

**CHAPTER ELEVEN: “TO OVERSPREAD THE CONTINENT”:
WESTWARD EXPANSION AND POLITICAL CONFLICT, 1840–1848**

READING AND STUDY GUIDE

- I. Manifest Destiny and Changing Visions of the West
 - A. The Trapper’s World
 - B. Manifest Destiny and the Overland Trail
 - C. The Native American Encounter with Manifest Destiny
 - D. The Mormon Flight to Utah

- II. American Expansionism into the Southwest
 - A. The Transformation of Northern Mexico
 - B. The Clash of Interests in Texas
 - C. The Republic of Texas and the Politics of Annexation
 - D. Polk’s Expansionist Vision

- III. The Mexican War and Its Consequences
 - A. A Controversial War
 - B. Images of the Mexican War

- IV. The Wilmot Proviso and the Realignment of American Politics
 - A. The Wilmot Proviso
 - B. Sectionalism and the Election of 1848

The Mexican War facilitated westward expansion, bringing new lands into American possession, but it also vastly complicated American politics by making slavery a central issue.

By 1840 all the land east of the Mississippi (excepting the territories of Florida and Wisconsin) had been organized into new states, but Americans remained hungry for land. By this time many had come to believe that America was destined to conquer and settle the entire North American continent, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. As a result, tens of thousands of Americans migrated west in search of land and opportunity. Some were part of the migration along the Overland Trail to the Pacific Northwest, others came with the large Mormon migration to the Great Salt Lake.

The American defeat of Mexico dramatically increased the size of the nation. The United States incorporated a huge swath of new territory, stretching from Texas to California. The war was also deeply divisive, exacerbating the divisions between Democrats and Whigs and intensifying the conflict between abolitionists and pro-slavery forces.

Learning Objectives

After a careful examination of Chapter 11, students should be able to do the following:

1. Describe the conditions in New England and the South that contributed to western migration.
2. Explain the diverse regional and cultural influences that defined the culture of the Old Northwest during the early nineteenth century.
3. List the factors that contributed to the migration of planters into the Old Southwest.
4. Compare and contrast the socioeconomic development of the Old Northwest and the Old Southwest.
5. Describe the dilemma that faced the Native American farming peoples of the Plains, such as the Pawnees, during the nineteenth century.
6. Identify the factors that contributed to the development of the Sioux Indians into one of the most formidable Native American tribes of the nineteenth century.
7. Describe the lifestyle of American fur traders who lived in the Trans-Mississippi West during the mid-nineteenth century.
8. Outline the path of the Oregon Trail and describe the overlanders who used the trail to migrate westward. Describe the particular gender roles on the Oregon Trail.
9. Define the terms *criollo* and *mestizo*.
10. List the principal groups of Native Americans living in the Southwest and explain how their lives were impacted by the Spanish mission system.
11. Identify the *Tejanos* and describe the role they played in the Texas War for Independence.
12. Identify Stephen F. Austin and explain the role of American *empresarios* in Texas.
13. Explain the Anglo-*Tejano* alliance in the Texas War for Independence and why these groups were interested in seeking independence from Mexico.
14. Identify and explain the historical significance of the phrase “Remember the Alamo!” in the Texas War for Independence.
15. Explain the nature of the Mexican and American interests in California and the Southwest during the years prior to the Mexican War.

16. Describe the impact of the Santa Fe Trail on the settlement of New Mexico, and describe the impact of the Mormons on the settlement of Utah.
17. Explain the philosophy of Manifest Destiny. Explain the racial overtones in the philosophy and why it was closely associated with the Democratic Party.
18. Outline the events leading to the Mexican War. Explain the factors that contributed to the American victory and outline the provisions of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Key Terms & Definitions:

rendezvous A festive annual gathering held in the Rocky Mountains in which Indians, mountain men, and traders would gather together to exchange pelts for a variety of goods. (318)

Manifest Destiny A term coined by editor and columnist John O'Sullivan to describe his belief in America's divine right to expand westward. (320)

Overland Trail The 2,000-mile route taken by American settlers traveling to new settlements in Oregon, California, and Utah. (320)

mission system The colonial system devised by the Spanish to control the Indian population, forcing them to convert to Catholicism and work the land. (326)

Liberty Party The staunchly antislavery, anti-annexation, party was short lived, but captured 62,000 votes, a small number, but enough to effectively rob Henry Clay of electoral victories in New York and Michigan thereby handing Polk the presidency in 1844. (329)

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo This treaty formally ended the war between the United States and Mexico (1848). In addition to settling the border dispute between Texas and Mexico, the United States gained a significant swath of new territory in the Southwest. (332)

Wilmot Proviso Bill introduced by Congressman David Wilmot would have banned slavery from the territories acquired from Mexico. (335)

popular sovereignty An approach to the question of slavery in a newly acquired territory that would have allowed the people in each territory to decide for themselves whether to permit slavery. (335)

Study Questions:

What impact did the Mexican War have on American politics? (316)

What function did the yearly rendezvous play in the culture of fur trappers? (318)

How did exploration of the West both impede and encourage migration? (319)

What were the most important ideas associated with Manifest Destiny? (320)

How does the painting of the Oregon trail reflect the ideas of Manifest Destiny? (321)

Why were tales of Indian attacks on immigrants so popular in American culture? (322)

How did Catlin represent his Mandan subject for an American audience? (323)

How did the Mormon immigration differ from other westward migrations? (324)

What role did Mormon communalism play in their experiences at Nauvoo? (325)

What was the rancharo system? (326)

What advantages did Americans have over Mexicans in the lucrative trade with Santa Fe? (327)

How did Anglo-Texans make use of their defeat at the Alamo to rally support for their cause? (328)

What role did the Liberty Party play in American politics? (329)

How did Polk pursue his expansionist agenda? (330)

What were the most important differences between the leadership style of Generals Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott? (331)

What role did images play in shaping American perceptions of the Mexican War? (332)

Why did the artist pose Henry Clay in the same posture as General Wolfe and General Warren? (333)

How significant was Henry Thoreau's essay at the time it was published? (334)

Why was the Wilmot Proviso so controversial? (335)

Why does this political cartoon show a phrenologist examining Taylor's skull? (336)

Who were the Barnburners? (337)

What were the most important differences between the strategy of the Whigs and Democrats in the election of 1848? (338)