

Name: _____

Date: _____

THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR (1846-1848)

Directions: Identify causes of the Mexican-American War

Context: The Mexican-American War (1846-1848) marked the first U.S. armed conflict fought on foreign soil. It pitted a politically divided and militarily unprepared Mexico against the expansionist-minded (wanted to get as much land as possible) administration of U.S. President James K. Polk, who believed the United States had a “manifest destiny” to spread across the continent to the Pacific Ocean. A border skirmish (fight) along the Rio Grande started off the fighting and was followed by a series of U.S. victories. When the dust cleared, Mexico had lost about one-third of its territory, including nearly all of present-day California, Utah, Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico.

Fifteen years before the United States was plunged (*pushed*) into Civil War, it fought a war against Mexico that added half a million square miles of territory to the United States. Not only was it the first American war fought almost entirely outside the United States, it was also the first American war to be reported, while it happened, by daily newspapers.

It was a controversial war that divided American public opinion. The *hidden* cause of the Mexican War was the movement of American settlers into lands claimed by Mexico. The immediate reason for the conflict was the annexation (To gain land for your country by peaceful means) of Texas in 1845.

After the defeat at San Jacinto in 1836, Mexico made two attempts in 1842 to re-conquer Texas. Even after these defeats, Mexico refused to recognize Texan independence and warned the United States that the annexation of Texas would be a declaration of war.

In early 1845, when Congress voted to annex Texas, Mexico kicked out the American ambassador and cut off relations between the two countries. But it did not declare war.

President Polk told his commanders to prepare for the possibility of war. He ordered American naval vessels (*ships*) to position themselves outside Mexican ports. And he sent American forces in the Southwest to Corpus Christi, Texas.

Peaceful settlement of the two countries' differences still seemed possible. In the fall of 1845, the President offered \$5 million to Mexico if they agreed to recognize the Rio Grande River as the southwestern boundary of Texas.

The United States also offered up to \$5 million for the territory of New Mexico--which included Nevada and Utah and parts of four other states--and up to \$25 million for California. Polk was anxious to acquire California because in mid-October 1845, he had been led to believe that Mexico had agreed to give California to Britain as payment for debts. Polk also sent a young Marine Corps lieutenant, Archibald H. Gillespie, to California, apparently to create a revolt against Mexican authority.

The Mexican government, already angry over the annexation of Texas, refused to accept an American negotiators. The failure of the negotiations led Polk to order Brigadier General Zachary Taylor to march 3,000 troops southwest from Corpus Christi, Texas, to "defend the Rio Grande" River. Late in March of 1846, Taylor and his men set up camp along the Rio Grande, directly across from the Mexican city of Matamoros, on a stretch of land claimed by both Mexico and the United States.

On April 25, 1846, a Mexican cavalry force crossed the Rio Grande and clashed with American troops, forcing the Americans to surrender after the loss of several lives. On May 11, after he received word of the border clash, Polk asked Congress to acknowledge that a state of war already existed "by the act of Mexico herself...notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it." "Mexico," the President announced, "has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil." Congress responded with a declaration of war.

The Mexican War was extremely controversial. Its supporters blamed Mexico for the hostilities because it had severed relations with the United States, threatened war, refused to receive an American negotiators or to pay the damage claims of American citizens. In addition, Mexico had "invaded our territory and shed American blood on American soil." Opponents declared the war as an un-right land grab by an expansionistic power against a weak neighbor that had been independent barely two decades.

The war's critics claimed that Polk intentionally provoked Mexico into war by ordering American troops into disputed territory. A Delaware Senator declared that ordering Taylor to the Rio Grande was "as much an act of aggression on our part as is a man's pointing a pistol at another's breast." Critics also argued that the war was an expansionist power play dictated by an aggressive Southern slave owners intent on acquiring more slave states.

A) Identify 5 causes of the Mexican American War from the reading

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2)

3)

4)

5)

B) Why did opponents criticize the Mexican-American war? Use evidence from the reading.

C) Why did people support the Mexican-American War? Use evidence from the reading.