

PADRE AGUSTÍN VIJIL AND WILLIAM WALKER: NICARAGUA, FILIBUSTERING,
AND THE NATIONAL WAR

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ABSTRACT

The research involves an examination of the basis the National War in Nicaragua from 1854-1857. The purpose is to show how the social, cultural, and political antecedents led to the National War. This has been done by focusing on William Walker and Padre Agustín Vijil. William Walker was the American filibuster invited to Nicaragua in 1855 by the Liberals to aid them in the year old civil war with the Conservatives. Walker took control of the Nicaraguan government, first through a puppet president. He became president himself in July of 1856. Padre Agustín Vijil encountered Walker in October of 1855 and provided an example of the support given to Walker by Nicaraguans. Though Walker would be forced to leave Nicaragua in 1857, the intersection between these individuals sheds light on actions shaping the National War.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 1855, the leaders of Nicaragua's Liberal Party sent emissaries to San Francisco, California. They were ordered to acquire the services of an exceptionally well-known soldier of fortune, William Walker. These emissaries were authorized to offer Walker both monetary reimbursement and promises of land in Nicaragua in exchange for his services in overthrowing the Conservative government of Nicaragua, then based in the city of Granada.¹ Liberal leaders welcomed Walker with open arms when he and a band of fifty-seven mercenaries arrived at the port of Realejo on June 16, 1855. From this port city, the Liberal Party members escorted Walker to the small city of Chinandega. Along the route, numerous citizens of Nicaragua rang church bells to greet the arrival of Walker and his forces. Eventually, Walker was brought to the nation's largest city of León, the center of power for Nicaragua's Liberal forces. Here, Walker was welcomed by Liberal leader Francisco Castellón. His newfound employers charged him to fight against the Granada Conservatives.²

During the mid-nineteenth century, a filibuster was a military adventurer who traveled to foreign countries to wage war. Actions such as this were specifically illegal, barred by the United States Neutrality Act of 1818. The efforts of the filibusters thus violated United States law, and occasionally brought the United States into conflict with the great powers of Britain, France, and Spain. Moreover, it established a legacy of distrust of American intentions in Nicaragua and Central America. Nonetheless, Liberals were eager to draw upon the support of Walker.

¹ Jamison 1909, 12.

² Pérez and Chamorro 1975, 226.

Though present-day Nicaraguans look back on the Walker invasion with contempt, Walker was warmly upon his arrival on the shores of Nicaragua in 1855. Walker would come to rule the Central American nation for a relatively brief time, but Nicaragua would remember him as the leader of an invading force with the intention of destroying Nicaraguan culture and subjugating them to U.S. imperialism. Walker is also remembered for assuming the presidency of the Nicaraguan government in a fraudulent election, restoring slavery, and establishing English as a national language of Nicaragua.³ What is less remembered is that Walker and his forces were not an invading horde but were, in actuality, invited to play their part in Nicaraguan history. The Liberal leaders of Nicaragua did not seek out Walker randomly; they had been impressed by his efforts as a “filibuster” in his failed invasion of Mexico.

Nicaragua’s Liberal leaders, in fact, planned for the U.S. force to settle down in Nicaragua. All those that came with Walker were given Nicaraguan citizenship, and the land that they were provided as part of their service was to encourage them to remain as colonists. Liberal elites had high hopes for these colonists to create in Nicaragua the modernity of the United States. In later decades, authors such as José Enrique Rodó would warn against an overreliance on the United States as a model for modernization.⁴ But the Liberal elites in 1855 took the opposite point of view, and they were not alone in their belief in William Walker.⁵ Non-elite citizens of Nicaragua were also excited about the arrival of Walker and his forces and continued to back him even as he took control of their country and made arrangements for nearly ten thousand men and women to follow him in colonizing Nicaragua.⁶ One of Walker’s associates, William Caseneau, noted that “Nicaragua is rich in a vast extent of public domain of

³ Walker 1985, 260.

⁴ Rodó 2006, 91.

⁵ Burns 1991, 197-218.

⁶ Bolaños Geyer 1988 141-142.

incomparable beauty and fertility, which is open to the whole world by a liberal plan of colonization.”⁷ In addition to colonizing, many of the men from the United States chose to take Nicaraguan wives. The elite families of Nicaragua presented opportunities for poor settlers from the United States to marry their daughters to further strengthen these connections.⁸

Walker’s popularity was secured by his relatively quick victory over the Conservative armies. On October 13, 1855 Walker successfully took possession of the Conservative capital in Granada with his U.S. forces and approximately 300 Nicaraguan volunteers. Walker took the citizens of Granada hostage, and forced the Conservative generals to surrender. Overall, however, his control of Nicaragua was contingent on his support among the local populace. A clear example of this support was the sermon made by Padre Agustín Vijil the day after Walker’s victory in Granada.

On that day, Padre Vijil referred to William Walker as the North Star, calling him a guardian angel of peace.⁹ The fact that his words were delivered at La Merced, the primary church in Granada, gave them particular significance. On February 16, 1856, Vijil wrote

“Ever since General Walker stepped on the soil of Granada, from the moment that I had the pleasure of embracing him in my arms, and I heard from his lips words of peace, of public quiet, of reconciliation, which are ideas equal to mine. I looked upon him as the Maccabee of my people and I named him the man sent to us by God to wipe away tears, to heal wounds, and to reconcile the Nicaraguan family.”¹⁰

⁷ Caseneau 1856.

⁸ Jamison 1909, 109.

⁹ Vijil 1930, 151-155.

¹⁰ El Nicaraguense, February 16, 1856.

Vijil's point of view reflected the beliefs held by the supporters of U.S. involvement, arguing for the beneficence of Walker's arrival as he hailed from a civilized nation. Vijil, amongst others, believed that Walker and American colonists would be able to aid in ending the social, political, and economic turmoil that had plagued Nicaragua for decades since their independence from Spanish rule. Walker appeared to agree with his role in Nicaragua; he noted in his book, *The War in Nicaragua*, "The history of the world presents no such Utopian vision as that of an inferior race yielding meekly and peacefully to the controlling influence of a superior people."¹¹ At least initially, the elites and populace of Nicaragua agreed with their understanding of Walker's vision.

In retrospect, the welcoming response of Nicaraguans to Walker in 1855 seems extraordinarily confusing. With the benefit of hindsight, Nicaraguans today are aware of the devastation and violence Walker brought to Nicaragua. Walker received a surprising degree of support for his takeover from Nicaraguans, and the social and cultural situation in Nicaragua that allowed support for Walker to develop has not been fully examined. The desire for peace following years of war and for modernity following years of privation led many to wish to believe in Walker as a panacea for the problems facing Nicaragua. A great deal of scholarly attention has been paid to the efforts of filibusters like Walker, their conquests, and the impact that their unsanctioned belligerence had on U.S. diplomacy in this period. In order to gain a deeper understanding of these events the study of filibustering must be expanded to understand the involvement of the Nicaraguan people and the impact that the conquest and filibustering movements had on them and the nation of Nicaragua.

¹¹ Walker 1985, 430.

No one more exemplifies the contradictions inherent in Walker's Nicaraguan support than Padre Agustín Vijil. Padre Vijil offered his wholehearted support to the filibuster from the United States and administered to him the oath of office when he became the Commander in Chief of the Nicaraguan military. Vijil additionally offered the support of the Catholic Church, which aided in eliminating concerns over a Protestant ruler in Nicaragua. Padre Vijil would become the first ambassador of the new Nicaraguan government to the United States and the only ambassador from the Walker government recognized by the United States. Vijil supported the Liberal elites in their plans for Nicaragua and was also known to the Conservative elites due to his many years serving in Granada. A study of the support provided by Agustín Vijil will allow us to understand the support provided by the Liberal and even Conservative elites in Nicaragua to William Walker. Additionally, examining the support for the Walker government by the Catholic Church and the associated priesthood will enable us to evaluate and come to a greater understanding of why the populace remained loyal to Walker for as long as they did.

Historiographical Antecedents

In Nicaragua, the first complete analysis of the National War was provided by Jerónimo Pérez in a two-volume history entitled *Memorias para la historia de la revolución de Nicaragua y de la Guerra Nacional Contra los Filibusteros, 1854-1857*. Published in 1865, this was the first extensive examination of the conflict from a Central American voice. This was expanded upon by the Guatemalan biographer Lorenzo Montúfar in his book *Walker en Centroamérica*. In 1895, a pamphlet by Francisco Rodríguez Camacho entitled *Glorias de Costa Rica: Pincelados sobre las guerras de Centro América en los Años de 1856 y 1857* provided a limited history of the campaign itself, focusing on the battles of Santa Rosa and Rivas and the capture of San Juan

del Norte. A further fragmentary Costa Rican account of the National War was provided by Máximo Soto Hall in *Episodos Nacionales, 1856-1857* in 1902.

A significant analytic theme of study between 1910 and 1960 was the examination of Costa Rican military operations in the National War and the impact of the conflict on creating a national identity in Costa Rica. Costa Rican historian Carlos Méndez produced two studies on the Costa Rican national hero Juan Santamaría and the battle in which he earned his reputation. Méndez's account is notable in that he located a series of interviews with veterans of the National War, recorded in 1891. Gutiérrez Mata emphasized Costa Rican military life on a day to day basis. This historical analysis focused on specific events of note, but offered little insight into the cultural and social impact of the National War. Closer examination of the community response to the National War in Costa Rica was provided by Juan Rafael Quesada in his book *Clarín patriótico: la guerra contra los filibusteros y la nacionalidad costarricense*. The primary emphasis of this study was on the genesis of a Costa Rican national character through the events of the National War. Despite this, scholars have done very little work on the social and cultural impact of the National War in Nicaragua itself, or the role of the people of that nation in the actions of William Walker.

Many examinations of the National War focus on analysis of the filibusters themselves. In 1963, historian Albert Z. Carr reviewed the life of William Walker and his followers with an emphasis on their grandiose plans for the future of Central America. His biographical examination of Walker established the basic details of his life and motivations for travel to Nicaragua. Carr's analysis is an excellent starting point despite being overly fond of the Walker himself. The more general origins of the filibustering movements have been examined by Charles Brown in his work *Agents of Manifest Destiny: The Lives and Times of the Filibusters*

and William O. Scroggs in his book *Filibusters and Financiers*. Scroggs' 1916 work provided one of the first historical examinations of the filibusters and the forces underlying filibusterism. In particular, he examined the financial motives of those that supported the filibusters in the United States. Brown's more recent work continued in that vein, though provided primarily a biographical sketch of Walker and his fellow adventurer's. Such works provide us insight into the type of individual that chose to make these expeditions of conquest in the nineteenth century from a primarily biographical stance. The works of this period also tend to focus on events from the United State point of view. Historian James McPherson examined filibustering from a more generalized perspective in his book *Battle Cry of Freedom*. McPherson's book is greatly successful in placing the activities of filibusters in the context of the coming of the United States Civil War. While valuable, this work emphasizes the filibusters as part of the United States sectional disputes without examination of a broader context.

The most nuanced work examining the filibusters has been provided by historian Robert May in his 2002 book *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America*. May's analysis examined the role of the United States government in conjunction with the filibusters. He also goes further in his examination of Walker's motives, detailing both his stated motives and other less obvious motivations for the filibustering movement. As with McPherson, May focused on the role of filibustering in a United States context. May, however, goes further in examining the role of filibustering in the social history of the United States. In 1992, Alejandro Bolanos Geyer provided a Nicaraguan analysis of the war in his book, *William Walker, El Prestinado*. Geyer's work made extensive use of previous historical work in once again focusing primarily on a biographical study of William Walker.

The connection of the Catholic Church to the filibustering movement has also been examined, albeit only minimally. Manzar Foroohar addressed this involvement and the effects it had on Nicaraguan society and culture in his book *The Catholic Church and Social Change in Nicaragua*. Though the major focus of Foroohar's book is on the period following 1968, the author also traces the historical development of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua from colonial times through the twentieth century. His examination of the National War is brief, but does provide context for the involvement of the Church in the development of Nicaragua following independence. Philip J. Williams provided additional analysis in *The Catholic Church and Politics in Nicaragua and Costa Rica*, arguing that the development of the Church in both Nicaragua and Costa Rica needs to be understood in the appropriate political and socio-economic context. As with Foroohar, Williams focus on the development of the Church over the entirety of Central American history yields insights though they are not focused on the early national development of Nicaragua. John Kirk added to the body of literature concerning the Catholic Church in his 1992 book *Politics and the Church in Nicaragua*. Once again, however the focus is on the Catholic Church near the end of the twentieth century. The colonial and post-colonial development of the Church is examined primarily to provide context for analysis of the present Church. Each of these studies is useful in establishing a contextual basis for the examination of Nicaragua politics and religion, although their examination of the National War is exceptionally brief.

More recent analysis has focused on the role played by Nicaraguan elites in Walker's government, such as the 2005 work by Michel Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua Under U.S. Imperial Rule*. Gobat's work covers a far greater period of time than the National War, but does include examination of the involvement by Nicaraguans themselves in

both the National War and beyond. Steven Palmer also examined the National War as an important element of national identity formation for the nations of Guatemala and Costa Rica in his dissertation “A Liberal Discipline: Inventing Nations in Guatemala and Costa Rica, 1870-1900.” Both of these works provide a greater understanding of the impact of the National War, but once again do it in the context of the national impact of other nations without primary emphasis on Nicaragua.

Sources and Methods

The examination of the social and cultural support for William Walker in both the United States and Nicaragua will be done through a deeper look at one of his supporters, Padre Agustín Vijil, and through the cultural milieu that allowed Walker’s adventurism in the first place. Agustín Vijil presents an opportunity to examine both the position of the Nicaraguan elites and to aid in understanding why the local populace came to support a Protestant conquistador. Through this lens we can begin to understand the state of the Nicaraguan nation and the difficulties that led it to invite a filibuster from the United States into their midst.

The contemporary accounts concerning filibustering offer an excellent beginning body of research to evaluate the impacts of filibustering. William Walker’s defense of his own actions was published in 1860 as *The War in Nicaragua*. The book’s purpose was to engender support in the United States for his eventual return to Nicaragua. The story of his filibustering actions in his own words, however, provides an invaluable starting point for examination of the National War and Walker’s actions therein. The popularity of filibustering in the consciousness of the United States led to several other accounts of the war. In 1886, C.W. Doubleday recorded his memories in the book *Reminiscences of Filibuster War in Nicaragua*. Along the same lines, James Carson

Jamison's 1909 book *With Walker in Nicaragua* gave first-hand accounts of filibustering in this time period. Jamison's book is particularly instructive due to extensive discussion of the local populace of Nicaragua and their interactions with the invaders from the North. Though each of these texts is obviously a highly biased account and represent only one perspective, they present an excellent source of information concerning the events of the National War.

In addition to using published accounts, this study of the cultural impact of filibustering in Nicaragua has made use of archival resources found both in Nicaragua and the United States. The Archivo de la Prefectura in Granada originally housed material from the city councils and the courts. Unfortunately, numerous records were lost when Granada burned at the end of the National War. Despite this unfortunate loss the archive itself still maintains a collection of books and papers focused on the National War. The Archivo Nacional in Managua provided information on the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of government. This archive was also home to numerous documents concerning the National War as part of the Alberto Benrana Collection. In addition to these sources, the letters written and sermons presented by Padre Vijil as published in a biographical study are invaluable. These documents are essential for arriving at an accurate interpretation of the actions and motivations of Vijil and the Catholic Church in the period surrounding the National War.

In addition to these records, documents from the Tennessee Historical Society, the Library of Congress, and the Callendar I. Fayssoux papers housed at Tulane University served to provide further information. The Tennessee Historical Society has collected extensive information about the early years of Walker as well as his activities following his return from Nicaragua. The Fayssoux papers are the source for numerous correspondence between Walker and his supporters as well as newspaper analysis of his endeavors. Further information was

drawn from papers housed in the Library of Congress and the National Archives. Governmental correspondence between the United States and Nicaragua provided a significant source of information concerning the National War and Walker's involvement. Moreover, these resources proved to host copies of the newspaper founded by Walker, *El Nicaraguense*, as well as information concerning Vijil's brief time in the United States.

Organization

This study, then, will begin by analyzing the history of Nicaragua in the decades preceding the National War, with particular attention to the life of Agustin Vijil and his role in the National War of Nicaragua. The first chapter will focus on establishing an understanding of Nicaraguan society after Independence and what it meant to be "elite" in Nicaragua prior to the National War. Following Independence, Nicaragua was a deeply divided nation politically, socially, and spiritually. An understanding of nature of these divisions is needed to understand exactly why intervention from the United States was not only tolerated but actively sought out

The ideals and needs of the Nicaraguan state for such an intercession would depend on finding individuals willing to travel to their nation and provide such support. Chapter two will provide an examination of the the cultural milieu of William Walker. Had he arrived in Nicaragua solely as a conqueror it is unlikely he would have been welcomed. The idealism he represented can provide additional insight into why Vijil chose to support the man he referred to as the "Star of the North." The third chapter will directly address *La Guerra Nacional* and the intersection of Vijil's and Walker idealism. It is the contention of this thesis that a deeper understanding of the National War necessitates an understanding of how the visions of both Walker and Vijil coincided, superficially connected but with drastically different interpretations

that ended tragically for both men yet in their wake provided the national unity that Vijil had hoped for.

CHAPTER 2: NICARAGUA AFTER INDEPENDENCE, 1801-1854

On April 26, 1801, Agustín Vijil was born to Don Joaquín Fernández Vijil and Doña Dolores Selva Mayor. Agustín was the youngest of eleven children, preceded by seven sisters and three brothers. His father, Don Joaquín, was a prosperous individual, owning a profitable *finca* (farm) near Granada. Joaquín Fernández Vijil was one of the elites of the area, and strongly supportive of the conservative nature of the city he called home.¹² His son, Agustín, quickly showed an impressive memory and aptitude. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the strongest education center in Nicaragua was in León. For this reason, Agustín was sent to the rival (and liberal) city of León. He completed his education there, and proceeded to attend the University of León as well. Thus, the man who was to be Padre Vijil served as an example of the tensions within Nicaragua and the difficult division between liberals and conservatives, between the elites of León and Granada. By birth Agustín was of Granada. By training and association with political figures and his fellow students in León, his political thinking tended to be liberal. Those conflicting influences would often place him in the middle of Nicaraguan national struggles, reflecting the difficulties inherent in the Central American drive to independence.

