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THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR, BY-PRODUCT OF AMERICA'S MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY POLITICAL RIVALRIES

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By Lieutenant-Colonel B.E. Bart

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ABSTRACT

This paper serves as an examination of the people, events, decisions, leaders, and political and religious motivations that ignited the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848. Proper placement of the discussion in context of the first half of the nineteenth century shall explain the circumstances that led two independent nations, geographically connected into a destructive two-year war that significantly affected both nations. This paper does not seek to excuse or debate the outcomes when scoped or measured against current political correctness. Rather, it seeks to understand the mentality, beliefs and geo-political maneuverings of two young republics through a chronological explanation of events within early American history leading up to the war. A description of the evolution of internal American politics helps the reader understand the why Americans supported the country's declaration of war against Mexico. This war was a by-product of American sectional rivalries vying for control of the United States, and because of that rivalry, the Mexican-American War would have happened within a decade of 1846 with the same outcome. This paper concludes with summarizing the aftermath and ramifications of the war on both countries.

CHAPTER 1 – AMERICAN CONSCIOUSNESS

The right of conquest was more respected in the nineteenth century than it is today.¹

Introduction

To properly set the discussion of the events which led to the Mexican-American War requires describing the people and events of the early to mid-nineteenth century. Specifically, the people and events which shaped Colonial America's earliest beliefs, perceptions of itself and effects of its recent history on the American Psyche. Understanding what influenced the Presidential leadership in office leading up to the Mexican-American War, establishes a precedent of America's anti-European, Anglo-phobic view towards the Old World. Eight of the first nine American Presidents had direct involvement with military actions against European countries, specifically Great Britain or France or both. Their belief system provides the foundation for early American decision-makers during this time period, and helps explain why each made certain decisions.

The Keep-Europe-Out mentality took a back seat to the inter-American rivalry, pitting Pro-Slavery vs. Abolitionist factions, each maneuvering for political domination of the United States. The evolutionary process of American expansionism morphed into a visceral sectional rivalry with each rival jockeying for power through the expansion of additional American States formed under their desired precepts and ideals. This rivalry was predominant over other cultural and sovereign boundaries as America pushed westward.

Examining America's earliest history and its perceptions of itself and the world abroad, one begins to paint a picture of a young Republic emerging from the shadow of European influence. America stepped onto the world stage in the early part of the nineteenth century. Beginning with

¹ John S.D. Eisenhower. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848*. New York: Random House, (1989): 370.

Colonial America and its founding, and centers on its most recognizable figures beginning with George Washington through James Polk. To understand the mindset of Americans during the time period leading up to 1846, the discussion begins with George Washington's influence and the precedents he set during his two-term presidency.

The first President; if the national identity of early America could be represented by one person, that person would be George Washington. Washington was the heart and soul of the Colonial Army, de-facto symbol of the American Revolution and first president of the United States. In 1796, President Washington expressed in his farewell address his vision of, and for, America, laying the intellectual foundation for a young Republic still seeking its character while trying to find its place in the world. From this address the American identity, or consciousness, can be seen forming around Washington's idea of isolationism, which based itself on the unsettled nature of the young Republic and his distrust of European monarchies. Washington sought American neutrality in the latest European conflict, the French Revolution (1789-1799), deeming it the prudent course for America.²

President Washington was a Federalist, pushing for a strong central government. He believed that a two-party political system was detrimental to the long-term health of the country. Seemingly clairvoyant when he warned about forming political parties along "geographical discriminations,"³ one could infer a prediction of future wars motivated along political party fault lines. This juxtaposed against the Whig-Democrat fault line more than fifty years later in 1846, seemingly proved Washington's point. Washington vouched for the necessity of a strong central bank to insure the creditworthiness of the country abroad. President Washington started the

² George Washington. Farewell Address 1796, Database: History Reference Center. (U.S. National Archives & Records Administration) 2001: 189.

³ Ibid.

precedent of only serving two terms, voluntarily leaving office in 1796, a precedent that lasted 145 years until Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected for a third term in 1941. President James K. Polk bettered that example and kept his campaign promise of serving one term in office.⁴

Finally, Washington's most lasting influence on American foreign policy came from his desire to avoid lasting entanglements with other countries. He said "It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliance with any portion of the foreign world."⁵ In other words, stay out of European troubles and keep Europe out of America. This belief became the cornerstone of an ideological conviction that permeated early nineteenth-century American thinking.

Washington's vision for America: Understanding the mindset of Americans at that time supports the isolationist view. Stay at home and avoid alliances are most sensible for American foreign policy. Simplifying the goal of an alliance; either to defend one's self or to attack another country or group of countries. Staying out of alliances meant staying out of Europe's war, if possible. Washington's personal experiences during his lifetime were interwoven with the seemingly eternal British-French struggle for military supremacy. The realist influence on Washington correlated directly to his military experiences as an up and coming officer in the French-Indian War, as Army General in the American Revolution and as President trying to navigate his country through another chapter of the English-French conflict by keeping America neutral during the French Revolutionary Wars.⁶ These difficulties showed Washington the intricacies associated with diplomacy and threats posed from foreign intrigue, alliances and the effects of outside foreign influences on American politics.

⁴ Fred I. Greenstein. "The Policy-Driven Leadership of James K. Polk: Making the Most of a Weak Presidency." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 40, no. 4 (December 2010): 726.

⁵ George Washington. Farewell Address 1796, Database: History Reference Center. (U.S. National Archives & Records Administration) 2001: 189.

⁶ Scott A. Silverstone. Federal Democratic Peace: Domestic Institutions and International Conflict in the Early American Republic. *Security Studies* 13, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 61.

What emerges during the first half of the nineteenth century are competing political, economic, social motivations and interests. A veritable stew-pot of personal and political convictions, compelling America in the direction each interest group believed best. What developed in terms of competing factions and political issues fleshed out to be abolitionist vs. pro-slavery, the industrial north vs. the agrarian south, expansionist, native American resettlement, continued European intrigue with accompanying business interest, the Monroe Doctrine, Manifest Destiny and a two party political system that seemed to covet power above all else. European pressures on American decision makers intensified after Washington. President John Adams dealt with the Quasi-War with France 1798-1800 and his struggle to avoid being sucked into this chapter of the British-French conflict. Despite domestic pressure and jeers from opposing political opponents, President Adams successfully kept America from declaring war with France. Thomas Jefferson dealt with the British who plagued his presidency with threats of military action and the risk of being drawn into the Napoleonic Wars raging across Europe.⁷

British influence/continued interference and its impact on the American psyche during the first half of the nineteenth century should not be underestimated.⁸ Using a metaphor to describe this love-hate relationship, the specter of Great Britain appears as a European buzzard, circling high overhead, waiting for America to stumble and impale itself on the many pitfalls of establishing a republic. The British buzzard then swoops down for a hearty meal of colonial liberties. In early American history, Great Britain was always threatening. The British Navy continued attacks on American maritime shipping and impressment of American sailors into the

⁷ Jeremy D. Bailey "Opposition to the Theory of Presidential Representation: Federalists, Whigs and Republicans." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 44, no. 1 (March 2014): 54.

⁸ Lawrence A. Peskin. "Conspiratorial Anglophobia and the War of 1812." *Journal of American History*. 98, no. 3 (December 2011): 649.

Royal Navy. Great Britain contested the United States' northern borders and pushed its own commercial interest above all others, while keeping an ever watchful eye on America, eventually trying to retard its expansionist desires.

The continued American distrust of Great Britain is founded in the lingering animosities between the two nations; "Many, probably most, Americans distrusted Britain long after the Revolution."⁹ The Anglo-American crisis of 1793-1794, the Chesapeake crisis of 1807, the War crisis of 1809 and finally the War of 1812, showed a continual presence of European, specifically British, intrigue that helped shape the world view of early American decision makers to resist an ever menacing British threat. Resolved to free themselves from this danger through means of either negotiation, trade embargoes or even war, early American Presidents, and the country at large, were always suspicious of European dalliances in the new world. Subsequent border disputes over Canadian boundaries in the northeast, accompanied with a more serious dispute over the Oregon territory in the mid-1840s, continued to reaffirm, upon each generation of Americans, an outright distrust for the British. These continued entanglements with British foreign policy threatened the interest of the United States. Having the net effect on Americans developing an autonomic war reflex against the British whenever they entered into the equation, these Anglophobes saw British threats real or perceived lurking in every shadow.¹⁰

In 1807, a British warship attacked the USS Chesapeake off the coast of Norfolk, Virginia. President Jefferson was outraged and began preparations for a possible war with Britain.

"Considering war as one of the alternatives which Congress may adopt on the failure of proper

⁹ Lawrence A. Peskin. "Conspiratorial Anglophobia and the War of 1812." *Journal of American History*. 98, no. 3 (December 2011): 647.

¹⁰ Scott A. Silverstone. Federal Democratic Peace: Domestic Institutions and International Conflict in the Early American Republic. *Security Studies* 13, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 70.

satisfaction for the outrages committed on us by Great Britain.”¹¹ For political leaders and even the man on the street, it showed the complete disregard of American sovereignty and maritime rights. President Jefferson subsequently notified the states to be prepared to provide militia to support an Army of up to 100,000 to defend against British attacks and potentially offensive operations into Canada.¹²

The war fervor subsided over the Chesapeake Affair, and the next issue manifested itself in 1809 with the Enforcement Act. Passed in the waning days of the Jefferson administration, Congress passed the Enforcement Act which attempted to punish British commerce through trade embargos. Questionable on the actual impact to Britain, the Enforcement Act highlighted the continued issue of British interference with American shipping and commerce. Lacking support from American merchants in the northeast, the newly elected President James Madison supported the embargo to the point of wanting to declare war on Britain for its maritime policies. This law, too, lacked unanimous support in congress and showed the fracture along regional alignments, where economics undermined foreign policy with tepid political support for the war.

Rounding out Madison’s presidency and his experiences with the British, Madison’s next attempt at a formal declaration of war proved successful when “in 1812 President Madison requested a declaration of war”¹³ and congress agreed, thus starting the second declared war against Great Britain. Bemoaning the issue of impressment of American sailors accompanied with increased British restrictions of American trade with Europe, President Madison successfully garnered enough congressional support for a declaration of war approval. For

¹¹ Scott A. Silverstone. Federal Democratic Peace: Domestic Institutions and International Conflict in the Early American Republic. *Security Studies* 13, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 71.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 76.

America, at best the War of 1812 was a draw, at worst a murky debacle of limited battlefield success and capital burned by British troops.

