

*Historical/
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Fifty-Four Forty or Fight: The Mexican-American War



CHAIR: Lindsey Spain

GWCI AXXIX

December 7th

GWCIA XXIX

Letter from the Chair

3

Sensitivity Statement

4

Background Information

5

Topic 1: Westward Expansion

8

Topic 2: Texas Statehood

11

Character List

15

Works Cited

22

GW CIA XXIX

Letter from the Chair

Delegates,

Welcome! My name is Lindsey Spain, and I will be acting as your Chair for the twenty-ninth iteration of the George Washington University Conference on International Affairs, otherwise known as GW CIA. I am positively ecstatic to see the lively debate and creative ideas that you all will bring to the table. I am confident that all delegates will participate in a meaningful manner, and will do my best to enable equitable and substantive participation. This particular topic is one which presents many different possibilities for interpretation; thus, I duly encourage all delegates to use their fair and better judgment when collaborating and discussing topics. A little about myself: I am a second-year student studying Political Science and International Business with a minor in Criminal Justice in the Colombian College of Arts and Sciences. I have been doing Model United Nations since my freshman year of high school, and am on the George Washington University Model United Nations Travel Team. Aside from Model United Nations, I am a member of Kappa Alpha Theta sorority and Phi Alpha Delta pre-law professional fraternity, among others. I'm originally from sunny South Florida, so naturally I love going to the beach and soaking up the sun's rays.

Model United Nations has made an unspeakable impact on my life and the person I am today. I have traversed across state and country lines with some of the brightest and most driven people I've had the privilege of knowing. I am confident that you all will find your own niche within Model United Nations, and am therefore glad we will be able to facilitate this growth. Best,

Lindsey Spain, Chair

lindsey.spain@gwmail.gwu.edu (Note: please CC your advisor)

GW CIA XXIX

Sensitivity Statement

Delegates,

Hello again! I'm sure you're all eager to commence research on your respective roles, and for that I applaud you. However, prior to doing so, I urge you to read the following message, as it contains important information regarding the permissibility of committee content and research. Plainly garnered from the name, this committee takes place in a wartime setting. When dealing with wartime content, certain steps and precautions must be taken to foster a safe and comfortable environment for all delegates. Though this is a wartime committee, I will not tolerate excessive use or discussion of violence in resolutions or moderated speeches. I recognize the presence of violence in the setting of a war, however delegates will not be permitted to utilize violence in a manner which does not serve a purely constructive and demonstrated committee purpose. Excessive utilization of violence both takes advantage of the victimization of the real people involved in the conflict, and potentially creates an unsafe atmosphere for your peers. Additionally, I will not tolerate the utilization of harmful stereotypes or inappropriate language during the committee. The respective nations and people involved in this conflict have rich and diverse cultures which present many appropriate possibilities for creative interpretation, negating the necessity for any inappropriate language. If I or another staffer witnesses proof of harmful or discriminatory behaviors by a delegate, said delegate will be disqualified from participation, and be ineligible for any awards. If you have any questions about appropriate content, I encourage you to reach out to my email.

Best,

Lindsey Spain, Chair

lindsey.spain@gwmail.gwu.edu (Note: You must CC your advisor)

GWCIA XXIX

Background Information

The Mexican-American War, which lasted from 1846 to 1848, was a significant conflict between the United States and Mexico. The war had profound implications for both nations and shaped the geopolitical landscape of North America. This summary will explore the causes, key events, and outcomes of the war, emphasizing the historical context and major consequences.

Causes of the War

The roots of the Mexican-American War can be traced back to the early 19th century when the United States adopted an expansionist ideology known as Manifest Destiny. This belief held that the United States was destined to expand across the North American continent, spreading democracy and capitalism (Horsman, 1981). The annexation of Texas in 1845, which had declared independence from Mexico in 1836, was a critical catalyst. Mexico had never recognized Texas' independence and viewed its annexation by the United States as an act of aggression (Eisenhower, 1989). Another significant factor was the boundary dispute between Texas and Mexico. The United States claimed the Rio Grande as the southern border of Texas, while Mexico insisted the boundary was the Nueces River, further to the north. This disagreement led to heightened tensions and military confrontations (Millett, Maslowski, & Feis, 2012).

