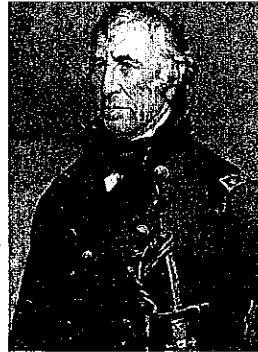


11 Fighting Over a Border

Military historian John S. D. Eisenhower says that the Mexican War had "the highest death rate of any war in our history."

General Zachary

Taylor wins one battle after another and is soon a national hero. Taylor is a Whig. So is another soldier-hero, General Winfield Scott. President Polk, a Democrat, is not pleased with their acclaim. He knows that the last soldier-hero, Andrew Jackson, was swept into the presidency. (Polk is right to worry; Taylor will become president in 1849.)



Zachary Taylor was 24 in 1808 when he entered the U.S. Army; he served for 39 years.

The Texans thought their southern border went down to the Rio Grande river. Mexico said, "No, it doesn't." The U.S. said that the Mexicans owed a lot of money to American citizens and it was time to pay up. Things got tense. Both countries sent armies to the Texas border. Both those armies had hotheads. President James K. Polk had already decided to declare war, when a few Mexicans killed a few Americans. It was May of 1846, and the Mexican War had begun.

People in the United States had mixed feelings about the war. President Polk was eager to fight. So were many other people. Thousands rushed to volunteer. Some people thought the United States should take all of Mexico. Slave owners saw Mexico as a place to extend slavery. Some, who thought themselves patriots, said they wanted to spread the American way of life. It was that manifest destiny idea.

But not everyone agreed. Some Americans said the United States was acting like a bully, picking on a weak neighbor. It took courage to speak out against the war; it usually does. Frederick Douglass, the abolitionist, had courage. Douglass wrote:

In our judgment, those who have all along been loudly in favor of... the war, and heralding its bloody triumphs with apparent rapture... have succeeded in robbing Mexico of her territory.... We are not the people to rejoice; we ought rather blush and hang our heads for shame.

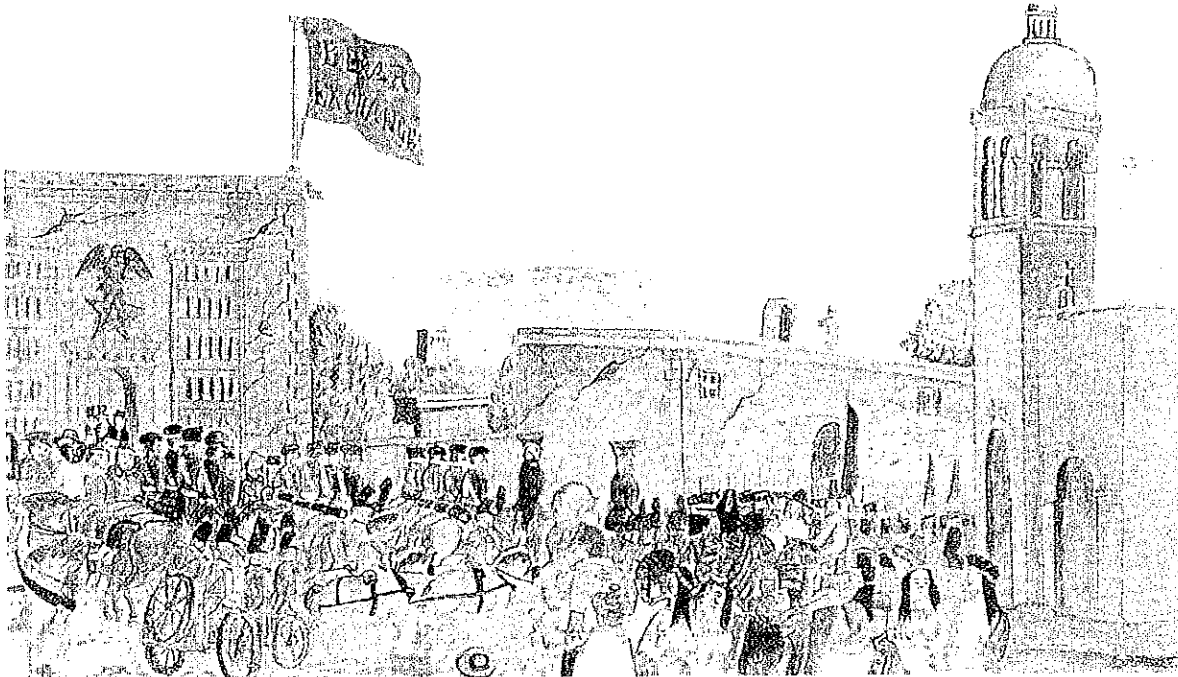
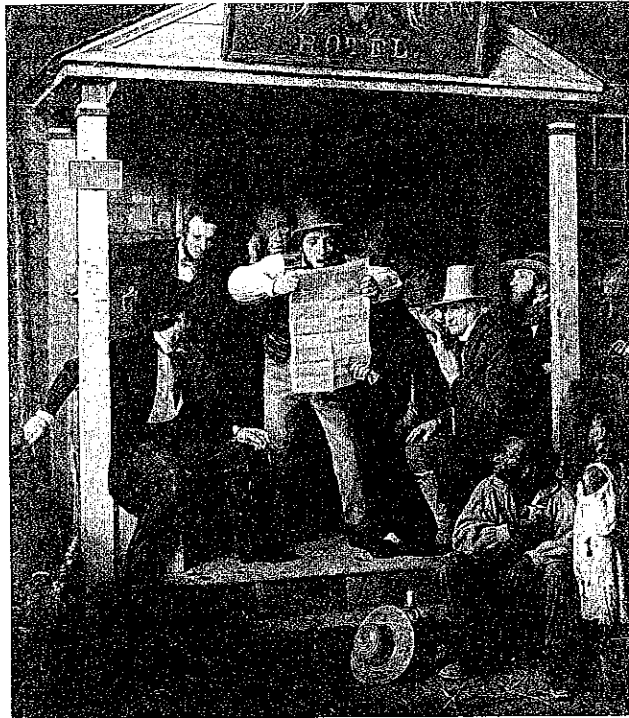
Writer Henry David Thoreau refused to pay his taxes and went to jail. (He didn't want his tax money used to support a war.) Three church groups—Congregational, Quaker, and Unitarian—denounced

