

Causes of the Mexican-American War: Assignment Help Notes

Target Objective

The target objective for this essay is for students to analyze the causes of the Mexican-American War in 1846-48. Students should arrive at a judgment about which of these causes is most significant.

Brief Indicative Content

Students need to weigh the *relative importance* of historiographical views. Themes for analysis include:

- *Diplomatic*. To what extent was the conflict between the US and Mexico shaped by the relations between these countries and Britain, and particularly by the annexation of Texas to the US?
- *Ideological*. To what extent was the war caused by (1) Mexican nationalist aggression and political instability; or (2) US nationalist aggression and desire for land (Manifest Destiny)?
- *“New” Western*. To what extent did the history of the American West result from a collision between several cultural and ethnic groups (Anglo-American, African-American, Hispanic, American Indian and Asian), shaping the current borders between the US and Mexico?
- *Political*. To what extent was the war caused by (1) Mexican political inability to cope with the loss of Texas; or (2) sectional and party politics in the US?
- *Strategic*. To what extent did the US provoke war with Mexico as part of a plan to obtain Texas, California and the area between in order to consolidate American national security?

Students will need to take care to select material that will provide some range, depth, and cohesion in their answers. Students are *required* to use the extracts in the assignment sheet to explain and evaluate competing interpretations of the origins of the war. Students will need to formulate their own informed opinion on the *most significant* cause of the war. Students may, in conclusion, also reflect on the consequences of the war.

Suggested Resources

To sustain a well informed and analytical discussion, students will need to go beyond the material in the extracts by using a variety of books (check Google Books), including those from which the extracts are taken, e.g.:

Benjamin, Thomas and Jesús Velasco Márquez (1997) “The War Between the United States and Mexico 1846-1848” in Jaime E. Rodríguez and Kathryn Vincent, eds. *Myths, Misdeeds, and Misunderstandings: The Roots of Misunderstanding in US-Mexico Relations* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc.) pp. 97-124

Stephanson, Anders (2006) “The Ideology and Spirit of Manifest Destiny” in Dennis Merrill and Thomas G. Paterson, eds. *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations: Documents and Essays*, Concise Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company) pp 150-156.

Weeks, William E. (2006) “American Expansion, 1815-1860” in Robert D. Schulzinger, ed. *A Companion to American Foreign Relations* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing) pp. 64-78.

Bailey, Thomas S. (1980) *A Diplomatic History of the American People*, 10th Ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.)

Bemis, Samuel Flagg (1955) *A Diplomatic History of the United States*, 4th Ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company)

Bill, Alfred Hoyt (1969) *Rehearsal for Conflict: The War with Mexico 1846-1848* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc.)

Carney, Stephen A. (2006) *The Occupation of Mexico 1846-1848* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office), available at <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/Occupation/Occupation.htm>

Clary, David A. (2009) *Eagles and Empire: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle For a Continent* (New York: Bantam Books)

Crow, John A. (1991) *The Epic of Latin America*, 4th Ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press)

Davis, David Brion and Steven Mintz (1998) *The Boisterous Sea of Liberty: A Documentary History of America From Discovery Through the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press)

Eisenhower, John S. D. (1989) *So Far From God: The U.S. War With Mexico 1846-1848* (New York: Random House)

Eisenhower, John S. D. (1997) *Agent of Destiny: The Life and Times of General Winfield Scott* (New York: The Free Press)

Fehrenbach, T.R. (1995) *Fire and Blood: A History of Mexico*, Updated Ed. (New York: Da Capo Press)

Hietala, Thomas R. (1985) *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press)

Humphreys, R.A. (1960) "The States of Latin America", in J.P.T Bury, ed., *The New Cambridge Modern History, Volume X The Zenith of European Power 1830-70* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press)

Krenn, Michael L. (2006) *The Color of Empire: Race and American Foreign Relations* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, Inc.)

