

Teaching with **POLK POP**



Original, educational music from the
PRESIDENT JAMES K. POLK
HOME & MUSEUM

1. YOUNG HICKORY

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STANDARDS

5.4 Identify the impact of important Tennesseans prior to the Civil War, including: President James K. Polk (Manifest Destiny)

8.53 Identify the major events and impact of James K. Polk's presidency, including the annexation of Texas and the settlement of the Oregon boundary.

IMAGE:

Grand National Democratic Banner, lithograph by N. Currier (New York, 1844)

PRIMARY SOURCE

Gentlemen: Columbia Tennessee June 12th 1844 I have had the honour to receive your letter of the 29th ultimo, in forming me that the Democratic National Convention then assembled at Baltimore, had designated me to be the candidate of the Democratic party for President of the United States, and that I had been unanimously nominated for that office. It has been well observed that the office of President of the United States should neither be sought nor declined. I have never sought it, nor shall I feel at liberty to decline it, if conferred upon me by the voluntary suffrages of my Fellow Citizens...I am duly sensible of the great and weighty responsibilities which must ever devolve on any citizen who may be called to fill the high station, of President of the United States. I deem the present to be a proper occasion to declare that if the nomination made by the convention shall be confirmed by the people and result in my election, I shall enter upon the discharge of the high and solemn duties of the office, with the settled purpose of not being a candidate for re-election. In the event of my election, it shall be my constant aim, by a strict adherence to the Old Republican land-marks, to maintain and preserve the public prosperity, and at the end of four years I am resolved to retire to private life. JAMES K. POLK"

YOUNG HICKORY KEY POINTS

James K. Polk was born in North Carolina, and moved as a boy to Tennessee. Growing up in a western frontier state, James Polk formed political beliefs that included expansionism.

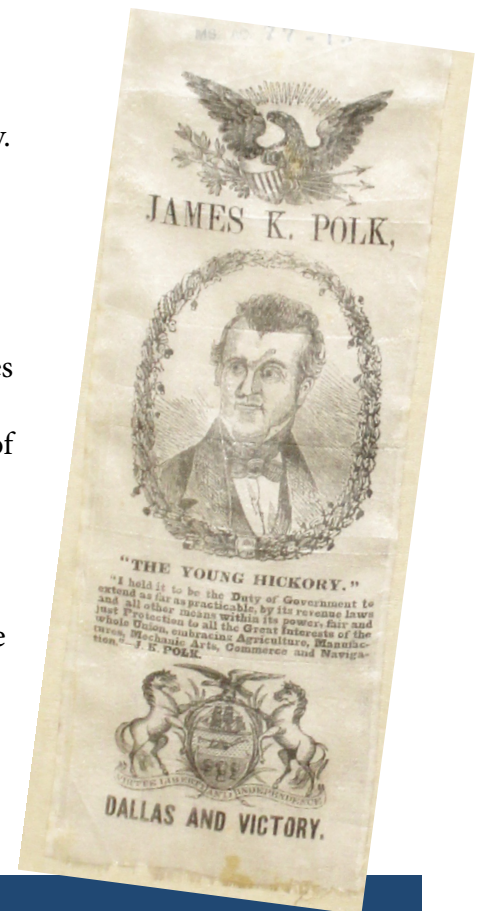
Expansionism: the desire to see the United States spread across the North American continent to the Pacific Ocean, popular in the mid-1800s.

Polk suffered setbacks in both with his health and in politics, but in both cases Polk was able to recover and find success. Polk was known for his work ethic and as President considered himself to be "...the hardest working man" in the United States.

Polk served seven terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. For his final two terms he was voted Speaker of the House. During this time Polk infamously enacted a "gag rule" on the issue of slavery. To this day, Polk is the only former Speaker of the House to become President.

The Polks remotely managed two plantations where day to day activities were managed by overseers. James Polk represented himself as a model slave owner. However, the Polk plantation in Mississippi had one of the highest death and escape rates in the region.

Polk is called "The Dark Horse" because he unexpectedly won the nomination for president at the Democratic convention of 1844. He then narrowly defeated the Whig candidate Henry Clay in the presidential campaign. Polk ran on an expansionist platform that included Texas annexation and a claim to the entire Oregon Territory.



