**Primary Accounts Excerpted from Howard Zinn’s People’s History of the United States**

**Opposition to Mexican American War Viewpoint**

The Mexicans had fired the first shot. But they had done what the American government wanted, according to Colonel Hitchcock, who wrote in his diary, even before those first incidents:

*I have said from the first that the United States are the aggressors. … We have not one particle of right to be here. … It looks as if the government sent a small force on purpose to bring on a war, so as to have a pretext for taking California and as much of this country as it chooses. … My heart is not in this business … but, as a military man, I am bound to execute orders. On May 9, before news of any battles, Polk was suggesting to his cabinet a declaration of war. Polk recorded in his diary what he said to the cabinet meeting: I stated … that up to this time, as we knew, we had heard of no open act of aggression by the Mexican army, but that the danger was imminent that such acts would be committed. I said that in my opinion we had ample cause of war, and that it was impossible … that I could remain silent much longer … that the country was excited and impatient on the subject. …*

Abraham Lincoln of Illinois was not yet in Congress when the war began, but after his election in 1846 he had occasion to vote and speak on the war. His “spot resolutions” became famous—he challenged Polk to specify the exact spot where American blood was shed “on the American soil.” But he would not try to end the war by stopping funds for men and supplies. Speaking in the House on July 27, 1848, he said:

*If to say “the war was unnecessarily and unconstitutionally commenced by the President” be opposing the war, then the Whigs have very generally opposed it. … The marching an army into the midst of a peaceful Mexican settlement, frightening the inhabitants away, leaving their growing crops and other property to destruction, to you may appear a perfectly amiable, peaceful, unprovoking procedure; but it does not appear so to us. … But if, when the war had begun, and had become the cause of the country, the giving of our money and our blood, in common with yours, was support of the war, then it is not true that we have always opposed the war. With few individual exceptions, you have constantly had our votes here for all the necessary supplies. …*

**Pro-Mexican War Viewpoint**

Accompanying all this aggressiveness was the idea that the United States would be giving the blessings of liberty and democracy to more people. This was intermingled with ideas of racial superiority, longings for the beautiful lands of New Mexico and California, and thoughts of commercial enterprise across the Pacific. The New York Herald said, in 1847:

*“The universal Yankee nation can regenerate and disenthrall the people of Mexico in a few years; and we believe it is part of our destiny to civilize that beautiful country.” The Congressional Globe of February 11, 1847, reported: Mr. Giles, of Maryland—I take it for granted, that we shall gain territory, and must gain territory, before we shut the gates of the temple of Janus. …We must march from ocean to ocean. … We must march from Texas straight to the Pacific ocean, and be bounded only by its roaring wave. … It is the destiny of the white race, it is the destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race. …*

Meanwhile, by land and by sea, Anglo-American forces were moving into California. A young naval officer, after the long voyage around the southern cape of South America, and up the coast to Monterey in California, wrote in his diary:

*Asia … will be brought to our very doors. Population will flow into the fertile regions of California. The resources of the entire country … will be developed. … The public lands lying along the route [of railroads] will be changed from deserts into gardens, and a large population will be settled. …*

**Mexican Viewpoint**

From the viewpoint of Mexicans, the answer was clear: the U.S. government was not seeking to protect its territorial security, nor did it have other supposed demands. but rather it was determined to take over a territory legitimately belonging to Mexico. This posture was reiterated in an article in the daily "El Tiempo" which stated: "The American government acted like a bandit who came upon a traveler."21 The daily "El Republicano" published the following opinion:

*No one has any doubts about the intentions the Washington cabinet has had for some time now with respect to Mexico...One fights in the name of usurpation; the other defends justice... the war has begun and the [Mexican] nation has a great deal at stake, since even if justice is on its side, that is unfortunately not enough to triumph. and hold back the excesses of a powerful enemy The war...has now begun, to our misfortune, and it is urgent that time not be wasted*.

Most people in Mexico believed the use of arms was the only option available to defend their rights and territorial integrity. Thus, on July 6, 1846, President Mariano Paredes enacted the Congressional decree that sustained such principles in the following terms:

*Article 1. The government, in the natural defense of the nation, will repel the aggression initiated and sustained by the United States of America against the Republic of Mexico, having invaded and committed hostilities in a number of the departments making up Mexican territory.*

*Article 3. The government will communicate to friendly nations and to the entire republic the justifiable causes which obliged it to defend its rights, left with no other choice but to repel force with force, in response to the violent aggression committed by the United States.*

The events of the following months dramatically prevented Mexicans from pursuing the stubborn, however just, defense of their territory. and they finally had to accept a negotiation that was difficult, painful and undignified for negotiators on both sides. This is revealed by comments made by Nicholas Trist to his wife regarding the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the attitude assumed by Mexicans with regard to the U.S. invasion:

*Just as they were about to sign the treaty...one of the Mexicans, Don Bernardo Couto, remarked to him, "this must be a proud moment for you; no less proud for you than it is humiliating for us." To this Mr. Trist replied "we are making peace, let that be our only thought." But, said he to us in relating it, "Could those Mexicans have seen into my heart at that moment, they would have known that my feeling of shame as an American was far stronger than theirs could be as Mexicans. For though it would not have done for me to say so there, that was a thing for every right minded American to be ashamed of, and I was ashamed of it, most cordially and intensely ashamed of it."*

**Analysis Question (write responses BELOW primary source comparison CHART)**

1. How do the accounts differ? Use specific quotes to support your evidence.
2. What do the various primary resources reveal about differing viewpoints on the Mexican American War?