

The Ten Best Books on the U.S.-Mexican War

Bauer, K. Jack. *The Mexican War, 1846-1848*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1974.

“Much has been written about the Mexican war, but this ...is the best military history of that conflict...Leading personalities, civilian and military, Mexican and American, are given incisive and fair evaluations. The coming of war is seen as unavoidable, given American expansion and Mexican resistance to loss of territory, compounded by the fact that neither side understood the other. The events that led to war are described with reference to military strengths and weaknesses, and every military campaign and engagement is explained in clear detail and illustrated with good maps. Problems of large numbers of untrained volunteers, discipline and desertion, logistics, diseases and sanitation, relations with Mexican civilians in occupied territory, and Mexican guerrilla operations are all explained, as are the negotiations which led to war's end and the Mexican cession...This is an outstanding contribution to military history and a model of writing which will be admired and emulated”- Journal of American History.

Eisenhower, John S. D. *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848*. New York: Random House, 1989.

This well-written, comprehensive history of the war takes into account the political and diplomatic dimensions as well as the military. The two principal campaigns are traced in colorful detail: Zachary Taylor's battles in northeast Mexico, aggressively fought until Winfield Scott appropriated that general's best troops for his own amphibious landing at Veracruz, and Scott's over land drive on Mexico City against formidable opposition, brilliantly successful despite weak support from Washington. Eisenhower, son of the former president, suggests that Winfield Scott was the most capable soldier this country has ever produced. Of President James Polk, one of the three major characters in this lively narrative, the author remarks, "Manifest Destiny was not Polk's invention, but he was its ideal agent."

Haynes, Sam W. *James K. Polk and the Expansionist Impulse*. New York: Longman, 1997.

Paperback, brief, and inexpensive, each of the titles in the *Library of American Biography* series focuses on a figure whose actions and ideas significantly influenced the course of American History and national life. In addition, each biography relates the life of its subject to the broader themes and developments of the times. This text incorporates the latest scholarship and draws upon the longer, far more extensive studies of Polk's life and times, but makes the story accessible to students in both survey and upper division courses in American history. Moreover, this biography explores the controversies, triumphs, and failures of the presidency of James K.

Polk. Sam W. Haynes places Polk's expansionist agenda in both political and social contexts and examines the nature and origins of the expansionist impulse.

Henderson, Timothy J. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2007.

“As a result of the 1846-48 war with Mexico, the U.S. absorbed considerable territory, but, as explored in clear prose in this absorbing account, the ramifications of that armed conflict stretched, for both countries, well beyond territorial loss and gain in terms of aggravating sectional disputes (centered on the spread of slavery) within the U.S and darkening the Mexican-American relationship for a long time to come. The special quality of Henderson's study is twofold: first, how carefully he explains the antecedents of the war itself; second is the expansiveness of his view, focusing equal time on the Mexican political currents that drew that country into an impossible war and the political currents in the U.S. that compelled it into an insistence that war must occur. An important aspect of this dual view of the conflict is Henderson's systematic but fascinating appraisal of why the war progressed badly for Mexico and successfully for the U.S. This unique contribution to the literature of the era is perfectly suitable to general readers.”—Booklist

Johannsen, Robert W. *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

For mid-19th-century Americans, the Mexican War was not only a grand exercise in self-identity, legitimizing the young republic's convictions of mission and destiny to a doubting world; it was also the first American conflict to be widely reported in the press and to be waged against an alien foe in a distant and exotic land. It provided a window onto the outside world and promoted an awareness of a people and a land unlike any Americans had known before. This rich cultural history examines the place of the Mexican War in the popular imagination of the era. Drawing on military and travel accounts, newspaper dispatches, and a host of other sources, Johannsen vividly recreates the mood and feeling of the period--its unbounded optimism and patriotic pride--and adds a new dimension to our understanding of both the Mexican War and America itself.

Lavender, David. *Climax at Buena Vista: The American Campaigns in Northeastern Mexico 1846-47*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1966.

"Lavender relates the battles of Palo Alto, Monterrey, and the climactic Buena Vista with clarity and immediacy."—*New York Times*

Nevin, David. *The Old West: The Mexican War*. Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1978.

This volume is part of the Time-Life Old West Series. Stunning images complement Nevin's highly readable text. Probably the best introduction to the subject. *Students love this book.*

Sandweiss, Martha, Rick Stewart, and Ben W. Huseman. *Eyewitness to War: Prints and Daguerreotypes of the Mexican War, 1846-1848.* Fort Worth and Washington: Amon Carter Museum and Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989.

The U.S.-Mexican War was the first major event captured by photographs (daguerreotypes) as well as by prints, and this book assembles quite a number of both. In addition to two dozen lithographs included in the introductory sections, over 160 prints and daguerreotypes, grouped according to where and when they were taken, comprise the book.

Smith, Justin H. *The War with Mexico.* 2 vols. New York: Macmillan Co., 1919.

Justin H Smith's classic history of the war, written in 1919 from official archives in both countries, depicts the US as the wronged party, but many Americans at the time viewed the Mexican War as simply an American land grab, in which a large strong nation bullied territorial concessions from a smaller weaker neighbor. It is available in a recent paperback reprint.

Winders, Richard Bruce. *Mr. Polk's Army: The American Experience in the Mexican War.* College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001.

Drawing on numerous diaries, journals, and reminiscences, Winders presents the daily life of soldiers at war; links the army to the society that produced it; shares his impressions of the soldiers; and concludes that American participants in the Mexican War shared a common experience, no matter their rank or place of service. Taking a "new" military history approach, the volume examines the cultural, social, and political aspects of the regular and volunteer forces that made up the army of 1846-1848, presents the organizational framework of the army, and introduces the different styles of leadership exhibited by Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott.