



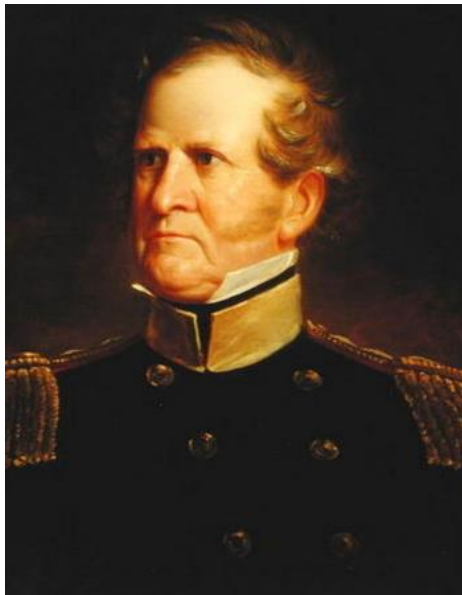
Strategic Challenges in American Military History

“To Conquer a Peace”

General Winfield Scott and the Mexican
American War



“the most perilous of all positions: A fire upon my rear, from Washington, and a fire, in front, from the Mexicans.”



Major General Winfield Scott
21 May 1846



Questions for Reflection

- Based on the information we discuss today, do you think that General Scott's statement accurately reflects the political and military environment he found himself in or is this merely a case of semantics designed to generate sympathy from supporters?
- Does such a wide gulf between key military and civilian leadership exist today? If so, cite examples that support your response?