Key Events

The war officially began on April 25, 1846, when Mexican forces attacked U.S. troops near the Rio Grande. President James K. Polk, an ardent supporter of Manifest Destiny, used the attack to justify a declaration of war, which Congress approved on May 13, 1846 (Morrison, 2009).

Several key battles defined the conflict. The Battle of Palo Alto and the Battle of Resaca

GW CIA XXIX

de la Palma in May 1846 saw U.S. forces, under General Zachary Taylor, defeating Mexican troops and establishing control over the disputed territory (Guardino, 1996). These victories boosted American morale and set the stage for further offensives. In September 1846, U.S. forces captured Monterrey after a fierce battle, leading to a temporary armistice. However, hostilities resumed, and General Taylor continued his advance into Mexico, culminating in the decisive Battle of Buena Vista in February 1847, where his troops repelled a larger Mexican force led by General Antonio López de Santa Anna (Winders, 2002).

Meanwhile, another significant campaign unfolded in the west. Colonel Stephen W. Kearny led U.S. forces to capture Santa Fe in August 1846 without firing a shot. He then marched to California, where U.S. naval forces had already seized key ports. By January 1847, California was firmly under American control (Richards, 2007).

The most critical phase of the war occurred in central Mexico. General Winfield Scott led an amphibious assault on Veracruz in March 1847, capturing the city after a 20-day siege. Scott's forces then marched inland, defeating Mexican troops at battles such as Cerro Gordo and Churubusco. The campaign culminated in the capture of Mexico City in September 1847, effectively ending major military operations (Eisenhower, 1989).

Outcomes and Consequences

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on February 2, 1848, formally ended the war. Under the treaty's terms, Mexico ceded a vast expanse of territory to the United States, including present-day California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, and parts of Texas. In return, the United States paid Mexico \$15 million and assumed \$3.25 million in claims by American citizens against Mexico (Smith, 1996). The war had profound and lasting impacts on both nations. For the United States, it

GW CIA XXIX

marked a significant expansion of territory and reinforced the notion of Manifest Destiny. The newly acquired lands provided vast resources and opportunities for settlement, ultimately contributing to the nation's growth and prosperity (Weeks, 2016). However, the war also intensified the debate over slavery's expansion into new territories, contributing to the sectional tensions that would eventually lead to the American Civil War (Horsman, 1981).

For Mexico, the war was a devastating defeat. The loss of nearly half its territory was a severe blow to its national pride and economic prospects. The war also exposed the weaknesses in Mexico's political and military institutions, leading to internal strife and instability in the following decades (Millett et al., 2012). The conflict highlighted the significant power disparity between the two nations and set the stage for future U.S. interventions in Latin America (Guardino, 1996).

Conclusion

The Mexican-American War was a pivotal event in North American history, driven by expansionist ambitions and territorial disputes. The war's outcome significantly altered the map of the continent, with far-reaching consequences for both the United States and Mexico. Understanding the causes, key events, and outcomes of this conflict provides valuable insights into the historical forces that shaped the modern relationship between these neighboring countries.

GW CIA XXIX

Topic 1: Westward Expansion

Manifest Destiny, an ideology popularized in the 19th century, asserted that American settlers were destined to expand across North America. This belief fueled the annexation of Texas in 1845, a territory that had declared independence from Mexico in 1836. Mexico, however, never recognized Texas' independence and viewed its annexation by the United States as an act of aggression (Eisenhower, 1989).

The annexation of Texas led to a boundary dispute between the United States and Mexico. The U.S. claimed the Rio Grande as the southern border of Texas, while Mexico insisted it was the Nueces River, further north. This disagreement heightened tensions and set the stage for military conflict (Morrison, 2009).

Outbreak of War

Tensions escalated in 1846 when President James K. Polk sent troops under General Zachary Taylor to the disputed territory between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande. Mexican forces attacked Taylor's troops on April 25, 1846, providing Polk with justification to declare war, which Congress approved on May 13, 1846 (Guardino, 1996).

