"Like Splitting a Man Up His Backbone": The Territorial Dismemberment of Utah, 1850-1896

This lesson plan, made available by the Utah State Historical Society, is designed to involve teachers, students, and parents in using the *Utah Historical Quarterly* to learn more about local, state and the nation's history.

How the provisional State of Deseret was swept aside and replaced with the Utah Territory in 1850 has been well explored - how the enormous 225,000 square mile Utah Territory was reduced to the current 85,000 square mile State of Utah has not. This lesson plan explores this topic and reveals little known events. For instance, perhaps the most influential factor fueling the move to change Utah's eastern boundary was the persistent lobbying efforts in Washington of mountain man Jim Bridger. This lesson plan focuses on how and why these boundary changes happened, what Utah's leaders thought and did about it, and where Utah's boundary experiences fit into the context of nineteenth century American state making.

Curriculum Ties: Utah Studies, Level 4, Standard 1, Objective 2
Utah Studies, Level 7, Standard 3, Objective 1
United States History I, Level 8, Standard 7, Objectives 1 & 2
United States History II, Levels 10-12, Standard 1, Objective 3

Time Frame: Activities 1 & 2 – one class period
Activities 3 & 4 – one class period
Activities 5, 6, 7 – one class period

Group Size: Any class size

Enduring Understanding:
The process of determining state boundaries is complex and involves political, historical, geographical, social and economic factors.

Essential Questions:
1. What boundary changes did Utah experience?
2. What factors influenced the changes in Utah's borders?

Materials:
•*Utah Historical Quarterly* (*UHQ*) article: *"Like Splitting a Man Up His Backbone": The Territorial Dismemberment of Utah, 1850-1896"* by William P. MacKinnon, (Spring 2003, Volume 71, Number 2).
•Enhancement items such as maps and images listed as available on "USHS website" at http://history.utah.gov/education/uhqlessons.html
•Reproduction of this *UHQ* article for educational purposes permission granted.

Additional Useful Materials:
•Picture of The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo at http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=26
•U.S. National Archives lesson plan for The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo at http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/treaty_of_guadalupe_hidalgo/treaty_of_guadalupe_hidalgo.html

Background for Teachers:
•Read *"Like Splitting a Man Up His Backbone": The Territorial Dismemberment of Utah, 1850-1896"* by William P. MacKinnon, *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Spring 2003, Vol. 71, Number 2.
•Become familiar with the lesson plan and enhancement materials at Lesson Plans for *Utah Historical Quarterly* web page at http://history.utah.gov/education/uhqlessons.html

Student Prior Knowledge:
The size and shape of the state of Utah went through evolutions.

Intended Learning Outcomes:
•Students will understand how Mexican Territory became Utah Territory.
•Students will understand what factors influenced Utah's boundary changes.

Instructional Procedures:
Engaging students in Utah's boundary changes may seem challenging, but this lesson plan attempts to do just that. Students may be surprised to find what countries claimed ownership in 1840 America; and how one war and one treaty gave the United States all of the present states of Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Utah, and part of Colorado and Wyoming. Students will learn how the proposed State of Deseret became the Territory of Utah and discover all the boundary changes the Territory of Utah experienced and why on her way to statehood.

Activity 1: Manifest Destiny

The Salt Lake Valley was part of Mexico when the Mormon pioneers arrived in 1847. Later it became part of the United States. The pioneers knew this was Mexico's land when they decided to settle here, which was not unusual as the spirit of "Manifest Destiny" seemed to offer moral justification for American expansion and acquisition. Groups already claiming territory might have felt differently. Steps 1-3 will explain this.

Step 1: On the board write "United States, Canada, Mexico, Great Britain, France, Republic of Texas, and Russia. Tell students all these countries claimed land in what is now the United States during the 1840s. Ask students which country they think "owned" what is now Utah when the Mormons arrived here in 1847. With a show of hands write their "votes" by each country. When voting is completed tell students that Mexico claimed the Utah area along with present-day Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas and part of Colorado and Wyoming. Show students map of the United States with areas claimed by these countries (USHS web site "United States c. 1840" map) either as a hand out or on overhead projector. Point out what was Mexican territory when the pioneers arrived in 1847.

