of San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco fell rapidly. In August, U.S. Navy commodore Robert Stockton claimed California for the United States. Some Californios continued to resist until early 1847, when they surrendered.

Mexican-American War 1846–1847



The Bear Flag Revolt
 American settlers took over Sonoma, the regional headquarters of the Mexican army. They captured Mexican general Mariano Vallejo and declared California a new country: the California Republic.



End of the War
 General Winfield Scott landed at Veracruz and defeated troops in the Mexican fortress there. He then marched inland, toward Mexico City. Scott's capture of the Mexican capital led to the end of the war.

Battle of Buena Vista

After the two-day Battle of Buena Vista, the American army gained control of northern Mexico. At the beginning of the battle, Mexican forces outnumbered the Americans. But the Mexicans suffered more than twice as many casualties.



War's End

In Mexico General Taylor finally got the reinforcements he needed. He drove his forces deep into enemy lands. Santa Anna, thrown from office after losing Texas, returned to power in Mexico in September 1846. Quickly, he came after Taylor.

The two armies clashed at Buena Vista in February 1847. After a close battle with heavy casualties on both sides, the Mexican Army retreated. In the morning, the cry went up: "The enemy has fled! The field is ours!"

Taylor's success made him a war hero back home. The general's popularity troubled President Polk, and when Taylor's progress stalled, Polk gave the command to General Winfield Scott. A beloved leader, he was known by his troops as "Old Fuss and Feathers" because of his strict military discipline.

Scott sailed to the port of Veracruz, the strongest fortress in Mexico. On March 29, after an 88-hour artillery attack, Veracruz fell. Scott moved on to the final goal, Mexico City, the capital. Taking a route similar to one followed by Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés in 1519, the Americans pushed 200 or so miles inland. Santa Anna tried to stop the U.S. forces at Cerro Gordo in mid-April, but failed. By August 1847, U.S. troops were at the edge of Mexico City.

After a truce failed, Scott ordered a massive attack on Mexico City. Mexican soldiers and civilians fought fierce battles in and around the capital. At a military school atop the steep, fortified hill of Chapultepec, young Mexican cadets bravely defended their hopeless position. At least one soldier jumped to his death rather than surrender to the invading forces. Finally, on September 14, 1847, Mexico City fell. Santa Anna soon fled the country.

American Settlement in the Mexican Cession

The war ended after Scott took Mexico City. **In February 1848, the United States and Mexico signed the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#), which officially ended the war and forced Mexico to turn over much of its northern territory to the United States.** Known as the Mexican Cession, this land included the present-day states of California, Nevada, and Utah. In addition, it included most of Arizona and New Mexico and parts of Colorado and Wyoming. The United States also won the area claimed by Texas north of the Rio Grande. The Mexican Cession totaled more than 500,000 square miles and increased the size of the United States by almost 25 percent.

Agreements and Payments

In exchange for this vast territory, the United States agreed to pay Mexico \$15 million. In addition, the United States assumed claims of more than \$3 million held by American citizens against the Mexican government. The treaty also addressed the status of Mexicans in the Mexican Cession. The treaty provided that they would be “protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty and property, and secured in the free exercise of their religion.” The Senate passed the treaty in March 1848.

After the war with Mexico, some Americans wanted to guarantee that any southern railroad to California would be built completely on American soil. James Gadsden, U.S. minister to Mexico, negotiated an important agreement with Mexico in December 1853. **Under the terms of the [Gadsden Purchase](#), the U.S. government paid Mexico \$10 million. In exchange, the United States received the southern parts of what are now Arizona and New Mexico.** With this purchase, the existing boundary with Mexico was finally fixed.