Key Campaigns and Battles

The war unfolded through several significant campaigns and battles aimed at securing territories crucial for Westward Expansion:

1. **Northern Mexico Campaign:** General Zachary Taylor won early victories at the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma in 1846. His capture of Monterrey and victory at Buena Vista in 1847 solidified U.S. control over northern Mexico (Eisenhower, 1989).
2. **California Campaign:** The Bear Flag Revolt in June 1846 saw American settlers in California declare independence from Mexico. U.S. naval forces captured

GW CIA XXIX

key ports, and by January 1847, California was under American control (Richards, 2007).

3. **New Mexico Campaign:** Colonel Stephen W. Kearny captured Santa Fe in August 1846 without resistance and moved to California, reinforcing American control over the region (Brands, 2006).

4. **Central Mexico Campaign:** General Winfield Scott launched an amphibious assault on Veracruz in March 1847, followed by victories at Cerro Gordo, Churubusco, and Chapultepec. The capture of Mexico City in September 1847 marked the end of major military operations (Smith, 1996).

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and Territorial Gains

The war concluded with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on February 2, 1848. Under the treaty, Mexico ceded an expansive territory to the United States, including present-day California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, and parts of Texas. In return, the United States paid Mexico \$15 million and assumed \$3.25 million in claims by American citizens against Mexico (Morrison, 2009).

The Mexican Cession, as it came to be known, was a monumental achievement for Manifest Destiny proponents, fulfilling the vision of a transcontinental United States and providing new lands for settlement, agriculture, and resource extraction (Richards, 2007).

Consequences of the War

The Mexican-American War had profound consequences for both nations:

1. **U.S. Expansion:** The acquisition of new territories facilitated westward expansion, contributing to economic growth and demographic change. The discovery of gold in California in 1848 accelerated migration, shaping the region's development (Weeks, 2016).

GW CIA XXIX

2. **Slavery Debate:** The war intensified the debate over the extension of slavery into new territories. The question of whether new states would be free or slave states heightened sectional tensions, eventually leading to the American Civil War (Morrison, 2009).
3. **Impact on Mexico:** The loss of nearly half its territory was a severe blow to Mexico's national pride and economic prospects. The war exacerbated internal political instability and left a legacy of distrust between the United States and Mexico (Guardino, 1996).

Conclusion

The Mexican-American War, driven by the ideology of Manifest Destiny and the pursuit of Westward Expansion, reshaped the geopolitical landscape of North America. It marked a significant chapter in U.S. history, expanding the nation's borders and influencing future domestic and international policies. Understanding the causes, events, and outcomes of this conflict provides valuable insights into the forces that shaped the United States and its relationship with its neighbors.

Topic 2: Texas Statehood

Texas Revolution and Independence

- **Early Settlement:** In the early 19th century, American settlers began moving into the Mexican territory of Texas, encouraged by the Mexican government, which hoped to develop the region economically. However, cultural and political tensions soon arose, particularly over issues like slavery, which was illegal in Mexico but practiced by many American settlers.
- **Texas Revolution (1835-1836):** Discontent among Texan settlers led to the Texas Revolution, a conflict between Texan insurgents and the Mexican government. The revolution was marked by several significant battles, including the Siege of the Alamo and the Battle of San Jacinto, where Texan forces, led by Sam Houston, defeated Mexican General Santa Anna. This victory secured Texas' independence from Mexico.
- **Republic of Texas (1836-1845):** Following the revolution, Texas declared itself an independent republic. However, its sovereignty was not recognized by Mexico, which continued to consider Texas a rebellious province. The new Republic of Texas sought recognition and support from the United States and other nations while facing ongoing threats from Mexico.

Annexation of Texas by the United States

- **American Interest in Texas:** Throughout its brief existence as an independent republic, Texas sought to join the United States. However, the issue of annexation was politically sensitive due to the contentious issue of slavery and the balance of power between slave and free states.
- **Annexation Debates:** The annexation of Texas became a major political issue

GWICIA XXIX

in the United States, with strong opinions both for and against. Proponents argued that annexing Texas was a manifestation of Manifest Destiny, the belief that the U.S. was destined to expand across the continent. Opponents, particularly in the North, were concerned about the expansion of slavery and the potential for war with Mexico.