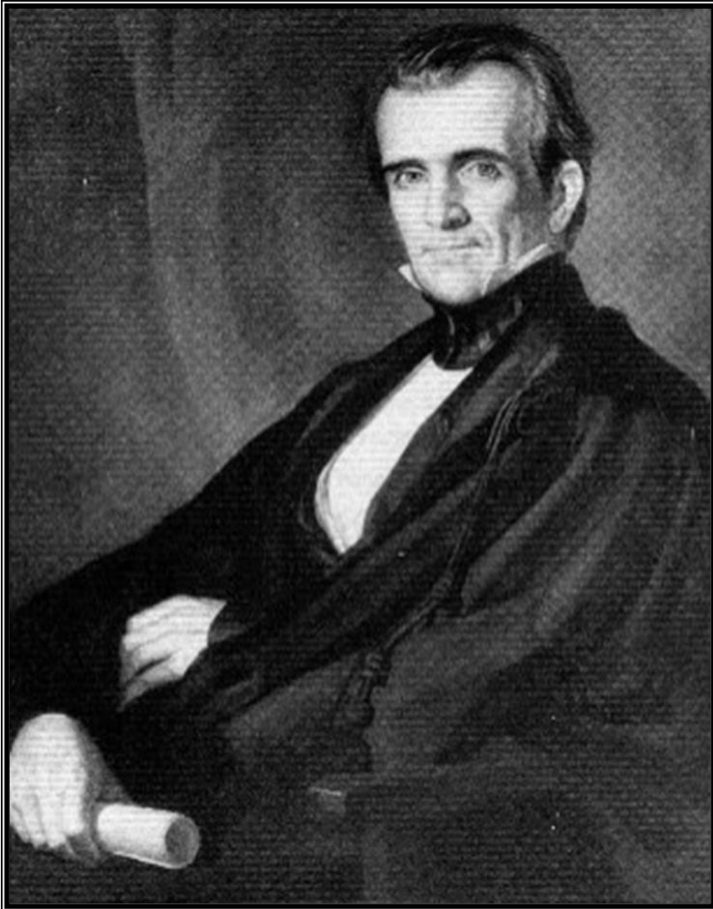


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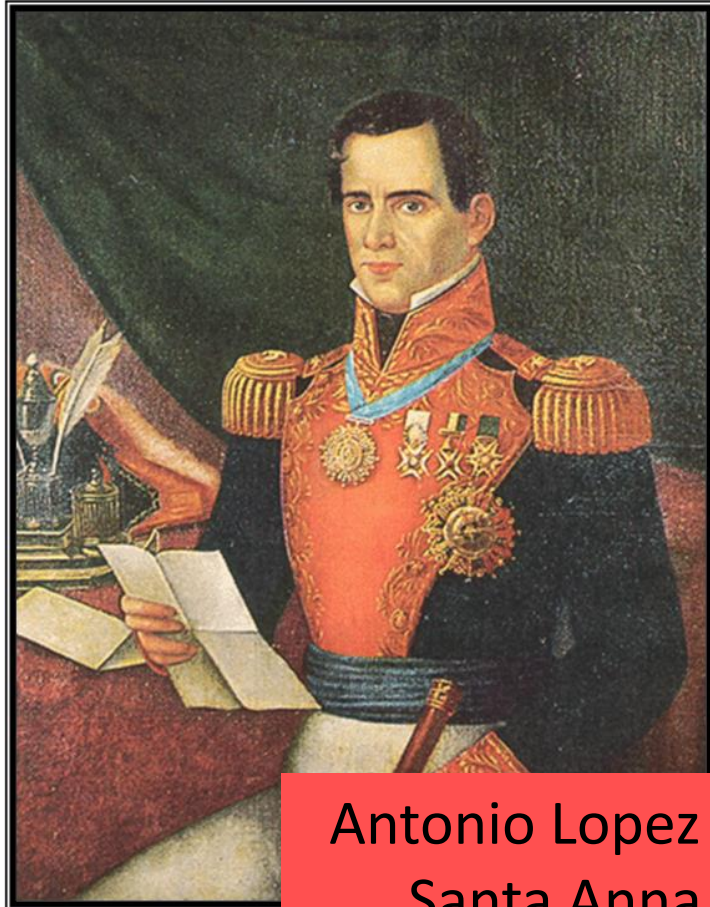
War with Mexico



- Manifest Destiny – U.S. wants the West for expansion and settlement.
- Mexican Government untidy – lots of revolutions and govt. changes in Mexico between 1830-1844.
- American citizens living in Mexico treated badly by government, usually when the Americans plan revolutions and stuff.
- Mexico owes U.S. a lot of money, and due to political instability, not likely to pay it off.
- Dispute between Mexico and the U.S. over boundaries of Texas.
- In 1844, Democrats make expansion a key plank in their presidential election platform.



War With Mexico



Antonio Lopez de
Santa Anna
(1794-1876)

Mexico also had sufficient grievances to want a war with the U.S.

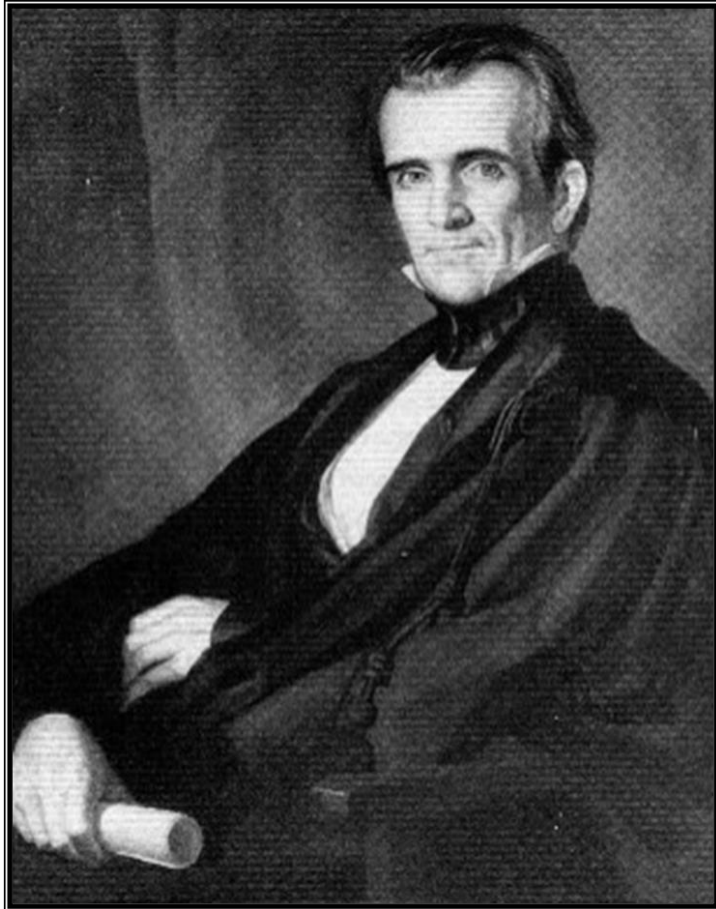
They believed that they could win the war because:

