

Summary: The Mexican–American War

Neighbors at War

The United States and Mexico could not agree on the border between them. The United States claimed that Mexican soldiers crossed over to attack some American soldiers. Some in the United States said it was just an excuse to get land claimed by Mexico. Others feared that the practice of slavery would spread to new land gained by war.

Most of Congress as well as President Polk were for the war. They believed in Manifest Destiny, and Polk wanted California. In May 1846, the United States declared war. It became known as the Mexican–American War.

News of the war took more than a month to reach California. On July 2, Commodore John D. Sloat, a commander of U.S. Navy ships in the Pacific, waited for news. He had orders to take California ports when war broke out. He decided to take action on July 7, and raised the American flag over Monterey. Yerba Buena and San Francisco Bay were captured, and Commodore Robert Stockton took San Diego and Los Angeles.

California and the War

While the U.S. Navy defended the coast of California, General Stephen Watts Kearney led U.S. Army troops on land. Kearney's troops drove some of the Mexican troops back to Mexico. Californios in the Mexican army were left to fight the Americans alone.

As a U.S. Army officer, John Frémont led the Bears and other troops. In January 1847, Frémont arrived in Santa Barbara. A Californio woman named Bernarda Ruiz convinced Frémont to make peace with Californio leaders. Ruiz also spoke with General Andrés Pico, a Californio leader. He agreed to the Treaty of Cahuenga, which ended the fighting in California.

The war continued outside California, until the United States defeated Mexico. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed by both sides in February 1848. Mexico was forced to give much of the territory of California, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico to the United States. California was now part of the United States.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

slavery *noun*, the practice of buying and selling people and forcing them to work without pay

armed forces *noun*, groups organized to protect a country

treaty *noun*, a written agreement between countries

territory *noun*, land that belongs to a country



After You Read

REVIEW **Why did the United States go to war with Mexico?** Highlight the sentences that explain what the United States wanted.

REVIEW **Who took part in ending the fighting in California during the Mexican–American War?** Underline the sentences that tell how fighting ended in California.