

MANIFESTLY UNCERTAIN DESTINY: THE DEBATE OVER AMERICAN  
EXPANSIONISM, 1803-1848

By

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B.A., University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 2003  
M.A., Western Carolina University, 2007

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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Department of History  
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## **Abstract**

Americans during the first half of the nineteenth-century were obsessed with expansion. God had bestowed upon them an innate superiority in nearly all things. American settlers were culturally, economically, racially and politically superior to all others. But how accurate are such statements? Did a majority of Americans support such declarations? The purpose of this dissertation is to examine how Americans wrote and read about expansion. Doing so reveals that for every citizen extolling the unique greatness of Americans, one questioned such an assumption. For every American insisting that the nation must expand to the Pacific coast to be successful there was one who disdained expansion and sought to industrialize what territory the nation already possessed. Americans during the first half of the nineteenth century were of many minds about expansion. The destiny of the United States was anything but manifest.

Using a wealth of nineteenth century newspapers this dissertation demonstrates that the concept of Manifest Destiny was far less popular than previously imagined. Newspapers were the primary source of information and their contents endlessly debated. Editors from around the country expressed their own views and eagerly published pertinent letters to the editor that further detailed how Americans perceived expansion. While many people have often read John O'Sullivan's rousing words he was not necessarily indicative of American sentiment. For every article espousing the importance of acquiring Florida to deny it to the British there was one deriding the notion because they felt Florida to be nothing but a worthless swamp filled with hostile Indians. American justification and opposition to territorial expansion followed no grand strategy.

Instead, its most fascinating characteristic was its dynamic nature. In the Southwest expansionist proponents argued that annexation would liberate the land from Papist masters, while opponents questioned the morality of such a conquest. Encouraging or discouraging territorial expansion could take on innumerable variations and it is this flexible rhetoric that the dissertation focuses upon. The debate that raged in the public forum over expansion was both heated and fascinating. The voices of both pro and anti-expansionists were crucial to the development of antebellum America.

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Approved by:

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thesis and dissertation. I must also admit he often had a better grasp of what I wanted to say than I did.

Final and most emphatic thanks go to my family. Thanks to Jim McDonough, whose insight into journalism proved vital as well the support of Dawn Davitian, Steve Fowler, Karen Davitian and John Lontka, they always knew that I would finish even when I did not. An incredible amount of thanks must also go to my wife Chasity, for without her support and assistance nothing would ever get done.

## **Dedication**

To the girl who told me to be quiet in political philosophy

## Introduction

[It is] the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.-John O’Sullivan<sup>1</sup>

It may be the ‘Manifest Destiny’ of the Anglo-Saxon race to possess the territory of Mexico but if we are to pursue this ‘Manifest Destiny’ by wantonly invading her soil, harassing her people, breaking up her civil liberties and murdering men, women and children it will most assuredly be our ‘Manifest Destiny’ to be punished for our crimes. –An Old Farmer<sup>2</sup>

The wildly divergent views above are just a glimpse of the varied and contrasting opinions expressed in the American press regarding expansionism during the first half of the nineteenth century. While many people have read John O’Sullivan’s rousing words his view was hardly unanimous. For every article espousing the importance of acquiring Florida to deny it to the British there was one deriding the notion because they saw Florida to be nothing but a worthless swamp filled with hostile Indians. Many Americans at this time, far from being obsessed with expansion, were unsure of its necessity. There is no question that some Americans wished to expand and felt God had bestowed this bountiful land to them for their own gratification. Just as fervent, however, were those Americans who feared expansion could lead to the destruction of the United States. These writers also expressed a wide range of explanations for why the nation should accept or reject expansionism. Some debated the necessity of spreading or restricting the institution of slavery, for others it was about uplifting benighted regions or preserving the democratic integrity of the established political apparatus.

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<sup>1</sup> “Annexation,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17 (July 1845).

<sup>2</sup> *Boston Recorder*, August 12, 1847.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine these many voices, both for and against expansion, and demonstrate that the destiny of the United States was anything but manifest.

Although the term Manifest Destiny was not actually coined until 1845 the idea that Americans were destined for greatness, for whatever reason, and expected by their creator to expand was much older. The ever evolving justification, now concisely termed as Manifest Destiny, was used throughout the nineteenth century. Consequently the term may be used to describe pro expansionist sentiment to events prior to 1845. Thoroughly re-examining the debate over expansion also sophisticates our understanding of antebellum America. For generations the popular understanding of Manifest Destiny and antebellum expansion has been grossly oversimplified. The image of white male Americans, confident in their own superiority, marching ceaselessly across the continent, is only part of the story. There were some Americans who wholeheartedly opposed any expansion, and many others who found fault with certain aspects. These voices of protests were not whispered behind closed doors or relegated to personal letters but freely expressed throughout the nation. Their thoughts vied for the public's attention as much as any pro-expansionist writer, yet their voices are often lost. American justification and opposition to territorial expansion followed no grand strategy. Instead, its most fascinating characteristic was its dynamic nature. It could take whatever forms were most prudent to any given situation. Proponents for the annexation of Oregon claimed only Americans were capable of properly utilizing the bountiful land while opponents argued for caution when negotiating with the British Empire. In the Southwest, expansionist proponents argued that annexation would liberate the land from "Papist" masters, while opponents questioned the morality of such a conquest. In Florida, proponents felt the area to be instrumental for American national security while opponents criticized the heavy-handed

attempts at annexation. Encouraging or discouraging territorial expansion could take on innumerable variations, and this flexible rhetoric will be the focus of the dissertation.<sup>3</sup>

The expressed opposition or support of expansion was also not merely relegated to a small handful of elite individuals. Americans from esteemed lawyers to hardscrabble farmers were aware of and often participated in the debate over expansion. Nineteenth-century newspapers were a powerful indicator of public opinion and many Americans enthusiastically expressed their opinions in this public forum. Newspaper editors from around the country expressed their own views and published pertinent letters to the editor that further detailed how many Americans perceived expansion. These writers were vocal about what they wanted and how they expected the United States to behave in the international community. Newspapers were crucial to understanding the people of the United States. As Alexis de Tocqueville noted in *Democracy in America*, “I am far from denying that newspapers in democratic countries lead citizens to do very ill-considered things in common; but without newspapers there would be hardly any common action at all. So they mend many more ills than they cause.”<sup>4</sup>

The importance of newspapers to nineteenth century Americans cannot be overstated. In addition to serving as the main instrument for political and diplomatic news, they were also a source of entertainment. Whether or not one agreed with the article was immaterial, but debating and discussing the article’s merits was a popular way to pass the time. Many nineteenth-century Americans were voracious readers and literacy for white male Americans improved with every passing year. In 1810 about 58% of white males were literate but by 1850 this jumped to an

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<sup>3</sup> Some examples of this tendency to oversimplify the popularity of expansion can be found in Anders Stephenson’s *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right*, David and Jeanne Heidler’s work *Manifest Destiny* and Eugene Hollon’s *Frontier Violence*.

<sup>4</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville *Democracy in America*, book two, chapter VI.

astonishing 75%. The introduction of the “penny press” in the 1830s made newspaper articles even more accessible to the “common” American.<sup>5</sup>

As the population of the United States increased so too did the appetite and need for newspapers. In 1810 there were fewer than six million white Americans and 359 newspapers. In 1828 the population had increased to eleven million and 852 newspapers. By 1840 the population had grown to fourteen million with an astounding 1,631 newspapers available nationwide. Unsurprisingly, many of the papers that offered frequent coverage of expansion were from larger cities such as Boston, New York, Charleston and New Orleans. The reader base for these papers, however, exceeded the boundaries of the major cities as many articles were republished in smaller newspapers from across the nation. Oftentimes, these smaller papers would also offer their own truncated viewpoints before running the big city editorial. In addition, some smaller outlying publications were also notably vocal regarding expansion and were eager to express their own views on the national stage.<sup>6</sup>

Just as antebellum expansionism sparked debate among Americans in the nineteenth-century, historians have carried on the fight. There is little consensus among historians regarding what fueled antebellum expansion and there are a multitude of views. One of the more common interpretations of Manifest Destiny is that of an expansionist ideology identical to imperialism. These historians have also tended to emphasize the importance of federal policy and political leaders as the major force behind expansion. Albert Weinberg’s *Manifest Destiny: A Study of*

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<sup>5</sup> The term “common” man is used to denote the many Americans who were aware of and probably debated the question of expansion. While the vast majority of articles and editorials cited were penned by literate white Americans, the ideas expressed would have been a topic of debate across all sections of American society. Peter Hutchinson, “Magazine Growth in the Nineteenth Century” *A Publisher’s History of American Magazines*, [http://themagazinist.com/uploads/Part\\_1\\_Population\\_and\\_Literacy.pdf](http://themagazinist.com/uploads/Part_1_Population_and_Literacy.pdf) (accessed November 20th, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Lee Soltow and Edward Stevens, *The Rise of Literacy and the Common School in the United States: A Socioeconomic Analysis to 1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 76.

*Nationalist Expansionism in American History*, Frank Owsley and Gene Smith's *Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800-1821*, Thomas Hietala's *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America*, and Robert Merry's *A Country of Vast Designs: James K Polk, The Mexican War, and the Conquest of the American Continent* are good examples. Although these works do a good job of examining expansion from the top down, they tend to downplay the importance of "common" Americans and neglect to explore how the expansionist debate played out in the public forum.<sup>7</sup>

Probably the most well-known and lauded historian of Manifest Destiny is Frederick Merk. A disciple and eventual successor of Frederick Jackson Turner, Merk's publications continued his mentor's American exceptionalism argument. This tendency is most evident in his attempt to refute Weinberg's argument in his seminal work *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History*. Merk claims American expansionism has taken distinct forms throughout history. Jeffersonian expansion was unrelated to Manifest Destiny which in turn was the "antithesis" of imperialism. The only common thread between these different eras of expansion was the innate American sense of "mission," which he characterizes as a longing to better the world. Merk acknowledges the debate that surrounded expansion but argues that the American people were misled by an elite group of politicians and select editors. Although, he makes some interesting points and was the first to question the inevitability of Manifest Destiny, his work is not without some cogent criticisms. Most problematic is his insistence that "mission" was the

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<sup>7</sup> Albert Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1935); Thomas Hietala's *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997); Merry, Robert W. *A Country of Vast Designs : James K. Polk, the Mexican War, and the Conquest of the American Continent* (New York : Simon & Schuster, 2009). Most of these historians use newspapers sparingly, as in the case of Merry who utilizes only 5 newspapers in a five hundred page manuscript.



largest driving force behind American expansion and his tendency to overemphasize the importance of elites in propagating the justifications for expansion.<sup>8</sup>

Two more instrumental works are Reginald Horsman's *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* and Michael Morrison's *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the coming of the Civil War*. Horsman claims that ideas of racial superiority, usually associated with the late nineteenth-century were in fact well entrenched in American culture and politics by the 1850s. He argues that Americans have always been blinded by their beliefs in racial superiority and claims that interactions with Native Americans and Mexicans often resulted in bloodshed because of this. Morrison admirably acknowledges the debate that surrounded expansion and contends that the extension of slavery drove American expansionism. While both Horsman and Morrison's postulations are provocative, their arguments that race and slavery were the determining characteristics of expansion oversimplifies the ideology of Manifest Destiny.<sup>9</sup>

For insight into how the ideology of Manifest Destiny fit into the larger history of the United States, few books are more useful than Michael Hunt's *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* and Major L. Wilson's *Space, Time, Freedom: The Quest for Nationality and the Irrepressible Conflict 1815-1861*. Hunt argues that Americans during the nineteenth century developed a "guiding vision" that became Manifest Destiny. He also contends that the ideology was complex and existed long before the writings of O'Sullivan. Wilson's work closely examines the rhetoric of expansion and how the search for nationality first drove Americans together and then

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<sup>8</sup> Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (Toronto: Random House Publishing, 1963).

<sup>9</sup> Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Michael Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

ultimately separated them. Although both authors do an excellent job explaining how rhetoric played into expansionism, they focus almost exclusively on the words of just a few elite politicians.<sup>10</sup>

Also important are those works that focus on American journalism in the Early Republic. Two of the most indispensable are from the History of American Journalism series, Carol Sue Humphrey's *The Press of the Young Republic, 1783-1833* and William Huntzicker's *The Popular Press, 1833-1865*. Both offer excellent overviews on how prevalent and partisan newspapers were at this time. More importantly they both offer excellent bibliographic essays regarding journalistic historiography. Both Humphrey and Huntzicker argue that the historiography of early nineteenth century journalism is largely underdeveloped as many works tend to focus upon a particular editor, specific paper or region. Humphrey in particular makes a plea that newspapers need to be studied more broadly.<sup>11</sup>

This dissertation is methodologically most similar to Robert Johannsen's *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination*, Paul Foos' *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict During the Mexican-American War* and Amy Greenberg's *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire*. Each of these insightful works focuses upon how expansion intersected with American society. Johannsen details how the American public felt toward the Mexican-American War, Foos explores how the promise of wealth inspired Americans to enlist in the war and Greenberg examines American sentiment in

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Major L. Wilson, *Space, Time, Freedom: The Quest for Nationality and the Irrepressible Conflict 1815-1861* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974).

<sup>11</sup> Carol Sue Humphrey, *The Press of the Young Republic, 1783-1833* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996); William Huntzicker, *The Popular Press, 1833-1865* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999); examples of Journalistic historiography include works like Donald Reynolds *Editors Make War: Southern Newspapers in the Secession Crisis*, Sherilyn Bennion *Equal to the Occasion: Women Editors of the Nineteenth century West*, John Nerone *The Culture of the Press in the Early Republic: Cincinnati, 1793-1848*.

regard to the filibustering expeditions to Latin America. These works also utilize numerous newspaper sources to bolster their claim.<sup>12</sup>

Although there have been some superb books published regarding the link between American expansionism and journalism, there is still room for further investigation. One major problem with most of the works is their proverbial “all or nothing” mentality. Many expansionist historians seek to emphasize one element over all others, but a claim that racism or economics or “mission” was the key determinant to expansion flattens a multifarious topic. Another shortcoming in current scholarship is the predisposition to emphasize the actions of prominent politicians and downplay the role of “common” Americans. Numerous letters to the editor advocating or rejecting expansion were published around the country and their existence certainly weakens the assertion that expansion was perpetrated and talked about only by an elite few. Certainly, some historians like Foos, Greenberg, and Johanssen admirably and extensively use newspapers but their scope of study is rather limited and they downplay the importance of the opponents to expansion.

The methodology for this dissertation also breaks with conformity. This study forgoes concentrating on the thoughts and words of prominent policy makers and instead focuses on how expansion was viewed and debated in the American press. To support such assertions one hundred and fifty five different newspapers from both rural and urban communities were consulted. These papers revealed a rich discourse with countless contrasting views and sentiments. The “common” American was well aware of the debate that surrounded expansion.

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Johanssen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Paul Foos, *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict During the Mexican-American War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Amy Greenberg *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Both prominent statesmen and poor laborers read and discussed viewpoints from across the political spectrum.

Since the sentiments expressed in nineteenth-century newspapers were so diverse, it is erroneous to pigeonhole newspapers as being simply Whig, Federalist or Democratic. Some Whig papers supported expansion, some Democratic ones opposed it and some, depending upon the circumstances, changed their stance. Allowing each individual author to speak for himself allows the reader to more readily appreciate what is actually being said rather than dismissing it as simply “partisan rhetoric.”<sup>13</sup>

While opinions varied, Americans were unified in their overwhelming distaste and distrust of Europe. The United States was both different and superior to the old world. The democratic institutions and industriousness of its citizenry put them on a higher plateau than decadent European societies. Both proponents and opponents to expansion insisted that American society was unique. Expansionists noted that American territorial acquisition was distinct in form and substance from European styles of conquest. At the same time, opponents bemoaned that expansion prevented the United States from living up to its promise of a superior society. Although both sides had very different views on expansion, they were united in that their “vision” for America was distinct from European savagery and excesses.

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<sup>13</sup> A good example of how problematic typecasting newspapers can become is found in the coverage regarding the Louisiana Purchase. Conventional wisdom, as exemplified by historian Jerry Knudson’s article “Newspaper Reaction to the Louisiana Purchase”, states that domestic opinion was strictly political. That Federalist newspapers denounced the acquisition and chalked it up to another failed Jeffersonian policy. This is simply not the case. As ably demonstrated by Victor Weiss there was in fact no agreement or consensus among federalist newspapers regarding expansion. Some supported the acquisition wholeheartedly like the *Charleston Courier*, others found merit in part of it like the *New York Evening Post* while others thought the whole enterprise would lead to the collapse of the United States like the *Connecticut Courant*. For more information regarding the disparate viewpoints of the federalist press see Victor Weiss’ dissertation “Domestic Opposition to the Louisiana Purchase: Anti-Expansionism and Republican Thought” University of Virginia, 1993.

Another common element among many nineteenth-century authors was to underemphasize the importance of Native Americans. “Dealing” or “pacifying” Indians was often seen as a domestic problem or annoyance that would inevitably be dealt with at a later date after the territory was safely in Americans hands. Most newspaper contributors cared little for Indian claims on territory and instead focused their editorials and letters on acquiring territory from more “civilized” peoples. Consequently, many references to Native Americans were tangential in the majority of expansionist pieces.

This dissertation is organized into seven separate chapters, each of which examines a particular expansionistic endeavor. The first chapter addresses the various viewpoints surrounding the importance of the Mississippi River and the acquisition of the Louisiana Territory. Chapter two details the process, events and debate that surrounded the acquisition of the Spanish Floridas. Chapters three and four focus on the settlement of Texas, coverage of the Texan War for Independence and the heated debate that erupted over Texan admittance to the Union. Chapter five explores the attempted acquisition of Canada during the war of 1812 and the annexation of the Oregon Territory, while chapter six focuses on the settlement to California and the Bear Flag Revolt. The seventh and final chapter addresses the Mexican-American War and the ill-fated “All of Mexico” movement.

Ultimately, this dissertation is neither a retelling of antebellum expansionist policy nor a treatise on the causes of Manifest Destiny. Rather it is a glimpse at the raucous, heated, and crucially important debate over expansion that erupted in the public press. Understanding the words of these many forgotten editors and concerned citizens reveals a far richer discourse than previously understood. Although studying the often-reviewed papers of Jefferson, Polk and Calhoun can be enlightening, they are also constrictive. Many Americans were nether ardent

expansionist or dedicated opponents but somewhere in between. They closely followed the events of the day and made stands that were often at odds with their contemporaries. Let us listen to their voices.

## **Chapter 1 - The Battle of the Long Dead Orators: Domestic Support and Dissent Regarding the Louisiana Purchase**

The purchase of the Louisiana Territory was the single most important event in American expansionism. This massive acquisition, obtained through peaceable means, doubled the size of the country and whetted the expansionistic appetites of countless Americans. Not only was Louisiana the first major expansionist acquisition, but many Americans hoped it would serve as an example for similarly bloodless territorial victories. In reality, this hope was forlorn. The Louisiana Purchase was unique and its pattern of acquisition would not be repeated. Future antebellum expansion would often be bloody, expensive and ultimately plant the seeds for the nation's own near destruction. Perhaps the Louisiana Purchase's most important legacy was in how Americans reacted to the acquisition. There was no massive, coordinated outpouring of support. Instead Americans were divided. These opinions manifested themselves in a variety of viewpoints. Some supported expansion for security or economic ones. Some Americans feared the acquisition would mark the destruction of industry while others opposed the purchase for moral reasons. Although the manner in which the territory was obtained would not be repeated, the debate surrounding it would. American support and dissatisfaction with the purchase resounded throughout the nation's press.

Thomas Jefferson, Sage of Monticello and author of the Declaration of Independence, deserves much of the credit for the Louisiana Purchase. Jefferson believed in an "Empire of Liberty" filled with honest, hardworking farmers. In this envisioned empire, every American citizen would own land. Doing so would encourage Americans to be virtuous citizens with a

stake in the nation's affairs. For Jefferson, the strength of the American Republic was inextricably tied to the land. In order for the nation to grow stronger it would need to expand and expansion would also help keep America safe from external threats. The United States still had much to fear from the European powers. Jefferson understood that American growth would be substantially retarded if the nation was surrounded by hostile neighbors. The premise was simple; if North America was inhabited solely by Americans the United States would be safer. The best way to do this was through expansion.<sup>14</sup>

Jefferson saw the Gulf Coast as especially crucial to American interests. Free navigation of the Mississippi River was key to a thriving economy and the port of New Orleans was instrumental in safeguarding this economic lifeline. Jefferson also believed Spanish West Florida was necessary to protect New Orleans and the United States had enjoyed relative free reign in the area. By 1795 the United States had successfully negotiated the right of "deposit," allowing American merchants to freely trade in New Orleans without any major interference from Spain. Jefferson and other expansionists encouraged Americans to move south and settle, hoping that in time Spain would collapse and the territory would pass bloodlessly to the United States. In the words of Jefferson, such immigration could "be a means of delivering to us peaceably what might otherwise have cost us a war." This stratagem would become known as "conquering without war."<sup>15</sup>

American citizens were drawn to the vast and bountiful region early in the young republic's life. The *Daily Advertiser*, from New York, reported in 1790 that the Spanish were

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Tucker & David Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 95-100.

<sup>15</sup> Tucker and Hendrickson, ix-x; letter by Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, April 2, 1791 as it appears in James Sofka, "Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of World Politics" *The Louisiana Purchase: Emergence of an American Nation*.



inducing Americans to settle in Spanish controlled North America. Freedom of religion was guaranteed to those who settled and they could live “without fear of inquisitors” though they would be answerable to the Spanish government. The editor of the *Advertiser* felt such inducements hid a darker motive however. He claimed that by encouraging settlers to move into Spanish lands discouraged them from living in the western areas of the United States. Supposedly this was done because the Spanish “dread nothing more than an enterprising, active nation in the vicinity of her Mexican settlements.” This article alludes to several enduring expansionistic beliefs. The editor makes it readily clear that the Spanish, in contrast to Americans, are a lethargic group of Papists. Their hold over so much territory is a waste since they do not properly govern the region and the great potential of the land is squandered. This tendency to categorize Americans as being both distinct and superior from Europeans would continue to show up in both pro and expansionists writings. The article also foreshadows American interest in not only Louisiana but Texas as well.<sup>16</sup>

Detailed and favorable depictions of the Louisiana territory were also a common feature in newspapers during the 1790s and early 1800s. The *New Jersey Journal* and *General Advertiser* published one such depiction entitled “Reflections of a Cosmopolitan Frenchmen.” The author claimed the lush territory to be capable of supporting upwards of “5,000,000” inhabitants even though the current population was only “220,000.” Most of the residents, according to the “cosmopolitan Frenchmen,” lived near the Mississippi river. This was similar to “lower Egypt” as the bulk of its population lived near the riverbanks. He later commented that the territory also “bears a strong resemblance to China, by its extent, fertility, the variety of its productions and temperatures.” The bulk of his depictions painted a large and expansive

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<sup>16</sup> *Daily Advertiser*, March 13, 1790

territory teeming with abundant wildlife and “fertile soil.” He claimed the planting of “wheat succeeds extremely well” and the “soil is excellent for Indian corn.” Pigeons and Turkeys were widely found “but more might be raised.” He also asserted that not only was lumbering plentiful but that Mulberry trees grew wild and could be cultivated for silk worm production. The depictions of the Louisiana territory described not only available resources and their current uses but also it’s potential. Strong willed and enterprising settlers were needed to make this area shine.<sup>17</sup>

The Frenchman also took great care in mentioning the importance and wealth of the gem of Louisiana, New Orleans. He claimed that the city shall soon “become the most flourishing and most thickly inhabited of any in America.” The location of the city at the base of the Mississippi made it especially important as a shipping destination. The Frenchman also noted that unscrupulous speculators were selling off less valuable portions of the land to unsuspecting victims. He thought this to be folly as it would be wiser to sell better pieces of land first and let the buyers speak well of the purchase and then start selling off the rest of the territory. He assured readers that cultivating both sides of the Mississippi would guarantee “New Orleans and the commercial cities of the United States would increase in wealth and population” and “lands less fertile would acquire a new value.”<sup>18</sup>

The *Stewart Kentucky Herald*, for months, ran advertisements for books that dealt with this promising province. The peddled manuscript had quite the title “an official account of the situation, soil, produce etc in that part of Louisiana which lies between the mouth of the Missouri

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<sup>17</sup> *General Advertiser* as it appeared in the *New Jersey Journal* July 11, 1792; Referring to a well-known location in the old world to depict territory in the new was a very common comparison. Just as Lower Louisiana was like “lower Egypt”, Texas would be the “Italy of America” and Oregon “resembling that of France.”

<sup>18</sup> *General Advertiser* as it appeared in the *New Jersey Journal* July 11, 1792

and New Madrid or L'anse? a'la graise and on the West Side of the Mississippi: together with an abstract by the Spanish Government.” The *New York Evening Post* found that the history of Louisiana “continues every day to become more and more interesting to all classes of American citizens.” Subsequently, the *Post* ran an article that closely detailed the history of the territory from 1512 to the 1790s. Either through editorials, letters to the editors or published books Americans had a voracious appetite for Louisiana.<sup>19</sup>

The editor and readers of the *City Gazette* from Charleston South Carolina also saw great potential in the Louisiana territory and printed several editorials and letters in the 1790s. In 1796 the editor published an expose regarding the political climate surrounding the Louisiana territory. He claimed that rumors started to appear in Parisian newspapers that claimed Spain would soon be trading back Louisiana to the French. Such news should “alarm” the United States. The editor argued that the French had never given up hope for recapturing Canada from the British and they may be induced to start another war. Worse yet French control of the Louisiana territory would mean that they would “spare no pains to get command of the rivers and lakes which are the natural communication between Canada and the Mexican Gulf.” Thus the United States “would be encircled by an artful, insinuating, active nation and must forever renounce the hope of obtaining by purchase or any amicable means the territory west of the Mississippi to the Ocean.” If that happened the editor feared that “nothing short of conquest” could deliver the desired lands into American hands. He also predicted a French presence in Mexico, but overestimated their capability. He argued that “in the hands of the plodding Spaniards, they do no harm and little good to the world at large; but in the hands of an active nation Mexico would be a dangerous engine of power.” Once again the portrayal of the Spanish was less than flattering. They were

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<sup>19</sup>*Stewart Kentucky Herald* February 24, 1801; *New York Evening Post* as it appeared in the *Alexandria Advertiser* January 18, 1803.

simply incapable of adequately running an empire and thus were the preferred neighbors to the United States. If a vibrant European power like Great Britain or France took over, they could seriously threaten and even impede American expansion. The editor did end on a positive note, by reiterating that America possessed “the best regions of the North Continent” with the “best climates” and populated by a “strong hardy-race.” Thus, while events in Louisiana should be closely monitored, it was not time to panic.<sup>20</sup>

A letter to the editor in the *City Gazette* in 1797 urged contemplative thought. The author signed himself as “Minerva,” a thinly-veiled attempt at making himself look smarter by adopting the name of the Roman Goddess of wisdom. “Minerva” commented on the wars engulfing Europe and felt France to be principally responsible for the problems as “she lives and thrives by war-peace may be her ruin.” He noted that while Great Britain was struggling with mounting war debt it still “has resources to cope with half of Europe in the maintenance of fleets and armies.” He noted that France and her ally Spain should be angling for closer relations with the United States “not on account of any attachment to our interests or form of government but because...it is in their interest not to drive us into hostilities.” “Minerva” concluded that both the Floridas and Louisiana are both “within our reach and our power.” Although he did not advocate any direct or immediate intervention he stated that the territories both fell within the American sphere of influence and hinted that such provinces could easily be absorbed into the United States. For “Minerva,” expansion into the Louisiana territory would be a desirable outcome but may not yet be prudent. Allowing the warlike European powers to exhaust themselves with war

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<sup>20</sup> *City Gazette* September 16, 1796. Using a pen name, often a famous roman orator or God, was common practice at this time. Often the penname belonged to the editor of the paper but it could also be used by those seeking anonymity when writing a letter to the editor. This practice fell out of favor by most Americans by the 1820s.

on the continent, however, could allow the United States to pluck the choicest bits of the new world from their grasp.<sup>21</sup>

Another letter to the editor regarding the highly sought after provinces appeared in the *City Gazette* in 1798. The letter revealed that the former governor of South Carolina, William Blount, had been approached to lead an expedition into the Louisiana and Florida Territories. Accompanying him would be British troops from Canada and four British frigates which would meet him in Pensacola. The exact details of the expedition are cloudy but it seemed military in nature and was unquestionably done at the behest of “British ministers.” Although the author stated that the offer was refused he feared that “some enterprising fellow will embrace the opportunity yet.” The editor of the *Richmond Recorder* warned that free trade down the Mississippi was in danger as Napoleon could send warships to blockade American goods and “there is an end of your western trade to the West Indies.” The various articles and letters provided clear warnings. The Louisiana Territory was coveted by several European nations and removal of the Spanish from the area could result in serious repercussions for Americans. Simply put, if the United States did not act soon, this promising province could be seized by America’s mortal enemy, an active European empire.<sup>22</sup>

Such a danger became manifest when Spain and France signed the Treaty of San Ildefonso. This agreement effectively handed the Louisiana Territory back to the French. The treaty was signed under duress by the Spanish and failed to adequately establish boundaries for the transferred territory. Such considerations mattered little to the United States. The hope that the territory could be had peacefully by simple immigration was now in peril. France was an

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<sup>21</sup> *City Gazette* September 22, 1797.