Experiences in the War of 1812 did propel the next four out of five future Presidents into Office: James Monroe (5th), John Quincy Adams (6th), Andrew Jackson (7th) and William Henry Harrison (9th), who unceremoniously died a month into his office. Martin Van Buren (8th) served in the New York State Senate during the War. Though the War of 1812 was marginally successful in accomplishing President Madison's goals, the War itself "hastened the growth of a nationalism which warped the American view of her role into a divine mission to evangelize the rest of the world with her one true way,"¹⁴ a galvanization of American precepts of liberty and ridding the new world of the influences from the old.

Briefly discussing the presidential history leading up to the 1840s shows that America's first nine Presidents had experiences either directly or indirectly with conflict among America and European powers. From that conflict-experience, those perceptions and ideals vacillated towards an isolationist slant in American foreign policy. As westward expansion continued, the view of a continental America stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans began to form in the minds of senior leadership and in the country as a whole. Once that continental view took hold in the American consciousness, it became a race to secure as much land as possible to the west of the Mississippi, especially when European nations (Great Britain and Russia) had designs of their own on Oregon and California.

Previous discussions about the love-hate or hate-hate relationship between America and Britain provided additional fuel for the expansionist vehicle racing towards a collision over Oregon. This issue drew more attention for Americans than did the ongoing Texas-Mexico border disputes which will be discussed later. One had only hint at British designs on Oregon

¹⁴ K. Jack Bauer. *The Mexican War, 1846-1848*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., (1974): 1.

before rumors and clamoring for a third war with Britain could be heard. For America it became essential to push farther and faster to the west before European countries could adequately stake ownership claims in the affected territories. The Louisiana Purchase from France in 1803 started the push westward; the Oregon issue focused America's specific attention on the west.¹⁵

Commercial interest in California drew even more interests in order to secure trade with Asian markets. To this, add a weakly defended, sparse Mexican populated southwest region, with a U.S. Government ignoring the claims of a perceived dysfunctional Mexican Government. These issues drew expansionist support and accompanying settlers westward, like the proverbial moth to the flame.

The Monroe Doctrine

We owe it, therefore, to candor and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those powers to declare that we should consider any attempts on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety.¹⁶

Canonized as America's foreign policy for the nineteenth century, what became known as the Monroe Doctrine put into words what America thought its role should be on the world stage, America's view towards westward expansion, and finally America's role at-large in the western hemisphere. Described as "America's declaration of diplomatic independence,"¹⁷ it became a precursor to America's perceived burgeoning dominance in North America. Though lacking the naval ability to enforce a western hemisphere free of European influence, most notably the stalwart British Navy, the precepts of the Monroe Doctrine added to America's notion of having a near divine right to expand and spread its notion of liberty across the continent. In essence, the

¹⁵ Jeremy D. Bailey "Opposition to the Theory of Presidential Representation: Federalists, Whigs and Republicans." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 44, no. 1 (March 2014): 54.

¹⁶ President James Monroe's address to congress, December 2, 1823.

¹⁷ Marco Mariano. "Isolationism, internationalism and the Monroe Doctrine." *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9, no. 1 (March 2011): 35.

document did more for America than affect any real change in the perspective of America. From an outsider's viewpoint, it appeared quite audacious for the young upstart nation to puff its chest out and notionally stake claim to such a large portion of the new world.¹⁸

For expansionists in America, the Monroe Doctrine provided a formal statement validating their previous claims for continued westward expansion, the precursor for adding additional states to the union. The document also expressed interest further south since "Latin America was the object of the document, but the subject was Transatlantic relations; the New World versus the Old World."¹⁹ The Monroe Doctrine served as a warning for other nations to steer clear of the region. For isolationists, the Monroe Doctrine provided a manifesto to stay out of European conflicts and keep Europe, most notably the British, out of America's interest.²⁰ The ideas within this document showcased a continual evolution within American thinking that America would continue to grow and evolve, expand its borders and, good or bad, spread its ideals across the region. It pitted itself as the underdog and advocate for New World principles, free of Old World thinking and monarchical despotism. "The Monroe Doctrine embodied the relation between US identity and security through the creations of a Manichean world in which Europe was the negative other."²¹

Manifest Destiny

¹⁸ Dov. H. Levin, and Benjamin Miller. "Why Great Powers Expand in their Own Neighborhood: Explaining the Territorial Expansion of the United States 1819-1848." *International Interactions*, 37, (2011): 237.

¹⁹ Marco Mariano. "Isolationism, internationalism and the Monroe Doctrine." *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9, no. 1 (March 2011): 36.

²⁰ Lane Crothers. "The cultural roots of isolationism and internationalism in American foreign policy." *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9, no. 1 (March 2011): 23.

²¹ Marco Mariano. "Isolationism, internationalism and the Monroe Doctrine." *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9, no. 1 (March 2011): 43.

Manifest Destiny, as O'Sullivan explained it, described the United States providential mission to extend its systems of democracy, federalism, and personal freedom, as well as to accommodate its rapidly growing population by ultimately taking possession of the entire North American continent.²²

In the years preceding the outbreak of the Mexican-American War, a new era of mass communication appeared with the wide circulation of newspapers. With its ability to communicate with masses of people quickly across a wide region, political pundits, parties and differing factions were able to spread their message to a whole new group of readers. John L. O'Sullivan is credited with coining the term "Manifest Destiny" in 1845. A journalist from New York, Mr. O'Sullivan's position as editor and co-founder of two newspapers, provided him the ability to insert his own prescriptions for American expansion. Because of the newspaper's ability to reach large quantities of people, Mr. O'Sullivan was able to define the narrative for most Americans in relation to annexation of Texas into the Union. Building from earlier expansionist views like that of former Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, whose statements referenced the achievements of the Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819, where Adams referred to the treaty's achievements affecting North America as "rendered it still more unavoidable that the remainder of the continent should ultimately be ours."²³ This alluded to the treaty's intended purpose of being a stepping stone for future territorial acquisitions.

To the common man, a cursory glance at the concepts of Manifest Destiny provided a seemingly logical explanation of America's interest and so-called right to grow. Some of O'Sullivan's more peaceful opinions such as, "the United States would wait for peoples living elsewhere to realize the advantages of annexation and voluntarily seek incorporation into the

²² The United States and Mexico at War, *Nineteenth-Century Expansionism and Conflict*. MacMillan Reference USA: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, (1998): 234.

²³ Dov. H. Levin, and Benjamin Miller. "Why Great Powers Expand in their Own Neighborhood: Explaining the Territorial Expansion of the United States 1819-1848." *International Interactions*, 37, (2011): 241.

Union,”²⁴ here O’Sullivan’s explanation of Manifest Destiny appears counter-intuitive to the mantra espoused by expansionists. Newspapers proved an efficient vehicle to distribute information quickly and affordably. The opinions prescribed by various factions within American government became very shrewd at using the medium to further their cause. Both political parties used this medium to incite the public to rally support for their cause. Seldom were differing opinions offered as a counterpoint or placed alongside for equal discussion. Here again, the issue of potential military action, or third war, against Great Britain, newspapers were used to stir up patriotic fervor in favor of action.

My attempt to retrace early American ideals back to the founding fathers was meant to outline a history of continued strife with European powers that helped shape the precepts and convictions of American leaders leading up to the Mexican-American War. What developed were isolationist views towards foreign policy. An America first mentality manifested itself in regards to domestic issues that overlooked, or completely ignored, competing interest in the name of expansionism, morphing both of these precepts into an American hegemony attempting to control events in the new world.²⁵

²⁴ The United States and Mexico at War, *Nineteenth-Century Expansionism and Conflict*. MacMillan Reference USA: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, (1998): 234.

²⁵ Dov. H. Levin, and Benjamin Miller. “Why Great Powers Expand in their Own Neighborhood: Explaining the Territorial Expansion of the United States 1819-1848.” *International Interactions*, 37, (2011): 251.

CHAPTER 2 – PRELUDE TO WAR

An Accident of fate and European power politics had cast the United States and Mexico as Neighbors; the United States determination to increase its national territory set the two countries on a collision course.²⁶

The political and cultural struggle happening in the early nineteenth century set a course for the inevitable clash between the United States and Mexico. The date of that clash was not predetermined, but if not in 1846, then 1847 or 1848, or, at the most, a year or two later. The continued stream of American settlers pushed westward, continuing to expand American culture and influence across the Texas territory to California. For America, the issues of Texas Annexation, a dispute with Great Britain over the Oregon territory and its goals of westward expansion fueled the mindset of mid-nineteenth century Americans looking to the West as an opportunity to expand its borders.

Internal American influences consisted of the sectional rivalries between north and south, each vying for control of the Presidency and Congress. External influences included Old World Europe, with the main antagonist of Great Britain continuing to play its role in motivating subsequent American administrations to push expansion further westward. Continual European external influences acted as a rallying point for American nationalism to unite both northern and southern interest in a common cause. Finally, the level of dysfunction within the Mexican Government post-independence from Spain (1822-1845) greatly aided in the eventual loss of its northern territories to the United States. A series of revolutions and counter-revolutions acted to destabilize Mexico's ability to adequately administer governmental rule over those territories, thus dooming their attachment to a troubled Mexico.

The argument that Mexico with its dysfunctional government in the 1830s could have instituted necessary changes to thwart American influence in the Texas territory does not hold

²⁶ Timothy J. Henderson. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, (2007): 22.

water. The Mexican government was unable to pass the requisite reforms necessary to improve their ability to effectively govern northern Mexican territories (Texas, New Mexico and California). Many reasons hampered effective institutional reforms within the Mexican government that negatively affected its ability to influence the Texas territory. First, the distance between Mexico City and the Texas territory was too far to maintain positive control or influence events there. Second, an appalling, almost non-existent transportation network that stifled commercial trade along a north-south route to counter east-west trade between Texas and the United States. Third, there were too few Spanish-speaking Mexican citizens which actually lived in the region, the result from its war of independence from Spain 1810-1821. Specifically in the region of Texas, its Spanish-speaking population “had been reduced from a high of some four thousand in 1810 to barely more than two thousand in 1820.”²⁷

What Texas did contain was a large presence of Native American or indigenous Indian tribes with population estimates ranging between thirty and forty thousand. A nomadic people with no love for either Mexicans or Anglo-American settlers.

By the mid-1830’s, many of the Indian groups began to escalate their raids and attacks on various Mexican villages and towns throughout Northern Mexico, depopulating many of them and further weakening the Mexican states hold over much of Northern Mexico.²⁸

The feeble Mexican government presence in Texas was unable to provide adequate security against Comanche and Cherokee Indian raids or mobilize an effective offensive capability to neutralize threats. Defending their own lands and right to exist, the Native Americans stymied any chance of establishing settlements loyal to Mexico City and the possibility of providing an effective buffer zone against American settlers. Fourth was Mexico’s own immigration policy,

²⁷ Timothy J. Henderson. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, (2007): 37.

