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# A Review and Examination of the Causes of the Mexican War, 1846-1848

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WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

A REVIEW AND EXAMINATION OF THE CAUSES OF  
THE MEXICAN WAR, 1846-1848

A SENIOR THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE UNIVERSITY SCHOLARS AND HISTORY HONORS PROGRAMS

BY

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BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY

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The Mexican War of 1846 to 1848, forgotten by most Americans, arose out of a complex situation that many different authors have attempted to explain. The results were plain: the United States so successfully carried out the war against Mexico that over ten degrees of latitude were added to the former country at the expense of the latter.<sup>1</sup> Mexico lost one-half of her territory. Many reasons have been given for the conflict. Some historians blame the Southern slaveholding interests for seeking to add more slave land to the United States. Others simply cite provocations by Mexico: her violations of treaties, abuses of U.S. citizens in her territory, mistreatment of the Texans after they gained their independence from Mexico, and finally, her declaration of war (albeit a defensive one) against the United States. President Polk's expansionist actions, some blame; the Eastern United States commercial interests, others impute. The ubiquitous concept of "Manifest Destiny" pervades the historiography of the Mexican War as a source of conflict. And infrequently mentioned is the significance of political instability in Mexico in the period from Mexico's independence in 1821 until the war. Because these varying theories do not fall neatly into groups, they will be examined chronologically.

## 19TH CENTURY AMERICAN AND OTHER NON-MEXICAN HISTORIANS

Nathan Covington Brooks

In A Complete History of the Mexican War: its causes, conduct, and consequences: comprising an account of the various military and naval operations, from its commencement to the treaty of peace, Nathan Covington Brooks claims that the war was an act of aggression that the President of the United States conducted without regard to the wishes of the Congress. Mexico did violate the April 5, 1831, commercial treaty with the United States when she impounded a vessel

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<sup>1</sup> Nathan Covington Brooks, A Complete History of the Mexican War: its causes, conduct, and consequences: comprising an account of the various military and naval operations, from its commencement to the treaty of peace (Chicago: the Rio Grande Press Inc., 1965), 523.

from Maine and incorporated it into the Mexican navy, and she did declare war first; but since the declaration of war was of a defensive nature, Mexico did not act upon it. The independence of Texas and later its annexation into the United States brought on the hostilities only in that Polk ordered troops into the territory between the Nueces and Rio Grande rivers that Texas claimed upon her independence. The boundary of Texas was the Nueces, and even though Texas made a claim to the land between the Nueces and the Rio Grande, the claim was not supported by occupation or the law; it was only made in writing. Polk, ". . .by an assumption of power not warranted in the Constitution, and without the knowledge and consent of Congress, order[ed] the American army into the territory of Mexico and precipitat[ed] the country into war."<sup>2</sup> Mexicans considered this act to be the commencement of war. The short period between the annexation of Texas and the outbreak of war allowed no time to pass for Mexican tempers to cool, further fueling the crisis and possibly causing the fighting. Brooks asks, ". . .who can imagine what the end would have been if, in the dispute about Oregon, the President, without consulting Congress, had ordered the American army to the boundary as claimed in 54 degrees 40 minutes?"<sup>3</sup>

William Jay

Perhaps the most unorthodox source considered here is A Review of the Causes and Consequences of the Mexican War by William Jay, first published in 1849. Jay cites the extension of slavery as the primary and, perhaps, only motivation for the initiation of the conflict. Slavery was geographically confined to the southeastern United States before the acquisition of any Mexican territory because it was not allowed by the free Northern states or the Mexican lands to the west. The grievances began for the Americans when the Mexican government completely abolished slavery in her territories in 1829. Because the Mexican government was too weak to expel the numerous slaveholding Americans in Texas, the Texans sought annexation to the United States as a slaveholding state. A wave of attempts to purchase Texas ensued. Some newspapers estimated that

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 102-3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 104; 13-36, 50-104 passim.

up to nine new slaveholding states could be added to the union if this were accomplished. Slavery needed land to survive: dense populations created rebellions.

The purchasing of Texas a failure, slaveholders encouraged the Texans to end their union with the Mexican government so that annexation could be pursued. Independence was gained with the aid of many U.S. citizens enlisted into the Texan armies. Unfortunately for slaveholders, annexation was opposed by many in Congress; this barrier would be removed if Mexico began the hostilities. The U.S. could then take the land through the right of conquest. "From this time, the policy of the administration was to force Mexico into war."<sup>4</sup>

Many claims were made by American citizens against the Mexican government, but upon examination of the abuses supposedly committed by Mexico, Jay writes that no claims were justly made. Even the ones that were legitimate abuses were not national issues, being committed by lower officials who occasionally took too much power into their own hands; no national tension should have begun over these claims. The threats that Mexico made about recapturing Texas were idle threats, and the political instability in that nation left them completely incapable of carrying any of them out. Also, the boundary dispute that allowed President Polk to declare that American blood had been spilled on American soil was a result of the Texan legislature's extreme claims: Texas at one point claimed land as far as Oregon. No Texan settlements were in the disputed area between the Rio Grande and the Nueces River. Even the clash of arms over the above boundary dispute was not enough to begin a war, as the British had previously seized two American ships, killing members of their crews and damaging the ships, with no talk of war over it.

Interestingly, Polk claimed Mexican territory with the same insistence with which he claimed British Oregon, but the "clear and unquestionable" title to Oregon ended in a peaceful relinquishment of five degrees and forty minutes of territory; in contrast, the claims to Mexican lands led to a war. Jay asserts that slavery would never have occurred in Oregon, but the new southern lands had ripe conditions for the introduction of slaves. From start to finish slavery

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<sup>4</sup> William Jay, A Review of the Causes and Consequences of the Mexican War (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 32.

determined the prosecution of the Mexican War and the provisions of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.<sup>5</sup>

## 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN AND OTHER NON-MEXICAN HISTORIANS

Karl Jack Bauer

In Bauer's book The Mexican War, 1846-1848, he finds Manifest Destiny and the accompanying notion of the superiority of American democratic egalitarianism to be the underlying principles behind the events that caused the Mexican War. These concepts entailed the vision of a United States expanded to the west coast of the continent in spite of the intervening Mexican territory. ". . .It was clearly America's obligation to overspread the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Only under the American Way could the trackless wilderness be brought into blossom."<sup>6</sup>

The key events that brought about the hostilities were the Texan Revolution and the claims held against the Mexican government by American citizens. The Texans won their independence on April 21, 1836, and there was some desire on the part of the United States government to annex Texas, but the opposition in Congress was too great to make an attempt until 1844. Then, President Tyler and his Secretaries of State, Abel P. Upshur and John C. Calhoun, were able to achieve the annexation of Texas. To the Mexicans, who never accepted the independence of Texas, this was in effect the annexation of their territory. They considered the loss of Texas a blow to their national honor. The dispute surrounding the border of Texas only served to inflame the tension between Mexico and the United States.

The adjustment of claims was the other major area of friction between the two nations. Mexico did not pay the \$2,026,149 in claims she had agreed to pay in 1843, and to many Americans, Mexico should have given parts of her territory to repay the debt she could not pay monetarily.<sup>7</sup> Repayment with territory was totally unacceptable to the Mexicans, who increasingly

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 1-19, 31-2, 69-73, 121-9, 158-76, 181-95 passim.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Jack Bauer, The Mexican War, 1846-1848 (New York: the MacMillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1974), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 10.

came to oppose any settlement with the United States, much less one involving the loss of land.

The United States and Mexico went to war in 1846 because Mexico could not give up her territory without a military defeat that eliminated her ability to resist. The United States, influenced by the necessity of expansion to the Pacific under the concept of Manifest Destiny, was unable to negotiate the peaceful transfer of the Mexican lands. In Bauer's opinion, "if America ever fought an unavoidable war, it was the conflict with Mexico over the delineation of the common boundary."<sup>8</sup>

Samuel Flagg Bemis

In A Diplomatic History of the United States the author defends Polk's actions by saying that "the United States was not responsible, nation to nation, for the settlement of Texas, nor for the outbreak of the Texan revolution."<sup>9</sup> Both of the above events were popular, justifiable movements, as was the independence of Texas; Mexico itself recognized it in 1845 when she offered to agree to a treaty with the Republic of Texas as long as the latter would never become a member of the United States. When Mexico informed the U.S. that annexation would be taken as a declaration of war, Polk sent troops to Texas to defend it and positioned the navy off the Mexican coasts. He avoided the policy of inciting the Texans to make war on Mexico, his primary goal being a peaceful settlement of both the boundary dispute and of the claims made against Mexico.

