Manifest Destiny and The Mexican American War

“Away, away with all these cobweb issues of the rights of discovery, exploration, settlement, … [the American claim] is by the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty.”

Manifest Destiny: the belief that the United States had the divine mission to extend its power and civilization across the breadth of N. America.

1. Conflicts Over land
2. Texas Disputes (1830s)
   * 1. Mexico wins independence from Spain in 1823
     2. Mexico laid claim to the Texas territory, wants people to settle there
     3. Moses Austin
        1. Obtains a large land grant in Tx.
        2. He dies, so his son inherits land
     4. Stephen Austin
        1. Brings 300 families into Tx
     5. By 1830, white settlers and blacks (slaves) outnumber Mexicans
   1. 1829: Mexico outlaws slavery in all of its territories and requires immigrants to convert to Catholicism
      1. Angers the American settlers in the territory
   2. General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna
      1. Makes himself dictator of Mexico in 1834
      2. Tries to enforce Mexican laws in Texas
      3. Gen. Sam Houston
         1. Leads American soldiers to revolt against Mexican government.
   3. “Remember the Alamo”
      1. Mexican Army attacks the rebels in San Antonio at a fort, called the Alamo
   4. Battle of San Jacinto River
      1. Houston leads his troops to defeat Santa Anna and forces the recognition of Texas’ independence (The Lone Star Republic)
         1. Mexican legislature refuses to accept the independence of Texas
   5. The Republic of Texas/Lone Star Republic
      1. Houston = first president
         1. Applies to have Texas annexed by the United States
         2. Jackson and Van Buren both deny annexation request
            1. Primarily a political move so as to not anger Northerners against the expansion of slavery
            2. Also, the threat of war with Mexico stopped early annexation attempts
         3. John Tyler works to annex Tex, but Senate rejected treaty
3. Maine Disputes (1840s)
   1. Conflict over the ill-defined N. Boundary of Maine and Canada (British owned)
      1. Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842
         1. Disputed territory was split between Canada and Maine
         2. N. Boundary of Minnesota is also set
4. Oregon Disputes (
   1. Spain, Russia, Great Britain, and The US all claimed Oregon
      1. Spain dropped claims in the Adams-Onis Treaty (1819)
   2. US laid claim to the territory primarily because:
      1. Discovery of Columbia river by Robert Gray
      2. Lewis and Clark Expedition
      3. John Jacob Astor fur trading outpost (Astoria)
      4. Successful farming in the Willamette Valley (1840s) led to immigration of Americans on the so-called “Oregon Trail”
5. The Election of 1844
   1. Martin Van Buren (Democrat)- anti slavery, anti annexation
   2. John C. Calhoun (Democrat)-pro slavery, pro annexation
   3. James K. Polk (Democrat)- pro slavery, pro annexation
      1. “Dark Horse Candidate” – lesser known
      2. Protégé of Andrew Jackson
      3. “Fifty-four forty or Fight!”
         1. Slogan of expansionists
            1. Signifies the boundary line between the northern border of the Oregon Territory and Russian Alaska
   4. Henry Clay (Whig) – flip flopped on annexation issue
   5. Ultimately, Polk wins – many believe it was destiny to annex Texas
6. Annexing Texas
   1. John Tyler, before leaving office, convinces congress to pass a joint resolution of annexation (which only required a simple majority vote of each house)
   2. Also, N. border of Oregon territory was decided at the 49th parallel (the same divide for the earlier Louisiana Territory)
   3. Polk was left to deal with Mexican reaction
7. War with Mexico
   1. Polk dispatches John Slidell to talk with Mexican government
      1. Persuade Mexico to sell California and New Mexico Territories to the US
      2. Settle disputed Mexico-Texas Border (Nueces River or Rio Grande?)
         1. Rio Grande (farther South) was claimed as the border by the Americans
   2. Causes
      1. Polk orders Gen. Zachary Taylor to move troops across Nueces R. south to the Rio Grande
      2. Mexican troops cross the Rio Grande and kill 11 Americans
      3. Polk has war message prepared for Congress
         1. Northern Whigs (including Lincoln) oppose war with Mexico
   3. Imp. Battles
      1. Santa Fe (California)
      2. John C. Fremont overthrows Mex. In N. California and declares California to be an independent Republic (the “Bear Flag Republic”)
      3. Buena Vista
      4. Vera Cruz
      5. Mexico City
   4. Consequences of War
      1. Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo
         1. Mexico Recognizes Rio Grande as the southern border of Texas
         2. US takes possession of California and New Mexico in what is called the Mexican Cession
            1. 15 million
      2. There was little opposition to the treaty, but:
         1. Some whigs opposed the war as immoral
         2. Some democrats opposed the treaty as they wanted to further expansion to take all of Mexico
   5. Wilmot Proviso
      1. 1846: Congressman David Wilmot proposes that slavery should be excluded in any of the new territories acquired from Mexico
         1. Passed in the house but was defeated in the senate
      2. Renews tensions and sectional disputes over slavery and power in congress (free vs. slave states)
   6. Gadsden Purchase
      1. President Pierce succeeds in purchasing the southern sections of New Mexico and Arizona in order to complete a section of the Trans continental railroad