CHAPTER 13

Moving West

It was July 4, 1836, but nothing in her 28 years had prepared Narcissa Whitman for the sights and sounds that marked this particular holiday. Earlier in the day, Narcissa and the party with which she was traveling had crossed over the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains, a memorable milestone for the nation’s birthday. Now evening had come, and the caravan had set up camp for the night. Suddenly, wild cries and the
sound of gunshots and galloping horses broke the silence. Fourteen or fifteen men, most dressed as Native Americans, advanced toward the camp. Frightened by the threatening appearance of the horsemen, the noise, and the bullets whizzing over her head, Narcissa may well have wondered if her journey and even her life were to end. But as the horsemen approached, the anxious travelers could make out a white flag tied to one of the riders’ rifles. These were not foes but friends who had ridden out from the annual fur traders’ rendezvous to greet the caravan.

Two days later Narcissa reached the rendezvous site, where hundreds of Indians as well as 200 whites, mostly traders and trappers, were gathered to exchange furs, tell stories, drink, and enjoy themselves. Some of the mounted Native Americans, “carrying their war weapons, wearing their war emblems and implements of music,” put on a special display. The exhibition was a novelty for Narcissa as was her presence for the Native Americans. Narcissa found herself the center of attention “in the midst of [a] gazing throng” of curious Indians. The experience was not unpleasant, and Narcissa’s impression of the natives was favorable: “They all like us and that we have come to live with them.”

Narcissa Whitman was one of the first white women to cross the Rocky Mountains and live in Oregon Territory in the 1830s. While many more Americans would follow her, only a few would share her reasons for coming west. They would come to farm, dig for gold, speculate in land, open a store, or practice law. However, Narcissa and her husband, Dr. Marcus Whitman, did not go west to better their lives but to carry God’s word to the Native Americans. Inspired by the revivals of the Second Great Awakening and convinced that all non-Christians were headed toward eternal damnation, Narcissa and her husband came to settle among the Native Americans in Oregon Territory and to convert them to Christianity and the American way of life.

This dream of becoming a missionary was one Narcissa had nourished since her early teens. But once the Whitmans had established their mission station in the Walla Walla valley, Narcissa slowly discovered that missionary work was nothing like her youthful fantasies. Although the Cayuse Indians listened to the missionaries and even adopted some Christian practices, they never lived up to the Whitmans’ high standards. None of them had conversion experiences that the Whitmans judged necessary for admittance to the Presbyterian church nor were they quick to abandon Native American customs. They continued to consult their medicine men and refused to settle permanently next to the mission station. Cayuse women seemed little interested in the middle-class domestic skills Narcissa wished to teach them. Narcissa’s positive impression of Native Americans disappeared. The Cayuse, she wrote, were “insolent, proud, domineering, arrogant, and ferocious.”

There were other disappointments and personal tragedies as well. Marcus was often away from the mission on medical business, and Narcissa was lonely and sometimes frightened when he was absent. Her beloved daughter fell into the river and drowned. Often sick and unhappy, Narcissa did not conceive again.

As time passed, however, Narcissa’s dismay and depression over her lack of success faded as hopeful signs of new possibilities other than Indian missionary work appeared. As she wrote to her mother in 1840, “a tide of immigration appears to be moving this way rapidly.” In the following years, more and more American families made their way past the mission station, headed for the Willamette valley. In one wagon train was a family of children who had been orphaned during their journey. The Whitmans took them in and adopted all seven children. Narcissa threw herself into caring for them and found herself too busy to work actively with the Cayuse.

The Native Americans were dismayed at the numbers of whites coming into the territory, but the Whitmans, convinced that the future of the West lay with the immigrants, welcomed them. The day of the Indians had passed. As a “hunted, despised and unprotected” people, the Whitmans believed that the Native Americans were headed toward “entire extinction.” But in an unexpected turn of events, some of the Cayuse
protested against this vision, turned against the Whitmans, and killed them both. Such violent actions did nothing to hold back the swarm of Americans heading west.

Narcissa Whitman and her husband, Marcus, were among thousands of Americans who played a part in the nation’s expansion into the trans-Mississippi West. While the religious faith that drove them west differentiated them from many crossing the western plains and prairies, the Whitmans’ cultural beliefs about the inferiority of the Native Americans and the necessity of American settlement were widely shared. Shared too was the conviction that American values and way of life were superior to those of the Native Americans and Mexicans who occupied the land.

This chapter concerns movement into the trans-Mississippi West between 1830 and 1865. First we will consider how and when Americans moved west, by what means the United States acquired the vast territories that in 1840 belonged to other nations, and the meaning of “Manifest Destiny,” the slogan used to defend the conquest of the continent west of the Mississippi River. Then we explore the nature of life on the western farms; in western mining communities where Latin American, Chinese, and European adventurers mingled with American fortune seekers; and in western cities. Finally, the chapter examines responses of Native Americans and Mexican Americans to expansion and illuminates the ways different cultural traditions intersected in the West.
PROBING THE TRANS-MISSISSIPPI WEST

Until the 1840s, most Americans lived east of the Mississippi in a nation with fluid and changing boundaries. By 1860, however, some 4.3 million Americans had moved beyond the great river into the trans-Mississippi West, and the United States had acquired fixed boundaries with Canada and Mexico and reached the western edge of the continent.

The International Context for American Expansionism

When the Whitmans arrived in Oregon Territory, they stayed at a bustling British fur trading post with hundreds of workers, French Canadians, English, Scots, and many from mixed European–Indian backgrounds. The establishment symbolized the international setting within which American expansionism occurred. The shifting interests and fortunes of several European nations helped shape the character and timing of westward emigration even though individual settlers might not recognize the large forces affecting their experiences.

In 1815, except for Louisiana Territory, Spain held title to most of the trans-Mississippi West. For hundreds of years, Spaniards had marched north from Mexico to explore, settle, and spread Spanish culture to native peoples. Eventually, Spanish holdings included present-day Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, western Colorado, California, and parts of Wyoming, Kansas, and Oklahoma. Spanish rulers tried to exclude foreigners from these frontier areas but increasingly found this policy difficult to enforce.

The area was vast, and Spain itself was experiencing internal difficulties that weakened its hold on its New World colonies. In 1820, the conservative Spanish monarch faced liberal revolt at home. Its ideas sparked liberation movements in the New World.

In 1821, Mexico declared its independence and acquired Spain’s territories in the trans-Mississippi West with a population that included 75,000 Spanish-speaking inhabitants and numerous Native American tribes. While maintaining control of this distant region and its peoples would have been difficult under any circumstances, Mexico was not successful in forming a strong or a stable government until the 1860s. It was in a weak position to resist the avid American appetite for expansion.

North of California lay Oregon country, a vaguely defined area extending to Alaska. Russia, Spain, Great Britain, and Spain all had claims to Oregon, but negotiations with Russia and Spain in 1819 and 1824 left just the United States and Britain in contention for the territory. Joint British–American occupation, agreed on in 1818 and 1827, delayed settling the boundary question. With only a handful of Americans in the territory, Oregon’s future would depend partly on how Britain, the world’s richest and most powerful country, defined its interests there as Americans began to stream into Oregon in the 1840s.

Early Interest in the West

Some Americans penetrated the trans-Mississippi West long before the great migrations of the 1840s and 1850s. The fur business attracted American trappers and traders to Oregon by 1811 and a decade later to the Rockies. Many of these men married Native
Events in Europe had a dramatic impact on the Americas. The popularization of the ideas of the French Revolution and Napoleon’s defeat of the Spanish king in 1808 contributed to ending Spanish rule in the Americas. Note how rapidly countries claimed their independence in the Southern Hemisphere and Latin America. Reflecting on the Past: How did the changing political landscape of the Americas affect the power and influence of the United States in the region?
American women and established valuable connections with tribes involved in trapping. Along with their wives, they occupied a cultural middle ground characterized by elements from both American and native ways of life. Some ultimately became guides for Americans who emigrated later to the West.

Like the Whitmans, Methodist missionaries established early outposts in Oregon territory to teach native tribes Christian and American practices. Roman Catholic priests, sent from Europe, also worked among the native peoples. More tolerant of Native American culture than their Protestant counterparts, the Catholics had greater initial success in converting native peoples to Christianity.

The collapse of the Spanish Empire in 1821 provided Americans with a variety of opportunities. Each year American caravans followed the Santa Fe Trail, loaded with weapons, tools, and brightly colored calicoes for New Mexico’s 40,000 inhabitants. Eventually, some “Anglos” settled there. In Texas, it was cheap land for cotton rather than commerce that attracted settlers and squatters just as the small local Tejano population was adjusting to Mexico’s independence. By 1835, almost 30,000 had migrated to Texas. They made up the largest group of Americans outside the nation’s boundaries at that time.

On the Pacific, a handful of New England traders carrying sea-otter skins to China anchored in the harbors of Spanish California in the early nineteenth century. By the 1830s, as the near extermination of the animals ruined this trade, a commerce developed that exchanged California cowhides and
tallow for clothes, boots, hardware, and furniture manufactured in the East.

Tribes driven from the South and the Old Northwest by the American government into present-day Oklahoma and Kansas were among the earliest easterners to settle in the trans-Mississippi West. Ironically, some of these tribes acted as agents of white civilization by introducing cotton, the plantation system, black slavery, and schools. Other tribes triggered conflicts that weakened the western tribes with whom they came into contact. These disruptions foreshadowed white incursions later in the century.

The fact that much of the trans-Mississippi West lay outside U.S. boundaries and that the government had guaranteed Indian tribes permanent possession of some western territories did not deter American economic or missionary activities. By the 1840s, a growing volume of published works detailed information that made emigration feasible. Lansford Hastings’s *Emigrants’ Guide to Oregon and California* (1845) provided both practical information and a rationale for emigration. American settlement would bring “genuine Republicanism and unsophisticated Democracy” to the West, replacing “ignorance, superstition, and despotism.”

Hastings’s confidence that the future of the West lay with the United States was speedily realized. During the 1840s the United States, by war and diplomacy, acquired Mexico’s possessions in the Southwest and on the Pacific and title to the Oregon country up to the 49th parallel. With the Gadsden Purchase in 1853, the country obtained another chunk of Mexican territory.