The conflict came when Polk misread the signals from the Mexican government about resolving the differences. The Mexicans under the Herrera government said they would accept a commissioner from the United States to negotiate a settlement; however, Polk appointed John Slidell as minister plenipotentiary to the Mexican government. Herrera could not accept a full minister from the U.S., as this would have been a sign of capitulation to the Americans and would have brought about the loss of his political power. When indeed he was later deposed by General Paredes, the new government continued to reject Slidell, fearing that to acknowledge Slidell as a minister would lead to the government's overthrow. In addition, since neither government was

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., xix; xix-xxi, 1-31 passim.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel F. Bemis, A Diplomatic History of the United States (New York: Holt, Rinehardt, and Winston, 1955), 232.

afraid of the United States, there was not much necessity for recognizing Slidell. This was an imprudent policy on the part of the Mexicans, for when it became apparent to Polk that the Mexican government would not negotiate with Slidell, ". . .he disposed the military forces of the United States in a challenging way. Only the fact that the Oregon question was still pending seems to have prevented Polk from sending a war message to Congress immediately upon learning of the failure of Slidell's mission."<sup>10</sup>

Polk could have kept the peace even then by not sending the army across the Nueces, but as his efforts to resolve the problems diplomatically had failed, he ordered the army to occupy the eastern bank of the Rio Grande, thereby preventing the Mexican military from gaining an advantageous position in the area. Once the Mexicans had declared a defensive war and a brief fight between Taylor's and Arista's army had occurred, Polk declared war as a reaction to Mexico's provocation. He could have avoided the war, but as Bemis indicates ". . . [he] allowed Mexico to begin [it], and this, too, without any dishonorable action on his part to precipitate it."<sup>11</sup>

Much territory was added to the United States as a result of the Mexican War. But the new territories inflamed the slavery controversy once again, and their acquisition became the first in a ten-year series of events that led to Southern secession and Civil War. In spite of the immense cost of the latter war, Bemis supports the actions taken by Polk, saying that ". . .it would be well-nigh impossible today to find a citizen of the United States who would desire to undo President Polk's diplomacy, President Polk's war, and the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. . . ."<sup>12</sup>

Seymour V. Connor and Odie B. Faulk

Connor and Faulk find the reaction of Mexico against the annexation of Texas by the United States as the cause of war in North America Divided: the Mexican War, 1846-1848. Basically, the war had its roots in the actions of Stephen F. Austin, who petitioned the Mexican Congress to allow

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 244; 232-244, passim.



him to settle American colonists in Texas. He was allowed to do so under the auspices of the Mexican Federal Colonization Law. The liberal Constitution of 1824 being in effect, the authorities thought it best to encourage colonization to the frontier areas of Mexico. For this reason, Mexico granted land quite freely to colonists; this liberality ". . .quite definitely provided the impetus for an American migration to Mexico. . . ."13 As Connor and Faulk indicate, the Americans settled Mexican northern provinces to get free land and live in a democracy.

However, Mexico did not continue the federal government that was in power when the colonists came into Texas. A shift in regimes ushered in a Centralist government which denied Texans their local autonomy and prompted the start of the Texan Revolution on October 2, 1835. This Revolution was not a rebellion against Mexico but against the Centralist, Santa Anna-led dictatorship that revoked federalism and abrogated the Constitution.<sup>14</sup> When the United States annexed Texas, a surge of nationalism sprung up in Mexico. Although some other factors contributed to the outbreak of war (such as the Centralist government's unwillingness to pay on any U.S. claims made against the previous Federalist government, and two military intrusions made by Santa Anna into independent Texas by 1842), it was the annexation of Texas that brought about the war. "There can be no question but that the annexation of Texas precipitated a reaction among patriotic zealots in Mexico which produced war-- California, Polk, Manifest Destiny, claims, Nueces boundary notwithstanding."<sup>15</sup> General Paredes, taking advantage of this patriotic fervor, used it as a tool to gain power by overthrowing the Herrera government and then ordering Mexican troops into combat (and thus beginning the war).<sup>16</sup>

William E. Dodd

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<sup>13</sup> Seymour V. Connor and Odie B. Faulk, North America Divided: the Mexican War, 1846-1848 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 3-31 passim.

William E. Dodd in an article that appeared in the Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, "The West and the War with Mexico," cites Western and Southern aggression as the primary forces that led to the Mexican War. James K. Polk, a sectional President from the West, defeated Henry Clay on a platform to annex Texas and Oregon for the United States. His candidacy was engineered by the capable Robert James Walker of Mississippi, who had widely publicized the Texas and Oregon plan. Polk remained loyal to his platform once in office, and immediately began hostilities with Mexico to annex territory. Slavery was not a part of this issue, as the goal of the West was to add more states to the union, thereby increasing its stability (a principle postulated by Thomas Jefferson) and extending its dominion over all of North America. The Western interests ruled the White House for four years and were responsible for the Mexican War.<sup>17</sup>

John S. D. Eisenhower

John S. D. Eisenhower in So Far From God proposes that the war was provoked primarily by American policies, although both nations were responsible. Mexico was responsible for several aggravations. Santa Anna, the Mexican dictator in and out of power in the period preceding the war, removed the liberal Mexican constitution and in doing so angered the Texans by taking away their sovereignty. The most offensive measures were the taking away of Texan self-government, establishing voting requirements that let only a few vote, and enforcing the abolition of slavery. Also, Santa Anna fought against the Texan rebels during their struggle for independence and was determined to handle them through terrorization. Until he was deposed in 1844, he continued border fighting with the independent Texans, inflaming American hostility toward the Mexican government and creating a great deal of sympathy for the new Texan republic. And because no Mexican politician could recognize Texan independence and remain in office, diplomatic relations were broken with the United States.

The United States, sympathetic to the Texans in their

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<sup>17</sup> William E. Dodd, "The West and the War with Mexico," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 5 (July 1912), reprinted in Ruiz, Mexican War, 39-46 passim.

struggle with the Mexicans, sought to annex the territory and gain it as a state. It was not necessary to engineer public opinion against the Mexicans-- the border terrorization carried on by Santa Anna's regime had polarized the American people against Mexico. The American government remained neutral until Texan statehood, but the people did not, liberally supplying the Texans with manpower and munitions. After Texas was accepted as a state in June of 1845, an army under Zachary Taylor was sent to the area for "defense," a reaction (on the surface) to the many Mexican wrongs against Americans. After taking the Mexican town of Corpus Christi, and after the American minister to Mexico, John Slidell, was rejected by their government, Polk issued his declaration of war. This declaration not only served to determine relations with Mexico, but it possibly settled the dispute with Great Britain over the Oregon Territory: the British were eager to settle once they saw that the United States was serious in its dealings with Mexico. Whether this was an intended effect or not is a question in itself: Mexico could have been the scapegoat for solving the Oregon question as well as a ready outlet to feed the desire for more land in the United States. Mexico was a victim of Manifest Destiny: her northern territories were in the way of the westward expansion, and she was unable, both as a result of corruption and of her devastating war for independence, to control them adequately.

The American people wholeheartedly supported the war, at least for the first year, until the casualty reports began to make themselves known. The American people gave much support to the Texans both before and after Texan independence, and this continued into the war itself, when many volunteers signed up to fight alongside the regular army. The Mexican mistreatment of Americans angered them: Mexico deserved to be defeated. The Mexican people, on the other hand, had a very low morale throughout the conflict; their leaders, especially Santa Anna, had primarily their own interests at heart, not those of the Mexican people, and all knew it. Mexican psychology worked to create the feeling that the people ". . . were being punished for the ambition and stupidity of their leaders. The Yankees were merely the agents of evil, sent to Mexico to chastise her."<sup>18</sup> Although

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<sup>18</sup> John S. D. Eisenhower, So Far From God: the U.S. war with Mexico, 1846-1848 (New York: Random House, 1989), 80.

many hated the Americans, most swallowed their pride and dejectedly accepted the events as they came.