- **Annexation Process:** Despite these concerns, the political landscape began to shift in favor of annexation. In 1845, under President John Tyler and his successor James K. Polk, Congress passed a joint resolution offering Texas admission to the Union. Texas accepted, and it officially became a state in December 1845.

The Mexican-American War

- **Tensions Escalate:** The annexation of Texas exacerbated tensions between the United States and Mexico. Disputes over the southern boundary of Texas further inflamed the situation. While the U.S. claimed the Rio Grande as the border, Mexico insisted it was the Nueces River, farther north.
- **Outbreak of War:** In 1846, these border disputes led to skirmishes between Mexican and American forces. President Polk, eager to expand U.S. territory, used these clashes as a pretext to request a declaration of war from Congress, which was granted in May 1846.
- **Texas' Role in the War:** Texas played a significant role in the Mexican-American War, serving as a staging ground for American troops and providing soldiers who were eager to secure their state against Mexican claims. The conflict saw major military campaigns across Mexican territory, leading to the capture of New Mexico, California, and key areas in northern and central

GWICIA XXIX

Mexico.

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and Its Aftermath

- **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848):** The war concluded with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which forced Mexico to cede a vast portion of its northern territories to the United States. This included present-day California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and parts of Colorado, Wyoming, New Mexico, and Texas. The treaty also established the Rio Grande as the official border between Texas and Mexico.
- **Impact on U.S. Politics:** The acquisition of new territories reignited debates over the extension of slavery, contributing to the growing sectional tensions between the North and South. Texas, as a slave state, was at the heart of these debates, illustrating the complex interplay between territorial expansion and the national conflict over slavery.

Legacy of Texas Statehood and the War

- **Manifest Destiny:** The annexation of Texas and the subsequent Mexican-American War were seen as the fulfillment of Manifest Destiny, the belief that the United States was destined to expand its territory across North America. This ideology drove American expansionist policies and shaped the nation's growth.
- **Long-term Consequences:** The Mexican-American War and the status of Texas during this period had lasting implications for U.S.-Mexico relations, American politics, and the broader trajectory of North American history. The war and its outcomes significantly altered the map of North America and set the

GWCIA XXIX

stage for future conflicts and developments.

GW CIA XXIX

Character List

1. **Zachary Taylor-** Zachary Taylor was the 12th President of the United States of America, serving from 1849 to 1850, as well as a major general in the United States Army, and a national hero due to his actions in the Mexican-American War. Taylor was a career officer in the Army, participating as a captain in the War of 1812 and the Second Seminole War, earning him the nickname “Old Rough and Ready.” Taylor was dispatched to the Texas-Mexican border in anticipation of a battle with Mexican forces in 1845; he would then go on to secure many victories for the United States in Mexico, notably the crushing defeat dealt at the Battle of Buena Vista. Taylor’s troops were eventually transferred to Major General Winfield Scott, but Taylor remained an incredibly popular figure.
2. **James K. Polk-** James K. Polk was the 11th President of the United States of America, serving from 1845 to 1849, as well as 13th speaker of the House of Representatives from 1835 to 1839 and the ninth governor of Tennessee from 1839 to 1841. Polk was a member of the Democratic party, and was well known for his spearheading of the annexation of the Republic of Texas and subsequent western United States territorial expansion efforts. Polk’s legacy is wrought with controversy, with some citing his incitement of war with Mexico and increased sectional divides in the United States as major administrative policy failures.
3. **Nicholas Trist-** Nicholas Trist was a 19th-century American diplomat best known for his role in negotiating the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War in 1848. Born in 1800, Trist served as chief clerk of the State Department under President James K. Polk. Despite being recalled by Polk during the negotiations, Trist defied orders and continued his work, ultimately securing a treaty that ceded vast territories, including present-day

GW CIA XXIX

California, Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Colorado, Nevada, and Utah, to the United States. His actions, though controversial, significantly shaped the geographic and political landscape of the country.

