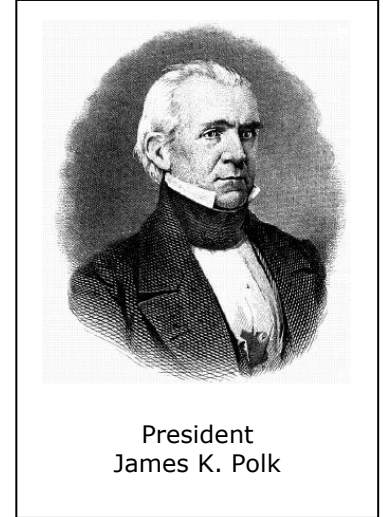


Twenty-Ninth Congress

Dec. 1, 1845 – Mar. 3, 1847

Administration of James K. Polk

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Historical Background

Upon taking office, James K. Polk had four main goals for his presidency: (1) the reduction of tariffs to a level that would produce only necessary government revenue; (2) the reestablishment of the Independent Treasury; (3) the settlement of the Oregon boundary with Great Britain; (4) and the accession of Upper California from Mexico. As one of his final acts of Presidency, incumbent John Tyler, approved the February 1845 bill making Texas eligible for annexation. Less than a week after Congress approved the resolution, the Mexican government broke off diplomatic relations with the United States. It was amidst this climate of growing foreign territorial tensions that James Polk took office. However, as Polk had run his election campaign on the platform of territorial expansion, calling for the ‘reoccupation’ of Oregon and the ‘re-annexation’ of Texas – suggesting that Texas had been included in the Louisiana purchase – this climate was in line with his political agenda as well as the growing national idea that the U.S. must inevitably expand westward to the Pacific Ocean.

In 1845, this doctrine of inevitable expansion was coined by the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* as the “Manifest Destiny” of the United States: the providential right of the U.S. to expand throughout the American continent. In Polk’s first annual message in December, he reaffirmed the Monroe Doctrine, opposing any European colonization of North America, using it as a means of underlying and vindicating U.S. expansionist policy.

Along with annexing Texas, Polk therefore, also called for the end of joint British and U.S. occupation of Oregon and the acquisition of California which was still under Mexican control. The annexation of Texas and the break in Mexico-U.S. relations, however, decreased the chances of negotiating a purchase agreement for the California territory and increased the likelihood of war with Mexico. After several more months of tension along the Texas-Mexico border, Polk signed a declaration of war with Mexico on May 13, 1846, beginning the Mexican-American War.

House	Senate
Majority Party: Democrats (142 seats)	Majority Party: Democrats (34 seats)
Minority Party: Whigs (79 seats)	Minority Party: Whigs (22 seats)
Other Parties: American (6 seats)	Other Parties: None
Speaker of the House: John W. Davis	President Pro Tempore: David R. Atchison

Looking to avoid war on two fronts, in June 1846 a treaty finally terminating the dispute between the United States and Great Britain concerning Oregon, setting the boundary between the U.S. and Canada at forty-nine degrees north latitude, was approved by the Senate.

In July 1846, Polk achieved one of his goals when Congress approved the Walker Tariff Act, which abandoned all specific rates and relied exclusively upon *ad valorem* duties, which is to say duties calculated based on the value of goods, rather than the type of goods concerned. Within a week Polk was to see another of his legislative initiatives approved with the reestablishment of an independent treasury. Just before the 29th Congress adjourned, it authorized the issuance of the first postage stamps.

Sources:

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Polk, James. [*Message from the President of the United States to the two Houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the Twenty-ninth Congress*](#), House, Dec. 8, 1846. 29th Congress, 2nd Session, H.doc.4/1 (Pr11.1/1:846). ProQuest Congressional, 497 H.doc.4/1

War or Peace?

The Polk administration's major foreign policy initiatives during the 29th Congress reflected his deep commitment to the concept of Manifest Destiny, the belief that the United States was destined to expand across the whole of the North American continent. This was reflected first in his efforts to settle once and for all the Oregon boundary dispute by entering into the Oregon Treaty with Great Britain, which established the 49th parallel as the official border between British Columbia and the Oregon Territory in the U.S. This left the territory of Upper California along the Pacific coast and New Mexico—Mexican territory that Polk and other expansionists coveted.

