

As Americans moved west into the Louisiana Territory (acquired in 1803), St. Louis quickly became the launching point for U.S. trade with northern Mexico through Santa Fe, Nuevo Mexico. American goods also were shipped from New Orleans to Matamoros, Mexico, through the port of Barzos Santiago, a segment of Padre Island.

The importance to American merchants of these two points of entry was tellingly revealed in the 1836 Treaty of Velasco, which ended the Texas Revolution. This treaty made the surprising claim that the Rio Grande was Texas' western border.

The claim seems absurd since the Medina and Nueces rivers had at various times constituted the western boundary of the Spanish province (and later Mexican state) of Texas. Additionally, the Trans-Nueces region contained mostly grazing land which was not desired by most Anglo Texans who were farmers.

But some of the instigators of the Texas Revolution were closely connected with the American trade network. They hoped to profit from commerce with northern Mexico by controlling Santa Fe and Barzos Santiago, both of which were conveniently west of the Rio Grande.

Settling the issue of the disputed Trans-Nueces territory became President James K. Polk's excuse for beginning the U.S. War with Mexico (1846). But his main goal was the larger dream of acquiring the port of San Francisco for the trade with Asia. (Santa Fe was secured for the already well-established U.S. trading houses, not for Texans.)

The War with Mexico involved a military invasion of northern Mexico. But it was the campaign into the central highlands that had the Marines march into "the halls of Montezuma" (Mexico City).

The exuberance generated by this conquest of Mexico gave rise to a "(Take) All of Mexico" political movement fueled by expansionists. This was strongly opposed by New Englanders who had from the start objected to the war on moral grounds. They accused the Southerners of wanting new lands for cotton and new slave states for their political battles in Congress.

In the debates over whether to take all of Mexico, Southerners came to realize that they also would be incorporating many mestizo (mixed-blooded) Mexicans who blur the line between whites and blacks necessary for preserving the institution of slavery.

The "All of Mexico" movement fizzled, and the United States settled for acquiring Mexico's northern lands, which were only thinly populated. Thus, through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Tejanos, Nuevo Mexicanos and Californios, descendants of the Spanish and Mexican *primeros pobladores* (first settlers), became U.S. citizens.

Their rights as Americans guaranteed by the treaty were not fully honored as the U.S. economy swept into the Southwest. But the new economy provided a very strong “pull” force for Mexicans in a centuries-old northward movement.

And the *primeros pobladores* were soon joined by their former fellow countrymen and women in a series of immigration waves through a border that until 1930 had few, if any, restrictions.

Together the old settlers and the newcomers would become Mexican-Americans, a process begun on Feb. 2, 1848.