

The Mexican War
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Historical Context: The Mexican War lasted from 1846 to 1848 following the annexation of Texas in 1845.

Directions: Read each of the documents below and answer the questions following the document. When you have finished, use your knowledge from the documents and other prior knowledge to write an essay that answers the question in the box below.

Essay Question: What part, if any, did Manifest Destiny play in the Mexican War? What other justifications were presented for the formation of War?

Document #1: President JOSÉ JOAQUIN DE HERRERA of Mexico's response to the United States annexation of Texas

1st. The Mexican nation calls upon all her children to the defence of her national independence, threatened by the usurpation of Texas, which is intended to be realized by the decree of annexation passed by the congress, and sanctioned by the president, of the United States of the north.

2d. In consequence, the government will call to arms all the forces of the army, according to the authority granted it by the existing laws; and for the preservation of public order, for the support of her institutions, and in case of necessity, to serve as the reserve to the army, the government, according to the powers given to it on the 9th December 1844, will raise the corps specified by said decree, under the name of "Defenders of the Independence and of the Laws."

JOSÉ JOAQUIN DE HERRERA.
A. D. LUIS G. CUEVAS

Palace of the National Government,
City of Mexico, June 4, 1845.

1. How does he refer to the annexation of Texas?
2. What does he call upon the citizens of Mexico to do?

Document #2: Gen. Francisco Mejia, at Matamoros in a proclamation

FELLOW-CITIZENS: - The annexation of the department of Texas to the United States, projected and consummated by the tortuous policy of the cabinet of the Union, does not yet satisfy the ambitious desires of the degenerate sons of Washington. The civilized world has already recognized in that act all the marks of injustice, iniquity, and the most scandalous violation of the rights of nations. Indelible is the stain which will for ever darken the character for

virtue falsely attributed to the people of the United States; and posterity will regard with horror their perfidious conduct, and the immorality of the means employed by them to carry into effect that most degrading depredation. The right of conquest has always been a crime against humanity; but nations jealous of their dignity and reputation have endeavoured at least to cover it by the splendour of arms and the prestige of victory. To the United States, it has been reserved to put in practice dissimulation, fraud, and the basest treachery, in order to obtain possession, in the midst of peace, of the territory of a friendly nation, which generously relied upon the faith of promises and the solemnity of treaties.

FRANCISCO MEJIA. March 18, 1846.

3. How does General Mejia refer to the annexation of Texas?
4. What has the United States, according to this document, have put in practice?

Document #3: President James K. Polk of the United States of American asking for a Declaration of War against Mexico.

In my message at the commencement of the present session I informed you that upon the earnest appeal both of the Congress and convention of Texas I had ordered an efficient military force to take a position "between the Nueces and Del Norte." This had become necessary to meet a threatened invasion of Texas by the Mexican forces, for which extensive military preparations had been made. The invasion was threatened solely because Texas had determined, in accordance with a solemn resolution of the Congress of the United States, to annex herself to our Union, and under these circumstances it was plainly our duty to extend our protection over her citizens and soil.

This force was concentrated at Corpus Christi, and remained there until after I had received such information from Mexico as rendered it probable, if not certain, that the Mexican Government would refuse to receive our envoy.

Meantime Texas, by the final act of our Congress, had become an integral part of our Union. The Congress of Texas, by its act of December 19, 1836, had declared the Rio del Norte to be the boundary of that Republic. Its jurisdiction had been extended and exercised beyond the Nueces. The country between that river and the Del Norte had been represented in the Congress and in the convention of Texas, had thus taken part in the act of annexation itself, and is now included within one of our Congressional districts. Our own Congress had, moreover, with great unanimity, by the act approved December 31, 1845, recognized the country beyond the Nueces as a part of our territory by including it within our own revenue system, and a revenue officer to reside within that district had been appointed by and with the advice and consent of the Senate. It became, therefore, of urgent necessity to provide for the defense of that portion of our country

James K. Polk
May 11, 1846.

