

BECOMING **US**

**THE TREATY OF
GUADALUPE HIDALGO**

**What Do You Do When the
Border Crosses You?**

STUDENT DELIBERATION GUIDE

Getting Started

Before you use this historical decisions issue guide, you must first use your imagination.

This guide asks you to imagine that you are living a long time ago, in a place which has a familiar name but which would have looked very different from the way it looks today. It asks you to put yourselves in the shoes of people who had some important decisions to make at that time, in that place.

You'll read more about those decisions in a minute.

But first . . .



Mexican Serape

A serape is a long blanket-like shawl, often brightly colored and fringed at the ends, worn especially by Mexican men.

Welcome to Los Angeles. It is June 1849.

The sun blazes overhead. The streets around you are dusty, unpaved, and mostly empty. A few people are walking slowly in the desert heat. The only other forms of locomotion you see involve horses. Most buildings are just one story tall, and none is taller than three stories.

You are part of a group of people who call Los Angeles home in 1849, who call themselves *Californios*.

Californios are people of Latin American or Hispanic descent who first arrived in this area hundreds of years ago. Known as Alta California, the region was originally under the control of Spain and then briefly became a part of Mexico. Californios brought with them culture from both countries, including the Spanish language, Catholic religious traditions, and favored pastimes such as rodeos.



J. Y. Del Valle overlooking Rancho Camulos, late 1880s–early 1900s

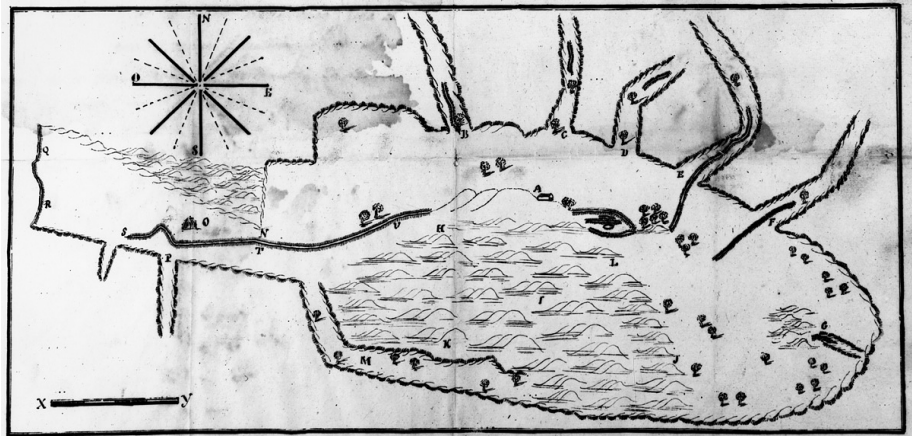
Courtesy of Seaver Center for Western History Research, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History

You and your fellow Californios share Los Angeles with many different peoples, including other Mexicans, Europeans, Africans, and white Americans (whom you call “Yankees”). But aside from the Native tribespeople, who have called this area home for thousands of years, Californios have been here longer than almost anyone else.

Californios have found much opportunity in Alta California, establishing cattle ranches and agricultural operations on land they have purchased or which was given to them by Spain or Mexico. Californio culture is unusual for the fact that married Californio women can own property and retain it even if their husbands die. This right means that many Californio women, especially widows, have been able to accumulate wealth, which has allowed them, and their families, to become rich and politically powerful over generations.

By this time—1849—Californios have a strong local identity. You have little contact with Mexico City and are almost entirely self-sufficient, having amassed significant wealth from your large landholdings. Your wealth is visible in your lavish homes and the elaborate cultural activities you host. You, and the large number of people you employ, work the land and make a living from ranching, farming, and raising produce in orchards. You have taken advantage of your success to establish credit, serve as leaders in the community, and move into positions of even wider influence and power.

All of this may be about to change.



Map of Rancho Camulos, part of the larger Rancho San Francisco, around 1843
Courtesy of Seaver Center for Western History Research, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History



Mexican Army frock coat, around 1840
This uniform coat would have been worn by a lieutenant in the Artillery of the Mexican Army.

A Time of Great Change

Right now, in June 1849, standing in Los Angeles means you are standing in the United States. That wasn't always the case, of course.