Campaign ribbon, 1844

YOUNG HICKORY LYRIC SHEET

On a farm in North Carolina
Way back in 1795
A boy was born, he was the first of ten
And he'd one day be president

Around about the age of eleven
His family moved out west of the mountains
Said "bye" to their cabin, packed up a wagon
And set out for Tennessee

Chorus

Young Hickory
Can't count him out
No doubt about it
Young Hickory
James Polk from Tennessee

Came close to dying at the age of 17
But thanks to the surgeon he come out clean
He went off to college at UNC
Where he graduated top of the class

He got back home
He studied the law
He met a girl named Sarah and they fell in love
They got married on New Year's Eve
And then he won his first Congressional seat

(Chorus)

A seven-term U.S. Congressman
He claimed to fight for the common man
A category narrowly defined

In this time of history
The great shame of slavery
Divided the nation and Polk ran a plantation
So he wanted to see its continuation, oh no
History is messy sometimes

In 1839 he returned to Tennessee
Where he won himself that Governor's seat
It didn't last long because Lean Jimmy Jones
Beat him in '41
A lot of people thought Polk was done

(Chorus)

In 1844 the Democrats were split
On who they should run for the President
They held a convention to make the decision
In the town of Baltimore

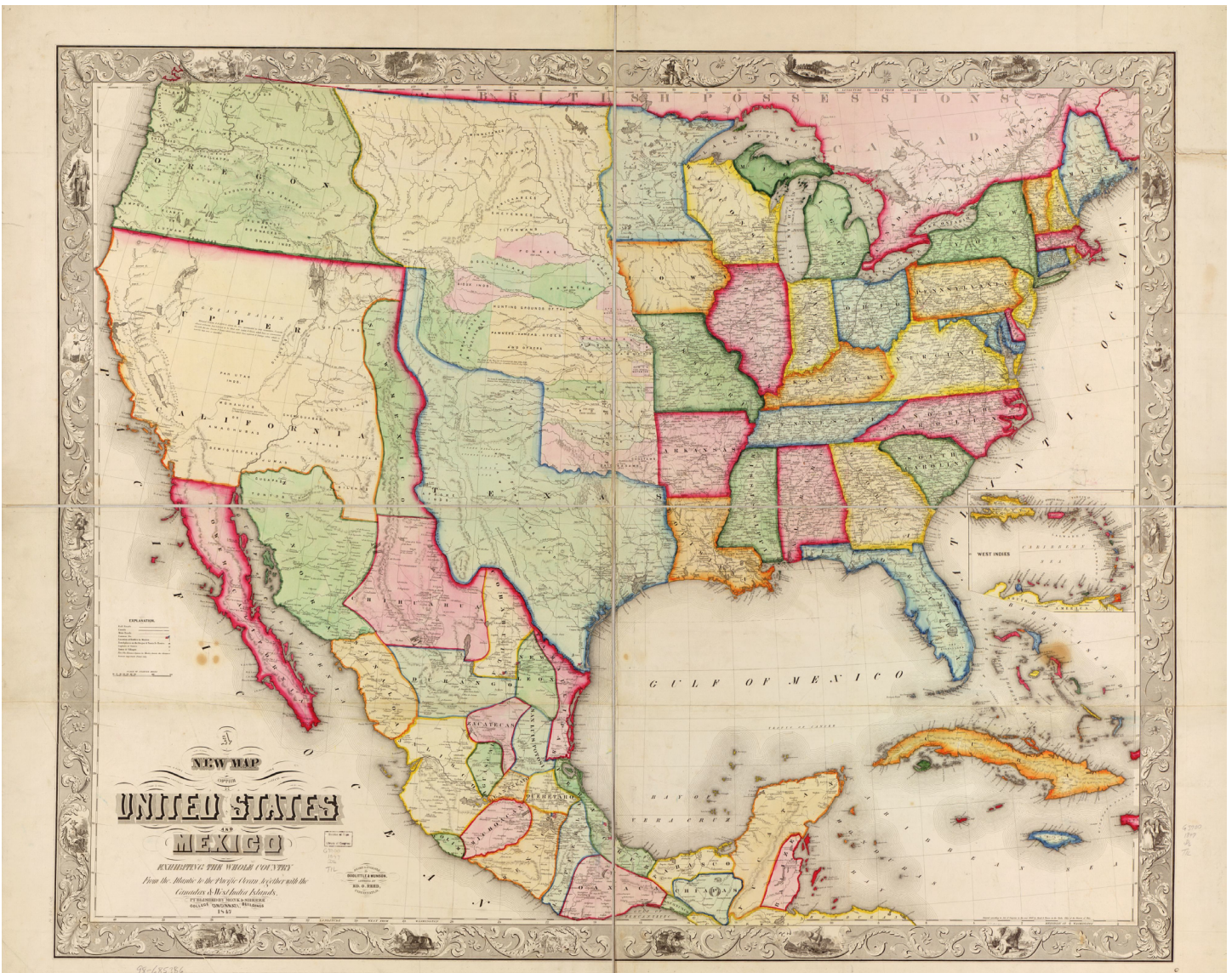
There were several points of big contention
From sectional tensions to expansionism
After three days of votes and derision
They settled on the Dark Horse