- War would be unpopular in the Northeastern U.S.
- Great Britain Might ally with Mexico in the war.
- Santa Anna was the greatest general in the world – he liked to call himself the Napoleon of the Western Hemisphere.

Mexican hopes were unfounded. Mexico lacked the military power to defend even its home territory, much less an empire.



War With Mexico



Polk elected in 1844. He hoped that he could acquire Mexican territories in the West through diplomacy. Mexico severed diplomatic ties with the U.S., so Polk decided to go to war.

He wanted the Mexicans to start the war, so that an outraged U.S. public would demand war. But the Mexicans refused to cooperate.

Just as Polk was about to ask for war anyway, Mexican and U.S. troops fought a skirmish on the Rio Grande River. Polk blamed Mexico. Got his war.



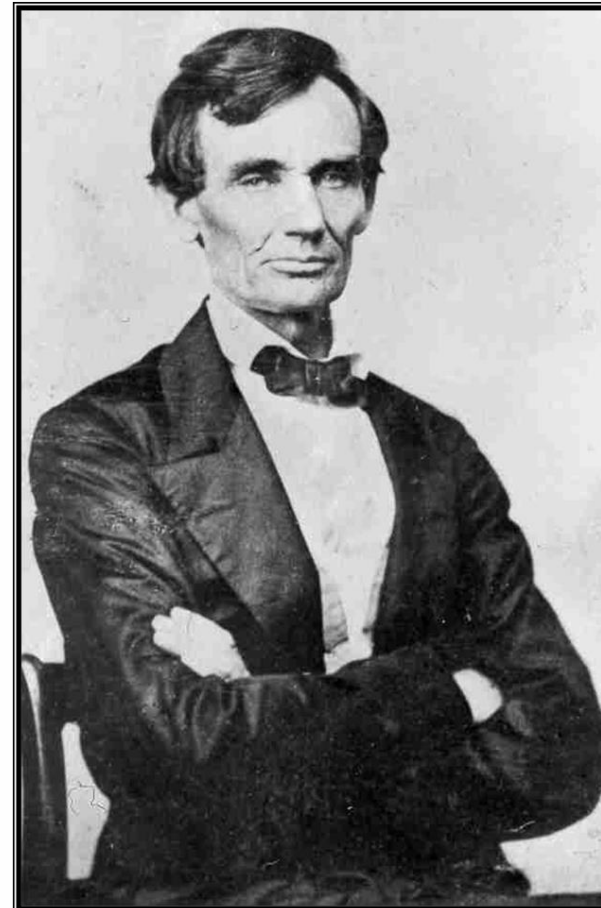
Who was at Fault?

Americans said that the Mexicans shot first, and had crossed the Rio Grande to attack U.S. troops.

Mexicans said Americans had attacked them across the river, and were the aggressors.

Whig Congressman, Abraham Lincoln asked where the first spot of American blood fell in the skirmish. If on Mexican soil then the war was unjust. His question called the "Spot Resolution."

Lincoln's constituents showed their appreciation by not re-electing him.





