DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR
“MEXICAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE MEXICAN–U.S. WAR, 1846–1848”
Professor Will Fowler, University of St. Andrews

Organizing Questions
• What were the consequences of the Mexican–U.S. War for Mexico?
• How does Mexico remember the Mexican–U.S. War? How does this compare to how the war is described in history textbooks outside of Mexico?

Summary
In July 2021, Professor Will Fowler of the University of St. Andrews gave a lecture titled “Mexican Perspectives on the Mexican–U.S. War, 1846–1848” to a group of teachers attending a course organized by the Center of Latin American Studies at Stanford University. As one of the world’s leading experts on Mexican history, Professor Fowler provided a perspective of the Mexican–U.S. War that few in the United States have considered. He gave a historical overview of the Mexican context in the build-up to the war and of the experience of the conflict itself. Professor Fowler also discussed the Mexican perspective on the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the larger consequences and legacy of the war for Mexico.

Objectives
During and after viewing this video, students will
• gain an understanding of Mexico’s experience of the Mexican–U.S. War and the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo;
• examine what led to Mexico’s defeat in the war;
• discuss the consequences and legacy of the war from a Mexican perspective; and
• learn the importance of thinking critically about perspectives in their textbooks and classes.
**Materials**
- Handout 1, Video Notes
- Handout 2, Background on the Niños Héroes
- Handout 3, Treatment of the War in a U.S. Textbook
- Answer Key 1, Video Notes
- Teacher Information, Video Transcript

**Equipment**
- Computer with Internet access and a Flash-enabled or HTML5-supported web browser
- Computer projector and screen
- Computer speakers

**Teacher Preparation**
Instructions and materials are based on a class size of 30 students. Adjust accordingly for different class sizes.

1. Make the appropriate number of copies of handouts.
2. Set up and test computer, projector, speakers, and video(s) before starting the lesson. Confirm that you are able to play the video(s) with adequate audio volume.
3. Become familiar with the content of handouts and answer keys.
5. (Recommended but optional) Ensure at least six textbooks (and preferably more) that discuss the Mexican–U.S. War are available in the classroom for students to consult on Day Two.

**Important Note on Terms**
In Mexico, this war is usually referred to as “la intervención estadounidense en México” or “la guerra mexicano-estadounidense,” which translates into English as the “U.S. Intervention in Mexico” or “the Mexican–U.S. War.” We use the term “U.S.–Mexico War” when referencing U.S. sources because that’s the most common term used in the United States.

**Time**
Two 50-minute class periods, plus homework after the first class period. This lesson works best when students have some background on the U.S.–Mexico War and is ideal for complementing students’ introduction to the war in the curriculum.

**Procedures: Day One**
1. Mention to students that they will be watching a video talk from noted Mexico expert Professor Will Fowler titled “The Mexican–U.S. War, 1846–48. The Mexican Perspective.” The Center for Latin American Studies at Stanford University arranged for Professor Fowler to give
this talk to secondary teachers in the United States in the summer of 2021.

2. Distribute one copy of Handout 1, Video Notes, to each student. Inform students that they will now listen to the talk from Professor Will Fowler. Have students read through the questions on the handout and instruct them to keep these in mind as they view the video.


4. After viewing the video, arrange students in small groups. Instruct them to work together in their small groups to answer the questions on Handout 1. If time is limited, assign each group four of the eight questions from the handout. (Optional: Distribute one copy of Teacher Information, Video Transcript, to each group.)

5. When students are finished answering the questions on Handout 1, lead a classroom discussion on Professor Fowler’s talk by having students share their responses to the questions on Handout 1. Use Answer Key 1, Video Notes, to ensure students learn the correct responses to each question.

6. Distribute one copy of Handout 2, Background on the Niños Héroes, to each student to complete as homework.

Day Two

1. Lead a class discussion on the questions in Handout 2, Background on the Niños Héroes, for about 15 minutes. Once you finish, collect student responses to the handout.

2. Organize students into groups of five students each. Distribute one copy of Handout 3, Treatment of the War in a U.S. Textbook, to each student.