Step 2: Explain to students that the pioneers knew Mexico owned the territory when they decided to settle here, that it was one of the main reasons they wanted to settle here. Ask students why they think the pioneers might have wanted to settle outside the United States. Write their answers on the board and discuss them. (Possible answers: Mormons wanted to be free from the persecution they had encountered for practicing their religious beliefs in the United States; and political independence.)

Ask students if they think the pioneers would have had any concerns about making their settlement in Mexico and what they might have been. Write their answers on the board and discuss them. (Possible answers: Mexico might not want them there; they might have to follow Mexican rules and regulations.)

Step 3: Explain that Manifest Destiny was the belief by Americans that it was their duty to populate the continent. The term was coined in 1845 by editor John Louis O'Sullivan who said, "Our manifest destiny is to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions." This belief seemed to offer moral justification for American expansion to the west. Discuss how different groups such as the pioneers, Canada, Great Britain, France, Republic of Texas, Russia, Mexico and Native Americans might have felt about this belief. (Possible answers: pioneers might have felt it was their duty to bring their beliefs to the area; Canada, Great Britain, France, Republic of Texas, Mexico and Russia might have been worried about losing their land; and Native Americans might have felt intruded upon and worried about losing their hunting grounds and way of life.)

Activity 2: How Mexican Territory became part of the United States

Step 1: Tell students that they are going to discover how one war and one treaty gave the United States all of the present states of Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Utah, and part of Colorado and Wyoming. The war was the Mexican War, which had started fourteen months before the pioneers entered the area and ended about six months after they arrived in the Great Basin. The treaty was the Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty. Explain both the Mexican War and the Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty to the students. A brief synopsis of the Mexican War and resulting treaty is at the end of this lesson plan. The synopsis could be given to each student and read together as a class, with discussion as needed. A map of this war could be used either as a hand out or on an overhead projector (USHS web site "The Mexican War, 1846-1848" map). See "Additional Useful Materials" for a lesson plan and picture of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Activity 3: From proposed State of Deseret to the Territory of Utah

Step 1: Explain that since the Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty had transferred the Mexican Territory to the United States, this created the option of the Deseret Territory becoming either a state or a territorial government. The Mormon leadership decided upon a territorial government and sent a petition to Washington D.C. in the spring of 1849. A few months later the Mormon leaders decided to petition for statehood instead and sent their first application, complete with a map of the suggested State of Deseret boundaries (which contained 265,000 square miles) for statehood. Show students State of Deseret 1849-51 map with proposed State of Deseret boundaries either as a handout or on an overhead projector (USHS web site "State of Deseret 1849-51" map).

The statehood application was doomed because the nation was in the midst of several controversies some of which were settled with the Compromise of 1850. As one of the five measures in the Compromise, the Territory of Utah was established with 225,000 square miles, 40,000 square miles less than the Mormons had requested earlier but still extremely large, about 20 percent of the width of the United States! Using the State of Deseret 1849-51 map again, show students the Territory of Utah 1850 boundaries. To help students understand how big a square mile is tell them a square mile is about four Utah city blocks or that it would take four minutes to drive around a square mile, one minute per side, if you were going 60 miles per hour.

Utah was so remote and snow-bound that word of the September 9, 1850 Territory of Utah creation didn't reach newly appointed governor Brigham Young for more than four months!

Congress was concerned that the daunting size of the Territory of Utah boundaries could not be sustained so they put in the legislation a fateful provision, "…that nothing in this act contained shall be construed to inhibit the government of the United States from dividing said Territory into two or more territories, in such manner, and at such time, as Congress shall deem convenient and proper, or from attaching any portion of said Territory to any other State or Territory of the United States."