LaFeber, Walter (1989) *The American Age: United States Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad since 1750* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company)

Merry, Robert W. (2009) *A Country of Vast Designs: James K. Polk, the Mexican War, and the Conquest of the American Continent* (New York: Simon & Schuster)

Milner II, Clyde A., Carol A. O'Connor and Martha A. Sandweiss, eds. (1994) *The Oxford History of the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press)

Reynolds, David (2009) *America, Empire of Liberty: A New History of the United States* (New York: Basic Books)

Robinson, Cecil, Trans. and ed. (1989) *The View From Chapultepec: Mexican Writers on the Mexican-American War* (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press)

Vazquez, Josefina Zoraida and Lorenzo Meyer (1985) *The United States and Mexico* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press)

Weeks, William E. (2006) "American Expansionism, 1815-1860" in Robert D. Schulzinger, ed., *A Companion to American Foreign Relations* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing)

Wheelan, Joseph (2007) *Invading Mexico: America's Continental Dream and the Mexican War, 1846-1848* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers)

Woodworth, Steven E. (2010) *Manifest Destinies: America's Westward Expansion and the Road to the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf)

Students are not required to conduct internet-based research for this assignment, and indeed are discouraged from using electronic sources. However, if students find an electronic source that they wish to use and have any questions about the reliability of the material found online, they should consult their instructor.

Technical Requirements

Students must follow the advice given in (a) the *History Study Skills* guide on "Researching, planning and writing essays"; and (b) the *Student Guide for History Courses On Ground*, which contains writing exemplars. In brief, essays must conform to the following requirements:

- Between 2,000 and 2,500 words i.e. 8-10 double spaced pages with one-inch margins, and font size of 11 or 12. A word count must be provided at the end of the paper.
- Referenced using APA (Harvard) system. See Indiana University Bloomington, Campus Writing Program, 'APA Style: A Quick Guide', available at: <http://www.indiana.edu/~citing/APA.pdf>
- Bibliography of sources used (which is the convention for APA).
- A clear structure with an obvious introduction, middle section, and conclusion.
- The introduction must establish a thesis and indicate the content that will be discussed.
- Each subsequent paragraph should discuss only one analytical point, or two closely-related points.
- The conclusion should reiterate the line of argument and should highlight what is most significant.

Late Assignment Policy

Research essays that have not been through the structured drafting and review process (further details below) will not be accepted for submission, and any research essay submitted after the deadline will receive zero points. If there are extenuating circumstances that are properly documented, you will be permitted to write another research assignment on a completely different topic to the first submission (i.e. you will have to start all over again).

Plagiarism Policy

Students are reminded about Baker College policies on academic honesty (syllabus, p.2):

“Academic honesty, integrity, and ethics are required of all members of the Baker College community. Academic integrity and acting honorably are essential parts of professionalism that continue well beyond courses at Baker College. They are the foundation for ethical behavior in the workplace. There are four possible consequences for violating Baker College's Honor Code:

1. Failure of the assignment
2. Failure of the course
3. Expulsion from the College
4. Rescinding a certificate or degree”

Your instructor may require you to submit your essay to Turnitin, as stated in the syllabus:

“Baker College utilizes plagiarism detection services and has the authority to submit any papers or assignments to such services to determine authenticity. Some assignments may need to be submitted electronically for this purpose.”

Assessment

Essays will be assessed on the basis of three criteria:

- *Analysis and evaluation* (80 points). The significance of the information deployed must be analyzed consistently and a clear line of argument maintained throughout the essay.
- *Factual knowledge and understanding* (80 points). The information deployed must be accurate and relevant to the question.
- *Communication and presentation* (40 points). The essay must be properly structured, free of spelling and grammatical errors, and supported by a sufficient number of references and a bibliography consistent with the APA style guide.

In addition, 50 points are available for the structured drafting and review process, which will be assessed EITHER by using the “Milestones” rubrics, OR the submission of a prospectus. Your instructor will advise you which method will be used. Students should familiarize themselves with the detailed descriptors in the rubrics, which are available on Blackboard under “Course Information”.