3. If you have textbooks that cover the U.S.–Mexico War, distribute these to the class. Ideally each student should have their own textbook to reference. If you have fewer textbooks, divide the class into groups and distribute at least one textbook to each group. If you don't have access to a textbook that covers the war, direct students to use the textbook excerpt in the handout.

4. Allow students the rest of the class period to complete the assignment in groups. Collect their responses at the end of the class period.

Optional Activity: Design a Monument to the U.S.–Mexico War for Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C. is full of monuments to key conflicts and events in U.S. history, yet there is no memorial to commemorate the Mexican–U.S. War despite the fact that it was a resounding victory for the United States that greatly expanded the country’s territory. Work as a group to design a commemoration of the war in Washington D.C.
Complete the following steps:

1. Each person in your group should briefly share their monument, statue, or exhibit.

2. Start by discussing what message you would want visitors to take away from the memorial. What impression do you want the memorial to leave on visitors?

3. Next, brainstorm some ways you could create this impression. Be creative. Memorials in Washington, D.C., and elsewhere take many forms, including:
   a. Enclosed museums
   b. Abstract sculptures
   c. Paintings or murals
   d. Spaces you can walk through
   e. Plaques in the ground
   f. Walking tours

4. Decide on the format of your memorial. If your group can’t come to consensus, take a vote. Your teacher can serve as the tiebreaker if needed.

5. Create a prototype of your memorial large enough to display to your classmates. You may conduct Internet research to complete this.
VIDEO NOTES

You are about to watch a 19-minute video from Dr. Will Fowler, Professor at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. In this video, Professor Fowler provides a historical overview of the Mexican context in the build-up to the war and of the experience of the conflict itself from the Mexican perspective. He also discusses the Mexican perspective on the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the more general consequences and legacy of the war.

Use the space below to answer each question; you may want to take notes on another sheet of paper as you watch the video.

1. What were the three campaigns of the Mexican–U.S. War?

2. Why does Santa Anna lose the northern campaign?

3. What conflict was occurring in Mexico City at the same time as the larger war?

4. What leads to the Mexican army’s loss in the Battle of Cerro Gordo?

5. Which of the agreements in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo does Professor Fowler mention?

6. In what sense did the war provoke a crisis of identity for Mexicans? How did they try to address this crisis?
7. Which arguments does Professor Fowler make for considering the Mexican–U.S. War unjust?

8. How do later Mexican leaders try to rescue a sense of pride from the war? What was the main symbol of this attempt to recast the memory of the war?
Reference: Defined Terms (in order of mention)

**Antonio López de Santa Anna**—the most influential person during Mexico’s first few decades of independence; he served as president multiple times and as general during several wars

**Niños Héroes**—six Mexican military cadets who died defending Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City during the Battle of Chapultepec. Mexico honors them as national heroes for sacrificing their lives for their country.

**Valentín Gómez Farías**—politician who served as president of Mexico for two brief periods: less than two months in 1833, and then from December 1846 to March 1847 during the Mexican–U.S. War

**Nicholas Trist**—main U.S. negotiator of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

**Juan Álvarez**—prominent general in southern Mexico

**comisionados**—representatives of the Mexican government sent to negotiate a treaty with U.S. representatives

**Tomás Mejía**—Mexican soldier who distinguished himself in the Battle of Buena Vista

**Emperor Maximilian I [von Habsburg]**—Austrian archduke who from 1864 to 1867 reigned as the (only) monarch of the Second Mexican Empire

**La Reforma period**—passage of a pivotal set of laws, including a new constitution, passed in Mexico in the 1850s and the subsequent civil war that broke out between liberals and conservatives

**José María Tornel**—prominent Mexican general and politician

**minister plenipotentiary**—diplomatic rank just below ambassador

**Revolt of the Polkos**—uprising by militias in Mexico City against Mexican President Valentín Gómez Farías, who was forced out of the presidency in part due to Santa Anna’s influence

**Manifest Destiny**—the 19th century belief that in the supposed inevitability of the continued territorial expansion of the boundaries of the United States westward to the Pacific and beyond

**Chapultepec Palace/Castle**—castle in Mexico City built to serve as the royal palace during Spanish rule
BACKGROUND ON THE NIÑOS HÉROES

As Professor Fowler mentioned, the legend of the six boy heroes, or the Niños Héroes, has become the main symbol and memory of the war in Mexico. The two most well-known depictions of the event are a mural in the ceiling of Chapultepec Castle and the Altar a la Patria (Altar to the Homeland) monument, more commonly called the Monumento A Los Niños Héroes, both in Mexico City. You can read about both depictions at the end of this handout.