Just two years ago, Los Angeles—and the rest of California—was still part of Mexico. That changed because of a war between the United States and Mexico in 1846, known as the Mexican–American War.

The Mexican–American War started because the United States wanted to annex the territory known as Texas—which was then also part of Mexico. Mexico refused to allow this, and for two years the two countries fought to settle this dispute, leaving nearly 30,000 people dead.

To Mexicans, this was a war of self-defense, forced on them by another nation. In the United States, opinions about the war were mixed. The newly elected U.S. president, James K. Polk, wanted to expand the country from the Atlantic to the Pacific, a goal his supporters called the “manifest destiny” of the United States. President Polk was very much interested in acquiring any Mexican territory that would make this possible.

Other Americans opposed the war, although not all for the same reasons. A man named Henry David Thoreau published a book called *Civil Disobedience*, in which he described Mexico as having been “unjustly overrun and conquered” by the United States and argued for “honest men to rebel and revolutionize” against the U.S. government to stop it.

Some opposed the war because they did not want to welcome conquered Mexicans into the United States. Arguing that “we [have never] incorporated into the Union any but the Caucasian race,” South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun argued against what he called the “fatal error of placing the colored race on an equality with the white” by granting Mexicans the privileges of U.S. citizenship.

The war continued until February 1848, when a treaty was signed in a small Mexican town called La Villa de Guadalupe Hidalgo. Under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the two warring nations agreed that Mexico would give up more than half of its territory—including California—in return for \$15 million.

Now, seemingly overnight, 525,000 square miles, or about 55 percent of Mexico's prewar territory have become part of the United States. As



20 3/4 Carat gold ingot, Moffat & Co., United States

The discovery of gold in 1848 at Sutter's Mill spurred a great wave of migration to California. Many of the attitudes of the new arrivals conflicted with Mexican culture and its strong Catholic faith.

a result, all of the people in these areas—including Californios—will be living under a new government. That government speaks English, not Spanish; much of the United States' mostly Protestant population regards the Catholic faith of the Californios and others with suspicion; and Californio cultural traditions and practices are seen as quaint relics of a bygone Spanish past.

Now, in June 1849, you stand at a crucial moment, on the verge of yet one more big change.

The United States government has announced that next month anyone still living in California or anywhere in the rest of the former Mexican territory will automatically become a United States citizen. Some people have already taken the citizenship oath, but others living in the new United States territory—especially Californios—are wondering what the best course of action is.

What does it mean to become a citizen of a country that has conquered you? The terms of the treaty promised that property rights would be "inviolably respected"; can this promise be trusted? If not, what other choices do you have? This is where your lives are—and the property that is the source of your families' wealth and even survival. Returning to Mexico would mean giving up almost everything and starting over.

What Are Your Options?

It is not simply a question of whether or not to become a U.S. citizen. Many other residents of the former Mexican territory are also wondering what their relationship should be to the government and people of the country that conquered them and took them away from the country they were born in. What do you do when the border crosses you?

This guide presents three possible courses of action, or “options.” These options are summarized below and explained in more detail in the following sections. Each option has possible benefits, but each has significant downsides, as well. There is no single correct answer, so the Californios will need to discuss these options with each other before you can decide which one—if any—is right for you.

OPTION ONE

Embrace New Opportunities

You have a history of riding out big changes in your government. You are survivors, and you will survive and thrive under the U.S. government as well. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo offers you citizenship and promises to respect your property rights. Going along with the new government is your only chance of keeping your landholdings, retaining your place at the table, and helping to shape things in a way that is beneficial. Certainly, you cannot just flee to Mexico, or you will lose everything.

