

Lesson Fifty-One

From Atlantic To Pacific

LESSON IDEA

To explain how the United States won control of the southwest from Mexico, and how the gold rush of 1849 helped populate this vast new territory.

PREPARATION

Obtain a map of the western hemisphere that will clearly show the Isthmus of Panama, Cape Horn, and the southwestern states that are mentioned in this lesson.

“FREE! LARGE GRANTS of land! Come to Texas!” The offer of free land on the frontier, widely advertised in western towns in 1836, drew Americans into Texas like a magnet. Even the hint of danger (“Come with a good rifle, and come soon”) did not deter them.

The Spanish, as European landlords of the southwest, were the first to entice American pioneers to settle in what would later become known as the Lone Star State. Mexico continued the policy after winning the South American war for independence. One Mexican law, designed to promote land development in Texas, offered impresarios (promoters) 23,040 acres of land for every 100 families they brought into the territory. A family arriving alone, rather than under a promoter’s contract, could purchase 4,428 acres of pastureland for \$30. For as little as \$3.50, they could buy 174 acres for farming.

For many Americans, it was a grand opportunity for a new beginning and the chance to earn a good living — perhaps even a fortune. So many took advantage of the offer, however, it made the Mexican government nervous. As the wilderness land began to flourish under the management of enterprising Americans, Mexico began having regrets about giving away so much of it away. Was that reaction natural and understandable? [Discuss incidents with which family members are familiar in which people have been willing to part with something that seems to have no value, or requires a great deal of effort to develop, only to regret their generosity once the recipient has made improvements that increase the value of the gift. One example might be a seemingly useless

automobile given to a recipient who is able to get it up and running due to his skill as an auto mechanic.]

The Texas colonists were disgusted by that reversal in attitude, and by policies of the Mexican government in general. The Mexicans were ill prepared for self-government after years of autocratic rule by Spain. They found it difficult to make laws and harder still to abide by them. One revolution followed another until it became virtually impossible to know from one month to the next who would officially be in command. Constitutional law existed in name only; not in practical application.

Why did the adoption of a constitution fail to bring Mexico the same benefits that the United States enjoyed? [Ask for opinions. Emphasize the point that constitutions are largely wasted efforts unless there is sufficient understanding and motivation on the part of the citizenry to energize their words and principles. The former Soviet Union, for instance, had an elaborate constitution with many wordy phrases about human rights, yet it was governed by one of the most oppressive dictatorships in history. Similarly, the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights espouses all sorts of supposed “human rights” and “freedom” that are consistently violated at whim by the UN itself. Indeed, after cataloguing such rights, the Declaration states (Article 29, paragraph 3): “These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.” Which means that those who oppose the UN have no “rights and freedoms” under terms of the widely acclaimed (and widely misunderstood) UN Declaration.]

Impatient with the chaos and instability of the Mexican government, Texans proceeded to make their own laws and govern themselves. In retaliation, Mexico outlawed self-government for the settlers and closed its borders to further American immigration. Refusing to accept the Mexican decrees, Texans adopted the slogan “Texas and Liberty” and proceeded on their own to promise