5. What is Mr. Polk expecting to come and what has he done to prepare for it?
6. What justification has Mr. Polk made for the annexation of Texas to the United States of America?

Document #4: John D. Sloat, Commander of the Pacific Navy of the United States addressing the people of California.

I declare to the inhabitants of California, that although I come in arms with a powerful force, I do not come among them as an enemy to California; on the contrary, I come as their best friend - as henceforward California will be a portion of the United States, and its peaceable inhabitants will enjoy the same rights and privileges they now enjoy; together with the privileges of choosing their own magistrates and other officers for the administration of justice among themselves, and the same protection will be extended to them as to any other State in the Union. They will also enjoy a permanent government under which life, property and the constitutional right and lawful security to worship the Creator in the way most congenial to each one's sense of duty will be secured, which unfortunately the central government of Mexico cannot afford them, destroyed as her resources are by internal factions and corrupt officers, who create constant revolutions to promote their own interests and to oppress the people. Under the flag of the United States California will be free from all such troubles and expense, consequently the country will rapidly advance and improve both in agriculture and commerce; as of course the revenue laws will be the same in California as in all other parts of the United States, affording them all manufactures and produce of the United States, free of any duty, and all foreign goods at one quarter of the duty they now pay, a great increase in the value of real estate and the products of California may also be anticipated.

JOHN D. SLOAT,
Harbor of Monterey, July 7, 1846.

7. What does Mr. Sloat offer to the people of California?

8. How does he describe the Mexican Government?

Document #5: United States Congress Joint Resolution offering terms of annexation to the Republic of Texas.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress Assembled, That Congress doth consent that the Territory properly included within, and rightfully belonging to, the Republic of Texas, may be erected into a new state, to be called the State of Texas, with a republican form of government, to be adopted by the people of said Republic, by deputies in convention assembled, with consent of the existing government, in order that the same may be admitted as one of the States of this Union.

Approved, March 1, 1845.

9. Who does the resolution say that the Territory of Texas belongs to?

10. What form of government should the state of Texas be given?

Document #6: Anson Jones, President of the Republic of Texas to President James K. Polk, President of the United States of America regarding the annexation of Texas in to the Union

Sir.

I avail myself with much pleasure of the opportunity afforded me by the return of General Besancon to address your Excellency this letter, and to communicate to you the gratifying intelligence, that the Deputies of the People of Texas assembled in Convention at the City of Austin on the 4th. Instant, and adopted on that day an ordinance expressing the acceptance and assent of the people to the proposal made by the government of the United States on the subject of the Annexation of Texas to the American Union.

This assent, given with promptness and with much unanimity, affords the assurance that this great measure, to the success of which, your Excellency is so sincerely attached, will be consummated without further difficulty and as I ardently hope in peace.

I shall have the further satisfaction to transmit to you very soon by request of the Convention, a copy of the ordinance I have now reference to, which will be placed in your hands by Mr. D. S. Kaufman, whom I have caused to be accredited as Charge d'Affaires of Texas near your Government, and I beg you to accept in the mean-time, assurances of the high regard with which I am

Your Excellency's
Most Obedient
and very humble servant
ANSON JONES

July 12, 1845.

11. What has been adopted by the People of Texas?

12. How does Mr. Jones feel about this decision?

Document #7: London Times article concerning the Annexation of Texas.

The discussion of the annexation of Texas in the United States has been frequently, and not unjustly, animadverted upon as a proof of the lawless tendencies of democratic communities, and the flexible nature of democratic constitutions, when a pretext is wanted to sanction a crime. But it may readily be imagined that all the argument on this important subject has not been confined to one side; and it is with pleasure that we turn to certain documents which have reached us, emanating from a higher source than the clamour of the populace, and conceived in a far higher tone of policy and justice. The people of New England have offered a constant opposition to the project for annexing Texas, for many very obvious reasons. The aggressive and adventurous spirit of that measure is at variance with the austere principles of their original constitutions; the preponderance of the South is already felt in the councils of the Union; and the acquisition of Texas would raise that preponderance into ascendancy, and secure the perpetuity of slave"ry and all its attendant evils. These opinions have been very forcibly expressed in the report of a Convention held for the purpose at Faneuil-hall, in the State of Massachusetts. This assembly deliberately resolved, that the scheme of annexing Texas to the United States is a plain violation of the Constitution, and as calculated and designed by the open declarations of its friends to uphold the interests of slavery, extend its influence, and secure its permanent duration; and they protested, that "Texas rebelling against "the laws of Mexico which abolished slavery - Texas wrested from Mexico by citizens of the United States - Texas the support and defence of American slavery, can never be joined to this Union but in "bonds of mutual infamy.

