

America's War with Mexico has been labeled, both then and since, an unprovoked and unjustifiable war of aggression and territorial aggrandizement (enlargement). Using the following documents as well as your knowledge of the diplomatic history of the years 1836-1846, evaluate this assertion.

Document A

Source: *Joint Congressional Resolution Offering Annexation to Texas (March 1, 1845)*

Resolved by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled: That Congress doth both consent that the territory properly included within and rightfully belonging to the Republic of Texas may be erected into a new state, to be called the State of Texas, with a republican form of government to be adopted by the people of said republic by deputies in convention assembled, with the consent of the existing government, in order that the same may be admitted as one of the states of this Union...

Document B

Source: *Letter from President James K. Polk to US Senator William H. Haywood (August 1845)*

Care had been taken—that all our military and naval movements shall be strictly defensive.—We will not be the aggressor upon Mexico; -- but if her army shall cross the [Rio Grande] del Norte and invade Texas, we will if we can drive her army—to her own territory. Less than this – in good faith to Texas, I think this government could not have done. We invite Texas to unite her destinies with our own. She has accepted the invitation, upon the terms proposed,...and if because she has done so, she is invaded by the Mexican Army – surely we are bound to give her our aid in her own defense.

Document C

Source: *Memoirs of John Charles Frémont*

As affairs resolve themselves, California stood out as the chief subject in the impending war; and with Mr. [Thomas Hart] Benton and other governing men at Washington it became a firm resolve to hold it for the United States. To them it seemed reasonably sure that California would eventually fall to England or to the United States and that the eventuality was near. This was talked over fully during the time of preparation for the third expedition and the contingencies anticipated and weighted. The relations between the three countries made a chief subject of interest about which our thoughts settled as the probability of war grew into certainty. For me, no distinct course or definitive instruction could be laid down, but the probabilities were made known to me as well as what to do when they became facts. The distance was too great for timely communication; but failing this I was given discretion to act.

Document D

Source: *Diary of President James K. Polk (September-October, 1845)*

The President, in consultation with the cabinet, agrees that the Hon. John Slidell of New Orleans, who spoke the Spanish language and was otherwise well qualified, should be tendered the mission... One great object of the mission, as stated by the President, would be to adjust a permanent boundary between Mexico and the United States, and that in doing this the Minister would be instructed to purchase for a pecuniary consideration Upper California and New Mexico. He said that a better boundary would be the Rio [Grande] del Norte from its mouth to the Passo, in latitude 32° north, and thence west to the Pacific Ocean, Mexico ceding to the United States all the country east and north of these lines. The President said that for such boundary the amount of pecuniary (economic) consideration to be paid would be of small importance. He supposed it might be had for fifteen or twenty million, but he was ready to pay forty million for it, if it could not be had less. In these views the Cabinet agreed with the President unanimously
(October, 1845)

The conversation then turned on California, on which I remarked that Great Britain had her eye on the country and intended to possess it if she could but that the people of the United States would not willingly permit California to pass into the possession of any new colony planted by Great Britain or any foreign monarchy and that in reasserting Mr. Monroe's doctrine I had California and the fine bay of San Francisco as much in view as Oregon. Col. Benton agreed that no foreign power ought to be permitted to colonize California, any more than they would be to colonize Cuba. As long as Cuba remains the possession of the present government we would not object, but if a powerful foreign power was about to possess it, we would not permit it. ON the same footing we would place California...

Document E

Source: *Order from the Secretary of War William. L Marcy to General Zachary Taylor, US Army (January 13, 1846)*

Sir: I am directed by the president to instruct you to advance and occupy, with the troops under your command, positions on or near the east bank of the Rio [Grande] del Norte as soon as it can be conveniently done with reference to the season and the routes by which your movements must be made...

In the positions you may take in carrying out these instructions and other movements that may be made, the use of the Rio [Grande] del Norte may be very convenient, if not necessary. Should you attempt to exercise the right which the United States [has] in common with Mexico to the free navigation of this river, it is probable that Mexico would interpose resistance. You will not attempt to enforce this right without further instructions...

It is not designed, in our present relations with Mexico that you should treat her as an enemy; but, should she assume that character by a declaration of war, or any open act of hostility towards us, you will not act merely on the defensive, if your relative means enable you to do otherwise...

Document F

Source: *Proclamation of President Don Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga (April 23, 1846)*

...At the time Mr. Slidell presented himself, the troops of the United States occupied our territory, their squadrons threatened our ports, and they prepared to occupy the peninsula of the California, of which the question of Oregon with England is only a preliminary. Mr. Slidell was not received, because the dignity of the nation repelled this new insult. Meanwhile, the army of the United States encamped at Corpus Christi, and occupied the Isla del Padre; following this, they then moved to the point Santo Isabel, and their standard of the stars and stripes waved on the bank of the Rio Bravo del Norte, opposite the city of Matamoros, blockading that river with their vessels of war. The village of Laredo was surprised by a part of their troops, and a small party of our men, reconnoitering there, were disarmed. Hostilities, then, have been commenced, by the United States of North America, beginning new conquests upon the frontier territories of the departments of Tamaulipas and New Leon, and progressing at such a rate that troops of the same United States threaten Monterey in Upper California. No one can doubt which of the two republics is responsible for this war: a war which any sense of equality and justice, and respect for the rights and laws of civilized nations, might have been avoided...

Document G

Source: *Diary of James K. Polk (May 8, 1846)*

Saw company until twelve o'clock today. Among others the Hon. John Slidell, late United States minister to Mexico, called in company with the Secretary of State. Mr. Buchanan retired after a few minutes, and Mr. Slidell remained about an hour in conversation concerning his mission and the state of our relation with Mexico. Mr. Slidell's opinion was that but one course towards Mexico was left to the United States, and that was to take redress of the wrongs and injuries which we had so long borne from Mexico into our own hands, and to act with promptness and energy. In this I agreed with him, and told him it was only a matter of time when I would make a communication to Congress on the subject, and that I had made up my mind to do so soon.

Document H

Source: *Polk's War message to Congress (May 11, 1846)*

The strong desire to establish peace with Mexico on liberal and honorable terms, and the readiness of this Government to regulate and adjust our boundary and other causes of difference with that power on such fair and equitable principles as would lead to permanent relations of the most friendly nature, induced me in September last to seek the reopening of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Every measure adopted on our part had for its object the furtherance of these desired results in communicating to Congress a succinct statement of injuries which we had suffered from Mexico, and which have been accumulating during a period of more than twenty years, every expression that could tend to inflame the people of Mexico or defeat or delay a pacific result was carefully avoided. An envoy of the United States repaired to Mexico with full powers to adjust every existing difference. But though present on the Mexican soil by agreement between the two governments, invested the full powers, and bearing evidence of the most friendly dispositions, his mission has been unavailing. The Mexican Government not only refused to receive him or listen to his propositions, but after a long-continued series of menaces have at last invaded our territory and shed the blood of our fellow-citizens on our own soil...