To understand more the story and perspectives on the six Niños Héroes, review at least two web sources that you believe are credible. These may include online dictionaries such as Wikipedia or Brittanica.com. Once you have done so, answer the following questions and bring your answers to the next class meeting:

1. What were the two web sources you consulted? What made you believe they were credible?
2. Who were the authors of each web source? What biases might they have?
3. Based on what you read, what might account for the widespread popularity in Mexico of the legend of the Niños Héroes?
4. Interestingly, the monument to the Niños Héroes represents a formal memorial to the Mexican–U.S. War in the capital of the country that lost the war, while there is no memorial to the war in the victorious country, the United States. How would you explain this?
The monument is the work of architect Enrique Aragón Echegaray and the sculptor Ernesto Tamariz, and was inaugurated on September 27, 1952. The structure is made out of six marble columns crowned by bronze torches and eagles. Its center boasts “La Patria” embodied by a feminine figure holding one of the fallen cadets, and next to her another cadet rises with a heroic stance. All of the figures are wrapped with the national flag and at their feet, the phrase “To the defenders of our homeland 1846–1847” can be read. Therein lie the remains of General Felipe Santiago Xicoténcatl and the six cadets that defended the Old Colegio Militar during the US invasion. The area lends itself to patriotic tributes, civic ceremonies, official functions, and Presidential Staff gatherings.

Photo and text by Pro Bosque de Chapultepec, a nonprofit organization devoted to preserving El Bosque de Chapultepec in Mexico City. Retrieved on 17 July 2022 at

https://www.chapultepec.org.mx/actividad/altar-de-la-patria/?lang=en

“The Sacrifice of the Boy Heroes” Mural

The national government of Mexico describes the mural as follows:

This work, made by the Jalisco artist Gabriel Flores García in 1970, depicts the fall of Juan Escutia during the battle that took place in the Castle of Chapultepec against U.S. troops in 1847. Behind the Child Hero appears an eagle, which symbolizes the Mexican nation. The horses, reminiscent of the horsemen of the Apocalypse, allude to the enemy troops. The composition also highlights the Castle of Chapultepec, the Exconvento de Churubusco and the Cathedral, sites that played an important role in the disastrous American [U.S.] intervention. (English translation of the original Spanish text)

Photo and text by the National Institute for Anthropology and History (INAH), Government of Mexico. Retrieved on 7 July 2022 at

https://www.inah.gob.mx/en/foto-del-dia/11159-el-sacrificio-de-los-ninos-heroes-mural
Review how your textbook treats the U.S.–Mexico War. If you do not have access to a textbook, review the passage that follows.

After reading the textbook excerpt, answer these questions. Turn in your response at the beginning of the next class period.

1. According to the textbook passage, how did U.S. leaders and the general public react to the U.S. victory in the war?
2. What was most surprising or novel to you about the textbook passage?
3. Which actors does the U.S. textbook emphasize? How do these differ from the actors that Professor Fowler emphasized?
4. Which perspectives does the textbook cover that Professor Fowler did not, and vice versa?

Excerpt from U.S. Textbook


15.6 War with Mexico

You might think that Texas and Oregon were quite enough new territory for any president. But not for Polk. This humorless, hardworking president had one great goal. He wanted to expand the United States as far as he could.

Polk’s gaze fell next on the huge areas known as California and New Mexico. He was determined to have them both—by purchase if possible, by force if necessary.

These areas were first colonized by Spain, but they became Mexican territories when Mexico won its independence in 1821. Both were thinly settled, and the Mexican government had long neglected them. That was reason enough for Polk to hope that they might be for sale. He sent a representative to Mexico to try to buy the territories. But Mexican officials refused even to see him.