OPTION TWO

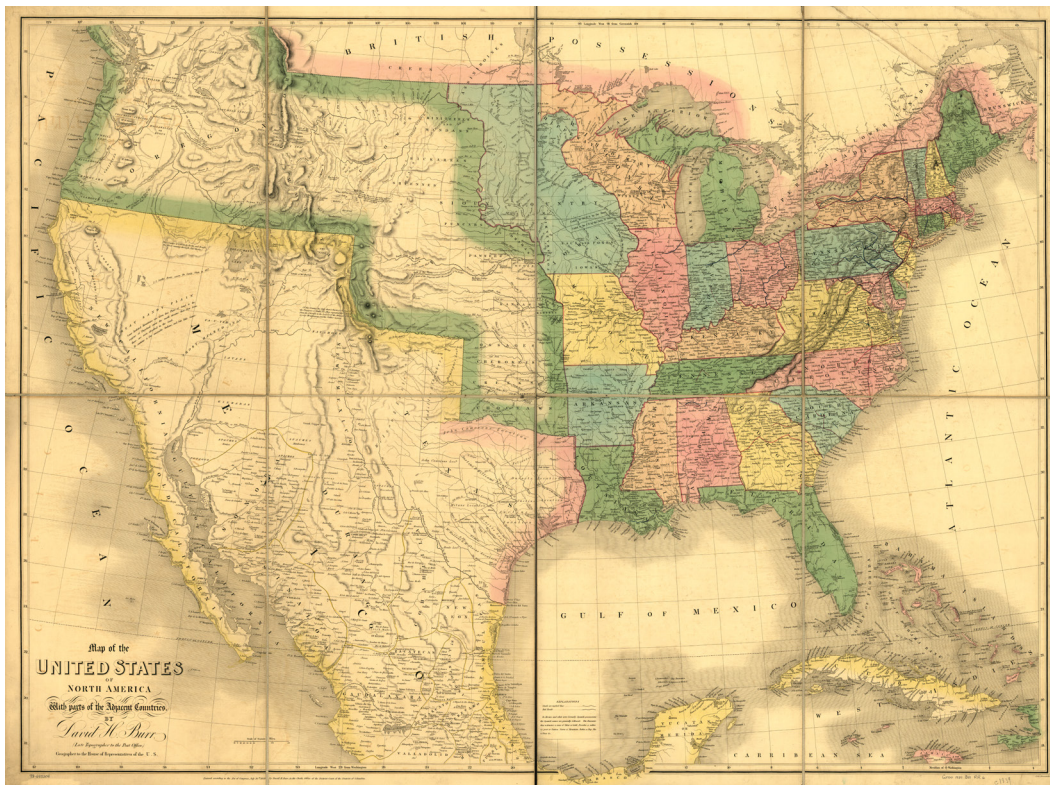
Passively Resist and Refuse to Assimilate

Just because change is coming doesn’t mean you need to change—and certainly not for the Yankees, who have mistreated you and fought a war of aggression against your homeland. The culture you have has preserved and protected all that is important to you; the Californios must “adapt” as little as possible, keep to your ways of life without looking for outsiders’ approval or participation, and passively resist these new forces that will expect you to change.

OPTION THREE

Actively Resist and Fight if Necessary

As the war and the events leading up to it have shown, you cannot trust the U.S. government and the recently arrived Yankee squatters, no matter what promises they make. The war began as a criminal act and had no goal other than theft of territory from Mexico. Instead of passively accepting and following the orders of new rulers, you must do everything you can to lead yourselves, to make your own choices, and in no way subject yourselves to the Yankee aggressors.



Map of the United States of America, 1839
 Courtesy of Library of Congress



Map of the United States of Mexico, 1847, appended to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo
 Courtesy of National Archives

Examples of What Might be Done

You must take stock of what is yours and document exactly what those properties consist of in order to allow for a smooth transition. Demonstrate your position to the U.S. government and assemble a case for your continued ownership of land and property.

You must be welcoming to new arrivals from the U.S. east and be open to the opportunities they bring. By intermarrying, entering into business partnerships, and forming economic alliances, you can find a better future together.

You should look for opportunities to join the new power structure by seeking elected office, securing jobs or contracts with the new government, and learning English.

You need to become new U.S. citizens. Anything you don't like can be changed from within as you enjoy the full rights of U.S. citizenship.

Consequences and Tradeoffs to Consider

Just because you play by the rules of the new government, there is no guarantee that the government will protect you and treat you fairly.

You'll be giving up control to people and practices you don't know and might not be able to trust. These alliances might result in less control over how you do your work and dramatic changes to your cultural traditions.

This requires accepting the rules and ways of an outsider. Some in your community might see you as traitors. As members or employees of the new government, you might be forced to say or do things that fly in the face of your cultural values.

This means giving up Mexican citizenship and the benefits that came with it.

OPTION TWO



Retablo

Due to the Spanish occupation, Mexico was largely Catholic, including the areas ceded to the United States.