<sup>22</sup> *City Gazette* January 6, 1798; *Richmond Recorder* April 3, 1802.

active, powerful nation that could prove to be a dangerous neighbor. Even Jefferson, the consummate Francophile, was concerned. Although he stated that he was willing to go to war to secure the territory he sent ministers to France to negotiate for New Orleans in a last ditch attempt at diplomacy. He hoped the “conquer without war” stratagem would not die stillborn.<sup>23</sup>

Once France received the province from Spain, the question on most American minds was to what extent would the French presence be felt. The American minister to France, Robert Livingston penned a letter to the French government explaining why they should not occupy the territory. Livingston’s arguments resonated among many Americans, and his plea appeared in several cities including Albany and Hudson NY, Charleston SC, Boston MA and Philadelphia PA. Livingston began with a single question “has France a superfluity of men and money great enough to justify the settling of a new colony?” His answer boiled down to a simple “no” and he offered ample examples to justify his point. He explained the importance of colonies and concluded that those nations who have an excess of population are best served by overseas colonies. He argued that while France had a sizable population it was not large enough to warrant shipping their industrious citizens overseas. He insisted that the French must remember that or every “emigration will form a vacuum somewhere or abandon some useful branch which will no longer be carried on. The emigrant also carries away with him a portion of the general good in the mass of the productivity labor of the mother country.” Instead, the French should take pride in their “spirit of invention” and rejoice in France’s “soil, climate and local situations [as they] give her a commercial and especially as a manufacturing nation great advantages over

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<sup>23</sup> The French had previously controlled the Louisiana territory until they were forced to cede it to Spain in 1763. Later, after Napoleon’s military superiority on the European continent had been demonstrated the Spanish government felt they had no alternative but to retrocede the province to France. Tucker and Hendrickson, 98; Frank Owsley and Gene Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800-1821* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 19.

all the nations of Europe.” Creating an infrastructure for a productive overseas colony would be time consuming and expensive. Efforts should be focused instead on making France an industrial power. Livingston provided evidence for his point by claiming that trade between the United States and Great Britain was high because of their production of manufactured items, while trade to France was often relegated to “wine or brandies.” Cultivating and garrisoning Louisiana, he argued, would be a detriment to France as she would be better served industrializing.<sup>24</sup>

Livingston also shot down the idea that France could use slave labor to develop Louisiana. While he conceded that Louisiana was “warm” and that “slavery alone can fertilize these colonies,” it was not the answer for France. He insisted it was economically unfeasible for the French to import the necessary slaves as that would require significant white manpower to oversee them and that they cannot be “procured but at great expense.” As “Experience has proved,” he cautioned, “the inhabitants of hot climates never work from want” and that “force alone” can compel them to work. France should not be burdened with a dream of a Louisiana Empire but instead focus on domestic development and leave the untapped province to those more accustomed to slavery issues.<sup>25</sup>

The American minister then explained that even if France adopted slavery and built an infrastructure the territory would prove commercially disappointing to them. He argued that the French West Indies, for the most part, produced many of the same goods that would be produced in Louisiana. Consequently, few new products would be gained and the duplicated ones would quickly see a “depreciation of their value.” The only exception, according to Livingston, was the

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<sup>24</sup> *Albany Register* July 12, 1803; *Balance and Columbian Repository* July 26, 1803; *Gazette of the United States* July 5, 1803; *City Gazette* July 18, 1803; *Boston Palladium* July 20, 1803.

<sup>25</sup> *Albany Register*, July 12, 1803.

cultivation of lumber which the territory had in large measure. This job, however, was not conducive to slave labor as few slaves were proficient in the use of axes. Given the added cost of saw-mills and transporting goods, Livingston insisted, that it made better economic sense for the French to procure their lumber from the United States. He also mentioned that should France seek to cultivate and supply themselves with lumber from Louisiana, war with Great Britain would prove disastrous. The British would navy cut off all access to the precious commodity and since the former trading agreement with the United States would have long since lapsed, the French would be in serious trouble. Ultimately, “it is very evident the colonizing of Louisiana would, in a commercial point of view, be very injurious to France.”<sup>26</sup>

Livingston’s final point was perhaps the most interesting. He concluded by stating that not only would settling Louisiana be a mistake commercially but also politically. He argued that the United States was a staunch ally and friend to France and in the future would hopefully become a close trading partner. Livingston reiterated how valuable American trade had been to Great Britain and hoped such a relationship would occur with France. This could not happen, however, if the French insisted on settling Louisiana. Doing so would create an acrimonious relationship as the border would cause considerable friction and turn a “natural ally, from a warm friend to a suspicious and jealous neighbor and perhaps hereafter into a declared enemy.” He attempted to discount the thinly-veiled threat by stating “I am incapable of conceiving the ridiculous idea of threatening a government which has seen all Europe bend the knee before its power.” Livingston, however, could not afford to look weak so he also mentioned that “I am too well acquainted with the resources of my own country to dread the power of any of the European nations.” He ended by offering the French a solution. A closer relationship with the United

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.



States would provide them with their necessary lumber and the Americans would be more than willing to take the troublesome port city of the province, New Orleans, off their hands. Failing to do so shall make France “an object of jealousy to Spain, The United States and England which powers will not only discourage her commerce but will compel her to make expensive establishments to secure the protection of it.”<sup>27</sup>

Livingston’s article clearly highlighted the fear of another European power on the American border. The United States would not welcome a war with France but New Orleans was desired so heartily that such a conflict might be necessary. Perhaps convincing the French that Louisiana was a liability to them could secure the city through more peaceable means. The letter also highlighted some of the many attributes the territory possessed such as good soil, pleasing climate, an abundant supply of lumber and, of course, the transportation and shipping hub, New Orleans.

Not all Americans felt the French acquisition of Louisiana would be a disaster of epic proportions. Both the *Alexandria Advertiser* from Virginia and the *New York Gazette* printed an expose written by “Ulysses.” The writer claimed that after much consideration he had “formed an opinion very different from that which seems to prevail.” He argued that the French occupation of Louisiana would not adversely affect the United States nor would it “restrain our settlements.” “Ulysses” insisted that while westward expansion would be stunted, that would be a good thing. He claimed that in the current manner of expansion the United States relied heavily upon imports from France and Great Britain and made America too dependent on foreign powers. This would change “when land becomes dear and scarce in the United States, we shall break ourselves of manufactories; for we have all the necessary materials in great perfection.”

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

Americans, when forced to use what they have to its full potential, would become self-sufficient. Moreover settlement in the western reaches of the country would fill up with industrious Americans and a sizable population is a necessary “circumstance that is favorable to instruction and civilization.” He claimed that by bottling up Americans they would become more homogenous “speak one language, governed by the same laws and accustomed to the use of arms.” Bordering a major and active European power would also compel Americans to become more patriotic and be vigilant in its defense. Such events would only benefit the United States and allow Americans to steer clear of foreign entanglements. He maintained that Americans must never forget that “whatever our political opinions may be at present—whether we are called republicans, democrats, aristocrats or federalists we shall soon discover that friendship among nations is no more substantial than the shadow of a ghost.”<sup>28</sup>

For “Ulysses” and other like-minded Americans, expansion, did not necessarily equal success. Lack of available land could ultimately prove a boon to the United States. Focusing on industrialization would keep Americans free from relying upon European goods and have a homogenizing effect on the populace. Americans should spend less time obsessing about expansion and more time trying to become self-sufficient. “Ulysses”, contrary to many of his contemporaries, was more concerned with becoming too dependent on Europe commerce rather than worrying about a potential war. Such opinions are crucially important to understanding the diversity that was expressed in the American public press.

Back in France negotiations were going exceedingly well and the American envoys, both Livingston and James Monroe, were astonished to learn that Napoleon was willing to cede not only New Orleans but the entire territory. The only real piece of contention was exactly how

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<sup>28</sup>*New York Gazette* as it appeared in the *Alexandria Advertiser* June 30, 1802.

much money would be paid. By April an agreement had been reached and on May 2, 1803 the French officially agreed to cede the entire Louisiana territory for fifteen million dollars. Monroe would consider the purchase an unmitigated success and reveled in its acquisition as it was obtained “neither by subtlety nor dictated by force.” Jefferson’s objective of securing the gulf coast for the United States by acquiring New Orleans and West Florida was half complete.<sup>29</sup>

The territory that comprised this purchase was vast. The land included 828,000 square miles which teemed with abundant soil, wildlife and Native Americans. The purchase doubled the size of the United States in one swift stroke and would lead to the creation of several states. Far more than just Louisiana, the territory also made up Arkansas, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas Oklahoma and Nebraska and portions of seven more states. All this for the low price of fifteen million, a truly astounding territorial acquisition. The deal was not without its drawbacks however. Although purchased from France, the territory had previously belonged to Spain and the cession between those two countries did not adequately address boundaries. Subsequently, the nebulous boundaries would be a source of contention as the United States continued to expand.

Once news that the territory had been successfully acquired reached the American public; debate over the wisdom of such a purchase erupted immediately. Although the most prolific and insightful articles originated from just a few papers, notably the *National Intelligencer*, *Columbian Centinel* and *Balance and Columbian Repository*, these stories were picked up quickly and appeared in papers across the country. Many of the articles appeared as letters to the editor and most were signed by some sort of pen name in an attempt to both conceal their identity and lend credence to their words. This battle of the long dead orators provides

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<sup>29</sup> Jerry W. Knudson, “Newspaper Reaction to the Louisiana Purchase,” *Missouri Historical Review* 63 (1969) pg 193-194.

exceptional insight into both the justifications and sense of unease many Americans felt toward expansion.

The *Columbian Centinel* published the writing of “Fabricius”, a pen name most likely selected as homage to the famous Roman general and statesman Caius Fabricius Luscinus. “Fabricius” argued that the new territory was too expensive, too vast and underdeveloped and could easily cause both the political and financial collapse of the United States. He succinctly stated that the purchase was “a great waste, a wilderness unpeopled with any beings except wolves and wandering Indians.” His choice of words was no accident. By portraying the Louisiana Territory as bereft of potential and full of dangerous entities might discourage further interest. Wolves and Indians were the type of savage obstacles any right-minded American would want to avoid. Portraying the Indians as wandering also lent credence to the idea that the territory lacked fertility for proper cultivation.<sup>30</sup>

The author was also concerned that the newly acquired wasteland may one day spell the nation’s destruction. “This unexplored empire” the “size of four or five European kingdoms...will drain away our people from the pursuit of better husbandry, and from manufactures and commerce.” Echoing the writings of “Minerva,” “Fabricius” felt it would be wiser for Americans to develop and cultivate the East rather than step out into the unknown. Worse still the land could “be cut up into states without number, but each with two votes in the senate.” This could then easily diminish the power of the original States. He also feared that these settlers would most likely be adventurous ruffians of the worst sort who would undoubtedly “claim power and resist taxes.” Accepting the deal would ultimately “give money of which we have too little for land of which we have already too much.” “Fabricius” took

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<sup>30</sup> *Columbian Centinel* July 13, 1803; his writings also appeared in the *National Intelligencer* and *Raleigh Register*; Knudson, “Newspaper Reaction to the Louisiana Purchase,” p. 198-202.

almost a shotgun like approach to airing his misgivings about Louisiana. Rather than focusing on just one negative aspect he briefly mentions many. The territory was full of undesirable Indians, it could hurt the economy and perhaps most distressingly, it could curtail the power and authority of the already existing states.<sup>31</sup>

The writer “Calculator” also saw the cession as unnecessary and a waste of money. In a series of articles that appeared in the *Balance and Columbian Repository* he made his case. It was evident that “Calculator” had read and admired Livingston’s letter to the French government. He argued that the rationale that France lacked the necessary population for colonization “is more abundantly forcible in its application to the United States” all while ignoring the American minister’s underlying plea that France should sell the territory to the Americans. The writer noted that like France the United States possessed territory that was already “more than sufficiently extensive.” The United States, however, contained significantly fewer citizens; only “five million white people” which was less than 1/13 that of France. Thus the acquisition of so large a territory as that of Louisiana would prove “injurious.” The writer then carefully broke down how many Americans lived per square mile in relation to the states. Even in the most crowded states there were less than eleven people per square mile. He concluded then that “in the United States lands are superabundant, but laborers are few and scarce.” The addition of the Louisiana territory would spread the population out even thinner and retard economic and manufacturing growth.<sup>32</sup>

“Calculator” also sought to discredit the claim that acquiring the territory would be necessary for national security. He illustrated his point by making yet another comparison to

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<sup>31</sup> *Columbian Centinel* July 13, 1803.

<sup>32</sup> *Balance and Columbian Repository* as it appeared in the *Alexandria Advertiser* September 15, 1803.

France. He rhetorically asked that if Germany was suddenly vacated of people and given to France for free would it be feasible to spread out their population in this new frontier. He claimed that “we confidently say NO!” Although such a situation would reduce border tension the frontier would just move farther west. Thus the frontier “would be double in extent and would therefore require double experience in defending them and by thus spreading her capitals and her population over twice the surface which she now possesses, she would be impoverished and weakened in nearly the same proportion.” “Calculator” argued that the situation was worse for the United States since Americans actually had to pay for such an inglorious fate.<sup>33</sup>

A few days later “Calculator” continued his crusade against expansion. He claimed his objective was not to “prejudice” people against the purchase but instead point out the “injurious effects especially in a young and thinly settled country and draining away from it vast sums of cash.” He admitted that some expansion could be beneficial if the territory was not overly large and could be a proven source for economic development. He included the “western waters” as such an example. The treaty in its current form, however, went far beyond what he saw as beneficial and thus should be given further consideration. “Calculator” stated that while many other Americans considered fifteen million to be a “trifling sum compared with the immense magnitude of the worth of the object for which it has been pledged... nothing can be more erroneous than such an opinion.”<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, he argued that advocates have been blinded by some misplaced sense of “rapture” and are not looking at the whole picture. He was skeptical that the “florid depictions”

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Considering the context the “western waters” most probably referred to the securing of the Mississippi River and of acquiring New Orleans; *Balance and Columbian Repository* as it appeared in the *Alexandria Advertiser* September 29, 1803.

of the region were accurate and, even if they were, he questioned the feasibility of utilizing slave labor in the area. Once again he takes Livingston's letter out of context. "Calculator" applauded the American minister's sharp analysis and claimed that the region would prove to be too cold for slaves as they more used to warmer climates and their labor would be wasted as their primary job would be as lumberjacks. This was a distortion of Livingston's original remarks. Livingston claimed that slave labor in the region would actually be economically efficient, but not for the French since they would only need them to harvest timber as the other crops were already being grown in the French West Indies. "Calculator" ended his critique with an attack on slavery. He opposed the very idea of slavery and found its expansion to be repugnant and completed his article by asking his readers one very important question. "will republicans, who glory in their sacred regard to the rights of human nature purchase an immense wilderness *for the purpose of cultivating it with the labor of slaves!*-the idea is too horrible to be indulged."<sup>35</sup>

"Calculator" lived up to his pen name; his writings were clear and carefully calculated. While it may be true that fifteen million for such vast tracts would be a good deal that only works if the purchased land returns a profit. "Calculator" thought otherwise since there were simply not enough American settlers to adequately populate the region. Although he strenuously opposed the purchase, he was not against the concept of expansion as long as it did not interfere with the economic development of the United States. He refused to be dazzled by promises of wealth that may be found in the unexplored reaches of the wilderness. Instead, it was more economically prudent to save the purchase price money and focus on internal economic development. His opposition to slavery was also economically based. Although he personally opposed the morality of slavery he couched his opposition as stemming from the type of "labor"

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<sup>35</sup> *Balance and Columbian Repository* as it appeared in the *Alexandria Advertiser* September 29, 1803.

slaves produced; it would simply be unsuitable to the cultivation of the Louisiana territory.

Although the slavery issue would be central to the expansionist debate in the coming years it was unusual for the two to be intertwined in 1803. “Calculator” was ahead of his time in this aspect and while the purchase would ultimately go through, his reasons for opposition would continue to be echoed by future writers in the American press.

The *Courant* from Connecticut published letters from “Citizen” who agreed with “Calculator” and saw the occupation of Louisiana as a misstep. “Citizen”, quite astutely, warned his fellow countrymen that Louisiana was not the empty bountiful land expansionists promised. Instead the territory “is to be a field of blood before it is a cultivated field” and must be won from “natives of the soil, a numerous race who never injured us, and never will ‘till encroached upon.” He was confident that these first inhabitants “must be driven out” before true cultivation could begin. In addition once the region was properly pacified slave labor would be brought in. These unfortunates “must be violently brought in to toil and bleed under the lath.” Although it was evident that “Citizen” was against the purchase, he still exhibited a sense of American exceptionalism as he was confident that the land would definitely be pacified and ultimately cultivated just through a means of questionable morality. For this editor morality trumped economic or political reasons to avoid occupying the Louisiana territory. He was also one of the very few authors who foresaw the bloodshed against Indians that would accompany expansion. His words, however, are not as pro-Indian as one may immediately suspect. While he certainly feels it morally wrong to go to war against them he see no way in which both Natives and Americans can peacefully co-exist. If the United States did take the territory then bloodshed would ensue and the Indians “must be driven out.” White Americans would undoubtedly be killed in the process and he wished to avoid any unnecessary American deaths. He had already



witnessed how Americans had slaughtered the Indians of the Northeast and assumed that co-existence was simply a pipe dream. The only recourse was to avoid settling the region altogether. His writings and foresight were far more realistic than the majority of his contemporaries.<sup>36</sup>

The editor of the *Trenton Federalist* feared the recent acquisition would negatively impact the political representation and economies of the mid-Atlantic states. He lamented that fifteen million dollars was far too much money “for nothing” and that for New Jersey and other Atlantic states it was “worse than nothing.” The territory would undoubtedly “be but a drain for the men and money of our country, ruinous to our agriculture, commerce and manufactures.” The editor argued that the United States was being manipulated by special interests, especially those residing in the “West.” This new territory would be “injurious” to New Jersey and insisted that if the acquisition was “so important to the western people, they ought to pay for it themselves.” In truth, most citizens of the United States “do not want this immense country, for which they are to pay a price equal to one-fifth part of the whole national debt.” The current boundaries were already problematic as the federal government still had to contend with “expensive Indian wars.” Adding Louisiana would only compound the problem. He warned his readers that they must never forget that the acquisition of the Louisiana territory will “drain from you the vital fluids of your political and social advantages.” Although the *Federalist* was a partisan paper, the editor refrained from making any direct attacks on Jefferson and limited this particular article on just the effect Louisiana would have on the editor’s beloved home state. His words illustrate the point that many Americans opposed the idea of expansion for a variety of reasons. Moral repugnance, economic productivity or national security were just some of several

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<sup>36</sup> Connecticut *Courant* August 24, 1803; Victor Adolfo Arriaga Weiss “Domestic Opposition to the Louisiana Purchase: Anti-Expansionism and Republican Thought” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1993.

anti-expansionist cries. Just as important, at least to the editor of the *Trenton Federalist*, was the growing political power of the West. If expansion was not curtailed, older States like New Jersey would suffer and lose their political clout. The debate among the American press continued to rage.<sup>37</sup>

Of course such caustic anti-expansionism raised the ire of some pro-expansionists. Appearing in both the *National Intelligencer* and *Raleigh Register*, the writer “Curtius, felt it necessary to attack any anti-expansionist writing head on. When the editor of the *Courant*, from Connecticut, rhetorically queried “We are to pay fifteen millions of dollars for bogs, mountains and Indians” “Curtius” called the statement a “shameless falsehood.” Instead he was more inclined to repeat the words of a Mr. White who claimed that Louisiana “was surpassed by no portion of the world in fertility of the soil and, most of it, in climate, a paradise.” The author also sought to criticize his contemporary “Fabricius.” He quoted the latter as claiming that “we thought the French influence had gone to sleep, eternal sleep, but the purchase of Louisiana will awaken the devil from his cell.” In contrast “Curtius” saw the deal as a way to prevent bloodshed and wondered that “perhaps Fabricius means that it is the purchase by pacific means that has this magical power of conjuring up devils, and that war, that acquisition by conquest, is the only lullaby to their infernal and grisly majesties.” In each of his rebuttals he claimed the anti-expansionists to all be federalists with a penchant for “inconsistencies” and “falsehoods.”<sup>38</sup>

Just as some authors like “Curtius” sought to mock and simply dismiss any opposition to expansion, others like “Columbus” and Franklin” made a concentrated and exhaustive effort to educate their readers on the wonders of expansion. The writings of “Columbus” began

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<sup>37</sup> *Trenton Federalist* as it appeared in the *Raleigh Register* October 3, 1803.

<sup>38</sup> *National Intelligencer* September 12, 1803; *National Intelligencer* September 9, 1803; *Raleigh Register* October 3, 1803.

appearing in the Philadelphia *Aurora* and *National Intelligencer* in July of 1803. The name itself was intended to evoke the discovery of new and wonderful lands and the author's arguments did the same. "Columbus," in a series of different articles, attempted to explain the importance of the territory to the economic development of the United States. He steered clear of any moral issue connected with expanding and instead focused on the economics of the cession. His first article detailed the effect Louisiana would have on the American seaports located on the East Coast. The author repeated the claim that Louisiana had much in common with the old world and New Orleans can be considered a "modern Alexandria" since it lies at "the mouth of our American Nile." Thus, right away "Columbus" has connected with his readers that he is a trusted source regarding geography and just as the Nile brings productivity to Egypt so too shall the Mississippi work for the United States. Maintaining this valuable port city will be integral to American prosperity. He argued that American shipping "between our gulf ports and those of the Atlantic states will appear, in the current year, to be a great and highly valuable branch of our trade." Encouraging such trade was critical to the success of the burgeoning nation which was still attempting to solidify its place economically and politically in the world. A bustling port such as New Orleans would bolster the idea that the United States was a growing economic power. "Columbus" predicted that New Orleans would ultimately become "very far superior to that of any other American port."<sup>39</sup>

The author also noted that the Louisiana territory itself would be a great economic boon. Much like Livingston, "Columbus", saw similarities between Louisiana and the West India Islands. Both claimed the two regions were capable of producing a vast array of crops but since the United States lacked a similar region the acquisition was an unmitigated success. He claimed

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<sup>39</sup> From the *Aurora* as it appeared in the *National Intelligencer* July 25, 1803.

the territory was capable of producing “sugar, coffee, cocoa, ginger, pimento, molasses, cane sugar, sprits or rum...and in general most of the precious articles of produce” attributed to the West India Islands. He also criticized the notion that the territory needed years of settlement before it would be capable of mass cultivation. Instead, thanks to the efforts of previous settlers, all of American or European stock, the land “will be able immediately to produce large quantities of the articles mentioned.” These “Louisiana plantations” would also help stimulate other businesses. Ship builders would see an increase in work as more goods would need to be produced as would mariners and sailors. Therefore the acquisition of this grand territory would help all Americans not just those adventurous enough to head west.<sup>40</sup>

“Columbus” also argued that the diplomatic way in which the territory was acquired should be applauded and postulated that the Jefferson administration was adamant about annexing the whole of Louisiana. He believed that “official correspondence will prove” that the government had implemented “zealous and unceasing endeavors to acquire everything that could be acquired in that quarter.” He derided those who would attack the purchase and wanted all of his readers to give “serious contemplation of the vast advantages, which will be derived to our ship-owners, mariners, merchants, fishermen, manufacturers and mechanics from their supplying and transporting to our ports in Louisiana...and the great benefits of receiving from thence all those articles which we are not allowed to bring away from the islands and colonies of the European nations.” This great cession then would not only help bolster the American economy by producing new goods and putting people to work, but it would allow the United States to become more self-sufficient.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

In August “Columbus” outlined the “advantages of the purchase of Louisiana in respect to our future exemption from foreign influence.” The author broke his argument up into several sections, each detailing a different rationale. The first dealt with the purchase price that was given to France, fifteen million dollars. He claimed that the territory was worth considerably more and the asking price was a “very good bargain.” “Columbus” insisted that both Spain and or Great Britain would gladly pay two or three times that amount for the territory just to deprive America of its bounty. Moreover, the acquisition of the territory will provide “relief at a critical time.” The author stated that Americans who were down on their luck could seek their fortune into the newly annexed wilderness. Doing so “will save many an honest man...rescue his credit from ruin and save his wife and child from poverty.” He envisioned that this land be used primarily for small independent farmers. So much acreage would prevent Americans from crowding the eastern states and he reasoned that economic opportunity awaited any who sought it in the Louisiana territory. He also included a bizarre allegory warning of the dangers of speaking too highly of the province. He warned that although the territory was of great value, Americans should have kept quiet about its worth during negotiations. He claimed that if a family was attempting to purchase land from a “very powerful and gracious neighbor” the sons, who would get such land, should refrain from “the most extravagant suggestions of the enormous value of the farm and of the absolute necessity...to obtain it at any price.” He feared that such actions may have resulted in the Americans paying more for the territory than they had to even though what they paid was “well worth the stipulated price.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid; His advice to tone down the exuberant descriptions of a region the United States sought would be completely and utterly disregarded throughout the nineteenth century.

“Columbus” also explained how the recent acquisition could help keep the United States out of future wars. He argued that although Europe was aflame fighting in the Napoleonic wars, the United States had acquired territory safely and without the need for bloodshed. He mused that had any European nation taken the territory the war would have quickly engulfed North America. He feared that foreign agents “wished to beguile or drive us into a seizure of Louisiana to produce war between us and France.” Most worrisome would be in the event that France refused to bargain the British could easily “with their present navy could make a successful expedition and secure it themselves.” For most patriotic Americans this would be calamitous, as the only thing worse than having Louisiana remain in French hands would it to fall under those dastardly monarchists. He pointed to Great Britain’s stranglehold on the St. Lawrence River “which is shut to us with the utmost severity” as proof of their ill will toward the United States. Instead, he confidently boasted the United States acquired “Louisiana without...one drop of human blood.” It would go down in history as a “glorious victory” and a “blessed mode of acquisition of a country so intrinsically valuable, so intimately connected with our prosperity, our union, and our peace.” It is implied that the Louisiana territory and especially the port of New Orleans were essential to American interests and would have been acquired through any means. Thanks to the sale, bloodshed was avoided but had Napoleon been more stubborn the results could have been much grimmer. It is also very significant that “Columbus” equated the acquisition with preserving “our union.” For him and many other Americans, expansion was necessary to keep the population in the east from becoming too crowded. With so much available land ready for cultivation, fewer disputes would break out, or so he hoped and surmised.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> From the *Aurora* as it appeared in the *National Intelligencer* August 26, 1803.

“Columbus” was also confident that the annexation of the Louisiana Territory benefited others beside Americans. Since the United States now possessed the river it so fervently wanted, North America was safe from bloodshed. In addition those that lived within the territory would now be welcomed as fellow Americans and their lifestyles improved. “ Every Louisianan rejoices that he is become the citizen of a country which protects his religion, secures his person and property, affords him the benefit of a cheap supply of every necessity and opens the door of a free commerce, fostered by public officials of his own choice.” The author wanted to make it evident that “all are benefitted” through American expansion. He remarked that only the “friends of war and confusion” are upset over the glorious acquisition of the Louisiana Territory.<sup>44</sup>

By the end of October of 1803 “Columbus” was anxious to see the success of Louisiana repeated. He warned that the populations of Europe could already be considered “as in a state of fullness” and that they would have no choice but to reject the Old World and embrace the “temptations of the new.” It was just a matter of time until European interlopers began to arrive in the western recesses of North America. If such a situation occurs, the United States will once again be under threat from European domination. He also feared that these settlers could set up their own independent nation and in conjunction with their “European parent, a dangerous foreign enemy.” He predicted that such new nations may take shape near the “Gulph of Mexico” and the “Pacific Ocean.” “Columbus” stated that similar problems could have affected the Louisiana Territory and that it was “surely more than well, that we have acquired it.” He urged then, that Americans settle strategic parts of the Louisiana Territory such as on both sides of the Mississippi River and the “south end of the Gulph of Mexico.” Once accomplished these

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

communities should petition to become States. With the Louisiana Territory settled it would be easy to continue to push westward and preempt any European “interference.” While “Columbus” made no specific mention of an American empire or “inevitable” march to the Pacific, he did make it clear that it was in America’s best interest to settle the acquired territory quickly. For “Columbus” it was hard to find fault with the purchase. The deal ultimately saved American lives, prevented any future conflict regarding the territory, relieved population pressure and bolstered the American economy. Jefferson’s “to Conquer without War” stratagem was paying off handsomely.<sup>45</sup>

Another frequent contributor to the *National Intelligencer* went by the pen name “Franklin.” Adopting a name every American would be familiar with, “Franklin” carefully examined the important questions that surrounded the Louisiana Purchase in a series editorials. His letters all followed a similar format as he would first pose a commonly asked question then offer a reasoned response. In early October of 1803, “Franklin” tackled the question of whether or not the executive branch was compelled to act. The author reiterated the idea that the vast majority of Americans, including members of Congress, wanted to acquire New Orleans. The manner over how this task was to be completed was fiercely debated. “Franklin” reprinted several congressional resolutions regarding New Orleans. He claimed that Congress entertained the idea of seizing New Orleans by force but that “after mature deliberations these resolutions were rejected by great majorities.” Since Congress has the definitive authority over whether or not the United States shall go to War, Jefferson was forced to acquire New Orleans by alternative means. Thus the President “being forbidden to resort to war” saw his “only remaining resource

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<sup>45</sup> From the *Aurora* as it appeared in the *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser* October 29, 1803.



was negotiation.” Ultimately, “Franklin” concluded that Jefferson’s purchase was made in good faith and did not break any Congressional resolutions.<sup>46</sup>

“Franklin” also commented on the justness of the Louisiana Purchase and the importance of public opinion. He argued that the American public saw the acquisition of the territory as a “favorable issue” and hoped that such political interest would continue. “However dangerous or delusive it may be to be guided by public opinion in nations that are extremely depressed and ignorant, it will in general be both safe and desirable to be governed by it, when the people are well informed.” This statement is crucial to understanding the strength and weakness of the American system. On the one hand, the public can be a mob, incapable of rational thought and very “dangerous.” If the people are “well informed”, however, nothing is more important or more democratic than being guided by public opinion. Nineteenth century journalism then was paramount to keeping the public informed and disseminating information to the masses. Central to this, were editorials written by concerned citizens like “Franklin” who sought to educate his fellow countrymen.<sup>47</sup>

Once “Franklin” set up the importance of staying well informed he turned his attention back over to the Louisiana Territory. He argued that the main point of desire for most Americans was to have access to the Mississippi River and sell goods in New Orleans. He entertained the notion that this could be achieved simply by a diplomatic guarantee from the controlling nation but that such an agreement would never be accepted by the American public. The problem was that such a promise could be arbitrarily broken and the “security of our rights” jeopardized. Worse still European nations have a “constant tendency to depress the price of

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<sup>46</sup> *National Intelligencer* October 3, 1803.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

produce and discourage the spirit of adventure.” Thus the true potential of the territory would never be seen if under European domination. With an economic understanding out of the question only two possible scenarios remained; negotiation or seizing the territory by force. Although “Franklin” was confident that the latter could be achieved, he questioned the shrewdness of such an action. Not only would seizing the territory cause an acrimonious relationship with France it would be necessary to garrison the region with an abundance of troops to safeguard against any counterattack. Such a policy could result in much bloodshed and economic cost. The only just and acceptable course of action then was to purchase the territory in a diplomatic agreement. “Franklin” argued that President Jefferson was wise in his actions and praised the agreement since it forestalled any violence or economic calamity.<sup>48</sup>

“Franklin” was also interested in making the case that it was wise to extend the purchase to all of the Louisiana territory “instead of confining it to just New Orleans.” The author stated simply and correctly that had New Orleans been the only objective the “western bank of the Mississippi” would have been occupied by France or another European power. This would result in both the United States and whoever controlled the rest of Louisiana to build up their military forces in the region. He claimed that sparks would inevitably occur with the end result being “frequent war.” The author declined to portray the horrific “moral effects” such a war would have but instead focused on “pecuniary effects.” He concluded that defense would cost around \$30 million which only included mobilization and augmentation of existing forces. More troubling would be the loss of labor as new soldiers would need to be pulled from the populace and “withdrawn from the plough or workshop.” “Franklin” also estimated that such wars would last for around five years and insisted that such postulation was a “moderate calculation, when

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

we consider the common length of wars.” Total cost of the conflict would hover around \$150 million, a catastrophic sum for a conflict that could be avoided.<sup>49</sup>

These flare-ups would consume not only the United States but other European powers. He claimed the Louisiana was to be a major source of strife and contention thanks to its soil and climate and in all probability France and England would come to blows over who would hold the territory. This could be a major cause for concern as either England or France would be stricter and less likely to acquiesce to American interests since they were not “as feeble as Spain.” “Franklin” feared that it was likely that the European powers may attempt to blockade the Mississippi River which would adversely affect the United States even if they were not involved in the conflict. Thus:

It is therefore most evident that the possession of New Orleans alone would not have secured our commercial rights without a constant recurrence to large military arrangements, and most probable that their vindication would have occasioned the incalculable evils of war. Can any rational being then hesitate to acknowledge that the possession of the Mississippi is gained, and by which every source of commercial rivalry and hostility is cut off, is an event of the greatest importance, and one which will be productive of the greatest benefits.