²⁸ Dov H. Levin, and Benjamin Miller. Why Great Powers Expand in their Own Neighborhood: Explaining the Territorial Expansion of the United States 1819-1848. *International Interactions*, 37, (2011): 242.

by signing a colonization law in August of 1824 that allowed for, and actually encouraged, Anglo-American immigration into the Texas territory. With this official authorization, the Mexican government incorrectly believed “that the American settlers would assimilate and become loyal Mexicans.”²⁹ The Mexican government’s attempt to effectively manage the stream of foreign immigration, predominantly American, from Mexico City, a distance of some 700 miles, was tantamount to opening the flood gates, holding its breath and hoping for the best.

Running counter to Mexican dreams of an immigrant friendly Texas were the beliefs of American expansionists. Their goals would continue to push American settlers further west into what is now New Mexico, Arizona, California and parts of Nevada. “The fact is that Mexico stood in the way of the American dream of Manifest Destiny;”³⁰ the American dream would be realized through legal and illegal immigration, political maneuverings and potentially military action if necessary. Time was on the side of American expansionists, every season more and more settlers moved into the disputed Texas territory. The constant stream of settlers quickly outnumbered native Mexicans. The relocation or extermination of native Indian tribes was another by-product of this westward expansion by Americans. The expansionist end-goal would eventually see the Independent Republic of Texas, established in 1836, gravitating towards annexation and statehood with the United States. Future border disputes between Mexico and an independent Texas almost certainly would have happened, igniting hostilities and an eventual war. The fact that it happened in 1846 was a culmination of many factors. Given a few more years, the balance of forces would have continued to favor the pro-American powers.

Texas

²⁹ Dov H. Levin, and Benjamin Miller. Why Great Powers Expand in their Own Neighborhood: Explaining the Territorial Expansion of the United States 1819-1848. *International Interactions*, 37, (2011): 241.

³⁰ John S.D. Eisenhower. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848*. New York: Random House, (1989): xviii.

The annexation of Texas: the singular issue that contributed the most to the Mexican-American War of 1846. The idea of an independent Texas had many backers. Texans themselves, most of whom were American settlers seeking a better life and promises of cheap property, they sought independence and viewed self-rule as better than bowing to unrealistic demands from a perceived derelict Mexican government. An aggressive expansionist view from America and its wish to add another state to the union, southern motivations for acquiring Texas sought to offset its loss of equality in the House of Representatives, with an additional southern-leaning state or states. The potential of such a large territory like Texas offered the potential opportunity for “its division into three or four states had an obvious appeal to many southerners.”³¹ Southern powers had previously managed to derail policies counter to their own ideology by maintaining equal representation in the Senate through equal number of pro-slavery to free-states. The push for Texas annexation enraged northern abolitionists who perceived it as a plot by southern slave holders to expand the reach of slavery and continue the vile act into new territories. President Polk, a slave owner himself, did little to convince them otherwise and left anti-slavery groups believing the entire war was nothing but an attempt to expand slavery westward. The family ties between settlers in Texas and their families elsewhere in the United States, predominately throughout southern states, were very strong and greatly contributed to the financial and military support to Texas when it fought for independence.³²

³¹ K. Jack Bauer. *The Mexican War, 1846-1848*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., (1974): 3.

³² Gregory D. Smithers. American Abolitionism and Slave-Breeding Discourse: A Re-Evaluation. *Slavery & Abolition*, 33, no. 4 (December 2012): 553.

A pair of battles in 1836 that heavily influenced American perceptions of the Texas-Mexico struggle were the Alamo and Goliad.³³ The battles were widely reported in American newspapers which could reach large masses of people across the entire country. Pro-annexation media portrayed the struggle as an updated version of the American Revolution. This time, the revolution was taking place in the southwest between a desperate group of American settlers fighting for their lives and their independence against the Mexican Army. The storming of the Alamo and the deaths of its defenders was the first travesty. The summary execution of some 300 plus men executed on Palm Sunday at Goliad, who had previously surrendered, “reinforced the image of Mexican tyranny and Anglo gallantry”³⁴ in the minds of most Americans. The feelings among Americans connected to Texas turned from casual support to that of vengeance and called for a reckoning which demanded justice. The killings of Americans and Texans at Goliad, and the Alamo, dashed any hopes of reconciliation and of bringing Texas back into the fold of Mexico proper. To this day, the battle of the Alamo is engrained in Americans as the pinnacle moment in the course of Texas independence and eventual path towards statehood.

Another source of interest in the push for American annexation of Texas came from then President John Tyler (1841-1845). An enigmatic political figure who is often overlooked in the discussion of the Mexican-American war, but whose own political motivations, and want of re-election in 1844, pushed the issue of Texas annexation to the forefront of American political discussion. President Tyler was the first vice-president to succeed to higher office due to the untimely death of William Henry Harrison only a few months into his term of office in 1841. President Tyler’s own beliefs put him at odds with his own party and he quickly became a man

³³ Dov H. Levin, and Benjamin Miller. Why Great Powers Expand in their Own Neighborhood: Explaining the Territorial Expansion of the United States 1819-1848. *International Interactions*, 37, (2011): 244.

³⁴ Timothy J. Henderson. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, (2007): 97.

without party backing. Lacking popular support of the American people, “Tyler saw the annexation of Texas as the magical issue that would provide him with enough public support to get re-elected as an independent in the 1844 elections.”³⁵ Here we see political motivations and want of political power take precedence over the recognition of potential lives lost and damage caused from a war with Mexico. Due to some political mishaps, the actual approval of Texas’s annexation was pushed to the last day of President Tyler’s office. It was too little too late to ensure his re-election, but the issue was teed up for the newly elected James Polk. President Polk and his administration were all too eager to press the issue and add Texas to the fold of American states.³⁶

Oregon

Another fixation for expansionists looking towards the west coast was the Oregon territory. Armed with the belief in America’s inherent right to expand drew the country’s attention to the Pacific Northwest and the Oregon territory. British interest in this territory and their perceived designs on expanding their foothold farther south from Canada drew much of America’s focus to this territorial dispute in the years 1845-46. Oregon became another hot-button issue for anti-British sentiment with factions on both parties and across all regions uniting in a common purpose. The dispute over the boundary between Canada and America became a rallying cry of “Fifty-four forty or Fight,” representing the parallel 54°40’ north, which overshadowed the happenings in Texas at this time. The issue of Oregon’s boundaries and Britain’s competing interest were the primary concern until the issue was finally settled in 1846. The seriousness of both aggrieved parties’ willingness to go to war over this issue highlights how close a third war

³⁵ Levin and Miller. *Why Great Powers Expand in their Own Neighborhood...*, 246.

³⁶ Edward B. Rugemer. “Robert Monroe Harrison, British Abolition, Southern Anglophobia and Texas Annexation. *Slavery and Abolition*, 28, no. 2 (Aug 2007): 177.

between Great Britain and the United States came to happen. President Polk was resigned that war with Britain, over the issue of Oregon, was indeed probable when he said “if we must have war with Great Britain we may as well have it now as leave it to our successor.”³⁷ President Polk was resolved to play a game of chicken over the Oregon territory issue and was resolved not to be the first to blink in the game of power politics.

For the United States, the hardline support for all of Oregon came from northwestern democrats who were “motivated by lingering suspicion of the United Kingdom and disgust with its imperial global reach.”³⁸ These hardliners kept the pressure on President Polk to take a firm stance throughout the crisis. The importance of Oregon for other northern interest lie in its addition to the union as a pro-federalist state, free of slavery. Oregon was more important to northern interest than the issue of Texas annexation for southern supporters as seen in their ability to rally America’s political resolve for Oregon. Britain’s involvement in anything on the continent set-off American nationalist alarm bells, focusing the country’s attention on that issue. To some degree, much like any family squabble is quickly forgotten when that family is threatened from the outside. The north-south issue was not fully manifested yet and when threatened from Britain over Oregon, the internal country differences between abolitionists and pro-slavery backers was temporarily set aside. America’s perceived arch-nemesis was at it again, attempting to dictate to America what it could and could not do. No country was as polarizing to American resolve and willingness to dig-in on an issue like Great Britain.³⁹

³⁷ Scott A. Silverstone. Federal Democratic Peace: Domestic Institutions and International Conflict in the Early American Republic. *Security Studies* 13, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 85.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

³⁹ Lawrence A. Peskin. “Conspiratorial Anglophobia and the War of 1812.” *Journal of American History*. 98, no. 3 (December 2011): 668.

President Polk continued to seek advice from his political mentor, former President Andrew Jackson. From retirement Jackson advised Polk to stay the course and too “take a strong hand”⁴⁰ when dealing with Britain over the Oregon territory. Here, economics played the strongest hand in determining the final outcome between Britain and America. The cost of war outweighed benefits gained from acquiring the disputed territory. The continual influx of American settlers into the Oregon territory also worked to strengthen Polk’s hand in negotiations, tipping the balance in representation and consolidating an American presence. Negotiations between Great Britain and the United States continued with cooler heads prevailing in steering the countries away from war. Both parties would agree on the 49th parallel of latitude as the prescribed boundary between British Canada and the United States with this the 54-40 claim faded into history with ratification by the U.S. Senate by a vote of 41-14. The matter of Oregon was put to bed in 1846 and issue of Texas became the new focus in American newspapers and houses of Congress.⁴¹

The British continued with their political intrigues involving Texas independence and its relationship with Mexico when it “sent an ambassador Henry George Ward, who sought advantage for England partly by discrediting the American ambassador at every opportunity.”⁴² Though not to the point of risking open war with the United States like the Oregon issue had nearly done, British efforts in the Texas-Mexico dispute sought to contain or curtail growth in American expansionism while protecting their financial interest in Mexico. Britain continued to dabble in America’s affairs, intentionally or unintentionally helping to shape America’s foreign

⁴⁰ John S.D. Eisenhower. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848*. New York: Random House, (1989): 23.

⁴¹ Fred I. Greenstein. “The Policy-Driven Leadership of James K. Polk: Making the Most of a Weak Presidency.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 40, no. 4 (December 2010): 728.

⁴² Timothy J. Henderson. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, (2007): 42.

and domestic policies. With the Oregon issue resolved and America's attention turning toward Texas, America's territorial wandering eye turned to other regions such as California.