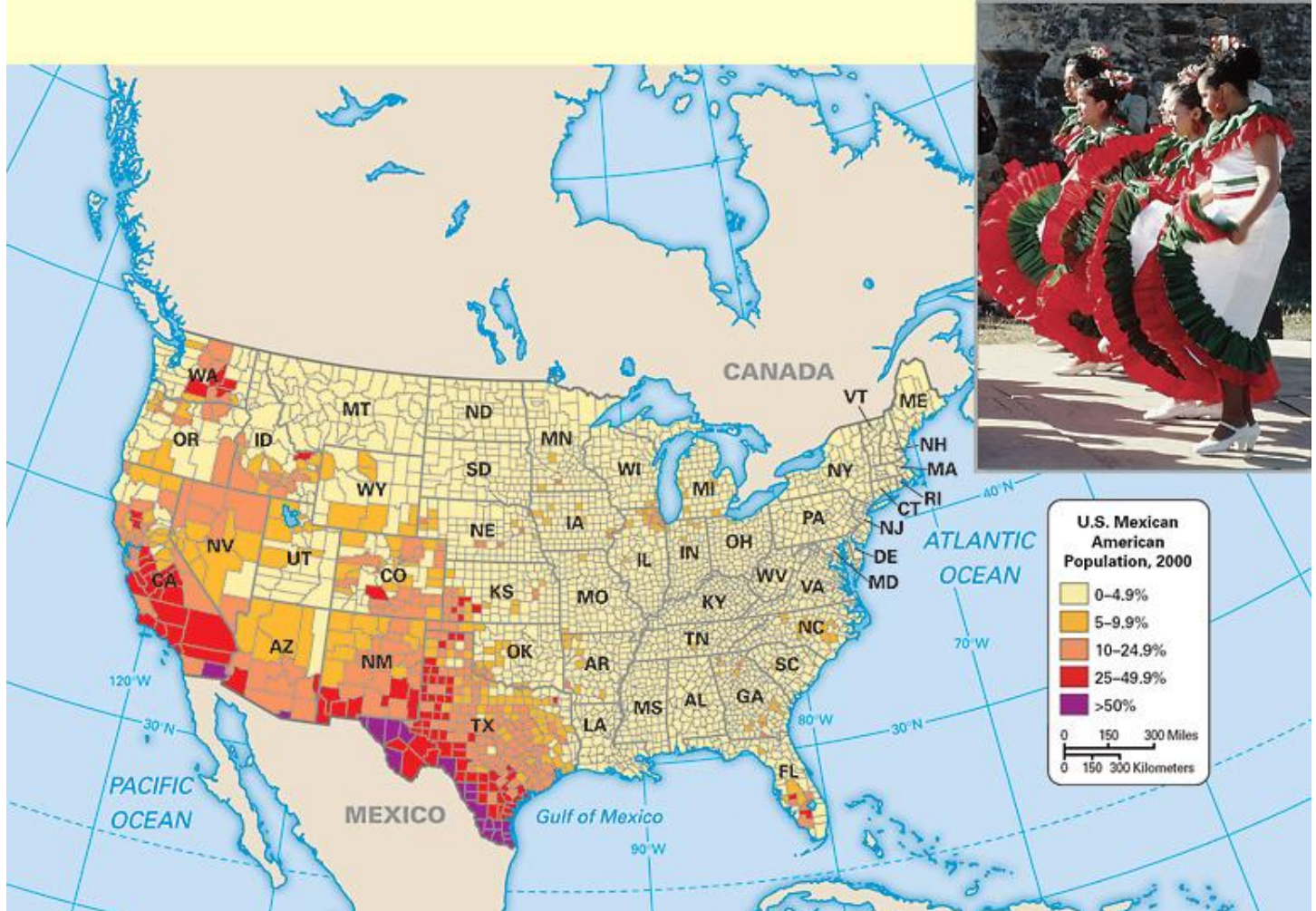
Surge of American Settlers

After the Mexican-American War, a flood of Americans moved to the Southwest. American newcomers struggled against longtime residents to control the land and other valuable resources, such as water and minerals. Most Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans faced legal, economic, and social discrimination. As a result, they found it difficult to protect their rights.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo promised to protect Mexican American residents’ property rights. Yet differences between Mexican and U.S. land laws led to great confusion. The U.S. government often made Mexican American landowners go to court to prove that they had titles to their land. Landowners had to pay their own travel costs as well as those of witnesses and interpreters. They also had to pay attorneys’ and interpreters’ fees. These legal battles often bankrupted landowners. New settlers also tended to ignore Mexican legal concepts, such as community property or community water rights.

Mexican Americans Today

Today Mexican Americans are about 8 percent of the U.S. population. More than 26 million Mexican Americans live in all 50 states. Many who live in the West are descended from people who lived there long before the region became part of the United States.



