

PERIODIC TABLE OF THE PRESIDENTS™

James K. Polk & Texas Annexation



Essential Question:

What is the historical significance of the annexation of Texas?

Context:

By the late 1830s the issue of Texas annexation came to the fore in national politics. When Texas rebels defeated the Mexican government in 1836, the newly-formed Texas government subsequently looked to join the United States. Led by Sam Houston, Texas officials sought U.S. annexation in 1837. This request was welcomed by some Americans, but it also met with opposition in parts of the U.S., specifically northeastern states. The annexation of Texas would tip the balance of Northern and Southern states in Congress and would likely lead to the expansion of slavery.

During the presidential election of 1844, Texas annexation was a significant issue. James K. Polk, the democratic candidate from Tennessee, argued for the annexation of Texas. As part of his argument, Polk claimed that Texas was originally part of the Louisiana Purchase (1803) and, as a result, belonged to the United States. Due in part to his pro-annexation platform, Polk defeated his Whig opponent, Henry Clay. During Polk's first year as president, Congress voted to annex Texas as a state. On December 29, 1845, Texas joined the Union as a slave state. The annexation of Texas led to a border dispute between the United States and Mexico that would subsequently erupt into the Mexican-American War (1846-48).

Lesson Ideas:

In this lesson, students will examine the issue of Texas annexation by reading two primary sources: James K. Polk's inaugural address (1845) and an anti-slavery meeting broadside from Boston, Massachusetts (1838). Although the sources are separated by several years, they present opposing views on Texas annexation. As a social studies teacher, I use this lesson to help students understand different perspectives on the Texas annexation debate. In addition, this lesson offers opportunities to incorporate the Common Core Standards into social studies.

Idea #1:

Read the sources and answer the accompanying questions.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

Idea #2:

Create a graphic organizer, such as a t-chart, citing main ideas and/or quotations that support each side of the debate.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Idea #3:

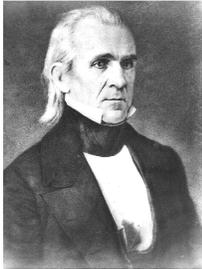
Have a class debate on the annexation of Texas. Students should cite arguments made in the two sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.



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Source 1:

Excerpts from James K. Polk's Inaugural Address

March 4, 1845

Excerpt #1:

"The Republic of Texas has made known her desire to come into our Union, to form a part of our Confederacy and enjoy with us the blessings of liberty secured and guaranteed by our Constitution. Texas was once a part of our country - was unwisely ceded away to a foreign power - is now independent, and possesses an undoubted right to dispose of a part or the whole of her territory and to merge her sovereignty as a separate and independent state in ours."

Excerpt #2:

"I regard the question of annexation as belonging exclusively to the United States and Texas. They are independent powers competent to contract, and foreign nations have no right to interfere with them or to take exceptions to their reunion."

Excerpt #3:

"To Texas the reunion is important, because the strong protecting arm of our Government would be extended over her, and the vast resources of her fertile soil and genial climate would be speedily developed, while the safety of New Orleans and of our whole southwestern frontier against hostile aggression, as well as the interests of the whole Union, would be promoted by it."

Excerpt #4:

"None can fail to see the danger to our safety and future peace if Texas remains an independent state or becomes an ally or dependency of some foreign nation more powerful than herself. Is there one among our citizens who would not prefer perpetual peace with Texas to occasional wars, which so often occur between bordering independent nations?"

Excerpt #5:

"...I shall on the broad principle which formed the basis and produced the adoption of our Constitution, and not in any narrow spirit of sectional policy, endeavor by all constitutional, honorable, and appropriate means to consummate the expressed will of the people and Government of the United States by the reannexation of Texas to our Union at the earliest practicable period."



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Source 2:

"Anti-Texas Meeting" Broadside from Boston, Massachusetts

Published 1838

ANTI-TEXAS MEETING

AT FANEUIL HALL!

Friends of Freedom!

A proposition has been made, and will soon come up for consideration in the United States Senate, to annex Texas to the Union. This territory has been wrested from Mexico by violence and fraud. Such is the character of the leaders in this enterprise that the country has been aptly termed "that valley of rascals." It is large enough to make *nine* or *ten* States as large as Massachusetts. It was, under Mexico, a free territory. The freebooters have made it a slave territory. The design is to annex it, with its load of infamy and oppression, to the Union. The immediate result may be a war with Mexico—the ultimate result *will be* some 18 or 20 more slaveholders in the Senate of the United States, a still larger number in the House of Representatives, and the balance of power in the hands of the South! And if, when in a minority in Congress, slaveholders browbeat the North, demand the passage of gag laws, trample on the Right of Petition, and threaten, in defiance of the General Government, to hang every man, caught at the South, who dares to speak against their "domestic institutions," what limits shall be set to their intolerant demands and high handed usurpations, when they are in the majority?

All opposed to this scheme, of whatever sect or party, are invited to attend the meeting at the Old Cradle of Liberty, to-morrow, (Thursday Jan. 25,) at 10 o'clock, A. M., at which time addresses are expected from several able speakers.

Bostonians! Friends of Freedom!! Let your voices be heard in loud remonstrance against this scheme, fraught with such ruin to yourselves and such infamy to your country.

January 24, 1838.



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Questions:

1. List at least two reasons that James K. Polk gives for supporting the annexation of Texas.
2. List at least two reasons that the “Anti-Texas Meeting” broadside gives for opposing the annexation of Texas.
3. Cite a quotation from Polk’s inaugural address that reveals his perspective on the annexation of Texas.
4. Refer to excerpt #4 in Polk’s inaugural address. What danger does Polk mention if Texas is not annexed?
5. After reading the excerpts from Polk’s inaugural address, do you think he presents a convincing argument for annexing Texas? Why?
6. Why do you think the “Anti-Texas Meeting” broadside begins with the phrase “Friends of Freedom?”
7. Refer to the middle of the first paragraph in the “Anti-Texas Meeting” broadside. What does the phrase “with its load of infamy and oppression” refer to?
8. Which source do you think presents a better argument for its side of the Texas annexation debate? Why?