STRATEGIC PICTURE, 1845

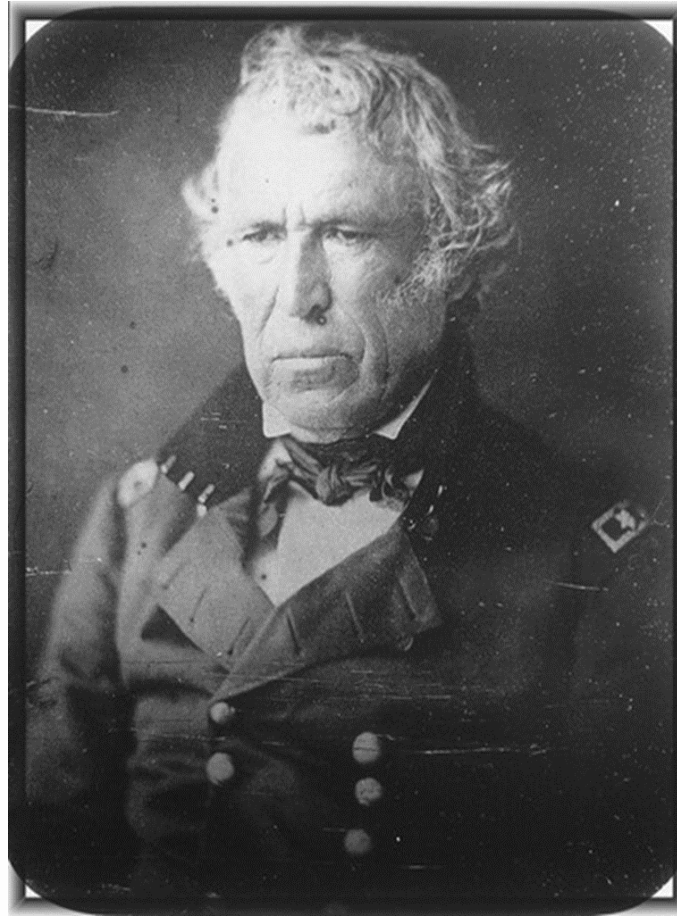
- Oregon Territory Dispute
- Texas Debacle
- “Manifest Destiny”
- War with Mexico





Ready for War? Problems?

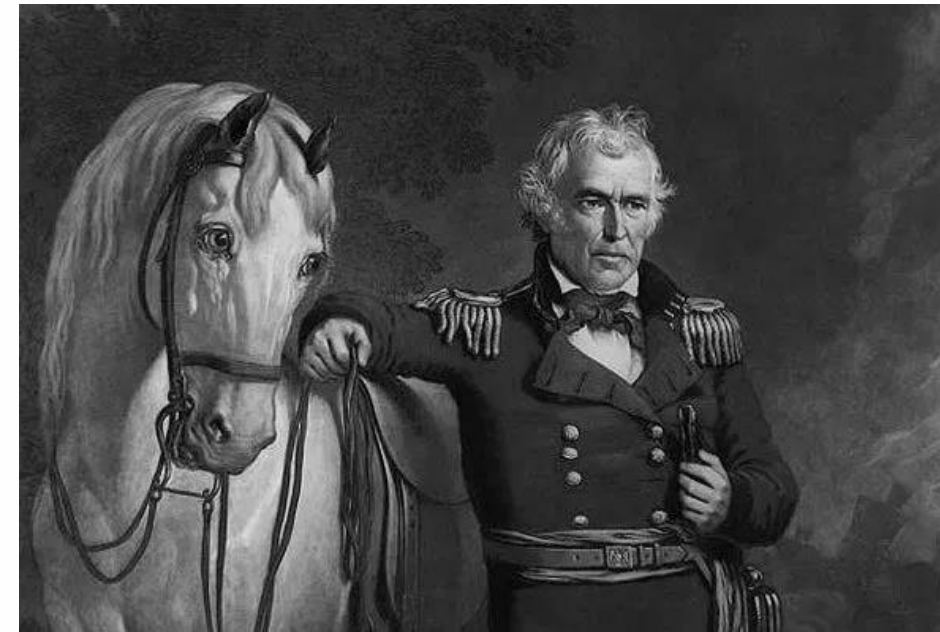
- Endstate?
- Regulars vs. Volunteers?
- Presidential Control
- Political Officers
- Logistics
- Anti-War Sentiment