White settlers also battled with American Indians over property rights. In some areas, for example, new white settlers soon outnumbered southwestern Native Americans. The Anglo settlers often tried to take control of valuable water resources and grazing lands. In addition, settlers rarely respected Indian holy places. Native American peoples such as the Navajo and the Apache tried to protect their land and livestock from the settlers. Indians and settlers alike attacked one another to protect their interests.

Cultural Encounters

Despite conflicts, different cultures shaped one another in the Southwest. In settlements with large Mexican populations, laws were often printed in both English and Spanish. Names of places—such as San Antonio, San Diego, and Santa Barbara—show Hispanic heritage. Other place-names, such as Taos and Tesuque, are derived from Native American words. Communities throughout the Southwest regularly celebrated both Mexican and American holidays.

Mexican and Native American knowledge and traditions also shaped many local economies. Mexican Americans taught Anglo settlers about mining in the mountains. Many ranching communities were first started by Mexican settlers. In addition, Mexican Americans introduced new types of saddles and other equipment to American ranchers. Adobe, developed by the Anasazi Indians, was adopted from the Pueblo people by the Spanish. It is still commonly used by American residents in New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

Trade also changed the Southwest. For example, the Navajo created handwoven woolen blankets to sell to Americans. Americans in turn brought manufactured goods and money to the Southwest. Due to exchanges like these, the economies of many Mexican American and Native American communities in the Southwest began to change.

Water Rights

Eastern water-use laws commonly required owners whose land bordered streams or rivers to maintain a free flow of water. These restrictions generally prevented landowners from constructing dams because doing so would infringe upon the water rights of neighbors downstream.

In the typically dry climate of the West, large-scale agriculture was not possible without irrigation. Dams and canals were required to direct scarce water to fields. This need conflicted with the accepted eastern tradition of equal access to water.

Brigham Young established a strict code regulating water rights for the Mormon community. In any dispute over water use, the good of the community would outweigh the interests of individuals. Young's approach stood as an example for modern water laws throughout the West.

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW America's westward expansion continued rapidly after the Mexican-American War. In the next section you will learn about the California gold rush.

Section 4

The California Gold Rush

If YOU were there...

You are a low-paid bank clerk in New England in early 1849. Local newspaper headlines are shouting exciting news: "Gold Is Discovered in California! Thousands Are On Their Way to the West." You enjoy having a steady job. However, some of your friends are planning to go west, and you are being influenced by their excitement. Your friends are even buying pickaxes and other mining equipment. They urge you to go west with them.

**Would you go west to seek your fortune in California?
Why?**

BUILDING BACKGROUND At the end of the Mexican-American War, the United States gained control of Mexican territories in the West, including all of the present-day state of California. American settlements in California increased slowly at first. Then, the discovery of gold brought quick population growth and an economic boom.

Discovery of Gold Brings Settlers

In the 1830s and 1840s, Americans who wanted to move to California started up the Oregon Trail. At the Snake River in present-day Idaho, the trail split. People bound for California took the southern route, which became known as the California Trail. This path ran through the Sierra Nevada mountain range. American emigrants and traders on the California Trail tried to cross these mountains before the season's first snows.

Although many Americans traveled along the California Trail, few actually settled in California. American merchants were usually more interested in trading goods made in factories than in establishing settlements.

They traded for gold and silver coins, hides, and tallow (animal fat used to make soap and candles) from Mexico. California became a meeting ground for traders from Mexico and the United States.

Before the Mexican-American War, California's population consisted mostly of Mexicans and Native Americans. When Mexico controlled California, Mexican officials did not want many Americans to settle there. However, in 1839, they did give Swiss immigrant [John Sutter](#) permission to start a colony. Sutter's Fort, located near the Sacramento River, soon became a popular rest stop for many American emigrants. These new arrivals praised Sutter's hospitality and helpfulness. By the mid-1840s some Anglo Californians were publishing newspaper advertisements and guidebooks encouraging other settlers to move West.

The [Donner party](#) was a group of western travelers who went to California but were stranded in the Sierra Nevada Mountains during winter. The party began its journey west in the spring of 1846. Trying to find a shortcut, the group left the main trail and got lost. When the Donner party reached the Sierra Nevada Mountains, they became trapped by heavy snows. They were stuck and had almost no food.