Possession of all of Louisiana then benefited not just the United States but also the major powers of Europe who would not be tempted to fight for control of the region if it were completely controlled by Americans.<sup>50</sup>

Also of great interest to “Franklin” and other Americans was the fifteen million dollar price tag attached to the Louisiana Territory. His next article wondered if the “sum paid [was] too great.” He took stock of what the United States had acquired since they took control of the region. He was pleased to announce that “we have prevented war for the present” and by

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<sup>49</sup> *National Intelligencer* October 5, 1803.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

holding territory beyond just New Orleans “removed the occasion of war.” The author was confident that the territory would be home to some “very extensive trade” and that the United States “gained a territory of at least 200 millions, and probably 400 millions of acres.” The last point reveals the most interesting feature of the purchase. The staunchest proponents were unsure how much territory was actually included in the deal. Even “Franklin” who took great pride in carefully analyzing each aspect of the purchase had a two hundred million acre margin of error. These nebulous boundaries from the Louisiana Purchase would contribute to American expansion for the next fifty years. Proponents would continually claim that a territory, first Florida, then Texas, then Oregon, were originally annexed to the United States in 1803 in some form. For now, however, “Franklin” was interested in merely justifying the price paid. Before going into greater detail he hoped his readers would appreciate his “outlines, leaving it to the understanding of the intelligent citizens to fill them up.” Once again the author calls upon the virtuous citizenry to guide the United States. American expansion was an important topic that concerned not just the government but society as a whole. Nor was expansion an inevitable conclusion. Instead, authors had to convince others of the necessity or lack thereof to expanding. This was a matter that deserved every citizen’s attention so that they could intelligently contribute to the discussion that raged amidst American newspapers.<sup>51</sup>

“Franklin” referred to his earlier article and remarked upon the great amount of money the United States saved since they did not go to war. By his estimates the savings easily dwarfed the paltry fifteen million owed to France. He also commented on the immense potential the province held for American traders. “The present trade of the Mississippi is great; its future trade is destined to be immense.” He was confident that once some infrastructure was

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<sup>51</sup> *National Intelligencer* October 10, 1803.

established more Americans would settle in the area bolstering the economy even further. Ultimately, “when this great eventual value is considered, and the immediate sacrifices of treasure avoided by escaping the experience of war, can it admit of a doubt that the government have made a good bargain.”<sup>52</sup>

“Franklin’s” next editorial addressed the effect the Louisiana territory would have on the economic value of the “western lands” and on its effect on the Union as a whole. The author admitted that unrestricted sale of land in Louisiana could be a problem for the well-being of the western provinces, but he was confident that the government would set up an office to prevent any abuses. This was immaterial, however, as one point overshadowed all others. Louisiana, were it not possessed by the United States would be owned by some other powerful nation. This nation would be “anxious” to entice rapid settlement “either from the low price of land or from the cession of particular commercial privileges.” These new emigrants would most likely be enterprising Americans, with many of them hailing from the western lands. Thus the economic potential of the territory would be realized by Americans, but the fruits of their labor going to some foreign power. The western lands would suffer if the United States did not acquire the Louisiana Territory. With the United States in possession of the coveted lands, however, economic opportunities abounded for Americans. “Franklin” argued that the increase in trade would actually benefit all parts of the nation. The current situation then keeps enterprising and adventurous Americans within the United States and the “purchase, far from depressing, will elevate the value of our western lands.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> *National Intelligencer* October 14, 1803.

The final inquiry was “whether the cession of Louisiana will endanger the Union.” The author “confidently affirmed that the cession of Louisiana will not endanger the union” but will instead serve to “cement and strengthen it.” He reiterated the idea that if a foreign power still maintained the territory the United States would be under immediate threat of conflict and that reason alone made the purchase a boon for the Union. Had the United States not purchased the territory, he saw two likely but ultimately disastrous scenarios. One would see the outbreak of the often mentioned war to seize the territory. This would cost both tremendous amounts of money and bloodshed. The second scenario promised an “*unauthorized* seizure of Louisiana by our western citizens.” This would have been “an evil of awful magnitude” as such an action would have undermined the federal government and been synonymous with “rebellion.” This point highlights the complicated nature of American expansion. For “Franklin” the federal government should be the main instrument for expansion. This would stand in stark contrast to the later writings of men like John O’Sullivan who felt expansion should be carried out by settlers without governmental interference. Nineteenth-century American expansion followed no easily understood pattern and certainly saw no consensus, even among fellow expansionists.<sup>54</sup>

“Franklin” also commented on the oft cited concern that expanding territory was detrimental to a republican society. He admitted that a “democracy, strictly speaking, must be limited in extent to a small territory,” for if it were too vast, the citizenry could not adequately communicate or govern justly. “Franklin” however, reminded readers that the United States had a representative form of government that was free from such expansionist restrictions. The United States was composed of a “federal head deriving its powers equally from every portion of the Union.” The acquisition of more territory would just expand the amount of representatives

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

and in no way cause a rift in the system itself. “Franklin” was also hopeful that the creation of several new states would help decrease the power of larger states. By having more states represented the authority of any one would be diminished and force others to come to more frequent compromises, or so he hoped. Thus by adding new voting members of congress the lands that would arise out of the Louisiana Purchase would actually strengthen the Union.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps most illuminating was what “Franklin” neglected to mention. Unlike his anti-expansionist contemporaries, “Calculator” and “Citizen”, this author ignored slavery. The rift that would ultimately cause the greatest bloodletting in American history was not important enough for him to warrant discussion. “Franklin” closely examined nearly every aspect of the purchase yet still failed to discuss the one that would demonstrate most dire. Instead, he chose to see the extension of territory only as an unmitigated good. “Franklin” was not alone in his oversight. For the vast majority of Americans expansion had not yet been inextricably linked to slavery. For the time being, however, expansion into the Louisiana Territory was a fait accompli. Some Americans supported it, others denounced it but all were forced to accept it. Many Americans were anxious to see how this drama would unfold. Would it meet the expansionist’s predictions of a heaven on earth or would it more resemble the anti-expansionists fear of a territory that would tear the very fabric of the American union?

For most Americans the deal was too good to resist and newspapers became flooded with praise regarding the recent acquisition. The *Political Observatory* from New Hampshire toasted the purchase claiming “This monument of wisdom, prudence, and negotiation, shall survive the proudest pyramid of the conquering despots.” Charleston’s *City Gazette* called the cession a “great event” and ran an ad selling tickets to a dinner in celebration of the Louisiana Purchase for

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

the astronomical fee of seven dollars. Tickets were available to any “citizen” who sought to celebrate such a grand achievement.<sup>56</sup>

Enthusiasm for the purchase often manifested itself in song lyrics or short poems. The *Vermont Gazette* printed a poem entitled “the sketch of the times.” The poet announced that:

To purchase New Orleans a debt we create  
Of important amount for a juvenile state,  
Yet our national debt felt a rapid decrease  
And our natives all smoke the calumet of peace...  
...The riches of Louisiana our own,  
Its price not a life, not a wound, not a groan

Although much of the rest of the poem was critical of Jefferson, the territorial expansion escaped any scathing criticism. Even the staunchest opponent of Jefferson or anti-expansionist had to applaud the diplomatic solution. The *Suffolk Gazette* was even more direct in its praise in its printing of the poem “War.”

Behold the treasur'd land his wisdom gain'd  
No conquest gor'd it, and no battle stain'd  
No heaps of dead, no scenes of dire despair  
No widow's tears, no wailing orphans there  
No slaughter'd thousands gasping on its plains  
Nor blazing towns, no captive slaves in chains  
A noble conquest, fame shall long record  
Bought without blood and gain'd without a sword!

Both poems make it clear that the greatest characteristic of the Louisiana Purchase was the bloodless manner in which it was obtained. The relative ease with which so large a piece of territory was gained merely whetted the appetite of many Americans. The size of the country nearly doubled and it didn't cost a single American their life. This was truly a remarkable achievement. The dire predictions of the anti-expansionists failed to materialize immediately and unrestricted expansion continued to entice devotees. Anti-expansionists, however, did not

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<sup>56</sup> *Political Observatory* May 5, 1804; *City Gazette* May 8, 1804.



remain silent. While this round would be considered an expansionist victory, the debate was not over.<sup>57</sup>

Ultimately, the Louisiana Purchase became an accepted and lauded diplomatic achievement. Jefferson had effectively doubled the size of the burgeoning republic and kept the United States out of a war. At the time, however, fierce debate surrounded the acquisition. No real consensus developed for either pro or anti expansionists. Some Americans opposed the cession for moral reasons, others feared expansion was incompatible with the American political system. Pro-expansionists were just as divided, some focused upon the economic opportunity available while others were more concerned with national security. The bickering and intense debate that erupted in relation to Louisiana would not be an isolated incident. Americans throughout the first half of the nineteenth century were not all comfortable with expansion. The debate would continue.

Although the acquisition of the Louisiana Territory was an unmitigated expansionist victory, it was only half of what Jefferson desired. His orders to Livingston and Monroe were to secure New Orleans and West Florida, as he considered both of them vital to American interests. Securing West Florida would prove trickier. Justifications for the American occupation of West Florida surfaced soon after news of the Louisiana Purchase. The *Richmond Enquirer* published a lengthy editorial that explained how the United States had claim to West Florida. The editor proclaimed that prior treaties between Spain and France never accurately stipulated that Florida was broken into two parts, East and West. Since this had never been clarified, West Florida would cease to be a Spanish territory. While Spain claimed the western boundary of Louisiana

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<sup>57</sup> *Vermont Gazette* January 24, 1804; *Suffolk Gazette* August 25, 1806; The *Suffolk Gazette* had two footnotes denoting “treasur’d land” to be Louisiana and “his wisdom gain’d” to be Jefferson.

to be the Mississippi River, this editor and other likeminded expansionists claimed the Perdido River as “the true line of demarcation between the American territory of Louisiana and the Spanish province of Florida.” Staking claim to the latter enabled the Americans to argue that the port of Mobile, safely within West Florida, was actually part of the Louisiana Purchase. This sliver of justification would lead the United States into their next territorial acquisition, the Spanish Floridas. This endeavor would also be fiercely debated and contested in the public forum and to the chagrin of many Americans, considerably bloodier.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Richmond Enquirer* as it appeared in the *Alexandria Advertiser* September 24, 1804.

## **Chapter 2 - “To Conquer without War”:**

### **The Acquisition of the Floridas**

For Jefferson and other economic minded-expansionists, the only area more important than New Orleans was the Spanish held Floridas. With the Louisiana territory safely in American hands their attention turned to the rest of the gulf coast. The Spanish broke the territory up into two distinct parts East Florida and West Florida. Both provinces fell under their neglectful eye and many Americans were convinced they would make an excellent addition to the burgeoning Republic. Since the vast majority of Americans saw Spain to be a weak and ineffectual overseer, some hoped that Florida could serve as another example of Jefferson’s “conquest without war” policy. Justifications for this land grab were diverse. Some felt the territory was necessary to safeguard American access to the Gulf of Mexico and take advantage of the ports located there. Others saw national security to be a stronger motive than economic prosperity and sought the territory to curtail Native American raids emanating from Florida. Of particular interest were those Americans who maintained that the United States had no justifiable claim to the area and felt the various acquisition attempts to be of a dubious morality.

At first independent rebellions and filibuster expeditions attempted to wrench the territory free without the use of the federal government. When such covert means failed to deliver the territory, outright aggression was employed. When both the Patriot War and Jackson’s invasion also failed to secure the province, a diplomatic compromise between Spain and the United States would be made. All of these machinations were closely watched by the

American public and hotly contested among American newspapers. The “destiny” of Florida was not a foregone conclusion.

By 1795 justifications for the annexation of East and West Florida had already begun. The *New Bedford Marine Journal* printed an excerpt of a letter from a “Gentlemen in the state of Georgia” commenting on the political disposition of Floridians. The letter stated that information gleaned from a reliable source from St Augustine claimed that “the inhabitants of East Florida in general, and a large majority of those of West Florida, are disposed to revolt,” and eager to link up with any American forces that come into the area. The source further noted that the Spanish troops at St. Augustine were in a “starving condition” and that desertions occurred daily. Publication of such a letter was almost begging for adventurous Americans to seize the moment and help bring Florida into the expanding nation. It was clear to any reader that the Spanish were incapable of properly caring for the territory and that its citizens have had enough. While no great filibuster army marched to Florida in response to this letter; the idea that Florida was chafing under Spanish neglect persisted among the American public.<sup>59</sup>

American traders and merchants frequented the profitable Gulf Coast and inducements from the Spanish crown encouraging further settlement to Florida also brought about American immigration. In 1804 the Spanish realized these new settlers were not assimilating and attempted to curb American immigration by closing the border. By, then, however the damage had already been done; Americans living in East and West Florida harbored dreams of living within the newly created Republic.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *New Bedford Marine Journal*, August 7, 1795.

<sup>60</sup> Frank Owsley and Gene Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800-1821* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 65-68.

To make matters even worse for the Spanish, West Florida was seen by some Americans to be a part of the Louisiana Purchase. The boundaries of Florida, much like everything else near the Louisiana Territory, were nebulous at best. The territory of West Florida was a small tract of land along the Gulf Coast that included pieces of Florida, Alabama and Louisiana. Expansionists argued that the ports in Mobile, Apalachicola and Baton Rouge were vital to American shipping and needed to be secured just as much as the venerable New Orleans. They also maintained that such ports were intended to be included in the Purchase and thus should be swiftly occupied and annexed by the United States.<sup>61</sup>

Although some Americans supported annexation it was not universally accepted. The *Balance and Columbian Repository* printed a long editorial that questioned the validity of purchasing either the Louisiana Territory or Florida. The editorial claimed that such a purchase was unwise in the short term as the number of citizens needed to cultivate such an enlarged area would take many years. It further stipulated that the cost of defending and maintaining such a vast expanse of territory would shortly become “a very considerable amount.” The writer acknowledged that proponents for expansion felt that West Florida “would be important, not as a territory for cultivation, but as being necessary for the security, peace and prosperity of the western country.” In reality, however, “as clear as a sunbeam... an enlargement of this nation’s territory, especially in the western direction ... would be injurious rather than beneficial to its general interests.” His fear stemmed from the idea that more territory would create a longer national border. Such a border would require troops for defense and the costs for maintaining such protection would be astronomical. This editor was focusing on a European mindset.

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<sup>61</sup> *Balance and Columbian Repository*, September 27, 1803; Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*, 61-63; James Cusick, *The Other War of 1812: The Patriot War and the American Invasion of Spanish East Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 2-3.

Europe was nearly always in some state of warfare and a large border would be dangerous. The benefits of more land were overshadowed by his deep seated fear that a larger border would merely make it easier for enemies to cross and ravage American soil.<sup>62</sup>

Not all publications were as serious in tone as the *Columbian Repository*. By 1806 some Americans were beginning to have buyer's remorse over Louisiana and questioned the "inevitability" of acquiring Florida. The *Newburyport Herald* printed several toasts used to commemorate the Fourth of July. The most illuminating, toasted "Two Million" and hoped that "this little sum be given to France to induce her to compel Spain to sell us the Floridas; and when bought, may they be given to France to induce her to take Louisiana off our hands; and if this will satisfy her, may heaven be praised." The *Ostego Herald* printed a poem to celebrate the New Year.

Louisiana has been bought sir  
Whether it is good or not sir  
Florida may come this year  
Should not Bona interfere

Although satirical in tone, it is clear that not all Americans were satisfied with unbridled expansion. Going into debt for a vast tract of uncultivated land did not sit well with many Americans. The expense incurred from acquiring a perceived swampland such as Florida was also to be questioned. Greater still was the nebulous border to Florida which could result in the United States going to war with Bonaparte's France, Spain or Great Britain. Many Americans also saw the Florida and Louisiana territory's as inseparable. One or the other would not do as both were needed for maximum security purposes. Some Americans reasoned the United States would be safer with neither or both, no middle choice was acceptable. Since Louisiana was

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<sup>62</sup> *Balance and Columbian Repository*, September 27, 1803.

already under American control it was then necessary, for purposes of security, to obtain the Floridas. Such an acquisition would be expensive, however, either monetarily or through bloodshed. Many Americans debated on the cost and whether or not it would be worth the price. This domestic opposition to expansion would prolong Florida's admittance into the Union.<sup>63</sup>

American immigration to and federal interest in West Florida compelled the Spanish governor of the area to open negotiations with the United States. He was willing to talk for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the Spanish grasp on the gulf area was tenuous at best and the increase of American settlers to the area ramped up protests against the Spanish. The *Maryland Gazette* printed a letter from June of 1810 that claimed the inhabitants of West Florida, specifically Baton Rouge "have come to a determination to declare themselves independent."<sup>64</sup>

This declaration was confirmed in September of 1810 when Baton Rouge was seized by American citizens who promptly declared the area independent from Spain and asked to join the American Union. A few months later excerpts from the "revolutionary Convention of West Florida" began appearing in Boston and Washington D.C. papers. The revolutionaries contacted the Governor of Mississippi who was expected to pass on their request to President Madison. They hoped that the newly-created commonwealth would be "immediately acknowledged and protected by the government of the United States as an integral part of the American Union." They also stated that they were in a weak defensive position and warned that if their request were denied "they would be forced to look to some foreign government for support." Such a declaration was exceedingly shrewd. The petition was sent to not only important government officials but also to prominent newspapers. Many American citizens would be outraged if the

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<sup>63</sup> *Newburyport Herald*, July 18, 1806; *Ostego Herald*, January 29, 1807.

<sup>64</sup> The Spanish governor at this time was Vincente Folch who understood his country's precarious position and was apt to negotiate. Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*, 64-67; *Maryland Gazette* August 1, 1810.

government refused to protect these intrepid countrymen. Worse still was the thought that support may come from a foreign government. Thus the only way to protect American interests and remain free of troublesome European neighbors was to have the federal government intervene.<sup>65</sup>

The *New York Spectator* reprinted a letter from a concerned citizen “Apollo.” The man with the deity-like namesake recommended that residents of West Florida raise the American flag at “three nearly uninhabited” parts of the territory. He was confident that doing so “will secure to the United States titles to the land, it will strengthen our proclamations, and will eventually drive the Spanish out of West Florida.” Exactly how flying flags in uninhabited places would scare the Spanish is unknown but it was clear that Americans from across the country were invested and interested in the drama that was unfolding along the gulf coast.<sup>66</sup>

Debate over the proclamation and what sort of stance President Madison should take resulted in some note-worthy conclusions. Some Americans initially sided with the filibusters. An excerpt of a letter from a Mississippian appeared in several papers which lambasted Spanish misrule of the region He claimed the Spanish were entirely “disorganized” and that the political state of affairs was “anarchy.” Such neglect was no way to treat such a potentially advantageous territory and it justified American attempts to take over. The author also argued that the majority of inhabitants in West Florida were Americans “who are extremely anxious to come under the government of the United States.” This particular point is how many expansionists justified the acquisition. It was not conquest if the inhabitants willed the union. While European style invasion was an unacceptable, the events unfolding in Florida were nobler. Intrepid settlers

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<sup>65</sup> *Repertory* December 12, 1810; *National Intelligencer* December 6, 1810.

<sup>66</sup> *New York Spectator* March 2, 1811; Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*, 64-67



languishing under neglect wished only to be under American care and protection. The author was attempting to paint a picture where it would appear the United States had no choice but to intervene. It was also yet another example of legitimizing American expansion by portraying it as distinct from European styles of conquest.<sup>67</sup>

An editorial in the *Worcester Gazette* feared that the American citizens in West Florida were too scattered and disorganized to stay independent for long. Worse, the editor felt that many of the citizens were being manipulated by a handful of filibusters who were “avaricious and ambitious.” It was hoped that annexation to the United States would occur shortly and thus save the majority of the inhabitants and disappoint the greedy adventurers. For many Americans, annexation to the United States was a privilege that should only be granted to the most deserving. Notions such as spreading liberty, freedom and “democratic institutions” fit such criteria. Such notions had to be spread naturally by citizens who under good intentions settled in a region. Over time the settlers would realize that the current government was unsatisfactorily fulfilling their needs; then, and only then could American intervention be justified. Adventurers and filibusters were different. They were Americans who had never settled in the area and instead were only interested in personal glory and money. Many newspapers portrayed them as uncouth ruffians interested in plunder; such individuals did not meet the standards for justifiable and proper American expansion.<sup>68</sup>

The *Northern Centinel* also demanded swift action on the part of the United States. Quoting a recent speech delivered by a Mr. Pope revealed that endless debate was not the answer. Mr. Pope warned that “if we waste our time in discussion and defining abstract

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<sup>67</sup> *National Intelligencer*, August 3, 1810; also appeared in the *Columbian* from New York, *Washingtonian* from Vermont and the *New York Commercial Advertiser*.

<sup>68</sup> *Worcester Gazette* January 1, 1811.

questions of right and wrong we shall lose our independence and we shall deserve to lose it.” He lamented that the President and Congress were locked in constant bickering and demanded that there should be “less talk and more action.” In December of 1810 President Madison agreed with Mr. Pope’s assessment and accepted the request for recognition and annexation. He and Congress justified the acquisition of West Florida by claiming the territory was part of the Louisiana Purchase and he sent federal troops into the area to seal the deal. Jefferson’s promise of acquiring territory through the policy of “conquest without war” was proving to be prophetic.<sup>69</sup>

The swift and peaceful acquisition of West Florida resulted in both celebration and calls for concern. The *Washingtonian* referred to the territory as a “mighty boon” and celebrated the fact that it was acquired without bloodshed. The *New York Commercial Advertiser* agreed that West Florida was worth acquiring but noted that the introduction of American troops to the region could be worrisome as “God knows what will be the result.” The concern proved unwarranted in the case of West Florida, but would be an accurate forewarning in regards to East Florida. The *Richmond Enquirer*, soon after Independence Day 1811, printed several toasts, one of which toasted Florida and hoped its “peaceful accession to the Federal Union, prove a lasting barrier against the aggression of turbulent neighbors.”<sup>70</sup>

Of course not all Americans agreed that annexing West Florida was in the best interest of the United States, no matter the reason. The *Farmer’s Repository* from Virginia quoted a speech given by Representative John Randolph in regards to the Louisiana Purchase. The *Repository*

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<sup>69</sup> *Northern Centinel*, January 31, 1811, the same speech also appeared in the *Boston Patriot*; Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists* 67-68.

<sup>70</sup> *Washingtonian*, February 18, 1811; *New York Commercial Advertiser*, February 4, 1811; *Richmond Enquirer*, July 9, 1811; The *Enquirer* also printed a toast to another of America’s great barriers, newspapers. The reprint saluted the importance of the Press and hoped that “it never degenerate into licentiousness-never yield to the threats of power, nor become the engine of party spirit-may it ever be the scourge of tyrants and the shield of liberty.”

claimed the speech was both concise “and at the same time we believe a correct view of the subject.” Randolph explored the geographic location of the Floridas and concluded that they would not fall under the Louisiana Territory. He further argued that the extension of democratic institutions could prove detrimental to the Union. He feared that “we have already far exceeded the limit which visionary speculatists have supposed capable of free government...instead of acquiring we ought to divest ourselves of territory.” The Congressman pointed to the Republics of Greece and Switzerland as better examples of government due to their limited size. A smaller Republic allowed more citizens to participate and stay abreast of matters that were of concern to them. The danger with a large Republic would be that disparate regions would find no common ground and never be able to compromise. He postulated instead that the extra land could be put to better use as a dumping ground for “that brave and injured race of men,” Native Americans. The Congressman hit upon a notion that many Americans agreed with. Co-existing with Indians was unfathomable, but extermination as also morally repugnant. The swamps of Florida could be quite useful politically. Keeping Florida out of the Union would not only safeguard the American way of life but offer an attractive alternative to the Native question. Notions of American superiority were just as pronounced among anti-expansionists as they were among expansionists.<sup>71</sup>

Fear of the European powers was also a major reason for caution. The *Columbian Centinel* published a very detailed expose regarding West Florida and concluded that annexing the territory may bring about unwarranted attention. The editor warned that sending troops into the area was “not only a breach of neutrality but a highly dishonorable act.” More importantly, however, was the concern that the Spanish had a strong ally, Great Britain. Although the article

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<sup>71</sup> *Farmer's Repository*, February 8, 1811.

acknowledged that the United States did not seek an open declaration of war against the European nations, they feared “a war may be brought on by juggling.” He was not against the concept of expansion per se, like the above congressman, but he feared the reaction of foreign powers. The British, very different than the neglectful Spanish, could fight for Florida. That factor was cause for serious concern. There was simply no consensus on the best course of action. Even for those who opposed annexing Florida their opinions varied.<sup>72</sup>

Some Americans also took umbrage at the government’s role in the expansion. The *Repertory* published an article entitled “Plain and Positive proof that the United States have no claim to any part of West Florida” which left little doubt as to the author’s stance on the matter. The article began with a simple update for its readers claiming that Federal troops were ordered into a “country which does not belong to us.” The editor acknowledged claims that West Florida may fall under sway to a foreign government, but insisted that “whoever may claim the Floridas, it is certain we have no right in them.” The editor then proceeded to offer a long and detailed explanation as to what treaties Spain and France had together prior to the Louisiana Purchase. The article concluded that the Madisonian Administration “cannot produce the least shadow of claim to a single foot of West Florida” and must admit to the error. A similarly angry article appeared in the *Constitutionalist* which called the revolution in West Florida “Disgraceful and disgusting.” They claimed the so called filibusters were in reality “minions” serving at the behest of the federal government and even receiving monetary compensation for their service. They insisted the whole episode was reminiscent of a Napoleonic scheme and that American actions in West Florida were at best a “flagrant breach of the law of nations” or at worst “high treason.” Again the notion that the United States was better than Europe materialized, but in this

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<sup>72</sup> *Columbian Centinel*, December 15, 1810.

case among anti-expansionists. Rather than claiming American distinctness justified expansion, these writers argued that because the United States was better than Europe it should not engage in petty land grab schemes.<sup>73</sup>

Rhetoric against the annexation of West Florida took on a multitude of forms. Some questioned the morality of such expeditions, some on concern for the well-being of democratic institutions and still others feared for national security. Anti-expansionist Americans were just as divided over how to justify their opposition as they were toward expansion itself. Although the acquisition of West Florida went through; the unexpected and vocal opposition did not go completely unheeded.

For the time being, however, the results exceedingly pleased President Madison. West Florida was a perfect example of “conquest without war” and the Madison administration hoped East Florida would fall in a similarly bloodless way. In a secret session of Congress that met in January of 1811, the President authorized American troops under the command of a former General, George Mathews, to march into the Floridas. Madison defended the seizure of East Florida as a pre-emptive strike to prevent the territory from falling into the hands of any “foreign government.” Although the territory actually belonged to the Spanish, the major adversary in this land grab was the quintessential American boogeyman, the British. Madison and his administration were interested not only in securing the Gulf Coast for American interests but also as a way to keep Great Britain from possessing land adjacent to both the Northern and Southern border of the United States. Hiring Mathews and relying on mostly volunteer filibusters would

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<sup>73</sup> *The Repertory*, January 25, 1811; *Constitutionalist*, April 16, 1811.

allow the seizure to take place without any messy official invasion. This decision, however, would not sit well with many Americans.<sup>74</sup>

Mathew's orders were rather ambiguous and tasked the General with acquiring "all or any part" of East Florida. Mathews was expected to move if the local populace was willing to negotiate and asked for American protection or if the land was about to be seized by the aforementioned "foreign government." Mathews was no stranger to either war or leadership. He initially developed a name for himself during the American Revolution and served as Governor of Georgia. The close border to Florida as well as the opportunity to serve under a former governor also enticed many Georgians to join the expedition. Mathews also promised acreage to any who joined in on the filibuster crusade. In addition to monetary support, the United States also provided assistance in the form of a naval gunboat that would provide artillery fire for the expedition. Lastly the details of such an undertaking were supposed to be kept under wraps and the session of congress that authorized the action was not immediately publicized in newspapers, though it would eventually be leaked.<sup>75</sup>

The entire episode was exceedingly complex and convoluted. Technically the "patriots" were not American military personal and were not fighting under American orders. They were an independent group dedicated to freeing East Florida from Spanish tyranny and bring them into the American Union. Mathews, though in command of them, was officially working for the federal government. The incursion into East Florida became known as the "Patriots War." Mathews and the filibusters styled themselves such because they felt they felt they were bringing liberty and freedom to those in Florida. The expedition itself turned out to be a military success

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<sup>74</sup>Julius Pratt, *Expansionists of 1812* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1925), 72-75.