Mexican-American War

Though several factors had contributed to the mounting tensions between the governments of the United States and Mexico, including increasing incidence of Indian raids in both countries, the primary impetus for the war was the U.S. government's policy of territorial expansion. Mexico had never formally recognized the secession of Texas subsequent to the War of Independence of 1836 and the border separating the two territories was disputed, with Texas claiming the Rio Grande—or as the Mexicans referred to it, the Rio Bravo del Norte—and Mexico the Nueces River further to the north.



President Pro Tempore
David R. Atchison



Speaker of the House
John W. Davis

Polk first sought to obtain the territories of Upper California and New Mexico by purchasing them from Mexico, but the Mexican government refused due to the increased tensions between the two countries when the United States formally annexed Texas at the end of 1845. President Polk subsequently sent General Zachary Taylor, along with roughly 1,500 troops, to the disputed territories between the Rio Grande and Nueces rivers, exploiting the ensuing border skirmishes to press Congress for a declaration of war in May 1846.

The Mexicans were confident of winning the war, as their army of 32,000 was four times as large as that of the United States, but they suffered from poor leadership and organization. President Polk controlled military strategies directly, making him the first American President to be an active Commander-in-Chief.

By the end of 1846, the United States was sewing up its conquest of Alta California (now California) and Major General Zachary Taylor was pushing the Mexican army further south of the Rio Grande after the punishing siege of the city of Monterrey in late September 1846. In November, Taylor ordered his Army of Occupation along with General William Worth's forces to advance on the city of Saltillo, despite orders to halt any movement further south of the Rio Grande. Mexican President General Antonio López de Santa Anna then moved his force of over 21,000 to Encarnacion, south of Saltillo.

When, on February 20, 1847, Major Benjamin McCulloch's Texas Rangers encountered Santa Anna's forces at Encarnacion, Taylor ordered his Army to Angostura, near Hacienda San Juan de la Buena Vista. Brigadier General John E. Wool thought the site at Angostura, with its narrow approach road cutting through a series of ravines and arroyos, was ideal for defense. On February 22, Santa Anna's vastly superior forces attacked in a series of feint and flanking maneuvers, ultimately unsuccessfully, and on February 25th the Mexican President took the advice of his council of war and made a retreat. The Battle of Buena Vista, in which an American army of fewer than 5,000 defeated a Mexican force more than four times its size cemented Zachary Taylor's reputation as a war hero, helping him secure victory as the Whig candidate in the Presidential election of 1848.

Sources:

Polk, James. [*Message from the President of the United States to the two Houses of Congress, at the commencement of the first session of the Twenty-ninth Congress*](#), Senate, Dec. 2, 1845. 29th Congress, 1st Session, S.doc.1/1 (Pr11.1/1:845). ProQuest Congressional, 470 S.doc.1/1

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Economic Trends and Conditions

Of President Polk's goals for his presidency, two were directly related to the ongoing economic recovery of the United States and federal monetary policy. These included the reduction of tariffs to a level that would produce only necessary government revenue and the reestablishment of an independent Treasury. On the other hand, the settlement of the Oregon boundary with England and the accession of Upper California from Mexico, had a more indirect impact on the U.S. economy, but these would soon become embroiled in the gathering sectional crisis over the expansion of slavery in newly acquired territories.

Democratic Congressional majorities in both chambers enacted the Walker Tariff and approved the reestablishment of an independent Treasury in 1846. However, the Walker Tariff, which had low rates on manufactured goods and high rates on imported raw materials used by manufacturers, had angered the Pennsylvania Congressional caucus. Only one Pennsylvania Democrat voted in favor of the bill, forcing President Polk to depend on Midwestern and Southern Democratic support. Midwestern Democrats voted in favor of the bill in exchange for support from Polk for their priorities, while Southern Democrats agreed if legislation was introduced to lower western land prices. Once the new tariff passed, however, Polk and the Southern Democrats abandoned the land bill, which quickly died. Polk also vetoed a large rivers-and-harbors bill that was heavily backed by Midwestern Democrats.