Zachary Taylor

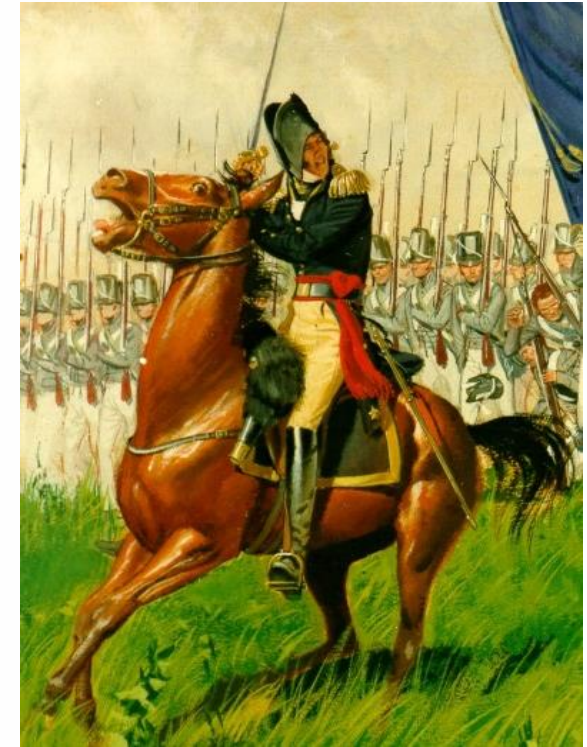
- Although educated, he was a poor student. His handwriting, spelling, and grammar were crude and unrefined throughout his life.
- Even as a boy, he wanted a career in the military; Taylor received his first commission as an officer in 1808 and was immediately assigned to command the garrison at Fort Pickering, located in modern-day Memphis. From that moment until his election as President, Taylor was in the military, stationed at a succession of frontier outposts.
- Taylor's willingness to share the hardships of field duty with his men earned him the affectionate nickname "Old Rough and Ready." Although he fought Native Americans in numerous engagements, much of his service was devoted to protecting their lands from invading white settlers.
- While a career Army officer, he had little formal training, and led by charisma and force of will with little time for the details of military planning and strategy
- Although a poorly paid career officer, Taylor had parlayed the 300 acres of land given to him by his father into holdings in Kentucky, Louisiana, and Mississippi. In 1850, his estate was valued at around \$120,000—equivalent to \$6 million today.





“OLD FUSS AND FEATHERS”

- Entered service in 1808
- Promoted to Brigadier General: 1814
(aged: 27)
- Potential Whig candidate for President
- Retires as a Lieutenant-General: 1861
- 53 years of service; 47 as a General Officer





BATTLE IN MEXICO AND WASHINGTON

- Zachary Taylor and his Campaign
- “an enemy more to be dreaded than Santa Anna”
- “a choice of evils”
- “the part of an executioner”



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- President Polk described military officers as “so in the habit of enjoying their ease, sitting in parlours and on carpeted floors, that most of them have no energy and are content to jog on in a regular routine.” What types of challenges would this present to senior military officers? How did Scott continue to work under a Commander in Chief with these prejudices? Does Scott’s performance in preparing for war support or invalidate Polk’s assessment?
- What does the following statement by Senator Thomas Benton tell you about Polk’s concerns about war with Mexico, “a small war, just large enough to require a treaty of peace, and not large enough to make military reputations, dangerous for the presidency”? Would this be considered a ‘Limited War’ philosophy? Could this statement be applied to the political landscape of the 21st Century? Is it relevant?



THE PRESIDENT'S STRATEGY:

- “Masterful Inactivity”
- Occupation of large areas of Northern Mexico
- Tampico to Chihuahua
- Desired end state: Mexican Government sues for peace
- Impractical and unrealistic



STRATEGIC GUIDANCE

“Sir,

The President, several days since, communicated in person to you his orders to repair to Mexico, to take command of the forces there assembled, and particularly to organize and **set on foot an expedition to operate on the Gulf coast, if, on arriving at the theater of action you shall deem it practicable. It is not proposed to control your operations by definite and positive instructions, but you are left to prosecute them as your judgment under a full view of all the circumstances, shall dictate. The work is before you, and the means provided, or to be provided, for accomplishing it, are committed to you, in the full confidence that you will use them to the best advantage.**

The objects which it is desirable to obtain have been indicated, and it is hope that you will have the requisite force to accomplish them.