Activity 4: Events leading to the first Utah Territory boundary change

Step 1: Explain the first boundary change did not happen for eleven years, not until 1861; but the boundaries were debated frequently before the Civil War. During the 1850s three explosive issues arose whose forces and events all but destroyed national political support for the Utah Territory by the end of the 1850s:

1. The Mormon church's public announcement of the doctrine of plural marriage in August 1852. This caused huge anti-Mormon feelings which spilled into the national political scene.

2. The ten year deterioration in federal and Mormon relations fueled by many conflicts, especially the quality and behavior of federally appointed officers for Utah, that turned into the Utah War of 1857-58.

3. The discovery of fabulous gold and silver deposits at two sites, the Comstock Lode in western Utah Territory (now Virginia City, Nevada) and Cherry Creek in western Kansas Territory (now Denver, Colorado area).

The combination of the above three issues inflamed emotional perceptions of Utah Mormons and their leaders as immoral, un-American, disloyal, theocratic, and anti-mining and led to repeated calls for Utah's mutilation if not obliteration.

Step 2: Ask students how they think the Mormon church's public announcement of the doctrine of plural marriage (polygamy) might have made the rest of the nation feel about Utah and why. List their thoughts on the board and discuss them. (Possible answers: people may have seen polygamy as immoral and sinful, a man should have only one wife; and people saw Mormons breaking the law and therefore behaving illegally.)

Step 3: Explain some of the incidents that led to bad relations between the federal government and the Mormons:

- Mountain man Jim Bridger's persistent lobbying in Washington, D.C. against Utahns was perhaps the most influential factor fueling an early move to alter Utah's boundaries. Jim Bridger had been run out of Utah's Black's Fork district (now southwestern Wyoming) in 1853 by a large Mormon posse seeking to serve arrest warrants for the sale of alcohol and munitions to Indians during Utah's Walker War. Interesting to note that during the Utah War of 1857-58 Jim Bridger served as the army's chief guide.

- Reports from Indian agents, Utah surveyor general, former U.S. mail contractor, and territorial supreme court justices that alleged the Mormons were unwilling to accept and cooperate with non-Mormon officials; had destroyed the supreme court records; had dominated the lower courts so that there was no justice for non-Mormons; that Brigham Young and other Mormon leaders were disrespectful of federal officials; that the Mormon government was violent and ruled with absolute power and authority; that a state of rebellion existed; and that many Utahns wanted to escape the "cruelties" of Mormon society.

Step 4: Ask students why they think the discovery of fabulous gold and silver deposits in Utah and Kansas would have affected Utah's boundaries and list them on the board and discuss. (Main reason was basically other states wanted to have this mineral rich land in their state so they could make the money.)

Note: In 1852 Utah re-petitioned Congress for statehood for the State of Deseret, and it failed again. In 1856 a petition for statehood was again forwarded to Washington, D.C., and it too failed.

Step 5: Explain to students that before it was clear how the Utah War was to be resolved, the pressures for the dismemberment of the Utah Territory intensified. There were bills before Congress to divide Utah among the Territories of Nebraska, Kansas, Oregon and New Mexico, giving a slice to California. There were other rumors such as the creation of a territory named Columbus or Nevada to be made out of Utah's western flank or the creation of an eastern intrusion into Utah territory named "Jefferson" or "Idaho." These border changes did not happen mainly due to the re-organization of a large number of other territories because of the slavery issue in America.

When many of the southern states withdrew from Congress in 1860-61, the way was open during the last days of President Buchanan's administration to complete the formation of three new western territories. In Buchanan's last week in office he signed bills establishing Nevada, Colorado, and Dakota territories.

Using the original 1850 western boundaries map (USHS web site "Original 1850 Borders" map) either as a handout or on an overhead projector, show students the two boundary changes that Buchanan created in 1861.