During the Mexican-American War, Polk's opponents claimed that the President pursued the conflict to encourage the expansion of slavery in the newly acquired territories. These claims were challenged with the introduction of the Wilmot Proviso in 1846, which would have banned slavery in any newly acquired territories. The Proviso was ultimately struck down, but the issue generated heated exchanges between representatives from the slave-holding South and industrial North and promised to continue to polarize the nation in the coming years.

Sources:

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Polk, James. [*Message from the President of the United States to the two Houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the Twenty-ninth Congress*](#), House, Dec. 8, 1846. 29th Congress, 2nd Session, H.doc.4/1 (Pr11.1/1:846). ProQuest Congressional, 497 H.doc.4/1

Walker, John Robert. [*Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury, transmitting his annual report on the state of the finances*](#). Department of Treasury, Dec. 9, 1846. 29th Congress, 2nd Session, H.doc.7 (T1.1:846). ProQuest Congressional, 498, H.doc.7

Major Treaties

Oregon Treaty. Established the 49th parallel as the boundary line between U.S. and British possessions west of the Rocky Mountains and mutual access rights to certain waterways in the areas in question. Concluded June 15, 1846. Approved by the Senate June 18, 1846. ([9 Stat. 869](#))

Sources:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980](#). Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

1845 Events

- **Jan. 21:** Edgar Allan Poe publishes *The Raven and Other Poems*
- **Feb. 27:** [The United States Congress approves the annexation of Texas](#)
- **Mar.:** *Mexican-American War* – Mexico cuts diplomatic ties with U.S. following the annexation of Texas
- **Mar. 3:** [Florida becomes the 27th State admitted to the U.S.](#)
- **Mar. 3:** [The Postal Act standardizes U.S. mail rates for the first time](#)
- **Mar. 4:** [Congress overrides a Presidential Veto for the first time in U.S. history](#)
- **June 8:** [Former U.S. President Andrew Jackson dies of chronic tuberculosis](#)
- **July:** "Morning News" and "Democratic Review" editor John L. O'Sullivan coins the phrase "Manifest Destiny"
- **Aug. 9:** The Aberdeen Act is passed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom empowering the British Royal Navy to search Brazilian ships as part of the abolition of the slave trade from Africa
- **Sep. 13:** The Knickerbocker Club, New York City, codifies the rules of baseball
- **Oct. 10:** [The Naval School \(later the Naval Academy\) is established without Congressional funding at Fort Severn in Annapolis, Maryland](#)
- **Dec. 2:** [President Polk addresses Congress on the State of the Union, reinforcing the Monroe Doctrine and arguing for more aggressive westward expansion](#)
- **Dec. 29:** [Texas is admitted as the 28th U.S. State](#)

1846 Events

- **Jan. 21:** The Daily News is founded in London, England, with the author Charles Dickens as editor - the first popularly-priced daily newspaper in Britain
- **Feb. 10:** [Mormons led by Brigham Young begin to travel further west, eventually settling in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake](#)
- **Feb. 19:** Austin formally becomes the capital of the newly annexed state of Texas
- **Mar. 9:** The Treaty of Lahore brings an end to the First Anglo-Sikh War in India. Britain gains territory beyond the Sutlej River, the

previous boundary of British India. Punjab becomes a British protectorate

- **May 3:** *Mexican-American War* – [2,300 American soldiers scatter a Mexican force twice as large in the battle of Palo Alto; General Taylor is called a hero](#)
- **May 13:** *Mexican-American War* – [The U.S. makes a formal declaration of war against Mexico over the disputed territories of New Mexico, California and Texas](#)
- **June 6:** [President Polk submits to Congress a treaty with Great Britain to set the boundary between Canada and Oregon at the 49th parallel](#)
- **June 26:** [British Prime Minister Robert Peel repeals the Corn Laws to allow the unhindered importation of grain into Ireland in an effort to alleviate the famine caused by the failure of the potato crop](#)
- **July 7:** *Mexican-American War* – [Commodore John D. Sloat occupies Monterey and Yerba Buena, beginning the annexation of California](#)
- **Aug. 8:** [Representative David Wilmot introduced the so-called "Wimot Proviso" to ban slavery in districts acquired in the Mexican-American War](#)
- **Aug. 10:** [The Smithsonian Institution is established](#)
- **Sep. 10:** U.S. inventor Elias Howe patents a practical sewing machine; it revolutionizes garment manufacture in both the factory and the home
- **Sep. 23:** [German astronomer Johann Gottfried Galle discovers the planet Neptune on the basis of French astronomer Urbain Le Verrier's calculations of its position](#)
- **Nov.** Donner Party becomes snowbound near Truckee Lake
- **Dec. 28:** [Iowa admitted to the Union as the 29th State](#)

