



VIEWPOINTS

On Expanding into Mexican Territory

The annexation of vast Mexican territories in 1848 exacerbated the already strained relations between North and South.

As you read the passages below, consider how regional differences may have influenced arguments for and against expansionism in the mid-1800s.

PRO-ANNEXATION

In his 1845 inaugural address, President James Polk argued in favor of the annexation of Texas.

The Republic of Texas has made known her desire to come into our Union, to form a part of our Confederacy and enjoy with us the blessings of liberty secured and guaranteed by our Constitution. Texas was once a part of our country—was unwisely ceded away to a foreign power [in 1819]—is now independent, and possesses an undoubted right to dispose of a part or the whole of her territory, and to merge her sovereignty as a separate and independent state in ours . . .

To Texas, the reunion is important because the strong protecting arm of our government would be extended over her, and the vast resources of her fertile soil and genial climate would be speedily developed, while the safety of New Orleans and of our whole southwestern frontier against hostile aggression, as well as the interests of the whole Union, would be promoted by it. . .

None can fail to see the danger to our safety and future peace if Texas remains an independent state, or becomes an ally or dependency of some foreign nation more powerful than herself. Is there one among our citizens who would not prefer perpetual peace with Texas to occasional wars, which so often occur between bordering independent nations? Is there one who would not prefer free intercourse with her, to high duties on all our products and manufactures which enter her ports or cross her frontiers? Is there one who would not prefer an unrestricted communication with her citizens, to the frontier obstructions which must occur if she remains out of the Union?

Whatever is good or evil in the local [slave] institutions of Texas will remain her own, whether annexed to the United States or not. None of the

present states will be responsible for them any more than they are for the local institutions of each other. They have confederated together for certain specific objects. Upon the same principle that they would refuse to form a perpetual union with Texas because of her local institutions, our forefathers would have been prevented from forming our present Union.

PRO-ANNEXATION

In an 1845 editorial in United States Magazine and Democratic Review, John L. O'Sullivan explained why the United States should own the rich and beautiful lands of the Southwest.

It is time now for opposition to the annexation of Texas to cease. It is time for the common duty of patriotism to the country to succeed. Or if this claim will not be recognized, it is at least time for common sense to bow with decent grace to the inevitable and the irreversible.

The pretense that the annexation has been unrightful and unrighteous is wholly untrue and unjust to ourselves. If Texas became peopled with an American population, it was on the express invitation of Mexico herself. The invitation was accompanied with guarantees of state independence and the maintenance of a federal system similar to our own. What, then, can be more preposterous than all this clamor by Mexico against annexation as a violation of any rights of hers, any duties of ours?

Nor is there any just foundation for the charge that annexation is a great proslavery measure calculated to increase and keep alive that institution. Slavery had nothing to do with it. Opinions were and are greatly divided in both the North and South, as to the influence to be exerted by the annexation on slavery and the slave states.

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VIEWPOINTS**ANTI-ANNEXATION**

In an 1848 editorial, Frederick Douglass, a leader of the antislavery movement, sympathized with the Mexicans.

PEACE! PEACE! PEACE!

The shout is on every lip and published in every paper. The joyful news is told in every quarter with enthusiastic delight. We are such an exception to the great mass of our fellow countrymen, in respect to everything else, and we have been so accustomed to hear them rejoice over the most barbarous outrages committed upon an unoffending people, that we find it difficult to unite with them in their jubilation at this time. We believe that by peace they mean plunder.

In our judgment, those who have all along been loudly in favor of a vigorous prosecution of the war, and announcing its bloody triumphs with apparent delight, have no sincere love of peace and are not now rejoicing over peace, but plunder. They have succeeded in robbing Mexico of her territory. And they are rejoicing over their success under the hypocritical pretense of a regard for peace. Had they not succeeded in robbing Mexico of the most important and most valuable part of her territory, many of those now loudest in their cries of favor for peace would be loudest and wildest for war—war to the knife.

Our soul is sick of such hypocrisy. That an end is put to the wholesale murder in Mexico is truly just cause for rejoicing. But we are not the people to rejoice. We ought rather blush and hang our heads for shame. In the spirit of profound humility, we should beg pardon for our crimes at the hands of a god whose mercy endures forever.

ANTI-ANNEXATION

In presenting a set of resolutions to the Massachusetts legislature, Charles Sumner related the war to domination by the "Slave Power."

The object of the bold measure of annexation was not only to extend slavery, but to strengthen the "Slave Power." The same object is now proposed by the Mexican war. This is another link in the gigantic chain by which our country and the Constitution are to be bound to the "Slave Power." This has been proclaimed in public journals. The following passage from the *Charleston (S.C.) Courier* avows it: "Every battle fought in Mexico, and every dollar spent there, but insures the acquisition of territory which must widen the field of Southern enterprise and power in future. And the final result will be to readjust the balance of power in the confederacy, so as to give us control over the operations of government in all time to come."

It is a War Against the Free States. Regarding it as a war to strengthen the "Slave Power," we are conducted to a natural conclusion, that it is virtually, and in its consequences, a war against the free States of the Union. Conquest and robbery are attempted in order to obtain a political control at home; and distant battles are fought, less with a special view of subjugating Mexico than with the design of overcoming the power of the free States, under the Constitution. . . .

Criminality of the War. And it is also a violation of the fundamental law of Heaven, of that great law of Right which is written by God's own finger on the heart of man. . . . An unjust and unnecessary war is the dismal offspring of national insensibility.

ACTIVITY

Imagine you are moderator at a Town Meeting in your own home town. At the meeting, arguments for and against the Texas annexation and war with Mexico have been debated. Summarize for your audience the arguments on both sides. Then state which arguments you found most relevant and persuasive and why. Present your summary as a written report or as notes you can refer to for an oral report.