

# Chapter 13: Expansion, War, and Sectional Crisis, 1844-1860

## I. Manifest Destiny: South and North

### A. The Push to the Pacific

1. In 1845, John L. O'Sullivan coined the phrase **Manifest Destiny**; he felt that Americans had a right to develop the entire continent as they saw fit, which implied a sense of cultural and racial superiority.
2. The Oregon country stretched along the Pacific coast from the border with Mexican California to the border with Russian Alaska and was claimed by both Great Britain and the United States.
3. "Oregon fever" raged in 1843 as thousands, lured by reports of fine harbors, mild climate, and fertile soil, journeyed for months across the continent to the Willamette Valley.
4. By 1860, about 250,000 Americans had braved the Oregon Trail; many died *en route* from disease and exposure, although relatively few died from Indian attacks.
5. Some pioneers left the Oregon Trail and traveled south along the California Trail, settling along the Sacramento River in the Mexican province of California.
6. To promote California's development, the Mexican government took over the California missions and liberated the 20,000 Indians who worked on them, many of whom intermarried with mestizos and worked as laborers and cowboys on large cattle ranches.
7. The rise of cattle ranching created a new society and economy as agents from New England firms assimilated to Mexican life and married into the families of the Californios.
8. Many American migrants in California had no desire to assimilate into Mexican society and hoped for eventual annexation to the United States; however, at that time American settlers in California were too few.

### B. The Plains Indians

1. As the Pacific-bound wagon trains rumbled across Nebraska, the migrants encountered the Great Plains, a vast sea of grass stretching north from Texas to Saskatchewan in Canada, and west from the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains.
2. Nomadic buffalo-hunting Indian peoples roamed the western Plains, while the tall grass lands and river valleys to the east were home to semi-sedentary tribes.
3. A line of military forts – stretching from Fort Jesup in Louisiana to Fort Snelling in Minnesota – policed the boundary between white America and what Congress in 1834 designated as Permanent Indian Territory.
4. For centuries, the Indians who lived on the eastern edge of the Plains, such as the Pawnees and the Mandan on the upper Missouri River, subsisted primarily on food crops – corn and beans – supplemented by buffalo meat.
5. They also exchanged goods with traders and travelers along the Santa Fe Trail, which cut through Comanche and Kiowa territory as it connected Missouri and New Mexico. By the early 1840s, goods worth nearly \$1 million moved along the trail each year.
6. By the 1830s, the Kiowas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos had also adopted this horse culture and, allied with the Comanches, dominated the Plains between the Arkansas and Red rivers.
7. As European horses enhanced the mobility and wealth of the Plains Indians, European diseases and guns thinned their ranks. A devastating smallpox epidemic spread northward from New Spain in 1779-1781, taking the lives of half of the Plains peoples.
8. The powerful Sioux, who acquired guns and ammunition from French, Spanish, and American traders along the Missouri River, also remained buffalo hunters. As nomadic people who travelled in small groups, the Sioux largely avoided major epidemics and increased their numbers.

### C. The Fateful Election of 1844

1. The election of 1844 determined the American government's western policy.
2. To thwart rumored British schemes of North American expansion, southern expansionists demanded the immediate annexation of Texas.
3. "Oregon fever" and Manifest Destiny were also altering the political and diplomatic landscape in the North. Responding to "Oregon conventions" that called for an end to joint occupation of the region, in 1843 a bipartisan national convention demanded that the United States seize Oregon all the way to the 54°40' north latitude.
4. Texas and Oregon became the central issues in the election of 1844; Democrats selected James K. Polk, a slave owner and expansionist who favored annexation of both Texas and Oregon.

5. The Whigs nominated Henry Clay, who again championed his American System of internal improvements, high tariffs, and national banking that begrudgingly supported the annexation of Texas.
6. Polk's strategy of linking the issues of Texas and Oregon was successful; immediately after Polk's victory, Democrats in Congress approved annexation of Texas by a joint resolution to bring it into the Union.

