
Army Of Manifest Destiny

The Mexican War is an important part of history, making it America's first foreign war. This war took the timeline of 1846 to 1848 making it two years that the soldiers had to fight in and experience intense routine in their daily lives. The author, James M. McCaffrey breaks down day-to-day life challenges the soldiers had to face during the time of the war in his book, *Army of Manifest Destiny*. The way he describes the struggles that the soldiers had to go through during the war makes you think the way they were feeling, and how incapable they must have felt following rules from their officers. The author McCaffery points out encounters the soldiers had to face when they went to a new place, surrounded by a different environment they were not used to. Could you imagine being isolated from your family and friends, fighting a war you were either forced to or had to be in because of where you were and economically?. The author McCaffrey states the thesis on the preface of the book, making the readers get an idea of why he decided to write this book and why he went a certain direction than other authors, bringing attention to the soldier's conflicts, aside from what the Mexican War was. In addition, he also decides to talk about the different rules they had to follow during their lives in that time and how they perceived when they had to encounter the other soldiers that were fighting against them.

“The purpose of the present work, then, is to look at the war from the viewpoint of the common soldiers’ experiences. What prompted them to enlist in the first place? What did they think of the Mexican people with whom they came in contact? How did they feel toward their officers? Were they adequately supported with food, clothing, shelter, and medical care by their government? How did they spend their spare time? If they broke any rules, how were they punished? What did the regular soldiers think of these temporary volunteers, and vice versa? And finally, having answered these questions, how did the American soldiers in the Mexican War measure up to their counterparts of earlier and later conflicts? ”(McCaffery, xii). All the rules they enforce on the soldiers made them act very cautious of their behavior and how they were doing things. Some soldiers did not care what the rules said and did what they wanted, others got away with breaking certain rules and never getting caught. But most of the time when a serviceman decided to disobey, there would be consequences for them that were not all pretty. *Army of Manifest Destiny* makes you think about the hard life the soldiers had during the war, having to change their lifestyles from before. When the author mentions moments about how the soldiers were surviving during their new lives in the war shows how they were miserable and alone. Soldiers would have to find ways to entertain themselves with the little they had and make a bad situation to a somewhat decent moment for them.

The Mexican war is not a war that has gathered much attention, then other problems that have happened in America. McCaffrey elaborates on how the soldiers desperately discovered new ways to occupy themselves, while making their lives feel like home. All the serviceman that wanted to be in the war had to go through an examination to determine if they could be enlist or not. When they were getting checked to become a soldier, the men “with deformed or missing limbs” (McCaffery, 24) were not allowed to enter. Men that had abnormalities were not a fit candidate they were looking for, meaning they were not worthy of fighting. The men that wanted to volunteer had different reasons why they were choosing to be a part of the Mexican War, many were young men that were enthusiastic to volunteer and others had no option but to join for personal reasons. During the summer of 1846, many young men across the United States

hurried to join the new volunteer “regiments bound for Mexico and glory” (McCaffery, 34). When the author mentions this, he was explaining how the young men united to the army because they had a personal desire and wanted the adventure in a foreign land, which was Mexico. Other encouragement some soldiers had, was the need to be a part of history and not miss the war that was happening during their time. They viewed this war as an opportunity for them to do memorable and maybe get some recognition for their service. As the war was happening, the servicemen would have a hard time communicating back home, making it difficult for them to keep up with the lives they left behind. Back then you couldn't just make a phone call to your loved one, they had to take their time to write on paper and send it to you, but that process took a long time. When the soldiers had time for themselves they would read the letters they would get, getting news from their loved ones back home. Not all the soldiers got letters, but the letter they would receive were called “like angels visits” (McCaffery, 86). A simple piece of paper with words from their families and friends would make their lives a little more tolerant to continue being in that place. Having them reading those letters made them feel like they had a connection with back home, escaping the moment they were truly living. As the troops had to learn how to entertain themselves during that time, they had to acquire activities that would distract them from what was really happening around them. Many of the troops would go in Mexican towns to patronize and buy the foods they had in the local merchants when the troops were camped away from civilian contact. In the time when the servicemen were bored out of their minds, they would drink to fix their problem of being fatigued. Many of the soldiers even claimed to choose “liquor as the weapon of choice” (McCaffery, 99) when they were faced with the weariness of camp life. Drinking became a big solution to their boredom and decided to spend their free time like that. They would even gamble and drink all in one day, spending time with their friends all together. They all loved the game called monte, which involved the gambling cards they would use when they would gamble. Since some of the soldiers came in the war having a background of being troublemakers, they had to set some rules for them. If the soldiers would not obey or follow what they were told too they would “march for several hours” (McCaffery, 106) , while they had to carry a heavyweight with them. Marching for hours was not something easy for them to do, it was definitely something they would try to avoid. Another way the troops would get punishment was by bucking. The discipline bucking, was when they had to sit on the ground with their knees drawn up close to their chest, and having their hands tied together in front of the leg below the knee, while they had a pole pass underneath their knees but above their elbows. Fighting in the Mexican war were the regulars and the volunteers. The majority of the regulars that were enlisted to the army came from a low society, which in many cases it meant that joining the army was the only way they would survive. Volunteers were the opposite of where the regulars came from, they were wealthy enough to come from a middle class or a higher class. The regulars were viewed as the less privileged ones from the volunteers, which they made obvious. The regular officers “abhorred the lack of discipline” (McCaffery, 120) the volunteers were. Even though the regulars came from the low part of society, they were way more discipline than the volunteers were ever going to be. The volunteers were so superior that they would think that if the regular officers talked about how they badly behaved, it meant that they were jealous of them. The difference between the regulars and the volunteers continued even when they were already going home. When the volunteers went home they received the celebration of welcoming them back, but the regulars did not get anything. The regulars had to stay in the army and still obey the rules of their officers, while the volunteers got the recognition of being heroes and getting to be at home with their families. Between these two, their Socioeconomic status determined how they were looked at and treated as, but in reality when they fought at war they were the same. Both the regulars and volunteers had to survive and even face death during the war. As they fought, their

Socioeconomic status did not matter who they were and what type of soldier they were, they either decided to get through it or be a coward.