Sources:

["An Act for the admission the States of Iowa and Florida into the Union."](#) (5 Stat. 742, Chap. 48; Mar. 3, 1845). ProQuest Congressional

["An Act to establish the "Smithsonian Institution," for the Increase and Diffusion of Knowledge among Men."](#) (9 Stat. 102, Chap. 178; Aug. 10, 1846). ProQuest Congressional

["An Act to reduce the rates of postage, to limit the use and correct the abuse of the franking privilege, and for the prevention of frauds on the revenues of the Post Office Department."](#) (5 Stat. 732, Chap. 43; Mar. 3, 1845). ProQuest Congressional

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Mason, John Y. [List of papers accompanying the report of the Secretary of the Navy](#). Department of Navy, Senate, Dec. 7, 1846. 29th Congress, 2nd Session, S.doc.1/7. ProQuest Congressional, 493 S.doc.1/7

Polk, James Knox. [Authorizing transfer of Fort Severn, Annapolis, Maryland to Navy Department to be used as a Naval school.](#) June 16, 1845. Unnumbered Executive Orders, Directives, and Proclamations. ProQuest Congressional, 1845-17-6

Polk, James Knox. [Executive Proceedings, Correspondence, and Documents, Relating to Oregon, from Which the Injunction of Secrecy Has Been Removed.](#) Aug. 8, 1846. 29th Congress, 1st Session, Exec.Doc.16[b], 29-1. ProQuest Congressional, SED-29-1-17

Polk, James Knox. [Hostilities by Mexico. Message from the President of the United States, relative to an invasion and commencement of hostilities by Mexico.](#) House, May 11, 1846. 29th Congress, 1st Session, H.doc.196. ProQuest Congressional, 485 H.doc.196

Polk, James Knox. [Message from the President of the United States to the two Houses of Congress, at the commencement of the first session of the Twenty-ninth Congress,](#) Senate, Dec. 2, 1845. 29th Congress, 1st Session, S.doc.1/1 (Pr11.1/1:845). ProQuest Congressional, 470 S.doc.1/1

Polk, James Knox. [Message from the President of the United States, transmitting a copy of the Constitution of the State of Texas.](#) Committee on Territories, House, Dec. 9, 1845. 29th Congress, 1st Session, H.doc.16. ProQuest Congressional, 482 H.doc.16

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[Report on history of discovery of Neptune.](#) Smithsonian Institution, Jan. 1, 1850. 31st Congress, SI1.2:N35. ProQuest Congressional, SI102-26

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["The Vetoed Bill."](#) Congressional Globe, 28th Congress, 2nd Session (Mar. 3, 1845) Vol. 14, p. 391. ProQuest Congressional, CG-1845-0303

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Webster, Daniel. [Report on the commercial relations of the United States with foreign nations \[...\]](#) Department of State, House, Mar. 29, 1842. 27th Congress, 2nd Session, H.doc.163. ProQuest Congressional, 403 H.doc.163

Major Acts

Declaration of War with Mexico. Declared that the war was begun by Mexico, appropriated \$10 million to conclude the war, and empowered the President to use the Army and Navy. Approved May 13, 1846 ([9 Stat. 9, Chap. 16](#))

Walker Tariff Act. Reduced the duties on imports to about the rate of the Compromise tariff of 1833. Approved July 30, 1846 ([9 Stat. 42, Chap. 74](#))

Public Credit Act of 1846. Strengthened public credit by pledging payment of obligations of the United States in coin or its equivalent in notes. Approved Aug. 6, 1846 ([9 Stat. 59, Chap. 90](#))

Postage Stamp Act. Authorized use of adhesive postage stamps in the United States for the first time. Approved Mar. 3, 1847 ([9 Stat. 188, Chap. 63](#))

Sources:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980](#), Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

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