**Manifest Destiny**

Bursts of florid rhetoric accompanied territorial growth, and Americans used the slogan “Manifest Destiny” to justify and account for it. The phrase, coined in 1845 by John L. O’Sullivan, editor of the *Democratic Review*, expressed the conviction that the country’s superior institutions and culture gave Americans a God-given right, even an obligation, to spread their civilization across the entire continent. This sense of uniqueness and mission was a legacy of early Puritan utopianism and Revolutionary republicanism. By the 1840s, the successful absorption of the Louisiana Territory, rapid population growth, and advances in transportation, communication, and industry bolstered the idea of national superiority. Publicists of Manifest Destiny proclaimed that the nation not only could but must absorb new territories.
WINNING THE TRANS-MISSISSIPPI WEST

Manifest Destiny justified expansion, but events in Texas triggered the government's determination to acquire territories west of the Mississippi River. The Texas question originated in the years when Spain held most of the Southwest. Although some settlements such as Santa Fe, founded in 1609, were almost
as old as Jamestown, the sparsely populated and underdeveloped Southwest acted primarily as a buffer zone for Mexico. The main centers of Spanish settlement were geographically distant from one another and thousands of miles from Mexico City. This weak defensive perimeter was increasingly vulnerable as Spain weakened, but its legal status was recognized internationally in the Transcontinental Treaty. Moreover, in its treaty negotiations with Spain in 1819, the United States, in return for Florida, accepted a southern border excluding Texas, to which the Americans had gained rights from Spain to bring 200 families of the American impresarios, or contractors, to take advantage of this opportunity. His call for settlers brought an enthusiastic response, as Mary Austin Holley recalled. “I was a young thing then, but 5 months married, my husband . . . failed in Tennessee, proposed to commence business in New Orleans. I ready to go anywhere . . . freely consented. Just then Stephen Austin and Joe Hawkins were crying up Texas—beautiful country, land for nothing, etc.—Texas fever rose then . . . there we must go. There without much reflection, we did go.”

Like the Holleys, most of the American settlers came from the South, and some brought slaves. By the end of the decade, some 15,000 white Americans and 1,000 slaves lived in Texas, far outnumbering the 5,000 Tejano inhabitants.

Mexican officials soon had second thoughts. Although Stephen Austin converted to Roman Catholicism, few settlers gave signs of honoring their bargain with the Mexican government. Most remained far more American than Mexican. Some were malcontents who disliked Mexican laws and customs and the limitations on their economic and commercial opportunities. In late 1826, a small group of them rebelled and declared the Republic of Fredonia. Although Stephen Austin and others assisted in putting down the brief rebellion, American newspapers hailed the rebels as “apostles of democracy” and called Mexico an “alien civilization.”

Mexican anxiety grew apace. Secretary of Foreign Relations Lucas Aláman accused American settlers of being advance agents of the United States. “They commence by introducing themselves into the territory which they covet,” he told the Mexican Congress, “grow, multiply, become the predominant party in the population . . . These pioneers excite . . . movements which disturb the political state of the country . . . and then follow discontent and dissatisfaction.”

In 1829, the Mexican government altered its Texas policy. Determined to curb American influence, the government abolished slavery in Texas in 1830 and forbade further emigration from the United States. Officials began to collect customs duties on goods crossing the Louisiana border. But little changed in Texas. American slave owners freed their slaves and then forced them to sign life indenture contracts. Emigrants still crossed the border and outnumbered Mexicans.

Tensions escalated, and in October 1835, a skirmish between the colonial militia and Mexican forces opened hostilities. Sam Houston, onetime governor of Tennessee and army officer, became commander in chief of the Texas forces. Although Texans called the war with Mexico a revolution, a Vermont soldier perhaps more accurately observed, “It is in fact a rebellion.”

The new Mexican dictator and general Antonio López de Santa Anna hurried north to crush the rebellion with an army of 6,000 conscripts. Although he had a numerical advantage, many of his soldiers were Mayan Indians who had been drafted unwillingly, spoke no Spanish, and were exhausted by the long march. Supply lines were spread thin. Nevertheless, Santa Anna and his men won the initial engagements of the war: the Alamo at San Antonio fell to him, as did the fortress of Goliad, to the southeast. All the Americans were killed, even though the Americans holding Goliad had surrendered.

As he pursued Houston and the Texans toward the San Jacinto River, carelessness proved Santa Anna’s undoing. Although fully anticipating an American attack, the Mexican general and his men settled down to their usual siesta on April 21, 1836,
without posting an adequate guard. As the Mexicans dozed, the Americans attacked. With cries of “Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!” the Texans overcame the army, captured its commander in his slippers, and won the war within 20 minutes. Their casualties were minimal: 8 or 9 dead, 17 wounded. But 630 Mexicans lay dead.

With the victory at San Jacinto, Texas gained its independence. Threatened with lynching, Santa Anna saw little choice but to sign the treaty of independence setting the republic’s boundary at the Rio Grande. When news of the disastrous events reached Mexico City, however, the Mexican Congress repudiated an “agreement carried out under the threat of death.” Mexico maintained that Texas was still part of Mexico.

The new republic started off shakily, financially unstable, unrecognized by its enemy, rejected by its friends. Although Texans immediately sought admission to the Union, their bid failed. Jackson, whose agent in Texas reported that the republic’s “future security must depend more upon the weakness and imbecility of her enemy than upon her own strength,” was reluctant to run the risk of war with Mexico. With the union precariously balanced with 13 free and 13 slave states, many northerners violently opposed annexation of another slave state. Petitions poured into Congress in 1837 opposing annexation, and John Quincy Adams repeatedly denounced the idea. Annexation was too explosive a political issue to pursue; debate finally died down and then disappeared.

For the next few years, the Lone Star Republic led a precarious existence. Mexico refused to recognize its independence but could send only an occasional raiding party across the border. Texans skirmished with Mexican bands, did their share of border raiding, and suffered an ignominious defeat in an ill-conceived attempt to capture Santa Fe in 1841. Diplomatic maneuvering in European capitals for financial aid and recognition was only moderately successful. Financial ties with the United States increased, however, as trade grew and many Americans invested in Texas bonds and lands.

Texas became headline news again in 1844. “It is the greatest question of the age,” an Alabama expansionist declared, “and I predict will agitate the country more than all the other public questions ever have.” He was right. Although President John Tyler (who assumed office after Harrison’s sudden death) reopened the question of annexation hoping to ensure his re-election, the issue exploded. It brought to life powerful sectional, national, and political tensions and demonstrated the divisiveness of the questions connected to the western expansion of slavery. Southern Democrats claimed that the South’s future hinged on the annexation of Texas. “Now is the time to vindicate and save our institutions,” John C. Calhoun insisted.

Other wings of the Democratic party capitalized more successfully on the issue, however. Senators such as Lewis Cass of Michigan, Stephen Douglas of Illinois, and Robert Walker of Mississippi vigorously supported annexation, not because it would expand slavery, a topic they carefully avoided, but because it would spread the benefits of American civilization. Their arguments, classic examples of the basic tenets of Manifest Destiny, put the question into a national context of expanding American freedom. So powerfully did they link Texas to Manifest Destiny and avoid sectional issues that their candidate, James Polk of Tennessee, secured the Democratic nomination in 1844. Polk called for “the reannexation of Texas at the
earliest practicable period” and the occupation of the Oregon Territory. Manifest Destiny had come of age.

Whigs tended to oppose annexation, fearing slavery’s expansion and the growth of southern power. They accused the Democrats of exploiting Manifest Destiny, more as a means of securing office than of bringing freedom to Texas.

The Whigs were right that the annexation issue would bring victory to the Democrats. Polk won a close election in 1844. But by the time he took the oath of office in March 1845, Tyler had resolved the question of annexation by pushing through Congress a joint resolution admitting Texas to the Union. Unlike a treaty, which required the approval of two-thirds of the Senate and which Tyler had already failed to win, a joint resolution needed only majority support. Nine years after its revolution, Texas finally joined the Union with the unusual right to divide into five states if it chose to do so.

War with Mexico, 1846–1848

When Mexico learned of Texas’s annexation, it promptly severed diplomatic ties with the United States. It was easy for Mexicans to interpret the events from the 1820s on as part of an American plot to steal Texas. During the war for Texas independence, American newspapers, especially those in the South, had enthusiastically hailed the efforts of the rebels, while southern money and volunteers had aided the Texans in their struggle. Now that the Americans had gained Texas, would they want still more?

In his inaugural address in 1845, President Polk pointed out “that our system may easily be extended to the utmost bounds of our territorial limits, and that as it shall be extended the bonds of our Union, so far from being weakened will become stronger.” What were those territorial limits? Did they extend into the territory the Mexican government considered its own?

Polk, like many other Americans, failed to appreciate how the annexation of Texas humiliated Mexico and increased pressures on its government to respond belligerently. Knowing that Mexico was weak, the president anticipated that it would grant his grandiose demands: a Texas boundary at the Rio Grande rather than the Nueces River 150 miles to the north, as well as California and New Mexico.
Even before the Texans could accept the invitation to join the Union, rumors of a Mexican invasion were afloat. As a precautionary move, Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor to move “on or near the Rio Grande.” By October 1845, Taylor and 3,500 American troops had reached the Nueces River. The presence of the army did not mean that Polk actually expected war. Rather, he hoped that military might, coupled with secret diplomacy, would bring the desired concessions. In November, the president sent his agent, John L. Slidell, to Mexico City. When the Mexican government refused to receive Slidell, Polk angrily decided to force Mexico into accepting American terms. He ordered Taylor south to the Rio Grande. To the Mexicans, who insisted that the Nueces River was the legitimate boundary, their presence constituted an act of war. Democratic newspapers and expansionists enthusiastically hailed Polk’s provocative decision; the Whigs opposed it.

It was only a matter of time before an incident occurred to justify American hostilities. In late April, the Mexican government declared a state of defensive war. Two days later, a skirmish between Mexican and American troops resulted in 16 American casualties. When Polk received Taylor’s report, he quickly drafted a war message for Congress. The president claimed that Mexico had “passed the boundary of the United States . . . invaded our territory and shed American blood upon American soil.” “War exists,” he claimed, adding untruthfully, “notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by act of Mexico.”

Although Congress declared war, the conflict bitterly divided Americans. Many Whigs, including Abraham Lincoln, questioned the accuracy of Polk’s initial account of the events, and their opposition grew more vocal as time passed. Lincoln called the war one “of conquest brought into existence to catch votes.” The American Peace Society revealed sordid examples of army misbehavior in Mexico, and Frederick Douglass accused the country of “cupidity and love of dominion.” Many workers also criticized the war.
Debate continued as American troops swept into Mexico and advanced toward the capital. Although the Mexicans were also fighting Native American tribes on their northern border, the government refused to admit defeat and end the hostilities. The war dragged on. The American Review, a Whig paper, proclaimed that the conflict was a "crime over which angels may weep." In 1847, a month after General Winfield Scott took Mexico City, Philadelphian Joseph Sills wrote in his diary, "There is a widely spread conviction . . . that it is a wicked & disgraceful war."

Yet Polk enjoyed the enthusiastic support of expansionists. Most soldiers were eager volunteers. Some expansionists even urged permanent occupation of Mexico. Illinois Democratic senator Sidney Breese told the Senate, "The avowed objects of the war . . . [were] to obtain redress of wrongs, a permanent and honorable peace, and indemnity for the past and security for the future." To secure these goals, Breese could even contemplate permanent occupation with "great ultimate good" to the United States, to Mexico, "and to humanity."

