

## Examining Perspectives: Support for War

In 1845, the *Washington Union*, a newspaper that supported the position of President Polk, insisted that westward expansion into Mexican lands was inevitable. An editorial in the paper asked: *Let the great measure of annexation be accomplished, and with it the questions of boundary and claims. For who can arrest the torrent that will pour onward to the West? The road to California will be open to us. Who will stay the march of our western people?*

The influential *American Review* said that Mexico should bow before "a superior population, insensibly oozing into her territories, changing her customs, and out-living, out-trading, exterminating her weaker blood."

The New York *Herald* said in 1847, "The universal Yankee nation can regenerate and disenthral the people of Mexico in a few years; and we believe it is a part of our destiny to civilize that beautiful country."

The Reverend Theodore Parker of Boston criticized war with Mexico, arguing that the US should expand not by war but by the power of ideas. He referred to the Mexicans as "a wretched people; wretched in their origin, history and character." He viewed US expansion as the "steady advance of a superior race, with superior ideas and a better civilization."

An editorial in the *Congressional Globe* echoed this sentiment, stating, "We must march from Texas straight to the Pacific Ocean....It is the destiny of the white race."

Many leaders shared these attitudes. Ohio Congressman Delano described Mexicans as an inferior people who "embrace all shades of color...a sad compound of Spanish, English, Indian and Negro bloods...and resulting, it is said, in the production of a slothful, ignorant race of beings."

On May 9, even before Polk had received news of any battles between US and Mexican troops, Polk held a cabinet meeting. He recorded in his diary what he said at the 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...*

When Polk heard the news of US casualties, he and his cabinet decided to declare war. The declaration of war contained the following text:

*After reiterated menaces, Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil.... The cup of forbearance has been exhausted, even before the recent information from the frontier of the [Rio Grande]. But now, after reiterated menaces, Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory, and shed American blood upon American soil. She has proclaimed that hostilities have commenced, and that the two nations are now at war.*

*As war, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, by the act of Mexico herself, we are called upon by every consideration of duty and patriotism to vindicate with decision and honor, the rights, and the interests of our country.*

The US House passed the war resolution by a vote of 174 to 14. Senators debated the measure, which was limited to one day, and approved the measure by a vote of 40 to 2. The poet Walt Whitman reacted to the declaration of war against Mexico by writing in the *Brooklyn Eagle*, "Yes: Mexico must be thoroughly chastised!...Let our arms now be carried with a spirit which shall teach the world that, while we are not forward for a quarrel, America knows how to crush, as well as how to expand!"