## II. War, Expansion, and Slavery, 1846–1850

### A. The War with Mexico, 1846–1848

1. President Polk saw Texas as just the beginning; he wanted American control over all Mexican territory between Texas and the Pacific Ocean and was prepared to go to war to get it.
2. Mexico was determined to retain its territories, and when the Texas Republic accepted American statehood in 1845, Mexico broke off diplomatic relations with the United States.
3. To intimidate the Mexican government, Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor to occupy the disputed lands between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande.
4. Polk also sent John Slidell to Mexico City on a secret diplomatic initiative to secure Mexican acceptance of the Rio Grande boundary and to buy Mexico and California; Mexican officials refused to see him.
5. Polk's alternative plan was to foment a revolution in California that, as in Texas, would lead to an independent republic and a request for annexation.
6. In October 1845, at Polk's request, Thomas O. Larkin encouraged the leading Mexican residents of Monterey, California, to declare independence and support peaceful annexation.
7. Polk also ordered naval commanders to seize California's coastal towns in case of war, and dispatched Captain John C. Fremont's heavily armed troops deep into Mexican territory.
8. Hoping to incite an armed Mexican response, Polk ordered General Taylor to the Rio Grande; when a clash occurred, Polk blamed the Mexicans for the bloodshed and called for war.
9. Ignoring Whig pleas for a negotiated settlement, the Democratic majority in Congress voted for war with Mexico.
10. To avoid simultaneous war with Britain, the president accepted a British proposal to divide the Oregon Country at the forty-ninth parallel.
11. By the end of 1846, the United States controlled much of northeastern Mexico, and American forces secured control of California in 1847.
12. Santa Anna went on the offensive, attacking Zachary Taylor's units at Buena Vista in 1847, and only superior artillery enabled a narrow American victory.
13. General Winfield Scott's troops seized Mexico City in September 1847; Santa Anna was overthrown and the new Mexican government agreed to make peace.

### B. A Divisive Victory

1. “**Conscience Whigs**” viewed the Mexican War as a conspiracy to add new slave states in the West, and Polk's expansionist policy split the Democrats into sectional factions.
2. The Wilmot Proviso (1846) was intended to prohibit slavery in any new territories acquired from Mexico; the Senate killed the proviso.
3. To reunite Democrats before the election, Polk and Buchanan abandoned their expansionist hopes for Mexico and agreed to take only California and New Mexico.
4. In the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), the United States agreed to pay Mexico \$15 million for Texas north of the Rio Grande, New Mexico, and California.
5. Many northerners joined a new **free-soil movement**, viewing slavery as a threat to republicanism and the yeomen farmers (and not, as the Liberty Party believed, a sin against the natural rights of African Americans).
6. The Wilmot Proviso's call for free soil was the first antislavery proposal to attract broad popular support. Frederick Douglass, the foremost black abolitionist, endorsed the free-soil movement and began to lecture for William Lloyd Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society.
7. Democrats nominated Lewis Cass as their presidential candidate for the election of 1848; Cass was an avid expansionist who proposed squatter sovereignty and was deliberately vague on the issue of slavery in the West.
8. The Free-Soilers nominated Martin Van Buren for president; the Whigs nominated General Zachary Taylor, a slave owner who had not taken a position on slavery in the territories.
9. Taylor and his running mate Millard Fillmore won the election, but the electoral margin was thin because of the Free-Soil ticket taking New York's vote.

### C. California Gold and Racial Warfare

1. Even before Taylor took office, workers for John A. Sutter in the Sierra Nevada foothills of California discovered flakes of gold in January of 1848.
2. By January 1849, sixty-one crowded ships had left northeastern ports to sail around Cape Horn to San Francisco; by May, twelve thousand wagons had crossed the Missouri River bound for the goldfields. By the end of 1849, more than 80,000 people, mostly men, had arrived in California.
3. Most miners eventually found themselves working for wages for companies that engaged in hydraulic or underground mining; many others turned to farming.
4. Farming required arable land, which was owned by Mexican grantees or occupied by Indian peoples.
5. The subjugation of the Indians came first. In 1848, there were about 150,000 Indians in California; by 1861, there were only 30,000.
6. European diseases took the lives of thousands of natives. But in California, white settlers also undertook systematic campaigns of extermination and local political leaders did little to stop them.
7. Congress abetted these assaults. At the bidding of white Californians, it repudiated treaties that federal agents had negotiated with 119 tribes, and that provided the Indians with 7 million acres of land. Instead, in 1853, Congress authorized five reservations of only 25,000 acres each and refused to provide the Indians with military protection.
8. Some settlers simply murdered Indians to push them off non-reservation lands. Other white Californians turned to slave trading.
9. The Mexicans and Californios who held grants to thousands of acres were harder to dislodge. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo guaranteed that the land grants made by Spanish and Mexican authorities would be “inviolably respected.”
10. Despite the fact that many of the 800 grants in California were either fraudulent or questionable, the Land Claims Commission created by Congress upheld the validity of 75 percent of them.
11. In the meantime, hundreds of Americans had set up farms on the grants, many of which had never been settled. American squatters rejected the notion that so much unoccupied and unimproved land could be held by a few families. They successfully pressured local land commissioners and judges to void suspect grants.
12. In northern California, farmers found that they could grow most eastern crops. Ranchers gradually replaced Spanish cattle with American breeds, which found a ready market as California’s population shot up to 380,000 by 1860 and 560,000 by 1870.
13. Wheat and barley farmers cultivated hundreds of acres, using the latest technology and scores of hired workers to produce huge crops, which San Francisco merchants exported to Europe at high prices. The gold rush gradually turned into a wheat boom.