The Road to Independence

Long before Vijil's birth, Nicaragua was under Spanish imperial domination. As the once mighty Spanish empire faltered near the end of the eighteenth century, so too did its provinces in Central America. They experienced difficulties adapting to changing circumstances. As early as 1768, the challenges faced by the colonies were communicated to no less than the king of Spain by cleric Pedro Cortés y Larraz when he found himself unable to fully explain the magnitude of

¹² Vijil 1930, 1-2.

the situation. He noted “All acknowledge that... these Kingdoms find themselves in such a deplorable state... that one knows not how to make them believable.”¹³ The elites of Nicaragua searched for ways to improve their conditions and that of the Spanish Empire. They recognized that their future could be greatly enhanced with a greater source of commercial trade. The only authorized trade route involved a circuitous journey through Guatemala City on to Omoa in Honduras. Such a difficult route made Nicaraguan trade unprofitable. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the economy of Nicaragua, minimal as it was, bore a decidedly local rather than international flavor. Most economic activity was self-sustaining and focused on the various communities. A report to the Marqués de la Hornaza indicated a belief that an inter-oceanic route such as a canal would allow “This miserable and abandoned kingdom would be reborn and flourish... if overseas commerce could be conducted through the San Juan River and Lake Nicaragua.”¹⁴ The report further pointed to the significant difficulties placed on potential Nicaraguan development by the Spanish crown.

The cities of Granada and León controlled the economic activity of the small province of Nicaragua. Both cities developed to take advantage of the environment of Nicaragua. Western Nicaragua can be divided into three different environmental regions; the Pacific Coastal Zone, the Lacustrine Depression, and the Central Highlands. The rain drenched lowlands of Eastern Nicaragua were lightly populated, as was the Central Highlands. The population of Nicaragua in 1821 was 186,000¹⁵ and was centered on the Pacific Coastal Zone and the Lacustrine Depression. The Pacific Coastal Zone included plains, volcanoes, and plateaus. More importantly, the rich volcanic soils of this region provided the most fertile farming region in

¹³ Cortés y Larraz, 1958, 11.

¹⁴ Report to the Marques de la Hornaza as quoted in Burns 1991, 5.

¹⁵ Woodward, 1985, 178.

Nicaragua.¹⁶ León's founding focused on the advantages posed by the farmland in this region. Spanish explorers founded Granada in the Lacustrine Depression on Lake Nicaragua with the intent of finding a route to the Caribbean. This link was established via the San Juan River. Though not as rich as the Pacific Coastal Zone, the Lacustrine Depression provided excellent grazing land for another primary Nicaraguan economic endeavor, cattle. Both cities would historically compete for grazing land in this territory.¹⁷ The elites of both of these cities envisioned the creation of a vibrant economy making use of the natural advantages of their nation. Nicaragua. The rivers, lakes, and port cities on both oceans presented opportunities to increase trade. This emphasis on trade focused primarily on the needs of the elites, an exceptionally small portion of the Nicaraguan population. Much of the population focused on subsistence farming and raising cattle. Both of these industries, unfortunately, were consistently disrupted over the course of the early nineteenth century by the constant military struggles.

The larger of the two cities, León, boasted a population that reached 32,000 by 1823 and served as a hub for politics, education, and religion in addition to its role as a commercial center. Although smaller, with a population of 10,223 people, Granada dominated the lands from Masaya to Rivas, and served as the primary merchant city based on the control it had over traffic across Lake Nicaragua and down the San Juan River. The rivalry between these two cities was primarily economic during the late colonial period. Nicaragua's subsistence level of agricultural production led the Spanish government to focus on the more profitable colonies such as Mexico and Peru, exploiting the vast mineral wealth of Mexico or the trade opportunities growing in Buenos Aires. Mercantilistic restrictions placed on Nicaragua led Jaime Wheelock Román to

¹⁶ Radell, 1969, 22.

¹⁷ Radell, 1968, 149.

characterize it as a “virtually closed subsistence economy.”¹⁸ Governor Crisano Sacada spoke for the elites of Nicaragua, vigorously arguing for freedom of trade in order to allow Nicaragua to export and flourish. Granadan resident Pedro José Chamorro repeated these concerns, but concentrated the blame on merchants and bureaucrats in Guatemala City. Chamorro allied with other provincial delegates in León in 1814 to petition the crown to remove Nicaragua and Costa Rica from Guatemalan control, raising it to an intendancy of its own.¹⁹

The language within the petition highlighted both current and future difficulties in Central America, stating “What a contrast exists between the natural fertility, wealth, and abundance of these provinces and the poverty, misery, and depression in which they find themselves... The principle cause is the subjection to and dependence on Guatemala, so far away that we feel abandoned. The only way for us to achieve prosperity is to be independent of Guatemala.”²⁰ These petitions were the results of resistance movements in Nicaragua in their efforts to gain independence. The contrast between the potential of Nicaragua and the poverty of the people would be a theme later addressed by Vijil, both before and during the National War. In 1811, León and Granada both acted to expel Spanish officials and assumed direct control. The Spanish crown sent forces at the beginning of 1812 to quell the insurrections. The authorities in León capitulated immediately; the Granadan contingent held out briefly and was harshly punished for their momentary resistance. The elites of Granada viewed this as a betrayal by León. While their economic interests aligned, they were together. Yet these actions during the late colonial period would severely harden the differences between the two cities and the view that neither was to be trusted with power.²¹ More immediately, however, the rivalry between the

¹⁸ Burns 1991, 8.

¹⁹ Burns 1991, 10.

²⁰ *Revista de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua*, August, 1945

²¹ Burns 1991, 15

various Central American provinces foretold difficult times for the region as the opportunity came for independence from Spanish rule and the formation of a Central American republic.

A United and Divided Central America

Vijil would come of age as Central American began its struggles for independence, struggles that would be particularly influential on the young man. In 1821, the newly formed Republic of Central America faced great difficulties in the aftermath of independence as the provinces of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica joined. Strife generated from the economic and social climate following the colonial era engendered tumultuous political struggles and civil wars throughout most of the region. Despite this rocky future, the Republic was formed with high expectations among the leaders of Central America; these hopes were soon to be violently dashed in the years following independence. The vision of a united and prosperous isthmian empire were held up to the reality of conflicting city states and, equally importantly, conflicting desires of the elites holding power in their respective cities. It would be these desires that would spell an end to the Republic. Shortly before his death in 1830, Latin American political leader Simón Bolívar would state that “America is ungovernable. Those who have served the revolution have plowed the sea.”²² The conflicts of Liberals and Conservatives during this time would be less about ideology and class struggle and focus more on the intraclass struggle between the elite and those that had aspirations of being part of the elite.²³

In February of 1821 rebellion began in Mexico, and news of these events quickly spread to the south. The ideas of local participation and decision making had become part of the fabric

²² Simón Bolívar, quoted in Liss & Liss, 133.

²³ Gudmundson and Lindo-Fuentes 1995, 82.

of the local *ayuntamientos* (municipal councils), and each of them took it upon themselves to decide how they should respond to the battle for independence going on in Mexico. In a stormy session held in Guatemala, the majority of the delegates (including most of the moderates led by José del Valle) voted in favor of independence. In practice, the vote changed absolutely nothing. Though the more conservative aspects of Spanish bureaucracy remained in control the creole elite had taken control of their own destiny, and reacted against the Spanish liberal regime. The Conservative Party can trace its origins to this meeting of elites as they united in their pursuit of both independence from Spain and an adherence to the methods of the Spanish crown.

Perhaps arrogantly, the decision that was finally reached in Guatemala for independence was considered applicable to the entire region of Central America. Once again, however, the idea of local participation and control would be apparent. In Nicaragua, the more conservative leaders in Granada declared their support for the central government in Guatemala and independence. In León, however, the elites declared independence from both Spain and Guatemala.²⁴ The elites of León were, however, willing to support uniting with Mexico. Though arguably most pronounced in the rival cities of Granada and León, a similar fragmentation of opinion occurred throughout Central America. In San Salvador, the liberal leadership of Father José Matías Delgado decided to declare the independence of El Salvador, requiring those that wished to be part of a Mexican or Guatemalan confederation to leave the city. Other cities in the region responded differently, leading to further conflict. In Honduras, Tegucigalpa sided with the conservative leadership in Guatemala while the city of Comayagua followed the lead of Padre Delgado in declaring complete independence. The last of the eventual provinces, Costa Rica, had no less than four cities vying for primacy in 1821.

²⁴ Bethell 1991, 5.

The initial issue dividing the region became the concern of annexation to the newly independent Mexican Empire. Conservatives throughout Central America supported the Guatemalan government and annexation to Mexico while liberal contingents favored an independent republic for Central America. The conservatives had the advantage over their opposition as they maintained control of the various levers of government, thwarting liberal efforts. As might be expected, this led to further violence throughout the region, including Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. The violence proved insufficient to sway the issue, and by the end of 1821 the majority of the *ayuntamientos* had chosen to support annexation. Only San Salvador and Granada rejected annexation outright, exhibiting an odd connection between liberal and conservative municipalities. San Salvador was invaded by troops from Mexico, and their military influence proved decisive (despite efforts to declare annexation to the United States).²⁵ Granada, however, continued to hold out to pressure to join the annexation movement. The issue proved to be moot, as the Mexican empire envisioned by Agustín de Iturbide failed to survive even a year. After its collapse a new Central American congress formed on June 24, 1823, bearing a decidedly more liberal mien. Many of the conservative politicians remained in Mexico, and their fortunes had fallen due to the collapse into anarchy of the Mexican government.

The liberal leader of San Salvador, Padre Delgado, presided as the congress declared Central America free and independent on July 1, 1823. The congress adopted the name *Provincias Unidas del Centro América* or United Provinces of Central America, and the next day convened a National Constituent Assembly with the end goal of writing a constitution for the new republic. Mexico recognized the United Provinces, and its military forces returned to

²⁵ Bethell 1991, 7.

Mexico. The congress expressed a considerable and misplaced optimism for the future of this union. Though many of them blamed Spanish and Mexican partisans, serious economic and social divisions still plagued the newly born republic, and these divisions were not erased by the 1824 constitution. The divisions remained primarily amongst the elites, as evidenced in Nicaragua, where an estimated 84% of the population was ladino (mestizo and mulatto) and outside of the elite power structure. Despite their numbers, these masses were left outside of the political debates.²⁶ The issues that divided liberals and conservatives in the new union were not significantly different from those that existed under Spanish rule. The conservatives expressed a greater comfort level with monarchical rule, while the liberal contingent preferred a republican form of government. Conservatives believed that governing should be reserved for those who were properly educated and, equally importantly, held property and position in society – similar to that of Don Joaquín Fernández Vijil. Liberal political leaders endeavored, in contrast, to break down the monopolistic control of the economy and to eliminate the *fueros* (privileges) of the conservative elites (ecclesiastical, commercial, university). Both sides recognized the need for modernization and envisioned Central America as a strong international power, drawing from the utilitarian views of Jeremy Bentham when articulating their ideology.²⁷ Despite this, and despite significant connections between the elite families of Central America, differing economic and political views divided the union at the local level. In the early years of the new republic, these views would focus the nascent parties into warring forces. These conflicting forces would continue to dominate Central America for the entirety of the nineteenth century and would be particularly apparent in the Nicaraguan cities of Granada and León.

²⁶ Martinez Pelaez, 397-8.

²⁷ Williford 1970, 83.

The National Constituent Assembly initially served as an organ of power for the Liberal politicians, and acted quickly to eliminate the traditional class privileges. The Assembly abolished all titles of nobility, including the use of the honorific title don. This prohibition was extended to the Church as well, eliminating use of any term save that of padre.²⁸ Despite violent uprisings, liberal Salvadoran troops arrived in Guatemala to support the burgeoning government. In November of 1824, the conservative and the liberal alliances established a compromise constitution. This constitution was heavily influenced by both the Spanish Constitution of 1812 as well as the United States Constitution of 1789. The constitution established five autonomous states with their respective assemblies, judiciaries, and executives. Liberal leader Manuel José de Arce maneuvered in the Congress to win the first election for president of Central America. Arce attempted to establish a coalition with conservative politicians, unintentionally creating resentment amongst the more extreme liberals. The lack of federal control was clear early, and Arce never maintained control of the five constituent provinces. Once again, Nicaragua provided a prime example of violent disagreement between liberal and conservative factions. President Arce personally led military forces in an effort to pacify the conflicting forces in Nicaragua. He succeeded only in creating a momentary armistice and lull in the conflict between Granada and León.²⁹ The conflicts in Nicaragua were mild compared to the conflicts that would be faced by Arce's government in the early years. The radical liberals that felt betrayed by Arce rallied and opposed the government, forcing Arce to unite with conservative Mariano Aycinena. In Honduras, General Francisco Morazán rallied forces and emerged as a Liberal military leader. Arce resigned from the presidency, leaving Aycinena as the power behind the Central American

²⁸ Marure 1895, p 11-12.

²⁹ Pérez 1977, 477.

government. Morazán's forces engaged in a civil war from 1826-1829, showcasing the violent differences in viewpoint in the isthmus.

Morazán's victory led to persecution of conservative leaders and the introduction of legislation by radical liberal politicians. Elections were held again at the end of 1830, and Morazán was named to the presidency. Despite his successful role in the civil war and the removal of many conservative political leaders, Morazán's popularity was not universal. Moderate José del Valle won the 1834 election, in a triumph for those favoring moderation of the liberal policies coming from the Morazán government. Those evincing moderate political views were likely disappointed by the death of del Valle, leading Morazán to retain the presidency (as he had received the second highest number of votes in the election). With the death of their leader, many moderates felt unable to effect change and began to join with conservatives in opposition to the liberal government. The bitterness and frustration turned increasingly more violent as time passed without change in the liberal agenda.

The political realities of Nicaragua mirrored those of the remainder of the isthmus. Following the military intervention by Arce, the State Constituent Assembly installed Manuel Antonio de la Cerda as the new chief of state for Nicaragua in April of 1825, with Juan Argüello as the vice-chief. The relationship between Argüello and de la Cerda was tumultuous, with Argüello taking power upon de la Cerda's resignation a few months later. The resignation did not end the anarchic nature of Nicaraguan politics, and civil war was the order of the day there as was the case further to the north. This bitter civil war ended only with the public execution of de la Cerda near the end of 1828.³⁰

³⁰ Burns 1991, 42.

During this time, Vijil had completed his education in León, graduating from the University of Leon on November 28, 1826. While in León, Vijil came into contact with a number of political actors, including Juan Argüello and de la Cerda.³¹ Importantly, he would also come into contact with the future Nicaraguan general Trinidad Muñoz.³² Vijil began his first career as a lawyer in Nicaragua, returning to his home city of Granada. His newfound liberal political outlook troubled his father, Don Joaquín. In 1829, Narciso Arellano resigned the post of General Minister for Nicaragua. Arguello remembered Vijil, and offered the position to him directly.³³ Francisco Morazán sought to consolidate his control by sending the Honduran Dionisio Herrera to León as the federal governor in an attempt to pacify the violence, organize the state, and establish Liberal ascendancy in the area. Herrera was in no hurry to arrive in Nicaragua, and quickly named Juan Espinoza as his representative there. Espinoza in turn appointed Vijil to the same position.³⁴ The arrival of Herrera was seen as a potential boon by Vijil and others, desperate for an end to the continued war that had torn the nation apart since independence from Spain. Herrera's reluctance to travel to Nicaragua caused Vijil to write a telling letter to the federal government in Guatemala:

Minister General of Guatemala

My Government regrets to inform you of the new misfortunes that threaten unhappy Nicaragua: Managua, with its tenacious dissidence wishes to make the first days of our peace bitter. You are aware, Citizen Secretary, of the efforts that the Government has used to allow Managua the enjoyment of immense benefits.

³¹ Vijil 1930, 3.

³² Gudmundson & Wolfe 2010, 182.

³³ Vijil 1930, 6.

³⁴ Vijil 1930, 10.

Four residents of that town, or better say a small theocratic faction, imbued with insane ideologies, despised the people's entreaties of union and peace. What are my resources to look into this situation, and when does this leniency become a discredit to the other towns of the state?

My Government that has tried to avoid destructive recourses or weapons to end the difficult business. I reiterate, I beg for the elected chief, Citizen Dionisio Herrera, to accelerate his march to this State, let his journey have a successful conclusion. Only the presence of Señor Herrera could bring the benefits of peace and harmony to Nicaragua; but this means has been fruitless because the man has begged off his blessed march for so long.

Finally, Minister, it was agreed by the Legislature to circumvent Managua militarily for fear and total lack of provisions once surrender is achieved, and my Government is looking into the slim hope of implementing the sovereign order.

Heaven grant that without the fatal effects of war the expressed reconciliation that just demands be achieved.

My government has instructed me to inform him of the situation as soon as he arrives. I offer you my most respectful consideration and appreciation.

Dios, Unión, Libertad – Granada, April 5, 1830

Agustín Vijil³⁵

The concern evinced by Vijil for his home of Nicaragua is evident in this letter to the Federal Government in Guatemala. At this point in his career, his service as a lawyer and politician dominate his thinking and would, of course, continue to influence him upon ordination. His wish

³⁵ General Minister Agustín Vijil to the Federal Government, April 5, 1830. Reprinted in Huete, *Estampas*, 45-46,

for a consummation of hostilities represented an honest interest in peace, but not in peace at any cost. The beliefs he acquired while at university dominated his thinking, and would be important to his future role in Nicaraguan history.

Dionisio Herrera had previously been the Honduran head of state, removed from office by conservatives in Honduras and imprisoned in Guatemala until the end of the Central American civil war. Despite his checkered past, Vijil looked to Herrera as a savior for the province of Nicaragua. As noted, Vijil sided with the liberal contingent in the civil war and believed that Herrera would establish liberal supremacy in the beleaguered province. Not only would this be a victory for Vijil's political views it would accomplish a more important goal, peace and prosperity for Nicaragua. Even at this point, he was focused on trying to create a longer term solution to the political issues that had engendered the years of anarchy in his home.

Herrera would finally arrive in Nicaragua in April, 1830 upon which he announced, "I have been sent to you by the Supreme Federal Government to conciliate your quarrels, to pacify the State, to organize it, to reestablish order and the government of law, to end your misfortunes, and to stop civil war, the cause of all your troubles."³⁶ This agenda proved to be an impossible one for the politician to achieve. Herrera was an astute enough leader and executive to ameliorate the political differences, but it proved impossible to eliminate the armed conflict. 1831 was a year of relative peace, but violence once again surfaced. In 1833, *La Opinión Pública* denounced the resurgence of civil war as "the monster that attacks and devours" and "contradictory to the teaching of our Holy Religion."³⁷ Herrera's primary accomplishment during his three years in

³⁶ "A los Habitantes del Mismo Estado," April 7, 1830, reprinted in the *Revista de la Academia de Geografica e Historia de Nicaragua*, 10:3, December 1850, p. 258.