War Breaks Out in Texas

When Congress voted to annex Texas, relations between the United States and Mexico turned sour. To Mexico, the annexation of Texas was an act of war. To make matters worse, Texas and Mexico could not agree on a border. Texas claimed the Rio Grande as its border on the south and the west. Mexico wanted the border to be the Nueces River, about 150 miles northeast of the Rio Grande.

On April 25, 1846, Mexican soldiers fired on American troops who were patrolling along the Rio Grande. Sixteen Americans were killed or wounded. This was just the excuse for war that Polk had been waiting for. Mexico, he charged, “has invaded our territory and shed American blood on American soil.” Two days after Polk’s speech, Congress declared war on Mexico.

To Mexico, the truth was just the opposite. Mexican president Mariano Paredes declared that a greedy people “have thrown themselves on our territory ... The time has come to fight.”
The Fall of New Mexico and California

A few months later, General Stephen Kearny led the Army of the West out of Kansas. His orders were to occupy New Mexico and continue west to California.

Mexican opposition melted away in front of Kearny’s army. The Americans took control of New Mexico without firing a shot. “General Kearny,” a pleased Polk wrote in his diary, “has thus far performed his duties well.”

Meanwhile, a group of Americans led by the explorer John C. Frémont launched a rebellion against Mexican rule in California. The Americans arrested and jailed General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, the Mexican commander of Northern California. Then they raised a crude flag showing a grizzly bear sketched in blackberry juice. California, they declared, was now the Bear Flag Republic.

When Kearny reached California, he joined forces with the rebels. Within weeks, all of California was under American control.

The United States Invades Mexico

The conquest of Mexico itself was far more difficult. American troops under Zachary Taylor battled their way south from Texas. Taylor was a no-nonsense general who was known fondly as “Old Rough and Ready” because of his backwoods clothes. After 6,000 troops took the Mexican city of Monterrey, an old enemy stopped them. General Santa Anna had marched north to meet Taylor with an army of 20,000 Mexican troops.

In February 1847, the two forces met near a ranch called Buena Vista. After two days of hard fighting, Santa Anna reported that “both armies have been cut to pieces.” Rather than lose his remaining forces, Santa Anna retreated south. The war in northern Mexico was over.

A month later, American forces led by General Winfield Scott landed at Veracruz in southern Mexico. Scott was a stickler for discipline and loved fancy uniforms. These traits earned him the nickname “Old Fuss and Feathers.” For the next six months, his troops fought their way to Mexico City, the capital of Mexico.

Outside the capital, the Americans met fierce resistance at the castle of Chapultepec. About 1,000 Mexican soldiers and 100 young military cadets fought bravely to defend the fortress. Six of the cadets chose to die fighting rather than surrender. To this day, the boys who died that day are honored in Mexico as the Niños Héroes—the heroic children.

Despite such determined resistance, Scott’s army captured Mexico City in September 1847. Watching from a distance, a Mexican officer muttered darkly, “God is a Yankee.”

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

Early in 1848, Mexico and the United States signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Mexico agreed to give up Texas and a vast region known as the Mexican Cession. (A cession is something that is given up.) This area included the present-day states of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, as well as parts of Colorado and Wyoming. By this agreement, Mexico gave up half of all its territory.
In return, the United States agreed to pay Mexico $15 million. It also promised to protect the 80,000 Mexicans living in Texas and in the Mexican Cession.

In Washington, a few senators spoke up to oppose the treaty. Some of them argued that the United States had no right to any Mexican territory other than Texas. They believed that the Mexican War had been unjust and that the treaty was even more so. New Mexico and California together, they said, were “not worth a dollar” and should be returned to Mexico.

Other senators opposed the treaty because they wanted even more land. They wanted the Mexican Cession to include a large part of northern Mexico as well.

To most senators, however, the Mexican Cession was a Manifest Destiny dream come true. The Senate ratified the treaty by a vote of 38 to 14.