Inflated rhetoric did not win the war, however. In the end, chance helped draw hostilities to a close. Mexican moderates approached Polk's diplomatic representative, Nicholas Trist, who accompanied the American army in Mexico. In Trist's baggage were detailed though out-of-date instructions outlining Polk's requirements: the Rio Grande boundary, Upper California, and New Mexico. Although the president had lost confidence in Trist and had ordered him home, Trist stayed in Mexico to negotiate an end to the war.

Having obtained most of Polk's objectives, he returned to Washington to an ungrateful president who fired him from his job at the State Department and denounced him as an "unqualified scoundrel."

California and New Mexico

Although Texas and Mexico dominated the headlines, Polk considered California and New Mexico part of any resolution of the Mexico crisis. Serious American interest in California dated from the late 1830s. Before then, few Americans were living in California. Many had married into California families and taken Mexican citizenship. But gradual recognition of California's fine harbors, its favorable position for the China trade, and suspicion that Great Britain had designs on it, fed the conviction that California must become part of the United States. The arrival of 1,500 overland emigrants in the 1840s increased the likelihood that California would not long remain a Mexican outpost.

In 1845, Polk appointed Thomas Larkin, a successful American merchant in Monterey, as his confidential agent. "If the people [of California] should desire to unite their destiny with ours," wrote Polk's secretary of state, James Buchanan, to Larkin, "they would be received as brethren." Polk's efforts to buy California suggested that he was sensitive to the fragility of American claims to the region. But Santa Anna, carrying the burden of having lost Texas, was in no position to sell.

New Mexico was also on Polk's list. Profitable economic ties with the United States dating back to the 1820s stimulated American territorial ambitions. As part of the oldest and largest Mexican community in North America, however, most New Mexicans had little desire for annexation. The unsuccessful attempt by the Texans to capture Santa Fe in 1841 and border clashes in the two following years did not enhance the attractiveness of Anglo neighbors. But because New Mexico stood awkwardly in the path of westward expansion and was further isolated from Mexico by the annexation of Texas in 1846, its future was uncertain.

In June 1846, shortly after the declaration of war with Mexico, American troops led by Colonel Stephen W. Kearney left Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, for New Mexico. Kearney had orders to occupy Mexico's northern provinces and to protect the lucrative Santa Fe trade. Two months later, the army took Santa Fe without a shot, although one eyewitness noticed "surly" countenances and a "wail of grief." New Mexico's upper class, having already made strategic alliances with Americans, readily accepted the new rulers. However, ordinary Mexicans and Pueblo Indians did not take conquest so lightly. After Kearney departed for California, resistance erupted first in New Mexico and then in California. Kearney was wounded, and the first appointed American governor of New Mexico was killed. In the end, superior American military strength won the day. By January 1847, both California and New Mexico were firmly in American hands.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 1848

Negotiated by Trist and signed on February 2, 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo resolved the original issues by setting the Rio Grande as the boundary between Mexico and the United States.
CHAPTER 13 Moving West

The Oregon Country

What does this map reveal about the claims to Oregon voiced during the election of 1844? How do the claims correspond to the eventual boundaries established with Great Britain? The major trails that brought American settlers to the West suggest the population movements that lay behind the Oregon controversy.

Though the British considered the president's speech belligerent, Polk correctly noted that Americans had not hesitated to settle the disputed territories. Between 1842 and 1845, the number of Americans in Oregon grew from 400 to more than 5,000, mostly south of the Columbia River in the Willamette valley. By 1843, these settlers had written a constitution and soon after elected a legislature. At the same time, declining British interest in the area set the stage for an eventual compromise. The near destruction of the beaver had weakened the fur trade, and the riches produced in Britain by the Industrial Revolution made colonies appear less important than they had been in the eighteenth century. Britain had already granted Canada self-rule. Attractive commercial opportunities were opening up in other parts of the world such as India and China, while New Zealand, annexed in 1840, and Australia became magnets for British emigration.

Polk's flamboyant posture and the expansive American claims made mediation difficult, however. Polk's campaign slogan claimed a boundary of 54°40'. But Polk was not willing to go to war with Great Britain for Oregon. Privately, he considered reasonable a boundary at the forty-ninth parallel, which would extend the existing Canadian–American border to the Pacific.

Soon after his inauguration, Polk offered his compromise to Great Britain, but his tone antagonized the British. In his year-end address to Congress in 1845, the president increased diplomatic tensions by again claiming Oregon and giving the required one year's notice of American intention to cancel the joint occupation.

Despite slogans, most Americans did not want to fight for Oregon. As war with Mexico loomed, the task of resolving the disagreement became more urgent. The British, too, were eager to settle, and in June 1846 they agreed to the forty-ninth-parallel boundary if Vancouver Island remained British. Polk ended the crisis just weeks before the declaration of war with Mexico; he escaped some of the responsibility for retreating from slogans by sharing it with the Senate, who approved the compromise.

As these events show, Manifest Destiny was an idea that supported and justified expansionist policies. It corresponded to Americans' basic belief that expansion was necessary and right. As early as 1816, American geography books pictured the nation's western boundary at the Pacific and included Texas. Popular literature typically described Native Americans as a dying race and Mexicans as "injurious neighbor[s]."

and by transferring the Southwest and California into American hands. At a cost of 13,000 American lives, mostly due to disease, the United States gained 75,000 Spanish-speaking inhabitants, 150,000 Native Americans, and 529,017 square miles, almost a third of prewar Mexico. It paid Mexico $15 million (and another $10 million in 1853 for the Gadsden Purchase), agreed to honor American claims against Mexico, and guaranteed the civil, political, and property rights of former Mexican citizens. Although sporadic violence would continue for years in the Southwest as Mexicans protested the outcome, the war was over, and the Americans had won.

The Oregon Question, 1844–1846

In the Pacific Northwest, the presence of mighty Great Britain suggested reliance on diplomacy rather than war. Glossing over the disputed nature of American claims to the Oregon Territory, Polk assured the inauguration day crowd that "our title to the country of Oregon is 'clear and unquestionable.'" The British did not agree.
On December 30, 1845, the London Times included an excerpt from the French newspaper Journal des Debats that commented on President Polk’s message about Oregon.

The message of the President of the United States respecting the Oregon question, is not of a tenour to indicate that Mr. Polk is animated by a spirit of conciliation. He dwells much upon his moderation, but he shows it so little, and his tone is such, that should a similar tone be assumed by the British Government, the affair must inevitably terminate in a war. Negotiations rejecting the Oregon territory have been pending since the year 1818. Both Powers wish to possess the river Columbia, the only important stream in the west of the New World. In the conferences which were held in 1818, 1824, and 1826, it was agreed that the navigation should be free for both countries, but the United States wished to possess both banks from the 49th degree of latitude to the ocean. England offered the left bank, preserving the other for herself, both countries having the free right of traffic with the Indians. Such is the convention which at present exists, and which Mr. Polk wishes to put an end to. The President, instead of exerting himself to bring the debate to a pacific termination, appears to have done all in his power to render it impossible. . . . The President breathe war, and his message in that respect is a novelty, even after those of General Jackson. Mr. Polk evidently belongs to a new school; and the American democracy, since the taking possession of Texas, abandons itself to an ambition which may prove fatal to it. His message is without precedent, not merely as regards the manner in which the Oregon question is treated, but on account of the general tone which characterizes it. Up to the present time, or at least up to the time of General Jackson, it was customary in the messages to speak in a differential tone to the European Powers. The Presidents were men who had seen Europe, and who duly appreciated the power of the great states of the old continent. In those solemn documents concocted principally for the multitude, they showed themselves proud of the republican institutions, they made a pompous parade of the prosperity sans egale (the favourite term of the country), but they carefully avoided anything which might be regarded at the other side of the Atlantic as vain and ridiculous bravadoes. . . . Mr. Polk, very different from his illustrious predecessors, reduces himself to the level of the rough cultivators of the valley of the Ohio, in whose opinion Europe is a collection of degraded beings groaning under the weight of monarchical government, and which it would be no difficult matter for the forces of the Union to overcome. It is impossible to explain the imprudent language contained in the President’s message in any other manner. But England is not the only Power to which the arrogant message applies. France is likewise roughly handled with respect to the Texas affair. France is reproached with wishing to have Texas made an independent state instead of going to swell the American federation, and the incorporation of Texas is represented as a victory over the European monarchies.

How does the French newspaper characterize Polk and American policy on the Oregon question?

Source: The London Times, December 30, 1845, from “The Mexican-American War and the Media, 1845–1848, transcribed by 3a"
Americans lost little time in moving into the new territories. During the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s, thousands of Americans left their homes for the West. By 1860, California alone had 380,000 settlers. At the same time, thousands of Chinese headed south and east to destinations such as Australia, Hawaii, and North and South America to escape the unrest caused by the opium wars in the 1840s with Great Britain, internal unrest, and poor economic conditions. Sixty-three thousand had come to the United States by 1870. Most were in California, the land of the “Gold Mountain.”

One Chinese folk song depicted the “perilous journey” to the United States “sailing [in] a boat
The Chinese, of course, had little choice on their travel route to the American West, but American migrants did. Some chose the sea route; although the trip was expensive, one could sail from Atlantic or Gulf Coast ports around South America to the West Coast or embark for Panama, cross the isthmus by land, and then continue by sea. Most emigrants from the states, however, chose land routes. In 1843, the first large party succeeded in crossing the plains and mountains to Oregon. More followed. Between 1841 and 1867, some 350,000 traveled the overland trails to California or Oregon, while others trekked part of the way to intermediate points such as Colorado and Utah.

**The Emigrants**

Most of the emigrants who headed for the Far West, where slavery was prohibited, were white and American born. They came from the Midwest and the Upper South. A few free blacks made the trip as well. Pioneer Margaret Frink remembered seeing a “Negro woman . . . tramping along through the heat and dust, carrying a cast iron black stove on her head, with her provisions and a blanket piled on top . . . bravely pushing on for California.” Emigrants from the Deep South usually selected Arkansas or Texas as their destination, and many took their slaves with them. By 1840, more than 11,000 slaves toiled in Texas and 20,000 in Arkansas.

The many pioneers who kept journals during the five- to six-month overland trip captured the human dimension of emigrating. Their journals, usually their only contribution to the historical record, focused on day-to-day events and expressed some of the thoughts and emotions experienced on the long journey west. One migrant, Lodisa Frizzell, described her feelings at parting in 1852:

> Who is there that does not recollect their first night when started on a long journey, the well known voices of our friends still ring in our ears, the parting kiss feels...
RECOVERING THE PAST

Personal Diaries

Nineteenth-century journals kept by hundreds of ordinary men and women traveling west on the overland trails constitute a rich source for exploring the nature of the westward experience. They are also an example of how private sources can be used to deepen our understanding of the past. Diaries, journals, and letters all provide us with a personal perspective on major happenings. These sources tend to focus on the concrete, so they convey the texture of daily life in the nineteenth century, daily routines and amusements, clothing, habits, and interactions with family and friends. They also provide evidence of the varied concerns, attitudes, and prejudices of the writers, thus providing a test of commonly accepted generalizations about individual and group behavior.

