

Mexican war

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The Mexican War is often regarded as one of the United States' most controversial wars. The idea of Manifest Destiny was beginning to consume the minds of many Democratic Americans. They wished for the United States to expand their land to possess a continental control; it was believed that more land would mean furthered economical success. Meanwhile, the Whigs felt that the key to expanding the country was embracing the economical endeavors that were already being pursued.

In order for the continent to be dominated by Americans, western expansion would need to occur, taking land from Mexico. Mexicans had long threatened that if the United States decided to impose on their territories and annex Texas, they would begin a civil war with the country. When James K. Polk, a Whig president, agreed to declare war on Mexico, turmoil began to arise. Americans were incredibly victorious and undefeated between 1846 and 1848, while the war was occurring, and accumulated extensive amounts of land that had been under Mexican rule. That is when the true war really began.

American citizens in New England, the West, and the South all had very different political motives that greatly challenged the sectional interests regarding state versus federal power, betrayal of political parties, and the ideal plan for incorporating new regions into a very polarized country. When the new land was acquired from Mexico, there was a rather heated argument on whether it should be considered a "free state" or a "slave state." In 1849, Zachary Taylor became the last Whig president and decided in favor of making California and New Mexico automatically admitted "free states."

Southerners, who were pro-slavery, were primarily Whigs and felt that their president was alienating them. Politicians supposedly standing for southern views were instead collaborating with northern efforts. Some southerners took the idea to such an extreme that they were known as “ fire-eaters” and met to discuss plans for secession at the Nashville Convention. Since politicians were not staying true to their parties, it became much more difficult for American citizens to truly trust their elected officials.

The North and South had such different economical priorities regarding slavery that it was hard for a political figure not to need to take a “ side. ” No matter which side they would have chosen, half of the country would end up being displeased. The mistrust in political parties began to break-down the two-party system within the United States. New parties such as the Know Nothing Party and the Free Soil Party began to emerge in rebellion. By 1854, the Whig Party has been disassembled entirely, and the Democrats began a split into the two most prominent modern political parties; Democrats and Republicans.

The Mexican War really led the beginning of regionalization and political stance interfering with national advancement. Between the North and the South, neither side was truly able to settle about having slavery, or not having slavery, within the new states. Each wanted to force their view onto the new western lands. At the time, the federal government felt that during their annexation, they had the ability to choose the status of rights within the states. This brought about the proposal of the Compromise of 1850, by Henry Clay.

Basically, the proposal meant that California would be deemed a “ free state” by the federal government, but New Mexico and Utah would be granted the freedom to choose being a “ free state” or a “ slave state” by popular sovereignty. Since most citizens in the western areas were in favor of abolition, the North was generally pleased with this component of the compromise. However, it also worked to suit the South by passing the Fugitive Slave Law, which would allow southerners to pursue the recapturing of their escaped slaves.

Abolitionists within the North were very angered by this idea, causing southerners to be more likely to antagonize northerners by invading the North in search of their African American fugitives. While the compromise was intended to give both the North and the South some benefit that they desired, each side still felt the need to overpower the other. This continued throughout the time period and reignited fiercer in 1854, after the passing of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. This act repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820, and again allowed popular sovereignty to decide the fate of slavery within Kansas and Nebraska.

This provoked both southerners and northerners to send masses to the territories in order to try to dominate the votes. The New England Emigrant Aid Company was founded in the North to force immigrants that were against slavery into Kansas so that it would be annexed into the United States as a “ free state. ” The sectional dividing of the North and the South pushed citizens of each region to attempt to manipulate politics to allow new regions to reflect corresponding interests. The West was generally very trampled by northerners and southerners.

The area was more undeveloped, but truly was the region that the land expansion would affect most. Westerners generally did not have a lot of political power in the mid-1800s, as citizens from the South and from New England felt they could just dominate with their views. The westerners tried not to really interfere with the feuding between the North and the South, though tended to have more similar views with the North. Only a small section of citizens in the West desired slave states, so they were rather agreeable to the Compromise of 1850.

By having the compromise initiated, it would give freedom to the new western states, which was much desired. The West was very in favor of self-ruling, so popular sovereignty was greatly desired. The West remained neutral throughout the impacts of the Mexican War, and was greatly against the sectionalism it had caused. Being caught in the middle put the West in a rough position to get controlled by the other rivaling sections. It was accepted that something needed to develop a form of law and order to unite the United States together.

This raised a debating question on how much should the government govern its territory, and how should new land have its fate decided. With the country sectionalized, there would always be a disagreement on which views were right to instill in the new area. Whichever should be chosen would simply further advance the domination of that interest. Henry Thoreau was a very strong anti-slavery leader, who in his essay "Civil Disobedience" wrote, "That government is best which governs least."

This stands true yet contradicting for the views of Western citizens, as they wished to be set free from the sectionalized government dictating and

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fighting over the new region, but also false in the sense that it was apparent that that could only truly occur if the country was able to band together as a whole. Differences needed to be overcome, and the debates after the Mexican War only alienated westerners who did not wish to be sectionalized. The Mexican War was a very influential event in American history. The impacts that it made stirred up debate that could not truly reach a true resolution.

Each section of the United States had its own idea of how issues should be handled, and the federal government was not able to suit all three sections at once. The sectional interests of the North and South especially reached new extremes as political actions bounced between favoritism. The West, in result, went even more extreme in wanting their independence to choose their political stance on their own rather than get trapped in between the debate over slavery. The United States began its whirlwind towards continual splitting and disagreement that would eventually cause the Civil War.

Between 1848 and 1855, the sectional interests overran any unity that remained in the United States as the debates that occurred eliminated trust within the government and destroyed the party system of the time. The United States was going through a stage of rapid change to find a solution that could suit each region of the country and still maintain a federal level of governing. The quest for compromise met many tedious conflicts, making the Mexican War spark the beginning of one of America's biggest civil disagreements.