LONDON, SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 1845.

13. What is the opinion of the London Times in regard to the annexation of Texas?

14. What does the London Times see as the justification for the annexation?

Document #8: José María Sánchez, visiting the Mexican territory of Texas in 1828.

The Americans from the north have taken possession of practically all the eastern part of Texas, in most cases without the permission of the authorities. They immigrate constantly, finding no one to prevent them, and take possession of the sitio [site] that best suits them without either asking leave or going through any formality other than that of building their homes. Thus the majority of inhabitants in the Department are North Americans, the Mexican population being reduced to only Béjar, Nacogdoches, and La Bahía del Espíritu Santo, wretched settlements that between them do not number three thousand inhabitants, and the new village of Guadalupe Victoria that has scarcely more than seventy settlers. The government of the state, with its seat at Saltillo, that should watch over the preservation of its most precious and interesting departments, taking measures to prevent its being stolen by foreign hands, is the one that knows the least not only about the actual conditions, but even about its territory.... Repeated and urgent appeals have been made to the Supreme Government of the federation regarding the imminent danger in which this interesting Department is becoming the prize of the ambitious North Americans, but never has it taken any measures that may be called conclusive....

Source: José María Sánchez, "A Trip to Texas in 1828," trans. Carlos E. Castañeda, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 29 (1926), 260-61, 271

15 .What is this author's opinion of the Americans coming in to Texas?

16. What has been the Mexican government's response?

Document #9: John L. O'Sullivan writing for the Democratic review in 1845

It is wholly untrue, and unjust to ourselves, the pretence that the Annexation [of Texas] has been a measure of spoliation, unrightful and unrighteous--of military conquest under forms of peace and law.... If Texas became peopled with an American population, it was by no contrivance of our government, but on the express invitation of that of Mexico itself; accompanied with such guaranties of State independence, and the maintenance of a federal system analogous to our own, as constituted a compact fully justifying the strongest measures of redress on the part of those afterwards deceived in this guaranty.... She was released...by the acts and fault of Mexico herself, and Mexico alone.... It was not revolution; it was resistance to revolution....

California will, probably, next fall away from the loose adhesion which, in such a country as Mexico, holds a remote province in a slight equivocal kind of dependence on the metropolis. Imbecile and distracted, Mexico never can exert any real governmental authority over such a country.... Already the advance guard of the irresistible army of Anglo-American emigration has begun to pour down upon it, armed with the plough and the rifle, and marking its trail with school and colleges, courts and representative halls, mills and meeting-houses. A population will soon be in actual occupation of California, over which it will be idle for Mexico to dream of dominion.

Source: John L. O'Sullivan, *Democratic Review*, XVII (July-August, 1845), 5-6, 9-10.

17. According to the author, who is to blame for the annexation of Texas?

18. What state will fall next?

Document #10: Mexican historian Ramon Alcaraz writing in 1850 about the Mexican War

The North Americans...desired from the beginning to extend their dominion in such a manner as to become the absolute owners of almost all this continent. In two ways they could accomplish their ruling passion: in one by bringing under their laws and authority all America to the Isthmus of Panama; in another, in opening an overland passage to the Pacific Ocean, and making good harbors to facilitate its navigation....

Source: Ramon Alcaraz et al., eds. *The Other Side: Or Notes for the History of the War Between Mexico and the United States* (New York: 1850), 2-3, 30-32.