4. **Ulysses S. Grant-** Ulysses S. Grant was an American military leader and the 18th President of the United States, serving from 1869 to 1877. Born in 1822, Grant rose to prominence during the Civil War as the commanding general of the Union Army, earning a reputation for his decisive and relentless military strategies, particularly in the Vicksburg and Appomattox campaigns. His leadership was instrumental in securing the Union's victory and the subsequent surrender of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. As president, Grant worked to stabilize the post-war nation, enforce civil rights for freed slaves, and combat the Ku Klux Klan, though his administration was marred by economic turmoil and scandals involving his appointees. Grant's memoirs, published posthumously in 1885, are regarded as one of the finest works of American literature.
5. **Winfield Scott-** Winfield Scott was a prominent American military figure and political candidate, serving as a general in the U.S. Army from 1814 to 1861. Born in 1786, Scott played key roles in multiple conflicts, including the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, and the early stages of the Civil War. He is particularly renowned for his successful campaign in the Mexican-American War, where his leadership during the capture of Mexico City earned him national fame. Scott also formulated the "Anaconda Plan," the Union's strategic framework for defeating the Confederacy during the Civil War. Despite his military successes, his 1852 presidential bid as the Whig Party candidate was unsuccessful. Known for his strict discipline, strategic acumen, and imposing presence, Scott's influence on American military tactics and organization was

GWZIA XXIX

profound, earning him the nickname "Old Fuss and Feathers."

6. **William Worth-** William Jenkins Worth (1794-1849) was a prominent U.S. Army general during the Mexican-American War. He played a crucial role in several key battles, including the Battle of Monterrey and the capture of Mexico City. Worth's leadership and tactical prowess were instrumental in the U.S. Army's successes during the war. Prior to the Mexican-American War, he distinguished himself in the War of 1812 and later served in the Seminole Wars. Fort Worth, Texas, is named in his honor, recognizing his significant contributions to American military history.
7. **David Twiggs-** David Emanuel Twiggs was a career military officer in the United States Army who served during the War of 1812, the Black Hawk War, the Mexican-American War, and the American Civil War. Twiggs is best known for his role in the Mexican-American War, where he commanded a division at the Battle of Monterrey and later at the Battle of Buena Vista. Despite his loyalty to the Union during his early career, he switched allegiance to the Confederacy during the Civil War, becoming one of its oldest generals.
8. **George M. Dallas-** George Mifflin Dallas served as the 11th Vice President of the United States under President James K. Polk from 1845 to 1849. He played a significant role during a period marked by the annexation of Texas, the Mexican-American War, and the Oregon boundary dispute. Dallas was also a diplomat, serving as the U.S. Minister to Russia and later to the United Kingdom, where he helped navigate complex international relations during his tenure.
9. **John E. Wool-** John Ellis Wool was a senior officer in the United States Army who had a distinguished career spanning the War of 1812, the

GWCIAXXIX

Mexican-American War, and the Civil War. During the Mexican-American War, Wool's leadership was pivotal in the capture of Chihuahua and his subsequent contributions at the Battle of Buena Vista. His long service and strategic acumen earned him recognition as one of the most experienced military leaders of his time.

10. **William B. Ide-** William Brown Ide was a prominent figure in the Bear Flag Revolt, a short-lived rebellion in California against Mexican rule in 1846. Ide served as the President of the short-lived California Republic before the territory was claimed by the United States. His leadership during this revolt is a notable episode in the history of California's path to statehood.
11. **John Y. Mason-** John Young Mason was an influential American politician and diplomat who served as Secretary of the Navy under Presidents John Tyler and James K. Polk, and later as Attorney General. He played a significant role in expanding and modernizing the U.S. Navy during a time of growing international tensions. Mason also served as U.S. Minister to France, where he was involved in important diplomatic negotiations during the 1850s.
12. **George Bancroft-** George Bancroft was a distinguished historian and statesman, known for his comprehensive and seminal work, "History of the United States," which covered the nation's history up to the end of the Revolutionary War. As a politician, he served as Secretary of the Navy, where he established the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis. Bancroft also served as U.S. Minister to the United Kingdom and Germany, contributing significantly to the diplomatic and historical fields.
13. **Antonio López de Santa Anna-** Antonio López de Santa Anna was a complex and controversial Mexican political and military leader who played a key role in

GWICIA XXIX

Mexican history during the 19th century. Santa Anna served as president of Mexico multiple times and was a central figure in the Texas Revolution, the Mexican-American War, and various internal conflicts. Despite his fluctuating popularity and numerous comebacks, his leadership often left Mexico politically unstable.