After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the American public was elated, and the primary debate was not related to guilt over the wartime annexation of so much territory but to the leniency of the Nicholas Trist treaty. Some even recommended the annexation of the entire country of Mexico. The Mexicans, satisfied that they had tried to fight to save their territory, were not a defeated nation. They had lost many lives and much land, but at least their honor was defended and they had been compensated monetarily with \$15 million for the lost territory. The treaty was an acceptable way to rid their country of the Yankees.<sup>19</sup>

John D. P. Fuller

John D. P. Fuller refutes Jay's slave-conspiracy thesis in his essay entitled "The Slavery Question and the Movement to Acquire Mexico, 1846-1848." He proposes that at the beginning of the Mexican War, the prevalent belief was that territory acquired from Mexico would enter the union with slavery, but after sectional controversies flared up, most Southerners came out in opposition to the acquisition of new territory. Many of those who favored annexation of Mexican lands were slaveholders, but these were primarily in the Southwest and were motivated by Manifest Destiny more than the extension of slavery. The movement against annexation really was not based on the slavery question but on ". . .the partisan opposition of Whigs to Democratic measures" and New England's diminishing power as the nation grew.<sup>20</sup>

The question of slavery in any lands taken from Mexico was a contrary force to expansion until it became apparent that slavery would not be taken into Mexican territory and therefore was not a great concern. Almost everyone was opposed to expansion at the expense of the Union, and the sectionalism inflamed by the controversy put a damper on all proposals to acquire new land. But

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., xvii-xxvi, 8-28, 40-70, 80, 284-291, 369-374 passim.

<sup>20</sup> John D. P. Fuller, "The Slavery Question and the Movement to Acquire Mexico, 1846-1848," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review 21 (June 1934) reprinted in Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, The Mexican War: was it Manifest Destiny? (New York: Holt, Rinehardt and Winston, 1963), 30.

it was gradually realized that the Mexican people were opposed to slavery and that the land was unsuitable for its propagation, and therefore territory taken from it would be free territory upon entry into the Union. Such an expanse of free land would not only block the spread of slavery but would greatly increase the power of the free states over the slave states. It is here that the South, particularly the Southeast, came out in solid opposition to the acquisition of northern Mexico. Led by Senator John C. Calhoun, the position of the anti-annexation forces was rooted in two main beliefs: that annexation would greatly inflame sectionalism at the expense of the Union, and that the power of the South would be greatly diminished by the annexation of Mexican territory. By the end of the war, two "conspiracies" were seen developing: an anti-slavery drive to annex the entire nation of Mexico, supported by slaveholding Westerners, and a pro-slavery movement not to annex. Calhoun and the latter movement deserve ". . .not a little credit . . .for the fact that Mexico is to-day an independent nation,"<sup>21</sup> for without their solid opposition to annexation the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo might not have been accepted.<sup>22</sup>

Norman A. Graebner

Norman A. Graebner offers a challenge to the Manifest Destiny thesis in his work Empire on the Pacific. Manifest Destiny is an expanding, undirected concept that does not imply definite geographical goals; it cannot explain why certain areas, especially California and Oregon, were singled out as goals for American annexation. Graebner argues that the expansionist policies that led to the Mexican War were carried out in a very defined manner amidst popular opposition, not in an amorphous, undirected popular expansion. These policies were bent on securing the wealth and commerce of the Pacific Coast for the United States. Popular expansionism ended with Texas; only there was there sufficient American population to claim the territory in the name of westward expansion.

Americans had long known of the great commercial potential of the Pacific Coast, especially

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 29-38 passim.

of the excellent natural harbors of Puget Sound, San Francisco, San Diego, and the Strait of Juan de Fuca. "It was the Pacific Ocean that determined the territorial goals of all American Presidents from John Quincy Adams to Polk."<sup>23</sup> After the annexation of Texas, these ports became the main objectives of Polk's policies. The commercial interests looked beyond the western edge of the continent to the commerce of the Far East. The Mexican War provided the means of obtaining these ports, and many volunteers from the western states fought knowing that their agricultural produce could be sold on the Pacific Coast through overland routes. Manifest Destiny was not responsible for the War; the conflict occurred when peaceful policies failed to annex the Pacific Coast. Polk's expansionism was geared toward the single goal of a Pacific Coast commercial empire.<sup>24</sup>

#### D. E. Livingston-Little

As the editor of Thomas Tenny's war diary, Livingston-Little sees the admission of Texas into the Union as the event touching off the Mexican War. Many other factors contributed to the commencement of hostilities, however. The war had its roots in the policy of Mexico to offer generous tracts of land to settlers, mostly American, because of the unpopulated nature of her frontier. These settlers were given some local autonomy under the federal Constitution of 1824, and they participated in the government in spite of having to become Roman Catholic citizens of Mexico and accept the prohibition of slavery. But in 1833 when Mexico adopted a Centralist Constitution that ended local autonomy, the Texans began a revolution to get free. They won this revolution and their independence, and although Santa Anna recognized it in a treaty, later Presidents of Mexico denied its legitimacy.

Other factors for Livingston-Little that led to war were the difficulty the U.S. had in settling claims made against the Mexican government by Americans; numerous Mexican violations of the

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<sup>23</sup> Norman A. Graebner, Empire on the Pacific: a study in American Continental Expansion (New York: the Ronald Press Company, 1955), vi.

<sup>24</sup> Graebner, Empire, v-vii, 217-228 passim.

1831 commercial treaty between Mexico and the U.S. (including barring aliens from settling in Mexico's frontier areas, detaining Americans in California in 1840, and ending all trade between the two nations in 1843); and the breaking off of diplomatic relations by Juan Almonte, the Mexican minister to the U.S., when Texas was admitted into the Union. In short, Mexico was almost totally responsible for the War. The Paredes government that came into power in December 1845 ". . . vowed to defend Texas to the Sabine River. At this point it is sufficient to add only that for the next two years Polk never gave up trying to settle the conflict through diplomatic means."<sup>25</sup>

Glenn W. Price

Glenn W. Price in the Origins of the War with Mexico states that the war was a result of American expansionist policy when policy itself failed in achieving the annexation of Texas. When war did come, Americans had to justify it as a defensive war because Western Christendom has no provision to justify aggressive violence. Mexico's atrocities were used to justify the conflict: these included her failure to pay on claims made against the Mexican government; the insulting attitude taken by her in dealings with the U.S. government; and her proposals to reoccupy Texas.

From 1825 to 1845, when Americans held out the hope that parts of Mexico, most notably Texas, could be purchased from the Mexican government, the policy towards Mexico was geared toward that end. Numerous representatives were sent to the Mexican government with money to purchase lands, bribe governmental officials, or somehow to compensate the Mexicans in exchange for different territories. By 1840 it became evident that this sort of diplomacy would not be successful. But it represented the attitude held toward Mexicans by Americans: since the Mexicans were seen as being incapable of self-government, Americans carried the notion that liberty could be imposed upon them by the United States if they did not cooperate. Therefore, in dealings with the independent Texan republic the possibility of war to aid them was never very far from the minds of the people of the United States.

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas D. Tennery, The Mexican War Diary of Thomas D. Tennery ed. by D. E. Livingston-Little (Norman, Oklahoma: the University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), ix-xv passim.

Once diplomacy had failed, two conspiracies were organized to gain Mexican territory: one, engineered by the U.S. Consul to Texas Duff Green, aimed not only to add Texas and California to the United States but also other northern provinces of Mexico through the Texan government's establishment of the Del Norte Company. Private corporations would carry out the conquest of two-thirds of Mexican lands, which would then be annexed along with Texas. Although this scheme was disavowed and Green apparently had acted on his own, he was not at odds with the thinking of the day. The other conspiracy, sending Commodore Robert Stockton to the Republic of Texas not only to read but also to manipulate public opinion there into hostility against Mexico, had governmental sponsorship from President James K. Polk. The latter policy was at least effective to a degree, for Texan support was quickly won. This final conspiracy would not gain the territory for the U.S., but it paved the way for war with Mexico. Soon afterwards the army under Taylor was sent to defend Texas against Mexican and Indian invasion, and the clash of arms in the vague boundary area between Texas and Mexico on April 25, 1846, allowed Polk to cry that American blood had been shed on American soil. Polk had deliberately ordered the army to move on Mexican settlements north of the Rio Grande in primarily Mexican-settled territory to provoke war, which was then formally declared. The first act of war, however, was committed by the United States two weeks earlier on April 12, 1846, when it blockaded the Rio Grande.