California

The lure of trading routes to Asia and deep water ports on the west coast enticed American commercial interest to California. Viewed as the "real prize,"⁴³ California served as a natural western boundary to the westward looking expansionist. Much like Texas, this territory lay at the extreme reach of the dysfunctional government in Mexico City during the 1840s. Other factors contributing to the eventual annexation of California into America were distance from Mexico City, its lack of effective governance and a very minimal Mexican military capability. Mexico's lack of an effective military presence was best summed up by its own military commander in the area when he said "the Mexican government could either consent to what it could not prevent or command without being able to enforce its edicts."⁴⁴ Accompanied with tumultuous maneuverings of ineffectual Mexican leaders, allowed for California to slowly drift from its moorings of a territory loyal to Mexico City. A failed reassertion of Mexican central control in 1842 ended in 1845 with their acting governor being driven from the state by native Californians.⁴⁵ A subsequent expedition to again reassert itself in late 1845 failed to develop. Like Oregon and Texas, American settlers immigrating into California began to tilt the fate of California much like the other two territories. With time, the number of Americans would outnumber and overwhelm any semblance of effective Mexican governance.⁴⁶

⁴³ Sally Frahm. "The Cross and the Compass: Manifest Destiny, Religious Aspects of the Mexican-American War." *Journal of Popular Culture*, 35, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 95.

⁴⁴ Dov H. Levin, and Benjamin Miller. Why Great Powers Expand in their Own Neighborhood: Explaining the Territorial Expansion of the United States 1819-1848. *International Interactions*, 37, (2011): 249.

⁴⁵ K. Jack Bauer. *The Mexican War, 1846-1848*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., (1974): 13.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Reports to President Polk relayed an apparent dissatisfaction of local inhabitants and recent American settlers with the so-called Mexican authorities. Time, speed and distance between the territories continued working against Mexico City. An increasing number of pro-American settlers were beginning to immigrate into the California Territory, accompanied with increased shipping interest, commercial trade with Asian Markets and fear of a growing threat by British interest in California, real or imagined. “American haste to occupy California, for example, was prompted more by hyped fears of potential British action than by concern of what Mexico would do.”⁴⁷ Supported with reports from American contacts, President Polk surmised that “California was ripe for a peaceful conquest through infiltration and subversion.”⁴⁸ With these reports the cunning President Polk happily took action. Other Old World interests, including Russia, who “made plain their interest in acquiring California,”⁴⁹ increased a perceived need by the Polk administration to lay claim to California before other nations would. Additional territories ripe for the picking included what would become the states of New Mexico and parts of Nevada. Both coveted for their valuable trade routes between Santa Fe and Missouri, with estimates of trade value in the millions. The territory also provided a southern immigration route into California for American settlers and served as a link through which the American government could extend its influence and maintain communications to the west coast.

Dysfunctional Mexican Government

The level of dysfunction within Mexican politics and its government following its independence from Spain is astounding. Revolution followed by counter-revolution became the

⁴⁷ John S.D. Eisenhower. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848*. New York: Random House, (1989): xx; see also Bauer, *The Mexican War...*, 12.

⁴⁸ K. Jack Bauer. *The Mexican War, 1846-1848*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., (1974): 13.

⁴⁹ Timothy J. Henderson. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, (2007): 31.

signature representation in the years between Mexico's independence from Spain and the outbreak of the Mexican-American War in 1846. The one thing that all political factions did agree on was the threat of the United States and what that meant for their continued rule of Mexican territories. Here we see British efforts to aid in building anti-American sentiment during the years prior to declaration of war. "H.G. Ward went to some lengths during the 1820's to inflame Mexican anxieties regarding U.S. intentions toward Texas."⁵⁰ Though not the main cause of anti-Americanism, British fingerprints are seen once again attempting to shape the environment more favorable to the British Empire at the expense of the United States.

A common trait among despotic governments is to focus the attention of its populace on an outside threat, real or perceived. In this case the threat was the United States, and it was very real. The Mexican government, in its many forms of elected presidents or military dictatorships, had the ability to divert, even for a short time, the attention of the uneducated masses away from their corrupt leadership onto an outsider. By stirring nationalistic feelings, these dysfunctional governments were able to survive in one form or another, if only for a few years until the next revolution swept them out of power. The perceived threat or encroachment this time was from the menacing United States. Mexico was viewed as "the sick man of North America"⁵¹ by the United States and the Mexican ruling class knew it. However, they were unable and personally unwilling to put the needs of their country over personal or factional needs. Mexican leaders could not gain an effective majority of political support long enough to resist the oncoming advances of American immigration and influence. Furthermore, how can a government

⁵⁰ Timothy J. Henderson. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, (2007): 50.

⁵¹ Dov H. Levin, and Benjamin Miller. "Why Great Powers Expand in their Own Neighborhood: Explaining the Territorial Expansion of the United States 1819-1848." *International Interactions*, 37, (2011): 239.

effectively govern with its presidency changing 21 times in the 16 years (1829-1845) leading up to the Mexican-American War in 1846? Little to no time was given to allow for changes in governance and reforms to take hold. Political rivals only had to wait them out, stir anti-government sentiment among the people or find a member of the military willing to back their cause with some military muscle. Governments changed with the raising of torches and pitchforks by mobs or armed factions who marched on the capital, deposing one feeble government with their own glorified version. Within a year or two the process repeated itself to the detriment of the Mexican people.⁵²

Rampant corruption, poverty, insurrection, debt and the Catholic Church's ownership of three quarters of arable land not being used to produce crops in Mexico, all contributed greatly to the reduction of Mexico's economic output.⁵³ Seemingly implausible to the rational outsider was the willingness of the various ruling classes in Mexico to be continually drawn into political interludes with Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. The ultimate opportunist, Santa Anna repeatedly played on nationalistic demands for prosecution of Mexican citizens' rights, while repeatedly betraying that trust for his own glorification. This relationship appears like that of a battered house wife, powerless or reluctant to divorce itself from an abusive husband and dictator, because fear of the unknown is greater than the fear of the known. Consequently, the steps required to gain political solidarity between factions never materialized. Any steps forward by a coherent Mexican government attempting to install a rule-of-law that benefited the common man was quickly overturned by the repeated revolutions, coups and dictatorships which plowed under any measurable forward progress.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Timothy J. Henderson. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, (2007): 183.

CHAPTER 3 – OPPOSING LEADERS

The 1840's was the age of the individual, in which faceless bureaucrats did not exist.⁵⁴

James K. Polk: First elected to congress at the age of 29, where he served a total of seven terms representing the state of Tennessee. Before leaving congress he served as Speaker of House of Representatives. Elected Governor of Tennessee where he served one-term. Elected as the 11th President of the United States at the age of 49, being the youngest person elected president to that date. Serving only one-term he chose to walk away from a potential second term, upholding a campaign promise. During his four years in office, he nearly drew the country into a third declared war with Great Britain. He fought and won a war with Mexico and in the end doubled the size of the United States.⁵⁵

A closer examination of President James Polk reveals a shrewd and cunning politician. Examining President Polk's decision to allow former President of Mexico, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna to re-enter Mexico from his exile in Cuba. The knee-jerk reaction would imply a naïve and gullible President who falsely put his faith in a less than trustworthy former despot. Acquiring more territory through Texas annexation and eventual statehood were President Polk's true intentions all along. Replacing the current leader of Mexico with a so-called pro-American Santa Anna was a red herring and cover in case the issue came to light in the American press. President Polk knew what kind of person Santa Anna was, and shrewdly calculated that he, in fact, would rally enough support and goad him into attacking U.S. forces in or around the disputed Texas borders. Viewing President Polk's decision in regard to Santa Anna's return to power shows a depth of planning and acumen for strategic level intrigue which should be viewed

⁵⁴ John S.D. Eisenhower. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848*. New York: Random House, (1989): xxiii.

⁵⁵ Greenstein, Fred I. "The Policy-Driven Leadership of James K. Polk: Making the Most of a Weak Presidency." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 40, no. 4 (December 2010): 727.

as a master stroke of political genius. It can be adequately compared to the German government's decision to secretly transport Lenin back into Russia in a sealed German train in April 1917. Both had similar goals of destabilizing that nation's opposition and capability by installing a friendlier leader. Though unlike the German government's plan, Polk's plan worked. A poignant reminder of the degree to which President Polk coveted new territories was the fact that Santa Anna was the Mexican leader responsible for the deaths of nearly 250 defenders, most of which were American citizens, at the Alamo and at Goliad where 350 prisoners were summarily executed.⁵⁶

President Polk was determined to grow the size of the United States through acquisition of additional territories. "Despite his guile and his consuming obsession with partisan politics, he was effective as an executive. Manifest Destiny was not Polk's invention, but he was its ideal agent."⁵⁷ Several influences fueled his determination to acquire additional lands including the continued interference of European powers and the perceived American virtue of rightful expansion. President Polk's strategy referred to as the "application of graduated force"⁵⁸ sought to place Mexico in a position he thought would be so disadvantageous, they would willingly part with Texas, California and New Mexico. Add in financial incentives to smooth out the wrinkles of abdicating its territories to the United States, President Polk's grand strategy included strategic political maneuverings, spiced with overtures of potential military action, accompanied with financial rewards; these became the methods of procurement during his four years in office.

⁵⁶ John S.D. Eisenhower. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848*. New York: Random House, (1989): 13.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, xxvi.

⁵⁸ K. Jack Bauer. *The Mexican War, 1846-1848*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., (1974): xix.

When scoped through the lenses of ends, ways and means, or objectives, constraints and resources, President Polk's strategy for one-term in office was quite successful. By examining his ends, President Polk had clearly defined objectives: California, Oregon and Texas. He wanted territory and lots of it. He wanted to expand the country's borders as far west as he could, and the Pacific Ocean provided a natural western boundary. Mexico, for its part, became the main objective and fall-guy for Polk's strategy of territorial conquest. Either through negotiation or military action, Mexico would succumb to Polk's strategic objectives.

Looking at ways or constraints, for President Polk it was money, political support and size of the American military. America was on the rise economically and had the financial capability necessary to purchase the territory outright from Mexico. Since negotiations failed, the money was used to finance a military campaign. America's real constraints lay in the size of its military and to some extent unanimous political support in congress. Though the surge in American nationalism drowned out political objections early on, opponents to the war were rallying support by late 1847. The size of America's regular army at the start of the campaign was the only true constraint. Through political maneuverings and favorable messaging by American newspapers of the plight of Texas,⁵⁹ President Polk was able to garner enough popular support to recruit, train and deploy a sizeable enough Army to successfully invade Mexico.

The means or resources which America required to prosecute the war were plenty. The nationalistic zeal which swept America at the outbreak of hostilities provided ample recruits to man a sizeable enough force with the capability of defeating Mexican forces. A core of professionally trained Commissioned Officers and soldiers provided a solid foundation around which America's army could build itself. Though the outcome of the war was favorable for

⁵⁹ John S.D. Eisenhower. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848*. New York: Random House, (1989): 15.

