Reasons for U.S. Involvement in War

The United States has waged several wars throughout its history. These wars have in some ways differed drastically. For example, during the Revolutionary War, cannons that could fire 24 pound balls were one of the more powerful weapons.¹ Today, the United States has the capability of firing huge missiles thousands of miles. However, in other ways, war has remained the same. This can be seen when looking at the reasons why the United States has fought in wars. This paper will discuss three of these reasons and show how they have repeated throughout the history of our country.

The first reason for U.S. involvement in war has been to liberate people from oppression. This motivation is clearly seen in the first war fought by the American people. Before the Revolutionary War, Americans suffered under a series of oppressive laws placed on them by Great Britain. Some of these laws included the Sugar Act (1763), the Quartering and Stamp Act (1765), and the Tea Act (1773). This strict legislation culminated with the Intolerable Acts of 1774. One of these laws restricted the power of the Massachusetts’s legislature.² Outraged, many Americans called for a break from Britain. Nathanael Greene stated, “I am determined to defend my rights and maintain my freedom or sell my life in the attempt.”³ Soon a war with Britain began.

The struggle for liberation against oppression can again be clearly seen in the Civil War. In the late 1860s, southern states seceded from the Union and then, in 1861, formed the Confederate States of America. President Lincoln went to war with the Confederacy to preserve the Union.⁴ However, another compelling reason surfaced in 1863 with the Emancipation Proclamation. This document written by Lincoln freed all slaves in Confederate territory. The Civil War, thus, officially became a fight against the oppressive practice of slavery.⁵

Another reason why the United States has fought wars is to gain land. The Mexican War is a prime example of this. During the 1840s, Mexico refused to sell some disputed land between the Rio Grande and the Nueces River to the United States. Soon President Polk sent U.S. troops into the area. Mexican soldiers attacked these troops, causing the United States to declared war on Mexico. Within 2 years, the United States had defeated Mexico and gained the land it desired.\(^6\)

Practically all wars fought by the United States and other countries deal with land. For example, in 1950 the United States and UN forces attacked the North Korean army after it invaded South Korea. The United States fought to win back land for South Korea, which was friendly with our country.\(^7\)

Retaliation for attack is a third reason why Americans have fought wars. On December 7, 1941, Japanese aircraft attacked the U.S. Pacific fleet in Pearl Harbor.\(^8\) The following day, President Franklin D. Roosevelt requested that Congress declare war on Japan, stating:

“Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan . . . I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack . . . a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.”\(^9\)

Some attacks on the United States that have led to war have been disputed. For instance, in 1898, the battleship Maine was sent to Havana in the Spanish colony of Cuba to protect U.S. citizens from riots. Within a few weeks, an explosion sank the Maine, killing 260 sailors. The cause of this disaster remains a mystery to this day. However, at the time, several U.S. newspapers implied that the Spanish sabotaged the ship to increase public sentiment in favor of war.\(^10\) The influence of these papers had a strong impact. On April 21, 1898, the United States entered into war with Spain.\(^11\)

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\(^9\) “Request for a Declaration of War,” December 8, 1941.
The United States has fought wars to liberate people from oppression, gain land, and as a retaliation for attack. These reasons still hold true in today’s world. The U.S. war on terrorism started after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. The war in Iraq has been described as a fight against oppression. Although the ways wars have been fought have changed, the reasons why they are fought remain the same.

**Bibliography**

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Taking Notes

After you have taken notes from a variety of primary and secondary sources, look them over carefully. Identify three broad reasons for immigration to America and arrange your notes within those categories. After you have organized your notes, you should be able to answer the questions in the chart below.

This was the chart used for “Reasons for U.S. Involvement in War.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason 1: liberate people from oppression</th>
<th>Reason 2: gain land</th>
<th>Reason 3: retaliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What wars were waged for this reason?</td>
<td>What wars were waged for this reason?</td>
<td>What wars were waged for this reason?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer: Revolutionary War, Civil War</td>
<td>Answer: Mexican War; Korean War</td>
<td>Answer: World War II, Spanish-American War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When were these wars fought?</td>
<td>When were these wars fought?</td>
<td>When were these wars fought?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer: started in 1770s; 1860s</td>
<td>Answer: 1840s, early 1950s</td>
<td>Answer: started in 1941; 1898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What events gave rise to this reason?</td>
<td>What events gave rise to this reason?</td>
<td>What events gave rise to this reason?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer: oppressive British laws; slavery</td>
<td>Answer: disputed land, North Korea’s invasion of South Korea</td>
<td>Answer: bombing of Pearl Harbor; sinking of the Maine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Footnotes

A footnote tells the reader where you found certain information. When you use a fact or quotation, you should footnote it. Footnotes are identified by small numbers in the text that correspond to numbers at the bottom of the page. If possible, each footnote should include the title, publisher, date, page number, or Web address. Footnotes can have different styles, but the goal of all footnotes is to give the reader enough information to find the original source. What sources will you footnotes in your immigration research report?

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Bibliographies

A bibliography lists the sources used to write a research report. If possible, each citation should include the title, author, publisher, date, page number, or Web address. Notice that the formats for footnotes and bibliographies are different. Also notice that different types of sources are grouped together, and that the sources within each group are listed alphabetically. Use the format below for your immigration bibliography.

**Primary Sources**

Roosevelt, Franklin D. quoted in “Request for a Declaration of War” by Franklin D. Roosevelt. December 8, 1941.

**Web sites**


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Reasons for U.S. Involvement in War (continued)

Books