The legacy of the Mexican War for Price was the swelling of American pride and self-justification joined by a failing to recognize the Mexicans as a nation. With the acceptance of Manifest Destiny, the Turnerian frontier thesis, and the Monroe Doctrine, the war was not viewed as an international conflict but as a domestic dispute. When political intrigues failed, war was the solution, and this method carried into future policies. To Polk and many other Americans, the Mexicans brought the war upon themselves through their atrocities.<sup>26</sup>

Otis A. Singletary

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<sup>26</sup> Glenn W. Price, Origins of the War with Mexico: the Polk-Stockton intrigue (Austin, Texas: the University of Texas Press, 1967), 3-48, 105-130, 139-172 passim.



Otis A. Singletary in The Mexican War writes that although the annexation of Texas was the event that touched off the Mexican War, it was only the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back: both sides had ample reasons for dispute, and talk of war had circulated even prior to annexation. The Mexicans were the resentful victims of Manifest Destiny who inevitably came into conflict with the United States because of the latter's desire for westward expansion. The Mexicans had goaded the Americans into hostility, however. Santa Anna shot prisoners of war during the Texan Revolution, revoking the assurances of an inferior officer that the captured Texans would be treated as prisoners. The above incident, disrespect for the bodies left at the Alamo, and the Mexican war cry of "Exterminate to the Sabine"<sup>27</sup> during the Texan campaign had outraged many Americans. Mexican border raids on Texas kept these memories fresh. And finally, Singletary makes one of the few references to the extreme instability of the Mexican government, claiming that it prevented any diplomatic intercourse over the Texan issue; this lack of diplomacy was the key factor that led to war.

Socially, Americans saw the Mexicans as their inferiors and held a deep resentment for them. This was especially strong among the Texans, but was spread to a lesser degree throughout the population. Singletary says that "the intensity of [this feeling of resentment] would be difficult to describe."<sup>28</sup> Mexican resentment grew out of the expansionism to which they fell victim.<sup>29</sup>

Justin H. Smith

Justin H. Smith in The War With Mexico sees the Mexican desire for war with the United States as being the force that brought about the Mexican War. The Mexicans as a people hated the Americans; they feared the gradual annexation of the entirety of Mexico, the U.S. democratic influence, and Protestantism. All of these feelings were based on racism. This racism, fueled by the almost complete cultural dissimilarity between the two peoples, fostered the assumption that

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<sup>27</sup> Otis A. Singletary, The Mexican War (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1960), 16.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 8-27, 148-162 passim.

Americans were less than men.

Aside from the racial prejudice against Americans, many other factors led to the desire for war. Mexicans perceived that the Americans feared war with them to the point of preventing decisive action. Many Americans saw the war as unjust, and they gave support to this idea; the dissenters would provide internal political opposition. And the U.S. military was not seen as capable of carrying out the conflict. It lacked supplies, men, generals, and ships that would be necessary to defeat Mexico at such great distances from supply bases. The U.S. Navy would be subject to damaging Mexican privateer raids, and it needed many ships to effect a blockade, which would in fact benefit Mexico by protecting its industries.

In contrast, the Mexican army was held in high acclaim. The troops were seasoned from constant revolutions, and their leadership was capable. They could fight a defensive war, putting the burden of supplying a sizable army over vast deserts, high mountains, and other inhospitable terrain upon Washington, while the Mexicans could strike at any time. The United States would have to bear the cost of the war, which it could not do because of a lack of credit and resistance to high war taxes.

The Mexicans counted on significant foreign assistance once at war with the U.S. The anti-Anglo sentiment was not limited to Mexico; numerous Central and South American countries pledged their assistance to Mexico. Theirs was the moral cause, and the animosity of Europe towards the U.S. (particularly of Great Britain and France) would give them superiority. Slavery complicated the foreign aid issue; it was widely held that lands taken by the United States would spread the slaveholding system, further guaranteeing foreign intervention. But it was the U.S. dispute with Britain over Oregon that seemed to clinch the issue for the Mexicans. Certainly Britain would lend assistance to Mexico for a war with a nation that was attempting to take her territory.

Given the Mexicans' ideas, it is not surprising that they were not interested in continuing diplomatic relations with the U.S. They wanted war, and reinforced by their pride, they provoked the Americans into it. If they had won, Mexico would become a great nation; this was a gamble

they were willing to make.<sup>30</sup>

Richard R. Steinberg

Richard R. Steinberg accuses President Polk of deliberately bringing about the Mexican War in "The Failure of Polk's Mexican War Intrigue of 1845," which appeared in the Pacific Historical Review. Polk had a policy of covert aggression to bring about the War, a policy which was engineered to shift all blame from himself. His first attempt to gain Mexican territory through aggression was to incite Texas to conquer Mexico, and when this failed, Polk sent Slidell on a diplomatic mission to gain redress for American claims against Mexico, a mission which he had intended to fail.

Polk encouraged Texas to begin the conflict by pledging to uphold her territorial claims to the Rio Grande upon annexation. The "disputed" territory between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande was undoubtedly Mexican; Polk knew the Mexicans would defend it, as they could not passively allow their territory to be taken away. In this manner he could incite a war without taking the blame for it: the Mexicans would have been occupying Texan territory. To accomplish these ends, Commodore Stockton and a number of other unofficial diplomats were sent to Texas to encourage the war and annexation. Texas President Anson Jones among others was not eager to begin a war to further U.S. territorial acquisition; he was satisfied when Mexico recognized Texan independence and declared an end to the hostilities.

After failing to incite the Texans to begin the war, Polk sent Slidell on a diplomatic mission to Mexico to gain compensation due for private American claims against Mexico. This mission was intentionally doomed. Immediately after the annexation of Texas, Polk sent an army under Zachary Taylor encouraged to defend the Rio Grande border. Taylor's orders were made deliberately vague so that the blame for any hostilities could be pinned on him. However, Taylor refused to occupy the Mexican territory west of the Nueces until explicitly ordered to do so on January 13, 1846. The ensuing clash of arms allowed Polk to cry that "American blood had been shed on American soil,"

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<sup>30</sup> Justin H. Smith, The War With Mexico, vol. 1 (New York: the MacMillan Company, 1919), 58-137 passim.

and counting on the widespread popular support for the hostilities, he set out to seize northern Mexico. Having failed in his covert operations to begin the war, Polk aggressively turned to handling the boundary dispute as a means of furthering his expansionist policies.<sup>31</sup>

## 19TH CENTURY MEXICAN HISTORIANS

Ramón Alcaraz

In The Other Side: or notes for the history of the war between Mexico and the United States, Ramón Alcaraz presents the Mexican side of the problems of the war soon after its conclusion. In a primarily legalistic approach, Alcaraz sees ". . .the insatiable ambition of the United States, coupled by our weakness [from inexperience in government and a constant state of revolution after independence]. . ." as the origin of the war.<sup>32</sup> The United States from its foundation onward sought to expand its territory by any means, through purchase, covert operations, or outright aggression. This national attitude was directly taken from the British, who preferred violence to subdue the natives in their dominion. Mexico stood in the way, and the key event to the loss of its northern territories occurred when Louisiana passed into U.S. control. From that point on, Americans flooded into the Southwest, and with each plot of land they occupied they coveted the next.

Texas was an example of the above. A treaty of limits was passed on April 5, 1831, reiterating the territorial limits of the 1819 Adams-Onís treaty, which nullified all U.S. claims to Texas. [Nathan Covington Brooks calls this treaty one of amity, commerce, and navigation, and does not mention territorial limits.] The U.S. immediately sought to subvert this treaty while the Mexicans held it in good faith. Immediately following the ratification of the treaty, many failed attempts were made to purchase Texas. Then the Mexican government in an internal revolution revoked the federal system of government in its territories, and the U.S. seized the moment to provoke a revolution by the emigrant population in Texas. Not Mexican people in any way, either

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<sup>31</sup> Richard R. Steinberg, "The Failure of Polk's Mexican War Intrigue of 1845," The Pacific Historical Review 4 (1935) as reprinted in Ruiz, Mexican War, 65-76 passim.