<sup>75</sup> Cusick, *The Other War of 1812*, 3-10,30-35,70-76.

but a political fiasco. The “Patriots” ultimately captured Amelia Island and the town of Fernandino. Once in control of these territories, Mathews considered himself the victor and forced the local officials to cede control, under gunpoint, to him. Mathews then flew the American flag over the acquired territory and requested formal admittance into the United States. Emboldened by his success, Mathews and the “Patriots” then laid siege to St. Augustine. Unsurprisingly, however, the clandestine nature of the operation and dubious morality of such an expedition worried much of the American public. Once the public became aware of what exactly was going on in Florida there was significant backlash against the expedition. Coverage of the incursion was all over the political spectrum. Initially, the idea of an independent East Florida requesting to join the Union was applauded and justifications for why it would be beneficial were prevalent. As the expedition went on and information regarding the filibuster’s background became known this enthusiasm waned.<sup>76</sup>

Initially, details regarding the expedition were kept quiet and rumors were rampant. The most prevalent was the idea that if East Florida were to annex it would be through the efforts of Floridians. Since West Florida came in under similar pretenses it was assumed that the pattern would repeat itself in the rest of Florida. A toast that appeared in both the *Charleston City Gazette* and *Alexandria Herald* exemplified this sentiment. The toast praised the “Patriots of Florida” who “like our revolutionary forefathers have asserted those rights so dear and invaluable to mankind.-may success crown their struggle for freedom.” The concept expressed here that liberty and freedom was available to those who would seize it was a common theme in American newspapers at this time. It would appear again in American media coverage regarding independence movements in both Canada and South America. The United States was the best

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<sup>76</sup> Cusick, *The Other War of 1812*, xiv-xvi, 126-140

example of liberty, others merely needed to emulate America to succeed. Many expansionists fervently hoped and believed that both East and West Florida would be shortly welcomed into the ever expanding Union as official territories.<sup>77</sup>

The fact that American citizens resided in Florida helped justify more direct means of intervention. The *Alexandria Gazette* published a letter from a Floridian that was assessing the current situation. The writer hoped that Florida would soon come under the protection of the United States and that such a “measure will produce the most salutary result.” He claimed that although there were some hostile factions residing in the territory most inhabitants were law abiding and interested in the security and prosperity of both the United States and the Floridas. The writer ended by stating that the United States had an “obligation” to “attach Florida” just as it did in regards to the Louisiana Purchase. The *Richmond Enquirer* printed a letter that claimed that once the rebellion proved successful Floridians would “place themselves under the protection of the government of the U.S. which will secure to every man his religion, his liberty, and his property.” The key feature here though was that the rebels were inhabitants of the region. They had gone through the “proper” process needed so that annexation would be justifiable.<sup>78</sup>

Not only did some newspapers claim America had an “obligation” to annex the Floridas but some felt it was also the logical outcome of the situation. The *Essex Register* printed a verbose editorial that explained what was up for grabs and why it was critical the territory be annexed. The author carefully described where the Floridas were located geographically and

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<sup>77</sup> *Alexandria Herald* May 11, 1812; *City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, May 14, 1812. Both articles also included a toast dedicated to “the lamp of liberty-may it shed its benignant rays over the whole western hemisphere.”

<sup>78</sup> *Alexandria Gazette* March 2, 1812; *Richmond Enquirer* May 1, 1812.



grudgingly admitted that at present the territory belonged to Spain. He also argued that the British Empire may seize Florida to prevent it from falling into the hands of Napoleon. This would not be tolerated as “no third power” should be accepted in the Floridas. The author also provided an easy to understand parallel for any agrarian readers. He stipulated that if one was building a house and already possessed “thirteen acres in his own hands, and one acre, at the end, in the hands of another person” it was only natural “to make his parcel complete.” Since the United States owned all the acreage to the gulf it was logical to complete the parcel. Thus for this editor the “process” of proper expansionism was bolstered by American interest in the region.<sup>79</sup>

When news broke that the insurgents in East Florida were filibusters and not natives; enthusiasm and support for annexation dwindled. Newspaper coverage became increasingly critical of what was seen as an unabashed and unprovoked land grab. The noble idea that American expansion would result in the spreading of freedom and the bringing of liberty to the people took a backseat in the coverage regarding the expedition to East Florida. One particular letter appeared in newspapers across the country, including Charlestown, Alexandria, New York and Washington, and detailed a meeting between Spanish delegates and General Mathews. The author stated that the delegates found the General to be a genial person who was very courteous to his visitors. Upon being asked if the rebellion was made up of Floridians the General responded in the affirmative and denied that the United States was behind any such attack. He admitted, however, that he was under presidential authority to take control of the territory if asked by the local authorities. The delegation proceeded to inform “General Mathews that this was in fact an American invasion that the greatest part of the people in arms against us (native

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<sup>79</sup> *Essex Register* April 29, 1812.

Floridians) were Americans, brought over by a guarantee of 500 acres of land to each man.” The delegates then offered to negotiate with Mathews if such a charade ceased. The letter’s appearance in so many diverse newspapers lends credence to the fact that opinions regarding the acquisition of East Florida cannot be easily explained away by sectional or political differences. More importantly, however, it indicated that Madison’s plan of acquiring East Florida quietly and without a full blown incident was fading quickly.<sup>80</sup>

Many Americans now saw the “patriots” not as liberty-loving people but as uncouth ruffian filibusters only interested in making a buck. Another letter published in the *Northern Whig* and *Hampshire Federalist* proclaimed that the rebels (Patriots) were mostly made up of “American citizens of the lowest class” who threatened Native Floridians who didn’t support their cause to suffer a “general massacre.” The author then recounted the filibuster’s victory in securing Amelia Island and explained that many inhabitants surrendered as they feared the “ravages” of the rebels to be great. The author concluded that “never has there been an instance of one nation robbing another, under such a flimsy cloak as the American Government has robbed Spain.” He assured readers that “the inhabitants were not inclined to revolt” and suspected that were it not for the presence of an American gunboat the rebels would have been captured. Thus not only was the expedition being carried out by unsavory filibusters but they were not even up to the task of conquest without assistance from the American military. The entire expedition was a fiasco and Americans should be appalled at what was transpiring in Florida.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *Alexandria Gazette*, May 6, 1812; the same publication appeared in the *Charleston Courier*, *New York Commercial Advertiser*, *Washingtonian* and the *New York Spectator*.

<sup>81</sup> *Northern Whig*, May 4, 1812; *Hampshire Federalist*, May 7, 1812.

The *New York Evening Post*, *Washingtonian* and *New England Palladium* all reprinted a letter from a concerned citizen who also disagreed with the unprovoked assault. The author derided the expedition as being made up of “bandits” and felt the attack to be unwarranted. He too agreed that the filibusters were primarily motivated by money and only succeeded thanks to the efforts of the naval gunboats in the area. He declared that the affair was a stain on the “honor and integrity of the United States” and even argued that the Americans should “evacuate the province.” The author ended by stating that the “ruin that we have brought upon the unoffending inhabitants of that province must call down the curses of every man within the Union.” Faith in the American populace was still strong. Many anti-expansionists assumed that once word got out of the unwarranted attack on Spanish territory that most Americans would demand an end to hostilities. European style conquest was simply incompatible with American exceptionalism and would not be condoned, even if the reader sympathized with the benefits of expansionism.<sup>82</sup>

Some newspapers simultaneously derided the expedition and exonerated Madison for any wrongdoing. The *Alexandria Gazette* printed an eyewitness account that affirmed that Americans made up the majority of the rebels and that Floridians were not interested in rebelling. They were confident, however, that the Madisonian Administration was innocent of any crimes and hoped that such a letter would “be made known to the American government.” *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser* claimed that their information came from an eyewitness who revealed that the “bandit army” was not actually made up of disgruntled Floridians. Instead, they were embarrassed to report that the ruffians were “citizens of the United States.” The advertiser assured their readers, however, that “it is highly consoling to every one whose bosom glows with real American feeling to find that this disgraceful business has been disavowed by

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<sup>82</sup> *New England Palladium* October 13, 1812; the same article also appeared in the *New York Evening Post* and *Washingtonian*.

our government.” The article continued to deride the expedition as being “very far beneath the dignity of any regular government” and confidently declared that if such an undertaking were to be authorized it would be done in an “open and manly manner” without the use of a “motley rabble.” Once again the diversity among newspapers becomes evident. Rather than denouncing traditional manners of conquest this editor was upset over the filibuster’s ineptitude not their brazen attempts at a land grab. His editorial appears to defend an invasion if it was done in an “open and manly” style.<sup>83</sup>

The New York’s *Public Advertiser* also felt the brewing rebellion in East Florida to be a mistake. This publication was rather well informed and printed the gist of what Madison had ordered in the secret session of congress. The editorial insisted that their evidence was based upon official government documents, and concluded that the government’s actions have been justifiable and moderate. The fault, in their opinion, stemmed from General Mathews and his filibusters. The General’s orders were to either to “take the Floridas only in case they were voluntarily relinquished...by existing Spanish authorities” or if threatened by a foreign power. Since neither of the actions had occurred “our agents clearly exceeded their instructions.” In this case the government had a clear vision for the Floridas that was to be respected. By seizing Amelia Island the General had forfeited the “noble” aspects of American expansion.<sup>84</sup>

The public’s condemnation of Mathews and the incursion into East Florida did not go unnoticed by the government. In April of 1812 Madison removed Mathews from command and renounced the assault into Spanish territory. Madison’s actions came about for two reasons. First he felt that a war with Britain was imminent and wished to solidify the Southern border.

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<sup>83</sup> *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser* April 29, 1812; *Alexandria Gazette* June 8, 1812.

<sup>84</sup> *Public Advertiser* August 27, 1812.

Just as important, however, was the negative public reaction to the “Patriots War.” Madison appointed the Governor of Georgia, David Mitchell, to oversee the “Patriot” movement after dismissing Mathews. Mitchell was ordered to tread carefully in Florida, stall for time and negotiate with the Spanish. Madison’s new orders reflected his new stance, he needed to throw Mathews under the bus to appease the public but he still hoped that something could be salvaged from this PR nightmare. Hopefully the Georgian Governor could deliver.<sup>85</sup>

The *Charleston Courier* and *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser* ran a letter from a Spanish citizen addressing the Governor of Georgia. The letter was also sent directly to the *Charleston Courier* and was intended for publication. The author derided the American government’s attempt at annexation and accused the Governor and other officials of deceiving the American public. The author was confident though that “truth will force its way in spite of all your arts.” The rest of the letter then was intended to enlighten those left in the dark. Addressing the claim that Florida languished under Spanish neglect and was ripe for rebellion, the author confidently declared that “there is more sobriety and more subordination to legal authorities in St. Augustine than in the town of Savannah.” He also agreed with many other opponents of the invasion, denouncing the filibusters and calling them “bandits” and “a set of outlaws.”<sup>86</sup>

The irate Spaniard continued his critique by detailing many of the horrors inflicted upon Floridians. The author vehemently stated that East Florida had been “invaded in time of profound peace, the planters ruined, and the population of the capital starved.” Taking aim at the American protestations that the Spanish were arming blacks living in Florida, the author

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<sup>85</sup> Cusick, *The Other War of 1812*, xiv-xvi, 135-145.

<sup>86</sup> *Charleston Courier* December 30, 1812; *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser* January 12, 1813.

succinctly offered a solution; “withdraw from our country and you have nothing to fear from our troops.” The letter ended with another attack on the Governor but argued that the majority of Americans would balk at such excesses and condemn the invasion. He was confident that Congress “possesses too much virtue, to permit an act of injustice.” Once more it was assumed that Americans would not tolerate European style invasions and when given all the facts would denounce the unsavory attempt at a land grab.<sup>87</sup>

One particularly long-winded and scathing analysis of the incursion into East Florida came from the prominent Massachusetts politician Thomas Pickering. A staunch federalist, it was unsurprising that Pickering would attempt to badmouth Madison’s administration, but he made several print worthy points. The letter enjoyed widespread publication and appeared in the *Alexandria Gazette*, *Newburyport Herald*, *Hampshire Federalist* and *Boston Repertory*. Pickering published verbatim the contents of Madison’s orders to Mathews and claimed that “the provisions of this act and subsequent events deserve consideration.” He questioned the President’s wording of the order and wondered how exactly the territory would be peacefully transferred to the United States. Pickering attacked even the idea of a Floridian led revolt as such an event would result in Spanish citizens turning treasonous. The only way that could happen was if the American agents “seduced” them. He admitted that Mathews was a “brave and enterprising” leader but feared that his talents were being wasted on such a scandalous expedition. Most importantly, Pickering attacked the idea that the United States had any title to the territory and argued that such an invasion mirrored the dastardly preemptive assault Great Britain had perpetrated against Denmark at the Second Battle of Copenhagen. Worse still the

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<sup>87</sup> *Charleston Courier* December 30, 1812.

federalist politician feared that the uncalled for invasion of East Florida could draw Great Britain and Spain into war with the United States.<sup>88</sup>

Echoing similar sentiments were toasts published in *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*. Ridiculing the preemptive nature of seizing Amelia Island, the salute was to “the invasion of Florida-Copenhagen tragedy-The First American edition.” In another thinly-veiled critique of the expansionistic endeavor, the revelers cheered “the original United States of America, Undivided, Un-extended.” An editorial that appeared throughout the South also made the connection to the British assault on Copenhagen. The article reminded readers of Madison’s orders to general Mathews and claimed that “our officers in taking possession of Amelia Island, had acted under the orders of our government.” The editor claimed the assault was justified by Madison under the “plea of mere expediency” noting that this was the same claim the British made against the Dutch. The editor reiterated that the “British have shown no disposition to take the Floridas, nor any other Spanish provinces.” Since there was no immediate threat Madison was wrong in the seizure. The editor also feared that the British might use the attack as a pretext for actually seizing the Floridas or worse declare war against the United States. For most Americans it was simply unthinkable to be compared to the British. The United States was different and was not supposed to act in the old world mentality. The “conquest without war”

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<sup>88</sup> *Alexandria Gazette* May 23, 1812; *Newburyport Herald* May 12, 1812; *Hampshire Federalist* May 21, 1812; *Boston Repertory*. The referenced attack occurred in 1807 and is known as the Second battle of Copenhagen. The British fearful that the neutral Danish fleet could pose a threat launched a pre-emptive attack on the city firing on the civilian populace until the city surrendered and handed the Danish fleet over to the British. For more information see *Defying Napoleon: How Britain bombarded Copenhagen and seized the Danish Fleet in 1807* by Thomas Munch Peterson.

stratagem was running into serious roadblocks. Some Americans now felt the United States government to be overstepping its authority in its quest for expansion.<sup>89</sup>

Publication of such letters and editorials offers much insight into how Americans perceived the expedition into East Florida. Many Americans were not opposed to the concept of expansion but, instead were critical of the manner in which it was seized. A true Floridian revolt, where its own citizens wished to annex to the United States without interference would be welcomed by most Americans. An American invasion, however, was cause for serious concern and answers for crucial questions. Who authorized such an attack? Was congress involved? Would a declaration of war be forthcoming? Most Americans needed concrete justifications if they were going to accept these new territories.

American territorial expansion was expected to be noble. The inhabitants were to be given a chance for self-determination by throwing off their European shackles and then welcomed into the expanding Union. In contrast, this expedition was seen as being carried out by filibusters. Such adventurers had unsavory reputations and worse still was the secrecy surrounding the invasion. If such actions were truly justified they should be out in the open and applauded by the Public. Instead the invasion was criticized for being duplicitous, disingenuous and perpetrated by vagabonds primarily motivated by pecuniary rewards.

The “Patriots” attempt to capture and annex East Florida failed. The public’s disgust with the conduct of the filibusters, Madison’s condemnation of the incursion and the removal of Mathews eroded support for the cause at home. To make matters worse the Spanish garrison at St. Augustine received badly needed reinforcements and the “Patriots” were forced to retreat. Some expansionists still refused to accept total defeat. The filibusters continued to maintain

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<sup>89</sup> *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser* July 21, 1813; *The Gleaner* August 13, 1813; *Raleigh Star* April 4 1812; the same editorial also appeared in the *Alexandria Gazette* and *Charleston Courier*.



control of sections of East Florida and it was hoped that war with Great Britain would shore up support for the seizure. Fear that the British would seize the territory had long been a going concern among both the public and federal government. Their hopes would prove to be forlorn as the United States Congress bowed to public support and refused to accept the territory or send troops into the area. In May of 1814 the majority of Americans were more concerned with defeating the British in the United States and the patriot movement finally collapsed. That did not, however, spell the end of American interest in the Spanish Floridas.<sup>90</sup>

By 1817 unrest permeated throughout the Georgia-Florida border and many citizens were demanding protection. Many Americans believed that various Indian tribes, such as the Seminoles, were mounting assaults on American communities with the tacit approval of the British. With the War of 1812 still on everyone's minds this was serious concern. The President, now Monroe, sent federal troops under the command of Andrew Jackson to the area to regain order. Jackson already had a fearsome reputation for fighting Indians in Florida and was more than willing to enter the Spanish controlled territory to bring the fight to his adversaries. Monroe himself was also no stranger to expansionistic policy and had served as secretary of State during the ill-conceived Patriot War.<sup>91</sup>

Jackson wasted little time and in March of 1818 invaded Florida. Upon doing so, he also captured two British citizens, Robert Ambrister and Alexander Arbuthnot. Jackson suspected the two of being covert British agents working with the Indians. After a short trial both were found guilty and Jackson had them executed. Jackson then proceeded to march on Pensacola and capture the city. His invasion made it clear that the Spanish were incapable of adequately

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<sup>90</sup> Cusick, *The Other War of 1812*, xvi, 258-278.

<sup>91</sup> Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*, 141-155.

defending their vast American empire, while some Americans applauded Jackson's audacious move others found it a "stain" on America's honor. Monroe would ultimately decide to renounce the conflict and offer to return Florida to its ante-bellum conditions. Although negotiations between the United States and Spain regarding Florida had been ongoing for years this newest incursion sped up the process. By 1819 the Spanish concluded that the region was more burden than gem to them and handed over the highly prized province. Unsurprisingly, such brazen actions caught the public's attention. Newspapers from across the country debated the legitimacy of such an invasion, the morality of executing British citizens, and the consequences that would befall the United States in the coming days.<sup>92</sup>

Jackson's reputation as a strong orator and leader of men admirably came through in a speech he gave to the volunteers assigned to help pacify the Georgia-Florida border. He appealed to their sense of disdain toward their foes and noted that "The savages on your borders, unwilling to be at peace have once more raised the tomahawk to shed the blood of our citizens, and already they are assembled in considerable force to carry their murderous schemes into execution." Ironically, especially considering Jackson's future Indian policy, he claimed the United States had very liberal laws toward Native Americans and they had taken advantage of such a relationship. He assured the troops that "they [Native Americans] must now be taught, that however, benevolent and humane" the United States "has sacred rights to protect and with impunity will not permit the butchery of her peaceable and unoffending citizens." Jackson also noted that this was an enemy that had been defeated before, that victory was inevitable but hardships and were sure to follow. He ended by stating he had the utmost confidence in the

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 156-163. *National Intelligencer* February 20, 1818.

troops and that he as their leader and general would “share the dangers and hardships of the campaign.”<sup>93</sup>

It is important to note that Jackson’s speech completely neglects to mention the Spanish. Instead he focuses upon the “savages” and their “murderous” ways. To him and the troops the soon to be launched invasion of Florida had less to do with territorial expansion than with simply defeating an enemy on their own turf. He considered this assault as a military necessity not a blatant land grab. There was, however, a veiled nod to the Spanish. The fact that the Native Americans were allowed to brazenly assault the United States reiterated the idea that Spanish governance was ineffectual at best. Had they been more effective territorial rulers they could control their own inhabitants. Their failure meant that the United States would be forced to deal with the issue. It was a simple leap of logic to then assume control over Florida indefinitely to ensure the United States would be secure from further Floridian based Indian raids.

The *National Advocate* published a short editorial praising Jackson’s speech and his abilities. The editor appreciated what he described as the General’s “soldier-like tone” since it did not deal much with pomp and circumstance. He was extraordinarily confident in Jackson’s ability, praising him almost to the point of obsequiousness. The editor was pleased to note that “after having achieved a splendid victory over a well-disciplined army, relieved an important section of the union from capture, and immortalized himself by his bravery and military talents to find him ever ready for any service, penetrating into the wilderness, to check the inroads of the savages and preserve the helpless families near their settlements.” The editor confidently proclaimed that “such a man cannot be valued too highly” and concluded that the conflict would soon end and that the “deluded creatures receive a prompt and effectual check.” Considering the

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<sup>93</sup> *National Intelligencer* February 20, 1818.

adoration for Jackson one must wonder if the General himself ghost wrote such a piece. Regardless the *Advocate* was clear in the portrayal of their favored soldier and their attitude toward the invasion. This editor, like Jackson, considered the incursion defensive in nature. Americans had to enter Spanish controlled territory to prevent further loss of life. Also important was the notion of payback not only did order need to be maintained but the “savages” needed to be “checked.” Veiling an expansionistic move as merely a chance to “check” or “chastise” an enemy would be a common feature in the coming years.<sup>94</sup>

After Jackson’s assault into Florida and the capture of Pensacola, newspapers were abuzz with the news. The *New Orleans Gazette* first published Jackson’s justification of the Florida invasion. In the published letter, Jackson was quick to point out to the American public that he had “not been prompted to this measure from a wish to extend the territorial limits of the United States or from any unfriendly feeling on the part of the American Republic to the Spanish government.” Instead he claimed the action was necessary to forestall any further Indians and as retribution for the “horrors of savage massacres...and cradles stained with the blood of innocence.” Keeping with the accepted view of the Spanish, Jackson portrayed the European occupiers as neither vindictive nor heartless, but incompetent. He admitted that Spanish authorities acknowledged the attacks and their obligation to restrain the Indians but insisted that their lax attitudes enabled the Indians to “raise the tomahawk against us.” Consequently he was compelled to “take possession of such parts of the Floridas in which Spanish authority could not be maintained.” Jackson further claimed that Pensacola fit such a description and would be held until “Spain can furnish military strength sufficient to enforce existing treaties.” The General also promised to respect Spanish laws, rights and property until the situation had been resolved.

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<sup>94</sup> *National Advocate* February 25, 1818.

At this point then, Jackson and his supporters insisted that the expansion that took place would merely be temporary. Once the “savages” were brought under control and punished authority would transfer back to the Spanish, provided they could effectively maintain the territory. Since in American eyes that last point is dubious it can be safely assumed that this “temporary” solution would have become more permanent had their not been such an outcry regarding Jackson’s actions.<sup>95</sup>

Understandably, the Spanish were not pleased with Jackson. *The Connecticut Herald and General Advertiser* printed a letter from the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs Don Joseph Pizarro. The Minister, in the careful wording of a diplomat, protested Jackson’s actions and threatened that negotiations between the United States and Spain should cease for the time being. He proclaimed that Spain would not treat with the United States until the government “in a manner suitable to its honor...disapprove of the excesses committed.” The Minister also insisted that the American government “inflict an appropriate punishment on the author of so many disorders.” The editor of the *Connecticut Herald* felt the Spanish were overreacting and argued that Jackson’s conduct was “justifiable on the plainest principles of national law.” The editor maintained that the President was behind the General and that if a Congressional hearing should be called Jackson would be promptly cleared of any impropriety. Completely perplexing the editor was the Spanish condemnation for merely “exercising the right of self-defense, by driving ruthless bandits from our borders.” The *Herald* ended with a recommendation; if the Spanish continue to be outraged they should come “take satisfaction.” Such an article perfectly exemplifies the disdain much of the American public felt toward the Spanish at this time. Jackson was a war hero who had already proven himself against the cream of European military

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<sup>95</sup> *New Orleans Gazette* as it appeared in *National Intelligencer* July 10, 1818.

proWess, the British. In contrast the Spanish were lazy, incompetent blowhards who did not deserve such a bountiful province such as Florida. The *Herald's* condescending response to Spanish protestations speaks volumes. So incompetent were the Spanish that some Americans were comfortable with threatening a war just because their opponents dared to protest a clear invasion of their own sovereign territory.<sup>96</sup>

Another passionate defense of Jackson appeared in the *National Advocate*. Appearing as a letter to the editor the writer called himself “Sulpicius”, probably as a reference to the great Roman orator of the same name. He blasted any condemnation of Jackson and felt it was his duty to defend such a clear patriot. “Sulpicius” argued that Jackson’s conduct was merely an extension of the Presidents will and thus he should not be made a sacrificial lamb. Furthermore, he claimed that Jackson’s invasion had been “necessary” and “effectual.” Not pursuing the Indian raiders into Florida would have been disastrous as further attacks would be inevitable. He explained that Spain’s neutrality was not a cause for concern as their ineptitude encouraged Jackson to “take possession of any part of the country necessary for their operations.”<sup>97</sup>

The author also felt the execution of Ambrister and Arbuthnot to be perfectly acceptable. The men were “wretches” who assisted a “set of merciless savages in their work of indiscriminate slaughter and destruction.” Releasing such men would be “an indignity to common sense.” Sulpicius warned the public to mourn “the tears of the mother who still weeps over her murdered infant” and forget the “fate of these disgraces to humanity.” He further defended Jackson’s seizure of Pensacola and reiterated that the city would not be kept as a war

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<sup>96</sup> *Connecticut Herald and General Advertiser* December 8, 1818.

<sup>97</sup> *National Advocate* August 29, 1818.

prize. The author ended his impassioned defense of the General and welcomed any official inquiry as a great chance to further clear Jackson's name.<sup>98</sup>

Unsurprisingly, many Americans were also concerned with how Jackson's actions might inflame international public opinion. While the Spanish were considered to be too inept to be much of a threat, the British reaction was a serious concern. The *National Intelligencer* published excerpts from three different London Newspapers regarding the British public's take on the unfolding drama in Florida. The *London Examiner* felt that the British government was overreacting to Jackson's invasion and claimed the incursion into Florida mirrored what European nations did all the time. The editor made no mention of Native Americans and saw the invasion as simply a justifiable land grab. The *Examiner* felt interfering would be counterproductive as Florida "must inevitably fall into their hands before long." The *London Morning Chronicle* agreed that the acquisition was probably inevitable and that Jackson's retaliation against the Indians was merely a smokescreen as "the American government has long had a wish to occupy the Floridas unconditionally." This editor feared that the American occupation of Florida "will give the United States a most powerful preponderance in our neighborhood, which they may one day make use of against us." For now the *Morning Chronicle* advocated caution and wished to closely follow the news as it developed. The simply titled *London Chronicle* also agreed that the invasion was a thinly-veiled land grab and concluded that Great Britain would be wise to keep abreast of the situation. Since no outright hostility was advocated it is easy to surmise that American readers found such reports

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

encouraging and could explain why the *Intelligencer* chose to reprint these three rather than more incendiary reactions.<sup>99</sup>

One aspect that both British and American papers had in common was their callous stance toward Spain. The *London Examiner* claimed all of Spain's possessions and specifically Florida were "wretchedly governed, subject to martial law and drained by governors, who got to squeeze fortunes out of them." The *London Morning Chronicle* saw the often maligned nation to be full of "weakness" while the *London Chronicle* stated simply that "Spain is the country which would be least affected...by the loss of the Floridas." Great Britain had little use for their wayward ally but could still prove to be problematic to American prospects if provoked.<sup>100</sup>

Such provocation came about as a result of Jackson's execution of Ambrister and Arbuthnot. Once word reached Great Britain both their government and press condemned the Americans and vowed to act. Just as quickly much of the American press quickly rallied around Jackson and justified his actions. The *Georgian* out of Savannah printed some short remarks which subsequently appeared in the *National Intelligencer* and *Scioto Gazette and Fredonian Chronicle*. The editorial admitted that Jackson was a bit hasty in his judgments but "we are inclined to believe that Jackson acted correctly, and we are sure he intended to act correctly if he did not." Once again the great General was beyond reproach. Even if he made a mistake this editor was confident he meant well. The esteem for Jackson was only matched by the disdain reserved for Ambrister, Arbuthnot and the Seminoles. He argued that the British citizens assisted the Indians in their "butcherous warfare against our citizens." The editor reasoned that since these men lived among the Indians they should be considered "citizens of the Seminole

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<sup>99</sup> *London Examiner, London Morning Chronicle, London Chronicle* as they appeared in the *National Intelligencer* September 11, 1818.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*



tribe, and treated accordingly.” Considering that these men were executed, death was seen as the only equitable treatment for a member of that particular Indian tribe. The editor also reasoned that the British should not protest since the executed Englishmen were “savages themselves” and thus “out of the protection of national law.”<sup>101</sup>

The above editorial is illuminating for a number of reasons. For many Americans Jackson was a man who could do no wrong even when the facts made it clear he did. Here the editor deftly sidestepped condemnation of the famous General by factoring in Jackson’s “intent.” Perhaps Jackson did overstep his authority by overruling the court martial but if he did it for the right reasons then he should be forgiven. This is an excellent parallel to American expansion. Perhaps invading Florida without a proper declaration of war is wrong but if the United States intends to uplift the province then all transgressions can be forgiven. Also noteworthy was the absolute and casual disregard the editor had for the executed Englishmen. By consorting with Native Americans they gave up their rights as whites and thus could be casually disregarded. The editor could have just as easily made his point by implicating the Englishmen as murderers and thus subject to retribution. Instead by linking them to murder and barbarity they become “citizens of the Seminole tribe” and thus a target for extermination. It is also impossible to ignore the author’s utter callousness for Indians. He refuses to separate the few Indians who did raid the border from the hundreds of innocents. Instead they were all guilty “savages” to be exterminated.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> While tempers flared momentarily high the British would ultimately conclude that trade with the United States was more important than vengeance and the protest over the executions dwindled, *Scioto Gazette and Fredonian Chronicle* January 1, 1819.

<sup>102</sup> Although both men were initially condemned to death the court lessened Ambrister’s sentence to hard labor. Jackson intervened and re-ordered the execution which was subsequently carried out. For more information see *Filibusters and Expansionists* pg 155-163.

