

Topics for Research and Discussion

There are numerous ways to use the U.S. and Mexican sources in *The U.S.-Mexican War: A Binational Reader*. Often, the best topics for further research result from the analytical responses of individual readers to the selections contained in a book like this one. Below we offer a few sample topics that will allow you to begin your exploration of the U.S.-Mexican War as presented in our book.

Slavery and the U.S.-Mexican War

One of the recurring themes of *The U.S.-Mexican War: A Binational Reader* is the topic of slavery. The issue of slavery appears in numerous selections in the book, such as “John Quincy Adams and Texas,” “Robert Walker’s Argument for Reannexing Texas,” “Debate over the War in the House of Representatives,” and “The Wilmot Proviso,” among many others. Moreover, selections such as the song “Uncle Sam and Mexico” and the anecdote “A Faithful Negro” can tell us about how African Americans and their voices were imagined by whites during the war. What were the main arguments about slavery in the years leading up to, during, and after the U.S.-Mexican War? As a part of your research, consider the two African American voices included in the volume, Frederick Douglass and Martin Robison Delany.

Manifest Destiny

The ideology of Manifest Destiny refers to the belief that the Anglo-American peoples of the United States are destined to conquer and populate the North American continent, displacing the “inferior” races. The phrase, coined by John O’Sullivan in the summer of 1845, has become central to our understanding of the ideology of westward expansion in nineteenth-century U.S. history. With this in mind, and considering selections such as those by John O’Sullivan, Robert Walker, and James K. Polk, and the All-Mexico Question, define different arguments in favor and against the idea of Manifest Destiny. As you do your research and formulate your arguments, please note the ways in which international geopolitics, particularly with regard to Great Britain, shaped views and agendas over the acquisition of Mexican land.

Mexico Divided

One of the most challenging aspects of the U.S.-Mexican War is understanding the intense divisions between Mexican federalists and centralists and between puros and moderados. A large number of the selections included in *The U.S.-Mexican War: A Binational Reader* lend themselves to an exploration of Mexican politics. As you read some of the Mexican documents in Parts II and III of the book, compare and contrast the positions of different Mexican factions regarding Texas, federalism, and the war. To deepen your knowledge even further, seek out secondary sources listed in the Suggestions for Further Reading.

Women and the U.S.-Mexican War

The U.S.-Mexican War: A Binational Reader features many references to women and includes several writings by women. Consider the image of Mexican women in selections such as “*Legends of Mexico*” by George Lippard, “The Angels of Buena Vista” by John Greenleaf Whittier, and “*Captain Ray*” by James A. Gordon, among others, and compare them to the representation of women in the corrido “La Pasadita” and the fictional selections “Don Luis Martínez de Castro or The National Guard” by Niceto de Zamacois and “*The Coiner*” by Nicolás Pizarro Suárez. Based on your research, discuss the ways in which stories about women and war function as propaganda or a tool of ideological persuasion. Since several selections in this volume were written by U.S. and Mexican women, you may want to consider the ways in which actual women responded to the war. In what ways do these real women conform or depart from the stereotypes of women seen in other selections?

Cultural Understanding and Misunderstanding during the U.S.-Mexican War

In selections such as “Mary Austin Holley on the People of Texas,” “A Mexican Account of the U.S. Occupation of Jalapa,” “U.S. and Mexican Accounts of the Fall and Occupation of Mexico City,” and “La Pasadita,” among many others in the book, we find revealing examples of the ways in which North Americans saw Mexicans and vice versa. Use these and other sources in the volume to write a paper that presents a composite North American view of Mexicans and a composite Mexican view of North Americans. Are there any selections in the volume in which Mexicans and North Americans come together and find common ground? Which voices, on either side of the conflict, present views that depart from the norm?

The Horrors of War

Throughout history, writers and thinkers have documented the horrors of war, and U.S. and Mexican commentators of the U.S.-Mexican War were no different, regardless of whether they were actual combatants or not. In *The U.S.-Mexican War: A Binational Reader*, look for U.S. and Mexican selections that attest to the horrors of war and contrast them. Then, consider more idealized visions of the war in some of the literary selections included in the book. How does the literary imagination soften, justify, or idealize the harsh realities of war depicted in eyewitness accounts?

Culture and National Identity

Wars are not only framed by battlefields and the political arena. They also belong to culture and to the stories that a nation tells about itself and its identity. Keeping this in mind, look at the selections in Part VI of *The U.S.-Mexican War: A Binational Reader* and find sources for an argument about the ways in which U.S. and Mexican writers interpreted the war. Do you think U.S. and Mexican writers used similar strategies to glorify themselves and their cause? Use specific examples to say how they did or did not. A more

ambitious and research intensive version of this topic might include comparing cultural narratives about the U.S.-Mexican War with cultural narratives from later wars, such as the Spanish-American War or any other subsequent conflict. For students who know Spanish, Mexican responses to the French Occupation of Mexico (1863–1867) will provide a useful point of comparison to the texts contained in this book.

The Legacies of the War

The U.S.-Mexican War had a lasting impact on U.S. and Mexican history. Identify and discuss documents in the book that synthesize three historical legacies related to the war: a legacy relating to post-war Mexican history, a legacy relating to the Mexicans and Native Americans who remained on the U.S. side of the border drawn by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and a post-war legacy relating to the United States and its debates over slavery. For each of these constituencies, what was gained and what was lost as a result of the U.S.-Mexican War? Do you think that these legacies continue to reverberate in the present? A more ambitious and research intensive project might lead you to consider in some detail the events that lead to the Civil War in the United States, or to explore the rise of Benito Juárez and the Reforma Movement in Mexico. Students interested in nineteenth-century Chicano history might explore the writings of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton or the ways in which seminal Chicano activists and thinkers of the twentieth century, such as Reyes Tijerina and Rodolfo Corky Gonzáles, interpreted the U.S.-Mexican War and its legacy.