³⁷ *La Opinión Publica*, León, May 9, 1833

Nicaragua was not a legacy of peace (as Vijil would have wished), but rather liberal political dominance from León for nearly a decade and a half, from 1830-1845.³⁸

The 1830s highlighted the difficulties faced by Central America as it strove to achieve independence as a unified nation. The economic policies of the liberal elite severely damaged native industries in efforts to enhance international trade, and taxation policies led to *campesino*, or peasant, unrest throughout Central America. This unrest created an undercurrent of social conflict between peasants and elite. This conflict did not depend on conservative or liberal governments – primarily on which of them held power, as both parties cared little for the plight of the underclass. In Nicaragua, this conflict was expressed in terms of *desnudos* (the naked) against *mechudos* (the longhairs) and caused rebellions in Nicaragua that would continue through to the Guerra de las Comunidades (War of the Communities) in 1881.³⁹ For the next decades, such strife would not be uncommon, though it would rarely influence the policies of the reigning elites. Private and communal lands were ceded to foreign interests during this time, with some properties netting the government as much as 253,526 pesos.⁴⁰ Opposition was further engendered by the new liberal judicial system. Liberals considered the system of laws unjust and antiquated, and determined to replace them with the adoption of the Edward Livingston Codes on January 1, 1837. Originally based on the Napoleonic Code, these laws had been originally introduced by Edward Livingston for use in the Louisiana territory in 1824.⁴¹ The majority of the population considered the codes less of an attempt to establish social justice than a centralization of authority from Guatemala City – a centralization that promised further foreign influences as well as continued anti-clericalism. The cholera epidemic of 1837 transformed the grievances,

³⁸ Burns 1991, 43.

³⁹ Gudmundson and Lindo-Fuentes 1995, 83.

⁴⁰ McCreery 1994, 77.

⁴¹ Bethell 1991, 16.

both threatened and real, into full rebellion.⁴² The Guatemalan priests fanned concerns over the government handling of the epidemic by telling the *campesinos* that the medicine being put into the water was actually poison, leading to further panic and insurgency.⁴³

The years after the Herrera departed in 1833 were difficult for Vijil as a liberal in the conservative city of Granada. Conservative politicians worked against Vijil and his political allies. Many liberals were suspicious of him due to his role in the federal government, as distrust of Guatemala was always high. Four of his associates were imprisoned, though Vijil himself escaped capture.⁴⁴ He sought refuge at his family's *finca* in Granada, and eventually was pardoned by the government through his own liberal connections and through the intervention of his mother on his behalf.⁴⁵ This intervention saved him from prison, but his mother would exact a cost upon her son. She had determined that her son should join the priesthood, a fate that the young man seems to have accepted. Vijil traveled to Cartegana in New Granada to comply with the wishes of his mother in 1835. His knowledge of canonical law and Latin made his studies relatively brief, and Vijil was ordained on April 16, 1836.⁴⁶ Upon his return, he served in the Granadan diocese until 1839.

As the Central American federal union collapsed, León and the liberals moved to establish Nicaragua as an independent nation. On April 30, 1838 a constituent assembly declared Nicaragua to be a free and sovereign state. Unlike many political issues, independence was supported both by León and Granada, liberals and conservatives alike.⁴⁷ The intention of the Constitution of 1838 was to establish a civilian and republican government focused on providing

⁴² McCreery 1994, 148.

⁴³ Bethell 1991, 17.

⁴⁴ Gámez 1975, 443.

⁴⁵ Vijil 1930, 31.

⁴⁶ Vijil, 1930, 32.

⁴⁷ Gamez 1975, 471-472.

liberties for the citizens of Nicaragua. The Constitution of 1838 was important for numerous reasons, not the least of which was in distinguishing the Liberals from the Conservatives. The struggles of the next twenty years would be focused on Liberal efforts to support the new constitution and Conservative efforts to eliminate it.⁴⁸

An Independent Nicaragua

The Constitution of 1838 separated the powers of the various branches of government. The legislature was strengthened, while the executive was weakened proportionally. The military command was separated as much as possible from the executive branch. The Nicaraguan chief executive, designated the supreme director, was limited to only a two year term. The role quickly proved to be contentious. For the next several years, five successive legislators held the executive office. It was not until the elections of 1841 that Pablo Buitrago of León was chosen as the first supreme director of Nicaragua that the executive branch was separate from legislative control. Independence and a new constitution proved no cure for the violent conflict that had begun before 1838. Despite this, the Liberal party maintained nominal control for a number of years. In 1844, a particularly vicious civil war concluded with the sacking of León in January of 1845. León and Nicaragua had joined in the wider isthmian conflict, and in the 1840s the political winds had shifted towards the Conservatives. In the mid-nineteenth century, Nicaragua would suffer more civil wars than any other Central American state.⁴⁹

By the mid-1840s, Nicaragua was the only Liberal government in Central America.⁵⁰ General Francisco Malespín, Conservative leaver of El Salvador, allied himself with Hondurans

⁴⁸ Burns 1991, 43.

⁴⁹ Bethell 1991, 23.

⁵⁰ Gudmundson and Lindo-Fuentes 1995, 89.

to invade Nicaragua. Their stated goal was to take captive exiles who had supported the erstwhile Central American president Francisco Morazán.⁵¹ The rival city of Granada, as might be imagined, saw these events as a chance to attain dominance over León. Granada joined with the forces of Managua and Rivas to set up a provisional government. Instead of removing the foreign invaders, the new Nicaraguan government sent its military forces to join with those of El Salvador and Honduras. The resultant siege ended in the destruction of León. With outside help, Granada had successfully thwarted its rival city and ended the dominance the Liberals had held since Herrera took power.⁵²

The beginning of 1845, unsurprisingly, saw the first Conservative supreme director of Nicaragua, José León Sandoval. The Conservative party faced further weakening when prominent Liberal general José Trinidad Muñoz decided to desert the Liberal cause and support the Conservatives, following the winds of power.⁵³ Like all occupants of high political office in Nicaragua, Sandoval was solidly a member of the elites both politically and economically, his enterprises combining shipping concerns on the San Juan river as well as agricultural concerns. The Conservative vision of the future that Sandoval supported differed minimally from that presented by the Liberal leaders of León. The primary difference was his place of residence. That difference, in the Nicaragua of the nineteenth century, meant everything. In fact, Sandoval did no better than his Liberal opponents at restoring order to Nicaragua. Norberto Ramírez noted this political concern when speaking as president of the Legislative Assembly in 1846, “The absence of national order and the false pleasures of exaggerated freedom have broken all the threads of the fabric of unity, even within families, and have produced the most complete and disastrous

⁵¹ Woodward 1985, 118.

⁵² Burns 1991, 43.

⁵³ Bethell 1991, 24.

anarchy. Each wants to enjoy a liberty without restrictions; none wants to obey the law or the authorities; and each wants to be the tyrant over the others. This behavior will destroy everything.”⁵⁴

The Conservatives, like the Liberals, began to realize the difficulties in governing Nicaragua. One of the first actions proved to be exceedingly controversial – Sandoval moved the capital of Nicaragua from León to Granada. In fairness, León had been severely damaged during the most recent civil war. The Leonese nonetheless disapproved of this move. In one of the few instances of compromise during this period, politicians determined that the capital should be established between Granada and León – leading to the village of Managua being raised to the status of a city which would eventually become the new capital of Nicaragua in 1852, ending at least one of the conflicts between León and Granada.⁵⁵

The conflict over the Constitution of 1838 remained, however. Sandoval brought the constituent assembly together in order to draft a new constitution for Nicaragua, but the Constitution of 1848 was not completed during his term in office. His successor, José Guerrero, veered more liberal than conservative and decided to allow the controversies over a new constitution to fall away. José Laureano Pineda took power back for the Conservative party in 1851, though the election of 1853 would prove more momentous for Nicaraguan politics. Twenty-six candidates were in the running for the position of supreme director (although only five received a significant number of votes). The wide field of candidates prevented either the Liberal candidate from León, Francisco Castellón or the Conservative from Granada, Fruto Chamorro, from gaining victory. This threw the election to the legislature, and it chose to transfer power to Chamorro. Despite the closeness of the election, most Nicaraguans believed

⁵⁴ Quoted in Burns 1991, 44.

⁵⁵ Woodward 1985, 136.

this to be a definitive victory of Granada over the Liberal city of León. Upon his inauguration, he promised to cure what he saw as the primary ill of Nicaraguan society, stating “I understand that my foremost duty is to maintain order, as this is the primary objective of society and the only way it can assure the happiness and prosperity of its citizens, I will try with the power you have placed in my hands to fulfill that duty, to fulfill it in such a way that the Nicaraguan people will not suffer the harm caused by the disturbance of order. I will follow the wise rule of law that prescribes preventing the crime rather than the curing of it.”⁵⁶ Liberals read these promises to hold forth the greater subjugation of León and the aggrandizement of Granada.

On May 1853, Chamorro took steps that caused Liberals to believe they were correct about his intentions. He called on the Conservative controlled legislature to pass a law calling for the formation of a new constituent assembly to create a new constitution, envisioning replacing the contentious 1838 document. Once again, his primary concern was the establishment of order and he followed a line of reasoning that ascribed the lack of order to the lack of a strong executive. Thus, the constitution envisioned by Chamorro would offer greater powers and capabilities to the supreme director. Tensions increased over this political standoff, and in November Chamorro increased the potential for conflict by announcing a “secret plot” amongst Liberals to overthrow his government. In an attempt to make good on his promise to maintain order, Chamorro ordered the arrest of the Liberal leaders (including those that had been named to the upcoming constituent assembly). Most of them successfully fled to Honduras before facing capture. “Insurrection is rebellion; it is an unjustifiable crime that the supreme law of social cohesion condemns” announced Chamorro, in defense of his policies.⁵⁷ Tensions had once again been exacerbated, and Nicaragua once again faced the specter of civil war. This war would

⁵⁶ Quoted in Pérez and Chamorro 1975, 6-8.

⁵⁷ Fruto Chamorro, *El Director Supremo a Los Pueblos del Estado*, 1853.

prove to be unlike any that had come before, and would threaten Nicaraguan sovereignty in an entirely different manner.

Central America, Nicaragua, and the Catholic Church

The institution of the Catholic Church has been vitally important to Latin America since the arrival of the Spanish in the sixteenth century. Catholic priests arrived in Nicaragua almost as quickly, with the arrival of Padre Diego de Agüero in 1523. In colonial Latin America, the Catholic Church provided an underpinning of support and legitimization for the conquest. The famous rationale for travel to the New World was God, gold, and glory. While gold was often in short supply and glory a debatable term, the Spanish conquerors certainly brought God along with them. As might be expected, the Church was initially a strong supporter of colonial monarchical rule from Spain. That support would not be universal in the decades to come. Social and political conflicts in the New World and beyond would find themselves reflected in the Catholic Church. The institution itself would be primarily Conservative in its politics, but that did not prevent clergy from identifying with Liberal causes and political ideals. One such priest, of course, would be Padre Vijil, and Conservative and Liberal ideologies would find significant support among the ecclesiastical representatives in Central America. This initial division was evident in Nicaragua as early as 1543. Antonio de Valdivieso, a Dominican, was appointed bishop of León. Bishop Valdivieso championed the indigenous population of Nicaragua, bringing him in direct conflict with the political authorities of the time as he spoke out against indigenous slavery.⁵⁸ This opposition did not end well for him; forces loyal to the governor assassinated Bishop Valdivieso and looted the city of León.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Gamez 1975, 176-178.

⁵⁹ Foroohar, 1989, 3.

The Nicaraguan Church followed the rest of Central American in divisions over the political issues surrounding independence in Latin America. The ranking Catholic clergy sided with Spain in the beginning of the nineteenth century, while the priests more closely connected with the masses served as active participants in the independence movement. Padres José Antonio Moñino and Benito Miguelena both supported Leonese rebellions against Spanish authority from 1811 to 1813. In December of 1811, Padre Miguelena wrote a letter on behalf of the rebels to the bishop of León, Nicolás García Jerez. At least temporarily, the bishop acceded to their demands. The clergy supporting revolution suffered with the other rebels as the Spanish government crushed the nascent rebellion, and imprisoned the clergy that chose to aid the rebels. The clerical divisions inherent in Nicaraguan society provide additional context to the incident that would help exacerbate the rivalry between the León and Granada. In 1812, the vicar of Granada, José Antonio Chamorro, issued a proclamation against the popular revolt. His words went beyond simple opposition, forcefully accusing the rebels of treason against God and the Church as well as their rightful King: “Therefore, the people conceive that they have more power than God, the Church, and the King. We can conclude that the insurgents are traitors to God, to the religion, and to the King of the country.”⁶⁰ Those clergy that participated in the rebellion received prison sentences for their efforts; it was, of course, dangerous to act against the properly constituted Church authorities. The Catholic Church remained an important part of Central America life following independence as the Constitution of 1824 declared it the official religion of Central America.

Liberal opposition to Church policies reinforced the church’s conservative leanings. Lowell Gudmundson noted this as the primary feature defining Liberalism in Central America

⁶⁰ Foroohar 1989, 4.

prior to 1860: violent opposition to the Church as it affected social and political policy in the isthmus.⁶¹ Gudmundson further pointed out that many priests, especially in the provinces, were supporters of Liberal policies. The Church faced significant political challenges from Liberal forces (and Conservative opportunists) determined to limit the power of religious authorities. Under the leadership of Francisco Morazán, the regular orders (particularly the Dominicans) found themselves expelled from Central America under a decree on July 28, 1829. A total of 289 clerics were exiled, and their property seized. The wealth and privilege of the Church became a popular target of Liberal political figures.⁶² The political struggles surrounding the Church found polarization in the same Liberal-Conservative dichotomy that promulgated chaos and anarchy through Central America from 1823 to 1857. Liberals traditionally advocated for reducing restrictions on trade and commerce, and eliminating exemptions for the Catholic Church. Conservatives, as might be imagined, supported maintaining the status quo as much as possible. In Nicaragua, these political divisions focused (as always) on the cities of León and Granada.⁶³ The Nicaraguan Constitution of 1838 continued the Liberal political trend, allowing for the exercise of religion other than Catholicism in Nicaragua. This formed part of the Conservative opposition to the Constitution of 1838, and was part of the opposition presented by Chamorro when he called for a revised constitution in the 1850s.⁶⁴

Despite the political chaos, the Church in Nicaragua spent the decades after independence eschewing direct political issues. José Desiderio de la Quedra served as Bishop of Nicaragua from 1825 to his death in 1849, and was praised for the neutrality he advocated. He had been educated in León, and rose from a family of modest means. His successor, Pedro Solís,

⁶¹ Gudmundson & Lindo-Fuentes 1995, 100.

⁶² Gudmundson & Lindo-Fuentes 1995, 103.

⁶³ Williams 1989, 15.

⁶⁴ Kirk 1992, 18.

continued that policy until his death in 1852. In 1852, the policy of political neutrality was reversed by Pope Pius IX's choice as bishop, Jorge de Viteri. Bishop Viteri had previously served as the Bishop of El Salvador, and his political adventurism had led to his expulsion from El Salvador. An associate of his (and confidante to the United States consul) Manuel Francisco Pavón had warned Viteri against involvement in the turbulent political climate of Nicaragua, but such warnings proved unnecessary as Bishop Viteri passed away in 1853.⁶⁵ The chaos of the Nicaraguan Civil War prevented another bishop from being consecrated in Nicaragua until 1859. During that period, the institution of the Church found itself unable to provide guidance or stability to the beleaguered Central American nation. The direction of the Church was left to local priests, and their leadership was also divided in response to William Walker's intervention in the middle of the 1850s.

When Agustín Vijil returned to Nicaragua following his ordination in 1836, he was assigned by Bishop de la Quedra to the parish of San Fernando Masaya. He remained in Masaya until 1843, at which time he returned to Granada. Vijil removed himself from political activity, but many in the Conservative stronghold had memories of his earlier Liberal activity. In 1843, the Church removed Vijil from Granada in order to avoid hostilities both with the elites as well as other priests in the area.⁶⁶ Despite this, Vijil had supporters in Granada that were impressed by his eloquence and knowledge, and those individuals took to writing letters to the ecclesiastical authorities seeking a redress of grievances for Vijil. These pleas came to fruition on June 20 of 1850, at which time he was appointed priest of Granada and Vicar of the Department of the East.⁶⁷ He served creditably in this role for the next several years, until Fruto Chamorro came to

⁶⁵ Perez 1977, 5.

⁶⁶ Vijil 1930, 49.

⁶⁷ Vijil, 1930, 58-60 & 67.

power in 1853. The Conservative government resented the presence of the Liberal clergy, especially given the long-standing alliance between the Conservatives and the Catholic Church. Most reports indicate that Padre Vijil attempted to stay out of political disputes, but he would often feel obligated to preserve and protect the lower classes under his care. Discussions between Chamorro and Vijil would be heard by numerous people in the squares, with Vijil's requests often being ignored by the Conservative president.⁶⁸ His political voice would be muted until the arrival of William Walker in Granada.

England, the United States, and the Trans-isthmian Canal

International attention continued to be focused on Nicaragua due to the potential of a canal allowing direct access from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Vijil, as with many Nicaraguans, believed that this attention would be the key to improving life in their nation. The United States and England engaged in a heated competition to acquire the right to create a canal in this location. Understanding the events that would follow involves examining these interests. The instructions from Secretary of State John M. Clayton to Ephraim George Squier in Nicaragua indicated the grandiose expectations presented in the process of building a canal across the Nicaraguan portion of the Central American isthmus in 1850:

Regarding the completion of that enterprise which had heretofore engaged the attention of philanthropists and statesmen for three hundred years without effect... tell the members of the Company who have with the aid of the United States obtained the power to construct this work that if there be any mean spirit of speculation indulged in by them, or any of them, to blight or disgrace so glorious an undertaking, they will merit and

⁶⁸ Vijil 1930, 118.

receive the execrations of good men, while on the other hand, if they be true to their own honor, their own interests and the best interests of their own country and of the human race, their names will be handed down to posterity among those of the noblest benefactors of man.⁶⁹

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the United States had designs on expansion and exploitation of Central America.⁷⁰ In addition to territorial expansion, there existed significant interest in establishing an interoceanic route. The man who would one day be Napoleon III, Emperor of France, had in 1846 remarked upon the potential of that route:

The State of Nicaragua can become better than Constantinople, the necessary route of the great commerce of the world, and is destined to attain an extraordinary degree of prosperity and grandeur. France, England, and Holland have a great commercial interest in the establishment of a communication between the two oceans, but England has, more than other powers, a political interest in the execution of this project.⁷¹

While Nicaragua was undergoing significant political strife, the powers of Britain and the United States were imagining the opportunities inherent for themselves in the potential commercial bounty of Nicaragua.

Interest by the United States was significantly enhanced by the California gold rush of 1848-1849, directing U.S interest heavily on this trans-isthmian canal.⁷² This passage was so important to U.S. interests that the two potential routes in Nicaragua and Panama received the

⁶⁹ Clayton to Squier, May 7, 1850, National Archives.

⁷⁰ Wood 2009, 357.

⁷¹ Folkman 1972, 14.