President Polk and America, his initial hopes for a quick war never materialized and, in the end, cost both countries exponentially more in troops and treasure than he initially thought. President Polk fell prey to a common misconception that with enough planning and personal will, wars can be quick and bloodless. Seldom, if ever, does this maxim come to fruition.

If a negotiated settlement failed, the alternative was to goad the Mexicans into attacking U.S. forces, all the while undermining their government with the insertion of a megalomaniacal loose cannon in the form of Santa Anna. This was a shrewd maneuver requiring a leader with a willingness to intrigue at the strategic level. Taken separately, the Mexico campaign was individually a successful endeavor for President Polk; taken together, with the Oregon issue and potential war with England and its eventual settlement, President Polk was either extremely lucky, or the only one playing chess while other world leaders were playing checkers at the time.

Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna: Definitely the most colorful character on both sides of the Mexican-American War. Indeed, he was the most memorable leader Mexico produced during the first half of the nineteenth century. Some of his characteristics included a gambler who loved cockfighting. He was wealthy to the extent of being considered a millionaire by today's standards. His leadership style was described as bold and decisive in early campaigns, a patriot who was a shameless self-promoter. He possessed a keen understanding of the common man and was able to manipulate mob-rule into political support. He had no formal military development as a leader, rather rose through the ranks being "schooled in the give-no-quarter, take-no-prisoners methods of the Spanish army, and he developed a penchant for cruelty."⁶⁰ Santa Anna most certainly was a charismatic leader with an innate ability not only to thrive, but also to survive the flotsam and jetsam of early nineteenth century Mexican politics. Further descriptions

⁶⁰ Timothy J. Henderson. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, (2007): 77.

portray him as “a zealous nationalist, his dedication to the glories of Mexico never wavered, but at the same time he was unstable, greedy, and vainglorious.”⁶¹

Entering the Spanish military in 1810, Santa Anna began his career at the early age of 16 with the help of family, entering as a cadet serving near his home in Vera Cruz. An early harbinger of his future tumultuous career found Santa Anna putting down the earliest uprising to Spanish authority in 1813. Before the age of 20 he was a combat veteran, having experienced first-hand the collusions of rebellion in the Texas territory. Ever the opportunist, Santa Anna switched sides during Mexico’s fight for independence. He rose to national fame for gathering, arming and leading a military force that defeated a Spanish invasion at the port city of Tampico in 1829. His retirement from the army was short lived, and by 1833, Santa Anna was elected to his first term as President of Mexico, and would serve a total of eleven terms of various lengths throughout his lifetime. Before the end of 1834, Santa Anna had dissolved congress and declared himself dictator. The following year he replaced the Mexican Constitution with his own authoritarian prescriptions for Mexico’s success called the Seven Laws.

Santa Anna’s proclamations of 1835 set in motion a series of events that led to Texas’s independence and eventual annexation into the United States less than a decade later. Mexico’s enforcement of a law against slavery and collection of taxes on imports into Texas resulted in the armed revolt of American settlers. In early 1836, Santa Anna personally led an Army north to crush the beginnings of a revolution. So confident in himself that “he would continue his march, he declaimed, and raise the Mexican flag over the Capitol in Washington.”⁶² The results of his expedition was the storming of the Alamo and the killing of all its defenders. As Commander,

⁶¹ John S.D. Eisenhower. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848*. New York: Random House, (1989): 9; see also Henderson, *A Glorious Defeat...*,102.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 13.

Santa Anna oversaw the execution of some 350 American prisoners at Goliad. Summarily defeated and later captured at the battle of San Jacinto, Santa Anna was forced to sign the Treaties of Velasco. As a prisoner of war he was sent to Washington in 1837 where he met President Andrew Jackson, who later sent him back to Mexico with an American Navy escort where he became a private citizen again.

A recurring theme in his life and career, Santa Anna, like the phoenix, rose from the ashes of obscurity to defeat a French invasion in 1838. By 1841 he'd returned to power at the head of a coup which began another term as president. During this term in office, he pursued a border war with Texas, with raids and skirmishes by both sides along the disputed boundaries. Santa Anna failed to grasp the effect that American newspapers had on shaping the narrative on the Texas-Mexico conflict. This new form of media swayed popular support within America for the Texans and portrayed them as the wronged party. By 1844 he was ousted from power and his second term of office had ended, unceremoniously. Santa Anna was sent into exile on the island of Cuba. Within two years, he once again returned to Mexico with the help of President Polk based on guarantees of a peaceful solution between America and Mexico. In late September, Santa Anna lead a small Army headed north to defeat Major General Zachery Taylor. The ensuing battle of Buena Vista was a stunning defeat of Santa Anna and neutralized the Mexican Army in the north. Santa Anna headed south to deal with a more potent threat of Winfield Scott's landing at Vera Cruz.⁶³

Santa Anna was dealt a series of defeats: first, at Cerro Gordo, then, Contreras and Churubusco, and finally, Mexico City. Having been out fought, out maneuvered, out gunned and out soldiered, Santa Anna fell from Mexico's grace by the end of 1847, and once again, found

⁶³ John S.D. Eisenhower. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848*. New York: Random House, (1989): 15.

himself out of power. His period of solitude lasted until 1853 when he returned to the presidency for the last time. Eventually forced into exile in 1855, he returned to Mexico as a private citizen and died in 1876.

Santa Anna, then, provides perhaps the ultimate proof that nineteenth-century Mexico was less than the sum of its parts, and that whoever controlled the critical parts controlled, to a perilous degree, the nation's destiny.⁶⁴

General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna was a sum of the parts of nineteenth century Mexico. Dysfunctional, erratic, proud, war criminal, arrogant and pugnacious, he represented the extremities to which Mexico found itself in searching for stability of any kind. A charismatic narcissist with delusions of grandeur who rose to power eleven times in a tumultuous era. His magnetism carried the day and gave temporary hope, if only for a moment to a people where there was none. He understood what it took to gain power, yet lost that reasoning and foresight once he held it. He was a zealot in the defense of Mexico who stood strong against the machinations and desires of Old World enemies that defeated Spanish and French invasions. Yet, through his barbarity, he lost the battle for Texas and hopes of reconciliation with its northern territories. Out soldiered and soundly beaten by the U.S. Army, he lost his country's capital and hopes for a negotiated settlement on favorable terms. He was the face of Mexico for the nineteenth century and above all else, he was a survivor who managed to live into his eighties.⁶⁵

Zachary Taylor: Entered the Army in 1808 as a commissioned officer, fighting in the War of 1812, the Black Hawk and Second Seminole Wars of the 1830s, he received a brevet promotion to Brigadier General in the latter. Taylor was 61 years of age at the start of the Mexican-American War. Described as having a calm demeanor, level-headed and slow to anger. Known

⁶⁴ Timothy J. Henderson. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, (2007): 79.

⁶⁵ John S.D. Eisenhower. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848*. New York: Random House, (1989): 8.

to his men as “Old Zack” or “Old Rough and Ready” would lead the vanguard of American troops into the disputed territory between Texas and Mexico. Brigadier General Taylor’s force was the defense against Mexican forces and bait to lure an attack. Taylor was successful as commander of the American army in the north. Though he “evidenced no great military capacity. His greatest strength was an imperturbable serenity in battle.”⁶⁶ He marched and drilled his army in basic tactics and expected rigors of nineteenth century battle. He received some criticism for being tactically unimaginative and for putting too much “reliance on the bayonet”⁶⁷ but his victories at Resaca de la Palma, Palo Alto, Monterrey and Buena Vista brought national attention and fame for Taylor. Eventually riding the wave of popularity into the White House in the 1848 election. Major General Taylor would become the 12th President of the United States.

Winfield Scott: Entered the U.S. Army in 1808 as an Artillery officer. In 1810 was court-martialed for insubordination. Returned to service a year later. Entered the War of 1812 as a Lieutenant Colonel, earning two promotions and left as a Brigadier General with an outstanding reputation. Commanded forces in the Second Seminole and Creek Wars of 1836. Described as pompous, arrogant and having a penchant for pomp and formality earning the name “old fuss and feathers” from his men. Undervalued by history, Major General Scott’s campaign plan was revolutionary at the time “Scott practiced aggressive Napoleonic warfare in the Valley of Mexico.”⁶⁸ He introduced the concept of the combined arms division into the lexicon of the U.S.

⁶⁶ K. Jack Bauer. *The Mexican War, 1846-1848*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., (1974): 395.

⁶⁷ John S.D. Eisenhower. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848*. New York: Random House, (1989): 30.

⁶⁸ Jochen S. Arndt. The True Napoleon of the West: *Journal of Military History* 76, no. 3 (July 2012): 5.

Army, putting into practice the operational tactics of “concentration, dispersion and tactical reserve.”⁶⁹

Major General Scott “may well have been the greatest general this country has ever produced”⁷⁰ yet belittled by President Polk’s petty rivalry and distrust of his commanders “the fratricidal relationships between the administration and its senior commanders ensured that few major heroes would emerge from the struggle.”⁷¹ In spite of President Polk’s dislike for him, Major General Scott was undefeated in his campaign into the heart of Mexico with victories at the Siege of Veracruz, Battles of Cerro Gordo, Contreras and Churubusco, Molino del Rey, Chapultepec and Mexico City. A testament to his success as a battlefield commander and acumen for operational and tactical brilliance is summed up best; “no other American general of his generation, and few of any other, could have successfully conducted the Mexico City campaign under similar conditions.”⁷²

Unfortunately for Major General Scott, he was caught up in an unprofessional public squabble with his senior commanders during the occupation of Mexico City.⁷³ Major General Scott was unceremoniously recalled to Washington for an inquiry which tarnished his image and smelled of political intrigue. Some speculate that his recall was an attempt to thwart a political nomination for Scott in the 1848 presidential elections. Though, he would run in the election of 1852 representing the Whig party, only to lose the election. During his farewell departure from

⁶⁹ Jochen S. Arndt. *The True Napoleon of the West: Journal of Military History* 76, no. 3 (July 2012): 5.

⁷⁰ John S.D. Eisenhower. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848*. New York: Random House, (1989): xxv.

⁷¹ K. Jack Bauer. *The Mexican War, 1846-1848*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., (1974): 395.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ John S.D. Eisenhower. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848*. New York: Random House, (1989): 355.

