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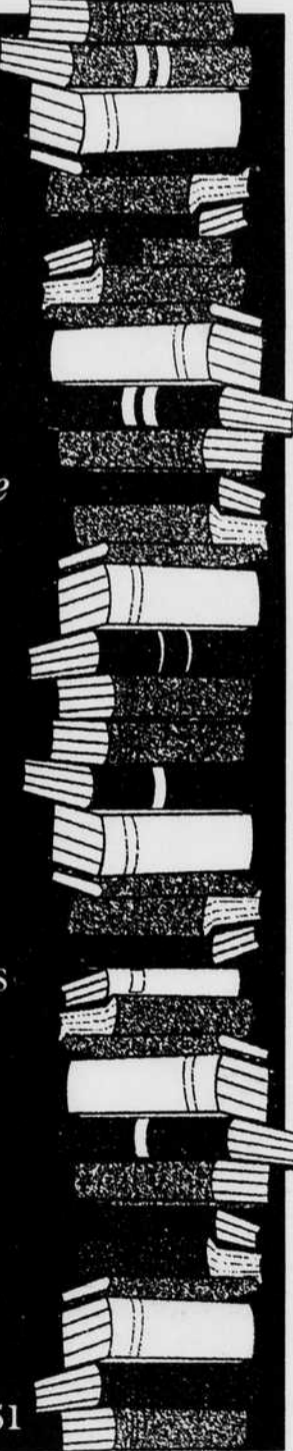
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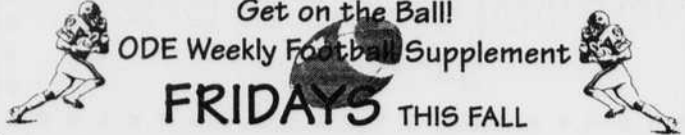


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FRIDAYS THIS FALL



PBS documentary examines U.S.-Mexican War of 1840s

The series will focus on the human element of the little-known conflict

By Robert G. Wieland
The Associated Press

DALLAS — It's described as a conflict that Americans can hardly remember and Mexicans can hardly forget.

Most U.S. history books refer to it as "The Mexican War," while Mexicans prefer "The U.S. Invasion." This year marks the 150th anniversary of the war's end, which changed boundaries and relations between two neighbors on either side of the Rio Grande.

A two-part PBS documentary series about the conflict, "The U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848)," explores the struggle for land, power and national identity. Produced by Dallas-Fort Worth public television station KERA 13, the four-hour program is the centerpiece of an education project produced in English and Spanish.

PBS will broadcast the documentary on Sept. 13 and 14 at 9 p.m. EDT. The Mexican network XEIPN Once TV will show it in November.

Neil Foley, a history professor at the University of Texas in Austin, calls the conflict "a naked land grab of a powerful nation against a weak nation." It's about time the United States talks about what happened, he said.

"We won the war with Mexico, so why aren't we celebrating it? The obvious answer is that we're embarrassed by it," he says. "We don't want to celebrate the portions of history that make us blush and feel uncomfortable."

U.S. Army Gen. John S.D. Eisenhower, son of the former president, contends that President James Polk resorted to "trumping up a war" when Mexico refused to sell land that the United States wanted.

In February 1846, Gen. Zachary Taylor was ordered to move troops into the disputed area south of the Nueces River to the mouth of the Rio Grande. Mexican officials protested, claiming the status of the territory was under negotiation.

After Taylor refused to leave, Mexican President Mariano Paredes declared war. Most of the battles were fought in Mexican territory.

"A clash was inevitable," Eisenhower said, "and when it occurred, the American Congress, previously reluctant to start a war, voted overwhelmingly to support it."

At one point, there was a call in Congress to annex Mexico, but opponents prevailed. Sen. John C. Calhoun of South Carolina argued that the United States "never dreamt of incorporating into our Union any but the Caucasian race — the free, white race."

Gen. Winfield Scott ended the war in March 1847 with the capture of Mexico City. The Treaty of

Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed on Feb. 2, 1848, making the Rio Grande an international boundary.

The production focuses on the human element of the conflict, using stories from letters and diaries written by people caught in the conflict between two cultures.

"Dear Father, what could have possessed you to send me way off here?" a U.S. soldier wrote from Monterrey, Mexico, in November 1846. "Your notions of military glory are all too exalted. There is no fun in cutting throats; I've tried it. I am obliged to Mother for her advice. But it's no use to read the Bible in the midst of swords and bayonets. Either I am, or that book is, wrong."

Executive producer Sylvia Komatsu said it was vital for the production to be accurate and balanced.

"We planted our feet on both sides of the border and invited a panel of distinguished scholars — historians from the United States and Mexico — to be our guides," she said.

Because few visual images of the period exist in Mexico, producers used re-enactment footage shot in Colorado, New Mexico and South Texas. Narrators include Shelley Duvall, Frederic Forrest, Ed Begley Jr., Esai Morales, Ricardo Montalban, Eric Stoltz and Dwight Yoakam. Ms. Komatsu's team included director Ginny Martin, senior producer Paul Espinosa and writer Rob Tranchin.

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