Of this, **you must be the judge, when preparations are made, and the time for action arrived.”**

W.L. Marcy
Secretary at War
November 23, 1846



STRATEGIC PICTURE

WAYS:

- Amphibious landing at Vera Cruz
- Move overland to capture Mexico City
- Force Mexican Government to negotiating table

MEANS:

- Combined arms force (Regulars/Volunteers)
- Limited naval support
- Sparse logistical support

ENDS:

- Compel the Mexican Government to cede territories in the Southwest and Western Coast of North American Continent

RISKS:

- Volunteer enlistment expirations
- Overextended lines of communication
- Strategic consumption
- Potential insurgency

SCOTT'S CONCEPT OF OPERATION



- Taylor Stalemated
- Amphibious Landing at Vera Cruz
- Overland March
- Objective: Mexico City



OCCUPATION POLICIES

- Historic Precedents
- Common Policies
 - Martial Law
 - Military
 - Economic
 - Cultural
- Impact on Operations and Strategic Goals
- A Tempting Offer





CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

Arrival of Nicolas Trist- Chief Clerk of the State Department

-- Authority undermines General Scott:

“Should [Mr. Trist] make known to you, in writing, that the contingency has occurred, in consequences of which the President is willing that further active military operations should cease, you will regard such notice as a direction from the President.”

-- General Scott's response in a letter to Nicholas Trist :

“I see that the Secretary of War proposed to degrade me, by requiring that I, commander of this army, shall defer to you, the chief clerk of the Department of State, the question of continuing or discontinuing hostilities.”



