

On Expanding into Mexican Territory

The annexation of vast Mexican territories in 1848 exacerbated the already strained relations between North and South.

As you read the passages below, consider how regional differences may have influenced arguments for and against expansionism in the mid-1800s.

PRO-ANNEXATION

In his 1845 Inaugural Address, President James Polk argued in favor of the annexation of Texas.

The Republic of Texas has made known her desire to come into our Union, to form a part of our Confederacy and enjoy with us the blessings of liberty secured and guaranteed by our Constitution. Texas was once a part of our country—was unwisely ceded away to a foreign power [in 1819]—is now independent, and possesses an undoubted right to dispose of a part or the whole of her territory, and to merge her sovereignty as a separate and independent state in ours . . .

To Texas, the reunion is important because the strong protecting arm of our government would be extended over her, and the vast resources of her fertile soil and genial climate would be speedily developed, while the safety of New Orleans and of our whole southwestern frontier against hostile aggression, as well as the interests of the whole Union, would be promoted by it. . .

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 so 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?

Whatever is good or evil in the local [slave] institutions of Texas will remain her own, whether annexed to the United States or not. None of the

present states will be responsible for them any more than they are for the local institutions of each other. They have confederated together for certain specific objects. Upon the same principle that they would refuse to form a perpetual union with Texas because of her local institutions, our forefathers would have been prevented from forming our present Union.

PRO-ANNEXATION

In an 1845 editorial in United States Magazine and Democratic Review, John L. O'Sullivan explained why the United States should own the rich and beautiful lands of the Southwest.

It is time now for opposition to the annexation of Texas to cease. It is time for the common duty of patriotism to the country to succeed. Or if this claim will not be recognized, it is at least time for common sense to bow with decent grace to the inevitable and the irreversible.

The pretense that the annexation has been unrightful and unrighteous is wholly untrue and unjust to ourselves. If Texas became peopled with an American population, it was on the express invitation of Mexico herself. The invitation was accompanied with guarantees of state independence and the maintenance of a federal system similar to our own. What, then, can be more preposterous than all this clamor by Mexico against annexation as a violation of any rights of hers, any duties of ours?

Nor is there any just foundation for the charge that annexation is a great proslavery measure calculated to increase and keep alive that institution. Slavery had nothing to do with it. Opinions were and are greatly divided in both the North and South, as to the influence to be exerted by the annexation on slavery and the slave states.