Like any historical source, personal documents must be used carefully. It is important to note the writer’s age, gender, class, and regional identification. Although this information may not be available, some of the writer’s background can be deduced from what he or she has written. It is also important to consider for what purpose and for whom the document was composed. This information will help explain the tone or character of the source and what has been included or left out. It is, of course, important to avoid generalizing too much from one or even several similar sources. Only after reading many diaries, letters, and journals is it possible to make valid generalizations about life in the past.

Here we present excerpts from two travel journals of the 1850s. Few of the writers considered their journals strictly private. Often they were intended as a family record or as information for friends back home. Therefore, material of a personal nature has often been excluded. Nineteenth-century Americans referred to certain topics, such as pregnancy, only indirectly or not at all.

One excerpt comes from Mary Bailey’s 1852 journal. Mary was 22 years old when she crossed the plains to California with her 32-year-old doctor husband. Originally a New Englander, Mary had lived in Ohio for six years before moving west. The Baileys were reasonably prosperous and were able to restock necessary supplies on the road west. The other writer, Robert Robe, was 30 years old when he crossed along the same route a year earlier than the Baileys, headed for Oregon. Robert was a native of Ohio and a Presbyterian minister.

As you read these excerpts, notice what each journal reveals about the trip west. What kinds of challenges did the emigrants face on their journey? Do these correspond to the picture you may have formed from novels, television, and movies? What kinds of work needed to be done, and who did it? Can you see any indication of a division of work based on gender? What kinds of interactions appear to have occurred between men and women on the trip? What does the pattern tell us about nineteenth-century society? How does the painting of the “emigrant train” reinforce the journal accounts of men’s and women’s roles?

Reflecting on the Past

Even these short excerpts suggest that men and women, as they traveled west, may have had different concerns and different perspectives on the journey. In what ways do the two accounts differ, and in what ways are they similar?

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Journal of Mary Stuart Bailey

Wednesday, April 13, 1852. Left our little happy home in Sylvania amid the tears of parting kisses of dear friends, many of whom were endeared to me by their kindness shown to me when I was a stranger in a strange land. When sickness and death visited our small family & removed our darling, our only child in a moment, as it were. Such kindness I can never forget...

Friday, 21st [May]. Rained last night. Slept in the tent for the first time. I was Yankee enough to protect myself by pinning up blankets over my head. I am quite at home in my tent.

Sunday, 23rd. Walked to the top of the hill where I could see & commune with nature & nature’s God. This afternoon I was annoyed by something very unpleasant & shed many tears and felt very unhappy. . . .

Thursday, 4th [June]. Very cold this morning after the shower. . . . We stopped on the banks of the Platte to take dinner. I am sitting on the banks of the Platte with my feet almost in the water. Have been writing to my Mother. How I wish I had some of my own relations with me. . . .

Sunday, 6th [July]. Started at 3 o’clock to find feed or know where it was. Had to go 4 or 5 miles off the road. Found water & good grass. Camped on the sand with sage roots for fuel. It is wintry, cold & somewhat inclined to rain, not pleasant. Rather a dreary Independence Day. We speak of our friends at home. We think they are thinking of us. . . .

Monday, 12th. Stayed in camp another day to get our horse better. He is much improved. It is cold enough. Washed in the morning & had the sick headache in the afternoon. . . .

Thursday, 12th [August]. Very warm. Slept until we stopped to take breakfast. Mr. Patterson starts as soon as light & stops in the heat of the day to rest the animals. We do not have much time to do anything except 4 or 5 hours in the middle of the day. . . .

Friday, 17th [September]. Have been confined ever since Monday with ague in my face which is very much swollen. Have suffered very much. We are now in Carson Valley. Plenty of trees but the country is very barren. Saturday, 18th. Very pleasant, delightful weather. Feel much better today. We are not stirring this afternoon. We have heard to a great deal of suffering, people being thrown out of their tents & being packed up & brought to the hospital. . . .

Source: From Ho for California! Women’s Overland Diaries, Sandra L. Myers, ed., Reprinted with the permission of the Henry E. Huntington Library.

Journal of Robert Robe

[May 19, 1851]. A fine day. The first spent in travelling on the plains of the Platte river.

20. Continue our journey up the Platte valley which I would judge to be here some 12 miles wide on this side of the river. The only game seen here are the antelope and wolf besides some wild fowl.

21. A rainy morning started early passed an old Pawnee village in ruins. The houses are constructed by placing timbers in forks and upon these without placing upright poles then rushes bound with [illegible] and finally earth. Chimney in center. Day became more & more rainy and wound up with a storm which beggared description.

22. Bluff approach the river—travelling less monotonous.

23. Roads very muddy in afternoon. Today our wagon severed itself from our former companions & joined a company of Californians.

24. Before starting a trader direct from Ft. Kearney arrived at our camp. He informs us it is yet 25 miles thither.

25. Passed Fort Kearney this morning and after a short drive encamped. Having conversed with some of the soldiers I find they consider life very monotonous.


27. High Bluffs on the opposite side of river approach and present a beautiful appearance. At night a fearful storm.


29. Have arrived in the region abounding in buffalo. At noon a considerable herd came in sight. The first any of us had ever seen. Thus now for the chase—the horsemen proved too swift in pursuit and frightened them into the Bluffs without capturing any—the footmen pursued however and killed three pretty good success for the first.

30. Nothing remarkable today.

31. Game being abundant we resolved to rest our stock and hunt today—Started in the morning on foot. Saw probably 1,000 Buffalo. Shot at several and killed one. Where ever we found them wolves were prowling around as if to guard them. Their real object is however no doubt to seize the calves as their prey. Saw a town of Prairie dogs, they are nearly as large as a gray squirrel. They bark fiercely when at a little distance but on near approach flee to their holes. Wherever they are we see numerous owls. After a very extensive ramble and having seen a variety of game we returned at sunset with most voracious appetites.

June 1. The Bluffs became beautifully undulating loving their precipitous aspect and the country further back is beautifully rolling prairie.

2. In the evening camped beside our old friends Miller and Dovey. They had met with a great loss this morning their 3 horses having taken fright at a drove of buffalo and ran entirely away. Some of our company killed more buffalo this evening & a company went in the night with teams to bring them in.

still warm upon our lips, and that last separating word farewell! sinks deeply into the heart! It may be the last we ever hear from some or all of them, and to those who start ... there can be no more solemn scene of parting only at death.

Most emigrants traveled with family and relatives. Only during the gold rush years did large numbers, usually young men, travel independently. Migration was a family experience, mostly involving men and women in their late 20s to early 40s. A sizable number of them had recently married. And for most, migration was a familiar experience. Like other geographically mobile Americans, emigrants to the Far West had earlier moved to other frontiers, often as children or as newlyweds. The difference was the vast distance to this frontier and the seemingly final separation from home.

Migrants’ Motives

What led so many Americans to sell most of their possessions and embark on an unknown future thousands of miles away? Many believed that frontier life would offer rich opportunities. A popular folk song expressed this widespread conviction:

Since times has been hard, I'll tell you sweetheart,
I've a notion to leave off my plow and my cart,
Away to Californy a journey pursue,
To double my fortunes as other men do.

The kinds of opportunities emigrants expected varied widely. Thousands sought riches in the form of gold. Others anticipated making their fortune as merchants, shopkeepers, and peddlers. Some intended to speculate in land, acquiring large blocks of public lands and then selling them later to settlers at a handsome profit. The possibility of professional rewards gained from practicing law or medicine attracted still others.

Most migrants dreamed of bettering their life by cultivating the land. As one settler explained, “The motive that induced us to part with pleasant associates and dear friends of our childhood days, was to obtain from the government of the United States a grant of land that ‘Uncle Sam’ had promised.” Federal and state land policies made the acquisition of land increasingly alluring. Preemption acts during the 1830s and 1840s gave “squatters” the right to settle public lands before the government offered them for sale and then allowed them to purchase these lands at the minimum price once they came on the market. At the same time, the amount of land a family had to buy shrank to only 40 acres. In 1862, the Homestead Act went further by offering 160 acres of government land free to citizens or future citizens over 21 who lived on the property, improved it, and paid a small registration fee. Oregon's land policy, which predated the Homestead Act, was even more generous. It awarded a single man 320 acres of free land and a married man 640 acres, provided he occupied his claim for four years and made improvements.

Some emigrants hoped the West would restore them to health. Settlers from the Mississippi valley wished to escape the region’s debilitating malarial fevers. Doctors advised those suffering the dreaded tuberculosis that the long out-of-doors trip and the western climate might cure them. Even invalids grasped at the advice offered by one doctor in 1850, who urged them to “attach themselves to the companies of emigrants bound for Oregon or Upper California.”

Others pursued religious or cultural missions in the West. Missionary couples like David and Catherine Blaine, who settled in Seattle when it was a frontier outpost, were determined to bring Protestantism and education west. Stirred by tales of the “deplorable morals” on the frontier, they willingly left the comforts of home to evangelize and educate westerners. Still others, like the Mormons, made the long trek to Utah to establish a society in conformity with their religious beliefs.

Not everyone who dreamed of setting off for the frontier could do so, however. Unlike the moves to earlier frontiers, the trip to the Far West involved considerable expense. The sea route, while probably the most comfortable, was the most costly, an estimated $600 per person for the trip around Cape Horn. For the same sum, four people could travel overland. And if the emigrants sold their wagons and oxen at the journey’s end, the final expenses might amount to only $220. Clearly, however, the initial financial outlay was considerable enough to rule out the trip for the very poor. Despite increasingly liberal land policies, American migration to the Far West (with the exception of group migration to Utah) was a movement of the middle class.

Like Americans, Chinese migrants were also inspired by the dream of bettering their condition. Most were married men who faced limited opportunities in their villages. Labor circulars proclaimed that Americans “want the Chinaman to come and make him very welcome. ... Money is in great plenty and to spare in America.” The message was reinforced when emigrants to Hawaii and the United States returned with money in their pockets.
In the 1860s, Chinese laborers could earn $30 a month working for the railroad, far more than the $3 to $5 they could expect if they stayed home.

The Overland Trails
The trip for American emigrants began in the late spring at starting points in Iowa and Missouri. By mid-May the grass was usually up for the stock, and the emigrant trains set out. Making only 15 miles a day, emigrants first followed the valley of the Platte River up to South Pass in the Rockies. This part of the trip seemed novel, even enjoyable. Until the 1850s, conflict with Native Americans was rare. The traditional division of labor persisted: Men did “outdoor” work such as driving and repairing wagons, and women handled domestic chores. Young children stayed out of the way in wagons, while older brothers and sisters walked alongside and lent a hand. Wagon trains might stop to observe the Sabbath, allowing for rest and laundry.