“From Sea to Shining Sea”

A few years later, the United States acquired still more land from Mexico. In 1853, James Gadsden arranged the purchase of a strip of land just south of the Mexican Cession for $10 million. Railroad builders wanted this land because it was relatively flat and could serve as a good railroad route. With the acquisition of this land, known as the Gadsden Purchase, the nation stretched “from sea to shining sea.”

Most Americans were pleased with the new outlines of their country. Still, not everyone rejoiced in this expansion. Until the Mexican War, many people had believed that the United States was too good a nation to bully or invade its weaker neighbors. Now they knew that such behavior was the dark side of Manifest Destiny.
VIDEO NOTES

1. What were the three campaigns of the Mexican–U.S. War?
   The three campaigns of the Mexican–U.S. War were the northern campaign, the eastern campaign, and the campaign of the Valley of Mexico.

2. Why does Santa Anna lose the northern campaign?
   Santa Anna lost the northern campaign because his troops ran out of food during the Battle of Buena Vista (known in Mexico as the Battle of Angostura). Santa Anna has to retreat south and effectively abandons the north of Mexico.

3. What conflict was occurring in Mexico City at the same time as the larger war?
   There was effectively a civil war in Mexico City between moderates and radicals while the larger military conflict was happening. This conflict pitted members of the church and moderates against the then-president Valentín Gómez Farías.

4. What leads to the Mexican army’s loss in the Battle of Cerro Gordo?
   Mexican forces fought on Cerro Gordo, one of the two big mountains in the area of the battle, but Santa Anna failed to protect the other mountain, Cerro Chico. Once U.S. General Taylor say this, he had his troops take cannons onto Cerro Chico and was able to attack the Mexican forces from the side, leading to U.S. victory.

5. Which of the agreements in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo does Professor Fowler mention?
   Professor Fowler mentions the following agreements:
   - Mexico gives half of its territory to the United States.
   - Inhabitants of the ceded territory that consider themselves Mexican have a year to decide their nationality.
   - The U.S. is responsible for controlling raids of indigenous communities.
   - The U.S. pays $15 million to Mexico.

6. In what sense did the war provoke a crisis of identify for Mexicans? How did they try to address this crisis?
   The war forced Mexicans to consider what it meant to be “Mexican.” Some of the country’s military and political leaders wondered why more Mexicans didn’t rush to defend the country against the inviting U.S. forces; others wonder how they can prevent the complete annexation of the country. In response, Santa Anna and others create national traditions and symbols, including Mexico’s national anthem.

7. Which arguments does Professor Fowler make for considering the Mexican–U.S. War unjust?
   He notes that this was a clear case of one country (the United States) invading another sovereign nation. He also notes how unequal the war was: the United States had been independent for longer, had a larger population, more territory, a larger economy, and more advanced weapons.
8. How do later Mexican leaders try to rescue a sense of pride from the war? What was the main symbol of this attempt to recase the memory of the war?

Later (in the 1860s), Mexican leaders try to rescue a sense of pride by making Santa Anna the scapegoat for the war and painting him as a leader who betrayed the country. By contrast, they celebrate the legend of the six Niños Héroes, who died defending their country rather than handing over the Mexican flag. These cadets became a national symbol of patriotism and valor and are now the main memory of the war in Mexico.
The Mexican–U.S. War, 1846–48. The Mexican Perspective
Professor Will Fowler, University of St. Andrews

So the U.S. war gets going, and again I won’t dwell too much on the chronology. My understanding is that Amy Greenberg did cover this to a certain extent. But, in essence, we are thinking in terms of three, we can summarize, or we can look at it briefly, in terms of three major campaigns: there’s the northern campaign, the eastern campaign, and the campaign of the Valley of Mexico.