#### D. 1850: Crisis and Compromise

1. The California gold rush and subsequent influx of settlers revived the national debate over free soil; in November 1849, Californians ratified a state constitution that prohibited slavery.
2. The admission of California as a state threatened the carefully maintained balance of slave states versus nonslave states in the Senate.
3. Southern leaders decided to block California’s entry unless the federal government guaranteed the future of slavery.
4. John C. Calhoun warned of possible secession by slave states and advanced the doctrine that Congress had no constitutional authority to regulate slavery in the territories.
5. Many southerners and some northern Democrats were willing to extend the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific Ocean, guaranteeing slave owners some western territory.
6. A third choice, squatter (popular) sovereignty, placed decisions about slavery in the hands of local settlers and their territorial governments.
7. Antislavery advocates were unwilling to accept any plan for California that might involve the expansion of slavery in the territories and urged federal authorities to restrict slavery within its existing boundaries and then extinguish it completely.
8. Whigs and Democrats desperately sought a compromise to preserve the Union; Whigs organized the Compromise of 1850.
9. The Compromise included a Fugitive Slave Act to mollify the South, it admitted California as a free state and abolished the slave trade in Washington, DC, to mollify the North, and it organized the rest of the lands acquired from Mexico into the territories of New Mexico

10. and Utah on the basis of popular sovereignty.
11. The Compromise averted a secession crisis in 1850, but resulted in special conventions in the South; in exchange for support of the Compromise, moderate southern politicians agreed to support secession in the future if Congress abolished slavery anywhere or refused to
12. grant statehood to a territory with a proslavery constitution.

### III. The End of the Second Party System, 1850–1858

#### A. Resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act

1. Under the terms of the Fugitive Slave Act, federal magistrates in the northern states determined the status of alleged runaway slaves. The law denied accused blacks a jury trial and even the right to testify and it allowed the reenslavement of about two hundred fugitives (as well as some free northern blacks).
2. The plight of runaway slaves and the appearance of slave catchers aroused popular hostility in the North and Midwest, and free blacks and abolitionists defied the new law.
3. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which evoked sympathy for slaves and outrage against slavery throughout the North, increased northern opposition to the act.
4. Northern legislatures enacted **personal liberty laws**, and in *Ableman v. Booth* (1857), the Wisconsin Supreme Court said the act violated the Constitution.
5. The U.S. Supreme Court in 1859 upheld the constitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Act, but by then the act had become a "dead letter."

#### B. The Political System in Decline

1. The conflict over slavery split both major political parties along sectional lines and stymied creative political leadership.
2. The Whig Party chose General Winfield Scott, but many southern Whigs refused to support Scott because northern Whigs refused to support slavery.
3. Democrats were divided at their convention and no candidate could secure the necessary two-thirds majority, so they settled on a compromise nominee, Franklin Pierce.
4. The Democrats swept the election, and their party was reunited; conversely, the Whig Party split into sectional wings and it would never again wage a national campaign.
5. Pierce pursued an expansionist foreign policy to assist northern merchants, secured railroad rights in northern Mexico with the Gadsden Purchase, and tried to seize Cuba, issuing the Ostend Manifesto (1854).
6. Opposition to the manifesto forced Pierce to halt efforts to take Cuba, but it revived the northern fears of a "Slave Power" conspiracy.

#### C. The Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Rise of New Parties

1. The Kansas-Nebraska Act, constructed by Democrat Stephen Douglas, divided the northern Louisiana Purchase into two territories, Kansas and Nebraska, and voided the Missouri Compromise line by opening the area to slavery through the principle of popular sovereignty.
2. The Kansas-Nebraska Act barely passed in 1854 through the use of patronage and persuasion by President Pierce and proved to be the end of the Second Party System.
3. Antislavery northern Whigs and Anti-Nebraska Democrats formed a new party, the Republicans; the party stood for opposition to slavery and a celebration of the moral virtues of a society based on "the middling classes."
4. The American, or "Know-Nothing" Party, had its origins in the anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic organizations of the 1840s. It hoped to unite native-born Protestants against the "alien menace" of Irish and German Catholics, prohibit further immigration, and institute literacy tests for voting.
5. In 1855, the Pierce administration recognized the territorial legislature in Lecompton, Kansas, which had adopted proslavery legislation.
6. Free-Soilers rejected the legitimacy of the territorial government; proslavery and antislavery sides turned to violence, including the "Pottawatomie massacre," led by John Brown.