The campaign of '44 was a real close race
Between James Polk and Henry Clay
Clay had the clout, momentum, and fame
Most people thought he would carry the day

But now and again the underdog wins
And Polk had an answer for the Texas Question
It seems the nation, they wanted annexation
And they voted James K. Polk for President

2. MANIFEST DESTINY

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New map of the United States and Mexico, Doolittle & Munson, 1847. Library of Congress.

STANDARDS

4.23 Examine the impact of President James K. Polk's view of Manifest Destiny on westward expansion.

8.49 Analyze the concept of Manifest Destiny and its impact on the development of the nation, and describe the economic incentives for westward expansion.

8.53 Identify the major events and impact of James K. Polk's presidency, including the annexation of Texas and the settlement of the Oregon boundary.

8.54 Describe the causes and consequences of the Mexican War, including the controversy over the Rio Grande boundary and the Mexican Cession.

PRIMARY SOURCE

“A population will soon be in actual occupation of California, over which it will be idle for Mexico to dream of dominion. They will necessarily become independent. All this without agency of our government, without responsibility of our people—in the natural flow of events, the spontaneous working of principles, and the adaptation of the tendencies and wants of the human race to the elemental circumstances in the midst of which they find themselves placed.”

John O’Sullivan, “Annexation,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, Volume 17 (New York: 1845)



John Gast, *American Progress*, 1872.
(Autry Museum of the American West.)

MANIFEST DESTINY KEY POINTS

John O’Sullivan was a newspaper editor credited with coining the term “Manifest Destiny.” The term is used to describe a feeling that many Americans had during the 1800s that the United States was destined to spread across North America. O’Sullivan and others believed that this western progress was predestined and that nothing would stop expansion.

James Polk ran for president in 1844 on an expansionist platform. He claimed that both Texas and Oregon were rightfully owned by the United States, that Mexico had no legitimate claim to Texas and that England did not have a rightful claim to Oregon. Polk’s pro-Texas stance is one of the key reason he won the election.

The annexation of Texas occurred in December of 1845. This angered the Mexican government as they still considered Texas to be their territory. A dispute over where the southern border of the new state was located triggered a stand-off. Polk sent troops to the contested territory between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande. Some historians believe this was a deliberate move by Polk to provoke Mexico into war they could not win and allow Polk to fulfill his territorial ambitions.

Before 1846, the Oregon territory was shared jointly between the United States and England. President Polk made claims that the entirety of the Oregon territory rightfully belonged to the United States. The slogan 54°40’ or fight was popularized during the 1844 presidential campaign. However, Polk was reluctant to provoke the English to war and agreed to divide the territory roughly in half.

The Mexican-American War (1846-1848) ended with the occupation of Mexico City by the U.S. army. The resulting Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo ceded a huge amount of territory to the United States including what would become the states of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and portions of Colorado and New Mexico. The War was controversial at the time. Many believed that a democracy should not invade other countries and that Polk had unjustly provoked Mexico into battle.

The rapid expansion of United States territory had many unintended consequences; gold was discovered in California in 1849 triggering massive immigration; American settlers moving west displaced Native cultures who already occupied the territory; and existing sectional tensions over slavery were inflamed when politicians were unable to agree on how to divide the new lands into slave state and free states.

MANIFEST DESTINY LYRIC SHEET

In 1844, Johnny O' wrote a letter in the paper saying
Let's go west. It's our destiny, manifest
He wanted Texas annexation
And to expand the nation west
All the way to the Pacific

You see, there was this line of thinking
That the country was meant for great things
And with God's blessing we'd just keep expanding west

Chorus

What does it mean?