- Nevada, then the heart of the Utah Territory, was created by breaking off a very large (63,214 square miles) section of the Utah Territory.
- Colorado's western boundary was created by removing a significant area from Utah lying between the summit of the Rockies and the 109th meridian to the west.

Activity 5: How Utah's "notch" was created

Step 1: Explain that Utah's notch was created in two steps. Using Original 1850 Borders map (USHS web site "Original 1850 Borders" map) either on an overhead projector or as a handout, show students the following boundary changes:

- In step one the easternmost half was lost by Utah in March 1861 with the Dakota legislation which altered Nebraska Territory by giving it 10,740 square miles of what had been part of Utah. This now obscure change extended Nebraska's pronounced panhandle shape, presumably to continue her influence over a corridor encompassing crucial emigration trails.

- Step two happened in 1868 when Congress reacted to the discovery of gold near South Pass, and the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad west of Cheyenne. Congress organized the rectangular Wyoming Territory, extracting an enormous piece from the Dakota Territory. In this process, Wyoming took from Dakota the relatively small rectangular area bounded by the 110th meridian and 41st parallel that Nebraska had first taken from northeast Utah Territory in 1861. This expanded the notch by moving the border another degree of longitude to the west and the border was established at the 111th meridian, where it remains today.

Activity 6: Nevada's Final Shape

Step 1: Explain to students that 1862 brought further deterioration in federal-Mormon relations with the passage of the Morrill Act. The Morrill Act was the first of a series of federal laws intended to end polygamy. Also during this time a fourth attempt at statehood failed.

Using the Original 1850 Borders map (USHS web site "Original 1850 Borders" map) either on an overhead projector or as a handout, show students the following boundary changes:

- The new Nevada Territory succeeded in further encroaching on Utah. In 1862 Congress moved the Nevada-Utah boundary east one additional degree of longitude from the 116th meridian to the 115th meridian, an 18,325 square mile change. Some Utahns thought this border change was motivated by gold in the Humboldt Mountains.

- No boundary changes were made in the Utah Territory during the Civil War, but federal-Mormon relations continued to fester. After the Civil War Congress felt it had gotten rid of slavery, now it should tackle polygamy. Within a year after Lincoln's death, Nevada, which had become a state in 1864, wanted some of Utah's territory with mineral deposits. In 1866 Nevada succeeded in getting Congress to move her boundary another degree of longitude east to the 114th meridian, another 18,325 square miles, where the Utah-Nevada border remains today.

There was continued pressure in 1867 on Utah's territorial boundaries with proposals to annex all of the Utah territory into Nevada or distribute all but the Salt Lake Valley to Utah's neighbors, neither of which happened.

Activity 7: Utah Territory's final boundaries and name

Step 1: Tell students that between 1868 and 1896 there were an amazing amount of proposals to further adjust Utah's borders, although none of them happened. A few are described in *UHQ* article pages 118-120, but too numerous to be catalogued even there.

Ironically, when Utah became a state in 1896, after a total of six attempts, Utah continued to try to annex the Arizona Strip (the portion of Arizona Territory lying between the 37th parallel and the Colorado River to the south). Perhaps after decades of experiencing shrinkage of her borders, Utah considered turnabout to be fair play.

Step 2: Why did Utah lose these six trenches of territory during 1861-1868? Ask students to brainstorm ideas and write them on the board. Tempting as it is to assume that anti-Mormon prejudice was the dominant reason, the story of Utah's border shifts is more complex than that factor alone. Certainly substantial "anti-Mormon" forces were powerfully, but their main impact was to undercut the arguments of Utah's would-be defenders.

Tell students that Utah's major handicaps in keeping her territory were: her sheer unsustainable size; hostility to mining; and the Mormons' inability to obtain statehood in 1850 as California had done. Had effective county governments for mining districts been created and had Utah been a state during this period, territorial amputations would have been far more difficult, if not impossible to accomplish.