As to British interference some Americans adopted a come and get it approach. The *New York Advertiser* printed a rather incendiary editorial that also appeared in the *Providence Patriot* and *National Advocate*. The editor explained to his readers that Great Britain had been building fortifications in Canada and had put itself “in a very strong posture of defense.” He repeated the American claim to Florida and stated that Great Britain may choose to back Spain if the “Florida question” got out of hand. In the event of such unpleasantness he assured his readers that “they (the British) will not find us unprepared for the event.” He reiterated that any war was unfortunate but insisted that if the British attack the war would be conducted with the “united exertions of the people, and managed with rather more address and facility than the late one.” The War of 1812 was fresh in every American’s mind and they were not eager to repeat their dismal performance. Jackson’s conduct in that war was exemplary and most Americans wished to preserve his honor and integrity, even if defending him flew in the face of conventional wisdom and simple facts. As for tangling with Great Britain itself, it was a prospect not to be entered into lightly but neither should it be shied away from. The hero Jackson had whooped them once before and some Americans were anxious to try their luck against John Bull once again. Whether or not one was for or against the acquisition of Florida was immaterial, all Americans were unified in wanting to keep Britain out of the debate over expansionism.<sup>103</sup>

Of course not every editorial found Jackson’s invasion to be the correct course of action. A detailed expose regarding the “Florida Question” appeared in the *Richmond Enquirer*. The editor remarked that Americans have a love of law and are quick to denounce any European transgressions such as the “partition of Poland” and “infamous capture of the Copenhagen fleet.” Fortunately the “laws of nations have been trampled underfoot in Europe, [but] America has

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<sup>103</sup> *New York Advertiser* as it appeared in the *Providence Patriot* September 1, 1819; *National Advocate* August 23, 1819.

always upheld it.” The editor feared that the recent outpouring of support for Jackson’s invasion was hypocritical. If Americans condemn such aggression in Europe should not similar actions be denounced domestically? Instead, many “virtuous citizens have been blinded to these considerations.” Most disturbingly were the calls some Americans made in reference to Jackson’s seizure of Pensacola to simply “keep what we have got.” The seizure of Florida was an illegal act and typical of European nations. The United States was above such nonsense and its virtuous citizens should protest and denounce such a flagrant violation of sovereignty.<sup>104</sup>

The editor wished to enlighten the readers and make several important points. First he wished to assure his fellow countrymen that he and the staff at the *Richmond Enquirer* “have no attachments toward Spain” and in fact “we despise her government” as her “conduct towards us excites only contempt or indignation.” However, he does “condemn the occupation of Pensacola” not out of any sense of love for Spain but because “we owe much to ourselves.” He felt that since Americans like to believe they aspire to a higher calling and are strict adherents to international law they should back that up in deeds as well as words. Another important question was did the United States have the right to fight the Seminole Indians without a formal declaration of War? The simple answer, according to the editor, was yes. Precedent had already been set when dealing with Native Americans and both Jackson and the presidential administration were correct to fight the Seminoles. This speaks volumes, but was also typical of how many Americans saw Native Americans. Indians were a menace and needed to be dealt with in the harshest of manners. They were “savages” and beneath the laws of “civilized” nations, no forewarning or declaration of war was necessary. Their defeat was inevitable and of a domestic concern. This editor’s contempt for them was so high he didn’t even wish to

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<sup>104</sup> *Richmond Enquirer* July 28, 1818.

acknowledge them as a legitimate nation. They were vagabonds who respected neither civilized laws nor borders. The only way to fight such a people, he reasoned, was to adopt a similar attitude.<sup>105</sup>

Trickier was the morality of following the Seminoles into Spanish controlled Florida. The editor argued that had the Seminoles remained in Florida they could not be touched “but we had a right to *pursue* them beyond the line, if they sought refuge in the neutral country.” He argued that this was a righteous move sanctioned by international law as it is a well-known fact that “a belligerent nation may follow his enemy into a neutral country, and destroy them there, provided he makes *fresh pursuit*, and does no other injury in the neutral.” More to the point the editor questioned Jackson’s decision to storm Spanish forts in pursuit of said enemies.

According to the editor once the fleeing Indians sought refuge in a Spanish fort Jackson’s mandate for pursuit ended. While sheltering the Indians may be a cause for war the United States had yet to officially declare such a move and Jackson should not have legally assaulted the fort. Thus it was acceptable to fight and pursue Natives Americans without a formal declaration of war but once the Spanish got involved, arguable a “civilized” nation, then protocol must be followed. While he was quick to point out Jackson’s illustrious career, he was clear that the United States “should never rely upon military officers as the infallible oracles of public law.” Instead, that duty should fall to the duly elected representatives. They should be the ones responsible for deciding whether to negotiate for the Indians surrender or call for a declaration of war. Clearly Jackson exceeded his orders. The editor was quick to point out, however, that

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

Jackson should not be turned over to the Spanish for a trial as the Spanish should instead punish their own officers for allowing the Indians to run rampant.<sup>106</sup>

The final question to be addressed was whether or not the United States had the right to retain Pensacola and the seized territory. The editor acknowledged Jackson's and his supporters claim that the seizure should be justified because it was necessary. He agreed that the seizure and acquisition of Florida may be necessary and even a good thing but adamantly opposed Jackson's action because the decision was not made by Congress. Subsequently "We ought not then, hold Pensacola-it ought to be restored-we hope to see it restored." He hoped that President Monroe would make the correct decision and "we hope to see the Constitution respected" and "escape the stain that might be cast on the American honor." For this editor, his staff, and arguably much of his readers, the question revolved not around morality but rather the law. Florida may be a valuable territory but it must come into the Union in an honorable and law abiding manner. Expansion was fine so long as it was done "correctly."<sup>107</sup>

Just three days later the *Richmond Enquirer* printed a companion piece to their earlier expose. They were pleased to learn that their faith in following international law would be preserved. The Richmond editor chose to reprint a recent publication from the *National Intelligencer* and added that he and the staff wholeheartedly agreed with their article.

We have pride in saying that we have never published an article which gave us more satisfaction. We feel that the honor of our country is saved from disgrace and the constitution from violation. We are now explicitly told that the Spanish posts were taken without *military orders*-on General Jackson's "responsibility" though his operations are ascribed to "motives of the purest patriotism"...Our government thus disavows the act, and they order restitution.

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid; The editor also made another fascinating hypothetical question and point; "What would be the consequences if a military officer or even the President himself could make war-the question looms in every man's bosom-and if such acts were tolerated it would be time to tremble for the Constitution." With the great power and authority of today's American President one must conclude that the *Enquirer's* editor is spinning in his grave. The thing he feared the most has become an accepted piece of national foreign policy.

The article celebrated Monroe's decision to reign in Jackson and return Pensacola and the taken posts back into Spanish hands and authority. In exchange the Spanish promised to be more vigilant in their prosecution of unruly Indians. Like the earlier article from the *Enquirer*, the editor from the *Intelligencer* was also hesitant on bowing to Spain's request to hand over Jackson for trial. They too felt that Spain had plenty of their own officers who were negligent and should look to their punishment first and foremost.<sup>108</sup>

The article went on to explain that if further problems arose in Florida then sterner action would be taken, so long as American institutions and processes are followed. In the case of Jackson's invasion, America had overstepped its bounds and now Monroe was forced to atone for the crime. Our "honor" the editor wrote "is more precious than a hundred Floridas." However, if the Spanish take no actions to control their "savages" then the United States may be forced to act, this time with proper congressional approval. If such an invasion becomes necessary then the United States will have little difficulty in capturing Florida as American troops "have twice marched to Pensacola, and how incapable she is of resisting our force." The editor took pains to make it clear to his readers and the world that if such action was necessary "that we seek not territory, but safety, not to injure others but to save ourselves." The article ended by rebuffing a recent rumor that Spain would be ceding Florida to the United States as that would clearly be "news too good to be true."<sup>109</sup>

Thus for some fastidious Americans acquiring Florida could be an acceptable course of action if done "properly." Nearly all agreed that the Indian threat was a serious problem and needed to be curtailed and that the Spanish had the power to neither control their "savages" or

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<sup>108</sup> *National Intelligencer* as it appeared in *Richmond Enquirer* July 31, 1818.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

beat back an American assault. Both editors made an effort to play up their disdain for Spain and disgust for Indian atrocities while still vehemently criticizing Jackson's invasion. Thus annexation may be acceptable to safeguard American lives but only if proper democratic etiquette is followed. It was critically important to make it clear to American readers and the world that the United States was not about ruthless conquest. Americans would never stoop to levels of European decadence such as Napoleon's invasion of Russia or England's pre-emptive strike on Copenhagen. The honor of the United States could not withstand such "stains." For some Americans the ends did not justify the means when it came to expansion.

Although Madison bowed to domestic and international pressure and renounced the invasion of Florida, the province soon came into the Union. The Spanish, already battling internal revolutions throughout their colonies, agreed to cede Florida. The Adams-Onís agreement or more officially the "Treaty of Amity, Settlement and limits between the United States of America and his Catholic Majesty" was signed in February of 1819. Spain agreed to cede "in full property and sovereignty, all the territories which belong to him, situated to the eastward of the Mississippi, known by the name of East and West Florida." In exchange the United States agreed to give up any right to territory owned by the Spanish west of the Mississippi. This specifically was aimed at portions of Texas which the Americans had claimed was included in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. More simply put the United States gave up any claim to Texas and got Florida. Although the border was now secure and Florida safely in American hands, the debate regarding expansion continued to rage.<sup>110</sup>

For the majority of Americans the acquisition of Florida through diplomatic means was heralded as a victory. The United States would now have ready access to the Gulf Coast and be

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<sup>110</sup> Avalon Project "Treaty of Amity, Settlement and limits between the United States of America and his Catholic Majesty 1819" [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/sp1819.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/sp1819.asp)

better situated to preempt any further Indian unrest. An editorial from the *National Intelligencer* saw widespread publication and acclaim. Both the *Providence Patriot* from Rhode Island and the *Carolina Observer* from North Carolina re-ran the article with their hearty approval. The editor gushed that “it is seldom that we have had so acceptable an office to perform” than that of announcing the treaties successful ratification. The article contained the various points of the treaty and approved that the “unpleasant negotiations with Spain” would now cease. Obtaining Florida, the settling of debt between injured parties and solidifying the Western boundary with Spain make the “treaty trebly acceptable to the American people.”<sup>111</sup>

Although the treaty met with great fanfare and approval, some Americans still feared that Spain may renege on the agreement or worse Great Britain intervene and prevent the peaceful exchange. The *Baltimore Federal Gazette* reprinted a letter from an Englishman who announced that Florida must not fall into American hands and insisted that Great Britain act as the United States cannot afford another war. The *Gazette* assured itself and its readers that the letter’s writer was “wholly mistaken.” The government could easily “procure funds sufficient to meet any exigencies that might be consequent on a final and permanent refusal of Spain to cede the Floridas, even if a war with Great Britain should ensue.” Furthermore a repeat of the Hartford convention would be impossible as the States would “firmly and energetically unite in support of all measures as the government might deem necessary.” The editorial was clearly designed to lay their own fears to rest. The editor wanted everyone to relax and rest assured that if war should come, the American public would rally together and prevent a repeat of the disasters of 1812.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> *National Intelligencer* February 25, 1819; *Providence Patriot* March 6, 1819; *Carolina Observer* March 9, 1819.

<sup>112</sup> *Baltimore Federal Gazette* October 21, 1819; *Orleans Gazette and Commercial Advertiser* November 20, 1819.



The *Boston Patriot* printed an expose, which subsequently appeared in the *Louisville Public Advertiser*, that also advocated a harsh response if Europe tried to interfere. The editor claimed, incorrectly as evidenced by many of the above protests, that in the event that Spain rejected the treaty the American public is “decidedly in favor of the military occupation of the Floridas even if it should result in a war with England and Spain.” The article took aim at the British criticism that the United States had an “insatiable ambition” and had become an “overgrown republic.” The editor argued that the British were masters of conquest and were being hypocritical. He explained:

If we had forcibly invaded Florida for the purposes of conquest and plunder, as the British have the East Indies, then indeed it might answer very well to talk of taking advantage of other’s weakness; but when in a fair bargain it has been surrendered to us in payment of a just debt, such language is truly ridiculous.

It is important to note that at this point the United States had not successfully had a war of conquest against any “civilized” power yet. The two major pieces of territorial expansion had both occurred through diplomatic means, the Louisiana Purchase and now Florida. Of course the author neglected to mention the various attempts to conquer Florida through military means but since they had been disavowed by the federal government they did not count.<sup>113</sup>

The staunchest opponents of the Florida treaty came from the West. The *Orleans Gazette* worried that another confrontation with Great Britain would result in another blockade of their ports. If it was like the blockade from the War of 1812 the “stagnation of trade” would far exceed the worth of Florida. More distressingly was the decision to give up any claim to Spanish controlled Texas. Doing so, the editor noted, made Louisiana the frontier. The border to Texas was both “fertile” and “almost wholly uncultivated and uninhabited except by a few

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<sup>113</sup> *Boston Patriot* as it appeared in the *Louisville Public Advertiser* November 6, 1819.

straggling tribes of Indians.” The writer further argued that such tribes would ally with the United States against Spain if conflict ever came to the region. The warnings for accepting the treaty were clear. Another war with England would bring about financial ruin and why would the United States give up claim to such a bountiful province like Texas? Not only was the land begging to be cultivated by Americans, but the Native tribes would even welcome the new settlers. Relinquishing the “right” to Texas, according to the Louisianans, was a shortsighted policy. Fortunately for the expansionists, the Mexican War of Independence would invalidate the agreement in their land hungry eyes.<sup>114</sup>

The *St. Louis Enquirer* also felt the Florida treaty to be misguided. The editor argued that giving up on Texas “unnecessarily sacrificed territory more than sufficient to make two western states.” He felt that spending so much time and effort trying to secure Florida was wasted when so much western territory had yet to enter the Union. He lamented that government jobs were scarce even in larger settlements such as St. Louis and it was only until recently that they received a postmaster. He explained “the truth is; the western states and territories and the populations in them are considered at Washington to be *inferior* to the states and the people on the other side of the mountains [the Appalachians].” For this editor the Florida treaty was all well and good but it diverted attention and funds away from where growth was most needed; the West.<sup>115</sup>

Just as reactions were mixed over if and how to acquire Florida so too was the public’s view of the territory’s true quality. The *Vermont Chronicle* printed a short blurb about an industrious individual who went to Florida. The individual decided to bring \$3,000 worth of

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<sup>114</sup> *Orleans Gazette* as it appeared in the *Louisville Public Advertiser* March 17, 1821.

<sup>115</sup> *St. Louis Enquirer* December 4, 1819.

merchandise to the province and in a matter of months sold his goods to the local populace for a “100 percent profit.” Using his newly acquired fortune immense he invested in Florida acreage and such land had now doubled in value. Such encouraging stories could induce further settlement to the region as others tried their luck.<sup>116</sup>

Others began to have buyer’s remorse after the Florida cession. The *Mobile Commercial Register* printed a meteorological table regarding the average temperature of Florida. The article claimed that “considerable interest” had been given to the viability of growing coffee in the territory. They were sorry to report that “the winters are too severe, even in its most southern extremity, for the growth of this tender plant.” The *Providence Patriot* also found fault with the new acquisition. The editor hoped that the reprinting of a letter from one of numerous emigrants to Florida would enlighten his readers. The emigrant noted “this place of which you have heard and read so much is, and I fear will be, a source of disappointment to all who come here with the expectation of finding either a paradise or place of flourishing trade.” He mentioned that few crops were grown and that the Spanish population lacked industry to get much of anything done. He concluded that Florida could still be useful as the soil was conducive to a variety of crops but success “depends on circumstances.” Perhaps with some hard work and more American emigrants, Florida could be a useful acquisition. For the time being, however, the province was not worth the money and time it took to obtain.<sup>117</sup>

The acquisition of the Floridas was a long and complicated process. In that way it perfectly mirrors American expansion during the first half of the nineteenth century. The various

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<sup>116</sup> *Vermont Chronicle* March 20, 1829.

<sup>117</sup> *Mobile Commercial Register* as it appeared in the *National Intelligencer* April 30, 1823; *Providence Patriot* November 21, 1821.

attempts at obtaining Florida, through filibusters, proxy war, direct invasion or diplomacy underscore the haphazard plans and uncertainty that characterized American expansion. Public opinion regarding Florida was just as complicated. Americans from across the country revealed what they thought the proper course of action should be and their words could often be startling. American expansion has often been characterized as both inevitable and immensely popular. The massive amount of ink spilt by newspaper editors in regards to Florida destroys such myths. Americans could come to no consensus regarding expanding into Spanish controlled territory and the debate that erupted among newspapers helps demonstrate that the acquisition of Florida was anything but manifest.

## Chapter 3 - “Texas Fever Cooled”:

### Early American Endeavors to Acquire Texas

The ghosts of the Louisiana Purchase surfaced once again in reference to the territory of Texas. Prior to the Adams-Onis Treaty the boundary between the American held Louisiana territory and Spanish held Texas was unclear. The problem stemmed all the way back to 1763 when the French first ceded the territory to Spain. The border was uncertain and remained elusive even after the United States took possession in 1803. The province of Texas had long drawn Americans and early in the nineteenth century several adventurers launched ill-fated conquest attempts. By the time of the Mexican War for Independence it was abundantly clear that some Americans had marked Texas as the next province to be granted American liberty. Ultimately, Texas would win its independence from Mexico but be denied immediate annexation to the United States. Throughout each of these expansionistic events Americans fiercely debated the necessity, morality and process of acquiring Texas. The annexation of Texas was neither inevitable nor manifest.<sup>118</sup>

Initially this interest manifested itself in American newspapers in the form of letters detailing the weather and living conditions of Texas. One such account, from a French traveler, was unflinching in its praise. The author claimed “The soil is so luxuriant that it requires little or no cultivation, and is enameled with the most beautiful flowers and fragrant shrubs. The plain is intersected by rivers, the waters of which have a delightful coolness; refreshing dews supply the place of rain, and the beauties and enjoyments of the place inspire the soul with the most

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<sup>118</sup> Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists* 32-39; for more information regarding early filibustering in Texas see *An Artist in Treason: The Extraordinary Double Life of General James Wilkinson* by Andro Linkleter.

delightful emotions.” The editor of the *National Intelligencer*, which published the above account, was more reserved in judgment. He admitted that Texas “appears, from all accounts, to be really a kind of paradise,” but “only if such stories are accurate.” Another well published account entitled a “tour through the provinces of New Spain” found the province of Texas “to be unhealthy” in large measure due to the “putrescence of vegetable productions”, though he did find the “temperature to be the most delightful in the world.” Many Americans were fascinated by Texas and intrigued by its potential. Although some were skeptical of its “delightful” qualities, others were willing to take a look for themselves. The Mexican war for independence helped encourage more Americans to head to Texas. This huge and relatively unsettled province meant Americans could escape their past and start anew. Land was plentiful and cheap and the ongoing revolution offered the possibility of adventure or lucrative political appointments in the newly established government. For some Americans the pecuniary rewards outweighed the dangers and Texas became a magnet for those who would head west.<sup>119</sup>

In 1811 the burgeoning Mexican independence movement sent an ambassador to the United States. The envoy, Jose Bernardo Gutiérrez, met with the American Secretary of State James Monroe. The Secretary of State offered American aid and recognition of the revolutionaries in exchange for a promise of ceding Texas in the event of Mexican independence. The proposed plan would see the American army posturing on the border between Louisiana and the province of Texas and threatening the Spanish. Although Gutiérrez refused to make a deal, it was abundantly clear that Texas was under the watchful and envious eye of the United States. While no official aid was given to the Mexican revolutionaries, some Americans of their own volition joined the independence movement. These adventurers came

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<sup>119</sup> *National Intelligencer* April 16, 1811; *National Intelligencer* July 18, 1811.

for a variety of reasons, but most were under the impression that their service would be richly rewarded through land grants and political power. Perhaps most interestingly, many of the American volunteers fought not as individuals but in whole American units and led by American officers. The bulk of these American filibusters linked up with Gutiérrez, now back in Mexico, styled themselves the “Republican Army of the North” and served to try and free Texas from the Spanish. Unsurprisingly, given the military involvement of Americans, the public press reported on their actions.<sup>120</sup>

Coverage regarding American activity in Texas at this time was limited. The most common type of correspondence were printed excerpts of letters from individuals in Texas. Most newspapers tended to sympathize with the Americans fighting the Spanish but were reluctant to espouse any interference from the United States. The *National Intelligencer* reprinted a letter from an “Intelligent Gentleman from Natchez.” This learned fellow informed the press that the Viceroy of Mexico had closed the border and issued orders to local commanders “not to admit any strangers into the country on any pretense whatsoever.” The Spanish authorities were especially concerned with French agents and were convinced that Mexico would be the basis for a Napoleonic plot. Most distressingly for the Spanish, however, were reports of American filibusters illegally entering the country. Local commanders were told to be especially watchful “over the province of Texas, which being the frontier province of the American line, would open a wider door to adventurers from the United States.” The appearance of such a letter in a respected newspaper is noteworthy. The publication could serve as both a warning to would be filibusters, but could equally inspire since many other Americans had already answered the call. Halting Americans from illegally crossing the border into Texas

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<sup>120</sup> Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*, 41-52.

would also be a concern to the Mexicans in the coming years. For now, however, the introduction of American filibusters was a problem for the Spanish officials attempting to quell the Mexican independence movement.<sup>121</sup>

Despite the Spanish Viceroy's efforts a couple hundred Americans crossed the border into Texas. *The Supporter*, from Chillicothe, Ohio offered some explanation as to why Americans volunteered by printing an "excerpt of a letter from an officer of the U.S. Army, to his friend in this place (Natchitoches)." The officer explained that the "Providence of Texas" had revolted against its Spanish masters. He predicted that the revolution would succeed and that the revolutionary forces had already "secretly enlisted a number of Americans and moved off with every prospect of success." The officer was confident that many of the Royalist troops stationed near San Antonio would defect and join the revolutionaries thanks to the "spirit of dissatisfaction" that existed. All new recruits were promised "plunder, lands, besides one dollar a day for their services." Such enticements were much more effective in swaying American sentiments than the Viceroy's half-hearted attempts at closing the border. Fighting for Mexican independence would bring adventurous Americans the money they so often desperately sought. Also important was the author's use of the word "plunder." The most damning charge anti-expansionists would level at those heading to Texas would be their preoccupation with plunder. Making money was acceptable and often encouraged but only through honest means such as trade or farming. Capturing or stealing goods in time of war was the practice of scoundrels. Although this article did not specifically mention annexation it is probable that many of the adventurers who took up the revolutionary cause hoped for an eventual link-up with the United

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<sup>121</sup> *National Intelligencer* October 8, 1811.



States. However, before any such action could take place, Texas needed to be free from Spain.<sup>122</sup>

The *Raleigh Register* announced, through a “source that is respectable”, that “two hundred Americans” had already crossed the Sabine River and were “marching against Nacogdoches.” The author sought to remind readers that although the region had previously rebelled and failed, the prospects for the new endeavor were looking good. The editor also commented that the recruited Americans were some “of the finest riflemen of our country, who have marched in high spirits, flushed with the love of liberty, and panting for glory.” These sentiments would be expressed again in 1836 when Texas rebelled against Mexico. The idea of winning glory for oneself and fighting for liberty were common themes that often transcended geographic area or time. While justifications as to why Texas should first be free from Spain, and then Mexico would change, reasons for why an American would risk his life often stayed the same, money, fame and the spreading of “liberty.”<sup>123</sup>

The rebellion in Texas reached its high water mark in early 1813. The rebel forces, including the American contingent, defeated a major royalist force in March. “Private Correspondence” from witnesses to the event appeared in American papers. The author stated that the battle “terminated in favor of the revolutionaries” and that “upwards of one hundred Spaniards were killed, many more wounded.” Perhaps most importantly “one whole company” of Spanish troops defected and joined the American contingent. The letter ended with more promising news as more defecting Spaniards “are daily coming in, all of whom agree in stating the distress and despair of Salcedo [Spanish Governor of Texas].” For a reader back in the

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<sup>122</sup> *The Supporter* December 7, 1811.

<sup>123</sup> *Raleigh Register* December 20, 1811.

United States this letter reveals more than just a battle report. The battle went so well that even Spanish troops could see their cause as hopeless and were defecting. This meant that not only would the Spanish soon be driven out of Mexico but that self-governance and liberty were taking hold south of the United States. All publications, regardless of their stance on expansionism, could agree that an independent Mexico was cause for celebration. Unfortunately, this consensus would be short lived.<sup>124</sup>

The victory prompted the Spanish Governor to surrender and the revolutionaries marched into San Antonio. On April 3 the new self-appointed Governor of Texas, Gutiérrez, issued a Declaration of Independence. Patterned after the American document, the Declaration ridiculed Spain for its corruption and inability to properly govern. The document also affirmed its loyalty to the Mexican Republic and hoped they would soon “assume a rank among the nations of the world.” Soon thereafter a Constitution was drafted which granted most power and authority to Gutiérrez. Any American who assisted in the rebellion was granted land, the amount to be determined by how long they served. Unfortunately, this goodwill between the Mexican revolutionaries and American adventurers would soon sour.<sup>125</sup>

The schism came in the form of war crimes and served to both horrify and upset many of the Americans serving in Texas and those reading about it back in the States. After Governor Salcedo’s surrender and subsequent removal from power the revolutionary leadership decided to make an example of them. Salcedo, the commander of the defeated royalist force, Herrera, and several other Spanish officials were executed. The Americans were not consulted regarding this decision and many felt it barbaric. Once again “Private correspondence” began appearing in

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<sup>124</sup> *National Intelligencer* April 15, 1813.

<sup>125</sup> Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*, 51-52; *National Intelligencer* July 3, 1813.

American newspapers highlighting this gruesome act. A letter that appeared in the *National Intelligencer* revealed that the Spanish officers had followed all the rules of war and surrendered with the understanding that they would be treated with the “usual urbanity.” Instead, the officials were “secretly and inhumanly put to death.” The author was quick to point out that the Americans “were entirely ignorant of the circumstance and [have] expressed great disgust and horror.” The author also claimed that Spanish forces still operated in the area but argued they were of little threat since “the Americans are alone sufficiently numerous to drive and beat all the Spaniards in the province.”<sup>126</sup>

Granting the majority of power to the Governor did not sit well with many Americans. They felt they deserved more authority and power and were disappointed that Texas did not seek to make closer ties to the United States. In response to both the executions and lack of participation in the government, many Americans serving in Texas decided that the revolution had lost its way and returned to the United States. The remaining Americans began to question and distrust the Mexican revolutionaries and in some cases even refusing to follow orders sent by the Mexican command. The animosity between American adventurers and Mexicans would not be easily forgotten. To make matters worse a new Spanish garrison had arrived in Texas and sought to stamp out the upstart rebels and their remaining American allies.<sup>127</sup>

In September 1813 the Royalist forces caught up with the revolutionaries outside of San Antonio and decisively defeated them. American accounts of the battle differed but it was evident that Royalist forces carried the day. The *National Intelligencer* reported that at least two hundred and fifty Americans who hailed “from every part of the United States” were involved in

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<sup>126</sup> *National Intelligencer* July 9, 1813.

<sup>127</sup> Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*, 52-57.

the battle. These “respectable young men” were of an “enterprising adventurous character.” The author mused that “perhaps a set of braver or more determined men were never collected than these Americans.” Soon after the battle began the “brave and determined men” ignored their officer’s calls for caution and rushed into the fray. The Americans “soon found themselves in the midst of the enemy” and though they “fought with desperate valor” the “patriots were at length overpowered by numbers.” Although defeated, the American “patriots” still managed to “leave more than their number in the dust.” The editor also feared that the Spanish General was responsible for prior massacres and would soon “lay waste to the whole province of Texas, and leave nothing but a wilderness between the limits of the United States and Rio del Norte.”<sup>128</sup>

The *Raleigh Register* offered a different version. Their information came “from a gentlemen of first respectability” who was sorry that the “Republican army of Texas... was entirely defeated.” This author refrained from any glowing depictions of the adventurers and stated that the revolutionary General sensed an ambush and ordered them to form on “better ground.” Instead, “the Americans with incredible enthusiasm and impetuosity, in spite of every exertion of their officers rushed into the ambush, where many pieces of cannon of the enemy were opened upon them, by which they were mostly destroyed.” The author made no mention to the incredible fighting ability nor of the heavy losses they inflicted upon the enemy. This defeat was a result of rashness and of rushing headlong into enemy artillery fire; hardly an event that called for praise. The author ended by stating that the Republican forces were in full retreat with the Royalist forces in pursuit. Although both accounts of the battle agree that the filibuster forces were defeated the latter lacked the bombast of the former. As more and more Americans

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<sup>128</sup> *National Intelligencer* October 11, 1813.

entered Texas and events there garnered additional media attention these differences in reporting would grow considerably wider.<sup>129</sup>

This battle marked the end of American involvement in Texas for the time being. The Spanish were remarkably cordial to those who were captured. They were given the choice to either return safely to the United States with passports, guns and transportation provided for their journey or to remain in Texas if they took an oath of loyalty to Spain. After the battle the Spanish garrison regained control of Texas and destroyed the provisional republican government. The province of Texas remained under Spanish control until Mexico finally won its independence in 1821. Although this insurrection failed to free Texas, the rebellion did serve to highlight several points. The execution of the Spanish governor was viewed by most Americans, both those serving in Texas and those back in the States, as horrific and barbaric. The notion that perhaps the Mexicans were simply not up to the challenge of self-government started here. Also important was the American-Mexican animosity. Although initially these two cultures worked well together, by 1813 the alliance was fractured with Americans refusing to obey Mexican commands. This falling out would appear again. Initially, during the Texas war for Independence in 1836, Americans and Mexicans living in Texas served honorably together. By that war's end this respect disappeared as more and more American settlers moved to the area. The rate at which Anglo-American immigrants arrived in Texas in the coming years would be staggering. In 1821 the Anglo-American population hovered around 2,500. Fifteen years later that number was 40,000. By 1836 Anglo-Americans outnumbered the Mexican locals by nearly ten to one and assimilation was not on the agenda. American customs, language and political ideas were rampant. So too were notions of racial superiority, motivated in part to many of the

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<sup>129</sup> *Raleigh Register* October 22, 1813.

immigrants southern roots. The idea that Americans not only belonged in Texas but would undoubtedly make better rulers started in this early rebellion and grew with the arrival of each new Anglo-American immigrant.<sup>130</sup>

While this rebellion ended in failure a few Americans continued to launch filibuster expeditions to Texas. Most of their fellow citizens were critical of these adventurers. Rather than fighting for “noble” sentiments these Adventurers were seen to be only in pursuit of plunder. The *Orleans Gazette* reported that local authorities had arrested fifty three individuals who had “for some time past been secretly organizing, in order to make an irruption into the province of Texas.” The would-be filibusters were found to be “unarmed”, arrested and brought before “the district judge of the United States.” The judge found that four of them were suspicious enough to warrant a full trial while the rest were detained on a charge of vagrancy.<sup>131</sup>

Opinions as to why such filibuster expeditions continued into Texas differed. Several New Orleans publications saw emigrating as a noble pursuit and wished luck to all those who sought to “join the existing legitimate government of Texas.” The *Friend of the Laws*, also published in New Orleans, disagreed with the above characterization. Instead, the editor felt that those who sought to emigrate to Texas were a “band of desperate adventurers, without character, without credit, and without principle.” This characterization mirrored many of the earlier criticisms leveled at filibusters who ventured into Florida. They were a group of shady degenerates who had failed to make a living in the United States. They only concerned themselves with financial reward and had few qualms in plundering the countryside to satisfy

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<sup>130</sup> Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*, 57-60; David Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 175-177.