⁷² Gobat 2005, 23.

most sizable level of foreign investment by U.S. citizens prior to the United States Civil War.⁷³ The discovery of gold along with the settlement of the California and Oregon territories created an amazing level of demand for a route other than the vast trek across land in the United States or the long and perilous Cape Horn journey. The most popular potential route was the crossing in Panama (then still a part of Colombia) – from Chagres on the Caribbean coast to Panama City on the Pacific coast. Though Panama had no canal at this point, a series of steamships on the Atlantic and Pacific sides made use of this narrow overland route in the 1840s. The Chagres side was served by the United States Mail Steamship Company; the Panama City to San Francisco, CA, route was covered by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. Although this route had a number of advantages, the overland trip across Panama was both difficult and dangerous. Remaining in the disease ridden port of Chagres overnight was considered dangerous enough that insurance companies included a cancellation clause in their policies for just that event.⁷⁴

The Nicaraguan route was initially not more inviting than the Panamanian route, but the difficulties of Panamanian transit and the complicity of the Nicaraguan government would make the more northern route an attractive option. Travel on the Nicaraguan route was complicated by both the greater length and the varied steps required to make the crossing. Passengers would disembark at the Atlantic port town of San Juan del Norte and travel via canoe up the San Juan River to Lake Nicaragua. A series of river rapids would force disembarking a minimum of three times prior to arrival at the lake. The lake itself could have issues, as early travelers reported encountering sharks and inclement weather events on the trek.⁷⁵ The last section of the journey involved carts pulled by either oxen or mules – a particularly difficult journey during the

⁷³ Wilkins 1970, 28.

⁷⁴ Folkman 1972, 2.

⁷⁵ Stout 1859, 19.

quagmire that was the rainy season in Nicaragua. The difficulties inherent in this journey led to the desire for a canal that would permit transit to the Pacific without disembarking. In Nicaragua, planners expected that such a canal would employ the San Juan River and Lake Nicaragua. The dream of creating such a route entailed considerable challenges concerning technology and financing. British interest in creating a similar canal caused another issue with the construction.

The British interest in Nicaragua and Central America in general can be traced to one man, Frederick Chatfield, who had arrived in Central America from Britain in 1834. For nearly the next two decades, Chatfield provided the dominant foreign interest in the region. His influence was notable and nettlesome enough to cause a Salvadoran newspaper to refer to him as “a living curse which corrodes the vitals of Central America.”⁷⁶ Despite his lack of popularity, Chatfield proved effective in the region. Lord Palmerston, the British Foreign Secretary for much of Chatfield’s time in the area, supported of his efforts. The British government allowed Chatfield virtual free reign to establish British policy in Central America. Palmerston directed the Royal Navy to make a show of force at Chatfield’s behest in order “to protect British nationals from interference in their commercial exploits.”⁷⁷ Chatfield envisioned British control over a Central American isthmus through control of the Mosquito Territory on the Eastern coast of Nicaragua. His plans included control of San Juan del Norte, one of the primary ports for a planned canal. In 1848, the British occupation of the Mosquito Coast expanded to allow for British control of any canal interest.⁷⁸ Jeremy Bentham sent an early plan for a canal to the Guatemalan ambassador residing in Britain at the time, José María del Barrio. Bentham also provided this plan to the British Foreign Secretary at the time, George Canning. The plan

⁷⁶ Hamshere 1972, 177.

⁷⁷ Hamshere 1972, 177.

⁷⁸ DuVal 1947, 5..

strongly implied the threat of potential French involvement. Bentham reinforced the desirability of the location, and noted in his papers that “Lake Nicaragua affords a most promising spot for the junction, and is far superior to any other.”⁷⁹

The United States, citing the Monroe Doctrine, expressed an understandable degree of concern over the increasing British activity in Central America. During the War with Mexico, President James K. Polk dispatched Elijah Hise to Guatemala with instructions to do what he could to further a unified Central American state that could provide a degree of resistance to British influence in the region. The internecine conflict and violence throughout Central America would, of course, make that goal untenable. Polk’s additional directives to Hise were more achievable, as he was to report on British involvement in the area and negotiate treaties of friendship and trade with the independent Central American states.⁸⁰ Chatfield sent a message to Palmerston noting that “It will, I think, be necessary to take a high hand with the North Americans, if we are to hold our ground in Central America.” Palmerston replied that Chatfield was to oppose the aims of the United States “as far as its object is hostile to the interests of Great Britain.”⁸¹ Chatfield’s personal secretary was Manuel F Pavón, one of José Rafael Carrera’s leading advisers. Specifically, Chatfield and Pavón sought to support British interests by maintaining Conservative sovereign states in Central America.⁸² Hise apparently felt a necessity to stymie British efforts in Nicaragua by finalizing a treaty with that nation. Despite lacking formal approval, Hise signed the Hise-Silva Treaty on May 31, 1849. The treaty allowed for rights of transit via canal, road, or railroad in perpetuity as well as guaranteeing the integrity and independence of Nicaragua.

⁷⁹ Williford 1970, 83.

⁸⁰ DuVal 1947, 51.

⁸¹ Rodríguez 1964, 295.

⁸² Bethell 1991, 25.

Polk's successor, President Zachary Taylor, proved uninterested in the Hise treaty, replacing Hise with Ephraim George Squier on June 6, 1849. Squier focused on determining whether British or United States interests would hold sway in the area. Secretary of State John M. Clayton instructed Squier to aid in acquiring a canal contract for United States capitalists interested in Nicaraguan investment, specifically one approved by the Nicaraguan government.⁸³ Squier was not authorized to guarantee the independence of the territory of Nicaragua. The canal goal was ostensibly to allow for equal access for all per Clayton's instructions: "Our object is as honest as it is clearly avowed, to claim no peculiar privilege, no exclusive right, no monopoly of commercial intercourse, but to see that the work is dedicated to the benefit of mankind."⁸⁴

Nicaraguans were, on the whole, eager to support a treaty that would bring the dream of a Nicaraguan canal to fruition. This was a dream especially pursued and supported by the Liberals in power, as they evinced a particular appreciation for United States intervention (more so than that of Britain). In later years, John H. Wheeler noted that Agustín Vijil had "expressed much desire that the United States should own Nicaragua and prevent their sanguinary revolutions."⁸⁵ The Nicaraguan government certainly desired the economic advantages that would be accessed by having the primary transit route in the Western Hemisphere. The primary concern of Nicaraguans was that the transit should benefit Nicaragua and not solely foreign entrepreneurs or governments. This environment provided an opening for United States businessman Cornelius Vanderbilt.

Along with Joseph L. White and Nathaniel H. Wolfe, Vanderbilt formed the American Atlantic and the Pacific Ship Canal Company. The Nicaraguan government signed a contract

⁸³ Clayton to Squier, May 1, 1849, National Archives, M77.

⁸⁴ Clayton to Squier, May 1, 1849, National Archives, M77.

⁸⁵Diary of John Hill Wheeler, May 6, 1855, The Papers of John Hill Wheeler, MS 16, 736.1. Diary, Library of Congress.

allowing the newly formed corporation exclusive access to the construction of a canal in Nicaragua. Under this agreement, the canal was to be open to all. Initially, Nicaragua would benefit from a payment of \$10,000 along with a similar sum annually until the canal was completed. Nicaragua was also to receive \$200,000 worth of stock in the enterprise and ten percent of the net profits for any route established by Vanderbilt's corporation.⁸⁶

During this time, Squier worked to establish means to protect treaty negotiations for the United States. In order to accomplish this, he negotiated an interim treaty with Nicaragua as directed by the United States Department of State. Contrary to his instructions, he also conceded a guarantee of Nicaraguan independence. This infraction was part of the rationale behind rejection of the treaty by the United States Congress. Clayton also expressed concerns about the limited duration of the treaty (twenty years) and the inclusion of a clause that allowed for the annulment of the treaty by either party with twelve month's notice. In rejecting the treaty, Clayton noted that further instructions would be transmitted once they had negotiated with the British to leave the Mosquito Territory.⁸⁷ Clayton proceeded to negotiate directly with Britain in order to bring such issues to a close. He negotiated with the British Minister in Washington, D.C., Sir Henry Lytton Bulwer, to achieve a satisfactory agreement. Clayton was exceptionally proud of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty signed on April 19, 1850.⁸⁸ His efforts focused on economic and commercial expansion in the region, though stopping short of imperialistic aspirations. In communications with Squier, Clayton expanded on the objectives of the treaty:

The object is to secure the protection of the British Government to the Nicaragua Canal and to liberate Central America from the dominion of any foreign power... secure the

⁸⁶ Folkman 1972, 18.

⁸⁷ Clayton to Squier, November 20, 1850, M77, National Archives.

⁸⁸ Woodward 1985, 134.

passage across the isthmus and every other practicable passage whether by Canal or Railway at Tehuantepec, Panama or elsewhere... All other nations that shall navigate the Canal will have to become guarantors of Central America and the Mosquito Coast... The agreement is not to erect or maintain any fortification commanding the canal or in the vicinity thereof nor to occupy, fortify, colonize or assume, or exercise any dominion whatever over any part of Nicaragua, Costa Rica, the Mosquito Coast, or Central America, nor to make use of any protection or alliance for any of those purposes.⁸⁹

With the establishment of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, the American Atlantic and Pacific Ship Canal Company made preliminary plans for carrying out their contract with Nicaragua. Vanderbilt and company proceeded to lay out plans and seek financing for the project, but soon ran into difficulties. Proposals to establish a canal capable of accommodating all vessels of the age ran as high as \$100,000,000, a sum beyond what Vanderbilt had any hope of raising to establish the canal. Without stable sources of financing or the support of multiple governments, Vanderbilt was forced to abandon the project.⁹⁰

In lieu of a viable canal project, Vanderbilt turned his attention to establishing a short term land and water route that would, in the end, prove to be the only route. A new corporate entity was created to work in conjunction with the American Atlantic and Pacific Ship Canal Company – the Accessory Transit Company. The Accessory Transit Company was designated solely to providing transit for passengers across Nicaragua while plans for an eventual canal were being prepared. The demand for traffic along this route was impressive and introduced the Nicaraguan populace to hordes of United States citizens that were looking to travel to California.

⁸⁹ Clayton to Squier, May 7, 1850, M77, National Archives.

⁹⁰ Folkman 1972, 36.

The relative prosperity of these travelers helped convince Nicaraguans that international commerce had the potential to uplift their nation to the economic heights that had been predicted in the region for generations.⁹¹

After creating this route, Cornelius Vanderbilt endeavored to divest himself of direct interest in the Accessory Transit Corporation in 1853, selling his shares to his colleagues Charles Morgan in New York and Cornelius K. Garrison in San Francisco. While Vanderbilt went on a planned vacation to Europe, Morgan and Garrison conspired to gain complete control of the Board of Directors. They determined that Vanderbilt was actually indebted to the company, and made no further payments to him on their contract. While they went about gaining the enmity of Vanderbilt, they also faced Nicaraguan concerns over the lack of profitability to their government.

These negotiations were held as Nicaragua fell into yet another civil war, this one involving the arrival of a “gray-eyed man of destiny” from the United States. This foreign intervention would not come with government sponsorship but rather through private individuals. The situation in Nicaragua provided the opportunity for Walker. The culture prevalent in the United States prior to 1854 would prove equally important in encouraging Walker and his phalanx to proceed on their course. With this in mind, the next chapter will focus on the cultural factors in the United States that allowed for “filibustering” to flourish.

⁹¹ W.F. Boone to Daniel Webster Secretary of State., January 13, 1852, T152, National Archives.

CHAPTER 3: BEHIND GREY EYES

By the twenty-first century, the name of William Walker has been largely forgotten in the popular American consciousness. Prior to the United States Civil War, however, Walker's exploits found a great deal of popular support. In examining the response to and effect on Nicaragua, it is equally important to understand the culture that allowed filibustering to prosper and precipitated the events of the 1850s. The origins of filibustering are in the twin American ideals of "Manifest Destiny" and "American Exceptionalism."

Nationalism and Manifest Destiny

In his work, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson defined a nation as an "imagined political community."⁹² His examination of nationalism focused on the shared connection across groups of people bounded by time and space. Individuals that never physically met each other possessed a connection by virtue of being part of the same nation. Although Anderson focused on Europe and Asia in his study, his analysis is highly applicable to understanding the United States' national fervor. It is especially relevant in the early nineteenth century, when the United States experienced excessive growth. Citizens of the United States saw their nation as a grand experiment, and it provided them with an extremely strong connection. Citizens of the United States were brought together by political ideals and loyalties as well as by a common culture and tradition.⁹³ Another part of Anderson's definition, however, did not directly apply to the United States' nationalism of the era. He determined that a nation was also limited and possessed of a finite boundary. In the early nineteenth century, many did not acknowledge such limits as a part

⁹² Anderson 1991, 6.

⁹³ Potter 2011, 11-12.

of the United States definition of nationalism. Americans viewed the concept of Manifest Destiny as a driving force for the expansion of the nation, and often did not accept that there was a finite border to American expansion.

Three key themes exemplified Manifest Destiny in America. The first of these was a belief in the virtue of the American people and the institutions of their government. The concept of American Exceptionalism drew from this idea. Americans evinced a belief in their superiority, and assumed that their governance and systems were superior and deserving of expansion. This justified conquest and acquisition of additional territory, and led into the second theme: a mission to spread these American institutions, and establishing a world in the image of the United States. This calling had almost a missionary zeal to Americans. Finally, many viewed it as their destiny to spread these institutions.⁹⁴ The propagation of American Exceptionalism was a directive supported by God. In his 1776 pamphlet, *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine stated that “We have it in our power to begin the world over again. A situation, similar to the present, hath not happened since the days of Noah until now. The birthday of a new world is at hand...”⁹⁵ In these words, Paine exemplified the essential concepts of Manifest Destiny and American imperialism.

One of the driving impulses of the beginning of the nineteenth century, the concept of Manifest Destiny influenced United States policy well in advance of the actual coining of the term. Filibustering was originally part of a larger design by such figures as Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe. These men were all focused on national expansion, with the caveat that they did not wish for the still young nation to embroil itself in wars.⁹⁶ Very early

⁹⁴ Weeks 1996, 61.

⁹⁵ Paine 2009, 83.

⁹⁶ Owsley and Smith 1997, 9.

filibustering efforts in the Spanish territories of Florida followed this particular design. Tacit approval of such actions led to effective control of Eastern Florida by the United States, and eventually led to Spain ceding the territory to the United States.⁹⁷ These actions proceeded carefully, avoiding direct conflict with the great powers. In line with this reasoning, the Congress passed the Neutrality Act of 1818. In essence the act noted that it was

“Lawful for the President of the United States or such person as he shall have empowered for that purpose, to employ such part of the land or naval forces of the United States... for the purposes of preventing the carrying on of any such expedition or enterprise from the territories or jurisdiction of the United States against the territories or dominions of any foreign prince or state, or of any colony, district, or people with whom the United States are at peace.”⁹⁸

The wording of the act was important to future filibusters. It established that the basic concept of filibustering was illegal, and for many years efforts at filibustering were well contained. The United States urge towards Manifest Destiny was well satisfied in its westward expansion with acquisitions such as the Louisiana Purchase. In the 1840s, American expansion reached the West coast. The war with Mexico in 1848 led to further acquisition, and presented a new frontier for United States expansion across the continent.

One additional aspect of Manifest Destiny and filibustering is important to acknowledge. In the years prior to the United States Civil War, the issue of slavery expansion colored the acquisition of territory. Many Southerners that filibustered did so in part to expand slavery. Walker himself did this, making Nicaragua the only Central American nation to reinstitute slavery. This garnered political advantage, with the newly added territories joining the United

⁹⁷ Owsley and Smith 1997, 15.

⁹⁸ May 1991, 864-865.

States as slave states. Some envisioned an expansion of the United States from Mexico through Central America. Prior to the war, the Missouri Compromise and other varied legal compromises allowed only one avenue to strengthen the power of the slave states, expansion served that purpose. Indeed, after Walker's last expedition the British found a projected constitution of the "Supreme Grand Lodge of the League of the Red Star of the United States." The document demanded that those devoted to the cause of the South and her institutions would work to guard and perpetuate the institution of slavery. Despite the high-minded rhetoric, not all of the filibuster's goals were by any means noble.⁹⁹

William Walker

Walker himself was a relatively unusual character and not one likely to be associated with revolutionary and filibustering intentions. He obtained a law degree by the age of fourteen from the University of Nashville, and then proceeded to travel to Paris, France, to pursue a medical degree. Walker chose to abandon both of those careers to enter a career in journalism, moving to New Orleans in 1848 to serve as the editor and foreign correspondent of the New Orleans Crescent. It was in this capacity that he came into contact with news on Manifest Destiny as well as various "violations" of the Monroe Doctrine. His biographer, Albert Z. Carr, attributed his later filibustering desires to his belief that they presented "the best chance for preventing the nation from tearing itself apart over the slavery issue" by presenting them with a common cause in defense of the Monroe Doctrine.¹⁰⁰

His time in New Orleans was short, moving to San Francisco to continue his journalism career at the San Francisco Herald. In relatively short order, Walker once again became bored

⁹⁹ May 2002, 267.

¹⁰⁰ Carr 1963, 28.

with his chosen career and was easily distracted by filibustering efforts to travel to Sonora, Mexico. On October 8, 1853 he led a group of 45 men into Mexico driven partially by idealism but also by the desire to acquire fame and reputation for himself.¹⁰¹ Without firing a shot, he landed in La Paz and took the governor prisoner, optimistically naming himself President of the Republic of Lower California, and indicated to the native population that he had arrived to defend them from the tyranny of Mexico. At least partially in response to these actions, the Mexican government was encouraged to make an accord with American minister James Gadsden in the purchase of Northern Sonora by the United States. With this agreement, the support for his efforts in Sonora from his American sources dissipated and left him to attempt his planned revolution with minimal resources. He and his men made the decision to continue with their filibustering efforts, which met with relatively unsurprising failure.¹⁰² Despite this, his efforts established his reputation as a visionary and courageous military leader in the eyes of United States' citizens and led to the nickname "Grey-Eyed Man of Destiny."

In 1854, civil war broke out in Nicaragua. The leader of the Liberal forces, Francisco Castellon had contacted Walker due to his reputation for fighting in Mexico. Walker had learned from his earlier efforts, and demanded a contract that allowed him and his men colonization rights, including offers of land and support.¹⁰³ He merged his relatively small force of men with native forces, and they all became citizens of Nicaragua in addition to their citizenship in the United States. The Liberal forces alongside Walker successfully pushed forward and defeated the Conservative forces, and organized a government in Nicaragua. Patricio Rivas was chosen as the first president of the new government, and Walker was named General and Commander in Chief.

¹⁰¹ Carr 1963, 81.

¹⁰² Carr 1963, 88.

¹⁰³ Jamison 1909, 12.