Later, difficulties multiplied. Cholera often took a heavy toll. Deserts and mountains replaced rolling prairies. Emigrants had to cross the final mountain ranges—the Sierras and the Cascades—before the first snowfall, so they pushed on relentlessly. Animals weakened by constant travel, poor feed, and bad water sickened, collapsed, and often died. Families had to lighten wagons by throwing out possessions lovingly brought from home. Food supplies dwindled, and the familiar division of responsibilities often collapsed. Women found themselves loading and driving wagons, even helping to drag them over rocky mountain trails. Their husbands worked frantically with the animals and the wagons as the time of the first snowfall drew closer. Tempers frayed. Family harmony often collapsed. Mary Power, who with her husband and three children crossed in 1853, revealed exasperation and depression in her journal: “I felt my courage must fail me, for there we were in a strange land, almost without anything to eat, [with] a team that was not able to pull an empty wagon.”

Finally, five or six months after setting out, emigrants arrived, exhausted and often penniless, in Oregon or California. As one wrote at the end of her journey in 1854, its “care, fatigue, tediousness, perplexities and dangers of various kinds, can not be excelled.”
A Mormon Wagon Train  What does this view of a Mormon wagon train in the 1850s suggest about the terrain that emigrant families encountered as they went west? The Mormon migrations were the most organized of the migrations into the trans-Mississippi West, although not all Mormons were lucky enough to travel by wagon. Some emigrants to Utah pushed handcarts across the plains to their destination. (Used by permission, Utah State Historical Society, all rights reserved. Photo no. 10077)
LIVING IN THE WEST

Whether elated or depressed when they reached their destinations, emigrants had no choice but to start anew. As they did so, they naturally drew on their experiences back East. "Pioneers though we are, and proud of it, we are not content with the wilds . . . with the idleness of the land, the rudely construct[ed] log cabin," one Oregon settler explained.

Farming in the West

Pioneer farmers faced the urgent task of establishing homesteads and beginning farming. First, they had to locate a suitable claim, then clear land, and construct a shelter. Only then could they plant crops.

As farmers labored "to get the land subdued and the wilde nature out of it," they repeated a process that had occurred on earlier frontiers. Felling timber, pulling out native plants that seemed without value, and planting familiar crops began a transformation of the landscape. Results were often unanticipated. When they planted seed brought from home, farmers unknowingly also introduced weeds that did all too well, like the Canadian thistle that gradually displaced native grass and rendered land useless for grazing.

Emigrants did not recognize the ecological transformation they set in motion. The goal of taming nature was so central and difficult that there was little time or inclination to wonder about long-range consequences.

The task of getting started presented many challenges. Since emigrant families had been able to bring only a few possessions with them, they had to work without familiar tools and implements. The Oregon bride who set up housekeeping in the 1840s with only a stew kettle and three knives was not unusual. Men often found themselves assisting wives in unfamiliar domestic chores while women helped men with their heavy outdoor work. After months of intense interaction with other travelers, families often felt lonely and thought longingly of friends and family back home. Although they might interact with nearby Native Americans, cultural biases made close friendships difficult.

One pioneer remembered that "in those days anyone residing within twenty miles was considered a neighbor." But the isolation usually ended within a few years as new emigrants arrived and old settlers sought better claims. As rural communities grew, settlers established schools, churches, and clubs. These organizations redefined acceptable forms of behavior and enforced conventional standards.

Determination to re-establish familiar institutions was most apparent in law and politics. In Oregon, pioneers set up a political system based on eastern models before territorial status was resolved. Before permanent schools or churches existed, men resumed familiar political rituals of
electioneering, voting, and talking politics. They went to court to ensure law and order.

Setting up a Common School system and churches was more difficult and less urgent than beginning political life. Few settlers initially thought education important enough to tax themselves for permanent public schools. Schools operated sporadically and only for students paying at least part of the fees. While confirmed believers attended early church services, they often discovered that there were too few members of individual denominations to support separate churches. Nor were converts plentiful, for many settlers had lost the habit of regular churchgoing. David Blaine learned the “unwelcome lesson” that “separation from gospel influences” had left many “quite indifferent to gospel truth.”

The chronic shortage of cash on the frontier hampered the growth of both schools and churches. Until farmers could send their goods to market, they had little cash to spare. Geographic mobility also contributed to institutional instability. Up to three-quarters of the population of a frontier county might vanish within a 10-year period. Some farmed in as many as four locations before finding a satisfactory claim. Institutions relying on continuing personal and financial support suffered accordingly.

Yet newspapers, journals, and books, which circulated early on the frontier, reinforced familiar norms and determination. As more settlers arrived, support for educational, religious, and cultural institutions grew. In the end, as one pioneer pointed out, “We have a telegraph line from the East, a daily rail road train, daily mail and I am beginning to feel quite civilized. And here ended my pioneer experience.” Only 16 years had passed since she had crossed the plains.

Although the belief in special economic and social opportunities on the frontier encouraged emigration, the dream was often illusory. Western society rapidly acquired a social and economic structure similar to that of the East. Frontier newspapers referred to leading settlers as the “better” sort, and workers for hire and tenant farmers appeared. Widespread geographic mobility also suggests that many could not capitalize on the benefits of homesteading. Those who left communities were generally less successful than the core of stable residents, who became economic and social leaders. Those on the move believed that fortune would finally smile at their next stop. Said one wife when her husband announced another move: “I seemed to have heard all this before.”

Mining Western Resources

The mineral riches of the trans-Mississippi West prompted people to leave their ordinary lives behind and set out to make their fortunes. News of the discovery of gold in 1848 in California swept the country like “wildfire,” according to one Missouri emigrant. Thousands raced to cash in on the bonanza. Within a year, California’s population ballooned from 14,000 to almost 100,000. By 1852, that figure had more than doubled.

Like migrants who planned to establish farms in the West, the “forty-niners” were mostly young (in

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**An Episcopal Church in Kansas**

It was not easy for denominations to establish strong congregations in the West. How would you describe this church and what does its appearance suggest about the challenges of religion in the West? How many people attended this church on the day of the photograph? How many parishioners do you think would be necessary to establish a strong congregation?

(Kansas State Historical Society)
1850, more than half the people in California were in their 20s). Unlike pioneers headed for rural homesteads, however, the gold seekers were unmarried, predominantly male, and heterogeneous. Of those pouring into California in 1849, about 80 percent came from the United States, 8 percent from Mexico, and 5 percent from South America. The rest came from Europe and Asia. California was thus one of the most diverse places in the country. Few of its residents, however, were as interested in settling the West as they were in extracting its precious metals and returning home rich.

California was the first and most dramatic of the western mining discoveries. But others followed. Rumors of gold propelled between 25,000 and 30,000 emigrants, many from California, to British Columbia in Canada in 1858. A year later, news of gold strikes in Colorado set off another rush for fortune. Precious metals unearthed in the Pacific Northwest early in the decade and in Montana and Idaho a few years later kept dreams alive and prospectors moving. In the mid-1870s, more gold, this time in the Black Hills of North Dakota, attracted hordes of fortune seekers.

In contrast to the agricultural settlements, where early residents were isolated and the community expanded gradually, the discovery of gold or silver spurred rapid, if usually short-lived, growth. Mining camps, ramshackle and often hastily constructed, soon housed hundreds or even thousands of miners and people serving them. Merchants, saloonkeepers, cooks, druggists, gamblers, and prostitutes hurried into boom areas as fast as prospectors. Usually, about half the residents of any mining camp were there to prospect the miners rather than the mines.

Given the motivation, character, and ethnic diversity of those flocking to boomtowns and the feeble attempts to set up local government in what were perceived as temporary communities, it was hardly surprising that mining life was often disorderly. Racial antagonism between American miners and foreigners, whom they labeled “greasers” (Mexicans), “chinks” (Chinese), “keskedees” (Frenchmen), and lesser “breeds,” led to ugly riots and lynchings. Miners had few qualms about eliminating those who interfered with the race for riches. Fistfights, drunkenness, and murder occurred often enough to become part of the lore of the gold rush. Wrote one woman, “In the short space of twenty four days, we have had murders, fearful accidents, bloody deaths, a mob, whippings, a hanging, an attempt at suicide, and a fatal duel.”

**AMERICAN VOICES**

**Mollie Dorsey Sanford, On Arriving in Denver, June 1860**

Mollie Dorsey Sanford emigrated with her family from Indiana to Nebraska Territory in 1857. In 1860, at the age of 21, she married her older suitor, By Sanford. Mollie reported in her diary that she caught “Pikes Peak Fever” when she learned about the gold rush in Colorado and that she had encouraged her husband “to make arrangements to go” to Denver to try their luck. When the couple arrived in Denver in June 1860, Dora, Mollie’s younger sister, and her husband were already there.

The Promised Land is gained and we are in Denver tonight. We entered the city of the plains at 10 o’clock A.M. We soon found Dora. They are camping on the banks of Cherry Creek, a dry, sandy channel. There are no houses to be had, and hundreds of families are living in wagons, tents, and shelters made of carpets and bedding. I like the looks of the place. Everybody seems glad to welcome the coming pilgrims, as we are called, anybody from “back in the States.” It is estimated there are five thousand people in and around Denver. It seems so near the mountains that I thought I could easily walk over there, but Dora says they are 12 miles away. The atmosphere is so dry and clear it brings distant objects nearer. . . . By sees no chance to get work at his trade, as the place is overrun, a blacksmith shop on every corner. We have interviewed our mutual pocket-book and found less than five dollars left. But we are supplied with several months’ provisions of staple articles. The luxuries we will dispense with.

- What picture does Mollie give of Denver and its atmosphere?
- What is her mood?
- What challenges does Denver present to the Sanfords?
CHAPTER 13  Moving West

If mining life was usually not this violent, it tolerated behavior unacceptable farther east. Miners were not trying to re-create eastern communities but to get rich. Married men, convinced of the rau-

cous character of mining communities, hesitated to bring wives and families west. As one declared, “I would much prefer that a wife of mine should board in a respectable bawd house in the city of New York than live anywhere in the city of San Francisco.”

Although a lucky few struck it rich or at least made enough money to return home with their pride intact, miners’ journals and letters reveal that many made only enough to keep going. Wrote one, “Everybody in the States who has friends here is always writing for them to come home. Now they all long to go home. . . . But it is hard for a man to leave . . . with nothing. . . . I have no pile yet, but you can bet your life I will never come home until I have something more than when I started.” The problem was that easily mined silver and gold deposits soon ran out. Chinese miners proved adept at finding what early miners overlooked. Working individually or in small companies, they became a familiar sight in their distinctive clothes, big hats, and pigtailed. But even their patient efforts brought decreasing rewards. The remaining rich deposits lay deeply embedded in rock or gravel. Extraction required cooperative efforts, capital, technological experience, and expensive machinery. Eventually, mining became a corporate industrial concern, with miners as wage earners. As early as 1852, the changing nature of mining in California had transformed most of the shaggy miners into wage workers.