<sup>131</sup> *Orleans Gazette* as it appeared in the *National Intelligencer* June 9, 1820.

their economic needs. In response to such criticism the *Orleans Gazette* printed an article signed by an “old Virginian.” This author defended the filibusters and challenged any who dared disagree with him. The “old Virginian” left his address at the *Gazette* office “to be exchanged for the card of any Gentlemen who may call for it.”<sup>132</sup>

The issue of expansion was an important issue to nineteenth century Americans. The “old Virginian” was not even an emigrant to Texas but believed in the right to expand so fervently that he was willing to engage in a duel against those who didn’t. Even more remarkable was the fact that each of these disparate viewpoints originated in New Orleans; a city which traditionally espoused a pro-expansionist viewpoint. Disagreement existed not only between regions, but often among citizens in the same city.

Although disagreement existed regarding the character of those who ventured west, such depictions rarely deterred American newspapers from printing exceedingly flattering coverage of Texas. The *Columbian Register* described Texas as a “beautiful country, lately flourishing” that had excellent potential for soil and trade. Texas was seen by some in the United States as the “Italy of America, where delightful breezes blow soft where every prospect pleases and where nature has bestowed her riches and beauties with a lavish hand.” The editorial indicated that “the hardy people of the north are pouring in a ceaseless tide of emigration and where is destined to be a great, wealthy and powerful nation.” It enticed settlers because of the “great fertility of its soil” as well as “the salubrity of its climate and the beauty of its scenery.” The *Baltimore*

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<sup>132</sup> *National Intelligencer* May 16, 1820, this article was a collection of various quotes from New Orleans papers.

*Telegraph* claimed Texas “produces in abundance coffee, sugar, cotton wheat rye, hemp [and] tobacco.”<sup>133</sup>

Other newspapers emphasized America’s legal claim to the province. The *Baltimore Telegraph* urged immigration to Texas since “the citizens of the United States may go where they please.” The article also claimed that “Texas of right is the property of the United States, acquired by the treaty which ceded Louisiana.” According to the author the Spanish government had proven itself incapable of governing Texas and now the job would be given to the inhabitants. Just as the Spanish were portrayed as ineffective rulers in the Floridas so too did they appear in regard to Texas. The author predicted that “The inhabitants being abandoned by the American Government [because of the Adams-Onis Treaty which gave up American rights to Texas], and long restive under the yoke of Spanish despotism...[shall] assert their independence.” He added that inhabitants were “putting their confidence for aid and succor in strangers for assistance. The call has not been ignored-already has hundreds of citizens in Western America, gone forth to the frontiers of that province to assist in their emancipation.” The author ended by claiming that the victory against Spain over Texas was preordained and “can only be defeated by the interposition of divine providence itself.”<sup>134</sup>

This article showcases the complexity regarding how Americans saw expansion. It was not always simply a matter of annexing land to the United States. Here the author clings to the notion that Texas was once part of the United States but accepts the fact that such a claim was abandoned. Independence in Mexico would be good but only if hardy and democratically

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<sup>133</sup> *Colombian Register*, October, 4, 1817; *New Hampshire Sentinel*, August 8, 1819. *Baltimore Telegraph* July 21, 1819.

<sup>134</sup> *Baltimore Telegraph* July 21, 1819; the article also appeared in the *Louisiana Gazette*, *New Hampshire Sentinel*, *New Bedford Mercury* and *Newburyport Herald*.



responsible Americans assisted the revolutionaries. This author was convinced that Americans were so good at expanding liberty and democracy that only God himself was capable of stopping their inevitable march. Exactly what this author intended for Texas is unknown, but it is clear that he felt the province was quite the prize. It can be safely surmised that the author probably hoped that if the Mexicans were aided by Americans they might be willing to relinquish control of Texas back to the United States in thanks for their aid. What is evident, however, was the idea that expansion was bound by neither a sense of immediacy nor of outright governmental assistance. Waiting for the Mexicans to win their freedom and then handing Texas over could take years. In addition, nowhere in his editorial did the author mention the role of the federal government. The process of expanding liberty was up to the individual American. They would come not as shady filibusters but as concerned neighbors willing to assist in Mexican emancipation from Spain.

Contrary to the above editor's opinion the emancipation assistance proved to be lacking. Instead the revolutionaries would have to be content with the "aid" of filibuster, adventurer and self-styled General, James Long. The General launched his assault into Texas in 1819 with a small band of American supporters. The expedition proved to be fruitless and ultimately disintegrated due to lack of support and funds. Long eventually surrendered to local authorities in 1821 and died in Mexico City the same year. Long's actions sparked considerable interest in the American press. Newspapers from around the country debated the legitimacy of his attack and sought to understand his objectives. The motives of both he and his followers were murky at best. The *Illinois Gazette* reported that Long intended to carve out his own private empire and sought to secure the "whole of New Mexico" and "has at present about 4,000 troops under his command." An excerpt from a letter by Long himself appeared in the *Nashville Clarion* that

offered further insight into the filibuster's intent. Long filled the letter with selfless platitudes and declared that "I am resolved to see Mexico Free and independent, or to perish in the attempt." Long recounted that he had "endured great hardships" and lamented that some of his fellow adventurers had already been killed or captured. He promised that the following day he would "commence paying our troops for the first time, and intend to continue it every two months." He further alluded to his financial problems and hoped that his "Tennessee friends will not forget me in my present difficulties." Long was confident that the Texan "inhabitants are anxious for my success" but then cryptically added that were "not to be relied on" until he linked up with reinforcements. Long saw himself not as an unsavory filibuster but rather a concerned neighbor who was dedicated to seeing Mexico free from Spanish dominion. He made no mention of annexing Texas to the United States in the event of victory yet expected American citizens to help fund his expedition. His concern that locals should not be relied upon further lend credence that his motives exceeded what he hinted at in his letters.<sup>135</sup>

Long's greatest success occurred July 30, 1820. On that day "the invader of Texas," as the *Raleigh Register* referred to him, won a skirmish against the "Caranqua Indians." Long then penned a letter to his followers shortly after the battle which was subsequently reprinted by the *Register*. He congratulated his men for their "decisive victory" and applauded their bravery since the enemy was "four times as numerous." He hoped the victory would bring lasting security to Americans as the Indians "have been extremely troublesome to the adjacent inhabitants of the United States." Long carefully concealed any mention of territorial acquisition and merely applauded his own victory. Although the United States should be grateful for his

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<sup>135</sup>Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*, 178-180; *Illinois Gazette* July 1, 1820; *Nashville Clarion* as it appeared in the *National Intelligencer* March 1, 1820. The figure 4,000 is most assuredly inflated.

assistance in “dealing” with the natives, no mention as to what fate awaited Texas in the event of his victory. <sup>136</sup>

Newspaper coverage regarding Long, his assault into Texas, and his recent military victory was mixed. Those supporting him usually came from the West and were in the minority. The editor of the *Orleans Gazette* claimed Long still had about 2,000 men with him but they had arrived “without resources.” Long was to be applauded for his actions that resulted in these men being “organized, equipped, transported and supplied,” for such actions made Long a successful “military provider.” The *Gazette* also felt that Long and his followers to be “pioneers” as Texas would soon become “three states of the Union.” This editor had no compunction in revealing the true nature of Long’s expedition, annexation. Texas would soon be won, thanks to the martial prowess of the brave “pioneers” and the United States would shortly welcome the addition of not one but three new members to its Union. The lofty ideals espoused by many expansionists such as bringing liberty and freedom to a region were ignored in this editorial. Instead, Long would simply conquer the province and deliver it into the hands of the United States. Unsurprisingly, this did not sit well with many Americans. <sup>137</sup>

The above editorial notwithstanding, most newspapers questioned the adventurer’s motives and scathingly condemned his actions. The editor of the *National Intelligencer* argued that the men were originally “without resources” because that is often the case with those “who invade a neighboring country in an unlicensed and furtive manner.” He also remarked that thinking Texas would be made into three states was comparable to “the skin of the lion being sold before he is caught.” As for the adventurers being considered “pioneers” that was an insult

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<sup>136</sup> *Raleigh Register* November 10, 1820.

<sup>137</sup> *Orleans Gazette* August 3, 1820; segments of the editorial also appeared in the *National Intelligencer* September 7, 1820.

to the latter. Instead he hoped that if there was to be an influx of Americans to Texas let they “expatriate themselves in a lawful manner...as the pilgrims of old, in the garb of peace, and not as an army with banners.” Rather than plunder these American settlers would “subdue the forest and tame the land.” The editor stated that General Long may well be a “man of good personal character” and military aptitude, but his actions were simply a violation of “the law of his country and the law of nations.” That alone puts him “beyond the pale of his country, and beyond the circle of sympathies.”<sup>138</sup>

The *Republican*, from New York, was even more scathing. The editor argued that Long had “penetrated as far into the interior of our neighbor’s country as to enable him to murder a few unoffending Caranqua Indians” and establish a small basecamp. He also declared that “we know not what system of ethics Gen. Long has studied, but certainly not one encumbered with many scruples, for lawless rapine and murder sound fearfully harsh to a good and virtuous man.” Long’s letter to his troops was derided as in the “inflated and arrogant language of an Alexander or a Napoleon” as it made him appear to be a “victorious leader of a numerous army-that fame and glory were wreathing unfading laurels to bind his brow wherever he turned his arms.” Instead, he reminder readers that “we know better, we know that instead of all this, he is the lawless leader of a handful of men, gathered from the kennels, and the night walks of New Orleans, men who know no law...and to whom crimes of the deepest dye have long been familiar, and who have been driven to the shades of society.” Furthermore the boast that some thousands of Americans were with Long were grossly exaggerated, instead they did not exceed “50 or 60 in number.” The editor continued to berate Long and his followers for their “predatory operations” and compared the invasion as the one perpetrated by Pizarro in South America. He

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<sup>138</sup> *National Intelligencer* September 7, 1820; the article also appeared in the *Raleigh Register* September 15, 1820 and the *Louisville Public Advertiser* September 27, 1820.

ended his tirade with a “word of advice to all whom it may concern. If Long’s views are just and honorable, let him go with the Olive Branch, instead of the sword, and enjoy the fruits of the earth without moistening it with the blood of the natives.” Again the author is carefully separating the proper actions of Americans from the wrong-headed European style of conquest favored by Long. For this author, Americans were better than that and Long deserved nothing but scorn.<sup>139</sup>

These anti-Long editorials reveal sentiments common among Americans regarding Texan annexation. They were not opposed to annexation itself. Instead they protested the heavy handed manner in which it appeared to be headed. Long and his followers were simply crooks and unscrupulous vagabonds. They were not inhabitants of Texas and only entered the region for purposes of conquest. There was no honor in such an endeavor. Such actions were too similar to European ways of conquest. The proper and “American” way to expand would be peaceful as settlers came to region to improve the land. Perhaps over time the region could then opt for annexation with the United States.

Also critical of the Long expedition was the *Louisville Public Advertiser*. A week prior the *Advertiser* had published a letter that praised Long’s leadership and claimed that his prospects “are beginning to look up” thanks in large measure to the arrival of an additional 300 Americans. The editor now felt the time was right to correct many of the misstatements that were inherent in the previously published letter. He found the estimate of 300 to be a gross exaggeration and ironically wondered how “the writer of this letter must be in possession of facts altogether concealed from his fellow citizens.” It was now the editor’s duty to correct such misinformation. He admitted that a few Americans did attempt to link up with Long but their

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<sup>139</sup> The *Republican* October 10, 1820; the editorial also appeared in the *National Intelligencer* November 6, 1820.

number was more like “30 or 40 persons” and they did not even reach the General as they were detained in New Orleans. Although they were eventually released due to lack of evidence the civil authorities were bound to act as they were expected to “suppress military enterprises...against neutral powers.” In addition many of Long’s followers had already deserted him and “converted their spears into plough-shares.” At present the General was left with a skeleton force of only “20 to 50 persons” and was no longer conducting any sort of military operations. By all accounts the *Advertiser* considered Long’s invasion a dismal and pathetic failure as the “only military achievement was the surprise and dispersion of a few naked, half-starved Indians.” This last statement is particularly illuminating. Its mocking tone suggests that Long and his few men were unsuited to real military activity and only won the battle because they opponents were in even worse condition than themselves. The statement was also a condemnation of Natives as well. In no other article or letter were the Caranqua Indians described as being “naked” or “half starved.” Depicting them as such not only makes them out to be pathetic enemies, an attack on Long’s military prowess, but as wretched savages. Such characterizations are expansionistic in tone. If Texas was full of nude, easily surprised and hungry savages, what threat could they possibly pose to robust Americans bent on “civilizing” the region? This author clearly had no sympathy for filibusters like Long but honest hardworking Anglo settlers should have no problem pacifying the region.<sup>140</sup>

The editor also heaped scorn upon the very idea of invading Texas. He warned “if there is any man, or body of men, so deluded as to enter Texas with the hope of securing any benefit to the country, or themselves, by *military operations*, most will woefully be disappointed.” He

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<sup>140</sup> *Louisville Public Advertiser* September 1, 1821; For more information regarding how many Texans interacted with Native Americans see Gary Anderson *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875*.

believed that the “mind must be diseased, or desperate, that could form such a project or embark in such a purpose.” The people living in Texas should never look to the United States for help as any revolution must come from within. An American invasion would most certainly be “viewed as little else than a crusade of spoil and plunder” and “would be repulsed with shame and ruin to those concerned in it.” Instead, “the only justifiable revolutions are those in which the people of a country embark for the amelioration of their own condition, for the just limitations of power, and for the security of those inalienable rights, necessary, to the happiness and prosperity of society.” The editor admitted that “however we may regret that our government has yielded to Spain this fine country [Texas], let no American stain his character by attempting to retake it under pretended crusades for liberty.” If Americans truly wished to live in Texas they should submit to Spanish authority as that would be the only way they could find “an honorable and prosperous residence.” Again this editor was not opposed to annexing Texas but rather the manner in which it would be acquired. The government had already relinquished any claim to Texas, for this editor that meant the case was closed. Americans may lament such a move but it was legal and should be adhered to. Launching a filibuster expedition brings only shame to America and death to Texans. He was also adamant in his definition of liberty and freedom. Such concepts could never come from outsiders but can only be maintained through the sacrifices of its citizens. The editor’s definitions, while specific, still provide a loophole for annexation. If the lawfully settled inhabitants of Texas desire liberty and freedom they should rebel of their own volition without interference from other governments. Once Texan independence is assured and the newly established government petitions for admission to the United States than such an act would be both lawful and desirous.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> *Louisville Public Advertiser* September 1, 1821.

The *St. Louis Enquirer* also claimed to have the inside scoop regarding Long, his expedition, and the ongoing revolution. The editor lambasted other newspapers, like the *National Intelligencer*, for relying upon false data and not considering the beneficial effect a free Texas would have on the United States. He commented that Long was “feeble” and outgunned but was happy to report that the General was now a “humble auxiliary in the cause of the great Mexican Republic.” The editor was optimistic and argued that the “revolution is at this time progressing, and will no doubt speedily terminate in the deliverance of the country from the power of Spain-the whole of Spanish North America, including the country of Texas will form one great Republic.” It was this new and grand administration that Long served, not some half-hearted filibuster expedition. He assured readers that “a bright day is about to open the prospects of the Western States which will afford them outlets and facilities that they have never yet enjoyed.” Soon a “direct road through Texas” will link the United States with the “very heart of Mexico.” This road would undoubtedly bring about “lucrative commerce...the great influence which this revolution will have on the prosperity of the West, must appear obvious to every intelligent mind.”<sup>142</sup>

This editorial further reveals the diverse and complex viewpoints that existed regarding expansion. Here, Long was neither patriot nor villain, but pawn. He was not a threat to Mexico and should not be reviled in the States. Instead, he was now honorably serving the Mexicans in their quest for freedom albeit in a very diminished capacity. The real issue was the independence of Mexico and the prospective trade routes that would undoubtedly pop up. The one “Great Republic” would be a valuable ally to the United States, specifically through overland trade. For this editor, territorial expansion was unnecessary as Americans could still

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<sup>142</sup> *St. Louis Enquirer* September 22, 1821.



attain economic prosperity through peaceful means. A war over who should own Texas was ludicrous. Cooperation rather than conquest would carry the day.

The *Baltimore Telegraph* agreed and questioned whether or not Texas was worth acquiring at all. He attacked the filibuster incursions into Texas, for if such a territory were to be annexed to the United States, Americans should avoid “dismembering and devastating her.” He also questioned the argument that Texan land was needed as “we have got enough of it beyond the Mississippi.” Most distressing to the editor would be the moral character of those already living in Texas. He admitted that initially the emigrants were of good American stock but their children had grown up in a lawless environment. In truth “none can tell who the population of Texas are, overrun as it has been for some years by pirates and outlaws.” He feared that it would be “doubly as expensive to rule them as the imaginary advantages.” Doing so would be both difficult and dangerous as America may be “compelled to rule it [Texas] as the Turks are said to rule their distant provinces-by giving it up to the oppressions and extortions of its appointed rulers, as long as the inhabitants submit; and whenever they shall not by suffering them to indulge in misrule and confusion of their own making.” The editor also sought to discredit the notion that the United States had a duty to uplift Texas for “philanthropic” reasons. He concluded that those Americans who sought to leave the United States for Texas should forego any sense of protection and accept “whatever fate” that should befall them. He ultimately concluded that the world was a dangerous place and Americans should mind their own business; that “we need not be disturbed by the desolate condition of our neighbors.”<sup>143</sup>

Once more this editor left a caveat for expansion. While he personally felt the United States did not need any additional land the United States did have a legal right to claim Texas. In

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<sup>143</sup> *Baltimore Telegraph* as it appeared in the *Louisville Public Advertiser* July 5, 1820.

present circumstances such an acquisition may be a pyrrhic victory. The province was filled with undesirables who may only be brought to order by stiff old world brutality. Since Americans were above such nastiness acquiring Texas may not be prudent. Furthermore those who ventured into this region should be under no presumption that the government would protect them. That right was abandoned as soon as they sought to settle in another country. While Texas was in “desolate condition” now that did not mean it would always remain so. If more and more “proper settlers,” not the previously mentioned pirates, came they may be able to create a semblance of civilization. In that case Texas could be annexed without any fear of ruling them through brutal matters and the acquisition would be justified as the United States had a strong legal claim for it. During the Texan war for independence in 1836, such requirements seemed to have been satisfied.

Not everyone was as critical of their Latin American neighbors as the above editor. Instead, many Americans held out hope that Mexico and other newly independent South American nations would be valuable sister Republics and needed allies against Europe. At the same time many Americans hoped the United States would serve as an example of Republicanism done right. As Jefferson succinctly stated, “the disease of liberty is catching.” As more nations began to declare independence from Spain, Americans from all over the country expressed their sympathy for the rebellions. The *Boston Chronicle* proclaimed that they were “happy to learn” of the South Americans struggle for the “sacred cause of liberty and independence.” After listing several of the rebellions the editor noted that such news has been “received with as much joy by the...real republicans of this Northern part of the Western hemisphere” than by the participants themselves. The editor also hoped that Bostonians would

“celebrate victory of the friends and advocates of South American liberty, over the minions of despotism, priestcraft, and monkism.”<sup>144</sup>

The *National Intelligencer* reported on a banquet held in Lexington, Kentucky where Henry Clay gave a speech praising the revolutions. During the banquet a Captain Parker offered a toast to “the patriots of South America, we wish them success in their struggle for liberty.” The *Baltimore Patriot*, echoing the sentiment that the United States would serve as an example to the rest of the world, printed a short blurb “To the patriots of South America-They have embarked in a glorious cause, and may their course be directed by the splendid star of civil liberty that beams on them from the North.” The *Columbian Register* from Connecticut stated that “the cause of liberty is gaining strength, and we hope soon to see it triumphant. Great are the privations which the patriots cheerfully undergo, to obtain this object, they emulate the conduct of our worthy sires, sacrificing their lives and fortunes on the sacred alter dedicated to freedom.”<sup>145</sup>

The *New-York Columbian* and *New Hampshire Sentinel* took a more philosophical approach and predicted that the South American revolutions were only the beginning. The *Sentinel* hoped that the revolutions would succeed in Mexico and South America. The author looked forward to an alliance of democratic nations that could rival Europe. He lauded “the two grand and important commonwealths [United States and Mexico] that may with the aid of those

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<sup>144</sup> *Boston Chronicle* as it appeared in the *Raleigh Register* April 9, 1813. Jefferson also feared that others may find democracy elusive because, “ignorance and superstition will chain their minds and bodies under religious and military despotism.” In one of his letters Jefferson asks a friend “How much liberty can they [other democratic nations] bear without intoxication.” Historian Drew McCoy claims that many Americans shared Jefferson’s views as “it was commonly assumed in Revolutionary America that a republican form of government was particularly precarious because it could succeed only in an extraordinary society of distinctly moral people.” Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980),5.

<sup>145</sup> *National Intelligencer* May 14, 1817; *Baltimore Patriot* March 15, 1817; *The Peoples Advocate* May 10, 1817; *Columbian Register* October 4, 1817.

forming in South America give law to the opposite continent.” The *Columbian* anticipated that democracy may catch on in Europe, stating that “Prussia again promises to add a representative branch to the government.” The *Columbian* ended the article by noting “that tyranny and liberty are but opposite points in the circle of revolution.”<sup>146</sup>

It was tyranny that some Americans feared would win out in the end in Latin America. Perhaps only Americans were capable of successful self-governance. The *New Hampshire Sentinel* claimed “that there is a strong bias in the minds of the people of this country in favor of the government and citizens of the United States in preference to all other nations.” The *Essex Register* looked to justify such assertions by claiming that the problem with South America was lack of equal land distribution. The editor stressed that the nations must emulate the United States and allow any man to own land or “the temple of freedom will rest on a sandy foundation that will not long sustain it.” The *Colombian Register* claimed that conditions were ripe in Mexico for independence but the nation lacked great leaders. “There is nothing wanting in Mexico but union and system to establish their independence, had they a chief like our departed Washington, able to unite the energies, resources and the hearts of patriots, we might soon hail her: Sister Republic.”<sup>147</sup>

The *Newburyport Herald*, from Massachusetts, sympathized with the rebellious colonies concluding that “the revolutionary struggles of South America cannot fail to highly interest the feeling of every friend to freedom and mankind.” The *Herald* recommended that Spain allow their colonies to become independent but wondered if “the time has yet arrived in which the

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<sup>146</sup> *New-York Columbian* May 6, 1817; *New Hampshire Sentinel* April 20, 1822.

<sup>147</sup> *New Hampshire Sentinel*, April 20, 1822; *Essex Register*, February 9, 1824; *Vermont Intelligencer*, February 23, 1817; *Colombian Register*, October, 4, 1817.

South Americans can erect a standard of national independence with a prospect of success...[or] give any degree of permanency to a government which should have rational liberty for its basis.” The *Herald* cautioned that “if the state of society is not adapted to a free government, the people may shake off the shackles of foreign masters, only to assume the manacles of domestic tyrants.” The author also warned that “an ignorant, bigoted and barbarous people cannot long be a free people.” The *Herald* also worried that those of South American stock may not be as industrious as Americans. “They may have a superficial idea of man in a free government, but for want of a competent knowledge of his corresponding duties, their attempts at liberty will commence with licentiousness, and progress through anarchy to despotism.” The above notions that Latin Americans were not industrious, lacked great leaders and were inept with land distribution, reinforced the idea that democracy may be uniquely American. This in turn indicated that only Americans should spread liberty as others are simply not up to the challenge.<sup>148</sup>

An article in the *Arkansas Gazette* found Mexico’s ability “to preserve the rank of an independent nation” to be “very doubtful.” The *Gazette* lamented that even if independence was maintained it would not be able to uphold a Constitution similar to the one enjoyed by Americans. The *Gazette* cautioned emigrants to Texas that Mexico was plagued by “religious intolerance.” They claimed the leaders of the Mexican government “instead of being composed of liberal and enlightened statesman, are in fact a set of bigoted monks.” The article ended by stating that most settlers were Protestant and “attached to Republican principles-are you willing to abandon your native country and be subjected to the dominion of ...monks in Mexico.” This article exemplifies the diverse viewpoints expressed in American newspapers. For this editor the most compelling reason for Americans to spread beyond the United States was religious

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<sup>148</sup> Tucker & Hendrickson, 252-254; *Newburyport Herald*, March 7, 1817.

superiority. For him political or racial superiority were secondary concerns. The real danger was popery. This editor was linking stable political government with Protestantism.<sup>149</sup>

For the editor of the *Salem Gazette*, Democracy not Protestantism was the reason Americans should expand. He reported that the United States was the only hope for liberty and democracy lamenting that “if our experiment fails, there is no hope for man on this side of the grave.” Other races had proven incapable of self-rule. The author also recalled the many great things associated with American democracy, urging readers to “contemplate the peaceful triumphs of industry, the rapid progress of civilization” and to “think of the countless multitudes that are springing up to inherit these blessings.” These new settlers needed their own land and were destined to spread democracy wherever they went. The editorial claimed that the destiny was already being fulfilled and noted that the “Republic advances in the wilderness of the West.”<sup>150</sup>

For many Americans, that advance once again wound up in Texas. The *Mississippi Republican* insisted that Spanish and Mexican misuse of the land was at an end. The time has “has arrived when all these obstacles cease to exist and when a government purely American, free and independent, hold an undisputed sway over this interesting section of the globe.” The *Republican* conceded that Mexico owned the territory and that they had a “policy of strengthening her north eastern frontier by a rapid accession of population” and were willing to “defend their possessions.” The editor then stated that he opposed a war of conquest because “it is not to be expected that a government so proverbial for its just, unambitious and pacific policy as the United States should ever attempt to regain by conquest a territory to which she has

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<sup>149</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, September 7, 1824.

<sup>150</sup> *Salem Gazette*, August 19, 1823.

relinquished all claim by solemn treaty.” While the *Republican* did not explicitly advise Americans to head to Texas, the tone suggests otherwise. It did explicitly state that Texas is useful and that it should have “a government purely American” but decided that war was not the solution. Instead, increased immigration may be the key. Filibustering expeditions were bloody and often considered uncouth while outright aggression would be in violation of international law and too similar to European styles of conquest. Peaceful American immigrants who took matters into their own hands would be an acceptable way for Texas to break free from its Catholic overlords.<sup>151</sup>

The Austin family was one of the first to organize peaceful non-filibuster expeditions to Texas. In 1821, Stephen Austin penned a letter that encouraged emigration to Texas and subsequently appeared in several newspapers. The letter stated that he was searching for three hundred families to settle in the new territory. “To each of whom will a tract of land will be given and to whom the most liberal privileges are secured.” Austin further claimed that “money is becoming more abundant [and] free trade is permitted.” The *Arkansas Gazette*, among others, published a letter looking for volunteers to establish a colony near Galveston with “a body of honest and well-disposed Americans.” In each of these cases the expeditions were to be peaceful and most importantly made up of enterprising Americans. They would be able to bring out the potential of Texas and turn the “wilderness” into “civilization.” These pleas differed substantially than the earlier attempts Americans made in Texas. They were neither out to assist the Mexicans in any rebellious cause, nor were they seeking to military wrench the province away. Economic productivity and stability were the settler’s goals not conquest and plunder. It

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<sup>151</sup> *Mississippi Republican* March 8, 1822; the same article also appeared in *The Times and Weekly Advisor*, April 2, 1822.

is also crucial to remember, however, that these industrious settlers tilling the soil were American, plucked from the States and not terribly interested in assimilation.<sup>152</sup>

Not everyone understood the restlessness of Americans. The editor of the *Arkansas Gazette* wished those who chose to head out west good fortune but questioned “the blind infatuation which has led hundreds of Americans to emigrate to Texas.” Instead the editor felt there was plenty of available land within the current American borders to satisfy any agrarian or economic requirement. Although many Americans tended to sympathize with those who sought their fortune out west that did not automatically mean enlarging the borders of the United States. If Americans were able to spread democracy, liberty and, Protestantism, without annexation then so be it. There was no consensus among expansionists what to do with the land aside from the fact that it should be populated by Americans.<sup>153</sup>

While not all Americans understood the draw of the west enough took up the call to establish an American majority in Texas. Those who stayed behind often viewed the migrants to Texas as fellow Americans, not as immigrants to a new nation. The *Arkansas Gazette* reassured readers that Texas was made up of mostly Americans that “the territory, though nominally Mexican, would in fact be virtually American.” The *Gazette* argued that Texas could be considered a “Republican empire” and that “will it not be better that the part of Mexico which borders the United States be made up of Americans.” The *Rhode-Island American* echoed this

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<sup>152</sup> William Binkley, *The Texas Revolution* (Baton rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 2-3; *Washington Gazette*, August 15, 1821; *Richmond Enquirer*, August 24, 1821; *Arkansas Gazette* September 8, 1825.

<sup>153</sup> *Arkansas Gazette* September 8, 1825.



statement and claimed that both territories shared the same “language and education” and that Americans could look west and find “Kindred souls . . . in those hardy pioneers.”<sup>154</sup>

The *Nashville Whig* printed an advertisement looking for subscribers back in the states interested in affairs in Texas as well as some hardy souls willing to move out west and assist in starting a newspaper in the town of Sarahville. The editors stated that in the olden days of westward expansion, to be successful all that was needed was “an ax, a grubbing hoe and a rifle.” The editorial claimed that times had changed and a newspaper was now required for the more sophisticated emigrant. The paper would be the *Texas Emigrant*, and would not “dictate or control public opinion but let the world know what that opinion is.” As a precursor to what opinions the world would learn the *Whig’s* editors deemed Americans “the founders of a system of government calculated to influence the happiness of millions yet unborn and the reclaimers of an almost boundless expanse of wilderness.” The budding publication was also to be printed exclusively in English and, unsurprisingly considering the title, cater to an American audience. By the 1830s Texas was perceived by many in the States to be almost another American province. It was principally made up of American settlers, who claimed had no martial aspirations and were organizing and establishing settlements with all the trimmings including English newspapers.<sup>155</sup>

Although many Americans saw the potential in Texas, its wonders were not accepted universally. The editor of the *Village Record* was convinced that acquiring the vast territory of Texas would result in nine new slave states. He warned readers that this would mean “five millions more of poor wretches held in bondage-bought and sold like cattle in the

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<sup>154</sup> *Arkansas Gazette* November 29, 1825; *Rhode-Island American* June 6, 1828.

