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**Protecting Democracy in an Age of Severe Political Polarization and
Extremism by promoting constructive discourse**

Historical Committee

Mexican-American War

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RESEARCH REPORT



Forum: Historical Committee

Issue: Mexican-American War

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Introduction

During the mid 19th century, the US was focused on expanding their country and acquiring more territory. Mexico was under the threat of the US expansion especially after they lost Texas to the US when they gained their independence in 1836. The President of the United States during that period of time, James K. Polk wanted to annex California and New Mexico. Polk offered money to Mexico in exchange for those regions; however, Mexico declined this offer. Although Mexico rejected the annexation in exchange for money, the US was determined to acquire those lands. Thus, Polk sent troops to occupy a disputed area of the Texas and Mexico border and the US officially declared war on Mexico in 1846. Mexico was unprepared for such war due to its internal political conflicts and their military was insufficient. Therefore, after two years of war, Mexico was defeated and the Treaty of Guadalupe and Hidalgo was signed that gave territories from Mexico such as Utah and California to the US. The Mexican-American War was an important event in the United States as it was the beginning of their expansionist policies and it affected future politics.

Definition of Key Terms

Annexation

Annexation is used for the act of taking a part of a land or a country usually without permission or by force. However, unlike cession where a territory is taken or given by selling or a treaty; an annexation is an one-sided ruling.

Expansionism

The policies and practices of invading foreign lands to expand territory, political influence and ideology.
(US History)

Abolitionism

abolitionism, in western Europe and the Americas, the movement chiefly responsible for creating the emotional climate necessary for ending the transatlantic slave trade and chattel slavery.

General Overview

The Mexican-American War (1846-1848) marks a great transition in history when it comes to the United States of America and Mexico's borders and political authority over their territorial claims. Tensions arising from these questions had existed for years prior and did not all of a sudden appear as there were warning signs for many years. The start of these tensions was over the territory of Texas. After diverging from Mexico in 1836, about a decade before the war, Texas became the Republic of Texas; the United States on one hand recognized its independence while Mexico persisted in its claim that the territory was theirs.

Consequently the annexation of Texas by the United States in 1845 provoked considerable resentment, as Mexico saw it as a direct attack to its sovereignty. Together with the already present disputes about the borders of Texas, where one side insisted that the Rio Grande was the boundary and the others insisted on the Nueces River, the events incited a lot of tension. Along with the territorial disputes, the popular American ideology of Manifest Destiny was another justification that entailed the idea that the U.S. must expand itself to the Atlantic Pacific. It created motivation for the Americans to continue their conquest into Mexican territory that also included lands in California, Arizona, and New Mexico.

Smaller battles near the disputed territories marked the official start of the war in April of 1846. Troops of the U.S. were commanded under General Zachary Taylor, near a disputed territory owned by Mexico, right next to the Rio Grande. After the Mexicans' attacks on Taylor's forces, President James K. Polk framed this incident in the guise of Mexico spilling "American blood on American soil". On May 13, 1846, the United States declared war, and fighting quickly spread across several fronts.

There were several major campaigns throughout the war. Taylor's forces had victories in northeastern Mexico, including the battles of Monterrey and Buena Vista. In the west, American forces seized California and a large portion of the Southwest with minimal resistance. With these victories from the U.S., General Winfield Scott's campaign in central Mexico led to the capture of Mexico City in September 1847, and this effectively ended Mexico's ability to continue the war.

The war formally concluded with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on February 2, 1848. This treaty brought monumental changes to both countries as Mexico ceded to the United States a considerable territory which included modern-day California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming, called the Mexican Cession. This was slightly more than half of Mexico's land. It also recognized the Rio Grande as the official boundary between Texas and Mexico, thus solving the

problem that had long caused dispute along the border. The United States paid an amount of 15 million dollars and alleviated 3.25 million dollars of debt from Mexico in turn for the territory it took.

The effects of the war were profound for both nations. The territorial expansion achieved much of what the United States was pursuing, but it led to the problem of differences over slavery in the new territories, which eventually led to the Civil War. Mexico suffered heavily from the loss of territory, which was even worse on the nation as there were economic hardships and political instability. This would go on to leave marks on Mexico decades after the war.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Mexico

After the US annexed Texas from Mexico, Mexican-American relationships became tense. When Slidell failed his secret mission to persuade Mexico to accept the US's offer, the US sent their troops to invade. Just before they declared the war, the news spread across the Mexican troops so they attacked American troops. This further triggered the war and the Mexican side's military phase ended when the US captured the capital, New Mexico.

United States of America

After Mexico rejected the money that was offered by the US, they invaded the region. Throughout the invasion and after the declaration of war, the US constantly legitimised their invasion through claiming that Mexico had broken the peace by rejecting the money and fighting back the invasion. Although the US was aggressive throughout the invasion, they had internal conflicts within the country as well. Many Americans, especially abolitionists, saw the war as an attempt for the US to extend slavery and enhance their power.

