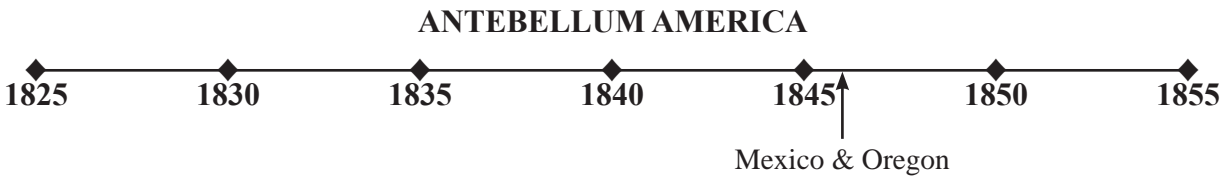
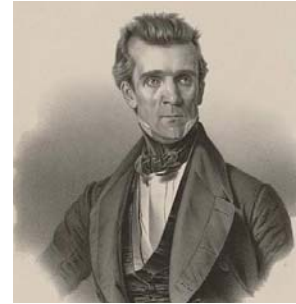


# LESSON 6: MEXICO AND OREGON, 1846

## Student Handout 1: Problems



The year is 1846 and you are President James K. Polk. You face two foreign policy crises at the same time: one with Mexico over Texas and California, and the other with Britain over Oregon. While each of the crises has its own distinctive features, your decision on one may affect what you can do in the other.



President James Polk

### Problem 1—Texas:

Texas has spelled trouble for Mexico for decades. When Texas declared itself an independent republic, a Mexican army unsuccessfully tried to end the rebellion. Last year, the U.S. Congress voted to make the Republic of Texas part of the United States and Texas accepted statehood. This action made the Mexican public very angry, since Texas had been a part of Mexico, and Mexicans were still hoping to get it back. Mexicans, in general, including many leaders, still want Texas back, preferring war over allowing Texas to remain part of the U.S. Meanwhile, many Americans want the rest of the territory of Mexico from Texas all the way out to California (about 40% of Mexico's land). They claim that the U.S. has a "Manifest Destiny" given by God to spread American democracy across the whole continent. Concurrently, Mexico and the U.S. are having a border dispute. Americans want the area up to the Rio Grande, which would make Texas larger. Mexicans want the area up to the Nueces River, which would make Texas smaller. The Mexicans claim that the Nueces River was the traditional boundary of Texas, and that it should stay there.



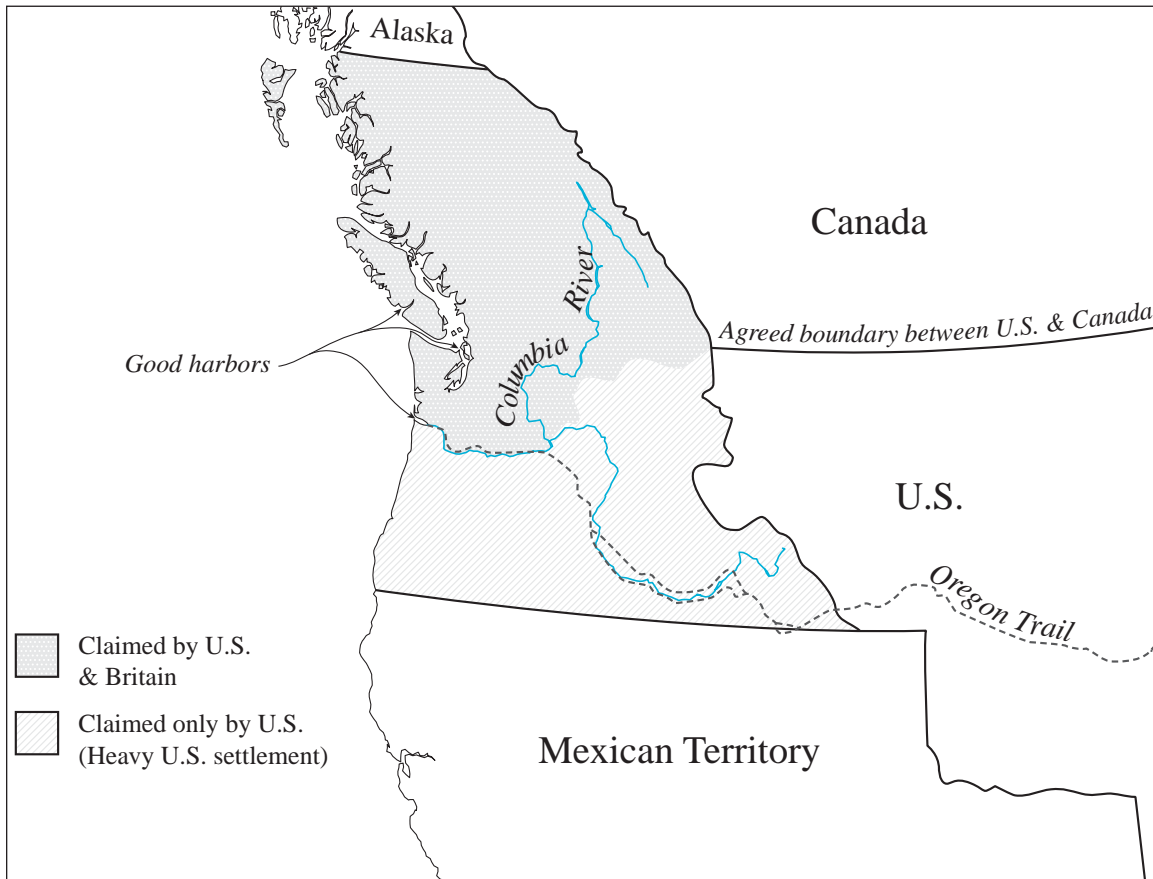
The Mexican government owes the U.S. government money. In 1843, Mexican leaders agreed in a settlement to pay Americans about \$2 million for claims against the Mexican government (the actual claims were over \$6 million). But Mexico hasn't been making payments for over two years—not even interest payments. The government itself is weak. About a year ago, the people of California overthrew Mexican authority in their state. The Mexican government decided to recruit and outfit an army to put down the rebellion, but couldn't raise the money. To make matters worse, the British may interfere in California. There are British ships in the area that could threaten American interests, and there are rumors of the British offering weapons to the Mexican people in order to help the Mexican government retake California.