The way the author McCaffery expresses the different tasks the soldiers had to confront, gives the readers a bit of an idea of what challenges they were faced with every day. Letting the readers know how the soldiers had to make their new location feel like home shows us how they were homesick. They had to struggle with being in a new environment and had to adapt to their new area without having the support they usually would. The conditions that the soldiers had to sleep on were nothing compared to how they used to live. When I think of what the soldiers had to deal with sleeping “on the ground in these tents” (McCaffery, 81) I could only think about how uncomfortable they must have felt. When people think about the Mexican war they most likely think of the causes and effects it had on the world, instead of adding interest in how the serviceman had to sacrifice their time and soul. The harsh circumstances they went through shows the determination they had to fight for this country. The argument that is being presented in the book shows to be effective toward what the author is stating in the thesis about what the american soldier had to deal with. The author McCaffery, gives us a variety of conformation of how a day in a soldier's life looked like and how they reacted when they saw the mexican people for the first time, as well as them facing new territory. When they saw the Mexicans, they started to stereotype them, calling them “lazy, immoral, and corrupt” (McCaffrey, 69). When he decides to mention the first interaction the soldiers had with the Mexican people and their culture, shows us how people tend to judge things that they are not used to seeing. Many people see it weird, or not normal, without knowing their background and meaning it is for them. The argument the author displays throughout the book is effective because he shows the diverse moments the troops went through. The way he explains and talks about the unfortunate occasion they had to live through shows a connection between how the author was writing this book with the troops. Throughout the book he tries to give the readers an inside of how it would look like if the people reading it were there. Every argument that was presented in the novel shows how the Mexican War is so important in the present time. He is trying to compile the ideas of how the soldiers were treated during the time of their serving. All the things McCaffery talks about is the back of the curtain of what the war was. When a History teacher talks to their students about the wars that have happened in the past they tend to mentioning the background of the war, instead of talking about the thousands of people who had to die alone. Every soldier that has fought in a battle is never recognized, unless they did something big or impacted the history in any way. But throughout history people never learned the harsh circumstances they had to live, and people never truly value the work they did to service their country. In the book when McCaffrey talks about how some soldiers would run away before their term of service has expired reflects on how they were feeling. They would even show that by mutinied, which basically meant that they would refuse to obey the orders of a person in authority. Some of them would even act this way because “shortages of food, clothing, and pay” (McCaffery, 114). Even the way the soldiers were fed was terrible, they deserved way more than what they would get. Living in a dump made it difficult for them to even find clean, drinkable water, “commonly lacking were.....drinking water” (McCaffery, 149). Whenever the serviceman would find water that was good enough to drink they would gather as much as they wanted because it was less likely for them to find another source of water for several days, maybe even weeks. All the research and dedication he took to present an argument in his book is implied, he lets the reader get the viewpoint if the common soldiers experiences.

As I was reading this book, I found that there wasn't anything wrong with his thesis nor did the author, McCaffery leave anything out, aside from more detailed in the soldier's emotions. As the

author talks to the readers throughout the book, he reflects all his extensive research to a conclusive and complete argument. As you continue reading, you come up with a woman's perspective towards the war that was mentioned. I liked how the author decided to add this piece of information about a woman because it said, "to pass herself as a man" (McCaffery, 26) but I wished he would have refer more about it. When the woman was trying to pass herself as a man, she basically was trying to get in the battle because they wouldn't allow women to join the war during that time, only men. The whole purpose of changing her gender look was so she could be close to her father who was a soldier, and the only way she could join her father was for her to disguise herself as a guy. I would have like to see more of the woman struggles and how they would literally consider changing who they were just to be in a place close to their delight ones. Aside from that, I wish the author would have mentioned more about how the families had to go through knowing their loved one was in danger everyday. In my opinion, If the author stated information about the family and what their perspective was, it would have brought a closer connection towards the readers and the soldiers in the book. As well as adding more of how the soldiers were feeling and how they managed with all the horrible things they saw like seeing people die and them killing another human being. Most of the book, the author does touch on main important points/details about how the soldiers were living in that time, but what I would have preferred is him adding more visual details so the readers, like I could imagine seeing the soldier in that place. There are moments were the author mentions all the sickness they had to deal with that makes you think how filthy and unsanitary their surroundings were. It must have been hard being diagnosed with a disease and not being able to fully treat it to make them feel better. One of the diseases the author mentions is the yellow fever which was "sometimes difficult to diagnose accurately"(McCaffery, 63). The soldiers would never know if they were affected with any disease, until they started seeing the symptoms in their body, which for the yellow fever they would have excruciating headaches, constipation, vomiting and etc. The medical precessional in the military didn't even know how to diagnose the disease at an early stage and they didn't have an idea where the disease started spreading around. Touching the subject about medical and doctors in the book is not mentioned as much as I would have wanted because i wonder how they had to deal in a moments when they were faced with a medical problem.