He proceeded to use his new authority to place Americans in charge of the Nicaraguan military, effectively making Rivas a puppet president. Soon this was not enough for Walker, and he arranged for elections to establish himself as President of Nicaragua. On September 22, 1856 Walker reinstated slavery in Nicaragua – binding the nation spiritually to the Southern nations of the United States and at the same time eliminating the possibility of annexation by the United States due to Northern opposition to slavery.¹⁰⁴

His term as president of Nicaragua was limited, as the neighboring countries of Costa Rica and Honduras were fearful of his purported plans to create a single nation from the nations of Central America. He had also earned the ire of railroad tycoon Cornelius Vanderbilt. Vanderbilt thus proved quite willing to provide logistical and financial support to the forces of Costa Rica and Honduras. Within a short period, Walker was forced out of Nicaragua in May of 1857. This did not end his filibustering desires, as he was “determined to regain what he believed were his rights in Nicaragua.”¹⁰⁵ Walker proceeded to attempt three more incursions into Nicaragua, the final one occurring in 1860. At that point, the British navy captured him and turned over to the Honduran government. The Honduran government proceeded to execute Walker, finally ending his filibustering efforts in Central America.

Walker and American Romanticism

One of the important keys to understanding Walker in relation to American culture was found in his fascination with Romantic literature. More specifically, it is valuable to understand how the Romantic tradition was viewed through the prism of United States cultural leanings towards the ideals of Manifest Destiny and United States Exceptionalism. The Romantic

¹⁰⁴ Walker 1860, 260.

¹⁰⁵ Jamison 1909, 12.

Movement traveled from Europe to the United States shortly following the American Revolution. The American interpretation of Romanticism continued a strong commitment to the individual and the presupposition that the natural world was good. Moreover, Americans added their revolutionary spirit to the Romantic tradition. As the United States expanded Romanticism took root. It lauded both the building of the nation but also praised the inherent potential of the burgeoning potential of their new country.¹⁰⁶ Romanticism thus became a distinctly American construct, exhibiting a strong connection to the aforementioned concepts of Manifest Destiny and United States Exceptionalism. In his analysis of United States Romanticism, David Morse noted “American literature is born of excessive claims, and burdened from the start by an overblown national rhetoric.”¹⁰⁷ In essence, the United States adopted the concepts inherent in Romanticism. In no place is this clearer than in the concept of the Romantic hero.

The Romantic hero was the essence of individualism and, by extension, nationalism. The Romantic heroes were nothing if not commanding figures, though most often in will and persona rather than anything else. The classic historical example of the Romantic hero is Napoleon Bonaparte. In Napoleon, historians see a peasant who crowned himself emperor and championed revolutionary ideals. He waged war against the nations of Europe, and reached too far in attempting to conquer Russia. In addition to the epic background and hubris, the Romantic hero was often presented with a degree of fallibility as a flawed construct. Again, Napoleon provided an excellent example. Lord Byron sums up these characteristics as:

“There sunk the greatest, nor the worst of men,
Whose spirit, antithetically mixt,
One moment of the mightiest, and again

¹⁰⁶ Courtney 2008, x.

¹⁰⁷ Morse 1989, 1.

On little objects with like firmness fixt;
Extreme in all things! hadst thou been betwixt,
Thy throne had still been thine, or never been;
For daring made thy rise as fall: thou seek'st
Even now to re-assume the imperial mien,
And shake again the world, the Thunderer of the scene!

. . . quiet to quick bosoms is a hell,
And *there* hath been thy bane; there is a fire
And motion of the soul which will not dwell
In its own narrow being, but aspire
Beyond the fitting medium of desire;
And, but once kindled, quenchless evermore,
Preys upon high adventure, nor can tire
Of aught but rest; a fever at the core,
Fatal to him who bears, to all who ever bore.”¹⁰⁸

The literary characteristics noted by Byron were specifically a description of Napoleon as a heroic Romantic figure. The hero was inherently gifted and skilled, both in intelligence and in imagination. Ordinary things were unsatisfactory to them, and unacceptable. The Romantic hero saw himself destined for a heightened level of greatness. They stood beyond the common range of human experience, but ultimately were still human (with the human frailties that come with it). Thomas Carlyle linked it directly the Romantic hero to the historical when he spoke in 1840:

¹⁰⁸ Byron 1818, Canto III.

“For myself in these days, I seem to see this indestructability of Hero-worship the everlasting adamant lower than which the confused wreck of revolutionary things cannot fall.... That man, in some sense or other, worships Heroes; that we all of us reverence and must ever reverence Great Men: this is, to me, the living rock amid all rushings-down whatsoever; -the one fixed point in modern revolutionary history, otherwise as if bottomless and shoreless.”¹⁰⁹

His words are important in understanding the nineteenth century correlation between history and the Romantic hero.

As noted above, one of the key relationships inherent to Romanticism was with the natural world. In his book *Meditations on the Hero*, Walter Reed noted that “nature is not the only ground against which the hero defines himself in the nineteenth century; there is also the ground of history. Nature and history in fact often act together as a ground for the heroic self.”¹¹⁰ This relationship can be seen explicitly in the histories of the time, specifically in the work of Romantic historian William Prescott. Two of his heroes, Cortez and Pizarro, dominate their respective places in his works *The Conquest of Mexico* and *The Conquest of Peru*. Both historical figures were extravagantly excessive. They were insanely ambitious, and were directly attracted to risky and likely impossible enterprises.¹¹¹ These examples are, of course, quite apt when considering the examination of filibustering. They presented the aesthetic of a Romantic hero grounded in history and going forth to conquest.

¹⁰⁹ Carlyle 1920, 14.

¹¹⁰ Reed 1974, 14.

¹¹¹ Morse 1989, 7.

The connection to William Walker becomes quite clear in this context, and he fits the role of an American Romantic hero. Walker certainly viewed himself as an agent of special destiny. His legal, medical, and journalistic careers were not enough to satisfy his belief in his own destiny. While he was editor of the *New Orleans Crescent*, he wrote: “Unless a man believes that there is something great for him to do, he can do nothing great. Hence so many of the captains and reformers of the world have relied on fate and the stars. A great idea springs up in a man’s soul; it agitates his whole being, transports him from the ignorant present and makes him feel the future in a moment. It is natural for a man so possessed to conceive that he is a special agent for working out in practice the thought that has been revealed to him.”¹¹² This was borne out in the nickname ascribed to him, that of the Grey-eyed Man of Destiny. As a young man, Walker seemed to have been “afflicted” with what Mark Twain referred to as “The Sir Walter disease.”¹¹³ The protagonist in Sir Walter Scott’s Waverly novels was himself heavily influenced by the works of Don Quixote, and Walker followed in that tradition with his reading and eventual belief in his own destined greatness. The former ambassador to Brazil summed up his view as an American Romantic here in an 1857 letter: “The greatest lion of Washington at present is General Walker of Nicaragua celebrity. I have met him several times and am very much pleased with him. He is a modest, retiring young man of about 30 and a perfect hero; his friends are convinced that he will yet return to Nicaragua and inaugurate orderly government in Central America. I have advised him in case of failure to try his hand in Brazil. I am rather inclined to become a filibuster since I have seen the fairest portion of God’s Creation rotting away in the hands of a decrepit race incapable of developing its resources.”¹¹⁴ Walker was a

¹¹² Brown 1980, 174.

¹¹³ Carr 1963, 3.

¹¹⁴ William Trousdale to W. Grayson Nann., TSLA, Nashville, TN.

figure of history, traveling forth to establish the natural destiny of American superiority over those that needed guidance so that they could properly utilize their resources.

The circle would continue again in the stories and presentations of Walker's own exploits. Foremost amongst these would be the play *Nicaragua, or, General Walker's Victories*. The details of the play itself are unknown, but a surviving playbill gives some insight into the content. Dated for July 21st and 22nd, the playbill announced the New York production of the "First week of an entire New Drama of great interest by E.F. Distin, Esq. written expressly for this Theatre and founded on scenes of actual occurrence, & of much importance to the Nation."¹¹⁵ The character of General Walker embodied hope and freedom, characteristics reflective of the public fascination with him. Audiences saw him as a dashing and romantic figure. Upon his expulsion from Nicaragua, theaters in Sacramento and San Francisco ran the "Siege of Granada" concerning the climactic moment of his failed Nicaraguan expedition. As it happened, the play featured New York actor C.E. Bingham, who had been present during the siege itself (having traveled in search of a land grant in Nicaragua).¹¹⁶ Walker found himself immortalized in poetry as well. Although his scribe did not garner the reputation of Lord Byron, Joaquin Miller added to the literary body of study with his poem recounting Walker's final trip to Nicaragua is particularly illuminating:

"The Carib sea comes in so slow!
It stays and stats, as loathe to go,
A Sense of death is in the air,
A sense of listless, dull despair.

¹¹⁵ Nicaragua Scrapbook, John Heiss Papers, TSLA, Nashville, TN.

¹¹⁶ May 2002, 71-74.

As if Truxillo, land and tide,
And all thing, died when Walker died.”¹¹⁷

As with other romanticized figures, poets placed Walker at the absolute center of events even in death.

Followers of Walker

As noted, historians have devoted a great deal of focus to the leaders and planners of the filibustering movements. Understanding filibustering requires understanding those that followed individuals such as Walker and why they chose to do so. Stereotypes of these individuals often portrayed them as criminals and a variety of unsavory characters. As with most stereotypes, this viewpoint has a great deal of truth to it. One such individual was Jennings Estelle, a native of San Francisco that joined Walker’s expedition to Nicaragua, who rushed onto the boat to avoid charges of having stabbed a man in the streets of San Francisco. Another example can be found in George Tillman (brother of future Senator Ben Tillman). Tillman had killed a man in a card game, and escaped punishment by traveling to Nicaragua and joining Walker’s forces. Not all of the criminal elements that joined with Walker were violent. Parker French was a thief and a con man prior to joining Walker’s forces, eventually serving as one of his ambassadors to the United States from Walker’s government. It would not be fair, of course, to suggest that the stereotype was true of all those that journeyed along with Walker on his various expeditions.¹¹⁸

If this had been the case, of course, Walker would not have been able to attract nearly ten thousand men and women to join him during his brief stint as President of Nicaragua.¹¹⁹ Instead

¹¹⁷ Miller 1923, LXIX.

¹¹⁸ May 2002, 91.

¹¹⁹ Gobat 2005, 3.

it can be argued that many young men looked to better their financial situation, and viewed Nicaragua and filibustering as a chance to better their lot in life. In a letter written to the *New York Herald*, William Caseneau passed along facts concerning life in Nicaragua. He noted: “Nicaragua is rich in a vast extent of public domain of incomparable beauty and fertility, which is open to the whole world by a liberal plan of colonization.”¹²⁰ Moreover, free passage to Nicaragua was offered to potential settlers as well as 80 acres of land to be provided for the families.

Nicaragua also had the benefit of being a prime transit route to the West Coast. During the gold rush, many individuals traversed Nicaragua to reach California. Overall, those traveling believed they would move from poverty in America to become plantation owners in Nicaragua. Additionally, the American Minister to Nicaragua, George E. Squier, provided reports that added an additional degree of inducement to young men looking to travel to Nicaragua, noting the charms and general attractiveness of Nicaraguan women.¹²¹ Once again, this presented the possibility of social mobility. Poor settlers from the United States were presented with an opportunity to marry into the elite families of Nicaragua. As James Carson Jamison notes in his memoir, “It was natural that the hearts of even warlike ‘filibusteros’ should soften under such influences, and that in turn there should be a yielding by dark-eyed beauties to suppliants for their love. A number of the Americans married estimable Nicaraguan women.”¹²²

Jamison himself provides an excellent example of the kind of individual that formed a significant portion of the filibustering movement. As a young man, he had a desire for adventure and travel. His family was certainly not wealthy – when he traveled to enlist in a military unit, he

¹²⁰ *New York Herald*, November 20, 1856.

¹²¹ Carr 1963, 115-116.

¹²² Jamison 1909, 109.

noted that he did not have money for food when he set out. He heard of the adventures of William Walker in Nicaragua, and noted that his “blood grew hot at the thought of the stirring adventures that awaited me if I could attach myself to Walker’s army.”¹²³ Like many young men, he saw the filibustering movement as a chance for upward mobility. This created a potent combination of the American dream with the concept of Manifest Destiny. The socio-economic structure of the nation at the time did not naturally provide such advantages, which further increased the attraction of traveling to a foreign country as a new ruling class.¹²⁴ The culture of Romanticism coincided with pragmatism.

As might be expected, filibustering held a great deal of appeal among military men as well. It was not uncommon for soldiers in the American military to resign commissions or desert in order to join filibustering movements.¹²⁵ Filibustering offered numerous inducements that service in the United States military did not. The recent wars fought by the United States had not brought glory or riches to the soldiers involved. Like the young men noted above, they were also looking for ways to improve their station. Traveling to a locale such as Nicaragua presented the opportunity to perform the same actions they would perform in the United States military with significantly enhanced rewards.

In addition to this, filibustering presented intangible rewards. Service in the army provided few opportunities for glory. Even the detractors of filibusters noted that they were universally courageous. Those involved in writing their reminiscences of the events often noted the opportunities available for distinction and glory.¹²⁶ The attraction was present even in soldiers graduating from West Point. In a letter to his mother prior to his graduation from West

¹²³ Jamison 1909, 52.

¹²⁴ May 2002, 101.

¹²⁵ May 1991, 862.

¹²⁶ Doubleday 1886, 66.

Point, George D. Bayard wrote that, “several of us talk of going to Nicaragua. If I am not pleased with my Corps I think I will probably resign and go there. I could easily obtain a Captain’s commission & there is a good opening. Walker is greatly in want of scientific men & then he will want especially in organizing his ordnance and artillery... It is a fine country & wealthy. Gold mines have already been discovered. What do you say to Nicaragua?”¹²⁷ Bayard did not end up joining Walker in Nicaragua, but his letter provided an invaluable insight into the mind of military men that may have interest in joining with the filibustering forces. Another important attraction was the potential for advancement in Walker’s military force. The Americans that joined with him quickly became officers, often being put in command of native troops. An 1856 letter from Callendar Fayssoux to Birkett D. Fry exhibited further strength for this belief. Fry had failed to graduate from West Point, but in Nicaragua he served as a Brigadier General in command of troops.¹²⁸

There is also evidence that Walker had support from varied levels of American culture, including Masonic groups and educational institutions. In his own defense of Nicaragua, Walker noted that he was handed a message that consisted of a “small piece of paper containing some cabalistic signs.”¹²⁹ Walker was unfamiliar with the symbology himself, but several of his officers were high ranking Masons and assisted him in the translation. In planning his return trips to Nicaragua, Walker was aided by a Mason named Hugh McLeod who consistently promoted Walker using his Masonic ties.¹³⁰ Masonic support for filibustering was perhaps unsurprising. An offshoot of the Masons was a group named The Knights of the Golden Circle. Their agenda

¹²⁷ May 1991, 882-883.

¹²⁸ Callender I Fayssoux to Brigadier General Birkett D. Fry, December 13, 1856, Callender I. Fayssoux Collection of William Walker Papers 1856-1860, Howard Milton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

¹²⁹ Walker 1985, 105.

¹³⁰ May 2005, 85.

strongly approved of filibustering as a means to establish a theoretical slave empire that included Mexico and Central America.¹³¹ Ties from earlier in Walker's life aided him, as his connection with John Berrien Lindsley allowed him to present his point of view in highly public forums. In this case, it was in a speech made in Nashville, TN, at the capitol building. Lindsley noted in his diary on July 8, 1857 that a large crowd was present and the speech was "well-received."¹³²

When preparing for what would be his final visit to Central America, Walker still expressed confidence in the success of his enterprises. In a message to Fayssoux on October 10, 1858, Walker advised that any individuals interested in emigrating to Nicaragua should be prepared to depart within the next month.¹³³ His continued efforts looked to recruit individuals well beyond the reprobate class normally associated with filibustering efforts. This was partially due to his firm belief that he was still President and Commander in Chief of Nicaragua, and thus still planned settlement of the country. He expressed this directly to Fayssoux in a later letter: "I have at last made arrangements for our return to Nicaragua. They are of such character that it will be difficult if not impossible for the U.S. authorities or anyone else to defeat them."¹³⁴ In this letter, Walker expressed his overwhelming optimism for his endeavors based upon popular support from the people he had been working with in his travels from New York to Washington to Mobile, AL.

¹³¹ May 2005, 263.

¹³² Diary of John Berrien Lindsley, 1856-1866, Lindsley Family Papers, TSLA, Nashville, TN.

¹³³ William Walker to Callendar I. Fayssoux, October 10th, 1858, Callender I. Fayssoux Collection of William Walker Papers 1856-1860, Howard Milton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

¹³⁴ William Walker to Callendar I. Fayssoux, July 13th, 1859, Callender I. Fayssoux Collection of William Walker Papers 1856-1860, Howard Milton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

Legal Status of Filibustering

Filibustering maintained popularity despite the fact that participants were breaking federal law in their efforts. Legal barriers proved to be less of an obstacle than would be expected. In a later speech to the United States Senate, the Honorable John Slidell of Louisiana noted that “the popular mind has almost unerring instincts in such questions. If he be right, he will be sustained and applauded. If not, he must bear the consequences.”¹³⁵ This seems to have been the overall status of prosecution in filibustering efforts. Prosecution of filibustering was rendered extremely difficult due to the need to prove intent. Intent often proved difficult and murky to prove and establish.¹³⁶ The prosecution of Walker’s filibustering efforts into Sonora exhibited the legal difficulties quite clearly.

The first ship Walker outfitted for transit to Sonora, the *Arrow*, was captured and impounded by General Hitchcock as it was suspected to be part of an illegal filibustering effort. His reward for these efforts in enforcement of the law was attacks on him from a wide variety of sources. The local newspapers unleashed a torrent of abuse on his actions, in support of Walker and his efforts. United States Senator John B. Wellin, from California, also directed criticism at General Hitchcock for his actions. Hitchcock was brought up on charges in court by a local judge for contempt, and Walker brought a trespass suit against him for \$30,000. The district attorney delayed processing the seizure of the ship long enough to allow Walker and his men to remove guns and ammunition from the *Arrow*. They transferred the incriminating items to the *Caroline*, the vessel they would then use to travel to Sonora. Hitchcock was left with a certainty that local

¹³⁵ 28 Congressional Globe 1858, 2.

¹³⁶ May 1991, 870.

officials were uninterested in prosecuting filibustering claims, and his efforts at interdicting such offenses were effectively stymied.¹³⁷

Efforts to enforce the laws opposing the filibustering efforts were equally difficult. Henry P. Watkins served as a procurer and recruiter for Walker's expedition, and as such remained in San Francisco while many of the rest of Walker's men were in Mexico. He was indicted on March 1, 1854, and brought to trial before Judge Hoffman. The arguments in court focused on potential unconstitutionality of the law as well as on the difficulty of proving intent. Somewhat disingenuously, it was claimed that the decision to invade Mexico with force of arms was taken only after they had already set sail for Sonora. Hoffman, concerned with the appearance of propriety in the case, noted to the jury that "from my heart I sympathize with the accused, but I am sworn to the execution of the law and must discharge my duty, whatever my sympathies may be."¹³⁸ This instruction to the jury led them to find Watkins guilty, leading to a fine of \$1,500. This punishment was even less severe than it would initially appear, as the fine was never collected and the sentence never enforced.¹³⁹

Walker himself was brought to trial later in the year. His arguments were similar to those made by Watkins, but the result was quite different. Michel Foucault would reference the global transitions that occurred in enforcement, which can be applied more specifically to the case involving William Walker. He adopted Jeremy Bentham's concept of the "Panopticon" to partially explain how society provided ceaseless inspection and judgment, enforcing the established norms. Allowing society the power to judge transitions, however, found its limits.¹⁴⁰ While given similar instructions to the jury in the Watkins case, the jury deliberated for eight

¹³⁷ May 1991, 873.

