Proviso—to a war appropriations bill in 1846. The proviso declared that no territory acquired from Mexico as a result of the war would be open to slavery. Although defeated in Congress, Wilmer's proposal became a symbolic political watershed. It proclaimed what would be one of the great issues that led to the Civil War: the question of slavery in the territories. The slavery issue, stoked again in Texas, reemerged to slow down the drive to annex densely populated areas of Mexico.

In his proviso, Wilmer also capitalized on a third obstacle to expansionism: racism. Expansionists had achieved support in the North by arguing that Texas would provide an outlet for blacks to migrate south and, eventually, merge with Mexicans. But if the United States acquired Mexico, not only would the rationale for having acquired Texas collapse, but the country also would add large numbers of nonwhites to its population. Wilmer called the expansionists on the contradiction between their arguments of 1844 and 1845 for the annexation of Texas and their desire for Mexican territory in 1846. It was a move of political genius, for although many Americans did not object to the acquisition of new lands from Mexico, they did have grave doubts about adding the Mexicans who lived in that territory. Such people, they contended, would form a racially inferior and unassimilable population unsuited to republican institutions. What would the United States do, the editor of the Cincinnati Enquirer asked, with eight million Mexicans "with their idol worship, heathen superstition, and degraded mongrel races?"

By linking these racist fears with republican and antislavery appeals, northern Democrats and Whigs blunted the extreme expansionist demands. Even some southern Democrats, John C. Calhoun among them, eventually joined the opposition to the "all Mexico" movement for fear of allowing "impure races" into the Union. As the war came to a close, the brief political dominance of the expansionists foundered on the shoals of sectionalism and racism. Those who wanted all or most of Mexico were a small minority in Congress and the press.

James K. Polk, whose wish list of Mexican territory had increased beyond California and New Mexico (which included present-day Arizona, most of Utah, and a large part of Colorado), thus found that sectional splits prevented him from gaining all the territory that he desired. Polk's opponents often accused him of duplicity, but at the end of the war he found himself the victim of independent scheming and maneuvering by his own generals and his peace negotiators, Nicholas Trist. In the spring of 1847, Polk had dispatched Trist to work out a peace with the Mexicans, but the Mexicans had rejected the peace terms Trist proposed. Polk ordered his emissary to return home. General Scott, however, persuaded Trist to offer a new and more malleable Mexican government one more chance to sign a treaty. The result was the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on February 2, 1848. For 15 million dollars and the assumption of all claims by American citizens against Mexico, the United States took Texas above the Rio Grande, New Mexico, and California. Polk was furious. He wanted a larger cession and regarded the treaty as the work of an unauthorized agent. He was also a realist, however. Persuaded that antislavery sentiment would not permit the rejection of a treaty ending the war, he submitted it to the Senate, which ratified it early in 1848.


**Gadsden Purchase**

The last piece of territory acquired in the contiguous United States came in 1853. Seeking a southerly railroad route, the government named James Gadsden to negotiate a new boundary with Mexico. The United States purchased the land lying between the Gila River and the present international boundary in Arizona, a strip of about 29,000 square miles. Antonio López de Santa Anna, whose career involved the transfer of so much of his country to the United States, was now back in power, and he agreed to the sale. Because the purchase was largely sparsely populated desert, it touched none of the raw sectional nerves hatched by the Mexican War. With the Gadsden Purchase the boundaries of the modern American West were complete.

These boundaries hardly matched the dreams of the most extreme expansionists, those who had believed in manifest destiny. Canada, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean remained outside the United States. Expansionism was an expression of nationalism in what was an increasingly sectionalist country. Expansionists were a powerful group, and they forged a real if temporary political majority, but after the Mexican War, their very success dimmed it in. As Ralph