Our Manifest Destiny

Well, it's complicated.

It might take some time to explain it

John O' Sullivan coined the term Manifest Destiny in 1844. There was a feeling among Americans that the country was destined to spread across the continent. Texas and California and all in between would soon be US territory.

In 1844 James K. Polk ran for president on a platform, west
Yeah, he was an expansionist
(*He believed*) Texas and Oregon, basically the continent is American by right
54°40' or fight (*That's longitude and latitude*)

It didn't matter what they think down in Mexico
It didn't matter if the whole world said no
Go west
It's ours by Providence.

(Chorus)

James K. Polk was elected president on a political platform of western expansion. He believed that Texas and all of the Oregon Territory rightfully belonged to the United States. Polk's appetite for territory would lead him into confrontation with England over Oregon and Mexico over Texas.

Texas became a state back in '45
And this led straight into a fight
The Mexicans said, "Now wait a minute, Mr. Texas is ours. We must resist this."

Polk sent his troops down to the border
To dare Mexico to give the order
War. Yeah, this means war
(*The Mexican-American War lasted two years*)

Things went a lot better up in Oregon
Polk wanted it all
But he settled for a portion (*At the 49th parallel*)
And a path to the Ocean

The fighting got real ugly down in Mexico
Polk ordered the troops to the capital
They took the city
And forced a treaty

Guadalupe-Hidalgo
Gave us California, Arizona, and New Mexico

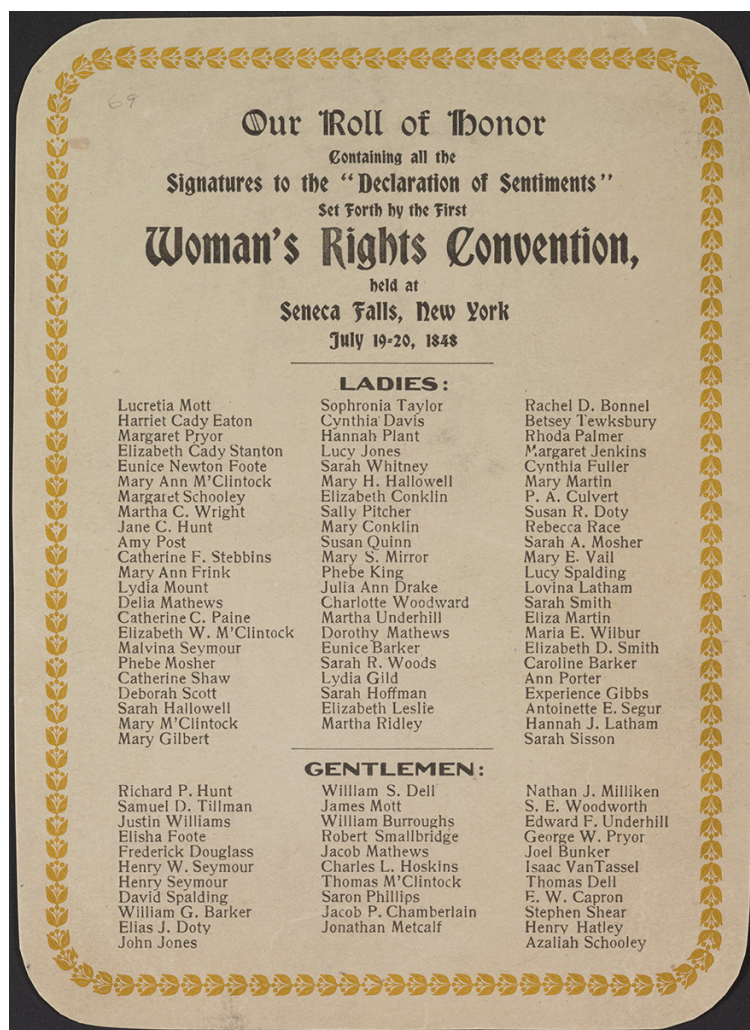
And a whole lot more. Quite a lot of land, infact. Nearly 1 million square miles of territory was added during the James K. Polk presidency. And in 1849 gold was discovered in California triggering the Gold Rush and massive waves of immigration to the west. However, quickly adding so much land to the United States had unintended consequences. The great shame of slavery still shadowed the nation, and politicians argued over how the territory would be divided between slave states and free states. This fueled the flames of the oncoming American Civil War. Not to mention the western territories were home to hundreds of Native American tribes and cultures, and the waves of American settlers moving west would forever displace these native people. This is complicated...