¹³⁸ Soulé et al. 1966, 525.

¹³⁹ Owsley and Smith 1997, 55-56.

¹⁴⁰ Foucault 1995.

minutes and returned a verdict of not guilty.¹⁴¹ This provided a window into the opinions of the public at the time. As has been previously noted, filibustering held a certain romantic appeal, and Walker was a figure of great notoriety. He had established himself as a heroic figure, even in abject defeat. His connections in the news media also aided in his efforts. Although news sources became less supportive of filibustering efforts following the failure of the Mexican expedition, they still reflected a strong admiration for Walker himself and his overall efforts. Though most would not claim he was right, the jury made the decision that his illegal actions did not deserve punishment. In modern parlance, their decision would be described as jury nullification. The public had spoken, continuing at least tacit support for filibusters.

The trials and experiences during the Sonora expedition made future efforts at filibustering simpler. The acquittal of Walker has made evident the fact that the public was willing to allow such actions to go unpunished. The United States government also gave minimal support to officials looking to enforce the Neutrality Act. Concerns over military enforcement of legal matters led the administration of Franklin Pierce to discourage the military from enforcing legal actions. When Walker planned his filibustering efforts in Nicaragua, he was informed that there would not be any roadblocks put in his way – in fact, the military wished him well in his efforts.¹⁴² Part of this was due to the carefully worded arrangement with the forces in Nicaragua, but it was also predicated on military knowledge that little effort would be spent in attempting to prosecute such crimes.

We can find additional support for Walker's actions by turning attention to the United States Congress. Although supportive of American laws, they also evinced a certain admiration

¹⁴¹ Owsley and Smith 1997, 65.

¹⁴² Carr 1963, 111.

for the work of filibusters such as William Walker. Representative Percy Walker of Alabama (no relation) referred to Walker when he spoke on December 17, 1856:

“A bold, adventurous, thoughtful man, imbued with the truest spirit of Americanism, the keenest instincts of his peculiar nationality, the brave, enduring pioneerism of the West and the South, prompt to the faintest voice of freedom, sallies forth to establish a nationality, to which he would impart, by his own energy, genius, and enthusiasm, the deep love of liberty, industry, morality, and it might be prosperity of his own happier land.”¹⁴³

It can hardly be surprising that the general population would be supportive of William Walker’s efforts when their legislative representatives were so fulsome in their praise of the individual. Once again, it is important to note that the praise is not directed towards filibustering conceptually but rather to Walker as an individual, focusing on his spirit of Americanism and his status as an emblem of pioneer spirit.

This support of Walker went even towards defying administration policy on Nicaragua. The Buchanan administration refused to acknowledge the Nicaraguan administration with Walker as President, fearing that would be going too far in their tacit approval of Walker’s efforts. Senator John B. Weller stated his opposition in May of 1856:

“I am in receipt of many letters from persons residing on the Pacific coast who are anxious to know whether I have been sustaining the Administration policy adopted in regard to the Nicaraguan government. I have no information on this subject other than that which is published in the newspapers of the day; and, upon the facts thus presented, I

¹⁴³ 26 Congressional Globe, 1856, 7.

have no hesitation in saying that I do not approve of the course which has been pursued.”¹⁴⁴

Weller based his support of Walker on information obtained from newspapers and pressure placed on him by his constituents. Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas spoke out in support of Walker and his government in Nicaragua, stating that “I hold that government is as legitimate as any which existed in Central America... I believe that justice is more impartially administered, that the rights of men and the rights of property are more carefully protected and guarded under the existing government than under any which has prevailed in Central America.”¹⁴⁵ Numerous politicians had little compunction about publicly supporting filibustering, directly fueling public support for William Walker.

Newspapers and William Walker

Following Walker’s efforts in Nicaragua, Horace Greeley stated in the *New York Weekly Tribune* of June 3, 1857 “In his whole career we look in vain for a single act of wisdom or foresight.”¹⁴⁶ This may well be a fitting epitaph to the career of Walker, as he often seemed to act without extensive forethought, simply presuming things would work out. This was not, however, a unified opinion of the news media concerning Walker. Newspapers had, by this point, become one of the strongest tools for shaping public opinion. They served as the primary mechanism to dispense information to the public, and electronic communication (via the telegraph) had allowed for the information presented in newspapers to have a truly national reach. Thus, the opinions

¹⁴⁴ 26 Congressional Globe 1856, 3.

¹⁴⁵ 26 Congressional Globe 1856, 1071-2.

¹⁴⁶ *New York Weekly Tribune*, June 3, 1857.

and coverage in the news media serve as invaluable sources to aid us in understanding the overall visage of public opinion on the efforts of Walker.

Walker had a significant understanding of newspapers and the effect they had on public opinion due to his service as an editor, owner, and reporter for newspapers in both New Orleans and San Francisco. It was during his time in San Francisco that he came into conflict with Judge Levi Parsons, of whom he wrote a highly critical article indicating that his efforts to oppose criminal activity had failed. Parsons faced an “indignation meeting” on March 9, 1851, where members of the public protested against him directly. In response, Parsons fined Walker \$500 and incarcerated him until the fine was paid. The news media, as might be expected under the circumstances, proved to be a powerful tool lobbying for Walker. Public support rallied, and the Superior Court of California soon reversed the Parsons decision.¹⁴⁷ The overall scandal affected Parsons far more dramatically than it did Walker, and led to an ultimately unsuccessful effort to impeach the judge.¹⁴⁸

Public support was also initially strongly in favor of Walker’s filibustering efforts in Mexico. The manipulation of the media by Walker and his associates helped create this impression. Knowing that their efforts were dependent on public support, information passed to his erstwhile associates in the media indicated that his efforts were wholly successful.¹⁴⁹ To an extent, the reports were true. Walker had indeed named himself president and had established governmental agencies. As historian Joseph Stout noted, “recruiting men for filibustering expeditions to Mexico, as always, proved easy,” specifically because of the positive coverage in the papers.¹⁵⁰ The spirit of Manifest Destiny was strong in California, and the success of the

¹⁴⁷ Soulé et al. 1966, 323.

¹⁴⁸ California and Supreme Court 1853.

¹⁴⁹ Soulé et al. 1966, 479.

¹⁵⁰ Stout 1972, 83.

enterprise was somewhat infectious. As was not unusual for the time, the coverage of the efforts in Mexico changed once the efforts were viewed as unsuccessful, with various supporters arrested as Walker's forces straggled from Mexico back to the United States.¹⁵¹ This established something of a pattern for analysis and support of Walker's efforts by the news media. Importantly, criticism of Walker was not directed toward his intent or his overall comportment but rather the unsuccessful nature of his expedition. Even when critical, the coverage served to be supportive of the courage and valiant efforts of the filibusters. This in turn continued to result in public support for their efforts, as evidenced in the previously discussed acquittal of Walker in his filibustering trial.

His filibustering efforts in Nicaragua served as the most successful effort in filibustering and received consequent support in the news. Far from seen as extralegal efforts that damaged United States diplomatic efforts, Walker's efforts were celebrated as superior policies. *The New York Times* of February 29, 1856, stated, "in formally claiming and annexing the Mosquito Coast Territory, the Administration, of which General Walker is the secret spring, has taken a bold but justifiable step. The act abolishes with one blow the British protectorate and its absurd assumptions, removes our most serious cause of quarrel with England, and annexes a tract of land to the State which it legitimately and naturally belongs."¹⁵² Through this article we can draw a great deal of information. The article not only acknowledged Walker's role as general but also directly credited him as a primary mover in the government of Nicaragua. The article also complimented Walker's efforts against the government of Britain. As far as public opinion was concerned, this certified his efforts and the efforts of filibusters as bulwarks against foreign

¹⁵¹ Soulé et al. 1966, 481.

¹⁵² *New York Times*, February 29, 1856.

intervention. Filibusters served as guardians of the Monroe Doctrine, and consequently as extensions of America's established foreign policy.

His efforts continued to find media support, even as military forces in the neighboring country of Costa Rica began to mass against him. The *New York Times* of April 22, 1856, continued to support Walker, noting that his "endeavors to preserve peaceful relations with the Central American States have doubtless been sincere."¹⁵³ The article proceeded to somewhat presciently place the blame for Walker's difficulties on tycoon Cornelius Vanderbilt, whose financial interests in Nicaragua had been abrogated by Walker's administration. Once again, Walker's efforts were evaluated as fair and just by the newspaper. The *Richmond Enquirer* of April 22, 1856, continued this support, acknowledging that Walker was "sowing a good seed for future harvests of civilization."¹⁵⁴ Walker had been lionized as a hero, defended as a protector of fundamental values of both the United States in general and civilization in specific. As in San Francisco, this impression of Walker was manufactured. One of the filibusters, Charles Callahan, wrote that he had arranged for information to be released that would "give you a good notice, as he wanted you to be placed properly before the public."¹⁵⁵ Critiques of Walker's efforts, on the other hand, focused on issues of less concern to the public. The *New York Tribune* blasted Walker's government as "nothing but a military despotism which sustains itself by forced contributions upon a population impoverished by his exaction."¹⁵⁶ While inarguably accurate, the American public was unlikely to be moved by the plight of the peoples of Nicaragua when Walker was heralded in other instances as an extension of American strength in the Western

¹⁵³ *New York Times*, April 2, 1856.

¹⁵⁴ *Richmond Enquirer*, April 22, 1856.

¹⁵⁵ Letter from Charles Callahan to Callendar Fayssoux August 25, 1856 Callender I. Fayssoux Collection of William Walker Papers 1856-1860, Howard Milton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

¹⁵⁶ *New York Tribune*, May 5, 1856.

Hemisphere. In the mind of the United States public, Walker and his cohorts were heroes.

Walker's hometown paper, the *Republican Banner* responded directly to the attacks on him:

“In view of the importance and responsibility of the position occupied by Gen. Walker, and of the unspeakably atrocious libels on his private character which have been recently published in the *New York Tribune*, *Louisville Courier* and other newspapers of extensive circulation, it was eminently fit that the people of this place, in the midst of whom he was born and reared, should meet together and bear their willing and emphatic testimony to the purity of his character and the undeviating rectitude of his conduct in all the relations of life, during the long period – from infancy to mature manhood – in which he dwelt among them.”¹⁵⁷

The article referenced a public meeting held in Nashville, evincing support for William Walker.

This article, like many in support of filibustering, walked a fine line. The newspaper established that it had little sympathy for filibustering in general, but that “as the whole world knows”

Walker was the legal leader of the nation and had done everything he could to establish friendly relations. In essence, filibustering, in general, was frowned upon, but the results of filibustering efforts were lauded.

Even after Walker's expulsion from Nicaragua, newspapers followed with great interest his continued efforts to return to the nation he claimed legal rights to. The *Louisville Daily Courier*, though generally opposed to Walker's efforts, noted that General Walker was one of the most talked about individuals of the day.¹⁵⁸ Once again Walker was accorded the title of General. Even as he continued his fruitless efforts, newspapers still seemed to provide him a

¹⁵⁷ *Republican Banner*, May 20, 1856.

¹⁵⁸ May 1991, 861.

great deal of support. The *New Orleans Crescent* of September 12, 1860, provides a direct example of this. “His persistency and gallantry in the matter, whether his cause be just or not, cannot but excite our admiration. Three failures seem not to have abated his zeal or destroyed his hopes.”¹⁵⁹ Once again, the newspapers expressed support for Walker in general. The distinction between the actor and his actions blurred, as they placed favorable judgment on him without a similar analysis of his actions.

Through Walker, it is possible to see how filibustering was viewed prior to the Civil War. The United States public certainly understood that it was illegal and rarely supported filibustering in theory. Conceptually, the public saw filibusters as little more than pirates and freebooters. In fairness, that is essentially what they were. Nonetheless, in specific instances the public evinced a willingness to see filibusters as heroes. Walker achieved the greatest fame by being able to provide a symbol of what Americans saw as good aspects of filibustering. Manifest Destiny demanded the export of American ideology, eventually to cover the entire hemisphere. In the 1840s, official governmental policy stopped looking for extensive territory additions. It only made sense that enterprising citizens would look to privatize the efforts.

Numerous filibusters made the journey south in order to acquire territory, although the specter of Walker loomed over them. This is at least partially explained by his obvious success, naming himself “president” twice, and holding the office for an extended period in Nicaragua. The cultural support granted to Walker cannot be underestimated, and needs acknowledgement. Although many Americans would likely prefer to forget the past, it is true that we once lionized a criminal in his efforts to establish a slave republic in Central America. Over his career, the public lauded Walker for his ability to command men and for his honor and valor. Individuals followed

¹⁵⁹ *New Orleans Crescent*, September 12, 1860.

him for a variety of reasons, but many saw it as an opportunity. Walker, and by extension filibustering, was an instrument of Manifest Destiny and American ideals that the popular consciousness embraced in the decades prior to the Civil War.

CHAPTER 4: LA GUERRA NACIONAL

Nineteenth-Century Neo-Conquistadors

In July 1854, the editors of *Boletín del Ejército Democrático de Nicaragua*, a Leónese publication, presented a poem entitled “To the Year 1854 on the Night of December 31, 1853,” which read:

And you, 1854, what can you tell us?
Is your news good or gloomy?
Will your days be sad and mournful
Or prosperous, happy, cheerful?
But, oh woe!, when a four appears in any decade
The trouble surely infiltrates that year,
As in 1814 when war erupted,
Events that repeated themselves in 1824.
Remember the turbulence of 1834,
Whose desolate memories still haunt us,
Just as does fateful 1844, with its fires,
Its assaults, its deaths, and its disasters.¹⁶⁰

By the time of the publication of this poem, of course, the editors were well aware of the events unfolding in 1854 in Nicaragua. In many ways, it fit well the fearful expectations present in the poem. The liberal leaders of Nicaragua had been exiled, and the Supreme Director Fruto Chamorro continued with his stated goal of creating a new constitution, calling together the Constituent Assembly on January 22. He spoke to the people when he said, “We urgently need

¹⁶⁰ *Boletín del Ejército Democrático de Nicaragua*, July 1, 1854.

to strengthen the principle of authority so weakened and neglected by us. This can be achieved by giving the executive greater power, authority, and consistency; and by surrounding the office with a certain pomp and majesty which will command the respect due the office.”¹⁶¹

These words presented cold comfort to the Liberals ensconced in León and most especially to those in exile for their opposition to the government. Vijil, a Liberal member of the clergy in Granada, was marginalized in the city that was his home due to his political ideology. The constitution put forth in April of 1854 was well suited to the Conservative ideology exhibited by Chamorro. True to his word, the constitution greatly enhanced the position of the executive in Nicaragua, now the president of the Republic of Nicaragua. The following month, a group of Liberals commanded by Máximo Jerez arrived in Nicaragua, landing at Realejo. In the past decades, such an action was relatively routine in the continued struggle between the rival city-states in Nicaragua. 1854 would prove different. As has already been noted, the promise of a Nicaraguan canal had fired foreign imaginations, and the small Central American nation had the attention and interest of both the United States and Great Britain. Jerez’ invasion would engender something new in Nicaragua and Central America as a whole. The conflict, referred to as La Guerra Nacional, would last until 1857 and in the end encompass all of the Central American nations. This war would be the bloodiest experienced by nineteenth-century Nicaragua, and perhaps the bloodiest in nineteenth-century Central America as a whole.¹⁶²

The prose and poetry of the time was in many ways emblematic of the political strife between the two cities. One morning in León many would find doors affixed with a poem entitled, “Arithmetic in Verse,” that gave a formula including 30 pounds of ignorance, 1000 pounds of petulance, and 100 yards of arrogance as some of the constituent elements of the

¹⁶¹ Burns 1991, 189.

¹⁶² Burns 1991, 190.

denizens of Granada.¹⁶³ The poets of Granada, not to be outdone, presented a lengthy parody of a Mass wherein the liberals of León were castigated roundly, “Hated Provisional Government, trinity and one, Castellón, Jerez, and Guerrero, Father, son, and cursed spirit of the revolution, in whom we do not believe, from whom we expect only evil, and whom we hate with all our body.”¹⁶⁴ The years of internecine warfare had served to intensify the rhetoric of conflict between the cities of León and Granada. Padre Vijil was not one of the individuals advocating for greater bloodshed and violence, however. His focus, as might be expected, was on his duties as a priest in Granada. His previous political efforts presented him with a strong belief that the violence needed to end. During his time in Granada, Padre Vijil had consistently preached for peace and an end to the violence that tore across his nation.¹⁶⁵ His efforts toward this end fell on deaf ears to those in power, but the people of Granada loved and respected him for his eloquence.¹⁶⁶ It may be suspected that the political leanings of the elites and their struggles meant little for those that were outside of such hallowed political circles, forced to watch as military forces consistently ripped apart Nicaragua seeking ideological and geographical dominance.

The civil war itself began exceptionally well for the Liberals, as they scored numerous victories in the first months and by the end of May were besieging the Conservative stronghold of Granada.¹⁶⁷ Brutality followed on both sides in similar measure. Liberals took their motto of “Liberty or Death” seriously, including the execution of surrendering prisoners. The Conservative motto of “Legitimacy or Death” served them in a similar manner. The Liberal army

¹⁶³ *Aritmètica en verso ...* 1851.

¹⁶⁴ *Cancion patriotica* 1854.

¹⁶⁵ Vijil 1930, 137.

¹⁶⁶ Vijil, 1930, 143.

¹⁶⁷ Gámez 1975, 588.

arrived at the gates of Granada, and laid siege to the Conservative stronghold. Granada held, and the siege ended in February of 1855. The changing situation allowed Conservative forces to retake the majority of Nicaragua, save for León itself. Conservative president Fruto Chamorro died in March of that same year, with José Maria Estrada taking his place. General Ponciano Corral, second in command of the Conservative army, took Chamorro's place as commanding general.¹⁶⁸ As might be expected given the vitriolic rhetoric, the transition of power did nothing to lessen the hostilities. The Liberals in León established their own provisional government, and elected Francisco Castellón as their supreme director (as the Constitution of 1838 referred to the chief executive). Castellón summoned General José Trinidad Muñoz to assume command of the military forces. Attempts by Castellón to negotiate an end to the civil war in June of 1855 proved fruitless, as the Conservatives were confident of their inevitable victory. Padre Manuel Alcaine attempted to lead reconciliation efforts but such work, sadly, was doomed to failure as the Conservatives were unwilling to come to terms that involved compromise.¹⁶⁹ This failure to resolve issues internally would attract the attention of multiple outside nations, drawing them into the Nicaraguan conflict.