Passively Resist and Refuse to Assimilate

Change may be coming—but why should you have to change? Californios and Indians have been here longer than just about anyone and long-time Anglo settlers are very different from Yankees. Californios work hard, you enjoy art and music and dancing. You have your own religious and spiritual traditions. Californios, for example, built and attend Catholic churches that provide the guidance and sense of community that has benefitted so many generations.

Now come these Yankees, who you already know to be vulgar, unrefined, and dishonest. Consider the experience of a Californio woman named Rosalía Vallejo de Leese. During the war, a U.S. Army officer named John C. Frémont held the pregnant Vallejo de Leese prisoner and threatened to burn her and her unborn baby alive unless she helped him transmit a deceptive message to a Mexican military leader. Terrible things happen during wars, but that does not make such shocking behavior against a civilian woman acceptable. John Frémont was operating illegally in what was then still the Mexican territory of California, instigating violence by white squatters against Californios, kidnapping and imprisoning your government officials, and showing no respect for your laws and people. That Frémont behaved this way tells you much about the Yankees' moral character.

This story is just one example of the many serious reasons you should be concerned. This is why you should keep to yourselves and preserve your language and your culture. The Yankees are coming with alien ways they will try to impose on you. You cannot stop them from coming, but you don't have to cooperate with them. You have lived here so long that leaving is out of the question. Instead, you must turn your attention to how you can best continue to live in ways that have always been important to your survival, your happiness, and your beliefs. Your culture—including your religion, language, family structure, gender roles, and values—has made you who you are. You must focus on your traditions, preserve and protect your language, and ensure that your children are taught your history and your cultural values.

Rather than depend on your conquerors to provide security, you might consider forming your own ways of keeping order and avoid fighting with each other. None of this will prevent all changes, but—no matter what changes do come—you will resist quietly, keep to yourselves and continue to preserve and practice your cultural traditions and ways of life.

Examples of What Might be Done

Maintain and practice your religious beliefs and traditions. Ensure that your children are taught your cultural values, history, and way of life.

Preserve your language by insisting on using it to do business and conduct other important transactions. Refuse to learn English, the conqueror's language. They can't colonize your minds.

Follow only laws that fit with your beliefs.

Form your own protective forces, such as community watch groups or others who can help you keep order without needing to call on the Yankee authorities.

Consequences and Tradeoffs to Consider

By preventing your children from assimilating, you may cost them opportunities later in life. Powerful newcomers may look down on you or persecute you for what they see as alien ways.

Refusing to learn English might make it harder to do business and cause you to miss out on valuable opportunities. Insisting on speaking your own language may trigger hostility and discrimination.

You will be arrested and punished.

The new U.S. government may not recognize the legitimacy of such forces, and though these measures might help to resolve conflicts within your own community, they may not help you resolve conflicts between Californios and new Yankee arrivals.

OPTION THREE



Mexican flag

The Mexican flag is full of national symbolism. The green stripe represents the Independence Movement. The white stripe represents the purity of the Catholic faith. The red stripe represents the Spaniards that joined in the quest for Independence and the blood of the national heroes. This flag was created in 1821, when the Independence Movement had ended victoriously.

Actively Resist and Fight if Necessary

There are more reasons to distrust the U.S. government than to trust it, and anyone who thinks otherwise is engaged in wishful thinking. Therefore, you should resist and even fight the Yankees to protect your independence.

The war that just ended is enough to raise grave doubts about whether your interests will really be protected by these new rulers. The United States has occupied your territory and waged an unjust war of conquest, cutting you off from your chosen form of government. There are few more hostile actions a government can take, and the fact that you were the “enemy” in this battle guarantees that you cannot expect to be treated fairly.

There are additional reasons for not trusting the U.S. First, consider what started the war in the first place: in a criminal act, the U.S. decided in 1845 to violate the boundaries of Mexico and take the area known as Texas for itself. This was theft, plain and simple, not something an honorable nation would do.

Here in California, you were already resisting illegal acts by representatives of the U.S. government. You have heard rumors of a hero named Joaquin Murrieta who brings scoundrels like Frémont to justice. You shouldn’t expect the leaders who sent Fremont to treat you fairly—like Murrieta you must resist and rebel against the new Yankee government.