Mexico, “grey haired officers and rugged soldiers wept when they parted from their General,”⁷⁴ a true sign of endearment from his soldiers and officers. His campaign strategy is worth studying; with his introduction of French tactics and formations at the Division level, he revolutionized the American way of war. Scott successfully neutralized a numerically superior force, fighting on its home turf, from the tactical defense. Major General Scott’s contribution to the rapid collapse of Mexico’s Army is unquestionable, and helped shorten the war for U.S. forces. One of the most distinguished careers for a U.S. Army General, serving over 50 years on active service, with 47 as a general officer through 14 different administrations. He retired as a brevet Lieutenant General, only the second officer to reach the rank at that time, the other being George Washington.

The state of the American Army was improving vs. that of Mexico’s, whose Army was in disarray after putting down continual revolts and fighting repeated civil wars. American training was better, its weapons were better, advancements in manufacturing and most of all the development of flying artillery all benefitted the U.S. Army.⁷⁵ Had the war been fought a few years later, the advancements in tactics, weaponry and most of all formal military education of commissioned officers would have continued to weigh in favor of America. Had President Polk began to enlarge the Army earlier with a larger core of regular army soldiers, this too could have shortened the war’s length with the same outcome. To quote our former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld: “As you know, you go to war with the army you have, not the army you might want or wish to have at a later time.” In spite of underfunding, micromanagement from the White House, continual procurement issues and a minimally sized core of regular army officers and

⁷⁴ John S.D. Eisenhower. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848*. New York: Random House, (1989): 364.

⁷⁵ Fred I. Greenstein. “The Policy-Driven Leadership of James K. Polk: Making the Most of a Weak Presidency.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 40, no. 4 (December 2010): 729.

soldiers, under Major General Winfield Scott's leadership and foresight the U.S. Army performed superbly.

General Manuel de Mier y Teran: A lesser known figure for Mexico whose suicide in 1832 ended the life of one of the few senior Mexican officials that understood Texas in its implications for Mexico. A twenty plus year veteran and college graduate who rose through the ranks of the Mexican Army to attain the rank of General. Second in command to Santa Anna when they defeated the Spanish invasion of Tampico in 1829. He was sent to Texas to ascertain the state of Mexican affairs in Texas and determine the proper border between Mexico and the United States. General Teran's report was the source document for Mexico's Law of April 6, 1830 which sought to reassert Mexican influence and control over Texas. The law outlawed slavery, increased Mexico's military presence from trade taxes and outlined the need to build forts to secure Texas against American incursions. It provided immigration incentives for Mexican families to move north into the Texas territory. The law encouraged European settlers to move to Texas with promises of free land. The law prohibited further immigration into Texas by Americans. General Teran was appointed commandant general for the Texas Territory.

General Teran was underfunded and undermanned receiving only tacit support from Mexico City. The Mexican immigration plan failed spectacularly when "only one Mexican family was actually sent to Texas under the plan."⁷⁶ General Teran understood that the main problem with Texas was economic. Trade between Texas and Mexico City was non-existent; trade with America, however, was robust and provided a lifeline for the Texas settlers. As discussed earlier, Mexico lacked a north-south trade route to offset the east-west trading between Texas and the United States. Those trade ties continued to strengthen the bond between Texas the United States

⁷⁶ Timothy J. Henderson. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, (2007): 70.

which drew them closer and closer. It helped to strengthen their identity with the United States and alienate the distant autocrats in Mexico City. Teran toiled in vain to reverse Mexican influence in Texas. In spite of his hard work and accurate predictions for the future of Texas, Mexico was unable to reverse the direction of Texas' eventual independence. Widely seen as a rising political figure "Teran was widely seen as the only man in Mexico who had the prestige and popularity to bridge the vast chasm between the factions."⁷⁷ He became extremely despondent over the direction of his country and failures in Texas. Choosing suicide, his death opened the door for Santa Anna's ascendancy to power to the detriment of Mexico.

⁷⁷ Timothy J. Henderson. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, (2007): 76.

CHAPTER 4 – INTERNAL U.S. POLITICS

When Spain had opened its Louisiana Territory to foreign immigrants in 1788, Thomas Jefferson wrote that he wished “a hundred thousand of our inhabitants would accept the invitation. It may be the means of delivering to us peaceably what may otherwise cost us a war.”⁷⁸

Internal U.S. Politics

The development or emergence of political parties in the United States can be traced back to the very founding of the nation. The Federalist Party dates back to the election of George Washington in 1789, followed by the election of John Adams in 1797. The Federalist Party remained in Presidential power until 1800.⁷⁹ The party favored a strong central government, a sound financial system featuring a national bank and leaned towards pro-British sentiment and maintaining economic relations. Described as Francophobes, the Federalist Party opposed maintaining close connections with French revolutionaries and sought to avoid being drawn into the Napoleonic Wars sweeping across Europe. The party wanted to pay off the debts of the states still lingering from the Revolutionary War. The election of 1800 brought Thomas Jefferson and the Republican Party to power. He opposed a strong central government, favored states’ rights and preferred stronger ties to France, who were considered Anglophobes for their opposition to maintaining ties with Great Britain. The first inklings of sectional rivalries are seen in Thomas Jefferson’s first term in office. The purchase of the Louisiana territory, over 800,000 square miles from France for 15 million dollars. The territory would encompass land from fifteen current-day states. The Federalist Party opposed the purchase, fearing loss of political influence

⁷⁸ Timothy J. Henderson. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, (2007): 35.

⁷⁹ Philip J. Lampi “The Federalist Party Resurgence, 1808-1816” *Journal of the Early Republic* (Summer 2013): 258.

and the preponderance of Americans to immigrate to the south and west, over whom they would be unable to project influence from their area of support in the New England northeast.⁸⁰

The Republican, or Democratic-Republican Party as it was then called, continued to dominate the office of the President with Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and James Monroe, maintaining control until 1825. By this time, the Federalist Party had effectively ceased to exist. The Democratic-Republican Party split into the National Republican party, now lead by John Quincy Adams, elected the sixth President of the United States in 1824. The Democratic Party rose to power with the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828 where he served two terms. Followed by Martin Van Buren serving one. At the beginning of the 1840s there appears a blending of political ideologies with the creation of the Whig Party and their candidate William Henry Harrison in 1841.⁸¹ Running on a platform of opposition to the current party in power, it most resembles a modern era independent party, having supporters from all facets of the political spectrum. Harrison's unfortunate death and succession by John Tyler was not enough to secure the party's re-election even with Texas's annexation in the waning days of Tyler's administration. The Democratic Party regained power with the election of James K. Polk in 1844.⁸²

There were a total of eight political parties in America between 1789 and 1848, the lessor known Anti-Masonic, or freeman, was in opposition to the Masonic Lodge. The Liberty Party based its platform on anti-slavery and the abolitionist movement opposing the annexation of Texas. The Free-Soil Party aligned with the restrictionist platform, opposing the expansion of

⁸⁰ James M. Banner "Federalist Party" *Federal Theatre Project*. (1970): 388; see also Peskin, "Conspiratorial Anglophobia..." 648.

⁸¹ Congressional Digest. "The Birth and Growth of American Political Parties." (January 1935): 2.

⁸² Dov. H. Levin, and Benjamin Miller. "Why Great Powers Expand in their Own Neighborhood: Explaining the Territorial Expansion of the United States 1819-1848." *International Interactions*, 37, (2011): 246.

slavery into the recently acquired territories from Mexico.⁸³ Though not as successful or as prominent during this time period, these three parties represented small burgeoning movements with finite causes struggling for a national platform. Both the Liberty and Free-Soil Party acted as bookends to the issue of Texas Annexation and subsequent Mexican-American War. The Liberty Party ran unsuccessful candidates in four elections between 1840 and 1852, though it has been attributed to winning the election for James Polk by siphoning enough votes off from Henry Clay in New York State.⁸⁴ The Free Soil Party ran in only two elections: 1848 and 1852, losing both as well.

What emerges in the decades prior to the 1840s in U.S. politics is a cornucopia of competing motivations and interests that pushed and pulled America's expansion westward. The war with Mexico was a by-product of the struggle between northern and southern factions that "each section of the nation wanted to spread its own type of civilization over the western country and appropriate its resources for its own use."⁸⁵ The United States was a veritable stew-pot of personal and political convictions, ranging from economic, social justice, anti-slavery, pro-slavery, mixed with racial and religious prejudices. Some Americans, who perceived themselves as having a divine calling and belief in bringing liberty to the masses, were compelling fellow American settlers to migrate west. The arguments for and against war with Mexico pitted abolitionist vs. pro slavery, the industrial north vs. the agrarian south and involved views ranging from expansionist to restrictionist, accompanied with issues of Native American resettlement and/or extermination, if necessary. Additional arguments for war included: continued European

⁸³ Congressional Digest. "The Birth and Growth of American Political Parties." (January 1935): 2.

⁸⁴ Vernon L. Volpe. "The Liberty Party and Polk's Election, 1844." *Historian*, 53, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 691.

⁸⁵ H. Jason Combs. "The South's Slave Culture Transplanted to the Western Frontier." *The Professional Geographer*. Volume 56, no. 3 (August 2004): 361.

interference based on their own competing business interests and the overarching themes of the Monroe Doctrine and Manifest Destiny had on influencing America's view toward war. Finally, the entrenched two party political system which coveted maintaining political power above all else. All these beliefs, factions and interests played a part in the decisions leading to the inevitable war between the United States and Mexico. A poorly prepared Mexico was caught-up in a street-brawl between America's northern and southern interests fighting for supremacy over the continent.

The Missouri Compromise of 1820 sought to address the continued expansion of slavery. However, the Missouri Compromise served as a Band-Aid for a much more severe disease that America was suffering from: the disease of slavery, and how the United States was unable to rid itself of this deplorable blight. Politicians in both the Republican and Democratic parties sought to maintain a balance of equal representation between the current balance of 11 free and 11 slave states.⁸⁶ The Missouri Compromise morphed into an agreement that added Missouri as an additional slave state with guarantees that slavery would not expand further into the territory from the Louisiana Purchase north of 36 degrees 30 minutes latitude, or Missouri's southern boundary. The term "Restrictionist" was coined to describe those who sought to halt the spread of slavery into new territories. Abolitionists began echoing the themes of restrictionism which "represented mostly an antislavery instinct in the general population,"⁸⁷ and pounced on this opportunity in obstructing congressional approval for further expansion of slavery west of the Mississippi River. An eventual compromise was reached with the addition of Maine as a free

⁸⁶ H. Jason Combs. "The South's Slave Culture Transplanted to the Western Frontier." *The Professional Geographer*. Volume 56, no. 3 (August 2004): 362; see also Pierson, *The Missouri Compromise...*, 25.

⁸⁷ Matthew Mason. "The Maine and Missouri Crisis." *Journal of the Early Republic*, no. 33 (Winter 2013): 682.

state. Supporters of the compromise were able to maintain parity in the Senate between free and slave states, while securing the union for the foreseeable future.