#### D. Buchanan's Failed Presidency

1. The Republican Party counted on anger over "Bleeding Kansas" to boost its fortunes and nominated Colonel James C. Frémont, a Free-Soiler, as its presidential candidate.
2. The American Party split into sectional factions, the northern faction endorsed Frémont and the southern faction nominated Millard Fillmore.
3. The Democrats reaffirmed their support for popular sovereignty and the Kansas-Nebraska Act and nominated

James Buchanan.

4. James Buchanan won, and the Republicans replaced the Whigs as the second major party.
5. Republicans had no support in the South, however; if they were to win in the next presidential election, it might prompt the southern states to withdraw from the Union. President Buchanan was left to devise a way of protecting free soil in the West and slavery in the South.
6. In *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1856), the U.S. Supreme Court opined that a slave's residence in a free state did not make him a free man and that African Americans were not citizens and could not sue in a federal court.
7. Chief Justice Taney declared that the provisions of the Northwest Ordinance and the Missouri Compromise which prohibited slavery had never been constitutional, and that Congress could not give to territorial governments any powers that Congress itself did not possess.
8. Taney thereby endorsed Calhoun's interpretation of popular sovereignty: only when settlers wrote a constitution and requested statehood could they prohibit slavery.
9. The Democrat-dominated Supreme Court had declared the Republicans' antislavery platform to be unconstitutional; Republicans countered by accusing the Supreme Court and President Buchanan of participating in the "Slave Power" conspiracy.
10. In 1858, Buchanan recommended the admission of Kansas as a slave state; by pursuing a proslavery agenda – first with *Dred Scott* and then in Kansas – he had helped to split his party and the nation.

#### **IV. Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Triumph, 1858–1860**

##### **A. Lincoln's Political Career**

1. Abraham Lincoln came from an impoverished yeoman farming family in Illinois; in 1831, he rejected the farmer's life and became a store clerk.
2. Lincoln was an ambitious man: he was admitted to the bar in 1837, married the more socially prominent Mary Todd in 1842, and served four terms as a Whig in the Illinois assembly.
3. In 1846, Lincoln won election to Congress, where he had to take a stand on the issue of slavery; he felt that slavery was unjust but did not believe that the federal government had the constitutional authority to tamper with it.
4. Lincoln argued that prohibiting the expansion of slavery, gradual emancipation, and the colonization of freed slaves were the only practical ways to address the issue.
5. Both abolitionists and proslavery activists derided Lincoln's pragmatic policies, he lost his bid for reelection, and for a while he withdrew from politics in order to devote his time to law.
6. Lincoln returned to politics after the passage of Stephen Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska Act; he attacked the doctrine of popular sovereignty and said he would leave slavery where it existed but not extend it into the territories.
7. Lincoln abandoned the Whig Party and joined the Republicans; he soon emerged as their leader in Illinois.
8. In Lincoln's "House Divided" speech, he predicted a constitutional crisis over slavery.
9. In the 1858 duel for the U.S. Senate, Stephen Douglas declared his support for white supremacy, and Lincoln, put on the defensive by Douglas, advocated economic opportunity for blacks but not equal political rights.
10. Douglas's "Freeport Doctrine" asserted that settlers could exclude slavery by not adopting local legislation to protect it; this upset proslavery advocates and abolitionists.
11. Douglas was elected to the Senate, but Lincoln had established a national reputation.

##### **B. The Union Under Siege**

1. Southern Democrats divided into two groups: the "Moderates" (Southern Rights Democrats) pursued protection of slavery in the territories, and the "Radicals" actively promoted secession.
2. In October 1859, John Brown led a raid that temporarily seized the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia; his purpose was to supply the arms for a slave rebellion and establish a separate African American state in the South.
3. Brown was charged with treason, sentenced to death, and hanged. He was a martyr to abolitionists, which horrified southerners.
4. In 1860, northern Democrats rejected Jefferson Davis's program to protect slavery in the territories, so the delegates from eight southern states quit the meeting and nominated as their candidate John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky. Northern and western delegates nominated Stephen Douglas.
5. The Republicans chose Lincoln as their candidate for his moderate position on slavery, his appealing egalitarian image, and his important Midwest political base.

6. The fourth candidate was John Bell, a former Tennessee Whig, who was the nominee of the compromise-seeking Constitutional Union Party.
7. Lincoln received only 40 percent of the popular vote but won a majority in the electoral college by carrying every northern and western state except New Jersey; Douglas won electoral votes only in Missouri and New Jersey; Breckinridge captured every state in the Deep South as well as Delaware, Maryland, and North Carolina; John Bell carried the Upper South states.
8. The Republicans had united the Northeast, the Midwest, and the Far West behind free soil and had seized national power; to many southerners it seemed their constitutional order of slavery was now under siege.