And the northern campaign basically sees Santa Anna and his army of about 20,000 men that he puts together in a response, going up and confronting Taylor in the battles of Buena Vista—in Mexico known as the Battle of Angostura—following the move, the progression of Taylor as he moves after the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, taking Monterrey and other parts of the North. And this is a battle which, again, if you look at the sources—some of the Mexican sources will argue that it is a kind of victory of Santa Anna, but, of course, it isn’t. It’s not as if Taylor necessarily wins either, but there is a moment in this battle where if—if—Santa Anna’s troops had not run out of food and had not run out of ammunition and could keep going, in theory Taylor’s moments, days, were numbered at the end of this battle. Except that Santa Anna does run out of food after two grueling days of combat and decides to retreat. So he achieves nothing, and in fact, of the 20,000 men that go up to confront Taylor in Buena Vista, only 5,000 make it back to San Luis Potosí. And this is—except that, rather than the U.S. campaign progressing from the North down to San Luis Potosí which is what Santa Anna had supposedly suggested Polk should do, which would be really problematic for the U.S. army to make that journey down—instead, of course, we’ve got Winfield Scott arriving in Veracruz and the campaign taking a different perspective, as it is the eastern campaign.

Now Santa Anna returns to Mexico City, except that before he does that, between February and March—so whilst Santa Anna is confronting Taylor in the northern campaign—the moderates in Mexico City link up with members of the church, who fund a revolt, where there are also Mexican conservatives involved, to bring down the Gómez Farías presidency and administration in Mexico City and to put a stop to the law of the 11th of January 1847 whereby Gómez Farías, with the approval of Santa Anna, had decreed that the church would fund the war effort to the tune of 20-odd million pesos, which the church funds a rebellion to stop this from happening.

So Santa Anna returns to a Mexico City that is undergoing a civil war in Mexico City, where the streets, Mexicans fighting each other, over between the moderates and radicals, rather than again putting their effort together to confront the foreign aggressor. And in this context Santa Anna takes a pragmatic decision, removes Gómez Farías, places a moderate in charge, but rather than stay and govern and be a president, he makes his way to Veracruz to confront Scott. And actually confronts Scott in Cerro Gordo, which is part of one of his haciendas, the Hacienda El Lencero, so he’s fighting on home ground. And from Santa Anna’s perspective, the main thing is to keep Taylor in the yellow fever-infested part of Veracruz and not allow them to climb high enough in the mountain where there is no yellow fever, so he tries to keep them down beneath the Cerro Gordo.

And in the Cerro Gordo area, you’ve got two mountains, the Cerro Gordo, which is the big mountain, and the Cerro Chico which is next to it. Santa Anna commits the disastrous mistake
of not protecting the Cerro Chico. Taylor sees this, troops arise, bring cannons onto the Cerro Chico, and attack from the side. They flank Santa Anna’s troops, and Cerro Gordo is a complete disaster, which victory for the U.S. as they progress further, make their way to Puebla, whilst Santa Anna makes his way back to Mexico City, where, interestingly, he is prepared to hand over his resignation, since he is obviously defeated, and let somebody else take over. The generals say “No, no, no, we need you to defend Mexico,” so he therefore sets about orchestrating the defense of the Valley of Mexico with a number of crucial brutal battles taking place, including, of course, the Battle of Chapultepec, where supposedly those six cadets that I mentioned at the beginning died. And Mexico City falls eventually on the 15th of September.

After Santa Anna leaves Mexico City he joins up with Álvarez, Juan Álvarez, and tries to move to Oaxaca to get a resistance going but fails, and whilst the government of Mexico City leaves Mexico, a bit like the Russians did against Napoleon, leaves Mexico City and heads out to Querétaro whilst Mexico City falls to the American troops. And it becomes evident for the government in Querétaro that their days are numbered, the war is lost. And negotiations begin between Nicholas Trist and those representatives, comisionados, that are sent by the government in Querétaro.

I want you to have, and I put there as reading, I mean it’s maybe a bit dry to read the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, but I’ll put it there as a text for you to read, simply because it gives you some sense of what was agreed at the end of that. And I guess what is worth focusing on, in particular, are Articles V, VIII, IX and XII, and I won’t say too much about them simply because my understanding is that Elizabeth will be talking about them, but what you have is they are problematic in the sense that, one, they recognize there is this granting of the half of Mexico to the United States. There are issues there in terms of what will happen to all of the people that are Mexican, that consider themselves Mexican, that live in California, that live in New Mexico—how will they fit. And there are a series of stipulations as to they have a year in which to decide whether they’re Mexican or members of the U.S., but it does pose a problem for all of those people that live there.

