Name _____ Mod _____ APUSH COACH LEWIS CBHS

H-O-H--> "The Causes of the Mexican War"

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

1. What were the arguments for and against the Mexican War?
2. Did President Polk provoke war with Mexico?
3. What were the goals of the U. S. government in the Mexican War?
4. Why did so many people eventually oppose the War?

Document #1

After twenty-five years, the American population has begun to extend itself to the Oregon. Some hundreds went a few years ago; a thousand went last year; two thousand are now setting out from the frontier of Missouri; tens of thousands are meditating the adventure. I say to them all, Go on! the government will follow you, and will give protection and land. . . .

Let the emigrants go on, and carry their rifles. We want thirty thousand rifles in the valley of the Oregon; they will make all quiet there, in the event of a war with Great Britain for the domination of that country. Thirty thousand rifles on the Oregon will annihilate the Hudson Bay Company, drive them off our continent, quiet their Indians, and protect the American interests in all the vast region of the Rocky Mountains. Besides . . . the settlers in Oregon will also recover and open for us the North American road to India!

Source: Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, speech in the U.S. Senate, 1844.

Document #2

I proceed now to a consideration of what is to me the strongest argument against annexing Texas to the United States. This measure will extend and perpetuate slavery. ...As far back as the year 1829, the annexation of Texas was agitated in the Southern and Western States; and it was urged on the ground of the strength and extension it would give to the slaveholding interest. . . . The great argument for annexing Texas is, that it will strengthen "the peculiar institution" of the South, and open a new and vast field for slavery. . . .

By this act, slavery will be perpetuated in the old States as well as spread over new. It is well known, that the soil of some of the old states has become exhausted by slave cultivation. . . . It is by slave breeding and slave selling that these states subsist.... By annexing Texas, we shall not only create slavery where it does not exist, but breathe new life into it, where its end seemed to be near. States, which might and ought to throw it off, will make the multiplication of slaves their great aim and chief resource.

Source: Reverend William Ellery Channing, a letter to Hon. Henry Clay, 1837.

Document #3

[The slave] population of the United States cannot be diminished, but must be increased. Now, if we shall annex Texas, it will operate as a safety-valve to let off the superabundant slave population from among us; and will, at the same time, improve their condition. They will be more happy, and we all shall be more secure . . .

Source: Senator George McDuffie of South Carolina, *Congressional Globe*, 1844.

Document #4

California will, probably, next fall away from [Mexico]. . . .The Anglo-Saxon foot is already on its borders. Already the advance guard of the irresistible army of Anglo-Saxon emigration has begun to pour down upon it, armed with the plough and the rifle, and marking its trail with schools and colleges, courts and representative halls, mills and meeting-houses. A population will soon be in actual occupation of California, over which it be idle for Mexico to dream of dominion. They will necessarily become independent. All this without ... responsibility of our people—in the natural flow of events.

Source: John L. O'Sullivan, *Democratic Review*, 1845.

Document #5

Why, says the chairman of this Committee on Foreign Relations, it is the most reasonable thing in the world! We ought to have the Bay of San Francisco. Why? Because it is the best harbor on the Pacific! It has been my fortune, Mr. President, to have practiced a good deal in criminal courts in the course of my life, but I have never yet heard a thief, arraigned for stealing a horse, plead that it was the best horse that he could find in the country! We want California. What for? Why, says the Senator from Michigan, we will have it; and the Senator from South Carolina, with a very mistaken view, I think, of policy, says you can't keep our people from going there. I don't desire to prevent them. Let them go and seek their happiness in whatever country or clime it pleases them.

Source: Senator Thomas Corwin of Ohio, *Congressional Globe*, 1845.

Document #6

None can fail to see the danger to our safety and future peace if Texas remains an independent state, or becomes an ally or dependency of some foreign nation more powerful than herself. Is there one among our citizens who would not prefer perpetual peace with Texas to occasional wars, which often occur between bordering independent nations? Is there one who would not prefer free intercourse with her, to high duties on all our products and manufactures which enter her ports or cross her frontiers? Is there one who would not prefer an unrestricted communication with her citizens, to the frontier obstructions which must occur if she remains out of the Union?

Source: President James Polk, Inaugural Address, 1845.

Document #7

The [Mexican] race is perfectly accustomed to being conquered, and the only new lesson we shall teach is that our victories will give liberty, safety, and prosperity to the vanquished. To liberate and ennoble—not to enslave and debase—-is our mission. Well may the Mexican nation, whose great masses have never yet tasted liberty, prattle over their lost phantom of nationality. . . . [T]here is no excuse for the man educated under our institutions, who talks of our "wronging the Mexicans" when we offer them a position infinitely above any they have occupied, since their history began, and in which, for the first time, they may aim at the greatness and dignity of a truly republican and self-governing people.

Source: Editor, *New York Sun*, November 20,1847.

Document #8

Resolved, That the present war with Mexico has its primary origin in the unconstitutional annexation to the United States of the foreign state of Texas while the same was still at war with Mexico; that it was unconstitutionally commenced by the order of the President, to General Taylor, to take military possession of territory in dispute between the United States and Mexico, and in the occupation of Mexico; and that it is now waged ingloriously—by a powerful nation against a weak neighbor—unnecessarily and without just cause, at immense cost of a portion of her territory, from which slavery has already been excluded, with the triple object of extending slavery, of strengthening "Slave Power," and of obtaining the control of the Free States, under the Constitution of the United States.

Resolved, That our attention is directed anew to the wrong and "enormity" of slavery, and to the tyranny and usurpation of the "Slave Power," as displayed in the history of our country, particularly in the annexation of Texas and the present war with Mexico. . . .