Chorus

(*You should probably ask your teacher.*)

3. SENECA FALLS

 LISTEN HERE



STANDARDS

4.07 Contrast how the principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence clashed with treatment of different groups including: women

8.42 Analyze the development of the women's suffrage movement, including the Seneca Falls Convention, and the ideals of Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Sojourner Truth.

IMAGE

"Our Roll of Honor" list of the signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, 1848

Elizabeth Cady Stanton Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (009.00.00)

PRIMARY SOURCE

"Having deprived her of this first right as a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides."

"He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead."

"He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns."

Excerpts from the Declaration of Sentiments, 1848

Read the Full Declaration here: [HTTPS://WWW.NPS.GOV/WORI/LEARN/HISTORYCULTURE/DECLARATION-OF-SENTIMENTS.htm](https://www.nps.gov/wori/learn/historyculture/declaration-of-sentiments.htm)

SENECA FALLS KEY POINTS

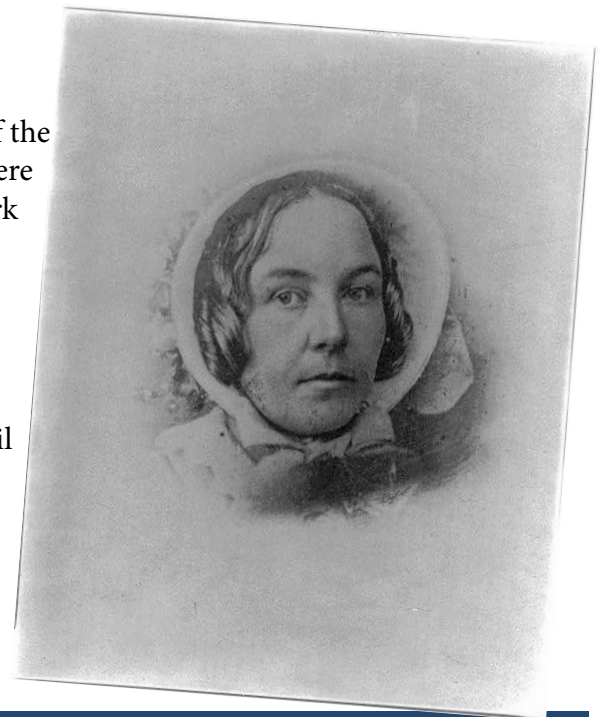
The Seneca Falls Convention was the first women's rights convention held in the United States. Led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Mary Ann M'Clintock, and others, the convention took place July 19-20, 1848, and attracted 300 people. On the first day only women were allowed to attend with men being welcomed for the second day.

The convention produced a document called the Declaration of Sentiments that outlined sixteen ways in which American society had oppressed women. The document, based partly on the Declaration of Independence, demanded equality for women in work, education, family, religion, and, finally, suffrage. The right to vote for women was seen by many at the convention as too radical, but was included after a speech delivered by Frederick Douglass, the famous abolitionist. The Declaration of Sentiments was signed by 100 women and men who attended the convention

The planners and many attendees of the convention had fought for justice and reform for other causes ranging from temperance to abolition. Lucretia Mott was a member of the Religious Society of Friends or Quakers. She was famous for her oratory and activism, and the convention was planned to coincide with her visit to the region.

The Quaker influence in the women's rights movement of the 1840s stemmed from their belief that men and women were equals. Seneca Falls and the surrounding area of New York state was home to a large number of Quakers.

The Seneca Falls Convention and its Declaration made national headlines providing a blueprint for other conventions and rallies across the country. It was not until 1920 that women finally gained the right to vote in the United States.



Elizabeth Cady Stanton, c. 1854
Library of Congress.