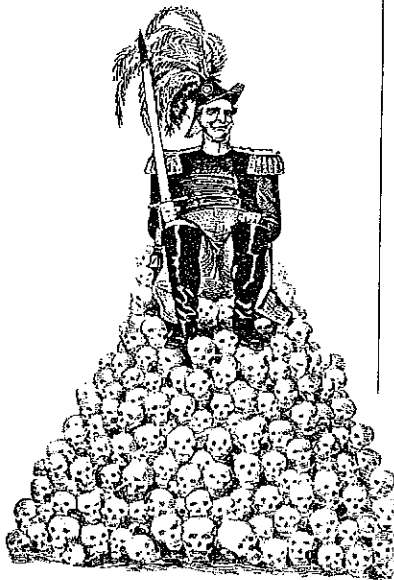
Back East, most Americans supported the war and thirsted for bulletins; Richard Caton Woodville called his picture *War News from Mexico*.

the war. Walt Whitman, a journalist who would soon become a poet, wrote that "America knows how to crush, as well as how to expand." (He favored peaceful expansion.) From the war front there were soon reports of ransacked towns, drunken soldiers, and senseless killings—on both sides. (Wars are usually like that.) More than 9,000 soldiers deserted the army before the war was over.

Henry Clay, who had been a war hawk in 1812, wrote, *This is no war of defense, but one of unnecessary and offensive aggression. It*

One of the U.S. divisions marches through San Antonio's Grand Military Plaza at the start of a 900-mile trek into Mexico.





is Mexico that is defending her firesides...not we. A gangly, long-legged, 38-year-old congressman named Abraham Lincoln stood up in Congress and attacked President Polk for starting an unnecessary war. *Allow the president to invade a neighboring nation...whenever he may choose to...and you allow him to make war at pleasure.* The House of Representatives passed a resolution condemning Polk.

But in New York, Philadelphia, Indianapolis, and many other places, the war was very popular. It was a war fought for territory, not ideals. Many Americans, at the time, seemed to want it that way. At parades and rallies, citizens cheered the war effort. American soldiers fought all the way to Mexico City, to "the halls of Montezuma." They fought Santa Anna—who was back in power—and they won the war.