Deemed a temporary solution to the issue of slavery, the Missouri Compromise not only prolonged, but also heightened, the rhetoric in the clash between free and slave interest. What the debate did show was a strong regional sectionalism manifesting itself as the driving force in American politics. Support against slavery between northerners varied by state and region. Nevertheless, the abolitionist movement continued to mature and slowly galvanized northern support against slavery describing it as “utterly abhorrent to good policy, to morality, and to the spirit of Christianity.”⁸⁸ The abolitionist movement was successful in defining the narrative for free states and their predominant anti-slavery views. The compromise brought slavery to the forefront of political discussions and country-wide debate. It served as a forcing-function in cementing the foundations of northern free-states’ opposition against the continued expansion of slavery.⁸⁹

The admission of Missouri as a slave state highlighted the issues of states’ rights and the constitutionality of admitting new states to the union. Though some opponents to the expansion of slavery argued against allowing Missouri in as a slave state, the proposed restriction was deemed by some as “unconstitutional because Congress could not admit a new State with less political rights than the others.”⁹⁰ Fervent opposition to slavery could not overcome the constitutionality of rightful admission of Missouri to the union. The citizens in Missouri supported slavery and its expansion. Since “the majority of early pioneers primarily moved along

⁸⁸ Margaret A. Nash “Contested Identities: Nationalism, Regionalism, and Patriotism in Early American Textbooks.” *History of Education Quarterly*, 49, no. 4 (November 2009): 425.

⁸⁹ Frederick J. Turner. “Geographic Sectionalism in American History.” *International Studies Quarterly*, 36, no. 2 (June 92): 87; see also Pierson, *The Missouri Compromise...*, 25.

⁹⁰ Matthew Mason. “The Maine and Missouri Crisis.” *Journal of the Early Republic*, no. 33 (Winter 2013): 684.

parallels of latitude,”⁹¹ the majority of Missouri’s immigrants were from southern states whose ideals and preconceptions about slavery were transplanted along with them.

Abolitionists and Restrictionists were confounded with the problem of unraveling slavery from states’ rights while preserving the union. The arguments against slavery’s expansion continued in earnest, delaying the eventual admission of Missouri from 1818 to 1821. The tone of debates turned divisive and quite visceral, to the point that in 1820 Thomas Jefferson wrote to a friend on the issue of slavery in Missouri “like a fire bell in the night, awakened me and filled me with terror.”⁹² The addition of Maine provided Abolitionists the counterbalance to Missouri’s admission and the free vs. slave state problem. Both sides claimed victory, for political moderates and Republicans were able to secure another slave state. The addition of Maine provided a bittersweet victory for Federalist and Restrictionist, but kept the political equality they desired to block a perceived growing threat from southern slave holders grip on political power.

Southern interests counter-punched abolitionist assaults on slavery by “changing the subject away from slavery to tapping partisan rivalry by blaming Federalists,”⁹³ by deflecting criticism towards northern intentions of manipulating the southern way of life. Recalcitrant in their belief of the right to continue slavery was the southern argument of paternalism, the distorted view that southern slave holders actually cared for the uneducated slave, who would be unable to take care of themselves if freed. They were praising paternalism as the nobler alternative to freeing slaves. Southern newspapers continued to extol the virtue of southern nobility to the point of societal

⁹¹ H. Jason Combs. “The South’s Slave Culture Transplanted to the Western Frontier.” *The Professional Geographer*. Volume 56, no. 3 (August 2004): 364.

⁹² Parke Pierson. “The Missouri Compromise exposed the raw nerve of slavery.” *America’s Civil War*. (January 2009): 25.

⁹³ Matthew Mason. “The Maine and Missouri Crisis.” *Journal of the Early Republic*, no. 33 (Winter 2013): 681.

indoctrination. Their false sense of nobility and willingness to believe in a so-called superior southern culture, turning into a self-licking ice cream cone. In essence, southern culture was indoctrinated into believing their own prejudiced views of slavery as morally superior to the northern calls for ending the cruel practice. Southern interest used their own newspapers to “protect the veneer of southern gentility”⁹⁴ through a campaign of misinformation and false sense of superiority.

By the 1830s, Abolitionists were successfully linking the continuance of slavery and its expansion to the “compromise politics”⁹⁵ being practiced in the nation’s capital. Further decrying political leaders ineptitude and unwillingness to stand up to southern interest “was playing into the hands of slave-breeding interests and fuelling slavery’s extension westward.”⁹⁶ The issue of slave breeding as a means to the continuance of the southern slave industry effectively portrayed southern culture as barbaric and morally bankrupt. When the Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves of 1807 took effect the following year in 1808, its intent was to cut America’s dependence on foreign importing of slaves and eventually ending its practice in the United States. What transpired however, was not the desired intent of the law. For southern interest, it meant seeking alternative sources or ways to circumvent the restriction. The unfortunate result was an increased demand for slave-breeding of those slaves already held captive in America as an offset to importation of additional foreign slaves. Southern slave holders turned inward seeking to enlarge their own slave populations through continual slave breeding as a means to secure their own financial interest and agrarian lifestyle.

⁹⁴ Gregory D. Smithers. American Abolitionism and Slave-Breeding Discourse: A Re-Evaluation. *Slavery & Abolition*, 33, no. 4 (December 2012): 554.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 553.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

The struggles between abolitionist vs. pro-slavery or north vs. south, foreshadowed causes leading up to the American Civil War. The polarizing issue of slavery reasserts itself again with annexation of Texas by the United States. Though Texas agricultural does not support slavery's cash crops of sugar and cotton, the southern immigrants brought their economic and cultural beliefs with them. Mexico outlawed slavery in 1829 and viewed its expansion into the Texas territory as unconscionable. The Mexican law of April 6, 1830, sought to counter American influence in the Texas territory. Britain outlawed slavery in the West Indies in 1834, adding pressure to Southern slave owners looking to expand in a shrinking, anti-slavery world. Southern Anglophobia began to weigh heavily on southern slave proponents. Rumors, fueled by several incidents of escaped slaves in the Bahamas being freed by the British. Southern supporters "were deeply concerned with British intentions"⁹⁷ and focused their attention to the issue of Texas Annexation, redoubling their efforts for Texas unification with the United States out of a perceived fear of British abolitionism.

Mexico outlawed further American immigration, importation of slaves and attempted to act as a bulwark against American influence, specifically pro-slavery's influence in the territory. As discussed earlier in this paper, Texas represented a potential windfall of another three to four pro-slavery states. Texas provided southern interests the vehicle to expand westward and counter the growing northern imbalance in congress. The south was now outnumbered in the House of Representatives due to northern population growth, but through the addition of two Senate seats for each new state added maintained equality in the Senate. The south viewed Texas as a source of maintaining political clout in Washington, D.C., and as a means of continuing southern political representation.

⁹⁷ Edward B. Rugemer. "Robert Monroe Harrison, British Abolition, Southern Anglophobia and Texas Annexation. *Slavery and Abolition*, 28, no. 2 (Aug 2007): 169.

Expansionism: Both political parties supported the ideals of American expansionism. The difference of opinion between them came into focus in regards to the role of the federal government and slavery. As the political parties began to form along sectional lines between northern and southern states, each party or section wanted their form of governance and way of life extending west. The Democratic Party led by James Polk and the pro-slavery south sought to extend slavery westward as a way of continuing their southern antebellum lifestyle, where agriculture, states' rights, low taxes and a less intrusive federal government was preferred. The Federalists, concentrated in northern states, considered their preference for a strong federal government, central bank, manufacturing and anti-slavery platform as the morally correct path for America. Both parties viewed expansion as a natural right and inevitable by-product of a growing America. As early as 1786, Thomas Jefferson wrote that the United States "must be viewed as the nest, from which all America, North and South, is to be peopled."⁹⁸ Continuing in that vein was Secretary of State John Quincy Adams who, in 1819, describing the effects of the Adams-Onis treaty "rendered it still more unavoidable that the remainder of the continent should ultimately be ours".⁹⁹ This was a premonition of sort on the eventual unification between Texas and the United States. In spite of the heated debates emanating from the Missouri Compromise, the addition of two additional states was viewed favorably and signaled continuing growth and prosperity for the nation. In President James Monroe's address in 1823, he stated "It is manifest that by enlarging the basis of our system and increasing the number of States, the system itself

⁹⁸ Timothy J. Henderson. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, (2007): 32.

⁹⁹ Dov H. Levin, and Benjamin Miller. Why Great Powers Expand in their Own Neighborhood: Explaining the Territorial Expansion of the United States 1819-1848. *International Interactions*, 37, (2011): 241.

has been greatly strengthened in both its branches.”¹⁰⁰ The earliest founders and the leading politicians of the time supported American expansionism.

Racial and religious prejudices contributed to the perceived belief of American inevitability in regards to westward expansion. Beliefs held by the American political elite were unfavorable towards Mexico and Latin America, pitting American Protestantism against Catholicism. Evident in views typified by Thomas Jefferson who “was convinced that free government and Roman Catholicism were simply incompatible.”¹⁰¹ John Quincy Adams held similar views when he denounced Spanish Americans as “the most ignorant, the most bigoted, and the most superstitious of all the Roman Catholics in Christendom.”¹⁰² For the less prominent “many Americans viewed the war as an opportunity to improve and evangelize Catholic Mexico.”¹⁰³ Unflattering and defamatory remarks like these towards Spanish speaking peoples aided in the portrayal of Mexicans as a backwards people devoid of rational thought or moral backwardness.¹⁰⁴

Though President James Polk was successful in demonizing Mexico as an opponent unworthy and unable to adequately govern Texas and the western territories. Efforts were made by the Polk administration to communicate with American and Mexican Catholics that this was not a punitive war of religion. Seeking to counter anti-Catholic hyperbole of some American publications. The Polk administration outlined guidance to its military commanders to respect

¹⁰⁰ James Monroe. *Messages and Papers of the Presidents, James Monroe*, Vol. 1, Pg.776. Database: MasterFILE Premier. (Presidential address to congress December 2, 1823).

¹⁰¹ Timothy J. Henderson. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, (2007): 32.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ John C. Pinheiro. “Extending the Light and Blessings of Our Purer Faith”: Anti-Catholic Sentiment among American Soldiers in the U.S.-Mexican War.” *Journal of Popular Culture*, 35, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 129.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 139.

and protect religious differences and refrain troops from debasing religious sites or from pilfering its treasures or religious artifacts. Major General Scott reiterated this guidance leading up to and after the capture of the port city of Vera Cruz. Brigadier General Taylor was provided religious liaison officers on his expedition into northern Mexico, adding weight to the importance of soldier restraint and respect for Mexican Catholics.¹⁰⁵

President Polk and his supporters were successfully able to “link political context to cultural variables to make the Mexican-American War make sense to the American people.”¹⁰⁶ Covering the nations sectional rivalries and disagreements in the flag of American Nationalism, President Polk gained popular support for the war long enough to accomplish his goals in acquiring land concessions from Mexico.