Finally, regarding the treaty’s offer of citizenship and its promise that the property of Californios will be “inviolably respected”: those are nothing more than words on paper. The United States has a history of breaking promises and simply taking whatever it wants. For example, consider how native peoples were forced from their homes and marched west under the 1830 Indian Removal Act. Why should you expect the United States to suddenly change, especially given the rich resources you possess—resources the Yankees probably want for themselves?

Whether you preferred the Mexican government or not, we’re all tired of passively accepting new power structures and you want to choose your own. In the face of takeover by this untrustworthy nation and its rulers, you must fight back or move south to Mexico. Either choice is hard, but at least you will have determined your own fate.

It is also important to connect and form allegiances with other local people, both because the neighbors you know feel more trustworthy and predictable, and because, in some cases, such allegiances are likely to be necessary to provide for safety and order.

Examples of What Might be Done	Consequences and Tradeoffs to Consider
<p>Don't give up the fight: form underground resistance cells and harass the new government's forces and their leaders.</p>	<p>This means living a life underground and in conflict. You or your families would be arrested, or even killed.</p>
<p>Move to Mexico to rejoin your people.</p>	<p>You will lose the people and property you leave behind and will need to start all over again.</p>
<p>Align yourselves with Native American tribes and longtime Anglo settlers to defend against Yankee aggressions, which would include taking up arms,—if necessary.</p>	<p>This will require at least tolerating, if not embracing, other cultural traditions. It could lead to adopting new ways and losing some of your cultural traditions. Armed aggression against established law would most definitely risk your lives.</p>
<p>Take advantage of this situation of flux and uncertainty by trying to form your own breakaway nation.</p>	<p>You might be independent, but you would not be under the protection of a larger nation and conflicts will inevitably arise.</p>

OPTION ONE

Embrace New Opportunities

Main Arguments In Favor

You have a history of riding out big changes in your government. You are survivors, and you will survive and thrive under the U.S. government as well. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo offers you citizenship and promises to respect your property rights. Going along with the new government is your only chance of keeping your landholdings, retaining your place at the table, and helping to shape things in a way that is beneficial. Certainly, you cannot just flee to Mexico, or you will lose everything.

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<p>You must take stock of what is yours and document exactly what those properties consist of in order to allow for a smooth transition. Demonstrate your position to the U.S. government and assemble a case for your continued ownership of land and property.</p>	<p>Just because you play by the rules of the new government, there is no guarantee that the government will protect you and treat you fairly.</p>
<p>You must be welcoming to new arrivals from the U.S. east and open to the opportunities they bring. By intermarrying, entering into business partnerships, and forming economic alliances, you can find a better future together. Your success depends on their success.</p>	<p>You'll be giving up control to people and practices you don't know and might not be able to trust. These alliances might result in less control over how you do your work and dramatic changes to your cultural traditions.</p>
<p>You should look for opportunities to join the new power structure by seeking elected office, securing jobs or contracts with the new government, and learning English.</p>	<p>This requires accepting the rules and ways of an outsider. Some in your community might see you as traitors. As members or employees of the new government, you might be forced to say or do things that fly in the face of your cultural values.</p>
<p>You need to become new U.S. citizens. Anything you don't like can be changed from within as you enjoy the full rights of U.S. citizenship.</p>	<p>This means giving up Mexican citizenship and the benefits that came with it.</p>

OPTION TWO

Passively Resist and Refuse to Assimilate

Main Arguments In Favor

Just because change is coming doesn't mean you need to change—and certainly not for Yankees, who have mistreated you and fought a war of aggression against what was your nation. Your culture has preserved and protected all that is important to you; you must “adapt” as little as possible and passively resist these new forces that will expect you to change.

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<p>Maintain and practice your religious beliefs and traditions. Ensure that your children are taught your cultural values, history, and way of life.</p>	<p>By preventing your children from assimilating, you may cost them opportunities later in life. Powerful newcomers may look down on you or persecute you for what they see as alien ways.</p>
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<p>Follow only laws that fit with your beliefs.</p>	<p>You will be arrested and punished.</p>
<p>Form your own protective forces, such as community watch groups or others who can help you keep order without needing to call on the Yankee authorities.</p>	<p>The new U.S. government may not recognize the legitimacy of such forces, and though these measures might help to resolve conflicts within your own community, they may not help you resolve conflicts between Californios and new Yankee arrivals.</p>

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Main Arguments In Favor

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