<sup>32</sup> Ramón Alcaraz, The Other Side: or notes for the history of the war between Mexico and the United States, trans. and ed. by Albert C. Ramsey (New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), 2.

culturally or even politically, the Texans used the abolition of slavery and the internal revolution in the Mexican government to justify the revolt. Probably the uprising would have occurred even if Mexico had not revoked the federal government, because the population in Texas was almost completely American in character.

Texan independence had to be fought, as the Mexicans could not passively allow a rebellion. They faced Texans supplied covertly by the United States, which the entire time proclaimed its neutrality in the affair. The diplomatic breaking point came when an army under General Gaines was sent to occupy Mexican soil, under the pretense of protecting against Indian incursions. The Mexican minister to the U.S. packed up and left Washington.

The Mexicans tried to let the matter blow over after Texan independence, and even when its annexation was being argued in Congress, the most that was done was the issuing of a protest saying that annexation would be considered as a declaration of war. It would have been just to wage war immediately on the U.S. when it annexed what rightfully belonged to Mexico, but even this was not done. The Mexicans kept their agreements in good faith. But the U.S. demonstrated its lack of neutrality and its war-making desires by blockading Mexican ports and stationing troops in Mexican territory. Mexico was within its indisputable rights in the whole affair; the United States conducted itself unjustly through a policy of aggression.<sup>33</sup>

Carlos María de Bustamante

Bustamante, a deputy to the Mexican Congress from Oaxaca as well as a former soldier and historian, views the Texans who rebelled against the Mexican government as ungrateful; they had been given free land, a suspension of taxes, and the ability to conduct commerce in Mexico. With this they happily established themselves, and Mexico did not gain anything from the colonization process. But they rebelled and set up an independent nation of American citizens; there was not enough time in the ten years or so from the independence of Mexico to the independence of Texas for a generation of Texans to emerge, so those who set up independent Texas had to be United

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-32 passim.

States citizens. Texas could not stand on its own as an independent nation, however; it needed volunteers from the United States to win and maintain its independence, so it cannot be compared to any other newly-independent nation that liberated itself and then stood under its own power.

Mexico had other complaints about the conduct of the U.S. government. Bustamante cites an example of United States troops aiding in the Texan Revolution (General Gaines' cavalry) as a violation of the neutrality claimed by the U.S. as well as the public organization of armies to send to Texas in United States cities such as New Orleans. "Who, then, provoked the war-- Mexico which only defended itself and protested [the annexation of Texas], or the United States which became aggressors and scorned Mexico, taking advantage of its weakness and of its internecine agitations."<sup>34</sup>

## 20TH CENTURY MEXICAN HISTORIANS

José María Roa Bárcena

José María Roa Bárcena, in his 1902 Recuerdos de la Invasión Norteamericana, 1846-1848, Por un Joven de Entonces, claims that "our war with the United States was the double result of inexperience and vanity about our own capacities, on the one hand; and of an ambition unconstrained by concepts of justice and of the abuse of force, on the other."<sup>35</sup> Mexico's attempts to recover Texas, both during and after its Revolution, with a poorly-equipped army from a great distance away exhibited the inexperience of the nation. The sending of U.S. citizens to colonize Spanish and later Mexican lands was a ". . . plan by the United States, calculated and executed calmly and cold-bloodedly in a manner truly Saxon" to gain new territory to be added to the United States.<sup>36</sup> If Mexico had been prudent, she would have ceased to bother with Texas after 1835 and

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<sup>34</sup> Carlos María de Bustamante, El Nuevo Bernal Díaz del Castillo o Sea Historia de la Invasión de Los Anglo-Americanos en México (Mexico, D.F.: Testimonios Mexicanos, Secretaría de Educación, 1949) reprinted in Cecil Robinson, The View from Chapultepec: Mexican writers on the Mexican-American War (Tucson, Arizona: the University of Arizona Press, 1989), 66.

<sup>35</sup> José María Roa Bárcena, Recuerdos de la Invasión Norteamericana, 1846-1848, Por un Joven de Entonces vol. II (Mexico, D.F.: Imprenta de V. Agüeros, 1902) reprinted in Cecil Robinson, The View from Chapultepec: Mexican writers on the Mexican-American War (Tucson, Arizona: the University of Arizona Press, 1989), 44.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

strengthened her frontiers instead; however, this would not have prevented the annexation of the frontier by the United States in 1848. American aggression was the root cause of the hostilities.<sup>37</sup>

Carlos Bosch García

For García, the concept of transcontinentalism was the cause of the Mexican War of 1846-1848; the people of the United States, ever interested in expansion, went about it in various ways which opened one door after another until the U.S. occupied the territories once held by Mexico. By 1819, the Adams-Onís Treaty and the Louisiana Purchase had gained Florida and Louisiana; this led to the acquisition of Texas on the Louisiana border, and the acquisition of Texas brought about the Mexican war in 1846. Transcontinentalism was encompassed in Manifest Destiny, and this later took on a maritime aspect as the United States occupied Cuba and the Panama Canal. It had become a driving force in U.S. foreign policy. What is important is that the territories gained were not gained as a result of overpopulation: the settlers had to pass through much empty land to get to Texas (and later New Mexico and California). The expansion was the result of "the desire to increase the power of the United States and with goals that were speculative and financial."<sup>38</sup>

Justo Sierra

Justo Sierra cites American aggression as the source of the war in Evolución Política del Pueblo Mexicano. However, the Mexican leaders mismanaged the war for personal gain and prevented successful resistance. Santa Anna was the main criminal in the national betrayal.

The vehicle for the conflict was the Spanish borderlands, the sparsely-populated north of Mexico, which the Mexicans could not hope to control once they were populated by the migrating Americans. Mexico should have simply given Texas away, because it became almost wholly American in composition. This was an impossibility at the time due to racism and ignorance of the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 44-45 passim.

<sup>38</sup> Carlos Bosch García, La Historia de Las Relaciones Entre Mexico y Los Estados Unidos, 1819-1848 (Mexico, D.F.: Escuela Nacional de Ciencias Políticas, 1961) reprinted in Cecil Robinson, The View from Chapultepec: Mexican writers on the Mexican-American War (Tuscon, Arizona: the University of Arizona Press, 1989), 187; 185-192, passim.

effects of holding onto the province. The desire for independence on the part of the Texans was completely understandable, as they had no ties to Mexico and every tie with the United States from whence they came.

The U.S. policy toward Mexico was a product of the South's continual attempts to acquire Mexican lands, seeking to spread slavery. These were done with complete disregard of Mexican rights over her territory. The U.S. claimed part of Texas across the Nueces that had never been a part of it, and marched troops onto Mexican lands before declaring war. Justice was with Mexico, and every nation knew it.

But the Mexican leaders continually undermined the national cause. Santa Anna kept agitating Texas to keep his army in the field (and therefore himself in power), a policy which led to the Texan revolution. General Paredes was sent with the finest troops to defend the northern border and take the offensive in Texas, but he used them to overthrow the Herrera government instead. Santa Anna, upon his return to power, sought to regain his own glory by leading the army against the United States. ". . .if the contending factions in Mexico had not converted the question of Texas into a political weapon to disparage each other by mutual accusations of treason, the great calamities could have been avoided."<sup>39</sup> If the incontrovertible Texan independence had been recognized, the Mexicans could have retained much of the territory that they lost.

The legacy of invading Mexico has had a disastrous effect on those who attempted it. The Franco-Prussian War came from French intervention in Mexico, and the American Civil War arose out of the acquisition of a vast expanse of southern land. "The war with Mexico was the school for the future generals of the Civil War."<sup>40</sup>

Josefina Zoraida Vázquez

Josefina Vázquez considers several factors as contributors to the Mexican War. Perhaps

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<sup>39</sup> Justo Sierra, Evolución Política del Pueblo Mexicano (Mexico, 1940) reprinted and trans. by Ramón Eduardo Ruiz in Ruiz, Mexican War, 113.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 116; 110-116, passim.



most important was the expansionist movement in the nation (reflected in the elections of Andrew Jackson and James K. Polk) and the concept of Manifest Destiny. Oregon, Texas, and California were the main objectives of this expansionism, which was justified in many ways: it was called biblical, and was seen as a commitment to spread the freedom and democratic government of the United States across the land.