Probably 5 percent of early gold rush emigrants to California were women and children. Many of the women also anticipated getting “rich in a hurry.” Because there were so few of them, the cooking, nursing, laundry, and hotel services women provided had a high value. When Luzena Wilson arrived in Sacramento, a miner offered to pay her $10 for a biscuit. That night, Luzena dreamt she saw “crowds of bearded miners striking gold from the earth with every blow of the pick, each one seeming to leave a share for me.” Yet it was wearying work. As Mary Ballou thought it over, she decided, “I would not advise any Lady to come out here and suffer to toil and fatigue I have suffered for the sake of a little gold.” As men’s profits shrank, so, too, did those of the women who served them.

Some of the first women to arrive were prostitutes. They rejected the hard labor of cooking and washing that “respectable” women performed, hoping that the gender ratio would make their profession especially profitable. Prostitutes may have constituted as much as 20 percent of California’s female population in 1850, and they probably vastly outnumbered other women in early mining camps. During boom days, they made good money and sometimes won a recognized place in society. But prostitutes always ran risks in a disorderly environment and often were the victims of murder and violence.

The Mexicans, South Americans, Chinese, and small numbers of blacks seeking their fortunes in California soon discovered that although they contributed substantially to California’s growth, racial discrimination flourished. At first, American miners hoped to force foreigners of color out of the goldfields altogether. But an attempt to declare mining illegal for foreigners failed. A high tax on foreign miners proved more successful. Thousands of Mexicans left the mines, while the Chinese found other jobs in San Francisco and Sacramento. As business stagnated in mining towns, however, white miners had second thoughts about the levy and reduced it. By 1870, when the tax was declared unconstitutional,
the Chinese, who had paid 85 percent of it, had “contributed” $5 million to California for the right to prospect. The hostility that led to this legislation also fed widespread violence against the Chinese and Mexicans.

Black Americans found that their skin color placed them in a situation akin to that of foreigners. Deprived of the vote, forbidden to testify in civil or criminal cases involving whites, and excluded from the bounties of the homestead law, blacks led a precarious existence. When news arrived of the discovery of gold in British Columbia in the late 1850s, hundreds of blacks as well as thousands of Chinese left the state, hoping that Canada would be more hospitable than California.

For the Native American tribes of the interior, the mining rushes were disasters. Accustomed to foraging for food, they found fish and game increasingly scarce as miners diverted streams, hunted game, or drove it from mining areas altogether. When Native Americans responded by raiding mining camps, miners erupted with fury. They stalked and killed native men and women, sometimes collecting bounties offered by some mining communities for their scalps. Indian women were raped; children were kidnapped and offered as apprentices. As one miner pointed out, “Indians seven or eight years old are worth $100 . . . and it is a damn poor Indian that’s not worth $50.” Without legal recourse because of their skin color, Native Americans could not withstand the onslaught of white society. Subjected not only to violence but to white disease, they died by the thousands. In 1849, there had been about 150,000 Native Americans in California. In just over 20 years, their numbers had tumbled to fewer than 30,000.

Although the mining experience was never as brutal for whites as for people of color, white men and women’s fantasies of dazzling riches rarely came true. The ghost towns of the West testify to the typical pattern: boom, bust, decay, death. The empty streets and rotting buildings stood as symbols of dashed hopes and disappointed dreams. Also left behind were other physical signs recalling the presence and passing of mining operations. Forests had been decimated to provide timber for the flumes to divert rivers from their channels in the hopes of exposing rich gold deposits in the dry river beds. Slurries and ditches created mounds of debris that during floods or heavy rains oozed over fields and choked rivers and streams. Consumed by visions of glittering metal, miners had been blind to the realities of eroding soil, deforested mountains, diverted waterways, and silt.

It was difficult, however, to recognize some of the negative consequences of the discovery of gold, for it had many positive effects on the West as a whole. Between 1848 and 1883, California mines supplied two-thirds of the country’s gold. Gold transformed San Francisco from a sleepy town into a bustling
metropolis. It fueled the agricultural and commercial development of California and Oregon, as miners provided a market for goods and services. Gold built harbors, railroads, and irrigation systems not just in California and Oregon but all over the West. Though few people made large fortunes, both the region and the nation profited from gold.

Establishing God's Kingdom
In the decades before 1860, many emigrants heading for the Far West stopped to rest and buy supplies in Salt Lake City, the heart of the Mormon state of Deseret. There they encountered a society that seemed familiar, yet foreign and shocking. Visitors admired the attractively laid-out town with its irrigation ditches, gardens, and tidy houses. But as they noted the decorous nature of everyday life, they gossiped about polygamy and searched for signs of rebellion in the faces of Mormon women. Emigrants who opposed slavery were fond of comparing the Mormon wife to the black slave. They were amazed that so few Mormon women seemed interested in escaping from the bonds of plural marriage.

Violent events brought the Mormons to the arid Great Basin area. Two years after Joseph Smith’s murder in 1844, angry mobs chased the last of the “Saints” out of Nauvoo, Illinois. As they struggled to join their advance groups at temporary camps in Iowa, Smith’s successor, Brigham Young, realized that the Saints’ best hope for survival lay in situating the kingdom of God somewhere in the West, far removed from the United States.

The Mexican-American War unexpectedly fur thered Mormon plans. At first, most Mormons probably agreed with Hosea Stout, who hoped that the war “might never end until the States were entirely destroyed.” But Brigham Young realized that war might provide desperately needed capital. By recruiting 500 young Mormons for Kearney’s Army of the West, Young acquired vital resources. The battalion’s advance pay bought wagonloads of supplies for starving and sick Mormons strung out along the trail between Missouri and Iowa and helped finance the impending great migration.

Young selected the Great Basin area, technically part of Mexico, as the best site for his future kingdom. It was arid and remote, 1,000 miles from its nearest “civilized” neighbors. But Mormon leaders concluded that if irrigated, the area might prove as fertile as the fields and vineyards of ancient Israel.

In April 1847, Young led an exploratory expedition of 143 men, 3 women, and 2 children to this promised land. In late July, after reaching Salt Lake, Young exclaimed, “This is the place.” Before returning to Iowa to prepare Mormons for the trip to Utah, he announced his land policy. Settlers would receive virtually free land on the basis of a family’s size and its ability to cultivate it. After Young left, the expeditionary group followed his directions to construct irrigation ditches and begin planting.

The following months and years tested Young’s organizational talents and his followers’ cooperative abilities. By September 1847, fully 566 wagons and 1,500 of the Saints had made the arduous trek to Salt Lake City. Still more Mormons came the next year, inspired by visions of a new Zion in the West. Their trip was also a collective venture, planned and directed by Church leaders. By 1850, the Mormon settlement had attracted more than 11,000 settlers. Missionary efforts in the United States and abroad, especially in Great Britain and Scandinavia, drew thousands of converts to the Great Basin. The Church emigration society and a loan fund facilitated the journey for many who could never have otherwise undertaken the trip. By the end of the decade, more than 30,000 Saints lived in Utah, not only in Salt Lake City but also in more than 90 village colonies Young had planned. Though hardship marked these early years, the Mormons thrived. As one early settler remarked, “We have everything around us we could ask.”
Non-Mormon, or “Gentile,” emigrants passing through Utah found much that was recognizable. The government had familiar characteristics. Most Mormons were farmers; many of them came originally from New England and the Midwest and shared mainstream customs and attitudes. But outsiders also perceived profound differences, for the heart of Mormon society was not the individual farmer on his own homestead but the cooperative village.

Years of persecution had nourished a strong sense of group identity and acceptance of Church leadership. Organized by Church leaders, who made the essential decisions, farming became a collective enterprise. All farmers were allotted land. All had irrigation rights, for water belonged to the community. During Sunday services, the local bishop might give farming instructions to his congregation along with his sermon. As Young explained, “I have looked upon the community of Latter-Day Saints in a vision and beheld them organized as the great family of heaven, each person performing his several duties in his line of industry; working for the good of the whole more than for individual aggrandizement.” In this vast communal effort, every Mormon was expected to work for success, men and women alike. “We do not believe in having any drones in the hive,” one woman said tartly.

The Church was omnipresent in Utah; in fact, nothing separated Church and state. Despite familiar government forms, Church leaders occupied all important political posts. Brigham Young’s Governing Quorum contained the high priests of the Church, who made both religious and political decisions.

When it became clear that Utah would become a territory, Mormon leaders drew up a constitution dividing religious and political power. But once in place, powers overlapped. As one Gentile pointed out, “This intimate connection of church and state seems to pervade everything that is done. The supreme power in both being lodged in the hands of the same individuals, it is difficult to separate their two official characters, and to determine whether in any one instance they act as spiritual or merely temporal officers.”

Although the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo officially incorporated Utah into the United States, it had little effect on political and religious arrangements. Brigham Young became territorial governor. Local bishops continued as spiritual leaders and civil magistrates. Mormons had come to Utah to establish a kingdom rather than a republic. Their motives dictated the unique politico-religious nature of the Utah experience.

Other aspects of the Mormon frontier were distinctive. Mormon policy toward the Native American tribes was remarkably enlightened. As one prominent Mormon explained, “It has been our habit to shoot Indians with tobacco and bread biscuits rather than with powder and lead, and we are most successful with them.” After two expeditions against the Timpanago and Shoshone in 1850, Mormons concentrated on converting rather than killing Native Americans. Mormon missionaries learned Bannock, Ute, Navajo, and Hopi languages to bring the faith to these tribes. They also encouraged Native Americans to ranch and farm.

Although most Gentiles could tolerate some of the differences they encountered in Utah, few could accept polygamy and the seemingly immoral extended family structure that plural marriage entailed. Although Joseph Smith and other Church leaders had secretly practiced polygamy in the early 1840s, Brigham Young publicly revealed the doctrine only in 1852, when the Saints were safely in Utah. Smith believed that the highest or “celestial” form of marriage brought special rewards in the afterlife. Because wives and children contributed to these rewards, polygamy was a means of sanctification. From a practical standpoint, polygamy served to incorporate into Mormon society single female converts who had left their families to come to Utah.

Although most Mormons accepted the doctrine and its religious justification, some found it hard to follow. One woman called it a “great trial of feelings.” Actually, relatively few families were polygamous. During the 40-year period in which Mormons practiced plural marriage, only 10 to 20 percent of Mormon families were polygamous. Few men had more than two wives. Because of the expense of maintaining several families and the personal strains involved, usually only the most successful and visible Mormon leaders practiced polygamy.

Polygamous family life was a far cry from the lascivious arrangement outsiders fantasized. Jealousy among wives could destroy the institution of plural marriage, so Mormon leaders minimized the role of romantic love and sexual attraction in courtship and marriage. Instead, they encouraged marriages founded on mutual attachment, with sex for procreation rather than pleasure.

To the shock of outsiders, Mormon women did not consider themselves slaves but highly regarded members of the community. Whether plural wives or not, they saw polygamy as the cutting edge of their society and defended it to the outside world. Polygamy was preferable to monogamy, which left the single woman without the economic and social protection of family life and forced some of them into prostitution; as Brenda Pratt explained, “Polygamy . . . tends directly
to the chastity of women, and the sound health and morals ... of their children.”