SENECA FALLS LYRICS SHEET

Every movement has to start somewhere
Someone has to stand up to clear the air
We've got to be willing to fight when the world's not right
We've got to be brave to shine a light
At Seneca Falls they started it all

Let me tell you a story
It's kind of scary to think about it
There was a time in our history
With a lot more rules on who a girl could be

She couldn't vote
She couldn't get a good job
She couldn't go to college
And her husband owned her stuff

And that was wrong
And it needed to change
So good people stood up to pave the way

Chorus

At Seneca Falls they gave the call
To unite the fight for women's rights
In the USA, 1848

Elizabeth Cady Stanton
From New York State
Together with women from the Quaker Faith
Held a convention
It was the first of its kind
With 300 people who were of a like mind

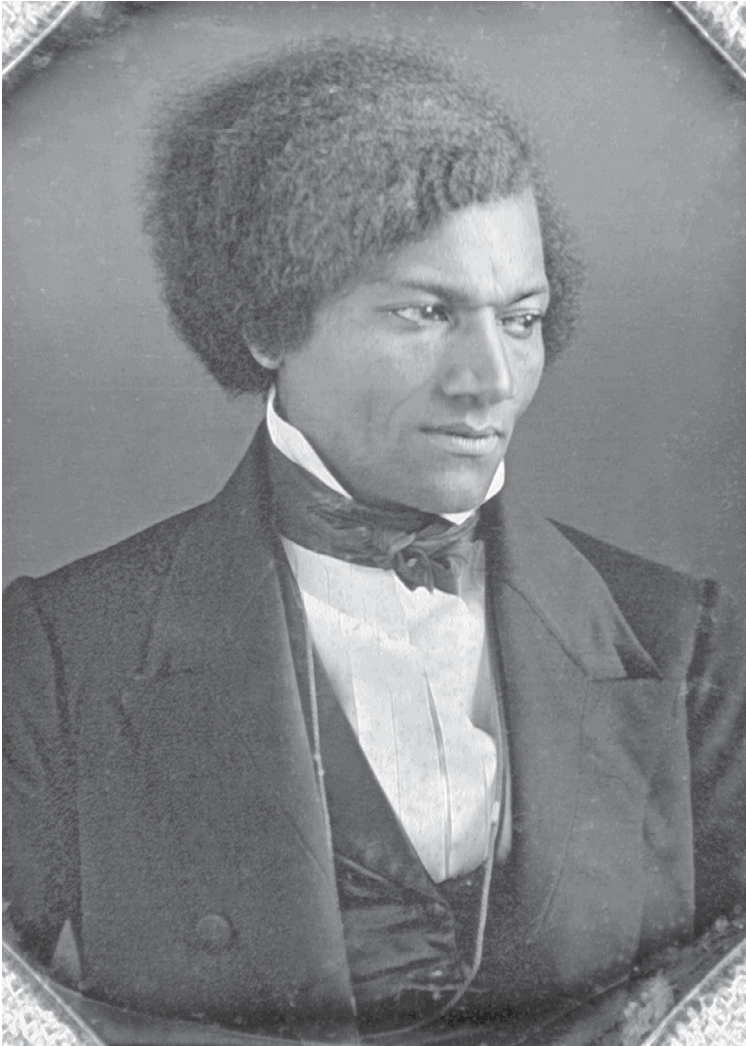
They spelled it out
In a Declaration of Sentiments on man's oppression
It was sixteen reasons to fight, a rallying cry

Chorus

The Seneca Falls convention of 1848 was a foundational moment in the women's rights movement of the United States of America. The convention culminated in the Declaration of Sentiments. This radical document demanded the right to vote for women more than 70 years before the dream of women's suffrage was finally realized with the 19th amendment of 1920. And to this day the legacy of Seneca Falls continues in actions of activists and advocates across this country.

4. MR. DOUGLASS

 **LISTEN HERE**



STANDARDS

4.26 Identify abolitionist leaders and their approaches to ending slavery, including: Frederick Douglass

8.43 Analyze the significance of leading abolitionists, including William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Elihu Embree, and Harriet Tubman, and the methods they used to spread the movement.

AAH.09 Assess the development of the abolitionist movement and its impact on slavery and the nation, including the efforts of: Frederick Douglass

IMAGE:

Frederick Douglass, c. 1848

Chester County (PA) Historical Society

PRIMARY SOURCE

“I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot county, Maryland. I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant. I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday.”

Opening of Chapter 1 of Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

Read online at: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>

MR. DOUGLASS KEY POINTS

Frederick Douglass was born and enslaved in Maryland. Separated from his family at a young age, Douglass was taken to Baltimore. It was there the young man learned to read before his master ended his education fearing that literacy would lead an enslaved man to desire freedom.

As a young man, Douglass taught other slaves to read using the Bible. The enslaved people in Douglass' class risked their safety for this education. Eventually, the class was violently dispersed when area slavemasters learned of its existence.