What also led to the breakdown of the diplomatic process was the difference in attitude that the U.S. government held in relation to the purchase of lands in comparison to that of Mexico. The United States had historically purchased land; Florida and Louisiana were acquired in that manner without great hostility on the part of foreign governments. But to Mexico, the sale of land to the United States was an unpatriotic act that would be a betrayal of the nation; therefore, the negotiations broke down amidst a flurry of insults on both sides. Both the U.S. and Mexico then resorted to force to settle the question.<sup>41</sup>

#### SOME CONCLUSION ABOUT THE MEXICAN WAR, 1846-1848

Clearly, there is no consensus on what caused the Mexican War. Manifest Destiny draws some support as a cause, as do the expansionism of Westerners and the commercialism of Easterners in the United States; Polk's naked aggression, general American expansionism, and the political inexperience of Mexico are factors often referred to by the Mexican historians. The slave-power thesis provides an alternate but refutable explanation. Only Otis Singletary and Justo Sierra give much importance to the chronic political instability in Mexico in the period from her independence from Spain in 1821 to the outbreak of war with the United States in 1846. This political instability that Mexico suffered from after independence was not unique; other newly-independent Latin-American nations shared a similar fate.

Simón Bolívar in his famous "Jamaica Letter" gives an explanation for the occurrence of political instability that plagued Latin American nations after they attained their independence.

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<sup>41</sup> Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, Mexicanos y Norteamericanos ante la Guerra del 47 (Mexico, D.F.: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1972) reprinted in Cecil Robinson, The View from Chapultepec: Mexican writers on the Mexican-American War (Tucson, Arizona: the University of Arizona Press, 1989), 196-209 passim.

Spain's monarchy held absolute sway over the colonies in the New World; her American subjects were not allowed participatory government, even if that participation was under the thumb of the King as subordinate administrators.<sup>42</sup> Instead, Spaniards were sent to the colonies to govern them, precluding any legitimacy for American rulers-- even autocratic ones-- and setting up fertile ground for the success of revolutions.<sup>43</sup> Liberal, constitutional republics like the one maintained in the United States were unsuited to Latin America because, unlike the people of the United States, Latin Americans lacked the experience and political virtues to sustain them in proper equilibrium.<sup>44</sup> Such a liberal government, based on the equality of man and liberty for all, was installed in Mexico through the Constitution of 1824.

In addition to the adoption of the Constitution of 1824 and the lack of legitimacy for any native Mexican ruler, other factors led to post-independence political instability for Mexico. The army that won her independence remained involved in politics and became a tool for political leaders to enter office.<sup>45</sup> And while the more conservative elements in Mexican society wanted no social change, liberal elements sought socioeconomic reorganization.<sup>46</sup> The alternation of power between the two groups with the army always in the middle was a hallmark of the period before the Mexican War.

It was this Mexican political instability in the period from independence until 1846 that was a significant factor in provoking the Mexican War. In fact, of all of the Presidents of Mexico between her independence in 1821 and 1844, only the first one, Guadalupe Victoria, was able to serve out a full four-year term in office.<sup>47</sup> Some of the often-cited causes of the Mexican War have

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<sup>42</sup> Simón Bolívar, "The Jamaica Letter" reprinted in Selected Writings of Bolívar vol. 1, 1810-1822 (New York: Colonial Press, Inc., 1951), 110.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>45</sup> Michael C. Meyer and William L. Sherman, The Course of Mexican History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 297.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Eisenhower, So Far From God, 377.

their origin in the endemic political instability that Mexico suffered from after she achieved her independence from Spain. Perhaps the most important of these is the Texan Revolution and later the annexation of Texas into the United States. President Johnson wrote that the admission of Texas into the Union was the cause for Mexico's initiating war.<sup>48</sup>

Under the liberal Constitution of 1824, the Mexican Congress passed the Federal Colonization Law, which allowed foreigners to colonize Mexico. The settlers were given large tracts of land: colonists received up to a league in Texas, and up to eleven leagues in California.<sup>49</sup> These tracts were offered to settlers, mostly American, because of the unpopulated nature of Mexico's frontier. The colonists accepted them in spite of having to become Roman Catholic citizens of Mexico, and they began participating in the federalist democracy.<sup>50</sup> But the situation at home in Mexico was not stable; the elections of 1833 would spell the death of the participatory democracy enjoyed by the Americans in Texas.

Antonio López de Santa Anna won the elections of 1833 under liberal auspices, and after discovering that being the President was dull, he turned power over to his Vice-President, Gómez Fariás, and returned to his estate in Veracruz.<sup>51</sup> The liberal Fariás, not surprisingly, enacted antimilitary and anticlerical reforms in keeping with his ideology. He shrank the army and abolished the fueros, which had kept military men from being subject to civil law. And in debasing the clergy, he attempted to secularize education (including closing the completely clerical University of Mexico); he declared the government's right to assign all clerical positions; he assumed control of the Californian Franciscan missions and put them under secular auspices; and most importantly, he abolished the mandatory tithes.<sup>52</sup> The conservatives (traditionally the hacendados, the clergy, and the

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<sup>48</sup> Andrew Johnson, The Papers of Andrew Johnson ed. by Leroy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins (Knoxville, Tennessee: the University of Tennessee Press, 1967), 362-3.

<sup>49</sup> Connor, Divided, 9.

<sup>50</sup> Tenny, Diary, x.

<sup>51</sup> Meyer and Sherman, Mexican History, 325-6.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 326.

military) reacted vehemently and sought to topple the government. And who would be their champion but the same Antonio López de Santa Anna who had been elected as a liberal? Santa Anna led a coup and repudiated all of the measures taken by Fariás, setting up a regime that "was openly conservative, Catholic, and centralist."<sup>53</sup>

Santa Anna then revoked the Constitution of 1824 and supplanted it with the Siete Leyes, a centralist document that allowed the central government to assign regional leaders and put income requirements on voting and election into political office.<sup>54</sup> Because of this shift in constitutions, the Texans were deprived of the local autonomy that they had enjoyed (which was similar to the self-government allowed to a state in the United States), and they began a revolution to get free.<sup>55</sup> The Texan Revolution began on October 2, 1835, as a rebellion not against Mexico but against the Centralist, Santa Anna-led dictatorship and the "abrogation of the Constitution."<sup>56</sup> Though the Texans won their independence and Santa Anna recognized it, later Presidents of Mexico denied the treaty of recognition.<sup>57</sup> This would prove to be a mistake; Roa Bárcena wrote that "Mexico, if it were to have acted with prevision and wisdom, should have written off Texas in 1835 while fastening onto itself and fortifying its new frontiers. It should have recognized as an accepted fact the independence of that colony and, by way of negotiations, should have resolved any differences and settled boundary questions with the United States."<sup>58</sup> Instead, by 1842 Santa Anna had made two small military intrusions into Texas, inflaming the possibility of the outbreak of war.<sup>59</sup>

When Texas was annexed by the United States, Juan Almonte, the Mexican minister to the U.S., left the country proclaiming that the "joint resolution [to annex Texas] was tantamount to a

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>55</sup> Tennery, Diary, x.

<sup>56</sup> Connor, Divided, 11.

<sup>57</sup> Tennery, Diary, xi.

<sup>58</sup> Roa Bárcena, Recuerdos, reprinted in Robinson, View from Chapultepec, 45.

<sup>59</sup> Connor, Divided, 19.

declaration of war;" however, he had expected to lose his position soon, as he was a centralist appointed by Santa Anna, who had since fallen from power.<sup>60</sup> In ending negotiations between the two governments, he hoped to discredit the new Herrera government by confronting the United States.<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, the ending of negotiations also complicated a diplomatic resolution to the conflict.