Although they faced obvious difficulties, many plural wives found rewards in polygamy. Without the constant presence of husbands, they had an unusual opportunity for independence. Many treated husbands when they visited as revered friends; their children, not their spouses, provided them with day-to-day emotional satisfaction. Occasionally, plural wives lived together and shared domestic work, becoming close friends. As one such wife put it, “We three ... loved each other more than sisters” and would “go hand in hand together down till eternity.”

Although the Mormon settlement seemed alien to outsiders, it succeeded in terms of its numbers, its growing economic prosperity, and its group unity. Long-term threats loomed, however, once the region became part of the United States. Attacks on Young’s power as well as heated verbal denunciations of polygamy proliferated. Efforts began in Congress to outlaw polygamy. In the years before the Civil War, Mormons withstood these assaults on their way of life. But as Utah became more connected to the rest of the country, the tide would turn against them.

Cities in the West

Many emigrants went west not to farm or pan for gold but to live in cities such as San Francisco, Denver, and Portland. There they pursued business and professional opportunities or perhaps speculated in real estate.

Cities were integral to frontier life. Some, like St. Joseph, Missouri, which catered to the emigrant trade, preceded agricultural settlement. Others, like Portland, were destinations for overland travelers or were market and supply centers for emigrant farmers. San Francisco and Denver were “instant cities,” transformed as the discovery of precious metals sent thousands of miners to and through them. Once the strike ran out, many miners returned to these cities to make a new start. In San Francisco, a Chinese community took shape as Chinese laborers abandoned mining and railroad work. In 1860, almost 3,000 Chinese lived in Chinatown; 10 years later, that number grew to 12,022.

Bustling commercial life offered residents a wide range of occupations and services. As a Portland emigrant remarked in 1852, “In many ways life here ... was more primitive than it was in the early times in Illinois and Missouri. But in others it was far more advanced. ... We could get the world’s commodities here which could not be had then, or scarcely at all, in the interior of Illinois or Missouri.”

Young, single men seeking their fortunes made up a disproportionate share of urban populations. Frontier Portland had more than three men for every woman. Predictably, urban life was often noisy and rowdy, and occasionally violent. Some women tried to reform the atmosphere by attempting to close stores on Sunday or to prohibit drinking. Others, of course, enjoyed all the attention that came with the presence of so many young men. Eventually, the gender ratio became balanced, but as late as 1880, fully 18 of the 24 largest western cities had more men than women.
Western cities soon lost their distinctiveness. The history of Portland suggests the common pattern of development. In 1845, it was only a clearing in the forest, with lively speculation in town lots. By the early 1850s, Portland had become a small trading center with a few rough log structures and muddy tracks for streets. As farmers poured into Oregon, the city became a regional commercial center. More permanent structures were built, giving it an "eastern" appearance.

The belief that western cities offered special opportunities initially drew many young men to Portland and other urban areas. Success was greatest, however, for those arriving with assets. By the 1860s, when the city's population had reached 2,874, Portland's Social Club symbolized the emergence of an elite. Portland's businessmen, lawyers, and editors controlled an increasing share of the community's wealth and set its social standards, showing how rapidly and far Portland had traveled from its raw frontier beginnings.
CULTURES IN CONFLICT

Looking at westward expansion through the eyes of white emigrants provides only one view of the migration experience. In such a diverse region, many other views existed.

Some of those heading to the American West came from southern China. Mostly men, they planned to work for a few years and then return home to their families. Initially, California welcomed the Chinese. One San Francisco merchant reported in 1855 that the Chinese were “received like guests” and treated “with politeness. From far and near we came and were pleased.” However, such tolerance soon disappeared as more Chinese arrived on the West Coast. Chinese workers met hostility, violence, and ridicule as they labored in mining camps, on the railroads, and in other jobs. A telegram from Chinese miners in the California mountains betrayed the anxieties many must have felt: “Am afraid there will be big fight.” Increasingly perceived by whites as racial threats, called “nagurs” with an appearance supposedly “but a slight removal from the African race,” Chinese workers faced many forms of harassment. In 1880, California legislators expressed white hostility by passing a law that made illegal any marriage between a white person and a “negro, mulatto, or Mongolian.”

Confronting the Plains Tribes

Some whites likened the Chinese to the Native Americans, another group that would see the western experience differently from white emigrants. An entry from an Oregon Trail journal hints at what one such perspective might be. On May 7, 1864, Mary Warner, a bride of only a few months, described a frightening event. That day, a “fine-looking” Indian had visited the wagon train and tried to buy her. Mary’s husband, probably uncertain how to handle the situation, played along, agreeing to trade his wife for two ponies. The Indian generously offered three. “Then,” wrote Mary, “he took hold of my shawl to make me understand to get out [of the wagon]. About this time I got frightened and really was so hysterical [that] I began to cry.” Everyone laughed at her, she reported, though surely the Indian found the whole incident no more amusing than she had.

This ordinary encounter on the overland trail only begins to point to the social and cultural differences separating white Americans moving west and the native peoples with whom they came in contact. Confident of their values and rights, emigrants had little regard for those who had lived in the West for centuries and no compunction in seizing their lands. Like the Whitmans, many predicted that the

**A Indian Child** This dark image, made in about 1851, provides a rare glimpse of one of California’s Native American children. What do the boy’s clothes suggest about the impact of white society on Native American culture during the gold rush? Generally, the gold rush was a disaster for Native American tribes in California, where violence against Native Americans was all too common. (Oakland Museum of California, Gift of Anonymous Donor)
Native American race would die out, a just reward for tribal “degeneracy.”

During the 1840s, white Americans for the first time came into extensive contact with the powerful Plains tribes, whose culture differed from that of the more familiar eastern woodland tribes. Probably a quarter million Native Americans occupied the area from the Rocky Mountains to the Missouri River and from the Platte River to New Mexico. Nearest the Missouri and Iowa frontier lived the “border” tribes—the Pawnee, Omaha, Oto, Ponca, and Kansa. These groups, unlike other Plains tribes, lived in villages and raised crops, though they supplemented their diet with buffalo meat during the summer months. On the Central Plains lived the Brulé and Oglala Sioux, Cheyenne, Shoshone, and Arapaho, aggressive tribes who followed the buffalo and often raided the border tribes. In the Southwest were the Comanche, Ute, Navajo, and some Apache bands; the Kiowa, Wichita, Apache, and southern Comanche claimed northern and western Texas as their hunting grounds. Many of the southwestern tribes had adopted aspects of Spanish culture and European domestic animals such as cattle, sheep, and horses.

Although differences existed, the Plains tribes shared important similarities. Most had adopted a nomadic way of life after the introduction of Spanish horses in the sixteenth century increased their seasonal mobility from 50 to 500 miles. Horses allowed Native American braves to hunt the buffalo with such success that tribes (with the exclusion of the border groups) came to depend on the beasts have they repaid it! With ingratitude! I have Never Called a White Man a Dog, but to day, I do Pronounce them to be a set of Black harted Dogs, they have deceived Me . . . to day I am Wounded, and by Whom, by those same White Dogs that I have always Considered, and treated as Brothers.

What is the implication of Four Bears’ remarks?

What does this excerpt suggest about the consequences of the white advance into the West?

for food, clothing, fuel, teepee dwellings, and trading purposes. Because women were responsible for processing buffalo products, some men had more than one wife to tan skins for trading.

Mobility also increased tribal contact and conflict. War played a central part in the lives of the Plains tribes. No male became a fully accepted member of his tribe until he had proved himself in battle. But tribal warfare was not like the warfare of white men. Native Americans sought not to exterminate their enemies or to claim territory but rather to steal horses and to prove individual prowess. They considered it braver to touch an enemy than to kill or scalp him. Moreover, because individual tribes were loosely organized, chiefs had only limited authority. As Chief Low Horn, a Blackfoot, explained, chiefs "could not restrain their young men . . . their young men were wild, and ambitious, in their turn to be braves and chiefs. They wanted by some brave act to win the favor of their young women, and bring scalps and horses to show their prowess."

This pattern of conflict on the Great Plains discouraged political unity. But even so, armed with guns, mounted on fast ponies, and skilled in warfare and raiding, the Plains tribes posed a fearsome obstacle to white expansion. They had signed no treaties with the United States and had few friendly feelings toward whites. Their contact with white society had brought gains through trade in skins, but the trade had also introduced alcohol and destructive epidemics of smallpox and scarlet fever.

In the early 1840s, relations between Native Americans and whites were peaceable. But the intrusion of whites set in motion an environmental cycle that eventually caused conflict. Native American tribes depended on the buffalo but respected this source of life. The Teton Sioux performed rituals to ensure a continuing supply of the animals, while hunters often ritualistically apologized to the Great Unseen Buffalo for slaughtering what the tribe needed. The grasses that nourished the buffalo also sustained the Indians’ own ponies and the animals that supported horse traders such as the Cheyenne.
Whites, however, put their stock to graze on the grass that both the Native Americans’ ponies and the buffalo needed. And they adopted the “most exciting sport,” the buffalo hunt. As the great herds began to shrink, Native American tribes began to battle one another for hunting grounds and food. The powerful Sioux swooped down into the hunting grounds of their enemies and mounted destructive raids against the Pawnee and other smaller tribes. In an 1846 petition to President Polk, the Sioux explained that “for several years past the Emigrants going over the Mountains from the United States, have been the cause that Buffalo have in great measure left our hunting grounds, thereby causing us to go into the Country of Our Enemies to hunt, exposing our lives daily for the necessary subsistence of our wives and Children and getting killed on several occasions.” Despite their plight, the Sioux had “all along treated the Emigrants in the most friendly manner, giving them free passage through our hunting grounds.”

The Sioux requested compensation for white damages. When the president denied their request, they tried to extract taxes from those passing over their lands. Emigrants were outraged. Frontier newspapers printed letters denouncing the Sioux, demanding adequate protection for travelers and some chastening of the “savages.” However, little was done to relieve the suffering of the tribes bearing the brunt of Sioux aggression, the dismay of the Sioux at the white invasion, or the fears of the emigrants themselves.

The discovery of gold in California, which lured more than 20,000 across the Great Plains in 1849 alone, became the catalyst for federal action. The vast numbers of gold seekers and their animals wrought such devastation in the Platte valley that it rapidly became a wasteland for the Indians. The dreaded cholera that whites carried with them spread to the Indians, killing thousands.

To meet the crisis, government officials devised a two-pronged plan. The government would construct a chain of forts to protect emigrants and, simultaneously, call the tribes to a general conference. Officials expected that in return for generous presents, Native Americans would end tribal warfare and limit their movements to prescribed areas. They instructed tribes to select chiefs to speak for them at the conference.

The Fort Laramie Council, 1851

In 1851, the tribal council convened at Fort Laramie. As many as 10,000 Native Americans, hopeful of ending the destruction of their way of life and eager for the promised presents, gathered at the fort. Tribal animosities simmered, however. Skirmishes occurred on the way to the fort, and the border tribes, fearful of the Sioux, declined to participate. The Comanche, Kiowa, and Apache also refused to come, because their enemies, the Sioux and the Crow, were to be there.