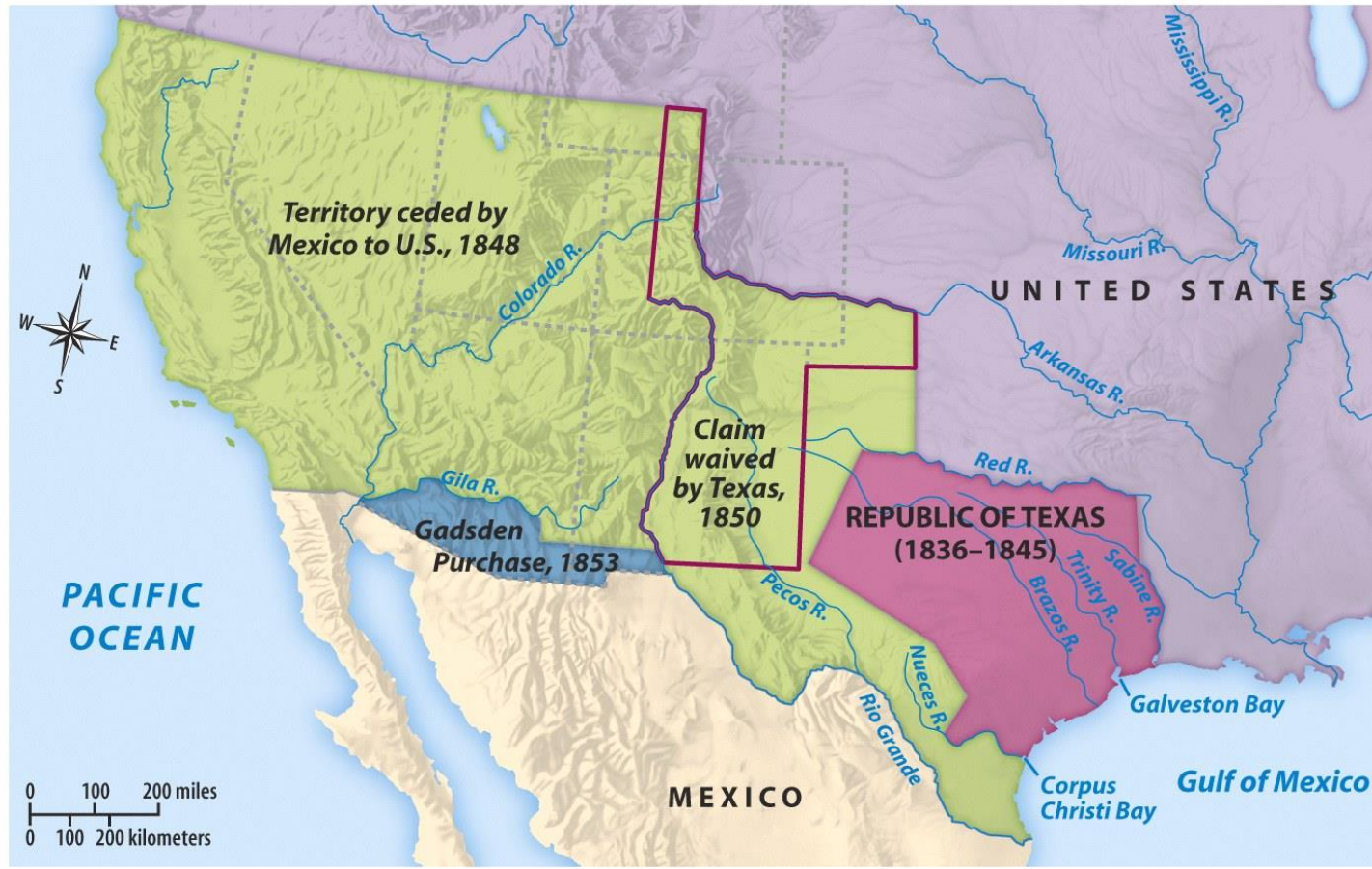
ACHIEVEING THE END STATE

- Reconciliation and Guava Marmalade
- Negotiating with Santa Anna
- Recall and Refusal
- Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo





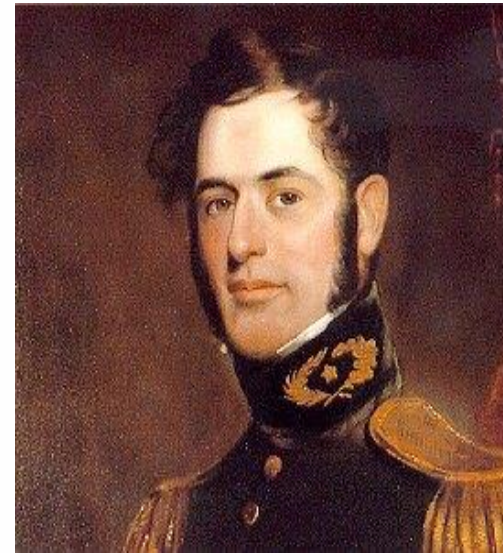
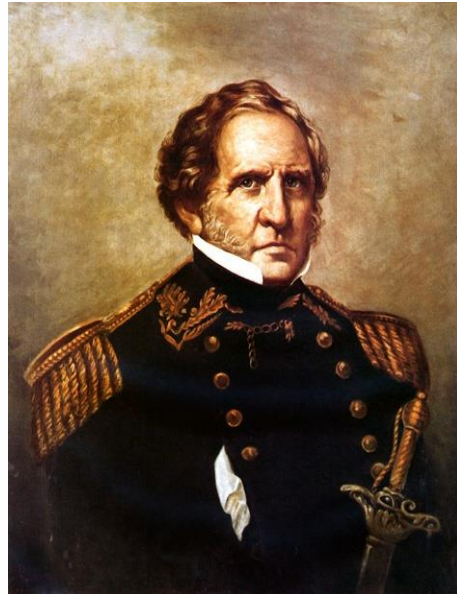
What did we get?



THE UNITED STATES ARMY WAR COLLEGE



Lieutenant Sam Grant



Captain R. E. Lee

“I give it as my fixed opinion that but for our graduated cadets the War between the United States and Mexico might, and probably would, have lasted some four or five years, with, in its first half, more defeats than victories falling to our share.”

-General Winfield Scott

Lessons Learned in Mexico for West Point Grads

- Flanking Maneuvers
- Training/Discipline
 - U.S. Regulars vs. Mexican Conscripts
 - Unreliability of Militia
- Logistics
- Engineering
- Artillery
 - Smoothbore vs. Rifled
- **War ended with a grand campaign against Mexico City**
- For the home front, the war affirmed a romantic view of armed conflict.