19. According to the author, what was desired of the Americans to begin with?

20. What boundaries to the Americans seek?

Document #11: Lt. William Helmsley's journal entry November 14, 1846

The colonel (now Brig. Gen'l Kearney) then addressed the multitude, nearly as follows:

"Mr. Alcalde and the people of New Mexico: I have come amongst you by the orders of my government, to take possession of your country, and extend over it the laws of the United States. We come among you as friends, not as enemies; we come to you as protectors, not conquerors; we come among you for your benefit, not for your injury.

Lt. William Helmsley Emory's Journal of General Stephen Watts Kearney's March to Santa Fe

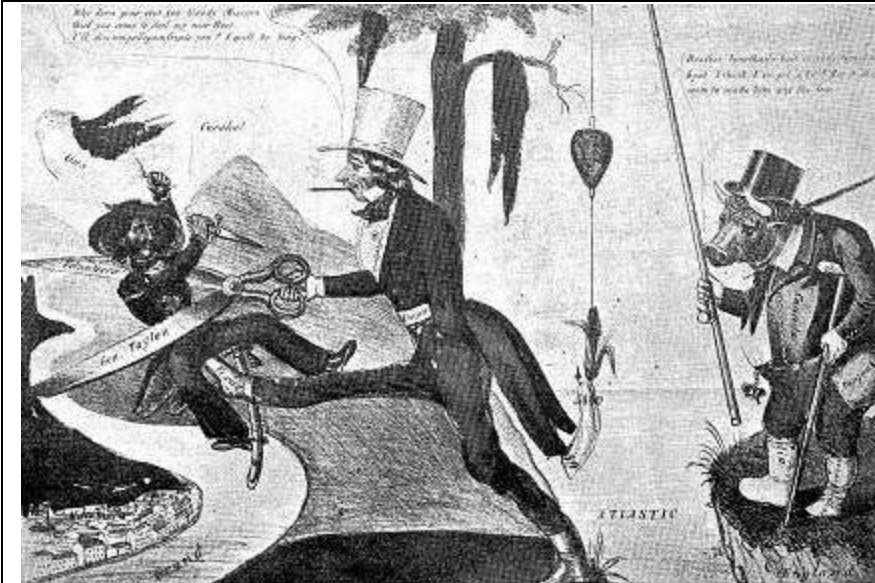
21. How does Colonel Kearney view the American Army in New Mexico?

Document #12: Map of the United States in 1850



22. About what percentage of the United States came from the Mexican Cession?

23. Why might this new territory bring America closer to the Civil War?



Source: E.W. Clay, Uncle Sam kicks Mexican back across the Rio Grande (1846)

24. Who do the three figures represent?

25. Where does this cartoon place the border of the USA?

Document #14: Abraham Lincoln's view on the Mexican War as given in the 1846 Lincoln-Douglas Debates

"...And so I think my friend, the judge, is equally at fault when he charges me at the time when I was in Congress of having opposed our soldiers who were fighting in the Mexican War. The judge did not make his charge very distinctly, but I tell you what he can prove, by referring to the record. You remember I was an Old Whig, and whenever the Democratic party tried to get me to vote that the war had been righteously begun by the President, I would not do it. But whenever they asked for any money, or land-warrants, or anything to pay the soldiers there, during all that time, I gave the same vote that Judge Douglas did. You can think as you please as to whether that was consistent. Such is the truth; and the judge has the right to make all he can out of it. But when he, by a general charge, conveys the idea that I withheld supplies from the soldiers who were fighting in the Mexican War, or did anything else to hinder the soldiers, he is, to say the least, grossly and altogether mistaken, as a consultation of the records will prove to him."

Abraham Lincoln 1846

1. What was Abraham Lincoln's view of the Mexican War?

2. Why does Lincoln oppose the war?

Sources for Documents:

<http://www.dmwv.org/mexwar/mexwar1.htm>

<http://www.history.vt.edu/MxAmWar/INDEX.HTM#>

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pre1898.htm>

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/modules/mex_am/documents.html

<http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/military/mexican-war.html>

<http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/D/>