Herrera wanted to settle the question over Texas without going to war, but Texas did not accept his offer of peace with Mexico because they had already decided on annexation into the United States by July 1845 (the Mexican proposal included a proviso that Texas would not seek to be annexed by the U.S.). Amidst opposition from many who wanted war, Herrera then sent word to the U.S. that his government would accept someone to resolve the problems between the two nations; this someone was John Slidell.<sup>62</sup> However, Herrera could not recognize Slidell as an "Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary" without fear of falling from power upon Slidell's arrival in Mexico.<sup>63</sup> Both Herrera and his successor, Paredes, told the United States government that ". . .it had been agreed to receive only a 'commissioner' empowered to adjust outstanding disputes, not a regular minister plenipotentiary to resume diplomatic relations before everything was settled."<sup>64</sup> In December of 1845, however, General Mariano Paredes took over the government, gaining support by insisting that Texas be reclaimed, violently if necessary.<sup>65</sup> "Centralists [Paredes]. . .used annexation to overthrow the Herrera government and to work large segments of the Mexican population into a war fever."<sup>66</sup> Paredes then immediately began preparing

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>63</sup> John H. Schroeder, Mr Polk's War: American opposition and dissent, 1846-1848 (Madison, Wisconsin: the University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), 8.

<sup>64</sup> Bemis, Diplomatic History, 237.

<sup>65</sup> Connor, Divided, 27-8.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

for war.<sup>67</sup>

Paredes believed that Mexico could win the war. Granted, many things were in Mexico's apparent favor: her troops were seasoned and well-equipped; the army of the United States was only one-quarter the size of Mexico's; and aid was expected from Great Britain due to the conflict between the United States and Britain over Oregon.<sup>68</sup> In contrast, the American army was filled with volunteers whose combat worthiness was in question, and since Texas was so far from centers of population and supply, logistical support would be difficult (especially for an American army inside Mexico). In addition, Paredes expected the Northern abolitionists in the U.S. to oppose the war and thereby ruin morale. He even went so far as to expect Indians to fight on the side of Mexico and slaves to rebel in the South.<sup>69</sup> However, the Mexican generals making these assumptions were not chosen on the basis of their generalship. Fransisco Bulnes, describing the situation of the Mexican army in 1830, said that because of a fear of falling out of power, presidents would not appoint any general with a good military reputation; such a man would be humiliated if he allowed the president to direct his activities.<sup>70</sup> As a result, presidents did whatever they could to prevent the development of good military leadership and instead focused on having the generals be their own minions: ". . .the Presidents Bustamante and Santa Anna demanded of their army chiefs that they be first of all followers of Bustamante or Santa Anna, although they might at the same time have been cowardly or inept."<sup>71</sup> The outcome was that only unfit men were given the top military positions.<sup>72</sup>

Political instability not only worked against a peaceful resolution of the conflict over Texas;

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>70</sup> Fransisco Bulnes, *Las Grandes Mentiras de Nuestra Historia* (Mexico, D.F.: Librería de la Vda DE C.H. BOURET, 1904) reprinted in Robinson, *View from Chapultepec*, 122.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

it caused and then made difficult the diplomatic resolution of the issue of claims made against the Mexican government by American citizens. After Mexico gained her independence, she experienced political chaos resulting in an almost constant array of pronunciamientos against the government; these uprisings and conflicts many times destroyed the property of aliens living in Mexico.<sup>73</sup> Foreign governments, seeking collection on the claims their people made against the Mexican government, sometimes skirted diplomatic means to do so. During the time between the closing of the American embassy in Mexico at the end of 1836 and its reopening in 1839, both Britain and France had sent military missions to pressure the Mexicans into settling claims their citizens had made against the Mexican government.<sup>74</sup>

Many other claims arose from Mexican violations of the April 5, 1831, "treaty of amity, commerce, and navigation" (which was ratified later) between Mexico and the United States.<sup>75</sup> For example, in 1836 Mexico barred aliens from settling in her frontier areas, thus violating the treaty; in an 1840 enforcement of this law some Americans were detained in California.<sup>76</sup> And in 1843, Santa Anna ended almost all trade with the U.S. and barred aliens from conducting any retail trade in Mexico, again abrogating the earlier treaty.<sup>77</sup>

In 1836, the centralist Mexican minister to the U.S., Manuel Gorostiza, left the country accusing the U.S. of aiding the Texans during their revolution; however, for the previous eight years President Jackson had been trying unsuccessfully to get the Mexican governments to pay the money they owed to American citizens.<sup>78</sup> Connor and Faulk write that "one may suspect that Gorostiza's diatribe against the United States was motivated in part by the impasse over the claims."<sup>79</sup> The

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<sup>73</sup> Meyer and Sherman, Mexican History, 328.

<sup>74</sup> Connor, Divided, 18.

<sup>75</sup> Brooks, Complete History, 8.

<sup>76</sup> Tenny, Diary, xiii.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>78</sup> Connor, Divided, 17.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 18.

previous federalist government in Mexico had been responsible for many of the claims, and the centralist government that Gorostiza served under was in power.<sup>80</sup>

The United States attempted arbitration rather than force to settle the claims its citizens made against the Mexican government, and arranged for Baron Roenne, a Prussian, to arbitrate a convention with the centralist government of Mexico.<sup>81</sup> After the eighteen months had run out for deliberation in 1842, \$2,026,139.68 was granted to the claimants (\$4,265,464.90 was not even addressed for lack of time).<sup>82</sup> The collection of this amount was difficult. A second convention was held on January 30, 1843, to assure Mexico's payment of the money owed, but "Mexico paid only the interest due on the 30th of April, 1843, and three of the twenty instalments [sic] of the principal;" a third convention to discuss the remainder of the claims began on November 20, 1843, but bogged down because the Mexican government did not respond to whether it would accept the amendments to the convention that the United States Senate ratified.<sup>83</sup> Santa Anna, back in the presidential chair after overthrowing the government that agreed to have the convention originally, refused to complete his obligation to pay.<sup>84</sup> By July 1844, because of the furor over Texas, the Mexican press began to criticize the Mexican government for agreeing to the remittance of claims, and applied pressure to stop payment altogether.<sup>85</sup>

Mexican political instability contributed heavily in causing the problems between Mexico and Texas, and it exacerbated the tension between Mexico and the United States by preventing a satisfactory diplomatic solution to the claims that the Mexican government owed the United States. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo included not only the settlement once and for all about Texas, but

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Brooks, Complete History, 21-2.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>84</sup> Connor, Divided, 19.

<sup>85</sup> Brooks, Complete History, 23.



it also provided a resolution of the claims owed by Mexico to citizens of the United States.<sup>86</sup> Given the absence of political instability in Mexico and the accompanying problems, the Mexican War of 1846-1848 might not have happened.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 522.

## WORKS CITED

- Alcaraz, Ramón. The Other Side: or notes for the history of the war between Mexico and the United States. Translated and edited by Albert C. Ramsey. New York: Burt Franklin, 1970. This source was invaluable, as it was one of the translated Mexican sources that I was able to use. Alcaraz presents a credible point of view and casts a different light on the history of the United States and its relation to the war. He portrays well the Mexican need to defend her honor and, in a somewhat biased manner, legally defends Mexico to the point of being blameless.
- Bauer, Karl Jack. The Mexican War, 1846-1848. New York: the MacMillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1974. Bauer takes a rather philosophical approach in explaining what brought about the Mexican War, seeing Manifest Destiny as the force that brought America into contact (and soon conflict) with Mexican territory. The inability of Mexico to back down politically made conflict inevitable. This view is explained well.
- Bolívar, Simón. "The Jamaica Letter." Reprinted in Selected Writings of Bolívar volume 1, 1810-1822. New York: Colonial Press, Inc., 1951. Bolívar's letter gives a good basis for my thesis by explaining why political instability was going to occur in Latin America after the various nations achieved their independence from Spain. This same political instability occurred in Mexico and was a factor in causing the Mexican War.
- Bemis, Samuel F. A Diplomatic History of the United States. New York: Holt, Rinehardt, and Winston, 1955. Although Bemis presents a defense of Polk's actions, it is not a very logical or credible defense. He says that Polk was primarily concerned with peace, even though he explains that while Polk could have kept peace he took the initiative in battle-- not a peaceful position. He justifies Polk's actions through "the end justifies the means."
- Brooks, Nathan Covington. A Complete History of the Mexican War: its causes, conduct, and consequences: comprising an account of the various military and naval operations, from its

commencement to the treaty of peace. Chicago: the Rio Grande Press, Inc., 1965. Brooks's work is an example of a well-researched, fairly unbiased, nineteenth-century source. It is a credit to the author that soon after the war was concluded, amidst the celebrations, he was still able to maintain a critical view. Brooks blames Polk for the war, writing that he manipulated the tensions between Mexico and the United States to begin war without consulting Congress.

