

Westward expansion and the mexican- american war : the unbalanced war research pap...

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The Mexicans called it " The US Invasion". The Americans called it " The Mexican War". So, let's try to understand what exactly happened. What was it that put the flame to the fire in an already smouldering situation? The Mexican-American war lasted almost 2 years - people say that " Mexico was ripe for a takeover" and others say it was America's " manifest destiny" and their land-grabbing greed that made them arrogant enough to send troops into Mexico. In addition, the Americans saw the border of Mexico at the Rio Grande, while to the Mexicans, the border was located much further away at the Neuces River.

According to Stephen J McNamee and Robert K Miller Jnr (The Meritocracy Myth, Spring 2004), United States of America was always lauded as " the land of limitless opportunities" and there were numerous favourable circumstances for a young family starting out to buy land cheaply or be given land to start a settlement, and settle down to a comfortable life. The Industrial Revolution, which started in Europe, was quickly spreading to all American states and life was pretty good. But there were rumblings when around the time of 1846, President Polk was heard to say " Well may the boldest fear and the wisest tremble when incurring responsibilities on which may depend our country's peace and prosperity" (Martin Kelly, 2013). Was this the first " trembling" of an intent to invade Mexico, to acquire some of the Mexican territories, such as California and New Mexico?

" Manifest Destiny" was the phrase used for the first time by John O'Sullivan, a newspaper editor in the US in the early 1845, and it quickly became very popular among all American politicians. It referred to their so called God-appointed right to expand the United States, and it helped those in power to

somewhat justify their land-grabbing behavior. In addition, they had a domineering attitude towards the Native American people and people of non-European descent as they viewed them as incapable of governing themselves.

At the same time, Mexico had recently achieved its independence from Spain and was struggling to get on its feet economically. But nevertheless, Mexico had turned down two formal offers of purchase from USA for California - one for \$5 million in 1835 and the second one in 1845 for \$25 million. Mexico had no intention of selling its territory to help make its most formidable neighbor even bigger and more powerful!

At the same time as these hard economic battles were occurring, thousands of Americans had been invited to settle in the Texas area by the Mexican government. They were also required to convert to Catholicism, the religion of Mexico's mother country, Spain. These brave pioneers took huge risks as these northern borders were rough territories and received almost no backup in any form from the Mexican government. Settling this far at the West meant that they were at the mercy of wild, roaming Native Americans and other "heathens". There were constant skirmishes taking place, and they became more and more discontent with the way the Mexican government was treating them. Eventually the inevitable happened and the citizens rebelled. The result was that Texas became independent of Mexico in 1836 after a short but bloody "Texan War of Independence".

As is usual in quests for 'independence' there were many Mexicans who did not see Texas as independent because their current President, President Santa Anna was in jail in a Texan prison! So the border fights and scraps and

confrontations continued unabated. Fuelling this fire were the Americans who sympathized with the former US-born citizens now living in Texas. Of course, the Mexicans were also seen as uncouth, wild and savage because they had no pure values. Catholicism vs Protestantism was also an issue. Eventually in 1845, the Texan government decided to become part of the United States - but the damage had been done, and Mexico was ripe for a takeover.

If we look closely at Texas - now a part of the US - it is pretty clear why USA wanted it. The land was extremely fertile with cotton being the main lucrative crop. But to have California in the West - ah, that was the dream.. ports on the Pacific ocean opening up potential shipping trade routes across the continent, as well as a railroad! But, to jolt ourselves back to reality, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah and Nevada belonging to Mexico, were between the US and the Pacific - so, no Transamerican railroad for a while! Reports about Texas and California revealed their potential riches, so, somehow, America had to get them from Mexico. But the Mexicans knew a thing or two and the land belonged to them, and they intended to keep it. They definitely intended to keep the States as far away from Mexico City as possible! So far, I have referred to the 'Native Americans' as 'heathens' or 'wild and savage' - which is how they were seen - but besides that they were pretty accomplished at controlling the land and controlling the pioneers - they actually posed more of a threat to the Mexicans than the mighty United States of America! On the brink of the war, there were serious problems between the Mexicans and the Indians. Legend has it that the Mexicans had to get approval from the Indians before they could travel on any roads or

access any land. It goes on to say that the ranchers who were farming simply gave many of their animals to the Indians just in order to keep the peace! And while the Americans looked at the Mexicans as uncouth, many of those very people ended up being part of the new pioneers and eventually becoming fully integrated by marrying Mexicans.

So we have the States itching to expand westwards and get its hands on California as part of its "manifest destiny", and we have Mexico fighting fires on all fronts while trying to stay economically viable. Again, the border between the two countries becomes an international issue. Is the dividing line between Mexico and USA at the Rio Grande River or the Nueces River further north? With troops arriving at the end of each territory, there was a strained standoff. But on April 25 1846, the standoff became a fight and the fight became a war.

President Polk reported to the US Congress that the "cup of forbearance has been exhausted, even before Mexico passed the boundary of the United States, invaded our territory, and shed American blood upon American soil." (History. com). In about three weeks, by the 13 May 1846, United States of America had officially declared war upon Mexico. Notably, Mexico never made a declaration of war. The outcome was somewhat easily predictable: after 21 long, difficult months for Mexico, who never stood a chance against the superior might of the United States, the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo was signed on 2 February 1848.

After the war, it took many, many years for the fellowship between Mexico and America to be rekindled. Mexico lost not only California, but Utah, Arizona and New Mexico as well - making it possible for the American dream

of using Californian ports and building a railroad through to the Pacific. The Mexican-American war was later looked upon as a perfect training opportunity for the troops who also, alas, ended up fighting in the Civil War, both for North and South. So many positives for America out of this war, but virtually none for the poor and old Mexico, who had no great commanding generals, no crackshot, disciplined troops who had been educated at Westpoint, no stable government to guide them, no money to purchase sufficient arms and military equipment and, ultimately no spirit to buoy up the troops. They were doomed from the very beginning

When the cost of the war was added up, almost 14 thousands American soldiers had lost their lives to the tune of \$100 million. The US finally got its land to fulfill its 'manifest destiny' But it also had to pay Mexico \$15 million in compensation. The real cost of the war is never really felt by those in power, but by the ordinary citizens who have to deal with misery and suffering, food shortages, injured and shell-shocked troops, as well as huge loss of life. If only no war had ever been fought

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