After the war, when Zachary Taylor ran for president, his opponents showed him sitting on a pile of skulls.

Many of the soldiers who fought together in Mexico would soon be fighting against each other. (Some of their names are Robert E. Lee, T. J. "Stonewall" Jackson, Ulysses S. Grant, and George B. McClellan.) None of them realized it then, but the

LIBERTY FOR ALL?

Mexican War was a training school for another war that was soon to come.

General Winfield Scott, who was called "Old Fuss and Feathers" because he always looked splendid in his neat, elegant uniform, became a national hero. So did another general, "Old Rough and Ready" Zachary Taylor, whose uniform wasn't neat at all.

Soldiers and sailors returned home singing this song:

*When Zacharias Taylor gained the day,
Heave away, Santy Anno;
He made poor Santy run away,
All on the plains of Mexico.*

(CHORUS)

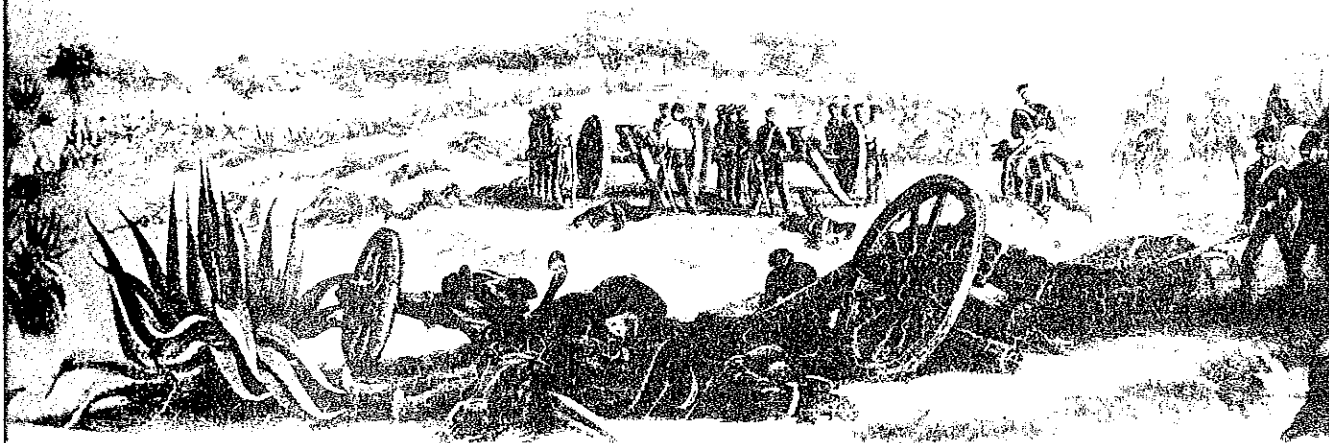
*So heave her up and away we'll go,
Heave away, Santy Anno;
Heave her up and away we'll go,
All on the plains of Mexico.*

*General Scott and Taylor, too,
Heave away, Santy Anno;
Have made poor Santy meet his Waterloo,
All on the plains of Mexico.*

(Repeat CHORUS)



The Mexican military academy was in a fort named Chapultepec. General Winfield Scott (*above*) attacked, and the Mexican army and the boy cadets fought him hand-to-hand. When the Americans charged Molino del Rey, part of the fort's defenses (*below*), half of them were killed. But Scott took Chapultepec and was a hero at home.



A young lieutenant—his name was Ulysses S. Grant—said the Mexican War was “one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation.”

A Yankee naval gunner, William H. Meyers, painted the pictures on this page. He was in California from 1846 to 1848 and made a picture record of the Mexican war there. Below is his view of the war's last battle, fought in 1847 at the Plains of Mesa near Los Angeles. Historians say hardly anyone got killed. Have you heard of artistic license?

When the war was over, the Texas–Mexico border was set at the Rio Grande river. But the United States got more than that border settlement; under the terms of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in 1848, the United States received California—which at the time meant land that stretched from Texas to California and went as far north as Wyoming.

President Polk didn't know how lucky he was. Nor did the rest of the nation. Something had just been discovered in California on land that belonged to that good-hearted Swiss-Californian, John A. Sutter. Something very valuable.



Like most inhabitants of the old Spanish lands, the Californians were great horsemen who fought with lassos and lances.