A rescue party found the starving and freezing group in February 1847. Of the original 87 travelers, 42 had died.

Gold in California

In January 1848, Sutter sent a carpenter named James Marshall to build a sawmill beside a nearby river. While working near Sutter's Mill, Marshall glanced at the ground. "I reached my hand down and picked it up; it made my heart thump, for I was certain it was gold."

Sutter and Marshall agreed to keep the discovery a secret. However, when they examined the work site the next day, they met a Spanish-speaking Native American worker holding a nugget and shouting, "Oro [gold]! Oro! Oro!"

Sutter's workers soon quit to search for gold. Stories of the discovery rapidly spread across the country. President Polk added to the national excitement by confirming the California gold strike in his farewell message to Congress in December 1848. In 1849 about 80,000 gold-seekers came to California, hoping to strike it rich. **These gold-seeking migrants to California were called [forty-niners](#).**

"Gold Fever"



"Gold fever" brought 80,000 people, like this miner, to California in 1849 alone. One California newspaper captured the excitement: "The whole country, from San Francisco to Los Angeles, and from the sea shore to the base of the Sierra Nevadas, resounds with the cry of 'gold, GOLD, GOLD!' while the field is left half planted, the house half built, and everything neglected but the manufacture of shovels and pickaxes." Above is a piece of jewelry made from nuggets found in California.

Staking a Claim



Miners came to California from around the world to make their fortune. In the photo above, Anglo and Chinese miners work together in Auburn Ravine in 1852. In the photo on the left, a woman joins men to look for gold. Fewer women than men moved west to search for gold, but the ones that did often found greater social and economic opportunity than they had in the east.

As one Iowa woman who left to find gold recalled, “At that time the ‘gold fever’ was contagious, and few, old or young, escaped the malady [sickness].” Nearly 80 percent of the forty-niners were Americans, while the rest came from all over the world.

Most of the forty-niners braved long and often dangerous journeys to reach California. Many easterners and Europeans arrived via sea routes. Midwestern gold-seekers usually traveled West in wagon trains. Most forty-niners first arrived in San Francisco. This port town became a convenient trade center and stopping point for travelers. As a result,

its population increased from around 800 in March 1848 to more than 25,000 by 1850.

Staking a Claim

Few of the forty-niners had any previous gold-mining experience. The work was difficult and time-consuming. The forty-niners would **prospect, or search for gold**, along the banks of streams or in shallow surface mines. The early forty-niners worked an area that ran for 70 miles along rivers in northern California.

The first person to arrive at a site would “stake a claim.” Early miners frequently banded together to prospect for gold. The miners agreed that each would keep a share of whatever gold was discovered. When one group abandoned a claim, more recent arrivals often took it over, hoping for success. Sometimes, two or more groups arrived in an area at the same time. In the early gold rush days, before courts were established, this competition often led to conflict. Occasionally violent disputes arose over competing claims.

Mining methods varied according to the location. The most popular method, placer [PLA-suhr] mining, and was done along rivers and streams. **Placer miners used pans or other devices to wash gold nuggets out of loose rock and gravel.**

To reach gold deposits buried in the hills, miners had to dig shafts and tunnels. These tasks were usually pursued by mining companies, rather than by individuals.

In 1853 California’s yearly gold production peaked at more than \$60 million. Individual success stories inspired many miners. One lucky man found two and a half pounds of gold after only 15 minutes of work. Two African American miners found a rich gold deposit that became known as Negro Hill in honor of their discovery. The vast majority of miners, however, did not become rich. Forty-niner Alonzo Delano commented that the “lean, meager [thin], worn-out and woe-begone [sorrowful] miner...might daily be seen at almost every point in the upper mines.”

Life in the Mining Camps

Mining camps sprang up wherever enough people gathered to look for gold. These camps had colorful names, such as Hangtown or Poker Flat.

Miners in the camps came from many cultures and backgrounds. Most miners were young, unmarried men in search of adventure. Only around 5 percent of gold-rush immigrants were women or children. The hardworking women generally made good money by cooking meals, washing clothes, and operating boardinghouses. One such woman, Catherine Haun, recalled her first home in California.

