

## Chapter 8: We Take Nothing By Conquest, Thank God

### Main Ideas:

1. The country itself wasn't wholly interested in expanding borders and starting the Mexican war, but when war fever comes along, it's hard to resist the infection.
2. While the military experience gained by the eventual commanding officers in the Civil War, many rank and file soldiers deserted or did not support the cause.
3. Many civilians also did not support the cause, and felt that the Mexican war was a war of aggression, or at least feigned defense.
4. President Polk took advantage of expansionist ideals of the time to allow for the expansion of the United States through military conflict.
5. This was the first "War of Aggression" the United States had begun, so the manner in which this war was held by and large dictated the way future aggressive or "preemptive" conflicts would be undertaken.
6. Factions of the government and people still wanted complete westward expansion, but wanted to do so through the much more slow and thorough process of cultural and economic amalgamation.

### Quotes:

1. "Violence leads to violence, and if this movement of ours does not lead to other and to bloodshed, I am much mistaken." Page 149 by Colonel Ethan Allen Hitchcock. I chose this quote in particular because it was a very accurate piece of foreshadowing. It shows that not only did the rank and file infantry have misgivings about the war, but that also some commanders wished they could ignore their orders. It can also be interpreted, if taken out of context, as to be a conjecture on the future of the United States. Many people in the world believe that the United States is becoming a 'Global police force' in a way, and taking aggressive action around the world, and would also blame the U.S.A for a sizable portion of bloodshed in recent history.
2. "Debate on the bill providing volunteers and money for the war was limited to two hours, and most of this was used up reading selected portions of the tabled documents, so that barely a half-hour was left for the discussion of issues." Pages 152-153 If you thought filibustering was bad, try a time limit on sending an entire nation to war. The immense pressure the legislators opposed to the war must've been nearly insurmountable. The decision to fund the war most likely would've been much different had there simply been more time to decide.
3. "If it is cruel to drag black men from their homes, how much more cruel it is to drag white men from their homes under false inducements, and compelling them to leave their wives and children, without leaving a cent or any protection, in the coldest season of the year, to die in a foreign and sickly climate!" By a man who wrote a history of the New York Volunteers on page 161. This quote shows the racism of the time, but also is reminiscent of what a Union officer may have said towards the end of the Civil War when the Union began recruiting black Americans. Moreover, it addressed the military

overstepping its bounds into civilian life and taking people away from where they are needed the most by their family to go fight where the nation needs them the most.

#### Questions:

1. While information about the Mexican War from the Mexicans themselves must be difficult to come by, I'm certain there's more of it out there. You stress that this was a war of aggression and take a tone against it. Well, where's the equal coverage? A war has multiple sides, and I think it's especially fair that in a war of aggression, the victors keep track of the history of the war not just for their side, but also for the opponents. In short, *what happened to the Mexicans during the Mexican War and were there any similarities between our reactions to the war?*
2. The subject of immigrants also seems to be glossed over. It is mentioned that immigrants deserted and had little patriotism, but is there any information or quotes from those that did desert? Surely there are trial proceedings for any that were caught?
3. President Polk must've had more of an opinion, or perhaps personal journals? He started the war for all intents and purposes, did he leave any diary entries on the subject? Was he plagued by it later in his life?

#### Terms:

1. Social Advancements
2. War of Aggression
3. Inferiors
4. Surrendered
5. Ceded
6. Exonerated
7. Depredation

#### Personal Reaction:

To be honest, I feel that human sentiment towards war is never always for the conflict, or always against it. History books often paint older wars as one-sided and supported by every branch and group when in actuality there are many divisions over the war during the period. This chapter talked about just such an occasion. This was not a war of necessity, but a war of convenience and speed in reaching the goal of westward expansion. In retrospect I believe the better decision for the United States would've been to absorb Mexico through economic and

cultural influence that would result in the eventual joining of both Mexico and the United States of America.