In 1854, Castellón had begun efforts to seek aid for the Liberal forces in Nicaragua. One of these entreaties had been to recruit mercenaries from the United States via an individual named Byron Cole, a newspaper associate of Walker.¹⁷⁰ In the end, he agreed to recruit 300 mercenaries from the United States under the command of William Walker, fresh from his acquittal for crimes stemming from his failed invasion of Sonora, Mexico. Walker and his fellow soldiers were to be granted Nicaraguan citizenship as well as 52,000 acres of land for their

¹⁶⁸ Gámez 1975 598-599.

¹⁶⁹ Gámez 1975 601.

¹⁷⁰ Gámez 1975 600.

service. Historian Robert May noted that without the civil strife and invitation it was extremely unlikely that Walker would have ever considered filibustering in Nicaragua.¹⁷¹ Castellón was to be somewhat disappointed by the mercenary force he acquired, as Walker set forth from San Francisco with only 57 fellow filibusters towards Nicaragua.¹⁷² Six weeks later, he and his men arrived in Realejo. According to both himself and his biographer, Walker was met by cheering and smiling crowds excited for the newcomers that were to be of aid in the battles against the Conservative forces of Granada. Walker and his forces proceeded towards their destination in León, where they encountered the first evidences of ecclesiastical support from an unnamed priest in the Liberal held city who remarked that “Nicaragua needs only the aid of the United States to become an Eden of beauty and the garden of the world.”¹⁷³ Such words certainly reflected the role Walker saw for himself in coming to the beleaguered nation of Nicaragua.

In June of 1855, the Conservative government of Granada reacted to the threat of the foreigners by attempting to appeal to the patriotism of Nicaraguans. The government announced to the citizenry, “Let the civil war, then, which now rends us asunder in so lamentable a manner, be brought to a close; and let all citizens of Nicaragua fix their eyes upon the integrity of the national territory and resolve to preserve it at all hazards.”¹⁷⁴ President Estrada put forth a decree to this effect as well, ordering that “All able bodied citizens of Nicaragua are called to arms to defend the independence of the country against foreign piratical invasion which threatens us.”¹⁷⁵ Even Padre Vijil, on the outside of the Nicaraguan government, was contacted concerning threats to Nicaragua. The threats indicated were not only to the independence of Nicaragua, but threats

¹⁷¹ May 2002, 89.

¹⁷² Gobat 2013, 1358.

¹⁷³ Carr 1963, 120-121.

¹⁷⁴ *Boletín Oficial*, Granada, June 2, 1855.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

that the foreign invaders would destroy the Catholic religion in Nicaragua as well. Vijil responded diffidently, reaffirming his trust in God and promising to continue his service as cura (priest) for Granada.¹⁷⁶

Castellón had sent a British soldier, Charles Doubleday, along with Colonel Ramírez of the army to greet the arrival from the United States. Doubleday's assistance would prove to be important, as Walker arrived in Nicaragua unable to speak any Spanish at all. Doubleday served as translator between Walker and Castellón.¹⁷⁷ Castellón greeted the arrival of Walker with some degree of relief. Up to that point, the war had been proceeding poorly for the Liberal contingent. They had been pushed back to León and the rumors indicated that Granada was being reinforced by troops from Guatemala and Honduras. It was Castellón who determined to name Walker and his men the "American Phalanx." These mercenaries were referred to as "colonists" to avoid potential issues with United States authorities. Granadan protests of these actions were ignored at the time, but with the benefit of hindsight seem terribly prescient:

Those Nicaraguans themselves invite in their own executioner, who will enchain them before marching them off to their deaths. It is unacceptable to see that, when the nation faces an eminent danger, they do not put aside personal ambitions to join in a common fight against the outside enemy. They, too, face a great danger; they, too, will be adversely affected by the outsiders. Yet they persist in their crime of keeping the nation divided by weakening the Republic through the continuation of this unjust and barbaric war.

¹⁷⁶ Vijil 1930, 138.

¹⁷⁷ Doubleday 1886, 108.

Who would have ever believed it? The party that calls itself Democratic, composed of Nicaraguans themselves, has signed a contract with foreigners to deliver our country to them. Those monsters have not hesitated to sell our holy Fatherland... Those miserable creatures hold ambition more dearly than ties of blood, than the life of their nation Nicaragua.¹⁷⁸

These concerns would perhaps have seemed more sincere were they not simply the inverse, the Conservatives blaming the Liberals for a war that both were involved in. The blame for the invitation of foreigners to the war also rings hollow, as Guatemalan forces were at the time providing aid and financing to the Conservative government of Granada. Nonetheless, the arrival of Walker would dramatically change the course of the war and culminated in great change for the entirety of Central America.

Castellón's pleasure at the arrival of the mercenaries from San Francisco was not shared by his commanding general. Castellón, without consulting General Muñoz, had granted Walker command of his own force and provided him with an additional two hundred Nicaraguan soldiers to support his efforts. As in the past, a visiting conquistador would be provided with native support in his efforts. Walker presented his plan to move towards the Nicaraguan transit routes and take the fight to the Granadan forces. Muñoz adamantly opposed Walker's aims and appeared on the whole unimpressed and suspicious of Walker and his aims. Muñoz insisted that Walker remain in León to provide support in case of a Conservative attack. His reasoning was not unsound, as the war of a decade earlier had led to the burning of León. Walker was diametrically opposed to Muñoz' plans, arguing that it was his duty to win the war. An argument can be made, of course, for concern from Walker about opposition to his goals in Nicaragua.

¹⁷⁸ Burns 1991, 195.

Although he likely did not have specific plans for the Central American nation, it is unlikely that he would be satisfied with the route of Cincinnatus, retiring to a farm once his military victories were completed. Muñoz presented a challenge to his eventually assuming political authority. Walker convinced Castellón that the best plan was to break the stalemate, and the chief executive overruled his commanding general in the matter. Chronicler James Jeffrey Roche noted that, “Walker had seen enough of his new friends to convince himself that his ambition had nothing to fear from such men. Castellón was an amiable and irresolute gentleman; Muñoz was ambitious and vain, but incapable. The native soldiery were ill-trained and feeble-minded. Faction had stifled any faint sparks of patriotism in their breasts.”¹⁷⁹ His respect for the people he was coming to aid was never great, but Walker was skilled at masking this disrespect when politically necessary. Nonetheless, he saw himself as a savior for the people of Nicaragua. Tired and exhausted from decades of near constant warfare, the people of Nicaragua were indeed looking for a dramatic change in their overall fortunes.

Walker understood that his path to power in Nicaragua was dependent on control of the transit route. The transit route would allow him to recruit to his cause, as well as provide access to money and supplies from the United States. His forces travelled down to the Nicaraguan city of Rivas where Walker, in what would become his favored tactic, ordered a frontal assault. The first battle of Rivas occurred on June 29, 1855, with Walker’s forces facing a near total defeat. It appeared to Walker that someone in León had leaked his plans. Unsurprisingly, Walker believed that Muñoz was at fault. Walker was forced to return to León to resupply and to provide additional protection to the city, as Muñoz had originally ordered. The unexpected death of Muñoz on August 18, amid rumors of assassination, rid Walker of his primary rival in León and

¹⁷⁹ Roche 1901, 97.

made the Liberal forces even more dependent on him and his forces. Many of the Nicaraguans had come to believe that Walker supported their cause, and support for him grew following the loss of the old Nicaraguan military hero.¹⁸⁰ Walker was once again able to proceed with his own plan of attack in la guerra nacional.

In late August, Walker led his phalanx toward San Juan del Sur and captured Virgin bay, a vital portion of the western section of the transit line. This was to be Walker's first taste of victory in Nicaragua. Control of the western end of the transit line gave Walker access, as expected, to reinforcements from the United States. From September 13 until October 3 Walker remained in San Juan del Sur collecting recruits from San Francisco. In addition to recruiting additional troops, Walker assessed financial "contributions" on foreign nationals in San Juan del Sur, including United States Consul John Priest, in order to support his militarization efforts.¹⁸¹ He had also garnered additional support from León in his efforts, which led him to consider an audacious plan. Walker had received intelligence indicating that the Conservative forces in Granada had weakened, and determined that an assault on Granada was in order. On October 11, he seized control of the Accessory Transit Company steamer Virgin. On October 12, Walker and his men boarded the "captured" steamer and made their way to Granada. At midnight, 200 United States troops and 300 Nicaraguans disembarked two miles to the northeast of Granada. On October 13, 1855, Walker assumed control of Granada on behalf of the Liberal forces of León. The battle itself took as little as fifteen minutes, and President Estrada fled the city.¹⁸² According to the first edition of Walker's own newspaper, the citizenry was calmed when Walker enforced strict discipline on his troops. The next day, October 14, was a Sunday. It

¹⁸⁰ Burns 1991, 198.

¹⁸¹ Priest to Marcy, September 11, 1855, M219 National Archives.

¹⁸² Wheeler to Marcy, October 14, 1855, M219, National Archive.

would open with a sermon in the main cathedral given by Padre Vijil as he returned to political life in Granada.

The North Star

The sermon given by Padre Vijil opened with a passage from the book of Luke, verse 52: “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.” In many ways, it was entirely appropriate to his perception of events in Nicaragua. Vijil was, as has been noted, often torn between the various views vying for the future of Nicaragua. By birth and inheritance, he was of Granada. By education and viewpoint, he was of León. He served in an early Liberal government, but found politics not to his liking. He was persecuted by Conservatives upon his return to Granada, making his life difficult there and eventually directing him to the priesthood. His time in service to the Church had further expanded his view, as he interacted with those that were outside of the realms of the elites that were constantly warring for political supremacy in his home country. Both sides had shown an unwillingness to compromise or work with one another, with years of peace simply an interlude before a continuation of war. In a letter written in 1855, Vijil indicated that he was trusting in God to solve the problems of Nicaragua. He pointedly likened their situation with the struggle between David and the Philistine Goliath, taking comfort in God’s protection of the just.¹⁸³

The opening verse, like the rest of his sermon, serves as an important aid in understanding the mindset of Padre Vijil and, through that, the mindset of Nicaragua in October of 1855. The verse highlights two motifs presented by Luke. The first of these is God as a warrior, engaging in battle on behalf of his beleaguered people. His will fights through them, and

¹⁸³ Vijil 1930, 137-138.

eventually brings his people to deliverance. He also calls forth the idea of God as merciful being, who remembers the less fortunate and the needy. The overthrow of temporal rulers serves not as a punitive act of vengeance but rather as an additional mercy. The burdens of rule are harsh, and often corrupting. The removal from power allows for those that have been brought low also to experience salvation.¹⁸⁴ Importantly, Vijil draws upon imagery that traditionally presupposes the coming of salvation. The intent of this verse would thus seem to be to bring to light one of Vijil's most devoutly sought goals – peace and prosperity for all of Nicaragua. The idea of Nicaragua as a potential Eden had long been a dream of both himself and other observers of the Nicaraguan nation.

The sermon was given on October 14. On October 13, Padre Vijil had retired to his small *finca* outside of Granada. On that morning, he was surprised by numerous individuals coming to his home requesting his assistance in dealing with the invaders that had entered Granada in the dark of the night.¹⁸⁵ The Conservative (Legitimist) forces in Granada had been insignificant, and had presented little resistance to Walker's forces. Within a period of hours, rule of the city had changed. Dionisio Chamorro, brother of the late president of Nicaragua, and Mateo Mayorga, the Nicaraguan Secretary of State under President Estrada, were both taken into custody. As Walker put it, they were under the "protection of American rifles."¹⁸⁶ Previous conquests of cities had led to fire and destruction. Walker's taking of prisoners and entering the city with an army fanned the flames of these fears, although actual flames were still many months away for Granada. The citizens of the city primarily hoped that the sudden violence was over. Walker freed approximately one hundred political prisoners, including Patricio Rivas (who would

¹⁸⁴ Harrelson, 2003.

¹⁸⁵ Vijil1930, 140.

¹⁸⁶ Walker 1985 109-110.

become the Nicaraguan president), and made a point of instructing his followers to “do no violence to the city or the people therein.”¹⁸⁷ A direct appeal by Padre Vijil on October 13 led to at least the semblance of freedom for those Conservative figures that had been taken captive following the fighting. Vijil was noted to have been “above all selfishness and calculation” in assisting those that had in the previous years made life difficult for him and his associates.¹⁸⁸

Perhaps surprisingly, Walker acceded to the Padre’s requests for clemency towards his Conservative captives. It may be assumed that his credentials as a supporter of the Liberals made his word more valued in the immediate situation, and his eloquence would certainly serve to aid in calming Granada. The Conservative government traditionally had the support of the Church in Nicaragua and pointedly reminded the clergy that the Yankee invaders entering their country were not adherents of Roman Catholicism and would not be respectful of the beliefs held dear by those in Nicaragua.¹⁸⁹ Walker defied these expectations of him, choosing instead to respect the Church and the clergy. Thus, the clergy that should by all rights have been alarmed by the presence of a protestant conqueror in their midst were congratulatory to him and his goals of peace in Nicaragua. Over the course of his short time in Nicaragua, the Church would go so far as to loan money to the Walker government.¹⁹⁰ Specifically, Padre Vijil donated the parish funds along with 963 ounces of silver taken from the Altar of the Merced Church and the statue of the Virgin of Mercedes, in order to aid Walker in acquiring war materials.¹⁹¹ It is likely that a part of the Church hierarchy acknowledged the political reality that was soon to be evident – that Walker and his forces had succeeded in conquering Nicaragua. Moreover, they likely considered

¹⁸⁷ Scroggs 1916, 117.

¹⁸⁸ Vijil 1930, 144.

¹⁸⁹ *Boletín Oficial* Granada., July 14, 1855.

¹⁹⁰ Gámez 1975, 620-621.

¹⁹¹ Foroohar 1989, 8.

events in a similar manner as Padre Vijil. The hope among many was that Walker's arrival would impose peace on the troubled nation, no matter how restrictive or controlling such a peace would be. His conciliatory relationship with ecclesiastical figures surely supported their conclusions in the short term.¹⁹²

Walker almost immediately worked to solidify his connections to Nicaragua in general, and to the Church in specific, when he and a number of his officers attended mass the next morning. As noted, Padre Vijil began with the biblical verse discussed previously. He went on to summarize the situation of the day for both the modern-day conquistadors and the citizenry of Nicaragua, still undoubtedly concerned with the events of the previous day:

The clash of arms caused by this phalanx of Americans awoke the inhabitants from a restful sleep, because of both the dangers of the events themselves and the general concern for the changing fate of the Government and the city. Powerful men yesterday, today fugitives; the oppressed a few days prior were facing penalties are now armed and threatening revenge... fueling thoughts of revenge...

How long have our dreams called to us for this sudden change?

When the initial abuses ensued there was a fear of greater abuse, and some city residents came to demand my presence in this extraordinarily difficult situation. In observance of my priestly duties and the voluntary inclinations of my feelings toward those that suffer persecution, I promptly agreed. The greatest dangers ran between the vanquished and the victorious, and I went to the victorious military commander to demand clemency.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Burns 1991, 200.

¹⁹³ Vijil 1930, 151-155.

Here, Vijil lays out the events and his role within them. As a priest, he obviously presents himself as a protector of the oppressed and is willing to intercede on their behalf despite potential dangers to him. Interestingly, he also calls forth very quickly the exhortation to consider how long the people of Nicaragua have been dreaming and meditating on the potential for sudden and dramatic change, a move away from the most recent civil war and the sequence of past civil wars that had caused such difficulty for the nation in decades past. The role he has chosen for himself, of peacemaker, is also made clear by his word choice. It is also telling that the victorious military commander he stood against now attends mass with the rest of the citizens of Nicaragua.

The next section of his sermon focused on examining the recent history of Nicaragua, and the events that had preceded the extraordinarily recent events of the previous morning:

Since our independence, we have lived in perpetual division and almost constant armed struggle, interrupted by short truces and weak peace efforts, without looking at the horrific damage done to the foundation of our national institutions. Within such divisions and blood strife lies hatred, the rodent cancer of the community that has made roots in a Nicaraguan society that has fought herself. Jesus Christ, our Lord, said: Love your enemies. But we have lived apart from God and we have underestimated the wise teachings from above

All too violent acts committed in our public threaten the existence of this unfortunate novice Republic, interrupting its development and what is more concerning, putting in danger of losing our sacred religion, and the heritage of our forefathers. We give accommodation to unhealthy feelings towards the unjust laws that have afflicted the Republic with fines, forced labor and prison, eager to run rampant to ruin. And the many disasters, tears, and blood spilled in vain, did not move or encourage change? Will we

acquiesce relapse to complete disaster? We manifest at least a truce, and then take with new resolution our duties to the homeland, in order to garner for our country the respect and admiration of other peoples.¹⁹⁴

In his examination of the decades since independence, Vijil obviously acknowledges the bloodshed and armed struggle. It is unclear to whom he refers to as the forefathers of the Nicaraguan nation, but it is clear that he believes that the current government and the political will has failed the promise of the nation. It is here where we can gain greater understanding of why a Nicaraguan partisan such as Vijil would be willing to countenance a drastic change in the form of government in Nicaragua. Vijil does not ignore efforts that have been made by Nicaraguans themselves:

During the last years, Nicaragua has been increasingly bleeding to death without getting honorable results. Thousands of victims have been sacrificed for the sake of a cruel struggle, claiming abandoned crop fields, destroying livelihoods, without respect and honor for life, the gift that comes from Providence, worthless because hate of our neighbor has eliminated piety in the hearts of men, as if the excitations of War made us forget the eternal truths of justice and mercy, being as a result of the setbacks and hollow victories, a struggle between siblings, a wide trail of blood and prosecution, families in discord and separated from the love of close friends, and the cities and towns torn by fierce hatred with most unfortunate consequences. I have always preached peace, harmony and progress through labor and fought against calling for more blood. This is the picture of our beloved Nicaragua in their present and past. Therefore I exhort moderation, put aside party passions have caused many evils and stolen the path of peace.

¹⁹⁴ Vijil 1930, 151-155.

Peace is the most valuable benefit of a people, as it comes from God and is the reward for our good deeds, all under His wings thrive because it is inexhaustible source of happiness: the sciences and the arts, agriculture, industry, trade as it receives the impulse that develops that is life: Peace, sovereign, conquering the whole of civilized cultured society should be our aspiration.¹⁹⁵

Walker later acknowledged the power of this sermon in highlighting the difficulties facing Nicaragua, focusing on how the hatred and war had been more important to many than the building of a strong nation.¹⁹⁶ This was a lesson that Vijil had been preaching for decades, and had hoped for as far back as his first government positions and his hopes for the coming of Herrera. Even at a young age, he had come to the conclusion that the strife in his nation was best addressed by those outside of Nicaragua. His experience with his family and education certainly supported this viewpoint, and the decades had done nothing to end the apparent intransigence of his home.