“We were glad to settle down and go housekeeping in a shed that was built in a day of lumber purchased with the first fee...For neighbors, we had a real live saloon. I never have received more respectful attention than I did from these neighbors.”

—Catherine Haun, quoted in *Ordinary Americans*,
edited by Linda R. Monk

Haun’s husband was a lawyer. He concluded that he could make more money practicing law than he could panning for gold. He was one of many people who made a good living supplying miners with food, clothing, equipment, and other services. Miners paid high prices for basic necessities because the large amounts of gold in circulation caused severe inflation in California. A loaf of bread, for example, might cost 5 cents in the East, but it would sell for 50 to 75 cents in San Francisco. Eggs sometimes sold for \$1 a piece.

Some settlers took full advantage of these conditions for free enterprise. Biddy Mason and her family, for instance, had arrived in California as slaves. A Georgia slaveholder had brought them during the gold-rush years. Mason quickly discovered that most Californians opposed slavery, particularly in the gold mines. She and her family gained their freedom and moved to the small village of Los Angeles. There, she saved money until she could purchase some land. Over time, Mason’s property increased in value from \$250 to \$200,000. She became one of the wealthiest landowners in California, a community leader, and a well-known supporter of charities.

Westward Movement in the United States

Causes

- Americans believe in the idea of manifest destiny.
- The United States acquires vast new lands in the West.
- Pathfinders open trails to new territories.
- Gold is discovered in California

Effects

- Native Americans are forced off lands.
- Americans travel west to settle new areas.
- The United States stretches to the Pacific Ocean.
- California experiences a population boom.

Immigrants to California

The lure of gold in California attracted miners from around the world. Many were from countries that had seen few immigrants to the United States in the past. They were drawn to California by the lure of wealth. For example, famine and economic hardship in southeastern China caused many Chinese men to leave China for America. Most hoped to find great wealth, and then return home to China. These immigrants were known in Chinese as *gam saan haak*, or “travelers to Gold Mountain.” Between 1849 and 1853 about 24,000 Chinese men moved to California. “From far and near we came and were pleased,” wrote merchant Lai Chun-chuen in 1855.

Chinese immigrants soon discovered that many Americans did not welcome them, however. In 1852, California placed a high monthly tax on all foreign miners. Chinese miners had no choice but to pay this tax if they wanted to prospect for gold in California. Some Chinese workers were the targets of violent attacks. If the Chinese miners dared to protest the attacks, the legal system favored Americans over immigrants.

Despite such treatment, many Chinese immigrants still worked in the gold mines. Some looked for other jobs. Others opened their own businesses. A newspaper reported Chinese working as “ploughmen, laundrymen, place miners, woolen spinners and weavers, domestic servants, cigar makers, [and] shoemakers.”

In 1849 alone, about 20,000 immigrants arrived in California not only from China but also from Europe, Mexico, and South America. Like most Americans who sought gold, these new arrivals intended to return home after they had made their fortunes. However, many decided to stay. Some began businesses. For example, Levi Strauss, a German immigrant, earned a fortune by making tough denim pants for miners.

Impact on California

During the Spanish and Mexican periods of settlement, California’s population grew slowly. The arrival of the forty-niners changed this dramatically. [The Impact Today](#)