Was this massive realignment of Utah's borders unique or unusual in the American and Western experience? In many, but not all respects, it was not. Examples of other states experiences available in *UHQ* page 122.

Step 3: Congress rejected the name Deseret and selected Utah, which was also not unusual. Nevada wanted to be named Washoe; Colorado wanted to be named Jefferson or Idaho; and two years later selected Idaho a name invented for another territory, under the wrong assumption that the name had either an Indian or mineral association.

Step 4: Explain to students that what was truly unique about the transformation of Utah's borders was not the fact that they changed, but rather that the changes were accompanied by a decades long call for Utah's obliteration as a geopolitical entity. No other American territory or state shared this threat, not even the post war fate of the eleven states of the Confederacy. With the sole exception of Virginia's loss of her western counties during the Civil War, none of the Confederate states was punished with territorial losses.

The phenomenon of Utah's shifting boundaries was in many respects a normal part of the American frontier experience. Congress continually creating enormous, illogical, and unsustainable territorial entities that later required rationalization. The American state making process had been that large, sparsely populated territories served temporarily as administrative stations on the road to the establishment of smaller, more populated, and more stable state governments. That Utah managed to retain the territory that she did was no small accomplishment that required constant vigilance and lobbying in Washington, D.C.

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The Mexican War
1846-1848

In the spring of 1845 relations between the United States and Mexico were tense. On March 6 the Mexican ambassador broke off relations with the United States in protest of plans to annex the Republic of Texas into the United States. Mexico still considered Texas it's territory. General Santa Anna, who had seized power as a dictator in Mexico, had been captured by Texans and Americans during Texas's fight for her independence from Mexico in 1836. Texans let Santa Anna go free after he signed a treaty giving Texas her independence from Mexico, a treaty the Mexican government never recognized.

At the beginning of 1845 Mexico territory included what is now Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Utah and part of Colorado and Wyoming (see "United States c. 1840" map, USHS web site). President James K. Polk wanted to provoke the Mexicans into a conflict in order to secure Texas and obtain California and New Mexico. Ulysses S. Grant, then a young army officer, later said, "We were sent to provoke a fight, but it was essential that Mexico commence it." On May 9, 1846 word reached President Polk that the Mexicans had attacked and killed eleven American soldiers and taken the rest prisoners north of the Rio Grande River considered by the United States to be the southern boundary between Texas and Mexico. President Polk's plan had worked and war was declared on Mexico four days later on May 13.

Both the United States and Mexico approached the war poorly prepared. The American army was especially small and inexperienced with barely 7,000 soldiers. Mexico had 32,000 soldiers, but many were pressured into service or recruited from prisons which made them less than enthusiastic fighters.

Before the war ended the American force grew to 104,000 soldiers, 31,000 which were regular army troops and marines, the rest were six- and twelve-month volunteers. Most of the volunteers came from rough backgrounds and were disorderly and rowdy. They lacked uniforms, standard equipment and discipline. Despite the best efforts of the American commanding generals many of the soldiers were involved with theft and even murder. Nevertheless, they consistently defeated larger Mexican forces which had their own problems with training, discipline and munitions. Mexican artillery pieces were generally obsolete and the powder so faulty that American soldiers could often dodge cannonballs that fell short and just bounced along the ground without exploding!

The United States entered the war without a plan of action and had to work one out quickly. It was reported that President Polk wanted a small war, just large enough to require a peace treaty and not large enough to make military heroes, which could in turn produce political heroes and threaten Polk's reelection to the presidency.

In the beginning President Polk didn't see the bowlegged, squatty, burly and none-too-handsome sixty-one year old Zachary Taylor (nick named "Old Rough and Ready") a political threat. (Taylor later became the 12th President of the United States in 1848.) Among the soldiers under his command, Taylor was soon a hero. Polk started to worry about Taylor's popularity. He also thought Taylor was too passive in battle. Having never seen the Mexican desert, Polk wrongly thought Taylor's men could live off the land and didn't need

resupplies. He didn't understand why Taylor was reluctant to head out across several hundred miles of barren land on his way to Mexico City without receiving more supplies.