At the conference, whites told the gathered tribes that times had changed. In the past, “you had plenty of buffalo and game . . . and your Great Father well knows that war has always been your favorite amusement and pursuit. He then left the question of peace and war to yourselves. Now, since the settling of the districts West . . . by the white men, your condition has changed.” There would be compensation for the destruction of their grass, timber, and buffalo and annual payments of goods and services. But in return, the
tribes had to give up their rights of free movement. The government drew tribal boundaries, and chiefs promised to stay within them. In most cases, some tribal lands were sold.

The Fort Laramie Treaty was the first agreement between the Plains tribes and the U.S. government. It expressed the conviction of whites that Indians must stay in clearly defined areas apart from white civilization.

But this system of isolation and its purported benefits were still in the future. During the conference, ominous signs appeared that more trouble would precede any “resolution” of Native American–white affairs. Sioux Chief Black Hawk told whites, “You have split the country and I do not like it.” His powerful tribe refused to be restricted to lands north of the Platte, for south of the river lay their recently conquered lands. “These lands once belonged to the Kiowas and the Crows,” one Sioux explained, “but we whipped those nations out of them and in this we did what the white men do when they want the lands of the Indians.” The words suggested that Native Americans, despite agreements, would not willingly abandon their traditional way of life for confinement. In the following years, it would become evident that Americans and Sioux had conflicting interests south of the Platte. Elsewhere in the trans-Mississippi West, other tribes, like the fierce Navajo of New Mexico, also resisted white attempts to confine them.

Overwhelming the Mexican Settlers

In the Southwest, in Texas, and in California, Americans encountered a Spanish-speaking population and Hispanic culture. Expansionist senator Lewis Cass expressed Americans’ scorn for both. Speaking in a congressional debate on the annexation of New Mexico, Cass stated, “We do not want the people of Mexico, either as citizens or as subjects. All we want is a portion of territory ... with a population, which would soon recede, or identify itself with ours.” Americans regarded Mexicans as lazy, ignorant, and cunning, the “dregs of society.” Although Mexicans easily recognized such cultural arrogance, they lacked the numbers to fend off American aggression.

Although Anglo–Mexican interaction differed, few Anglos heeded the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo’s assurances that Mexicans would have citizens’ rights and the “free enjoyment of their liberty and property.” The greatest numbers of Spanish-speaking people lived in New Mexico, and, of all former Mexican citizens, they probably fared the best. Most were of mixed blood, living marginally as ranch hands for rich landowners or as farmers and herdsmen in small villages dominated by a patron, or headman. As the century wore on, Americans produced legal titles and took over lands long occupied by peasant farmers and stock raisers. But despite economic reversals, New Mexicans survived, carrying their rural culture well into the twentieth century.

Light-skinned, upper-class landowners fared better. Even before the conquest, rich New Mexicans had protected their future by establishing contacts with American businessmen and by sending their sons east to American schools. When the United States annexed New Mexico, this substantial and powerful class contracted strategic marriage and business alliances with the Anglo men slowly trickling into the territory. Only rarely did they worry about their poorer countrymen. Class interests outweighed ethnic or cultural considerations.
In Texas, the Spanish-speaking residents, only 10 percent of the population in 1840, shrank to a mere 6 percent by 1860. Although the upper class also intermarried with Americans, they lost most of their power as Germans, Irish, French, and Americans poured into the state. Poor, dark-skinned Hispanics clustered in low-paying and largely unskilled jobs.

In California, the discovery of gold radically changed the situation for the Californios. In 1848, there were 7,000 Californios and about twice as many Anglos. By 1860, the Anglo population had ballooned to 360,000. Hispanic Americans were hard pressed to cope with the rapid influx of outsiders. At first, Californios and several thousand Mexicans from Sonora joined Anglos and others in the gold fields. But competition there fed antagonism and finally open conflict. Posters warned foreigners out of the gold fields. In Anglo eyes, one Hispanic was much like another, even if one claimed to be a Californio with political rights and another a Sonoran. Taxes and terrorism ultimately succeeded in forcing most Spanish speakers out of the mines and established the racial contours of the new California.

Other changes were even more disastrous. In 1851, Congress passed the Gwin Land Law, supposedly validating Spanish and Mexican land titles. But it violated the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo because it forced California landowners to defend what was already theirs and encouraged squatters to settle on land in the hopes that the Californios’ titles would prove false. It took an average of 17 years to establish clear title to land. Landowners found themselves paying American lawyers large fees, often in land, and borrowing at high interest rates to cover court proceedings. A victory at court often turned into a defeat when legal expenses forced owners to sell their lands to pay debts.

Working-class Hispanic Americans, laboring for Anglo farmers or for mining and later railroad companies, earned less money and did more unpleasant jobs than Anglo workers. By 1870, the average Hispanic American worker’s property was worth only about a third of its value of 20 years earlier.

Various forms of resistance to American expansion emerged. Some, like Tiburcio Vásquez in southern California, became *bandidos*. As he explained, the American presence provoked a “spirit of hatred and revenge . . . I believed we were unjustly and wrongfully deprived of the social rights that belonged to us.” Others, like the members of Las Gorras Blancas in New Mexico, ripped up railroad ties and cut the barbed-wire fences of Anglo ranchers and farmers, while the religiously oriented Penitentes tried to work through the ballot box. Ordinary men, women, and children resisted efforts to convert them to Protestantism and held onto familiar customs and beliefs while learning some of the skills they hoped would enable them to flourish in a changing culture.

**TIMELINE**

| 1803–1806 | Lewis and Clark expedition |
| 1818 | Treaty on joint U.S.–British occupation of Oregon |
| 1819 | Spain cedes Spanish territory in United States and sets transcontinental boundary of Louisiana Purchase, excluding Texas |
| 1821 | Mexican independence, Opening of Santa Fe Trail, Stephen Austin leads American settlement of Texas |
| 1821–1840 | Native American removals |
| 1830 | Mexico abolishes slavery in Texas |
| 1836 | Battles of the Alamo and San Jacinto, Texas declares independence |
| 1840s | Emigrant crossings of overland trails |
| 1844 | James Polk elected president |
| 1845 | “Manifest Destiny” coined, United States annexes Texas and sends troops to the Rio Grande |
| 1846 | Mexico declares defensive war, United States declares war and takes Santa Fe |
| 1848 | Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo |
| 1849 | California gold rush begins |
| 1850 | California admitted to the Union |
| 1851 | Fort Laramie Treaty |
| 1853 | Gadsden Purchase |
| 1862 | Homestead Act |
Conclusion

Fruits of Manifest Destiny

Like Narcissa Whitman and her husband, many nineteenth-century Americans decided that they had a unique right to settle the West and make it flower. They were not much concerned with the fate of those who had lived for centuries on the land. The process of acquiring the western half of the continent was so swift that there seemed little point in worrying about the losers. The tale of western expansion loomed large in the imagination of the American people for many years. Some western settlers became folk heroes. The Whitmans were remembered by the founding of Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington. All white Americans could be thankful for the special opportunities and the new chance that the West seemed to hold out. Certainly, the nation did gain vast natural wealth in the trans-Mississippi West. But only a small fraction of the hopeful emigrants heading for the frontier realized their dreams of success. And the move west and east had a dark side, as the acquisition of new territories fueled the controversy over the future of slavery.

Questions for Review and Reflection

1. Explain how and why the westward movement entangled the United States in the affairs of foreign powers.
2. Compare and contrast the acquisition of Texas and the Southwest with the annexation of Oregon.
3. What racial and ethnic tensions emerged in the West because of American expansionism?
4. What factors caused problems and tensions between Native Americans and whites?
5. What important American beliefs and values were involved in the westward movement? How did they shape the westward experience?

Recommended Reading

Recommended Readings are posted on the Web site for this textbook. Visit www.ablongman.com/nash

Fiction and Film

Mark Twain’s Roughing It (1872) is often humorous, but through the humor you can see Twain’s insightful comments about westerners’ values and standards. James C. Work’s Gunfight! (1996) contains a selection of gunfight stories originally printed in popular magazines. For an example of an early “dime novel,” see Ann Sophia Winterbotham Stephens’s Malaeska: Indian Wife of the White Hunter (1861, but use any edition). The West (1996) is a nine-part series by Ken Burns that was first shown on television. The films provide a sympathetic and critical account of the settlement and its impact on Native Americans. The Donner Party (1992) is a PBS video of the disastrous experience of a party of emigrants caught in the Sierra Nevada during the winter of 1846–1847. One critic notes a dark tone to the film, which is characteristic of the new Western history.

Discovering U.S. History Online

Fort Scott National Historic Site
www.nps.gov/fosc/mandest.htm
This illustrated site recounts the role of dragoon soldiers from Fort Scott as armed escorts for settlers traveling over the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails.

The Mexican-American War
www.sunsite.unam.mx/revistas/1847/
This well-illustrated site offers several sections (each available in English or Spanish) that explain the causes, courses, and outcomes of the Mexican-American War.

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Alamo History
www.drtl.org/History/
This site presents an illustrated timeline of the Alamo mission, including its role in the famous battle.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo
www.loc.gov/exhibits/ghtreaty
This site gives background on the treaty and has an exhibit of digitized images of each page of the treaty, including the seals. A map of the area of negotiation is also presented.

The Oregon Trail
www.ukans.edu/carrie/kancoll/index.html
www.isu.edu/~trinmich/Oregontrail.html
The Kansas Collection site holds several good primary sources with images concerning the Oregon Trail and America's early movement westward. The second site is a companion to the PBS film *The Oregon Trail* in which the authors present audio clips from historians, illustrated essays, maps, and images about this famous trail.

The Donner Party
www.members.aol.com/danmrosen/donner/index.htm
This site includes logs recreated from primary sources from the infamous party that resorted to extreme measures to survive. It also has images of the region.

James Knox Polk
www.ipl.org/ref/POTUS/jkpolk.html
This site contains basic factual data about Polk, including his presidency, speeches, cabinet members, and election information.

American Mountain Men
www.xmission.com/~drudy/amm.html
Private letters can speak volumes about the concerns and environment of the writers and recipients. Letters from early settlers west of the Mississippi River are offered on this site, which is an online research center devoted to the trappers, explorers, and traders known as the Mountain Men.

California in the Gold Rush Decade
www.huntington.org/Education/GoldRush
www.museumca.org/goldrush
The first site is a presentation of the "Huntington Library’s remarkable collection of Gold Rush manuscripts, drawings, and rare printed materials." The second is a well-illustrated interactive site on the Gold Rush exhibit formerly on display at the Oakland Museum of California.

The National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution and The George Gustav Heye Center
www.conexus.si.edu/main.htm
A cooperative effort of these two institutions, this site hosts several virtual exhibits about Native American culture and history.

Native American Women
www.gowest.coalliance.org/exhib/gallery4/leadin.htm
This site is an annotated photographic gallery of Native American women.