<sup>155</sup> *Nashville Whig*, October 26, 1835.

market...Gracious Heavens!” Admitting Texas into the Union would mean “Slavery to be perpetuated forever.” Worse yet new slave states would drastically upset the precarious political balance between free and slave states. Although the editor detested slavery, he accepted it pending each new slave state was accompanied by a free one. He called any who would seek to upset the balance “a traitor to themselves, to posterity, to the great cause of humanity, civil and social rights and order.” For this editor, the admission of Texas should be opposed simply because it would allow slavery to expand unchecked. He chose not to question any of the supposed benefits of the region but instead condemn it for upsetting the political equilibrium.<sup>156</sup>

The editor of the *New-England Weekly Review* agreed. He too worried about the effect “eight or ten” additional slave states would have on the Union. He wondered “what will become of the power and importance of New England?” and answered simply that “it will be annihilated.” He reminded readers that the South was already overtly powerful and admitting Texas would more than double their influence. Consequently his beloved New England “will be rendered a mere tributary province.” Furthermore, the author feared any addition of new territory, be they free or slave, to be detrimental to the country. The nation “is already too great, and if it continues to be extended, no human power will be able to prevent it from being rent and riven by moral convulsions.” The country’s interests were “already too diversified” as Northern and Southern interests rarely coincided. Additional territory would merely exacerbate this parochialism and he feared the Union would be in danger. Like some other expansionist opponents this editor was concerned with maintaining the political balance. More importantly for him though was preserving the power and authority of the New England region. Any new territory, even free states, would encroach upon his regions importance and thus must be

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<sup>156</sup> *Village Record* as it appeared in the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* October 9, 1829.

avoided. Such a viewpoint further illustrates the idea that opposition to expansion could take on a myriad of forms. Acquiring Texas, like Florida and Louisiana before it, would be no easy task and was vociferously opposed by many Americans for a variety of reasons.<sup>157</sup>

A letter to the editor that appeared in the *Huntsville Democrat* demonstrated that not every American emigrant who went to Texas was satisfied. The letter was entitled “Texas Fever Cooled” and was penned by a friend of the recently returned emigrant John Ballard. The letter was written in order to better inform the papers “numerous readers” of the pitfalls of settling in Texas. The friend noted that had Mr. Ballard all the available facts he would never have ventured to Texas and would have saved “between two and three hundred dollars and three months of his time, and would have prevented other families from going to a country wherein they are dissatisfied.” In order for future settlers to fully understand what they were getting involved in excerpted copies of the Mexican Constitution in regard to Texas were reprinted. Although the article did not explicitly state what segments rankled Mr. Ballard so much, two of the statutes are prime candidates. The first stated that “The religion of the Mexican nation is and will be perpetually, the Roman Catholic Apostolic. The Nation will protect it by wise and just laws, and prohibit the exercise of any other whatsoever.” The other section that was sure to bother Southern settlers stipulated that no slaves born in Mexico would be allowed after the publication of the Constitution and that “Neither will the introduction of slaves be permitted under any pretext.” While many American emigrants simply chose to ignore such stipulations, Mr. Ballard instead wanted to follow the letter of the law. He wished to prevent other Americans from being misled and wasting time and money settling in an unsuitable location. Publication of such an article is noteworthy for several reasons. First is that it demonstrates that not every

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<sup>157</sup> *New-England Weekly Review* as it appeared in the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* October 9, 1829.

Southern newspaper printed glowing reports of Texas that encouraged Americans to settle. More importantly, however, was the veiled idea that Texas could be the land that everyone dreamed it would be if only such stringent restrictions were curtailed. The Texan Revolution would fulfill such a request.<sup>158</sup>

Finally in 1835 the Mexican government, rightly concerned with the great numbers of Americans entering the country, attempted to curtail it. The Mexican President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna ordered all illegal Americans out of Texas. This applied to any American who came without official permission from Mexico City. The vast majority of settlers fell into this category. Santa Anna also abolished the Constitution of 1824, appointing himself dictator. He then ordered all legal American settlers to be disarmed. Stephen Austin, one of the few legal American residents, rushed to Mexico City to seek out an agreement whereby Texans could regain their privileges. Instead of listening to his pleas, Mexican officials arrested Austin and threw him into prison. In response, the residents of Texas, both Americans and Mexicans, rebelled and the Texan War for Independence began.<sup>159</sup>

Although some Texians, Americans living in Texas, went out of their way to claim that they were united with Tejanos, Mexicans living in Texas, notions of American superiority still dominated. Many Americans felt that Mexico *could* have been a “sister republic” but their support of Santa Anna’s despotism meant they had squandered their shot at the wonders of democracy. The only hope for freedom in Texas was through governance by Americans and like-minded Tejanos. The Texan Declaration of Independence made this sentiment immediately clear. The document lists grievances against the Mexican government and stated that they must

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<sup>158</sup> *Huntsville Democrat* as it appeared in the *Arkansas State Gazette* July 7, 1835.

<sup>159</sup> Stephen Hardin, *Texian Iliad: A military history of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 5-9.

fight or “submit to the most intolerable of all tyranny, the combined despotism of the sword and the priesthood.” The document recorded the authors “melancholy conclusion that the Mexican people have acquiesced in the destruction of their liberty... [and] that they are unfit to be free and incapable of self-government.”<sup>160</sup>

Many Americans back in the States saw the revolutionaries as fellow countrymen under threat from oppression in a noble struggle to spread liberty. While most newspapers sympathized with the plight of the revolutionaries they differed substantially regarding what sort of official stance the United States should take. Many Americans also agreed with the Texan revolutionaries that the Mexican people had demonstrated that they were simply not up to the challenge of self-government. The *New York Sunday Morning News* claimed that the Mexican government was “bigoted and despotic” and that Mexico itself “has undergone a thousand changes and revolutions in government, until it has got to be nothing more than a government of priests and soldiers.” *The Sentinel* also made it clear that assistance from the United States would be needed to achieve Texan independence. This aid, however, “should be supported and maintained ...not by the government of the United States, but by thousands of individual American citizens.” Officially, the United States needed to remain neutral so it could continue to cultivate its “pacific policy.”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Avalon Project “Texan Declaration of Independence” <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/texdec.htm>; Paul Lack, *The Texan Revolutionary Experience: A Political and Social History 1835-1836* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992), 97, 113, 184; Reginald Horseman *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 213; For more information regarding the considerable contributions Tejanos made during the Texan war for Independence see Andres Tijerina’s *Tejanos & Texas under the Mexican Flag 1821-1836* and *A Revolution Remembered: The Memoirs and Selected Correspondence of Juan Seguin*, Edited by Jesus de la Teja.

<sup>161</sup> *New York Sunday Morning News* as it appeared in *The New Hampshire Sentinel*, November 19, 1835; *Mississippi Republican*, March 8, 1822.

The Provisional Government of Texas recognized the budding relationship with the United States and authorized three commissioners to head east and garner support. One of those selected was Stephen Austin who, upon his release from prison, began making speeches and garnering support for the revolution. Many in the United States felt that democracy itself was being threatened and would not tolerate fellow Americans living under a dictatorship. They greeted Austin with support and adulation with few feeling anything other than sympathy for the Texan cause. Monetary aid was not the only thing Austin was after, and at a speech in Louisville, Kentucky, he made clear that:

The emancipation of Texas will extend the principles of self-government, over a rich and neighboring country, and open a vast field there for enterprise, wealth, and happiness, and for those who wish to escape from the frozen blasts of a northern climate, by removing to a more congenial one. It will promote and accelerate the march of the present age, for it will open a door through which a bright and constant stream of light and intelligence will flow from this great northern fountain over the benighted regions of Mexico.<sup>162</sup>

Another similar recruitment attempt was a letter written by a Thomas Greene and published in the *Nashville Whig*. Greene claimed the war was “between us republicans and the Priesthood of the Old Inquisition.” He had “too much confidence in the spirit of liberty in my ‘home, my own, my native home’ to believe the Republicans of the United States of North America will fold their arms and quietly witness so unequal a contest.” Greene also made it clear that “land can be obtained at about three cents an acre” and that it is “far superior to the best parts of Madison County, Mississippi, which I believe to be the best cotton region of the United States.” The fact that the majority of the recruitment efforts centered on these two themes meant that they were equally important. For some, Texas was merely another economic

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<sup>162</sup> Avalon Project “*Address of the Honorable S. F. Austin, Delivered at Louisville, Kentucky, March 7, 1836*” [avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/texind01.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/texind01.asp)

market ready for exploitation, for others it was a chance to spread liberty and the “freedom” to own slaves. For most expansionists it was probably a combination of the two.<sup>163</sup>

In February and March of 1836 a contingent of approximately 180 Texan soldiers fortified the Alamo mission on the outskirts of San Antonio. William Barrett Travis, formerly of South Carolina, was made commander of the garrison. He, like many others, had come to Texas for financial reasons and quickly embraced the rhetoric and spirit of the rebellion. Although his stint at leadership would prove short lived his and the rest of the garrisons’ deaths defending this dilapidated old mission would prove invaluable to the Texan cause. They were seen as the vanguard and first martyrs of the Texas revolution and their heroism appeared in newspapers all over the United States and helped inspire potential volunteers.

Travis felt that democracy itself was at stake and his letters appeared in print throughout the United States. The first of these, however, was not intended for publication and was addressed to Sam Houston, the commander of the Texan Army. Travis desperately asked for more volunteers to help defend the mission, stating that “if they overpower us, we fall a sacrifice at the shrine of our country, and we hope that posterity and our country will do our memory justice. Give me help, oh my country! Victory or death!” Houston was unable to muster the forces in time to save the Alamo but the letter found its way to several newspapers in the United States. When Travis realized that no aid was coming from Houston he penned another letter, requesting that it be printed in the United States. It was addressed to “the people of Texas and all Americans in the world.” After reaffirming his position and dedication to the cause, he proclaimed that “I call on you in the name of liberty, of patriotism and everything dear to the American character to come to our aid with all dispatch.” Interestingly, Travis asked for

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<sup>163</sup> *Nashville Whig*, August 1, 1836.

assistance from the populace and not the federal government. He requested that Americans leave their home, pay their own travel expenses to a foreign country and fight a nation with whom the United States was not at war. Travis's justification for such a sacrifice was that these volunteers would be fighting in "the name of liberty." Previous pro-expansionist rhetoric such as expanding economic markets and for national security reasons still existed but were overshadowed by the 'nobler' aspects such as fighting for liberty, freedom and independence. The Texan independence movement was often linked to the American Revolution and although the war was fought in a foreign country, most Texian and American volunteers were confident that they would eventually be reunited with their American brethren.<sup>164</sup>

At a time when entertainment outlets were few the role of music and songs played a crucial role in the shaping of public opinion and attention. One of the best examples of these songs was published in the *Nashville Whig* soon after the loss of the Alamo and Goliad.

Sons whose fathers Washington  
Led to glorious battle on  
And their countries freedom won,  
Is that spirit fled?

By a cruel and treacherous foe,  
Friends and brothers now are low,  
At the glorious Alamo  
Numbered with the dead

Hear the suffering Texians cry,  
See our land in ruin lie  
Can you still your aid deny?  
Sons of Tennessee

No! We shall gird our armor on  
Savage foe and haughty don  
Shall feel were each a freeman's son

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<sup>164</sup> Erik Brunn & Jay Crosby, editors. *Our Nations Archive: The History of the United States in Documents* (New York: Leventhal Publishers Inc. 1999), 296; Hardin, 148-155; Copies of Travis's letters also appeared in the *Nashville Whig*, *Newport Mercury*, *Vermont State Paper* and *Georgia Telegraph*.



And Texas shall be free  
Santa Anna's pirate hordes  
Soon shall fall beneath our swords  
Texas owns no despot lords  
Nor bow to slavery  
Then on ye gallant warriors go  
Lay the cruel murderers low  
Be your war cry Alamo  
Death or liberty!!

Although much of this song highlights common themes such appealing to a sense of history and calling the enemy “savage” there were some particularly revealing lines. The most revealing part is a line in the third stanza “see *our* land in ruin lie.” This author was making the common claim that the land in Texas was by right part of the United States. As was common in many pro-expansionist writings, no mention was made of the Adams-Onis Treaty which gave up any American claim to Texas. Instead, the author insisted the territory was already American even before the war was over. The song reiterated to its readers that United States territory was being defiled by those who would stamp out democracy. Also noteworthy was the anger and passion attached to the fall of the Alamo. Even though those killed at the Alamo were engaged in a civil war in a foreign land, their deaths enraged many Americans. The battle of the Alamo even in 1836 ranked among the pantheon of great American battles even though it was neither fought in defense of America or on her soil.<sup>165</sup>

By war's end nearly a third of all revolutionaries were American volunteers fresh from the States who had yet to even reside in the contested region. The Battle of San Jacinto, which

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<sup>165</sup> *Nashville Whig*, June 10, 1836; Goliad was a Texan fort captured by Santa Anna's troops immediately following the battle for the Alamo. In this case the garrison of 400 surrendered and were promptly executed, this unsurprisingly horrified both the Texan and American publics, for more information see *Texian Iliad* p. 168-174.

effectively ended military operations in Texas, was won thanks in large measure to American support. This included the “Kentucky Rifles” a company of men made up of recruits from Ohio and Kentucky that served in the final battle. The only artillery available to the Texans were the “twin sisters,” a pair of smoothbore cannons courtesy of the citizens of Cincinnati Ohio. Santa Anna was captured shortly after the battle and forced to give up any claim to Texas. The fledgling rebellion had succeeded and Texas became an independent nation. Although the war was over, conflict still raged in the United States regarding what to do with the newly established Republic.<sup>166</sup>

Many Americans had long seen Texas as a potential American acquisition. Much like other early expansionistic endeavors, attempts to acquire Texas were often half-baked schemes that utterly failed. Filibustering expeditions against Spanish controlled Texas gained nothing but death or inglorious defeat for the American adventurers. Attempts by the government to reign in expansion to Texas, such as the Adams-Onis Treaty, were often ignored as more American settlers moved to the area. While the Texan War for Independence ultimately proved successful, the annexation was delayed for an additional decade. Although the early attempts to acquire Texas through filibustering often met with withering criticism in the press, the debate on what to do with the newly independent “Elysium” only increased in intensity in the coming years.

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<sup>166</sup> Hardin, 213-217.

## **Chapter 4 - Texas Fever Raging: The Successful Annexation of Texas**

The independence of Texas did nothing to quell the war of opinion being waged in the United States. The major question on all American lips was “what now?” Should the United States welcome Texas as another state or should it remain independent. Just like previous attempts at expansion, acquiring Texas presented a variety of incendiary viewpoints. Some Americans feared an independent Texas could become an economic threat to the United States and advocated annexation, while others felt enlarging the nation’s boundaries was in the best interests of national security. Some opponents of expansion saw the annexation of Texas as an affront to republicanism, while others opposed it because they saw Texans as undesirable plunderers. Most tellingly, the debate over Texas was shaped by its relationship with slavery. The proverbial elephant in the room was finally moving to the forefront in the debate over expansionism. Interestingly, however, the peculiar institution was primarily invoked by opponents in a morally outraged sense while expansionist proponents often chose to ignore slavery altogether and extoll the regions other virtues.

Unquestionably, the most eloquent and detailed argument for the admittance of Texas appeared in the *United States Telegraph*. The article was a printing of a recently given speech by “Mr. Custis of Arlington,” who was most assuredly George Washington Parke Custis, adopted son of the revered first President and father-in-law of the famous Robert E. Lee. The speech was given on May 24<sup>th</sup> at the “Meeting of the Citizens of Washington favorable to the cause of Texas.” Custis claimed the rebellion in Texas was perfectly natural as the settlers were opposing

the “ruthless march of a military oppressor.” The “orator” as the *Telegraph* referred to Custis, insisted that the revolutionaries were fellow Americans who moved to Texas in response from Mexican offers to settle. These enterprising adventurers did so because “Texas was a country abounding in natural advantages but wanting in the grand essentials of a hardy and enterprising population to bring those advantages into practical use and benefit.” The Mexican inhabitants had squandered the potential of Texas and relented to living under tyranny. They were guilty of slaughtering captured prisoners with “revolting cruelty.” He argued that Santa Anna and the Mexican army “restored the age of barbarism in the enlightened era of the nineteenth century.” Although the “Mexicans have in their siestas sometimes dreamed of liberty; but the experience of waking hours shows that it was but a dream.” The “orator” claimed the Mexicans had much to learn from their American neighbors and that “truth, magnanimity, and courage” should be “tempered by mercy.”<sup>167</sup>

Custis was clearly couching his justification for expansion in cultural and racial terms. The lazy, barbaric Mexicans were only capable of true liberty when asleep. In their waking hours they were cruel papist slaves who reveled in killing captives. In stark contrast to the Mexicans stood the industrious and merciful Americans. The Americans were anxious to uplift the land, bring about civilization and rule fairly and justly. This expansion was different than European attempts. While Custis would consider the British to be good Anglos, they were also capable of mass cruelty and monarchism, with the hardy American emigrants to Texas, however, expansion was not only justified, but necessary.

Custis argued that the Texan revolutionaries were fighting for a sacred purpose as it was up to the “descendants of the Anglo Saxon to dispel the mists of ignorance, bigotry and

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<sup>167</sup> *United States Telegraph* June 23, 1836.

barbarism that so long shrouded that fair land, and let in the light of freedom, civilization and the arts.” Custis took pains to portray the Texan settlers not as greedy adventurers but instead as the noble vanguard whose purpose was to uplift the benighted region. Custis, while unwavering in his adulation for American emigrants to Texas, was remarkably silent regarding the Tejanos, who he lumped together with other papist and barbaric Mexicans. Custis also acknowledged another group in Texas that needed to be swept aside by virulent Anglo Saxons. The “orator” argued that the fierce Indian tribe known as the Comanche ruled Texas and that no one dared oppose them. With the coming of the Anglo settler the fierce “wild Arab of the west” had finally met his match. According to Custis, the Comanche greatly respected the new settlers for the bravery and ingenuity and were spreading word of the “coming of the pale face, who tradition had long since declared should one day possess the hunting grounds and home of the Indian.” The ingenuity of the American settler stemmed from his resourcefulness, and like the Mexican, the Comanche people were wasting the wonderful potential of the Texan region. They were nomads, incapable of properly utilizing the land and of creating “civilization.” The lazy Mexican failed to impress the fierce savages but the industrious American terrified the “Arab of the West.” It is also interesting to note how Custis portrayed the Indian. Clearly, they were fierce and nomadic but not necessarily dangerous to the American settler. According to Custis, the Comanche were so impressed with American settlers that they accepted that the land should be passed, seemingly bloodlessly, to their racial betters. The ability to cultivate the land forced the fierce Comanche to flee.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>168</sup>Ibid; Contrary to the claims of Custis the Comanche did not flee the Anglo settlers in Texas and they would prove troublesome to those Americans who sought to “civilize” Texas. See Pekka Hamalainen *The Comanche Empire* and T.R. Fehrenbach *Comanches: The History of a People*.

Custis then sought to explain and identify the sense of ingenuity and bravery that was characteristic of the American settler. The “orator” found that “the pioneer of the wilderness is a character purely American.” He claimed that when European peoples entered new lands they brought along vast Armies and Navies used to subjugate the inhabitants and resources. In contrast the American:

goes alone-in one hand the rifle in the other the axe. The rifle procures subsistence, while the axe levels the forest and prepares the infant settlement. The savage beast and savage man retire at the pioneer’s approach, while social life, civilization, and the arts follow his trail. But no sooner has the silence of nature been changed to the busy hum of industry, than onward is the cry of the pioneer; and again he plunges into the depths of new forests again to open the view of new worlds guided alone by that ‘star of empire that westward takes its way’.

At this point the *Telegraph* claimed the crowd cheered. It was this pioneering spirit that helped create America, and Custis proceeded to name and praise famous pioneers like Daniel Boone.

He asked the crowd “shall not the name of Austin be added to the gallant and honored list of pioneers of the wilderness?” He also recounted the bravery exhibited at the Alamo as typical of Americans and took particular care in pointing out the military prowess of Davy Crockett.

Stating “as a lion he fought and as a lion he died, his back to earth, his face to heaven.” These comments too were met with thunderous applause, it should also be noted that the speech was reprinted at the “request of the Texas Commissioners.” It is easy to surmise why that was the case. Custis made it clear that those who left for Texas were not like the old filibusters. This new breed were industrious, enterprising, brave and fighting in the name of liberty. Previous attempts to grab Texas were marred by adventurers only interested in plunder. Now the emigrants were peaceful agrarians forced to defend themselves against the despotic and papist

Mexicans. For Custis and other expansionists, Crockett came to Texas not to better his own political and financial situation but to assist in the glorious crusade of liberty.<sup>169</sup>

The “orator” made it abundantly clear that the revolt in Texas was just a harbinger for things to come and that the newly freed territory would be quickly welcomed into the United States. He claimed that soon Texas would fall under the “broad wing of the Eagle and become an integral portion of the Great Republic, one and indivisible.” Custis was confident that even after conquering Texas the American pioneer would seek new lands to conquer. The American settlers would “only find its limits in the frozen belts of the North...on the South, East and West its limits are Oceans. Such is Destiny.” The “orator” offered proof as the “hardy and intrepid adventurer has already won the passes of the Rocky Mountains, and is fast descending their western slopes to where Pacific rolls its distant wave.” He also predicted that in “another century... two hundred millions of freemen urged by one impulse, the impulse of civil and religious liberty, governed by one system of laws, the laws of our admirable and happy constitution shall spread over and possess the southern portion of this continent, forming in one grand whole, the proudest, the mightiest Republican Empire that ever enlightened and adorned the annals of the world.” Custis reassured the crowd that while such claims may sound like “the realm of fancy,” they were accurate predictions. He pointed to the rapid settlement and industrialization of states like Ohio as further proof and he begged the crowd to believe that “nothing is too vast, too wondrous or impossible for liberty.”<sup>170</sup>

In many ways Custis’ speech was a synthesis of what many expansionists had already claimed for years. Rather than advocating for one aspect, Custis took a shotgun approach to

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<sup>169</sup> *United States Telegraph* June 23, 1836.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

defend expansion. The settlers were not bloodthirsty filibusters but peaceful settlers invited to settle in the area by proper authorities. Through their uniquely American industriousness they had civilized the land driven back the Natives. They rebelled only because of Mexican atrocities, and they had no recourse but to fight for independence. Most importantly, Custis saw Texas as just the beginning for American expansionism. They came not as conquerors of a brutal dictatorship, but as the vanguard of a Republican Empire tasked with spreading liberty.

While Custis summed up the rhetoric of the expansionists eloquently, his view was far from universally accepted. For some Americans, the Texan War for Independence was an *evil* harbinger of things to come. The editor of the *Pennsylvania Freeman* felt the outbreak of hostilities in Texas to be a serious cause for concern. He claimed the American public had been “induced to believe that the inhabitants of Texas were engaged in a legitimate contest for the maintenance of the sacred principles of Liberty, and the natural inalienable Rights of Man.” In truth, the war was designed to “reestablish the system of slavery...and ultimately to annex it to the United States.” The author feared that the American government may attempt and send official military Units to Texas in defense of this slave system. The only way to prevent such an injustice was to have faith in “the voice of the people.” Once they knew the “truth,” the American public could utilize “petitions” and “ballot-boxes” to defeat the “slaveholding interest” that seemed to dominate the United States.<sup>171</sup>

The author promised to educate the American public in a series of editorials beginning with a brief history of the Anglo-American settlement to the region. He claimed that the majority of emigrants were shady characters only interested in financial gain. Most emigrants came to Texas illegally, with the few legitimate settlers refusing to convert to Catholicism. Most

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<sup>171</sup> *Pennsylvania Freeman* August 3, 1836.



were also engaged in dubious “speculating” and land grant schemes. These “avaricious adventurers” were drawn to Texas in order to dupe the “ignorant and unsuspecting.” He claimed that prior attempts at land grant schemes were “mere child’s play” in comparison and that “in no age or nation, perhaps, have unauthorized and illegal speculations in lands been carried to such extremes as in Texas.”<sup>172</sup>

With so many ruffians flocking to Texas, it was not surprising that they would engage in illegal smuggling. The author chastised some for selling guns and ammunition to “savage tribes,” but saved his fiercest condemnation for those that re-introduced slavery to the region. He reminded readers that Mexico had abolished slavery in its territory and that the main impetus for the rebellion was so the Anglos could continue to own slaves. Thus the “slaveholding interests” were the force behind the Texan rebellion. He feared this vast conspiracy had already blinded many Americans and predicted that they would soon attempt to unite Texas with the United States. The great danger was that Texas could easily be carved up into “five or six more slave holding states.” He begged his readers to “arouse from their lethargy” and denounce the war and any future union with Texas in “tones of thunder.”<sup>173</sup>

Other anti-expansionists chose to avoid the “slavery question” and focused their attacks on the conduct of the Texans themselves. One of the more convincing and controversial anti-revolution pieces was a letter to the editor of the *Lexington Observer* that subsequently appeared in several other papers including the *Arkansas State Gazette*, *Boston Courier*, *National Intelligencer* and *Indiana Journal*. The letter was written by two recently returned American volunteers, Colonel Edward Wilson and Captain G. L. Postlethwaite, who had become

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<sup>172</sup>Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> *Pennsylvania Freeman* August 24, 2836.

dissatisfied with the war and government in Texas. Both men had sympathized with the conflict and sought to serve with the Texan forces in their quest for Independence. The letter was addressed “to the public” and was designed to educate the American people on what was really happening in far off Texas. The men arrived shortly after the battle of San Jacinto and thus participated in no large scale engagements against the Mexicans. Nonetheless, they were less than impressed with the dedication of both Texian and American volunteers. The letter stated that although such criticisms would “cause a pang of mortification in many bosoms which now throb with exultation in the hope of Texian freedom,” it went beyond their mere “opinion” but was fact. They stated that many of the enticements such as good pay, opportunities for promotion, and land grants in exchange for military service never materialized. Instead, the prevailing notion among many American volunteers was to simply take any goods they desired as compensation for the broken promises. They concluded that the masses of people living in Texas regardless of political station or rank “are animated along by a desire of *plunder* and appear totally indifferent when they plunder friends or foes.”<sup>174</sup>

The recruits also found fault with the Texan citizenry. They were apathetic and “wholly incapable of a just idea of civil and political liberty.” Such an attitude in turn made it irrelevant whether Texans became free or remained under Mexican authority. Worse still was the petty squabbling between political wings of the new Texan administration. The recruits offered examples of this misconduct and argued that such pettiness was no different than the problems exhibited by the former Mexican government. Even the army itself was not above castigation. They were “undisciplined, and without an effort to become so,” neglected drill and generally

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<sup>174</sup> *Lexington Observer* as it appeared in *the Arkansas State Gazette* October 25, 1836; *Boston Courier* September 26, 1836; *National Intelligencer* October 11, 1836; *Indiana Journal* October 15, 1836.

made little effort to advance beyond being a rabble. The only activity they took serious was sending out “plundering parties” tasked with “robbing private individuals of their property.” Such conduct made a “mockery of the very name of liberty.” They warned their fellow Americans to beware the inaccurate claims of Texan liberty and avoid falling into any land speculation schemes. The Texan government and its citizens were simply “unworthy of public aid or sympathy.”<sup>175</sup>

The letter’s publication caused a firestorm of controversy regarding the article’s veracity. Many veterans of the recently-ended Texan war began sending their own letters which came to very different conclusions. In each instance the authors were usually pronounced by the paper as being a person of integrity. This same caveat was also used as a preamble to the disgruntled veteran’s article. The *United States Telegraph* compiled several of these responses in their October 26<sup>th</sup> edition. With one exception, these responders chose not to defend themselves against the charge of plundering Texas but instead attack Edward Wilson, the higher ranked of the two disgruntled veterans. Lieutenant James Combs insisted that Wilson and other volunteers were “received in the most favorable and welcome manner” and had no cause for complaint. Combs also suspected that Wilson penned such a nasty letter not because he disagreed with the revolution but because he was upset over not receiving the high ranking commission he felt was owed to him. He commented that “disappointed in his ambitious pretentions to rank, and finding that no lands were to be had in Texas without first fighting for them, Mr. Wilson, it seems, determined to abandon the country” and return to the United States. Another common defense was that Wilson arrived with around three hundred Kentucky volunteers and only fifty chose to

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<sup>175</sup> *Lexington Observer* as it appeared in *the Arkansas State Gazette* October 25, 1836. The idea that Americans would seek plunder as a way to offset their disappointment with expansionism came up again during the Mexican-American war. Such an argument is admirably addressed by Paul Foos in his book *A Short Offhand Killing Affair*.

return to the States with him. If conditions were as bad as Wilson claimed, why would the rest not defect as well? The main theme to all these letters was that Wilson was just bitter about not being promoted and sought to denigrate the revolution out of spite.<sup>176</sup>

A Captain Lawrence serving on garrison duty on Galveston Island also claimed that Wilson was spouting nonsense. He insisted that “the army is under the same discipline as that of the United States” with regular roll calls and guard patrols. He claimed he was acquainted with Wilson and the other defectors and stated that none of them even encountered regular Army units who were stationed farther west. The brother to Postlethwaite angrily penned a response to the attacks in the *Mississippi Free trader and Natchez Gazette*. He claimed that he had attempted to have his brother’s article published in the *Natchez Courier*, chief competitor to the *Mississippi Free Trader*, and was rebuffed. Instead the *Courier* printed the letters that criticized Wilson and Postlethwaite. He asked that the *Mississippi Free Trader* publish his brother’s article and “subserve the cause of justice.” This controversy further reveals the intense debate that surrounded American attempts at expansion. Newspapers from across the country took part in the discourse. Some sided with the disgruntled veterans and others against, but it was evident that no clear consensus or mandate existed. Expansion was simply not universally accepted or condoned and neither was American involvement in the Texan War for Independence.<sup>177</sup>

The *New York Sunday Morning News* published an editorial that sought to predict the most likely stance the United States would take regarding Texas. The editor argued that members of Congress would meet soon to discuss recognition of Texas and “settle the preliminaries for its admission into the Federal Union.” The major fear was that if the United

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<sup>176</sup> *United States Telegraph* October 26, 1836.