Then President Polk got duped. In 1846, after another overturn in the Mexican government, American forces allowed Santa Anna to return to Mexico from his exile in Cuba when he promised that he would work for a quick end to the war. Soon he was in command of the Mexican army and named president again. But instead of carrying out his promise to Polk to negotiate an end to the war, Santa Anna prepared to fight General Taylor's army. President Polk had put the most able Mexican general back in command!

In October of 1846 President Polk and his cabinet decided to attack Mexico City with an army that landed at Vera Cruz. On March 9, 1847 Polk's long-planned southern assault on the enemy's capital of Mexico City began with General Winfield Scott in command. The Mexican commander at Vera Cruz surrendered after a week-long siege. Then Scott and about 14,000 soldiers set out to retrace the 260-mile trip taken by Cortes more than 300 years before to Mexico City. After a failed attempt by Santa Anna to trap Scott in a mountain pass, Scott waited three months for reinforcements and new supplies. Now with his army almost doubled in size, he set out for Mexico City on August 7. On his way there Scott cut Santa Anna's supply line to the coast, and in two brilliant flanking operations (a move around to the side of an army to avoid battle) around the eastern approaches to Mexico City and San Antonio entered Mexico City on September 13. At Mexico's National Palace a battalion of marines ran up the American flag and occupied the "halls of Montezuma."

During 1846 the Mormons requested assistance from President Polk to settle in the west. Polk said no at first, but after the Mexican War began he ordered General Stephen W. Kearny at Fort Leavenworth to enlist a battalion of 500 Mormons to help in fighting Mexico by marching to California by way of Santa Fe. After discussions Brigham Young agreed to recruit the troops. Short of money to pay for wagons and supplies, the Mormons could use the pay and allowances offered Mormon Battalion recruits. The Mormon church leaders expected the battalion to travel west, prepare for their upcoming settlement, and make the Mormons the first settlers in the newly conquered country and therefore avoid any troubles with older settlers like they had in Missouri and Illinois. On July 16, 1846, the Mormon Battalion left Council Bluffs, Iowa for Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, traveled along the Santa Fe Trail to Santa Fe and then on to California. They arrived in southern California in late January 1847. (Scan map of Santa Fe Trail) Very few men reenlisted, most of them left for what is now Utah and some remained at Sutter's Fort where they participated in the discovery of gold in 1848.

After the fall of Mexico City, Santa Anna resigned and a month later fled the country. In the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on February 2, 1848, Mexico gave up all claims to Texas north of the Rio Grande River along with all of the present states of Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and part of Colorado and Wyoming to the United States. In return the United States agreed to pay Mexico $15 million and assume the claims of American citizens against Mexico up to a total of $3¼ million.

Somehow the Mexican War never became part of our national legends. It came to be seen as a war of conquest provoked by a president bent on expansion. During the war's brief season of glory it provided fame for Winfield Scott and Zachary Taylor, who became the next

president of the United States. President Polk, who had worked extremely hard during his term and suffered from exhaustion, decided not to run for president again. He remained popular and probably could have won a second term as president but felt he had achieved what he had set out to do. He died three months after leaving office at the age of 53.

Mexican War Legacies

How long did it last? Nearly 21 months
How many U.S. soldiers died? 1,721 killed and 11,155 dead from disease
How much did it cost the U.S.? $98 million in military and naval expenses

What did we get for this? More than a million square miles of territory
Uncounted millions in mineral wealth

Several important firsts: First successful offensive war (we attacked first)
First major amphibious (water) operation
First war covered by correspondents
First significant combat experience for a group of junior officers who would later serve as leading generals during the Civil War: Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, George B. McClellan, George Pickett, Braxton Bragg, George Meade and others.