Chapter 12
Expansion and Reaction
1846-1854

War With Mexico

- Mexico posed no threat to America.
- Americans simply wanted the territory then held by an independent Mexican state.
- New England states oppose the war but the South and West favor it.
- The regions that favor war with Mexico are those that will benefit from new territory.
- Few politicians have the will to vote against it.

Religious Overtones to War

- Anti-Catholic sentiment plays a role in war.
- Mexico’s predominant religion, Catholicism, mentioned as cause for war.
- Irish immigrants had begun entering America and were facing open hostility.
- Some Irish-Americans fought for Mexicans.
- Many false rationales for fighting this war.

Manifest Destiny

- Just as with Native American land, Americans believe they can take land at will; it’s a right!
- The pro-slavery political movement simply wanted Mexican land in which to spread.
- American settlers had moved to California and wanted to annex it to the United States.
- As with Texas Mexico had welcomed them.

Polk Presidency

- Polk was from Tennessee and a protégé of Jackson; a former Speaker of the House.
- He favored expansion into Oregon, then held by Britain, and the annexation of Texas.
- Though there was regional opposition he launched the War with Mexico.
- His health was deteriorating he died shortly after leaving office.

Eureka!

- In the 1840s gold is discovered in California.
- Desire to become wealthy from finding gold results 55,000 going there to mine; “49ers”
- About $6 million found in first few years.
• Men from all classes, ethnic groups, races flocked there to “get rich quick” with gold.
• Eventually large companies take over process.

**Slavery Subtext**

• Throughout this era the issue of slavery plays a part in almost every other political debate.
• Expansionism becomes embroiled in debates over new states slavery status.
• Congress even limited when slavery could be discussed it had become so bitter a debate.
• The South uses its inflated political power to secure compromises to allow slavery’s growth.

**Women’s Suffrage**

• A class of women, recently educated in colleges, eloquently advocate for equality.
• The frontier experience, with many single mothers living there, an example of equity.
• The rhetoric, and the promise, of the Declaration of Independence is being redefine.
• If “original intent” were truly sought, what would happen to women’s suffrage?

**Seneca Falls Convention**

• Female Abolitionists denied admission to international convention opposing slavery.
• Women, mostly Quakers, meet to discuss NY legislation about women’s property rights.
• Meeting expands into broader discussion of women’s rights in the entire United States.
• Meeting produces Seneca Falls Declaration.
• This was 1848; suffrage came 72 years later.

**Taylor Presidency**

• Military leader who disliked Pres. Polk.
• Elected in 1848; dies of illness in 1850
• Born in Virginia, raised in Kentucky, he owned 100 slaves; a fervent nationalist.
• Debate over slavery in land taken from Mexico; South threatens succession.
• Taylor tells Southern leaders they’ll hang.

**Millard Fillmore**

• Pres. Taylor’s death raises him to office.
• Born in Finger Lakes region (1800), moves to Buffalo; elected to House.
• As NY Comptroller nominated Vice Pres.
• Did not follow Taylor’s hard line with South
• He sought to compromise with South.
• Produces compromise where California prohibits slavery and Texas allows it.

_Uncle Tom’s Cabin_

• Written by Harriet Beacher Stowe.
• Daughter of an Abolitionist minister.
• She lived in Ohio just across from Kentucky where slavery was allowed; she saw it.
• Many white Americans were ignorant about the plight of the African American slave.
• The book has an enormous impact on Northern public opinion; angers South.

_American Literature_

• More stories about common men and women than found in British literature.
• Stories which portray the challenges of dealing with the elements; life on the frontier.
• Stories which portray America’s colonial and cultural past; America’s history.
• American values treated as basis of defining the plot, that is, the essence of literature.

_Walt Whitman_

• Born in 1819 in Long Island; a Quaker.
• Worked as a printer, later was a teacher.
• Became a journalist in Brooklyn and eventually became an editor.
• Writes a collection of poems called _Leaves of Grass_ (1855); received national acclaim.
• An American poet of international stature.

_Mormons’ Migration_

• Persecuted by mobs wherever they went.
• Founder, Joseph Smith, assassinated by men persecuting him for his religious beliefs.
• Desiring nothing more than to be left alone they eventually reach uninhabited Utah.
• Saw the desert around the Great Salt Lake as similar to Israel in Biblical portrayals.

_Immigration Increases_

• Ireland experiences an economic disaster erroneously called “The Potato Famine.”
• Irish poor, driven off family land by English occupiers, starve when only crop they can grow on the cheapest land is ruined by blight.
• 2-3 million Irish die; 3 million leave Ireland.
• Wanting the Irish to leave Ireland, the English make it easy to leave for America.
**Fugitive Slave Act**

- Runaway slaves take refuge in Free States.
- Southern political power exceeds actual numbers of represented citizens.
- Political clout results in law which says slaves can be captured anywhere in U.S.
- Many free African Americans, never slaves, taken back South as escaped slaves.

**The Know-Nothings**

- Influx of Catholic (mostly Irish) immigrants produces bigoted movement; violence common
- Secret society when they were confronted about their existence claim “I know nothing.”
- Nativist movement has presidential candidate.
- Anti-Catholicism in American history is one of those stories which does not often get told.

**Kansas-Nebraska Act**

- Slave state congressmen oppose forming a free state west of slave state Missouri.
- Solution is popular sovereignty.
- A doctrine under which the status of slavery in the territories was to be determined by the settlers themselves.
- Stephen Douglas crafts a pro-Slavery compromise; he has presidential aspirations.

**Railroads Moving West**

- Gradually the railroads move west.
- The government grants railroads land which they can sell to finance the building cost.
- Railroad companies become the locus of political and economic power, corruption.
- Collusion with large companies force farmers to accept low prices for crops.

**Manifest Destiny**

*(Westward Expansion)*

- The term is coined by a journalist in the East
- It means that the country was pre-ordained to go from shore to shore; it was a national right.
- Society dictates that one moves west
- Primogeniture-like inheritance sends younger sons and women in search of land.
- An expression of American exceptionalism.

**Who is Going West?**
• People accustomed to privacy recoil at increase in population.
• Entrepreneurial spirit-Financial independence.
• Immigrants who were farmers in Europe.
• Immigrants who solicited by the railroads to populate their right-of-way properties.
• Farmers who would exhaust the land they are working and set out to find better land.

Who Else Wants to Go West?
• Soldiers who return to find that life had changed at home; no work after war service.
• Religious minorities seeking freedom to worship without social pressures or prejudice
• Men in marriages they want out of
• A poor man’s divorce; just disappear west.
• African-Americans seeking economic goals.

Slavery wants to move west too.
• Sons of slave owners want their own land.
• Upwardly mobile Southerners want to succeed at what they see the rich of the South doing.
• Successful slave owners expand farms pushing less successful off land. Small slaveholders move to start over.
• Slave trade required expansion to sell slaves.

Moving West Impacts Culture
• When you feuded with neighbors or government, you would move.
• You developed a bad reputation, you moved.
• If you got into legal or financial trouble
• Adds to belief that poor are lazy
• Process masks flaws in the process.
• Continues until frontier no longer exists.

Moving West Cured Nations Ills
• Any and all issues of social and economic injustice could be solved by moving.
• Personal and familial disagreements are cured by distance; adulterous couples move west.
• When you were pushed to the margins economically or socially you moved.
• When you went bankrupt you left for the west.
• Nations’ belief in system depends on this major outlet for problems and inequities.