

# America's Acquisition was Justified

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When the war between the United States and Mexico came to an official end on February 2, 1848, the political nature of the North American continent had changed forever... Within a half century, Americans would, to a greater degree, have settled and developed the region. That fulfillment of the United States' manifest destiny can be viewed as justification for its seizure of all that land from Mexico.

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Although it is outside U.S. society's present norms, taken in the context of the time, the fact that Texas, and to some degree California, was already filling with American settlers seemed to have superseded supposed "legalities." The U.S. population at the time was growing rapidly, and the lands in dispute would never have been effectively populated or governed by Mexico. Since the Mexican government had allowed for the settlement of Americans – done with the purpose of developing the land for Mexico and lacking any altruism, the U.S. government had certain responsibilities. As early as the 1830's, when Mexico realized it could not retain control due to the burgeoning settlement of Americans in Texas, it looked to serve its own purposes again by closing off that settlement. Finally, where the Mexicans looked to retain a historical "claim" to the land, in reality the land belonged to the Spanish Crown, which the then government of Mexico had won from it.

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The argument that it was for Mexico to protect these borders fails, as had Mexico as a state. Unfortunately, where the United States had experienced long-term stability since its founding, in the short time since its independence in 1821, Mexico had seen rebellions and coups, and the catastrophic leadership of the dictator Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. There was no good reason for the United States to look at the unstable, failed state of Mexico as a neighbor that could secure the continent's borders. It was a strategic necessity for the federal government to acquire both Texas and the West Coast, especially the port of San Francisco. In doing so, this fulfilled a clear defensive need. President James K. Polk did initially offer to purchase these territories but was rebuffed. That he allowed the country to move to war to resolve the issue was a logical, if unfortunate, progression.

That Texas and California and the vast lands in between should become part of the United States served multiple purposes. It fulfilled the political will of Americans at the time and it took care of its greatest geopolitical liability as well. Historians have often put a modern face on the American acquisition, labeling it as an illegal land grab that led to the American Civil War. From a 21<sup>st</sup>-century perspective, this might be true, but fails to see the United States and the world as it was in the 1840's.