14. **Mariano Paredes-** Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga was a Mexican general and politician who briefly served as President of Mexico during a tumultuous period in the mid-19th century. His presidency was marked by political instability and internal conflict. Paredes attempted to centralize power and faced significant opposition, ultimately being overthrown as Mexico grappled with the pressures of foreign invasion and internal dissent.
15. **Manuel Peña-** Manuel de la Peña y Peña was a Mexican jurist and politician who briefly served as interim President of Mexico during the Mexican-American War. Known for his legal acumen, Peña y Peña focused on negotiating peace terms with the United States, leading to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the war and resulted in significant territorial losses for Mexico.
16. **Mariano Arista-** Mariano Arista was a Mexican military officer and politician who served as President of Mexico from 1851 to 1853. He played a significant role during the Mexican-American War, where he commanded Mexican forces in several key battles. Arista's presidency was marked by efforts to reform the military and stabilize the government, though he faced considerable political opposition.
17. **Pedro de Ampudia-** Pedro de Ampudia was a Mexican general known for his service during the Mexican-American War. He commanded Mexican forces at several key battles, including the Battle of Monterrey, where his defensive tactics

GWICIA XXIX

were notable. Despite his efforts, Ampudia's leadership was often criticized, and his career was marked by both military and political challenges.

18. **Nicholas Bravo-** Nicolás Bravo was a prominent Mexican military and political leader who served multiple terms as President of Mexico. A hero of the Mexican War of Independence, Bravo also played significant roles in subsequent conflicts, including the Mexican-American War. His leadership and dedication to the country made him a respected figure in Mexican history, although his political career faced numerous challenges.
19. **José Joaquín de Herrera-** José Joaquín de Herrera was a Mexican politician who served as President of Mexico multiple times during the mid-19th century. Known for his moderate and pragmatic approach, Herrera navigated Mexico through periods of political turmoil and foreign conflict, including the early stages of the Mexican-American War. His efforts to stabilize the government were met with mixed success.
20. **Pedro de Anaya-** Pedro María Anaya was a Mexican general and politician who served as interim President of Mexico during the Mexican-American War. Known for his staunch defense of Mexican territory, Anaya played a key role in several battles, including the defense of Churubusco. His leadership during this critical period was marked by his determination to resist American invasion.
21. **Joaquín Rea-** Joaquín Rea was a Mexican general known for his involvement in the Mexican-American War, where he led guerrilla forces against American troops. His tactics and leadership in unconventional warfare were significant in the Mexican resistance, though the overall outcome of the war was unfavorable for Mexico.
22. **Gabriel Valencia-** Gabriel Valencia was a Mexican general and political figure who played

GWICIA XXIX

notable roles in the Mexican-American War and various internal conflicts. His command at the Battle of Contreras was particularly significant, though ultimately unsuccessful. Valencia's career was marked by his involvement in Mexico's turbulent political and military affairs during the mid-19th century.

22. **José de Urrea-** José de Urrea was a Mexican general best known for his campaigns during the Texas Revolution, where he achieved several victories against Texan forces. He also served in the Mexican-American War, where his leadership and tactical skills were demonstrated in various engagements. Urrea's military career was notable for his strategic acumen and commitment to Mexico.
23. **Juan Almonte-** Juan Nepomuceno Almonte was a Mexican general and diplomat who played significant roles in the Texas Revolution and the Mexican-American War. As the son of José María Morelos, a hero of the Mexican War of Independence, Almonte had a notable legacy. He later served as Mexico's ambassador to the United States and France, where he worked on diplomatic efforts during a tumultuous period in Mexican history.
24. **Ramón Alcaraz-** Ramón Alcaraz was a Mexican historian and military officer who documented the Mexican-American War. His writings provide valuable insights into the Mexican perspective on the conflict. Alcaraz's works are considered important historical records, offering a detailed account of the war and its impact on Mexico.

GWCIAXXIX

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