¹⁰⁵ John C. Pinheiro. “Extending the Light and Blessings of Our Purer Faith”: Anti-Catholic Sentiment among American Soldiers in the U.S.-Mexican War.” *Journal of Popular Culture*, 35, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 130.

¹⁰⁶ Lane Crothers. “The cultural roots of isolationism and internationalism in American foreign policy.” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9, no. 1 (March 2011): 32.

CHAPTER 5 – AFTERMATH

“While no codified international law existed on the issue, there was a general understanding among nations that a country’s claim to a given territory would remain tenuous unless and until that country could establish significant settlement on the land in question, building cities and infrastructure and other wise cementing its ownership.”¹⁰⁷

The ramifications of the Mexican-American War are horrendous when examining the events in Mexico between 1847 and 1848. Leading up to and after the signing of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo between Mexico and the United States. Any semblance of order within Mexico City and the surrounding territories quickly evaporated after American troops left the country. In less than three years the indemnity payment of fifteen million dollars from the United States was spent by Mexico’s ruling class, leaving Mexico broke again.¹⁰⁸ Struggling to pay its debts or even provide a modicum of essential services for its people, Mexico languished in continued turmoil. Mexico repeated the fatalistic, bordering on insane decisions it made before the war with America. Counterintuitive to a rational outsider, Mexico’s ruling elites again elected Santa Anna President of Mexico in January 1853. His pattern of self-aggrandizement and fleecing of the Mexican people repeated itself until he was finally deposed for the last time.¹⁰⁹

The war triggered an explosion of a century’s worth of resentment and revulsion to the inequalities of class warfare. The subsequent revolts and military measures used by the Mexican government to put them down were extreme, but required such measures to end the violence. In the Yucatan peninsula a rebellion between Mayan Indians and the ruling class whites turned into a war of ethnic cleansing with “an estimated two-hundred thousand people killed in 1848

¹⁰⁷ Timothy J. Henderson. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, (2007): 35.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁰⁹ John S.D. Eisenhower. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848*. New York: Random House, (1989): 373.

alone.”¹¹⁰ The bloody civil war claimed half its population in the end. Both sides carried out an extermination policy towards the other in the conflict. The Mexican government’s response was to deploy a sizeable enough force with the intent to put down the insurrection once and for all. The level of depravity was such that authorities in Yucatan offered complete “dominion and sovereignty of the country”¹¹¹ in exchange for U.S. intervention, which was declined. Threatened with the ogre of class warfare, the ruling political classes in Mexico finally put personal and party differences aside to unite in efforts to quell peasant uprisings. The privileged classes successfully preserved their own power and livelihood at the expense of the poor and destitute peoples, prolonging their suffering.

United States Civil War: In just a couple years after the end of hostilities between Mexico and the United States. California was admitted to the union as a free state in 1850. American nationalism turned into entrenched regional sectionalism and pitted the northern states and accompanying belief system: abolitionist, restrictionist, federalist, and unionist. Faced off against those of southern states and their respective beliefs: pro-slavery, paternalism, States-rights, Republicanism. Just over thirteen years after hostilities ended between Mexico and the United States, the issues which divided political parties and various interest groups in America over Texas annexation; slavery, state’s rights and developing sectioning between north and south, eventually erupted into the bloodiest conflict America has ever known. An estimated low-end number of between 620–640,000 men lost their lives or two percent of the population in the war with a total of one and a half million total casualties. Former comrades like Robert E. Lee and George McClellan squared off against each other in a four year bludgeoning to settle their side’s

¹¹⁰ Timothy J. Henderson. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, (2007): 74.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

differences. Though the Mexican-American War ranks eighth for total deaths in American Wars, the war served as a military training ground for the majority of Northern and Southern Generals who led their respective armies on campaigns of their own. Development of weapons between wars outpaced advancement in the tactics like those displayed in the battles across Mexico. Brought together, this imbalance proved a fatal combination when considering ten of the wars largest battles had casualties exceeding the total U.S. casualties of 13,780 for the entire Mexican-American War. Places like Gettysburg, Chickamauga, Spotsylvania and The Wilderness chewed up Americans in a gristmill of carnage and death.¹¹²

America's zeal for expansion and belief of a divine calling continued to grow and pick-up speed coming into the nineteenth century. The conflicts with Great Britain in the Anglo American crisis of 1793-1794, Chesapeake crisis of 1807, the war crisis of 1809, the War of 1812 and Oregon disputes of 1845-1846 continued to fuel resentment towards Great Britain. American Nationalism within the country grew along with suspicion of European motivations towards the new world. American political parties gelled around certain precepts towards Europe with Anglophobes and Francophobes suspicious of any and all dealings with Great Britain and France. Like a snowball rolling downhill, America gained traction with the Monroe Doctrine leading to more anti-European sentiments.¹¹³ The advent of Manifest Destiny fuelled the divine calling for America to spread its vision for the new world. Expansionist and settlers pushed farther westward with goals of an America stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans. American Expansionism was on the march, headed for an eventual confrontation with an obstinate Mexican government over its northern territories "it is difficult to envision any set of

¹¹² Civil War Trust. "Saving America's Civil War Battlefields." Last accessed 10 February 2015. <http://www.civilwar.org/education/civil-war-casualties.html>.

¹¹³ Lane Crothers. "The cultural roots of isolationism and internationalism in American foreign policy." *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9, no. 1 (March 2011): 23.

circumstances which would have prevented an effort to add Mexico's northern regions to the American commonwealth."¹¹⁴ Disputes over the Oregon territory, Texas Annexation and the perceived empty expanse of the American southwest continued to fuel the country's desire for western growth. Each of these issues added mass and speed to the snowball which turned into an avalanche of westward American immigration as it thundered down the mountain towards a conflict of competing interest with Mexico over its perceived backwardness and failed policies.¹¹⁵

There is a lasting influence of the Mexican-American Civil war on current United States military doctrine. How the campaigns were fought during this war is of key interest to current military planners. After nearly 13 years of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. Army is undergoing an updated rewrite of its current doctrine. The new vision for how the Army will fight in the future is compiled in Training and Doctrine Command's (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-3-1, recently published 31 October 2014, called The U.S. Army Operating Concept (AOC): Win in a Complex World. The AOCs purpose is to provide forward thinking ideas for Army leaders in future years 2020-2040. The AOC "describes how future Army forces, as part of joint, inter-organizational, and multinational efforts, operate to accomplish campaign objectives and protect U.S. national interest."¹¹⁶ In essence, it attempts to outline future campaigns that are fought and won with smaller, faster, lighter forces, coming from multiple directions without a substantial logistics tail. How this ties back to the Mexican-American War was the way in which Major General Winfield Scott chose to fight his campaign and detach his force from secure supply

¹¹⁴ K. Jack Bauer. *The Mexican War, 1846-1848*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., (1974): 392.

¹¹⁵ Dov. H. Levin, and Benjamin Miller. "Why Great Powers Expand in their Own Neighborhood: Explaining the Territorial Expansion of the United States 1819-1848." *International Interactions*, 37, (2011): 239.

¹¹⁶ Department of the Army, The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, Fort Eustis, VA. October 31, 2014), 7.

lines. Though General Scott circumstances necessitated his decision, the Army's new Operating Concept used it as a how-to example for future doctrine. The article by Jochen S. Arndt, titled "The True Napoleon of the West: General Winfield Scott's Mexico City Campaign and the Origins of the U.S. Army's Combined-Arms Combat Division." It appeared in the *Journal of Military History*, volume 76, No. 3 July 2012, and was summarily emailed to all members of Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to include my command here at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, as required reading with the intent of educating our military and civilian staffs on the development process associated with the Army Operating Concept and future doctrines. In an era of budgetary constraints, force reductions, economies of scale and reliance on force multipliers which seek to offset loss of manpower, replicating General Scott's plan of attack requires serious changes in the western way of thinking about, and planning for, future wars. Our overreliance on maintaining a succinct logistics lifelines, necessitates profound changes in our approach to combating threats through 2040, and beyond.

In conclusion, America's war with Mexico was an inevitable by-product of America's sectional rivalries, belief in expansionism and American Nationalism which permeated the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. This paper focused on the leaders, ideals and belief system which made up the American Consciousness between the American Revolution and the Mexican-American War. Examining the seminal events in early American history shows the external, but specifically the internal, struggles that America faced trying to maintain the union while expanding westward. Discussing the effects of continued European conflicts, intrigue and their continued influence on the United States. How American leaders and people reacted show the rise of American Nationalism, highlighting the net-effect of continued European interference and competing national interest with America. By comparing and contrasting the leading figures

in the Mexican-American War revealed the motivations and personalities of each country's senior leaders who were pivotal to the war's outcome.

Describing the litany of competing internal interest wrestling for control in mid-nineteenth century American politics shows how those competing political interests developed into two regions, sectional in focus, with competing visions for the same country, each attempting to spread their own vision for America westward. The unresolved issue of slavery in America was a result of compromise politics and factional appeasement, eventually leading America into a bloody and costly civil war. In the same accord, the events of the Mexican-American War again pushed Mexico into its own civil war. This time, it quickly turned into a war of ethnic cleansing and unveiled centuries of pent-up resentment and frustration over class inequalities.

In 1846, America and Mexico were two countries headed in opposite directions. America was on the rise economically and militarily. In the decades leading up to the Mexican-American War the United States began to find its place on the world stage, slowly and methodically growing into a regional hegemony.¹¹⁷ In contrast, Mexico suffered greatly from the lingering effects from centuries of Spanish rule. Plagued by a ruling elite who oppressed the uneducated masses and wasted the nation's wealth. Infighting and backbiting pushed Mexico into financial ruin and chaos. Ineffective governments changed with the season, intermingled with military coups and power-hungry dictators, who cast a long shadow over Mexico for many years following the war. The Mexican-American War was a by-product of America's nineteenth century sectional rivalries attempting to spread their vision westward across America. The War was inevitable and the outcome all but assured as the two nations collided over control of the American southwest.

¹¹⁷ Dov. H. Levin, and Benjamin Miller. "Why Great Powers Expand in their Own Neighborhood: Explaining the Territorial Expansion of the United States 1819-1848." *International Interactions*, 37, (2011): 251.

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