

America's war with Mexico has been called, both then and since, an unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression and territorial aggrandizement. Use the following documents, as well as your knowledge of the diplomatic history of the years 1836-1846, evaluate this assertion.

Sample #1

During the 1830's and 1840's, the debate over Texas annexation and the expansion of slavery eventually led the United States into conflict with Mexico. As the population of the United States grew during this time period, the federal government had a responsibility to provide new land opportunities for its citizens. However, the manner in which the U.S. would gain territory was not clearly defined. Since the border with the Republic with Texas was not firmly established and Manifest Destiny was simply a belief of President Polk, these are not adequate reasons for going to war. Although most Americans were farmers and new land was needed, the United States cannot defend the means by which territory was taken by force from Mexico.

The Louisiana Territory and Florida were obtained from France and Spain respectively through appropriate agreements with each of those countries. Mexico was forced to sign the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo once Mexico City was captured. One of the reasons given to justify America's actions in the War with Mexico involved the border dispute: Rio Grande vs. the Nueces River (**Background**). The Mexican government agreed to give up Texas under the condition that the southern border was the Nueces River. Since U.S. forces crossed this river, Mexico was invaded and thus had a right to defend itself (**Doc F**). No violation of U.S. territory occurred and as a result, the American Government had no right to conduct a military action. In addition to the border dispute, President Polk believed that under Manifest Destiny, the United States was to be entitled by God to inherit the entire North American Continent from the Atlantic Ocean in the east to the Pacific Ocean in the west (**Background**). However, many Americans disagreed with this rationale because it would allow for the expansion of slavery. Not to mention, Polk himself questioned the validity of America's actions in the war with Mexico (**Doc G**). America was not threatened by Mexico. America's neighbor to the south was in the way and the Federal Government had to fabricate reasons for fighting an unjust war.

Sample #2

When Texas declared its Independence from Mexico in 1836, it created a complicated diplomatic situation which would erupt into war ten years later. While the immediate annexation of Texas would have fueled Manifest Destiny and created economic opportunities for Americans, the contentious issue of slavery and its impact on representation in Congress delayed the decision. Throughout the subsequent decade, Americans flooded into Texas, as well as California, New Mexico and Oregon. The Presidential Election of 1844 became a referendum on the issue of Manifest Destiny and the status of Texas. The election of James K. Polk made Texas annexation inevitable and Texas was annexed in February of 1845, prompting Mexican authorities to sever diplomatic relations. Faced with a contentious southern neighbor, the Polk administration attempted to utilize diplomacy to settle the dispute. While there is obvious miscommunication over the exact location of the border, it is clear that the United States government was justified in declaring war as the Polk Administration exhausted diplomatic avenues, was concerned only with defending American territory, and therefore was provoked into war due to the irresponsible actions of the Mexican authorities.

James K. Polk was essentially forced to ask Congress for a war declaration due to the aggressive actions by the Mexican government. The border between Mexico and Texas was disputed because Mexico claimed the treaty which secured Texan Independence and placed the border at the Rio Grande was invalid, as it was procured from Santa Anna, who was no longer in charge of Mexico and who had signed the treaty under duress. (**BACK**) The United States attempted to utilize diplomacy by offering to purchase Mexico's Northern provinces numerous times prior to the outbreak of war. When Mexico severed relations in 1845, they in fact, not the United States, escalated tensions between the two countries. (**BACK**) The Polk Administration showed great patience and persistence by sending John Slidell, special envoy to Mexico, to secure a peaceful solution to border dispute. (**Doc. C**) In the Spring of 1846, the Slidell mission was snubbed by President Paredes, ending all possible diplomatic solutions. (**DOC F**) Without the possibility of diplomatic relations defusing the situation, Mexican troops crossed the Rio Grande and were involved in a skirmish with American troops. (**BACK**) By severing relations, refusing to negotiate with the Slidell mission, and invading US territory, the aggressive actions by the Mexican government created the situation which would become the basis for Polk's War declaration, (**Doc H**) thus justifying the actions of the Polk Administration.