Source: Charles Sumner, Legislature of Massachusetts, 1847.

Document #9

But I am In danger of running Into unnecessary details, which my debility will not enable me to close. The question Is full of Interest, also, as It affects our domestic relations and as It may bear upon those of Mexico to us. I will not undertake to follow It out to its consequences In those respects, though I must say that, In all aspects, the annexation of Texas to the United States promises to enlarge the circle of free Institutions, and Is essential to the United States, particularly as lessening the probabilities of future collision with foreign powers, and giving them greater efficiency In spreading the blessings of peace.

Source: Andrew Jackson in a letter to Congressman Aaron V. Brown of TN, February 12, 1843.

Document #10

We love to indulge in thoughts of the future extent and power of this Republic—because with its increase is the increase of human happiness and liberty….What has miserable, inefficient Mexico—with her superstition, her burlesque upon freedom, her actual tyranny by the few over the many—what has she to do with the great mission of peopling the New World with a noble race? Be it ours, to achieve that mission! Be it ours to roll down all of the upstart leaven of old despotism, that comes our way!

Source: Walt Whitman, editorial, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle,* July 7, 1846.

Document #11

…The act of sending an armed force among the Mexicans was unnecessary, inasmuch as Mexico was in no way molesting or menacing the United States or the people thereof; and that it was unconstitutional, because the power of levying was is vested in Congress, and not in the President.

Source: Abraham Lincoln, June 1, 1860.

Document #12

Long-memoried Mexicans have never forgotten that their northern enemy tore away about half of their country. The argument that they were lucky not to lose all of it, and that they had been paid something for their land, did not lessen their bitterness. The war also marked an ugly turning point in the relations between the United States and Latin America as a whole. Hitherto, Uncle Sam had been regarded with some complacency, even friendliness. Henceforth, he was increasingly feared as the "Colossus of the North." Suspicious neighbors to the south condemned him as a greedy and untrustworthy bully, who might next despoil them of their soil.

Secondary Source: Bailey and Kennedy, *The American Pageant*, p. 272 (textbook).

Document #13

The cup of forbearance had been exhausted even before the recent information from the frontier of the [Rio Grande] Del Norte. But now, after reiterated menaces, Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory, and shed American blood upon the American soil. She has proclaimed that hostilities have commenced, and that the two nations are now at war.
As war exists, and, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of Mexico herself, we are called upon by every consideration of duty and patriotism to vindicate with decision the honor, the rights, and the interests of our country.

Source: James K. Polk, 1846.

Document #14

But, sir, the issue now presented is not whether slavery shall exist unmolested where it now is, but whether it shall be carried to new and distant regions, now free, where the footprint of a slave cannot be found. This, sir, is the issue. Upon it I take my stand, and from it I cannot be frightened or driven by idle charges of abolitionism.

I ask not that slavery be abolished. I demand that this government preserve the integrity of free territory against the aggressions of slavery--against its wrongful usurpations. . . . We are fighting this war cheerfully, not reluctantly--cheerfully fighting this war for Texas; and yet we seek not to change the character of her institutions. Slavery is there; there let it remain. . . .

Now, sir, we are told that California is ours, that New Mexico is ours--won by the valor of our arms. They are free. Shall they remain free? Shall these fair provinces be the inheritance and homes of the white labor of freemen or the black labor of slaves? This, sir, is the issue—this is the question. The North has the right, and her representatives here have the power. . . .

There is no question of abolition here, sir. Shall the South be permitted, by aggression, by invasion of the right, by subduing free territory and planting slavery upon it, to wrest these provinces from Northern freemen. . . ?

Source: David Wilmot, February 8, 1847.

Document #15

Sir: I am directed by the President to instruct you to advance and occupy, with the troops under your command, positions on or near the east bank of the Rio [Grande] del Norte, as soon as it can be conveniently done with reference to the season and the routes by which your movements must be made....

In the positions you may take in carrying out these instructions and other movements that may be made, the use of the Rio [Grande] del Norte may be very convenient, if not necessary. Should you attempt to exercise the right which the United States [has] in common with Mexico to the free navigation of this river, it is probable that Mexico would interpose resistance. You will not attempt to enforce this right without further instructions....

It is not designed, in our present relations with Mexico that you should treat her as an enemy; but, should she assume that character by a declaration of war, or any open act of hostility towards us, you will not act merely on the defensive, if your relative means enable you to do otherwise....

Source: Order from Secretary of War William L. Marcy to General Zachary Taylor, U.S. Army, January 13, 1846.

Document #16

At the time Mr. Slidell presented himself, the troops of the United States occupied our territory, their squadrons threatened our ports, and they prepared to occupy the peninsula of the Californias, of which the question of the Oregon with England is only a preliminary. Mr. Slidell was not received, because the dignity of the nation repelled this new insult. Meanwhile, the army of the United States encamped at Corpus Christi, and occupied the Isla del Padre; following this, they then moved to the point Santo Isabel, and their standard of the stars and stripes waved on the right bank of the Rio Bravo del Norte, opposite the city of Matamoros, blockading that river with their vessels of war. The village of Laredo was surprised by a part of their troops, and a small party of our men, reconnoitering there, were disarmed. Hostilities, then, have been commenced, by the United States of North America, beginning new conquests upon the frontier territories of the departments of Tamaulipas and New Leon, and progressing at such a rate that troops of the same United States threaten Monterey in Upper California. No one can doubt which of the two republics is responsible for this war: a war which any sense of equity and justice, and respect for the rights and laws of civilized nations, might have avoided....

Source: Proclamation of President Don Mariano, *Paredes y Arrillaga*, April 23, 1846.