As with many Liberals in Latin America, Vijil was particularly appreciative of the United States as a model of progress. The Conservatives maintained a closer relation with Great Britain, but those interested in progress saw much to admire in the United States. Argentinian writer Domingo Faustio Sarmiento noted that, “when a nation engages in a revolution, it is begun by the conflict between two opposing interests, the revolutionary and the conservative.”¹⁹⁷ This belief characterized Vijil’s earliest views, but as time passed his views changed to believe an outside influence would be more salubrious than merely a revolutionary spirit. His sermon then turned toward discussion of the mass’s guest of honor:

¹⁹⁵ Vijil 1930, 151-155.

¹⁹⁶ Walker 1985, 110.

¹⁹⁷ Sarmiento 1998, 58.

I hope the current situation change to one of harmony amongst Nicaraguans. You know that by the provisions issued by the General Walker, this illustrious and talented man, you are guaranteed promises for the people, for the home, and for our work, trying to reach a satisfactory and intelligent understanding between the parties involved.

If General Walker is encouraged in such laudable purposes, holding his standard among the men he commands, making it acceptable to our loyalist brothers and our Leon brothers, as a necessity of the times, it will have achieved the real victory. A victory not of surprise and the capture of a place, but a superior victory, exceeding our best hopes, and will win our appreciation. It will be sent to Providence to heal wounds and reconcile the divided Nicaraguan family, because being the instrument of peace and ending cruel hostilities, deserves the esteem of this afflicted land for that worst of misfortunes: the civil war. And then, when a new sun shines, not on death camps but on cultivated land; not on contested cities but in the cities in the best agreement, holding beneficial relationships, extended trade in the Republic, with unfettered free movement then we can say to General Walker that our present war is the beach, but that with him our better impulses shall move us forward, feeling the need to comply with noble aspirations that are elements of civilization before the chaos of war, to change in a providential way, mediator in the dispute of these parties, respecting the lives, property, religion, and family of the vanquished, and iris of Concordia, Guardian Angel of Peace, North Star to the aspirations of a beleaguered people.

General Walker has come from that great Republic blessed of God, where the current practices of life include respect for the weak and peace among men, ideas that, as civilized societies this country saw fit to organize their citizenry with this spirit, and

patriotic and unassuming men like Washington and Franklin, in particular the former, glittering atop of the American nation as its protector.¹⁹⁸

Vijil provided fulsome praise indeed for a man he had met only the day before. There is no record of what conversations occurred between Walker and Vijil, but evidently they were sufficient to convince the priest of Walker's sincerity and make him inclined to give credit to the promises made by the Tennessean filibuster.¹⁹⁹ Historians have paid particular attention to his words of adulation, such as "Guardian Angel" and "North Star," focusing on how the orator established Walker as a great man on par with the "founding fathers" of the United States, George Washington and Benjamin Franklin.²⁰⁰ The links in the paragraph after his fulsome praise of Walker bear out more of what Vijil was hoping, given his admiration of the United States. United States Minister John H. Wheeler mentioned this bias on the part of Vijil, noting that he "expressed much desire that the United States should own Nicaragua and prevent their sanguinary revolutions. I replied that under the Treaty with England the United States could not protect or own Nicaragua. He then hoped that North Americans would come and settle and finally possess the country."²⁰¹ Vijil's obvious imagination for the United States was evident, and the supposed plan was for Walker and his forces to become citizens of Nicaragua, settling in the acreage offered to them for their assistance in the Liberal cause in Nicaragua. In many ways, Vijil was seeing what he wanted to see. The forces of progress had arrived to become part of the progress of Nicaragua.

¹⁹⁸ Vijil 1930, 151-155.

¹⁹⁹ Vijil 1930, 144.

²⁰⁰ Gámez 1975, 621.

²⁰¹ Diary of John Hill Wheeler, May 6, 1855, The Papers of John Hill Wheeler. MS 16, 736.1, Library of Congress.

Vijil completed his sermon by reminding the people of the advantages presented by a closer connection to the United States. He was likely not aware that the government had seen little profit from the works of the Accessory Transit Corporation, but he was more obviously aware of the plans presented to make Nicaragua the center of the Western hemisphere, and bringing to reality the dreams of those that saw such incredible untapped potential in Nicaragua. The nation had seen many citizens of the United States travel across the nation on their way to the promise of gold in California. These individuals carried with them dreams of prosperity, combined with the potential for a canal to connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans through Nicaragua. The final paragraph of his sermon called forth these ideas of progress directly:

Perhaps, God grant it, the changed situation of yesterday is to the mutual benefit, that men called to revolution aspire to the higher purpose that is the gift of Providence, that these men put into practice the pulse of progress that has been formed, because our interest is to be in obtaining peace, output of industry, the work of our children, and a world we can only imagine. These same Americans, as with others who have come to our lands from the United States, will be constructors of communication between two oceans, carrying Nicaragua, hand in hand, to the grandeur intended by its position on the continent and natural blessings, bring to us the valued advantages of civilized relations with the rest of the world, and the sight of their ships and flags in the heart of our territory.²⁰²

The sermon was calculated to provide support for Walker, and to provide a balm to the fears of the beleaguered city. Vijil sustained his reputation as the foremost Nicaraguan orator of his time as he established the inherent problems faced by Nicaraguans, looking toward the North as a

²⁰² Vijil 1930, 151-155.

panacea that would be able to heal all the problems in Nicaragua. His sermon, as appropriate, ended with a benediction:

May our Lady Mother, kind intercessor between man and God, grant us His beneficent protection.

Amen²⁰³

Unfortunately, this intercession between man and God would not bring the beneficent protection prayed for. The goals of Walker were not in accord with the greater glory of Nicaragua and were directed more towards his own aggrandizement.

Aquí Fue Granada

In 1855, Walker was able to garner a significant amount of support from a wide cross-section of Nicaraguans, not all of which were affiliated with the Liberals in their efforts to “save” Nicaragua. Despite his promises, he reminded the remaining Conservative forces in Rivas that he held their families and political associates in Granada hostage. A treaty was quickly put together for the various parties to sign. True to his history as a journalist, Walker looked to solidify his rule by creating a way to communicate with the people of Nicaragua – his newspaper, *El Nicaraguense*. On October 23, a mere ten days after his victory in Granada, his newspaper announced that “A peace is about to be framed between the so-called Legitimate and Democratic Parties of Nicaragua.”²⁰⁴ The treaty effectively brought an end to the Nicaraguan civil war. One of the Liberal Democrats freed by Walker’s forces in Granada, Patricio Rivas, was chosen as the chief executive in a provisional non-partisan government, despite being something of a political

²⁰³ Vijil 1930, 151-155.

²⁰⁴ *El Nicaraguense*, October 23, 1855.

non-entity. On October 30, 1855, Wheeler contacted Secretary of State William L. Marcy with a note that the peace treaty had been signed between General Walker and General Corral. Rivas, despite his lack of political activity, was noted by Wheeler as being “esteemed as one of the best men of the Republic.”²⁰⁵ He further optimistically stated that “It is confidently believed that the present condition of things will be permanent and that substantial peace, for the first time in 30 years, reigns in Nicaragua.”²⁰⁶ Walker’s goal was the unity of Conservative and Liberal factions of Nicaragua. Eventually he would succeed in this goal, though certainly not in the way he had intended to accomplish it.

The literature of Nicaragua focused attention on Walker as salvation for Nicaragua, indicating that it was not just Padre Vijil and his associates that were enthusiastic for Walker’s new direction. The introduction of a non-partisan government that combined both Liberals and Conservatives, with Walker as commander-in-chief of the Nicaraguan military, led many to think that the days of tyrannical rule were ended. As is usual in Nicaraguan politics, a poem was circulated celebrating the coming of a new era:

Long live the illustrious Walker,
Long live the united Fatherland,
Death to the Aristocracy!
Join the ranks of
William the wise,
Who leads us to victory
Over the Conservatives
Who inhabit America.

²⁰⁵ Wheeler to Marcy, October 30, 1855, M219, National Archive.

²⁰⁶ Wheeler to Marcy, October 30, 1855, M219, National Archive.

Long live Liberty!

Death to Conservatism!²⁰⁷

One of Walker's first duties would be the establishment of a government. Ponciano Corral became Minister of War in the new government. Parker French, an associate of Walker's from the United States became Minister of the Treasury. The rest of the cabinet, to Corral's dismay, was made up of Liberal Democrats. Corral quickly looked to obviate Walker's power in Nicaragua by sending letters to Conservative leaders in Honduras, requesting their support in removing Walker before his control was solidified. Walker had taken the precaution of making sure that each of the various cabinet officials had military bodyguards loyal directly to him. These letters from Corral were intercepted by these individuals, and delivered to Walker himself. Walker immediately took Corral into custody and had him court martialed. Since Corral admitted writing the letters, he was found guilty and sentenced to execution – with a recommendation that the commander-in-chief grant clemency (strangely, the new president was not directly a part of the process).²⁰⁸ Many encouraged him to grant mercy to Corral, but according to the *San Francisco Herald* such please were ignored: “on the countenance of Walker there was not a visible particle of emotion. His features were calm and placid, and his cold passionless gray eyes relaxed nothing of its ordinary frigidity.”²⁰⁹ The execution took place on November 8, 1855, shocking the Granadan elites and creating an undercurrent of opposition to Walker.²¹⁰ This opposition was not forthright, but rather a removal of Nicaraguan elites to their estates. It was also somewhat prescient, as Walker would begin direct action against the elites of Nicaragua in

²⁰⁷ Burns 1991, 199.

²⁰⁸ Letter to Secretary of State Marcy November 8, 1855, M219, National Archive.

²⁰⁹ *San Francisco Herald*, December 14, 1855.

²¹⁰ Quoted in Burns 1991, 200.

July of 1856.²¹¹ The land that was promised to citizens from the United States was acquired by Walker from the defeated elites.

John Wheeler immediately sought to establish his position as United States minister by calling upon Rivas during the negotiations, providing United States recognition to the newly formed government. In 1856, Padre Agustín Vijil was made ambassador to the United States from Nicaragua. He arrived in Washington, DC in May of 1856 and was presented to Secretary of State William L. Marcy, providing further support to the Nicaraguan government of Rivas and Walker.²¹² In supporting that decision, President Franklin Pierce stated, “It is the established policy of the United States to recognize all governments without question of their source, or organization, or of the means by which the governing persons attain their power.”²¹³ This recognition did not extend to the government formed by Walker himself when he was elected president in July of 1856. By that time one of Walker’s other cardinal mistakes had finally caught up to him. In February of 1856, Walker revoked the charter of the Accessory Transit Corporation and transferred all the concessions gained by Cornelius Vanderbilt to his rivals, Charles Morgan and C.K. Garrison. This gained Walker the enmity of Vanderbilt, and made the United States tycoon a formidable ally to the forces arrayed against Walker’s government. At the beginning of March, President Juan Rafael Mora of Costa Rica would declare war on the Walker government in Nicaragua. The rest of the Central American nations were not pleased by the Anglo presence dominating Nicaragua, and feared that he had plans to expand his empire beyond the singular nation.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Gobat 2005, 34.

²¹² Marcy to Wheeler, June 3, 1856, M219, National Archive.

²¹³ Message of the President of the United States, May 15, 1856. 34th Congress doc. 68, 5.

²¹⁴ Woodward 1985, 141.

Vijil's time as minister in the United States was not as he had hoped. He was, indeed, recognized as the official representative of Nicaragua. Walker had attempted to use Parker French as his representative, but this had been poorly received. The appointment of Vijil led to greater willingness by the United States government to officially recognize Nicaragua. In April of 1856, Wheeler communicated to Marcy that Padre Vijil had been named Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary from Nicaragua.²¹⁵ His time in the United States would be extremely limited. Vijil did not speak much English, and he was met with ridicule and scorn from the other Latin American diplomats. Rather than seeing him as doing what was best for his country, he was seen as a collaborator and a traitor to his people. This was especially true for the Central American governments, as many of them were at war with Walker's Nicaragua. Vijil was presented with another opportunity to present his point of view in July, during a rally in New York to support Walker. He was asked to speak, and his words were translated by a Mr. Appleton Oaksmith and published in *El Nicaraguense*:

That he himself was engaged in sacred callings – one which leads mankind to a better and kinder appreciation of humanity and brings him nearer to his God – his life was passed within the quiet precinct of a church and many might think it ill became him to engage in a matter disconnected with his profession in the political affairs of his country. But to such he would say that he came there on no common mission. There are duties which impel a man beyond the ordinary interests of church and State, and such are now impelling him in the grand errand which he has come here to perform. He had heard for thirty years the cannon of discordant factions booming through a land that God had intended for a paradise – he had seen the walls of His sacred edifice crumble beneath the

²¹⁵ Wheeler to Marcy, April 17, 1856, M219, National Archives.

burning shot, and its most holy defiled to sanguinary purposes – he had seen families divided against each other and homesteads laid waste; and now, when by the infusion of new elements, there was a chance for all these things to end; when his people had adopted a government which would ensure internal tranquility; when brother was reconciled by brother, and father with son, the hand of aggression is raised against them by a neighboring State, who with Serviles in their ranks, and aided by one of the mightiest powers in Christendom, is marching to invade the territory and make it once more the theatre of bloodshed and misrule. Could he remain within his cloistered cell and see such things without adding his mite to the effort for his country's good?²¹⁶

After only six weeks in the United States, Padre Vijil notified the Secretary of State that he would be leaving the United States, and that Tennessean John P. Heiss would be assuming the role of Charge d' Affaires for Vijil. This ended the diplomatic efforts of Vijil, and his activity in the Walker government.²¹⁷

In June of 1856, Walker hastened events along by declaring early elections and putting himself up against Patricio Rivas. On June 24, Walker became president in his own right of Nicaragua. On June 25, Rivas declared Walker a traitor. Costa Rica was already at war with Walker – after the election, the rest of the Central American nations would join together to remove the United States' presence. Walker's popularity dwindled in Nicaragua as promises of peace dissipated into so much smoke. This did not induce citizens of Nicaragua to join with the invading forces. Nicaraguans made up only an eighth of the overall force arrayed against William Walker's government. In comparison, 3.5% of Costa Rica's population involved

²¹⁶ El Nicaraguense, July 12, 1856 .

²¹⁷ Vijil to Marcy, June 23, 1856, John P. Heiss Papers, TSHS, Nashville, TN

themselves in the war effort; only .5% of Nicaragua's population joined in.²¹⁸ After years of war, they were certainly willing to let others do the fighting for them. Walker was forced to retreat and eventually escape from Nicaragua. He did not leave before fulfilling the fears of the Granadan citizens from the previous year. As he was forced to retreat from Granada, he ordered the burning of the city, leaving a sign simply saying "aquí fue Granada."²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Gobat 2005, 39.

²¹⁹ Woodward, 1985, 144.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Vijil had returned to Nicaragua on July 6 of 1856, and found that his support of Walker had discredited him throughout Nicaragua while ironically leading to the ends he had envisioned. Walker had promised an end to the wars that had plagued Nicaragua for decades, but that promise proved itself an empty one. Once his Liberal supporters realized Walker's true vision they closed ranks against him politically. Both Liberal and Conservative elites sealed this unification on September 12, 1856.²²⁰ This agreement moved the capital of Nicaragua to Managua to eliminate strife between the city-states and provide a basis for a new government and provided a framework for the newly united elites of Nicaragua to coordinate with other Central American rulers. The threat posed by Walker and his filibusters provided a unity of purpose in a region that had previously been torn by near constant warfare.

The united forces of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras invaded northwestern Nicaragua and reclaimed León from control of the filibusters. This international force continued on to capture Managua while an army from Costa Rica moved forward from the South to advance upon Walker and his forces. The efforts from the South were aided by one of the enemies that Walker had made, Cornelius Vanderbilt. With agents and financing from Vanderbilt, Costa Rican troops took control of the transit route and forced Walker's forces to retreat to Rivas. With his supply line eliminated, Walker was forced to engage in a final retreat with his men. On May 1, 1857 the United States Navy arranged for transport for both Walker and his men back to the United States.²²¹

²²⁰ Gobat, 2005, 36.

²²¹ May 2002, 207.

Walker himself remained obsessed with Nicaragua, and refused to accept his departure in 1857 as the end. He led three subsequent filibustering expeditions to Nicaragua with no success. His final voyage to Nicaragua occurred in 1860 when he attempted to return via Honduras. The British navy took custody of Walker, and turned him over to Honduran authorities for execution. The support for Walker's endeavors that had burned so brightly in 1856 had dissipated by 1860 as the United States was more concerned with internal divisions and far less interested in further expansion. The United States Civil War would put an end to filibustering efforts in Latin America.

The two years of Walker's regime in Nicaragua would provide the impetus towards unification that had eluded the nation following independence. The National War had originated as a produce of the ongoing conflict between Liberal and Conservative elites but ironically proved to be a catalyst for cooperation. Patricio Rivas returned to the presidency of Nicaragua following the departure of William Walker and served in that office until June of 1857. Symbolic of the efforts to unite opposing factions, Nicaragua adopted a bipartisan presidency. Liberal General Máximo Jérez and Conservative General Tomás Martínez both held office until the end of 1857. In November of that year a Nicaraguan Constituent Assembly convened and named General Martínez as the sole president. Liberals and Conservatives also united in the creation of a new constitution in 1858 wherein they agreed to a greater degree of cooperation. The complicity of the Liberal elites in bringing Walker to their shores has not been completely forgotten. Martínez would serve as Nicaragua's president until 1867 and be succeeded by six Conservative presidents. This orderly Conservative rule would last in Nicaragua until near the end of the century.²²²

²²² Gobat, 2005, 42.

These political events diluted interest in the Nicaraguan canal. The instability of the National War had combined with the opening of a railroad across Panama to the detriment of the Nicaraguan route. The Nicaraguan transit route was closed following the war and not reopened until 1862. The United States would maintain the viability of this route throughout the nineteenth century, finally ended with the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914. The economic impetus for the involvement of the United States in Nicaragua would never come to fruition.

Vijil's education had made him an admirer of the United States and its astonishing development, which echoed the hopes he had for his own nation. His idealism reflected feelings common to many in the years before the arrival of Walker, and embodied the hopes that Nicaragua could attain both peace and prosperity. The intersection of Walker and Vijil's Nicaragua led to a united Nicaraguan government and decades of peace while at the same time ending the dream of prosperity presented by the transit route. For his support of Walker, Vijil received persecution for the rest of his life. As a reward for his failed efforts toward peace his property was confiscated and his position in Granada eliminated.²²³ Vijil retired from public life and was eventually sent to the distant parish of Teustepe, where he served until he died on June 6, 1867.²²⁴

²²³ Vijil, 1930, 284.

²²⁴ Burns, 1991, 201.

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