Population Boom

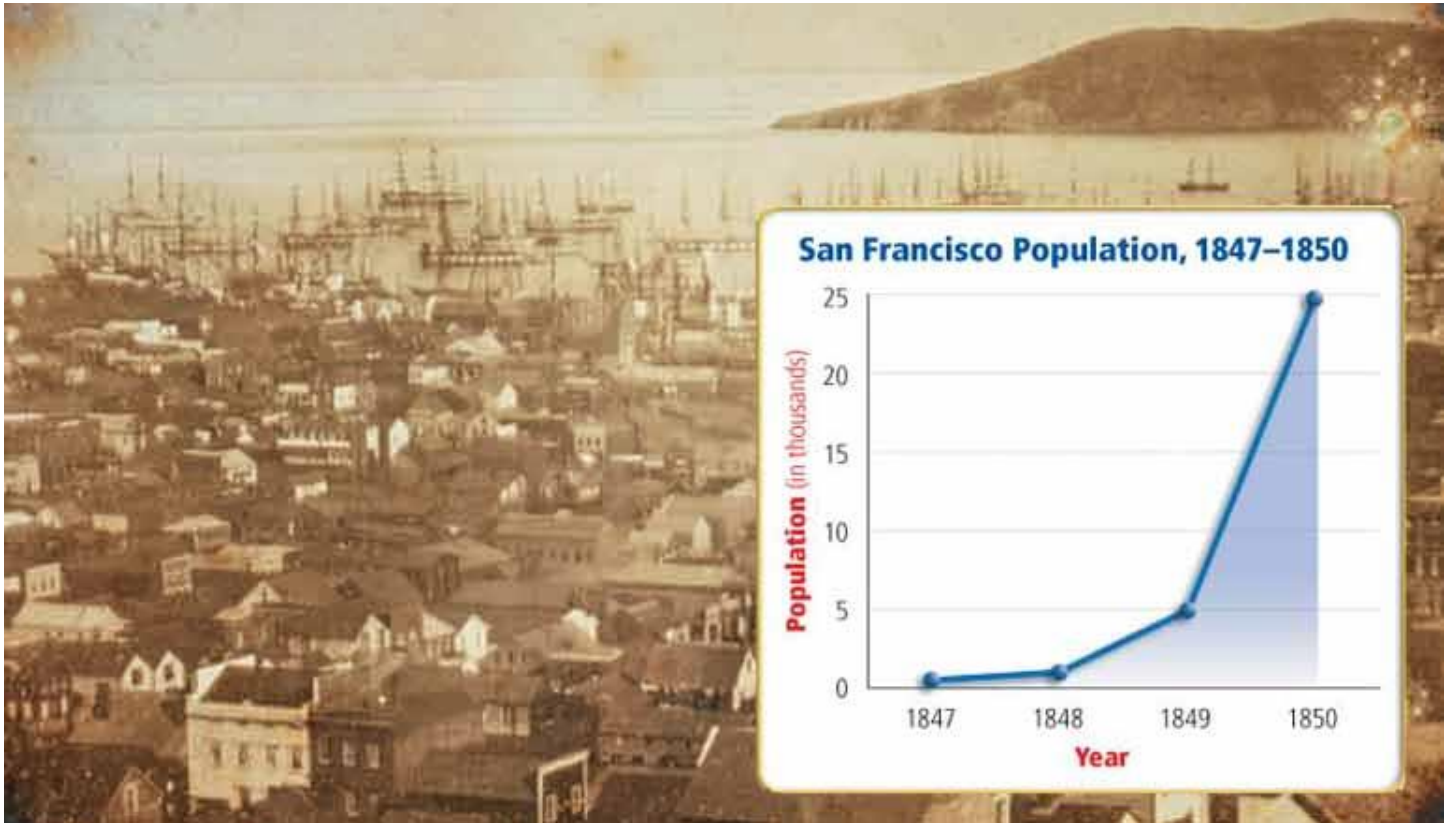
California’s population explosion made it eligible for statehood only two years after being acquired by the United States. In 1850 California became the 31st state.

However, fast population growth had negative consequences for many Californios and California Native American. One early observer of the gold rush described why.

“The Yankee regarded every man but [his own kind] as an interloper [trespasser], who had no right to come to California and pick up the gold of ‘free and enlightened citizens.’”

—W. Kelly, quoted in *The Other Californians*,
by Robert F. Heizer and Alan F. Almquist

San Francisco Grows



San Francisco boomed in the early years of the Gold Rush.

Economic Growth

In addition to rapid population growth, a flood of new businesses and industries transformed California's economy. Gold mining remained an important part of the state's early economy. But Californians soon discovered other ways to make a living. Farming and ranching, for example, became industries for those willing to do the necessary hard labor.

California faced an obstacle to growth, though. The state was isolated from the rest of the country. It was difficult to bring in and ship out goods. The answer to the isolation problem was to bring the railroad all the way to California. Californians would have to wait almost 20 years for that. Completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 at last gave Californians the means to grow a stronger economy.

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW Americans moved west to create new lives and seize new opportunities. In the next chapter you will learn about the Industrial Revolution in America.