There is a Mexican army near the Rio Grande that could attack Texas. However, it isn't clear if that army is loyal to the Mexican government. The commander might decide instead to march the army to Mexico City and overthrow the government.

What will your policy be with regard to Mexico on these issues? You may choose more than one:

1. Demand all of the Mexican territory from the Rio Grande, west to the Pacific Ocean
2. Provoke a war with Mexico. Send soldiers into the disputed area between the Nueces and Rio Grande. If the Mexicans don't attack, the U.S. will get the disputed area for free. If they do attack, then U.S. public opinion will be united in favor of war against Mexico.
3. Send a diplomat to Mexico to buy the disputed area down to the Rio Grande and the area out to California. The U.S. would pay \$20 million and cancel Mexico's debt to the U.S. in exchange for the disputed land to the Rio Grande and for California. The U.S. should try for a peaceful settlement of the dispute with Mexico.

4. Negotiate a compromise with the Mexicans, such as:
- Texas would be returned to Mexico
  - Mexico would pay the debt owed to the U.S.
  - The U.S. would buy California for \$10 million
  - Attack Mexico and take over the whole country



Problem 2—Oregon:

Americans want the Oregon Territory to become part of the U.S. Starting in 1843, thousands of American settlers have pushed into the southern part of Oregon along the Oregon Trail in what was referred to as “Oregon fever.” There are few British settlers in the area, but the U.S. and Britain have an agreement for joint occupation of Oregon. The British Hudson Bay Company is making good profits from the fur trade north of the Columbia River (in the area claimed by Britain). Meanwhile, an American naval commander, Charles Wilkes, has reported on its wonderful harbors. New England merchants engaged in trade with China are very interested in these harbors. Britain agrees that the U.S. can keep the southern part of Oregon, but wants to keep the northern part and wants British trade ships to be able sail on the Columbia River.

Many Americans want the whole Oregon Territory, right up to Alaska, to be taken over by the U.S. In the 1844 election, you took the position that the U.S. should get all of Oregon, including the part the British claim. This position was very popular with western

state leaders and voters, helping you win the election. Still, the majority of Americans will accept a compromise where the U.S. will get about half the land in the Oregon area. Reports from the American ambassador in London indicate that the British do not want to fight over Oregon. He says the British can't offer a compromise themselves because they would look weak to the British public. They are waiting for a reasonable offer from the U.S. to settle the dispute.

What is your policy with regard to Britain on the Oregon Territory? You may choose more than one:

Demand all of the Oregon Territory

- A. Provoke a war with Britain. Send soldiers into the disputed area in the north of the Oregon Territory. If the British don't attack, the U.S. will get the disputed area for free. If they do, then U.S. public opinion will be united for war against Britain.
- B. Send a diplomat to England to buy the whole of the Oregon Territory. This will be a peaceful settlement.
- C. Negotiate a compromise with the British. Tell them the U.S. will settle for some of the land in the disputed area.
- D. Declare war on Britain and invade Canada with the intention of taking over all of it