Timeline of Events

1836	<i>Texas declares independence from Mexico, creating tensions over territorial claims.</i>
March 1, 1845	<i>President John Tyler signed a joint resolution to annex Texas. The resolution called for Texas to enter the United States directly as a state, with its boundaries to be determined after annexation.</i>
November 1845	<i>U.S. envoy John Slidell is sent to Mexico to negotiate, but Mexico refuses to meet him.</i>
April 25, 1846	<i>A skirmish between U.S. and Mexican troops in disputed territory triggers the Mexican-American War.</i>
May 13, 1846	<i>The U.S. Congress officially declares war on Mexico.</i>

September 1846	<i>Battle of Monterrey: U.S. forces capture the Mexican city of Monterrey after intense fighting.</i>
March 9-29, 1847	<i>Siege of Veracruz: The U.S. conducts an assault and captures the key port of Veracruz.</i>
September 14, 1847	<i>U.S. troops occupy Mexico City, marking a decisive victory in the war.</i>
February 2, 1848	<i>The treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo is signed, officially ending the war.</i>
May 30, 1848	<i>The treaty is ratified by both countries, finalizing territorial changes and concluding the conflict.</i>

Treaties and Events

The Missouri Compromise

The Missouri Compromise was an attempt to balance the slavery rate and the expansion of it in the southern states. It resulted in Missouri being a slave state and Maine as a free state. The compromise's main goal was to limit the increase of slavery amongst the United States and possibly stop the division of citizens and ending up in an internal civil-war crisis. Especially newly gained territories amongst southern states. Even though the compromise was made in 1820, it still adds up to the conflicts going on after the Mexican-American war where the gained territories had a crucial increase in the slave population and acted as a catalyst to heating up the internal conflicts. Since the United States gained more than half of Mexico's areas, the southern states passed the line about civil rights agreements made with Mexico in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo about the civilians staying on the American border by the great rise of slavery.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which brought an official end to the war between the United of America and Mexico, was signed on February 2nd, 1848 in Guadalupe Hidalgo. After the Mexican army was defeated in the capital, Mexico City, the Mexican government surrendered to the United States of America and started the negotiations. Since having a defeat in the capital it was a must to come to the table for Mexico, the delegation of them went to Washington. With this treaty Mexico gave 55 percent of its territory, 525,000 square miles, (including the today-states: California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Wyoming.) to United States of America that shaped the west boundaries of the country afterwards with the 1853 Gadsden Purchase. Under the name of "in consideration of the extension acquired by the boundaries of the United States", the United States paid \$15 million and also promised to pay the debt to American citizens by the Mexican government. Other articles included the protection of Mexican citizens' civil rights and property whom now were living in the United States. Even though it seemed like the only possible way out of the American-Mexican war for Mexico, the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo is still being questioned today whether it was the right decision to sign it, by the Mexican citizens.

The Annexation of Texas

James K. Polk achieved the greatest territorial gains by the annexation of Texas, the Oregon Treaty with Britain (1846), and the Mexican-American war (the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo). Even with the success of the independence war of Texas against Mexico the annexation of the territory had to be refrained because of Mexico's war threats until 1844, when president Tyler came to the table for the negotiations with the Republic of Texas. After the Treaty of Annexation diplomatic tension between the United States and Mexico grew and came to the point of war. Which leads to the Annexation of Texas holding a significant place at nearly being the start point of the Mexican-American war. Where the war ended was Mexico losing more than half of its territory and gaining a lot of pressure from the civilians. Also the internal political tension because of Polk's expansionist goals leading to an over-slavery in the new gained territories which later on sought to ban slavery in told areas, remaining a divisive force in the United States of America ending up with a civil war.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Several diplomatic efforts were made to address the growing tensions between the United States and Mexico before the outbreak of the Mexican-American War in 1846, with these efforts primarily concerning territorial disputes following the U.S. annexation of Texas in 1845. One of the earliest attempts to prevent conflict was through diplomatic missions and negotiations when the U.S. sent John Slidell to Mexico in late 1845 with the objective of negotiating the recognition of the Rio Grande as the Texas-Mexico border and offering to purchase California and other northern Mexican territories. However, the Mexican government had recently undergone political upheaval and thus refused to meet with Slidell, viewing the annexation of Texas as an illegal act and the U.S. offer as an insult to their sovereignty, highlighting the deep mistrust and national pride on both sides and making peaceful negotiations nearly impossible.

Another key effort to avoid war was consecutive bilateral discussions and informal communications between Mexican and American officials. The problem that occurred as a result of these, however, was the fact that they lacked a formal framework or international mediation, which could have provided neutral ground for compromise. The U.S. government was strongly driven by the ideology of Manifest Destiny and was more than determined to expand its territory westward while Mexico was also highly determined on the matter of the protection of its territorial integrity. The absence of a neutral third-party mediator or involvement from international organizations meant that both nations approached negotiations with inflexible or rigid positions, and his lack of flexibility and mediation contributed to the breakdown of peaceful resolution attempts.

Possible Solutions

A possible solution would have been finding a peaceful course of action to resolve the differences between parties, similar to the United Nations' diplomatic approach. But since there is approximately a century for such an international organization to exist, it would be the perfect example of historical anachronism. The war has already commenced, so you should focus on military strategy, tactics,

diplomacy, logistics, and internal politics. Both sides should assemble a mobile army resistant enough to withstand the terrain, a functional navy powerful enough to dominate the Gulf of Mexico, and garner public support for their campaigns through the use of religion and coercion if need be.

Please bear in mind that the technological devices available for your use are those present at the time unless you “invent” them. Consider different approaches to formulate your plan, rally the public, and find creative ways to get things done while being realistic. Landscape and demographics can be what makes or breaks your plans, so be sure to have a firm grasp of the terrain and those living there. In addition, you are encouraged to be more knowledgeable about the geo-cultural aspects of the conflict. For example, information on international and national power dynamics could be very practical while trying to find allies.

Be sure to read your character's position and unique background, as this will allow you to more effectively steer your place in the committee. In Historical Committees, creativity is more than welcome; hence, try to find mind-blowing and entertaining ways to be steps ahead of your adversaries. The political support of outside powers and certain influential members in the cabinets would also be of the highest importance. Please equip yourself with enough background knowledge and an eagerness to defeat your opponents and fight to achieve the ultimate glory. Fortune favors the bold! Carpe diem!

Additional Resources

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Mexican-American-War>

<https://www.history.com/topics/19th-century/mexican-american-war>

<https://www.nps.gov/places/the-mexican-american-war.htm>

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