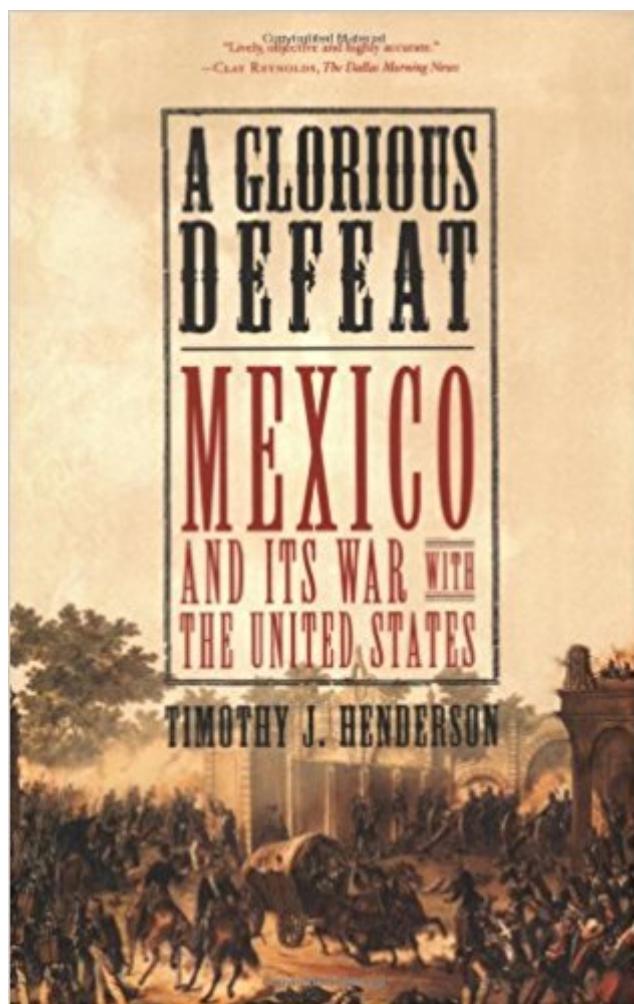


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A Glorious Defeat: Mexico And Its War With The United States



Synopsis

The war that was fought between the United States and Mexico from 1846 to 1848 was a major event in the history of both countries: it cost Mexico half of its national territory, opened western North America to U.S. expansion, and brought to the surface a host of tensions that led to devastating civil wars in both countries. Among generations of Latin Americans, it helped to cement the image of the United States as an arrogant, aggressive, and imperialist nation, poisoning relations between a young America and its southern neighbors. In contrast to many current books, which treat the war as a fundamentally American experience, Timothy J. Henderson's *A Glorious Defeat* offers a fresh perspective by looking closely at the Mexican side of the equation. He examines the tremendous inequalities of Mexican society and provides a greater understanding of the intense factionalism and political paralysis leading up to and through the war. Also touching on a range of topics from culture and ethnicity to religion and geography, this comprehensive yet concise narrative humanizes the conflict and serves as the perfect introduction for new readers of Mexican history.

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Customer Reviews

Henderson, on the faculty of Auburn University, offers a survey of the Mexican War from a Mexican perspective. Instead of the common depiction of Mexico as the victim of the U.S. and its racist Manifest Destiny, Henderson emphasizes Mexican agency in going to war, which reflected a profound sense of weakness. Mexico's revolutionary experience had produced a virulent factionalism based on divisions of race, class, region and ideology. The Texas revolt of 1836 only

made it more clear that Mexico was too weak to populate, control and defend its northern territories, but that opinion was derided within Mexico. Instead, politicians of every stripe denounced the policies of their rivals. The only common denominator was that Texas must be reconquered, even if that meant war with overwhelmingly superior U.S. military and economic power. But the Mexican people remained largely indifferent—otherwise Winfield Scott's landing at Vera Cruz and his decisive march on Mexico City would have been impossible. Mexico, unable to pursue a pragmatic strategy of negotiation and compromise, suffered—and celebrated—a "glorious defeat" that further unraveled a disunited nation. 8 pages b&w photos not seen by PW. (May)

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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. Brad Hooper

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This is an excellent book for the reader interested in a reasonably short and concise history of the political prelude to and major events of the United States / Mexico war in the late 1840s. The writing is generally excellent, though this short history could have been shorter. More and better maps would have been helpful, so if you read this book, keep an atlas nearby. One of the things I liked about this book is it did not dwell on the details of the battles. The author did try to maintain some objectivity, being equally critical of Mexico's political ineptness and the US's "manifest destiny." The author provides the reader sufficient information and latitude to form an independent take on this war.

This was a very interesting book. There are a lot of times in history where it seems like something should not have happened, and yet was inevitable. This book explains in a captivating manner how the war with Mexico was one of those cases. Mexico was very weak, and didn't even have control over all of its own people. It definitely didn't have control over most of the land that the US wanted to take. But a Mexican government that didn't attempt to defend its land from American occupation probably would have been despised, and so they really had to fight. It's interesting how a position of weakness would force a weak country to fight a strong country, but this book illustrates how that can be.

This is a really thoughtful history book. Why did the US win this war? Before I read this book, I would answer, because the US military was better. After reading this book, I would change that answer. This is not a book talking about the heroics about the American officers who would later participate in the civil war - or the battles. Instead, this book is a study about the political and social systems of Mexico and how that effected Mexican policy on Texas - and on how Mexico was (un)able to project power. There are so many nuggets of information in this book. They include how Scott prevented a guerrilla war on American supply lines on the march to Mexico City by discipline and respect to the Catholic church - which is remarkable considering the racism and jingoism of American policy in the 1830's. Another example is the books discussion of the forces driving the American peace negations and why the southern slave state politicians ultimately supported the peace treaty with Mexico. After reading this book, you will be much wiser.

Not only is this book a very useful guide to Mexican history and that of the Mexican-American war, but T. Henderson is an excellent writer keeping perfect pace and filling his story with interesting sub-plots that illuminate this fascinating and sometimes sad historical event. I highly recommend it to anyone who longs for the truth about American expansionism and the failings of so many Mexican regimes.

For this volume to adequately cover the story you would need volumes the size of Nicolay and Hayes or Sandberg's volumes on Lincoln. So what you're left with is a very superficial coverage of the great story that is required. Most large occurrences are just touched upon. Seldom are we giving the reasons as to why things are happening like they are. Still an interesting read though.

Truth is, two chapters and a prologue into the book, and it's already nigh unbearable. The author

quotes decades' old studies on colonial Mexico (the oldest of which hail from the 19th century!!!) so as to make his point of Mexican underdevelopment. This book is condescendence incarnate - the hapless Mexicans, after centuries of dastardly Habsburg rule were completely incapable and dysfunctional as a society to even deign to call themselves a society - let alone waging a war. Why, then, do I rate it three stars? The rest of the book is quite alright, if we are able to look beyond these major handicaps, and the author's prologue quite clearly illustrates - with what can be construed as sincere intent - that he holds Mexicans in high esteem, leading one to believe that his thinly-veiled paternalistic view on Mexico stems not from evil disdain, but sheer ignorance, which can be - partly - forgiven.

This book helps to explain a lot of US history particularly the current immigration debate. It is scary the way the U.S. is becoming like Mexico, developing all the weaknesses; partisanship, bickering, small fish fighting over big ponds, hurting political opponents even if the result is not in the best interest of the country, that made Mexico so weak.

This is a very clear reading of the topic of Mexico and the losses that country had to others and from within. It was done with someone with a positive outlook on life I presume.

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