# Manifest Destiny

### Oregon

Perhaps you have played the fantastic computer game, "The Oregon Trail." Or perhaps you've read Little House on the Prairie.Or perhaps you know the [quaint little picture](http://teenymanolo.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Covered-wagon.jpg) of the covered wagon, oxen, sun-bonneted ladies, and floppy-straw-hatted men well.

That's the image of "manifest destiny," family-style. Many, many people were going west along the "Oregon Trail." Problem was, British lumber companies were stillin America (proof that the War of 1812 totally didn't work). America wanted the Oregon territory all the way until the 54̊ 40' parallel.

**James K. Polk,**running as America's first **"Dark Horse Candidate"**for the presidency (which is to say thatnothingwas known of him and he had no real political history) used this to his advantage. His slogan was **"5**4̊**40' or fight."—**or, "Hey Brits, give us that territory or we'll fight you for it." That didn't exactly work, but Polk did negotiate much of the Oregon Territory to the 49th parallel.

### Texas

Texas was Mexico's. However, when has a little thing like foreign ownership stopped America from scoring what it wanted? Besides, Americans had come in droves to Texas when Mexico had invited them, in the hopes of using them to stimulate trade in the area, build settlements, and control the Native Americans.

Problem was, Americans started to like it there—and to resent Mexican government. In 1836, when **Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana**became Mexico's military dictator and tried to force Texas to follow Mexican laws, a Texan called **Sam Houston**staged a revolution.

Santa Ana won the first round, killing all the Americans stationed at the **Alamo.**After this brutal attack,Sam Houston had his soldiers declare "Remember the Alamo.", and they proceeded to totally whip Santa Ana's forces. He produced the might to win it, too, kicking out Santa Ana's forces and establishing Texas as an independent republic—the **Lone Star Republic.**

Funnily enough, America at first rejected Texas's request to be part of the union. The presidents, Jackson and then Van Buren, were worried about the whole slavery thing all over again, and tipping the nice balance of slave and free states in Congress. In 1844, however, President Tyler decided that "manifest destiny" trumped any tip-toeing around slavery, and let the Texans right on in

### The Mexican-American War

Obviously, Mexico was a little less than overjoyed about this. President James Polk sent a diplomat over to talk boundaries with them, and to ask if they could buy California, too. Buuut…he also sent some troops, just in case. The real history is hazy, but allegedlyMexicans fired on the troops—and the **Mexican-American War** began.

Happily for the Americans, the war was quick and decisive. Plus, they won big time. The **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo**gave them present-day New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and California to the U.S. Americans agreed to pay only 15 million dollars for it—pittance, for all that land.

Pittance, too, when it turned out that gold was discovered in California, in 1848. Thousands upon thousands of Americans (mostly men) hopped on boats or in caravans and swarmed west, hoping to strike it rich. They were called the **49ers,**and, thanks to them, California (and other parts of the West) were settled mighty quick.

America didn't only get gold in the bargain—gold came with a ton of other problems. You guessed it: the slavery issue reared its ugly head again. The number of these new territories promised that there would be a whole lot of new disputes about whether they would be slave or free.

The legislator who kicked it off was **David Wilmot,**whose **Wilmot Proviso**tried to say that slavery would be banned in the new territories (since Mexico had already banned it a while ago). Of course, Southerners blocked it, but on the other hand, a group of people formed the **Free Soil Party**in support of it. These members of the Free Soil Party weren't against slavery for moral issues: what they wanted was a free state where they wouldn't need tocompetewith slaves. In the South, the **Democratic Party**countered with an idea called **popular sovereignty**—people in the territories could themselvesdecide, with a popular vote, whether or not to have slavery.

The issue split the **Whig Party,**which refused to decide one way or the other on the issue, so dissolved into the other two parties. Increasingly, the nation was split economically, socially, ideologically—and politically. The heat of the slavery issue was making the nation a furnace.