Douglass self-emancipated by disguising himself as sailor with counterfeit freedom papers. Douglass later described the feeling, "I felt as one might feel upon escape from a den of hungry lions." He then became active in the abolitionist movement and travelled around the United States and Great Britain speaking against slavery. Douglass published an abolitionist newspaper called *The North Star*.

In 1845 Douglass published his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* which became famous around the world and made him a central leader of the abolition movement.

Frederick Douglass believed in a total equality between men and women of all races. He attended the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 as the only African American where he is partially credited with persuading the convention to include a demand for women's suffrage in the Declaration of Sentiments.



"The Fugitive's Song" sheet music cover featuring Frederick Douglass (Boston: Published by Henry Prentiss, 1845) Library of Congress.

MR. DOUGLASS LYRICS SHEET

Tell your story, Mr. Douglass
We want to know how it was
How you came to fight injustice
And lead the abolition cause

Born a slave in Maryland
You learn to read and teach
What you learned made you certain
That you should be free

Chorus

(You were singing) Am I not a man and brother?
Are we not sisters and mothers?
Our cry for freedom cannot be ignored.

It's time to join the mission
Of Abolitionism
And end slavery once and for all

Tell us more Mr. Douglass
How you spoke your truth
In speeches across this country
And across the ocean, too

You put your life to paper
In 1845
Your honest narrative touched
Countless hearts and minds

Because you believed
That everyone among us
Deserves to be free

You were living proof
That all of us are equal
Slavery is evil

5. HO! FOR CALIFORNIA

 LISTEN HERE



"The Way They Go to California" lithograph by N. Currier (1849) Library of Congress

In this cartoon, gold seekers crowd the docks with their picks and shovels ready. They jump into the water, board ships, and fly on imaginary rockets: anything to get to California.

STANDARDS

4.24 Explain the significance of the California Gold Rush in westward expansion.

8.55 Analyze the discovery of gold in California, its social and economic impact on the U.S., and the major migratory movement (including the forty-niners and Asian immigrants).

PRIMARY SOURCE

“It was known that mines of the precious metals existed to a considerable extent in California at the time of its acquisition. Recent discoveries render it probable that these mines are more extensive and valuable than was anticipated. The accounts of the abundance of gold in that territory are of such an extraordinary character as would scarcely command belief were they not corroborated by the authentic reports of officers in the public service who have visited the mineral district and derived the facts which they detail from personal observation.”

James K. Polk's Fourth Annual Message to Congress

HO! FOR CALIFORNIA KEY POINTS

- Gold was discovered in January of 1848 at Sutter's Mill on the American River in California. The American Southwest, recently transformed by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, would never be the same. Hundreds of thousands of fortune seekers and settlers would make their way to California in the following decade.
- Miners nicknamed “49ers” made their way to San Francisco following President Polk's announcement of the discovery of gold in December of 1848. By the summer of 1849 tens of thousands were headed west.
- The journey to California was difficult, dangerous, and costly. Roughly half made the journey overland with the others traveling by boat. It could take months to arrive in California and many travelers faced illness, hunger, and even death along the way.
- The California gold rush attracted people from around the world but the majority of gold miners did not strike it rich. In fact, most wealth generated during the gold rush was earned by merchants selling supplies, food, and boarding to the miners.

HO! FOR CALIFORNIA LYRICS SHEET

We've formed our band and we're well manned
To journey afar to the promised land
Where the golden ore is rich in store
On the banks of the Sacramento shore

Chorus

Ho! Boys, Ho! to Californi-o
There's plenty of gold out there we're told
On the banks of the Sacramento

As we explore the distant shore
We'll fill our pockets with that shining ore
And how it will sound as the word gets round that
We're digging up gold by the dozen pound

Chorus

As off we roam over dark seafoam
We'll never forget our friends back home
And memories, kind, will bring to mind
The thoughts of those we leave behind

Chorus

Heigh Ho! And Away we go!
Digging up gold out in San Francisco

Oh the land we'll save for the bold and brave
And never shall it hold a single slave
Let foes recoil for the sons of toil
Will make California God's Free Soil

The song "Ho! For California" was written by Jesse Hutchinson, Jr, a member of the Hutchinson Singers. This family band was one of the most popular American musical acts in the 1840s. "Ho! For California" became a kind of unofficial anthem for fortune seekers on their way to California.