




The Causes of the Civil War

1845-1861
Part 1



The Texas Question

- Americans came to Texas seeking cheap land and a fresh start. The Panic of 1819 influenced many Americans to make the move to Texas. With enough Americans moving to Texas, it influences other American families to also move into the West.
- Texas was a vast territory that could come into the Union as one slave state, or even as a combination of states which could tilt the balance of power between the North and the South. Parts of Texas would be suitable for the development of slave-based plantation agriculture.
- Clay opposed the annexation of Texas because he feared it would lead to war with Mexico. Calhoun supported the annexation of Texas because he believed that most of the people of Texas were Americans seeking to stay a part of the United States.

Manifest Destiny

- Most of the people who moved into the West came for a variety of reasons: some to escape religious persecution (like the Mormons), others to find wealth (such as the people who came because of the California Gold Rush), and others came as families looking for both land and a fresh start.
- The toughness of the pioneer family, braving the elements and creating something out of the land, as well as forming independent communities became an important part of the American identity.
- O'Sullivan believed it was our God-given right to own Texas, while Lincoln saw the idea that Americans would simply just take land as being hypocritical.

The Southwest

- Both before and after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), Mexicans, Native Americans and Americans would come to inhabit the space that is Tucson, Arizona, today.
- Though they would become American citizens, earning the respect of the white citizens who had tremendous power, but were few in number made for an often tense set of exchanges. Up until the 20th century, and even today, Tucson, still has a vibrant Hispanic population that is a significant part of the cultural fabric of the area and its history.
- Most of the slaves were actually Native Americans, and the people in the area did not favor the expansion of African-American slavery with its peculiar characteristics into the area. The following states (whole or in part) came into the Union because of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: California, Nevada, Utah, (in part) Colorado, Wyoming, New Mexico, and Arizona.

The Mexican-American War

- The land (due to the climate) was unsuitable for plantation agriculture, a number of New England families had migrated to the Oregon Country, and the distance made it an unlikely target for the Southern expansion of slavery.
- The idea that it was our God-given right to expand from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean was a major component of the idea of Manifest Destiny. We felt that we were destined to have the land and that it was ours for the taking— just as Texas had been (one reason for this is that we also saw the land as being underdeveloped). The war with Mexico ended with the fulfillment of the ideal of Manifest Destiny.
- President Polk believed that we were in our right to go to war with Mexico, because Americans had been attacked on soil that we had claimed in Texas as our own. Thoreau saw the war as immoral and that since a few people in the country wanted more land that we were willing to go along with it. He felt that we went to war without all of the people in the country having desired it.

The Compromise of 1850

- The fear was that if California became a free state that it would upset the balance of power in the US Senate (Northerners with the larger and growing population– thanks to immigration and industrialization would always have a majority in the House of Representatives). Therefore, Southerners see the entrance of California as a free state as a threat to their way of life.
- The goal of the Compromise of 1850 was to restore sectional harmony. It allowed California to enter as a free state, abolished the slave trade in the nation's capital, allowed the question of the expansion of slavery into the Utah and New Mexico Territories to be decided later, allowed the federal government to assume the debts of Texas and redrew its borders, and enacted a much tougher and harsher fugitive slave law.
- Seward opposed the idea that the new lands in the West could be open to the expansion of slavery– citing the Northwest Ordinance, he believed that Congress had the power and the authority to end the expansion of slavery into the new territories. Calhoun saw any attempt to block the expansion of slavery into the new western territories as a reason for secession.