

## **Evidence of Manifest Destiny & Westward Expansion In the Lower Rio Grande Valley**

### **Introduction:**

Despite the controversy surrounding the war, it initiated the growth of the communities north of the Rio Grande River that so many South Texans call home today. Industrious individuals supplied the occupying U.S. Troops with food and entertainment. As more and more American merchants came to region, they brought dreams of landownership and wealth. Unfortunately, many residents of the Rio Grande Valley are unaware of the significance of this time period to their current way of life. Too many walk past the battlefields at Palo Alto, Resaca de las Palmas and Fort Texas in Brownsville, and simply see unused land, an empty lot or a driving range. They are completely unaware of the deep, rich history that exists in the Rio Grande Valley, and how its "birth" paralleled the American move west.

### **Guiding Question:**

1. How does landownership equal power?
2. In what ways does local history affect U.S and World history?
3. What were the social, economic, and political changes in the Border after the U.S. - Mexican War?

### **Learning Objectives:**

Students will analyze pre/post war maps of the United States, property records, pre and post war artifacts and photographs, newspaper articles, journal entries and demographic data to evaluate how the newly acquired land affected the status of the United States, and the people of the Border region, politically, socially and economically.

### **TEKS:**

- 8.6C analyze the relationship between the concept of Manifest Destiny and the growth of the nation.
- 8.6D explain the causes and effects of the U.S. Mexican War and their impact on the United States
- 8.6E identify areas that were acquired to form the United States
- 8.10A locate places and regions of importance in the United States during the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries
- 8.10C analyze the effects of physical and human geographic factors on major historical and contemporary events in the United States.
- 8.21A identify different points of view of political parties and interest groups on important historical and contemporary issues.

### **Detailed Background:**

The history of the Rio Grande Valley can be divided into four main periods: Nuevo Santander, Mexican Period, Post War Period, and the Modern Irrigation Era. The Nuevo Santander period began in 1749, when the Spanish Crown assigned Jose de Escandon to oversee the *entradas* along the Rio Grande River. This region became known as Nuevo Santander. The *entradas* were designed to be a protective buffer zone between hostile natives and other European powers seeking to lay claim to the land. The Spanish deliberately populated with Nuevo Santander with soldiers, civilians, and clergy as a way to secure the land.

The Founding Families of Nuevo Santander were familiar with life in the Americas. They came from Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Queretaro, and San Luis Potosi. They were recruited from among some of the most successful ranching families of New Spain. Each settler received a plot of land on which to settle and make a home. Some families received more land than others based on the number of years the person had served the crown, either in military service or as a civilian.

The next period in Rio Grande Valley History is the Mexican Period from 1821, when Mexico gained independence from Spain, to 1848, the end of the U.S. -Mexican War. This was a time period of social, economic and political changes for the people living along the lower Rio Grande (Rio Bravo) river. The growing Meztizo population blended Native and European cultures to create a truly unique Mexican culture. Anglo Americans began to settle in Texas at the invitation of the Mexican government. However, most of the American settlers remained north of the Nueces River. Eventually, the Americans desired to break free from Mexican rule and rebelled. The differences in philosophies and cultures resulted in the Texas War for Independence. In 1836, Texas won its independence from Mexico, yet the Mexican government did not recognize Texas as a sovereign nation. The boundary for the “rebel” territory was in dispute. The dispute resulted in the U.S.-Mexican War and the Mexican Cession of what is the American Southwest. Overnight, the people of the Rio Grande Valley found themselves living inside the United States, where property laws differed and a lack of English meant severe vulnerability.

After the U.S. -Mexican War there was a sudden change in the surnames of the land owners in the Rio Grande Valley. Hidalgo County property records of the time indicate a land grab by many Anglo Americans. The large Spanish ranches that had remained within the same family for hundreds of years were rapidly chipped away and replaced with Anglo farms, ranches, and housing developments. With each land transfer, power shifted away from the Founding Families of the Rio Grande Valley to eager, young Americans wishing to fulfill their personal Manifest Destiny. These new owners became the founders of communities that became the cities of the RGV. The once powerful Spanish Land Grant families found themselves having to marry into the new Anglo society, or accept a lower social status.

