

# Summary: Bear Flag Revolt

## American Interest in California

In the mid-1840s, California had about 7,000 Californios and was part of Mexico. The families of most Californios were from Spain and Mexico. Under the law, only Mexican citizens could own land. By 1845, about 1,000 settlers had arrived from the United States. Some were trappers or merchants. Others ranched or farmed. They did not obey Mexican laws. Pío Pico, the Mexican governor of California, was concerned. Many settlers believed in “Manifest Destiny,” the belief that the United States was meant to extend from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. American settlers wanted Mexico to give up California.

James K. Polk, who became President of the United States in 1845, also believed in Manifest Destiny and wanted California to be part of the United States. Ports like San Francisco could expand trade and protect the United States. Polk also worried that Great Britain might take over California. Polk promised to protect settlers who went to California.

## The Bear Flag Republic

In the spring of 1846, a group of American farmers and mountain men called the Bears decided to rebel against Mexico. Ezekiel Merritt was one of the leaders. John C. Frémont, a U.S. Army officer in California, advised Merritt and the Bears on a plan to capture the pueblo of Sonoma.

Sonoma was headquarters for part of the Mexican army in northern California. Mariano Vallejo was in charge. But he also didn't like the way Mexico governed and thought the United States might do better. When Vallejo was surprised by the Bears on June 14, he invited them in and gave them control of Sonoma. The Bears then declared California free, and claimed it was now the Republic of California. They created a flag with a star and a grizzly bear. The event became known as The Bear Flag Revolt. The Republic of California lasted less than a month, as the United States had already declared war on Mexico in a separate incident.

### Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

**official** *noun*, someone in charge of a certain area

**headquarters** *noun*, a central place

**military** *noun*, groups armed to protect a country

### After You Read

**REVIEW** Why did President Polk want the United States to control California? Highlight the sentences that tell Polk's reasons for wanting California for the United States.

**REVIEW** What happened at Sonoma during the Bear Flag Revolt? Underline the sentences that describe the revolt.