



the crushing impediment of racism they also brought with them, and the difficulties of living in a different climate and sometimes hostile environment, U.S. forces comported themselves reasonably well. There were atrocities, to be sure, and the Polk administration imposed a heavy burden on a defeated people by forcing them to pay taxes to finance the occupation. As a matter of military expediency, however, and to behave as they felt citizens of a republic should, the Americans tried to conciliate the population in most areas they moved through. Little was done to impose republicanism, and the impact of U.S. intervention on Mexico appears to have been slight. The areas occupied were briefly Americanized and some elements of American culture survived in Mexico, but the mixing of peoples was at best superficial and the gap between them remained wide. Ironically, the impact of intervention may have been greater on the occupiers, manifesting itself in such things as men's fashions and hair-

styles and the incorporation of Spanish words and phrases into the language and as U.S. place names. The experience of fighting in a foreign land exposed Americans to a foreign culture, challenging their parochialism and contributing to the growth of national self-awareness.⁶³

The war bitterly divided the United States. Citizens responded to its outbreak with an enthusiasm that bordered on hysteria. The prospect of fighting in an exotic foreign land appealed to their romantic spirit and sense of adventure. War provided a diversion from the mounting sectional conflict and served as an antidote for the materialism of the age. In the eyes of some, it was a test for the republican experiment, a way to bring the nation back to its first principles. "Ho, for the Halls of the Montezumas" was the battle cry, and the call for volunteers produced such a response that thousands had to be turned away. This was the first U.S. war to rest on a popular base. Stirring reports of battles provided to avid readers through the penny press by correspondents on the scene stimulated great popular excitement.⁶⁴

Like most U.S. wars, this conflict also provoked opposition. Religious leaders, intellectuals, and some politicians denounced it as "illegal, unrighteous, and damnable" and accused Polk of violating "every principle of international law and moral justice."⁶⁵ Abolitionists claimed that this "piratical war" was being waged "solely for the detestable and horrible purpose of extending and perpetuating American slavery."⁶⁶ Whigs sought to exploit "Mr. Polk's War." The young congressman Abraham Lincoln introduced his famous "spot resolution," demanding to know precisely where Polk believed American blood had been shed on American soil. Senator Tom Corwin of Ohio declared that if he were a Mexican he would greet the invaders "with bloody hands" and welcome them to "hospitable graves." Polk's own Democratic Party was increasingly divided, the followers of both Calhoun and Van Buren opposing him. The opposition to the Mexican War was not as crippling as that during the War of 1812. Anti-war forces were weakened by the extremism of people such as Corwin and by their own ambivalence. Many who fervently opposed the war saw no choice but to support U.S. troops in the field. Opponents of the war also recognized that the nation as a whole supported

63. Johannsen, *Halls of the Montezumas*, 32-33, 50, 171-73, 205; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 789-90, 797-98.

64. Johannsen, *Halls of the Montezumas*, 10, 12-13, 16, 25.

65. Graebner, "Mexican War," 405.

66. John H. Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848* (Madison, Wisc., 1973), 99.

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