8.62 Describe the causes, course, and consequences of the Mexican War, including the controversy over the Rio Grande boundary, the roles played by Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott, the Mexican Cession and the Wilmot Proviso. (C,E,G,H,P)

The Mexican-American War

When war broke out against Mexico in May 1846, the United States Army numbered a mere 8,000, but soon 60,000 volunteers joined their ranks. The American Navy dominated the sea. The American government provided stable, capable leadership. The economy of the expanding United States far surpassed that of the fledgling Mexican state. Morale was on the American side. The war was a rout.

Polk directed the war from Washington, D.C. He sent a 4-prong attack into the Mexican heartland. John Fremont and Stephen Kearny were sent to control the coveted lands of California and New Mexico. Fremont led a group of zealous Californians to declare independence even before word of hostilities reached the West. The "BEAR FLAG REPUBLIC" was not taken seriously, but Fremont and his followers did march to Monterey to capture the Mexican Presidio, or fort. By 1847, California was secure.

Meanwhile, Kearny led his troops into Santa Fe in August of 1846 causing the governor of New Mexico to flee. The city was captured without a single casualty. Soon he marched his army westward across the desert to join Fremont in California.
Mexico never had recognized the Texas as an independent area. Americans resented Mexico and were upset that Mexico did not accept James K. Polk’s 30 million dollar offer to buy New Mexico and California. There also was an issue about the southern border of Texas and a border dispute finally led to war. Mexico and the US both claimed control of the land between Nueces River and Rio Grande River. If the border was set at the Rio Grande then Texas would get more land. Polk sent Taylor to the disputed land and this act started the war.

The attack on Mexico proper was left to two other commanders. Zachary Taylor crossed the Rio Grande with his troops upon Polk’s order. He fought Santa Anna’s troops successfully on his advance toward the heart of Mexico. WINFIELD SCOTT delivered the knockout punch. After invading Mexico at Vera Cruz, Scott’s troops marched to the capital, Mexico City. All that remained was negotiating the terms of peace.

At home, the Whigs of the north complained bitterly about the war. Many questioned Polk’s methods as misleading and unconstitutional. Abolitionists rightly feared that southerners would try to use newly acquired lands to expand slavery. Anti-war sentiment emerged in New England much as it had in the War of 1812. Writer Henry David Thoreau was sentenced to prison for refusing to pay the taxes he knew were used to fund the war effort. His essay, Civil Disobedience, became a standard of peaceful resistance for future activists.

The MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR was formally concluded by the TREATY OF GUADALUPE-HIDALGO. The United States received the disputed Texan territory, as well as New Mexico territory and California. The Mexican government was paid $15 million — the same sum issued to France for the Louisiana Territory. The United States Army won a grand victory. Although suffering 13,000 killed, the military won every engagement of the war. Mexico was stripped of half of its territory and was not consoled by the monetary settlement.
Wilmot Proviso

(Pictured Above: David Wilmot proposal divided both parties along sectional lines. By the standards of his day, DAVID WILMOT could be considered a racist.)

Yet the Pennsylvania representative was so adamantly against the extension of slavery to lands ceded by Mexico, he made a proposition that would divide the Congress. On August 8, 1846, Wilmot introduced legislation in the House that boldly declared, “neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist” in lands won in the Mexican-American War. If he was not opposed to slavery, why would Wilmot propose such an action? Why would the north, which only contained a small, but growing minority, of abolitionists, agree?

“Provided, That, as an express and fundamental condition to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico by the United States, by virtue of any treaty which may be negotiated between them, and to the use by the Executive of the moneys herein appropriated, neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of said territory, except for crime, whereof the party shall first be duly convicted.”

– The Wilmot Proviso, 1846
Wilmot and other northerners were angered by President Polk. They felt that the entire Cabinet and national agenda were dominated by southern minds and southern principles. Polk was willing to fight for southern territory, but proved willing to compromise when it came to the north. Polk had lowered the tariff and denied funds for internal improvements, both to the dismay of northerners. Now they felt a war was being fought to extend the southern way of life. The term "SLAVE POWER" jumped off the lips of northern lawmakers when they angrily referred to their southern colleagues. It was time for northerners to be heard.

Though Wilmot’s heart did not bleed for the slave, he envisioned California as a place where free white Pennsylvanians could work without the competition of slave labor. Since the north was more populous and had more Representatives in the House, the Wilmot Proviso passed. Laws require the approval of both houses of Congress, however. The Senate, equally divided between free states and slave states could not muster the majority necessary for approval. Angrily the House passed WILMOT’S PROVISO several times, all to no avail. It would never become law.

For years, the arguments for and against slavery were debated in the churches and in the newspapers. The House of Representatives had passed a gag rule forbidding the discussion of slavery for much of the previous decade. The issue could no longer be avoided. Lawmakers in the House and Senate, north and south, would have to stand up and be counted.

Online Resources for the Mexican American War - http://www.dmwv.org/mexwar/resources.htm
This map shows the land gained by the United States from the Mexican American War.

Finally, Manifest Destiny was reached. In the following years, California, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, and Utah would become states - from the land gained by the United States in the Mexican War.
General Winfield Scott

FIGURE 1.5

FIGURE 1.6
Zachary Taylor

http://mrnussbaum.com/zachary-taylor-biography-for-kids/

Mexican-American War from Mr. Nussbaum

http://mrnussbaum.com/history-2-2/mexicanwar/

Information from www.socialstudiesforkids.com

http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/articles/ushistory/mexicanamericanwar3.htm

and...

http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/articles/ushistory/mexicanamericanwar4.htm

http://www.ducksters.com/history/westward_expansion/mexican-american_war.php