There is an issue in terms of one of the articles there that one of the agreements was that the U.S. would be responsible for, in a way, policing, I guess, the First Nations in terms of the movements of the indigenous communities, in particular the Comanche and their raids and that this was, they were meant to control that, but inevitably that didn’t happen. And there is also, within that, the granting of 15 million dollars to Mexico, which is an interesting inclusion there, because they’re not buying anything; they’ve won the war. I guess it’s supposedly there to make it easier for the Mexican Government to approve this treaty, which they do. But in the end this money is spent up already on debts that the Mexican government has and it achieves little.

The real consequence, clearly, is that Mexico loses half of its country to the United States in what many Mexicans see as a humiliating disaster. Now interestingly, Santa Anna does not sign the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. After having tried to keep the fight going, he finds himself going into exile and he is disgusted with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. There are rebellions as well by a number of Mexican army officers, including interestingly Tomás Mejía, who will become famous later in his life for supporting the intervention with Emperor Maximilian on the throne, but at this point against the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

And it results in a crisis of identity, and I think that this is why Josefina Vazquez argues, I guess, that it is now that Mexicans start to think about what it is to be Mexican. Now they are forced to think, now that they are being faced with this “other” in terms of, as represented by the U.S., they’ve seen this other move into Mexico. And they have fought against him. It makes them
consider what it is to be Mexican, and what we have is a series of members of that generation of independence, who have now become, they’re old men, who remember what Mexico is like towards the end of the colonial period, who see this disaster and start writing histories of Mexico. One, to, in some cases, to retain a memory of what we were under the fear that we will lose everything that we are faced with the inevitability of the entire annexation of the country further down the line—to others that have this need to try and understand what it is to be Mexican, to see why, to explain why they lost this war.

And you see, for example, some minutes of a meeting of army officers after the battle of Cerro Gordo where it appears in these minutes of their meeting that they can’t understand why Mexicans aren’t just spontaneously rising up in arms to fight the Americans as they progress into Mexico. And there is a sense that there is no national spirit, because maybe there is no sense of nation, that they still, Mexicans don’t see themselves as Mexican in the way that the military do because they fight for Mexico, because they have traveled across Mexico, and they have a sense of what Mexico is. And which explains in turn why, under Santa Anna between 1853 and [18]55, that is when there will be an attempt under his dictatorship to, well, to, there is a commissioning of a national anthem—the national anthem that Mexicans sing is commissioned then—there’s an attempt to create a sense of nationhood through creating Mexican traditions, and that is one of the key early consequences of the war.

And in this soul-searching attempt to understand what Mexico is and what it is to be Mexican, you have this emergence of very clearly a dichotomy between those who see Mexico as a Catholic nation that is profoundly Catholic and that needs to in a way go back to the way it was, to its origins, to a powerful church, that sees society under threat by these foreign Protestant influences—against those who have always admired the United States, that are finding it now problematic to defend the United States in the context of this war, but that still see that as the role model. And clearly this will, in the end, become the background to the bloodshed of the horrific civil war of the Reforma, which has been my obsession in the last five, six years.

Interestingly, of course, the war has the same impact in the United States. I mean, in the end, the U.S. Civil War is a consequence of the Mexican–U.S. War in the sense of slavery and of what do we do about all these states that have now been taken from Mexico. Are we going to allow slavery to move into them or not? And that, again, it will intoxicate the context in the U.S., as it does in the Mexican context.

And I guess the key issues if we look at it is, one, obviously from a Mexican perspective, this is an unjust war, and, you know, the course has this question, “Is it a war or is it an intervention?” It’s an intervention! Of course, it’s an intervention! It’s a foreign invasion of a sovereign nation, right? So, of course, of course, it’s an unjust war. Although, clearly, to nuance what I’m saying, and Marcela Terrazas, another great historian of Mexican–U.S. relations, I mean, she would be somebody who would make the case that, you know, Mexicans did not populate these parts of what became part of the United States. So I mean Mexico was fighting a war which in a way did not make sense. It made more sense to sell all of that, give it away, there were not enough Mexicans who wanted this but, obviously, that was not going to happen.