Bulnes, Francisco. Las Grandes Mentiras de Nuestra Historia. Mexico, D.F.: Librería de la Vda DE C.H. BOURET, 1904. Reprinted in Robinson, View From Chapultepec, 119-26. Bulnes provides a good assessment of the Mexican military for my thesis on political instability. He was a keen observer of the situation in which only inept generals were given positions in the Mexican army.

Bustamante, Carlos María de. El Nuevo Bernal Díaz del Castillo o Sea Historia de la Invasión de Los Anglo-Americanos en Mexico. Mexico, D.F.: Testimonios Mexicanos, Secretaria de Educación, 1949. Reprinted in Robinson, The View from Chapultepec, 58-74. Bustamante makes no attempt to be unbiased as he blames the United States for its aggression. To him, the United States took advantage of the weakness of Mexico in beginning the war.

Connor, Seymour V. and Odie B. Faulk. North America Divided: the Mexican War, 1846-1848. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971. Connor and Faulk hold Mexico responsible for the war. The key factor was the Mexican reaction to the annexation of Texas by the United States, and this, above all other philosophical concerns such as Manifest Destiny, began the war. This source provides good information in support of my thesis.

Dodd, William E. "The West and the War with Mexico." Reprinted in Ruiz, Mexican War, 39-46. Dodd presents a good response to the slavery-conspiracy thesis by explaining the war as a result of western policies. He explains how the west took over the White House for four years and added a great amount of western land to the Union without regard to slavery. Pure expansionism was the driving force behind the war. This position seems incomplete; it fails to explain why Mexico, and not Oregon, was singled out as a goal for expansion.

Eisenhower, John S. D. So Far From God: the U.S. war with Mexico, 1846-1848. New York: Random House, 1989. I used this source to gain the basis of my understanding of the events of the Mexican War. This book is excellently written, and although I disagree that the Mexican War was a result of Manifest Destiny, it is very valuable in that it gives a comprehensive view of the war from its origins to its conclusion and legacy.

Fuller, John D. P. "The Slavery Question and the Movement to Acquire Mexico, 1846-1848." Reprinted in Ruiz, Mexican War, 29-38. In a clear and logical manner Fuller completely refutes the slave-conspiracy thesis, convincingly proving that slave interests were not only free of blame for the Mexican War but that they provided the only real opposition to the movement to annex all of Mexico. This is a very good source that added a critical appreciation to my reading.

García, Carlos Bosch. La Historia de Las Relaciones Entre Mexico y Los Estados Unidos, 1819-1848. Mexico, D.F.: Escuela Nacional de Ciencias Políticas, 1961. Reprinted in Robinson, View From Chapultepec, 185-192. García sees the concept of transcontinentalism in the United States as the cause for the war. This resulted in the occupation of the territory once held by Mexico after the conclusion of the Mexican War. This is a good Mexican source, less biased than others.

Graebner, Norman A. Empire on the Pacific: a study in American continental expansion. New York: the Ronald Press Company, 1955. This is one of the better explanations of the forces behind the Mexican War that I have encountered. Graebner refutes Manifest Destiny and explains the Mexican War in terms of the goals of commerce in the United States.

Jay, William. A Review of the Causes and Consequences of the Mexican War. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970. Originally published in 1849, Jay is avid in his anti-slavery stance, and blames the entire conflict on the desire of the South to attain more land in which to spread slavery. There are many problems with this proposal, and when viewed in the light of Fuller's essay, it falls apart.

Johnson, Andrew. The Papers of Andrew Johnson. Edited by Leroy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins. Knoxville, Tennessee: the University of Tennessee Press, 1967. Johnson agrees with many later writers by proposing that it was the annexation

of Texas by the United States that brought about war.

Meyer, Michael C. and William L. Sherman. The Course of Mexican History. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979. This book provides good information for my thesis and has been quite useful in clarifying this tumultuous period of Mexican history for me.

Price, Glenn W. Origins of the War with Mexico: the Polk-Stockton intrigue. Austin, Texas: the University of Texas Press, 1967. Price presents a credible explanation of what led to the Mexican War, the failure of policy to attain the desired Mexican lands, without explaining what brought about the expansionism that made the policy. He details two major pre-war conspiracies that attempted to covertly carry out the expansion, and describes some of the racism prevalent in the U.S. This is a moderately useful source, although I consider it somewhat incomplete for reasons described above.

Roa Bárcena, José María. Recuerdos de la Invasión Norteamericana, 1846-1848, Por un Joven de Entonces. Volume II. Mexico, D.F.: Imprenta de V. Agüeros, 1902. Reprinted in Robinson, View from Chapultepec, 44-49. Roa Bárcena holds Mexico's inexperience as a nation coupled with the United States' blatant aggression as the cause of the war. This is a good Mexican source, albeit a biased one.

Robinson, Cecil. The View from Chapultepec: Mexican writers on the Mexican-American War. Tuscon, Arizona: the University of Arizona Press, 1989. This has been an invaluable book for the research of my thesis. It provides translated sections of Mexican writers' works on the Mexican War, and a number of these sections were used in this paper. It would be a good starting point for research like Ruiz's sourcebook.

Ruiz, Ramón Eduardo. The Mexican War: was it Manifest Destiny? New York: Holt, Rinehardt and Winston, 1963. This has been an invaluable source to the compilation of this paper, for it presents a number of different theses on the war in an organized fashion. This should be considered by anyone doing research on the origins of the Mexican War because it not only details the different American schools of thought on the subject, but it also incorporates a German and a Mexican view. It proved to be critical for my research.

- Schroeder, John H. Mr. Polk's War: American opposition and dissent, 1846-1848. Madison, Wisconsin: the University of Wisconsin Press, 1973. Schroeder's book focuses on the opposition to the war in the United States, but it contains some useful information on the origins of the war.
- Sierra, Justo. Evolución Política del Pueblo Mexicano. Translated by Ramón Eduardo Ruiz. Reprinted in Ruiz, Mexican War, 110-116. Sierra blames the American aggression for the Mexican War, aided by Mexican incompetence. The Mexicans' big mistake was to take so long to recognize independent Texas. He includes an interesting section on the legacy of the Mexican War: anyone who invades Mexico will suffer disastrous effects even if they win. Sierra was one of the few sources to make note of the political instability in Mexico as a cause of the Mexican War.
- Singletary, Otis A. The Mexican War. Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1960. Singletary views Manifest Destiny as the driving force behind the conflict; on the surface, both sides had many reasons to dispute, and the annexation of Texas was the critical event that lit the fuse. He also discusses the racism that the Americans held against Mexicans. Singletary was another of the few sources that touched on the political instability in Mexico.
- Smith, Justin H. The War with Mexico. Volume 1. New York: the MacMillan Company, 1919. Smith blames the Mexicans for the war, and explains why they made no preparations to fight. He makes a good case for the lack of foreign intervention in the conflict. Smith also discusses the anti-American prejudice that was widely held in Mexico. This provided a counterweight to the theses blaming the U.S., but it seems rather blown out of proportion.
- Steinberg, Richard R. "The Failure of Polk's Mexican War Intrigue of 1845." Reprinted in Ruiz, Mexican War, 65-76. This source accuses Polk of causing the Mexican War after his policies of covert aggression failed. Although it makes sense, Polk could not carry out his policies without support, and it fails to explain why Polk wanted to expand.
- Tennery, Thomas D. The Mexican War Diary of Thomas D. Tennery. Edited by D. E. Livingston-Little. Norman, Oklahoma: the University of Oklahoma Press, 1970. The introduction to

Tennery's war diary by Livingston-Little contains much good information about what caused the Mexican War. The author proposes that the annexation of Texas coupled with the claims made against the Mexican government by Americans were the causes of the war. This is a credible assessment.

Vázquez, Josefina Zoraida. Mexicanos y Norteamericanos ante la Guerra del 47. Mexico, D.F.: Secretaria de Educación Pública, 1972. Reprinted in Robinson, View From Chapultepec, 196-209. Vázquez sees the concept of Manifest Destiny and the accompanying expansionism of the United States as the force behind the conflict. When Mexico would not sell land to the U.S. because it was considered unpatriotic, war resulted. This is a good Mexican source and is unbiased.