**Preparation Instructions:**

You will need:

1. Map showing the U.S. territory before and after the U.S. -Mexican war and another map showing the land ceded by Mexico to the United States.
2. Copies of property records, deeds, quit claims (etc.), and a land transfer history document to assist students follow the transfer of land throughout the years. This will have to be collected and prepared by the teacher or you can use the one provided. Be sure to white-out personal information except for the names.
3. Print out of Historical Background of the Rio Grande Valley including printout, or link to, the Palo Alto Battlefield National Park.
4. 2 different colors of sticky notes for Day 2 Warm Up Activity.
5. Listing and/or links to historical landmarks in the Rio Grande Valley.
6. Computer with internet access.

**Lesson Activities:**

**Day 1:** As students enter the room, have them independently think and answer the Guiding Questions. Have students turn to their elbow partner and share their answers with each other. Using a random selection technique, select two or three pairs to share with the class and hold a brief discussion. Deliberately guide conversation to the Spanish Land Grants and the descendents of these grants while displaying a map of the land grants of South Texas.

Pass out background information (history of the Rio Grande Valley) and information from the Palo Alto Battlefield National Park. Have students create their own three column chart with the headings of Social/Political/Economic. As students read and analyze the information, have them discuss and find evidence of social, political, and economic changes.

As a summary/ wrap-up, have students answer the following question: What were the social, economic, and political changes in the Border region ushered in by the Mexican War?

**Day 2:** Divide the class into two groups. Give each student in the first group a stack of one color of sticky notes. Instruct them to write their name on each sticky note. Designate areas of the room that each student in the first group can claim as their own. This is to represent the Royal Spanish Land Grants, with the Teacher acting as the Spanish Crown and the students in the first group the land grantees. Then give the second group of students a different color sticky note stack. Instruct them to randomly “tag” anything they would like to claim as their own while the first group tries to prevent their tags to be taken off. Hold a class discussion on why did the 2<sup>nd</sup> group feel it necessary to claim as much as they could.

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Have students work in small groups or in pairs. Introduce the Warranty Deeds and Land Transfer Document. Ask students to study the documents and write down their observations and discoveries. Discuss their findings and ask the guiding question: How does landownership equal power? How does this reflect the American belief of Manifest Destiny?

**Day 3:** Students will do a quick write on a local event that made national or international news and have them write about why they think the story was interesting or important to people living in another part of the country/world.

In a scavenger hunt style, instruct students to research local historical sites and create a timeline with brief descriptions for each historical site they find.

Pass out of class: Answer the guiding question: In what ways does local history affect U.S and World history?

**Day 4:** Introduce project task menu: Students will choose to do one of the following to address the guiding questions:

- Create a short documentary with a written script that answers the three guiding questions
- Pretend you are working on a marketing campaign promoting local history. Your campaign can consist of a video commercial, radio commercial, brochure and magazine ad, or webpage that answers all three guiding questions.
- Create 3 illustrations or take 3 artistic photographs that visually answer the unit questions. Include a written brief caption for each picture/illustration that also answers the guiding questions.

**Students will be given three days to a week to put their projects together.**

**Assessment:**

Completed projects will be presented before the class and evaluated using a peer/self-assessment rubric, teacher grading rubric, and a written reflection.

**Skills Targeted:**

Analyzing primary sources, POV, interpreting data, summarizing, categorizing,

**Resources:**

UTPA CHAPS and the Borders Studies Archive, Museum of South Texas History, Hidalgo County Property Records, Internet, Palo Alto Battlefield National Park, Mrs. Esperanza B. Ayala, textbook