But an unjust war in that sense, and also an unequal war. In terms of the United States has a population of 20 million in 1846, up against a nation of 6 million, maybe 8 million. A country that has been independent for longer, in the case of the United States, that has succeeded in establishing a greater degree of constitutional stability. I guess Peter Guardino is going to nuance that tomorrow, but certainly from a Mexican perspective, the U.S. seems to be doing all right; they have industrialization in a way that, at least the north of the United States, is being
industrialized in ways that Mexico hasn’t. I mean Tornel, who I quoted the beginning of the talk, Tornel spends time as a Mexican minister plenipotentiary in Baltimore in 1831, and is amazed by the factories, the thriving economy that you have in the United States. This is not the case in Mexico. Of course, he will take pride in the fact that he sees slaves where there are no slaves in Mexico. But certainly, and in terms of weapons, something as simple as weapons, the weapons that the American army is using are far more accurate, have a far further range, and are far better weapons.

There has always been this perspective that the Mexicans were also profoundly divided, they’re fighting each other, as I’ve already mentioned, the Revolt of the Polkos as an example, rather than putting up a united front, whilst supposedly those troops invading Mexico are carrying Prescott in their hands, the history of the conquest of Mexico, and are united in their vision of Manifest Destiny. Again, I think Peter Guardino may nuance that and sees there are greater divisions in the U.S. troops than has tended to be said from a Mexican perspective, but it is there as well. And a country that has had all of these problems that, as I’ve tried to in a way encapsulate in these 50 minutes.

And there is this tragic take of somebody like Carlos Maria de Bustamante, who had fought in the [Mexican] War of Independence, who on the 15th of September 1847 looks out and sees the spangled banner U.S. flag flying from the National Palace in Mexico City and says, you know, on the anniversary of us beginning a war of independence on the 16th of September of 1810, is this God’s punishment? You know, we just, He granted us freedom and we wasted it, and so we deserve it. And certainly there will be a profound introspective look at where they went wrong to begin with.

But eventually, interestingly, once the Reforma period comes to an end, once Benito Juarez triumphs over the French intervention and over the figure of Santa Anna, there is an attempt to look back and try and rescue pride in what has happened. And what they do is they will turn Santa Anna into the perfect scapegoat, so that the war against the United States will become all about Santa Anna’s betrayal. His transactions with Polk will be proof of the fact that he lost the war for a fistful of dollars, on purpose. And so that, in a way, ends any need to think longer or deeper about why Mexico lost the war to the United States.

And instead we will have the celebration of the Niños Héroes, these six cadets that, as we see in the painting by Siqueiros on the PowerPoint, which is in the Chapultepec, ceiling of Chapultepec Palace, plummeted to their deaths rather than hand over the flag. Except that, as we know from recent research, well not that recent anyway, these Niños Héroes, yes, they existed in as much as they were cadets who fought and died, but the whole story of the leaping out of the tower not to hand over the flag, all of that it’s not true. I mean, that was just invented in 1868, interestingly, at the end of the intervention, as a way of trying to rescue the past.

I end with an anecdote and then we’ll open up for questions and answers, and that is that back in the [19]90s when we were about to celebrate 150 years since 1847, there was a group of U.S. historians that tried to put together a whole massive team of researchers to produce the Encyclopedia of the Mexican War. And, interestingly, there was a whole series of Mexican historians who refused to contribute to the Encyclopedia of the Mexican War, because they were calling it the “Encyclopedia of the Mexican War.” And they will say, “Well, which Mexican war, okay? This is a typical U.S. perspective. Call it, you know, the Mexican–U.S. War, not, you know, not, so we’re not going to play ball with you guys.”

And instead, in Mexico, they were celebrating 150 years since the Niños Héroes, which never existed. So, interesting. I mean, we can obviously discuss, in terms of how you approach this
topic in class or how do we deal with commemoration and memory of this conflict on both sides of the border. Certainly, it remains problematic and conflictive. But I will end there and let’s open it up. I end there, just one slide for you to look at. This is what Mexico looked like in 1824, and this is what Mexicans were fighting to retain in 1846.