

John Charles Fremont

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John C. Frémont, pictured here as a Union Major General, was born in Savannah, Georgia on January 21, 1813. He briefly taught mathematics to U.S. naval cadets before launching his legendary career as an American explorer. As an assistant surveyor in 1838, Frémont joined the U.S. Topographical Corps and helped map the country between the upper Mississippi and Missouri rivers. He secured command in 1841 of an expedition to survey the Des Moines River in present-day Iowa. He arrived in St. Louis in July 1841 and a few months later eloped with Jessie Benton, daughter of Senator Thomas Hart Benton, the driving force behind the “Manifest Destiny” movement, or continental expansion. Between 1842 and 1844, Frémont led expeditions to the Rocky Mountains and to the Nevada, California, and Oregon territories with the help of legendary fur trapper and master guide Kit Carson. Frémont’s journals provide incredible, vivid details of these expeditions. His reports generated great interest in the West and western settlement.

Frémont returned to California in 1845 and convinced American settlers there to revolt against Mexican authorities, which ultimately led to the Bear Flag Revolt of 1846 and the short-lived California Republic. Frémont was elected one of California’s first U.S. senators in 1850 and was chosen as the Republican Party’s first U.S. presidential candidate in 1856. At the start of the Civil War, Frémont was given command of the Western Department of the Union Army. He was stripped of his command, however, when he announced in 1861 that all slaves owned by Confederates in Missouri were free, a decree that conflicted with President Abraham Lincoln’s war plan.

Further Reading: Bailey, Jacob W. “Fremont in Oregon: Deschutes River to Klamath Marsh, November-December 1843.” In *Northwest Discovery*. Portland, Oreg., 1982.

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