<sup>177</sup> *Mississippi Free trader and Natchez Gazette* October 21, 1836.

States did not act quickly the hated British would. The editor warned that an independent Texas would soon seek to sell its resources to a manufacturing nation. The United States would be unable to contend with the British. Instead it would be more economically and politically advantageous for Texas to unite with the United States as its citizenry were one in the same.<sup>178</sup>

Such a union would also be good for all sections of the nation. The author explained that while Texas would undoubtedly be a slave state, all Southern crops and goods are grown for “the benefit of Northern merchants, manufacturers and navigators.” Texas with its “fertile fields” would be “better than a mine of gold.” Thus, the North would support such an acquisition. The Southern states would also support annexation as it could not abide an independent Texas. The author explained that the territory of Texas was perfectly suited to growing cotton and that it alone could “supply the world with this great staple.” All Texas lacked was a labor supply and that could easily be purchased once independent. Once such a demand was met Texas would “speedily enter into competition with our States in the production of cotton, at once depreciating the value of our slaves, our cotton lands and our cotton.” The solution then was to annex Texas and thus guarantee the proper value for both cotton and slaves. The editor concluded then that “there can be little doubt...that the independence of Texas will be speedily acknowledged by the United States and that it will, without any unnecessary delay be admitted into the Federal Union.” For this editor, annexation was necessary for pecuniary reasons. He offered no bombastic speeches regarding liberty or civilization but instead appealed to common sense. An independent Texas could be a serious economic threat to the United States. That threat could be removed if Americans simply accepted annexation.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> *New York Sunday Morning News* as it appeared in the *Richmond Enquirer* November 25, 1836.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

Other Americans felt an independent Texas to be cause for celebration. The author of the *American Sentinel* penned a pro-expansionist piece that called the recent Texan victory “one of the most fortunate events that could have taken place.” He claimed that the war had been won thanks to the fortitude and determination of the Texans and was pleased to see Americans flocking to the area now that the war was over. This new group of American emigrants were “industrious, enterprising and hardy” the perfect race to occupy Texas. Without such emigrants Texas would have devolved into a “howling wilderness” and “rendered unsafe for the white man.” The author envisioned the newly established Texas would serve as a buffer zone for the United States and keep out hostile Mexicans or Indians. This was important as the Texan inhabitants could “keep a watchful eye on their savage neighbors” and warn the United States of any impending danger. The author was especially concerned that disgruntled Indians, such as those affected by the Indian Removal Act, may try and expand; an independent Texas could forestall such a move. A Texas ruled by former Americans was also crucial for denying its bounty to Europe. The author insisted that Mexico was so inept and Texas so desirable that it would have only been a matter of time until either France or Great Britain had seized the province. This meant that Texas could have been used as a staging ground for an American invasion. Economically, independence was beneficial as those hardy Americans would “cultivate her soil, and send her products to our markets, instead of those of Europe.” The editor reassured readers that Mexico was too corrupt and cowardly to successfully retake Texas. He concluded by stating that Americans should applaud the revolution for bringing “free political and religious institutions” to Texas and immediately recognize Texan independence.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> *American Sentinel* as it appeared in the *Pennsylvania Freeman* November 26, 1836.

Some editors felt the best way to demonstrate their view was to criticize the opposition. The editor of the *Pennsylvania Freeman* took umbrage at nearly everything contained in the above editorial. He claimed the entire article was full of misrepresentations or outright lies. The only people who would believe such nonsense were “stupid ignoramuses” blinded by the author’s “gross perversions” of the truth. The *Freeman* editor regretfully confessed that many Americans had been blinded by such claptrap but were now “getting their eyes open to the true state of things.” Soon all Americans would understand that the war in Texas and subsequent annexation attempts were the “offspring of heartless cupidity-of marauding ambition-of despotic arrogance.” He maintained that contrary to the above author’s remarks, the war was carried out not by loyal citizens of Texas but rather Americans who had no right to be there. The entire conflict was a “grand systematic effort of FOREIGN USURPATION AND AGGRESSION.” The editor insisted that “no man who entertains the least regard for justice, or the true principles of rational liberty, can, with any degree of consistency, utter a word in its favor.”<sup>181</sup>

The editor then offered a line by line critique of the *American Sentinel* article designed to expose his readers to the “truth.” The author began by attacking the idea that Texas should serve as a watchman against disgruntled Indians. He found it totally ridiculous that Americans should look to a third party to deal with an issue “whom we have raised up and exasperated by our aggressive policy.” Such logic was useful only “to gull the selfish and unprincipled in this country and induce them to acknowledge the ‘independence of Texas’, as a preparatory step to the annexation of the territory to the United States.” He also remarked that Mexico could have easily contained its own “savages” had they not had to contend with the rebellion. The editor questioned whether or not Texas would have fallen under European domination and assured

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<sup>181</sup> *Pennsylvania Freeman* November 26, 1836

readers that an independent Texas could still ship its wares to Europe and choose to ignore trade with the United States. He also argued that Texas would only maintain its freedom if the United States military assisted them and scoffed at the idea that a few thousand Texans could singlehandedly withstand the entire might of the Mexican army. Their only hope was through the goodwill and protection of their republican neighbor, the United States. Furthermore, the claim that Texas had “Free political and religious institutions” was simply untrue as Texas allowed slavery. He challenged readers to “point to a single spot on the globe, where man is more commonly subjugated to a state of abasement and despotism than he is in the United States, or than he would be in Texas, under the sway of marauders who are endeavoring to establish their power there.” He concluded that he was now confident that the American public are becoming “thoroughly awakened to the reality of the outrageous conspiracy against the Mexican government.” This conspiracy went against “every impression of justice, of national faith, and the universal rights of man.” As adamant as the *American Sentinel* was for recognition, the *Pennsylvania Freeman* was as dedicated in its disgust toward Texas.

The remarks of the editor of the *New York Courier and Enquirer* also caused quite the uproar and received a sharp rebuke by a fellow newspaperman. The editor of the *Courier and Enquirer* was a staunch supporter of both American involvement in the Texan war for independence and the province’s admission into the United States. He too opposed abolition and felt slavery was an American right that should not be curtailed. Just as the Texan war began the editor extolled that “we care not in what quarter of the globe the oppressed people may raise the standard of civil liberty, from Americans they are certain, at all times and under all circumstances, to receive the warmest sympathies and the most liberal pecuniary assistance.” The editor of the *New York Evangelist* quickly pounced upon the statement. He remarked on the



utter hypocrisy of such a quote and wondered what would happen if such words fell into the hands of the “oppressed people’ of South Carolina or Louisiana.” He facetiously wondered if the postmaster would even deliver such incendiary material to the South. He asked his readers to ponder “how can it be reconciled that the most bitter and reckless opposers of emancipation in America, should yet assume to be the friends of liberty in Texas?” The same rhetoric that was so treasured by all Americans, liberty and freedom, was used to both justify and oppose the annexation of Texas.<sup>182</sup>

The editor of the *New York Courier and Enquirer* was taken to task once again regarding the question of admitting Texas into the federal Union. He claimed that the abolitionist’s cry of no more slave states was disingenuous. If they truly cared for the well-being of the slave then they should support the admission of Texas. In his words “the conscientious opponent of slavery should feel as much for the slave in Texas or the West Indies, as in South Carolina; and that if refusing to admit Texas may possibly increase the number of her slaves, then it is his [the abolitionist] duty to advocate her admission in order to guard against a foreign traffic in slaves by bringing her under the jurisdiction of our laws, and at the same time giving inducements to our slaveholders to send them farther South, where they can be better provided for.”<sup>183</sup>

In response the *New-York Spectator* devoted an entire article dedicated to denouncing the above argument. The editor of the *Spectator* argued that the “conscientious opponent of slavery thinks of something beyond the mere evil and wickedness of slavery in the abstract; he has regard also for the welfare and honor of his country.” He agreed that all opponents of slavery should feel for all who are oppressed regardless of geographic region Americans must be

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<sup>182</sup> *New York Courier and Enquirer* November 17, 1835; *New York Evangelist* as it appeared in the *Ohio Observer* December 3, 1835.

<sup>183</sup> *New York Courier and Enquirer* as it appeared in the *New-York Spectator* August 14, 1837.

realistic and “begin the work at home.” The editor stressed that Americans must first “cleanse his own land from the stain, and when it is done, he will look beyond to the West Indies, and Texas, and every other region where men and women wear the yoke of bondage.” He claimed that slavery was not only sinful but its existence within the United States a “moral, social and political evil of the deepest dye.” While Americans had a duty to all of mankind and eradicate this evil “our first duty is to our country.” Ultimately if “the soil of Texas must be tilled by slaves, let it not be under the waving of our eagle banner.” He was also sad to report that even the Mexican government had passed laws outlawing slavery while the United States continued to condone “human bondage.” Once again the same rhetoric was being used by both sides. Expansionists claimed the United States, beacon for civilization and liberty, should welcome Texas as a new member because they were kindred spirits who established a Republican nation free from the oppression of the Mexicans. Conversely, the United States should live up to its promise as a beacon for liberty and freedom and reject admitting another province that tolerates an institution that denies those rights to some of its inhabitants.<sup>184</sup>

Women were also involved in the vociferous debate regarding expansion. Although many played a crucial role in the settlement of Texas their viewpoints rarely appeared in print. The vast majority of these pioneers came at the accompaniment of their husbands and helped till the land with their families. Women were technically allowed to own land in Texas under the Mexican government, but this was a rare occurrence. By the eve of the revolution there were only 176 property owning women, less than 4% of the population. For most women living in Texas expansionism was undoubtedly an important issue but their opinions were lost in the swirling sands of time. The few documented instances of women engaging in the expansionist

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<sup>184</sup>Ibid.

debate see their participation manifesting in the form of a petition. The viewpoints expressed by women in newspapers were nearly always of an abolitionist bent. Women in the nineteenth century were often perceived as pure and angelic, the perfect spokespeople to shed light on the evils of slavery. A common feature in the staunchly abolitionist paper *The Liberator*, advertised notices soliciting women to join the anti-slavery cause. The September 8, 1837 edition encouraged “all ladies throughout Massachusetts” to forward their “remonstrances against the annexation of Texas.” The many petitions would then be sent directly to the attention of policy makers in Washington D.C. The notice also proudly proclaimed that so many women had already followed the request that postage was more than anticipated and that donations would be accepted to help defray the cost.<sup>185</sup>

*The Liberator*, more than any other publication, attempted to turn the events in Texas as a cause for mobilization against the evils of slavery. In the July 14<sup>th</sup> 1837 edition William Lloyd Garrison, the editor, noted to his readers that so much opposition regarding Texas was cause for celebration. He encouraged the anti-expansionists, especially the abolitionists, to “continue to speak and they cannot fail to arouse others who are sleeping.” He urged all of his readers and supporters to continually “confer with the editors of newspapers and endeavor to enlist them on the side of truth and liberty.” If they could “get the press to speak” then the “plot will be defeated.” For Garrison, demonstrating against the annexation of Texas took on a religious like quality. He encouraged his readers to spread the “truth” and continue to organize and send petitions, hold rallies denouncing the Union. He reiterated that these actions must be done

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<sup>185</sup> *The Liberator*, September 8, 1837; Linda Hudson, *Mistress of Manifest Destiny: A Biography of Jane McManus Storm Cazneau 1807-1878* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2001), 21-28; For more information regarding the lives of some prominent women who settled in Texas see the collection of biographies in *Women in Early Texas* edited by Evelyn Carrington. For insight regarding general living conditions and the experience of women in the west see Julie Jeffrey's *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West 1840-1880*.

“IMMEDIATELY” so that the country may be “saved from catastrophe.” For him those whom supported annexation were merely uninformed, once they knew the “truth” all would be well. Garrison, however, like some other of his contemporaries underestimated the amount of diverse viewpoints surrounding Texan admission. For most Americans it was more than merely an issue regarding the expansion of slavery. The Texas question was also about economics, morality, international relations and national security.<sup>186</sup>

These disparate viewpoints became even more evident when President Andrew Jackson sent General Edmund Gaines to the Texas-Louisiana border with a contingent of American soldiers right before the end of the Texan war for Independence. Their orders were to prevent any armed Americans from crossing over and assisting the Texans as well as to guard against any Indian attacks that may originate from Mexico. Once at the border Gaines called up additional American troops from several nearby States. Ultimately, few volunteers headed for Texas were actually stopped and no Indian invasion appeared so the American press quickly questioned the decision with many vociferously denouncing the movements. The *National Intelligencer* reprinted several editorials from across the country under the heading “Spirit of the Press.” Opinions expressed in these editorials exemplify the heated debate that always accompanied expansion.

Stringently following international law was the key to successful expansion according to the editor of the *Louisiana Advertiser*. Aggressive posturing, covertly aiding or outright invasion to secure Texas was out of the question. The conflict in Texas was a civil war and Americans should take a neutral stance. The United States was bound by “treaty of amity” with Mexico and that both factions involved in the fighting are “equally entitled to the friendly feeling of the

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<sup>186</sup> *The Liberator* July 14, 1837.

United States.” Favoring one side over another would invalidate the treaty and be a breach of international law. Directly interfering in Mexico’s domestic affairs would lead to the “severest censure ever cast on the American name for selfishness and insatiable rapacity.” After establishing what sort of actions the United States should avoid the editor laid out a more reasonable course of action. If in the event that Texas frees itself from Mexico, which the editor felt likely, the United States should immediately send emissaries and establish a diplomatic relationship with the new nation. This would be done not out of any kindred feeling with Texas but rather to acknowledge the birth of a new nation. He insisted that the action of recognition was crucial but did not automatically mean annexation would follow. Instead, recognition was necessary to legitimize any further relationship with Texas. The editor also prophetically explained that in the event of annexation Mexico must acknowledge Texan independence. If they do not offer any recognition annexation would be like “a declaration of war by us against Mexico.” If the United States did not follow the editor’s recommended diplomatic path there would be a stain on “the honor of America.” The editor of the *Norfolk Herald* expressed similar concerns. He noted that the United States must remain neutral and refrain from entering into any military conflict with Mexico. Getting involved over Texas would be “utterly at war with those principles of truth and justice which have heretofore formed the basis of our relations with foreign powers and upon which we have built a national character which proudly challenges the admiration of the world.”<sup>187</sup>

For these editors morality was governed by international law. Their viewpoints stems from the long standing idea that America was a “city on a hill” and must serve as an example to the rest of the world. Let the European despots like Napoleon violate international law; the

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<sup>187</sup> *Louisiana Advertiser* and *Norfolk Herald* as they appeared in the *National Intelligencer* August 10, 1836.

United States followed a higher path. Treating Mexico fairly was not just recommended but crucial to maintaining the image that the United States was above the dirty political intrigue so prevalent in Europe. A blatantly expansionistic and aggressive conflict against Mexico would shatter this image. Such a move was not only morally repugnant but an affront to what the United States stood for, as described by these editors, honorable and just relations with all countries.

While other papers agreed that the United States should tread carefully, few were as concerned with international condemnation. Instead they were more disturbed with a baser outcome, war. The *Political Arena* from Virginia was one such publication. The editor was confident that if such a war were to occur it would be “the most useless and wanton one ever undertaken by a nation professing to be governed by maxims of justice and equity in its intercourse with others.” Mexico, he noted, was a much weaker nation that “invited invasion” but he warned that such an assault was both morally wrong and could adversely affect American “commerce.” As validation for his claim the editor asked readers to consider a war with Great Britain over Canada. “Would armed expeditions of men be fitted out in Boston and New York” in aid of a Canadian rebellion? Such a premise was absurd as “the power of Great Britain would have made us scrupulously adhere to a neutral course.” The editor’s hesitation was fueled by more than just a sense of fair play. Great Britain in the nineteenth century was a premier military power. Their armed forces on both land and seas were well trained, motivated, and supplied. They had already trounced the United States during the War of 1812 and this editor was reluctant for his beloved homeland to engage them again. His editorial not only points out the obvious moral quandary of bullying a weaker neighbor but highlights the absurdity that expansion was inevitable. Had the majority of Americans truly believed the United States was destined to rule

all of North America they would not hesitate to attack and fight any that dared oppose them. This, however, was not the case. The British were too strong and this editor prophetically stated that the United States would prefer diplomacy to war with them. Caution and diplomacy should thus be extended to all nations. A war with Mexico was merely schoolyard bullying writ large.<sup>188</sup>

The *Boston Daily Advertiser* agreed that aggressive posturing on the border spelled trouble. The editor argued that sending a military force to the border in such a manner against a neutral nation was an unfriendly and dangerous act. Doing so against a country fighting insurgents primarily made up of Americans is “an act of the most decidedly hostile character which could be committed by our government.” Worse still the editor felt that the Mexican Government would have justifiable cause to declare war on the United States. This was unfortunate as Mexico had offered not a shadow of justification” for such terrible treatment. He was appalled that President Jackson “has not regard enough for the national character to guard against such a stigma upon the national honor.” The *Lynchburg Virginian* agreed that the maneuvers were ill-conceived but felt Jackson to be innocent of any wrongdoing. The editor maintained that sending troops into the area to guard against Indians in a foreign country was a “ridiculous pretext.” Furthermore, even if some Anglos were killed by Indians in Texas that was no concern of the United States and thus did not justify any movement of troops. He felt that Gaines was overstepping his jurisdiction in calling up troops when “the Texans were about to be overwhelmed by the semi-barbarians of Mexico.” He was confident that Gaines was acting

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<sup>188</sup> *Political Arena* excerpt as it appeared in the *National Intelligencer* August 10, 1836. For an in depth treatment of the importance of race in regards to expansion see Reginald Horsman *Race and Manifest Destiny*.

“without orders from his government” and such actions should be condemned by the United States.<sup>189</sup>

The *Boston Atlas* declared that if Gaines was allowed to send troops into Mexico to assist the revolutionaries it would be “one of the most contemptible efforts at picking a quarrel and well deserves to be recoded on the same page as Louis XIV for invading Holland.” The editor also feared that most Americans had not given enough thought to how a high of a cost a war with Mexico would bring. He wondered if Merchants and ship owners were “desirous to expose themselves and their property to the depredations of a fleet of privateers of all nations, who will be ready as soon as the signal for war be given, to pounce upon our ships like vultures on their prey.” If they are not ready for such a nasty fate they must act now and prevent a war. If conflict cannot be avoided the war would be a “bitter and bloody feud” with American commerce paying a dreadful price. The editor bemoaned that even if the United States won “our national character [would be] in the deepest disgrace.” The administration was not solely to blame as the American public had thus far failed to adequately protest this “piracy on shore.” He called on all people “without distinction of sect or party, who have not run mad with the passion of conquest and plunder” to quickly “publically and solemnly declare that they will hold as the worst enemies of their country all who aid or abet in involving her in a contest so useless, so pernicious [and] so disgraceful.” If this is not done, he ominously concluded, the war would end “in the dissolution of our Union” and “the dismemberment of Mexico.”<sup>190</sup>

Not all papers denounced Gaines or the possibility of going to war. The *New York Courier* felt that calling up troops to the border was a prudent move to display the “dignity and

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<sup>189</sup> *Boston Daily Advertiser*, and *Lynchburg Virginia* as they appeared in the *National Intelligencer* August 10, 1836.

<sup>190</sup> *Boston Atlas* as it appeared in the *National Intelligencer* August 10, 1836.



power of the United States.” The editor felt the General was merely following a legal order and that nothing unbecoming had occurred. The troops had not entered Mexican territory and thus no breach of international law occurred. The *Philadelphia Gazette* went a step farther and postulated that a war might be just what some Americans needed. The editor was confident that war would be heralded by those persons who found the “dull pursuits of civil life present no charms,” or those seeking money and glory. Most appropriately a war would give the opportunity for “revenge for the cruel acts of the Mexican troops in their war against Texas.” The editor concluded that a war with Mexico could indeed be forthcoming.<sup>191</sup>

Although fears that the United States would go to war with Mexico would prove correct, they were premature in 1836. The aggressive posturing of General Gaines on the border would prove to be innocuous and officially the United States remained neutral throughout the Texan War for Independence. After his capture Santa Anna agreed to cease hostilities and grant Texas its independence, but the transition was not peaceful. The government of Santa Anna was overthrown and the new administration refused to concede the loss of Texas. Several skirmishes between the Mexicans and Texans continued to erupt with both sides illegally crossing the border until 1846. The majority of people living in Texas supported annexation and voted in favor of it in a referendum held by the Texan government in September of 1836. President Jackson and later Van Buren also opposed the union as they felt that the inclusion of a slave state would upset the precarious political balance and provoke a war with Mexico. Both presidential administrations wished to distance themselves from the rebellion so that the United States would not appear to be the instigator. While many Americans sympathized with the Texan cause, their attitudes manifested itself in many ways. Some headed out West to directly participate in both

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<sup>191</sup> *New York Courier* and *Philadelphia Gazette* as they appeared in the *National Intelligencer* August 10, 1836.

the war and creation of the Texan government. Others sent money and good will, while still others did nothing but acknowledge the cause. Conversely, opponents presented a variety of disparate opinions on why the United States should steer clear of any association with Texas. Thanks in no small part to the considerable amount of debate that erupted in the American press the question of Texan annexation would be deferred until 1845.<sup>192</sup>

Events in Oregon helped eliminate some, but certainly not all, of the opposition to the annexation of Texas. By 1843 American settlement in Oregon had already increased dramatically and because many considered the territory already United States soil, it would only be a matter of time until it petitioned for statehood. Since the Missouri Compromise prohibited slavery north of the 36' parallel, Oregon would enter as a free state. Some Americans used the admission of Oregon to justify Texan statehood; by admitting both territories the fragile balance could be maintained. The editor of the *New-Hampshire Gazette* published an editorial regarding such a compromise. The author argued "I am decidedly of the opinion that our people would go for admitting both. On the ground that the North would be strengthened by the possession of Oregon, the North would be willing that the South should be strengthened by the annexation of Texas." The editorial ended by warning its readers that those who opposed annexation were well organized and that it would "behoove the South, and all the friends of an equal distribution of

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<sup>192</sup> William Binkley, *The Texas Revolution* (Baton rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 115-118; David Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War*, (Colombia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 73; After the war Houston sent a letter to President Jackson stating that he hoped annexation would occur shortly. To facilitate this he dispatched some negotiators as well as a captured Santa Anna. See *The Autobiography of Sam Houston* p.134-136; One of the more severe of these skirmishes was the Mier expedition which resulted in the capture of over 200 Texans, for more information see Sam Haynes *Soldiers of Misfortune: the Somervell and Mier Expeditions*.

political power in the geographical divisions of the country to present a strong, bold, solid and determined front.”<sup>193</sup>

A concerned citizen from New York penned a letter to the editor of *the New York Herald* in 1844 that denounced political wrangling. Styling himself “anti-humbug”, the author claimed the “Texas Question” was being overshadowed by political intrigue. He stated that Democrats were for it merely because Whigs were against it and vice versa. The problem was simply that “everything must be done for the party, and nothing for the country.” Although he was quick to criticize all politicians he personally felt the admission of Texas to be a good thing. He claimed the “re-annexation” would help bring about “future peace and national security.” The author insisted that he and many other New Yorkers “would be willing to join a meeting in its favor [the annexation of Texas]” but only if it was held “without regard to party intrigue or interest.” He was confident that such an “impartial” meeting would be attended by “hundreds, if not thousands.”<sup>194</sup>

A considerably more partisan letter to the editor appeared just below “anti-humbug’s” This author, identified only by his initials A.J., blamed Whigs for being hypocritical. He reminded readers that many Whig leaders had attended a rally in support of Texas in 1836. He claimed these Whigs called Santa Anna a “savage chief” and resolved to assist the Texans in their quest for liberty. The author even reprinted snippets of the 1836 rally to refresh everyone’s memory. Now, he declared, the Whigs have the audacity to claim that Texas can only be annexed to the United States if Mexico agrees to the Union. He wondered how Whigs could praise Texas and denounce Mexico’s leadership in 1836 but in 1844 accept Texan admission

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<sup>193</sup> *New-Hampshire Gazette*, December 5, 1843; Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission*, 176-177.

<sup>194</sup> *New York Herald* May 1, 1844.

only if Mexican leaders agreed. He correctly stated that the same “savage chief” was still in charge, the same man who ordered the deaths of “brave Col. Fannin and his 230 men.” It is interesting that the author chose to invoke the deaths of Fannin and his men rather than the Alamo defenders. The author was attempting to portray Santa Anna in the darkest light possible. While the Alamo defenders were killed while under arms, Fannin and his men had surrendered and were helpless. Americans should simply not care what that cold blooded beast or any other Mexicans think.<sup>195</sup>

The author found dismissing the Mexican people as easy as dismissing Santa Anna. The whole nation was simply made up of degenerates who should be met with nothing but contempt by Americans. He asked “who and what is Mexico? Two-thirds of the Mexicans are Negroes and Indians, not one in five hundred can read and write.” Worse still the “power and wealth of the country are in the hands of the priests” with Santa Ana and other officials merely being the Church’s “minions.” Again the author’s choice of words speak volumes.; portraying the majority of Mexicans as being of black or Indian extraction automatically made them inferior to most Americans. The author merely assumed that all Americans would agree that Mexico was a sorry place where those “races” made up the majority. His boast that so few of them could read is also significant. For a strong, virtuous society the populace must be informed and educated. Literacy and the reading of newspapers were crucial to maintaining a “good” nation. Anyone reading the author’s letter to the editor could feel instantly superior to the Mexicans and agree, wholeheartedly, that such a pathetic group of illiterate papists should in no way be consulted on the Texan admission process. Only the twisted and hypocritical Whigs could stoop to such a

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<sup>195</sup>Ibid; Fannin was tasked with defending the Texan fort, Goliad. Upon being surrounded by Mexican forces he subsequently surrendered himself and the entire garrison in exchange for a promise of leniency for he and his men. Santa Anna instead ordered their executions. For more information see Texian Illiad pg. 157-174.

level. The author ended his rant by stating that listening to Santa Anna would be like taking advice from Benedict Arnold and would be “against the honor, dignity, and security of ‘our own, our native land.’” Like the above editorial, this author saw the annexation of Texas as completely natural. It was not conquest. The citizens of Texas wanted the union and the land itself, he deluded himself into believing, was already American soil.<sup>196</sup>

Other editors felt the annexation of Texas to be a serious threat to the stability of the United States regardless of Oregon. The editor of the *Richmond Whig* was furious over the annexation discussion that was taking place among members of Congress. He called on the legislative to immediately stop their bickering, “not because we arrogate any right to control them, but in the name of decency and common sense....it is time to stop these disgraceful proceedings.” The editor’s choices of words were noteworthy. Unlike many of his contemporaries who waxed eloquently regarding their opposition he instead chose to simply remind his readers that annexation was a bad idea. Once they thought about the situation and were not blinded by notions of expansionistic grandeur “decency and common sense” would rule and they would oppose annexation.<sup>197</sup>

The *National Intelligencer*, after quoting the above article, agreed, commenting that such sentiments were “common to all men , of whatever party, who duly consider either the signs of the times, or the momentous character of the questions involved in the Texas project; a project which concerns our not with Texas and Mexico only, directly or indirectly, but with the whole world besides.” The editor further argued that the annexation attempt was being pushed through by a select group of people, namely the President, who was being “stimulated by speculators and

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<sup>196</sup> *New York Herald* May 1, 1844.

<sup>197</sup> *Richmond Whig* as it appeared in the *National Intelligencer* May 6, 1844.

urged on by an ambition of fatal augury.” Although he bemoaned the situation he was confident that any attempt to annex Texas “will be defeated with disgrace.” The editor’s opposition was similar to sentiments expressed during the filibuster attempts to grab Texas. “Speculators” like filibusters were out only for pecuniary rewards; there was no grander, nobler aspect. This group of people was deliberately trying to swindle honest Americans. He was confident that they were a small group of troublemakers and that Americans could see the danger if only they looked close enough. The problem, however, was that many Americans were being deluded. The editor called the fascination with land speculation and expansion a “contagion.” Much like a flu that brings about delirium it was easier to succumb than to fight against the infection. The only people unaffected were those “persons capable of calm reflection” who could see beyond the outlandish promises and “acknowledge the folly and recklessness of the whole proceeding.”<sup>198</sup>

Perhaps most distressingly to the opponents of expansionism was the spreading of the “contagion.” He claimed that while Texas was primarily a Southern infection, hot heads in the North were also becoming sick with the expansionist fever. Their object of desire, however, had nothing to do with Mexico, instead they wanted the whole of Canada. The editor feared that recent rumors of an imminent Northern invasion of Canada were true. He claimed the publication where it appeared was “highly respectable” and that all Americans regardless of region should be leery. He warned that in the event of Texan annexation, the federal government would be unable to “quell or restrain” an “outbreak on the Northern frontier.” While he disparaged such an event he concluded that it was just as offensive as the recent Congressional

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<sup>198</sup> *National Intelligencer* May 6, 1844.

hearings regarding Texas. Annexing Texas without Mexican consent was just as egregious an error in judgment as attempting to take Canada from the British.<sup>199</sup>

The paper mentioned above was the *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, whose editor, claimed that an imminent takeover of Canada would occur if Texas was annexed. He insisted “thousands along this frontier” were eager and ready to expand northward. He mentioned the expansionistic fervor of acquiring Canada was still around and the successful annexation of Texas would “kindle that feeling into a flame.” He appealed to the sensibilities of Southern politicians to renounce their advances toward Texas or a new conflict would erupt in Canada. The editor warned “if the bloodhounds are to be let loose, we will select the hunting-ground and the game. Our people, if they are to fight at all, will fight, not for Texas, nor for California, nor for Oregon, nor for any other such bagatelle, but for CANADA.”<sup>200</sup>

This would be done, however, solely to counterbalance the Free State-Slave State power struggle. The editor sought to further explain his position; “let us not be misunderstood” the Northern public “are content with our present boundaries.” He even echoed comparisons that hadn’t been uttered much since the Louisiana Purchase; that the United States should follow in the footsteps of Greek city States and avoid further extension of its borders. He claimed the nation was much like “Sparta, ample in extent, variety and resources and they [Northern Public] would prefer to improve and embellish it within its present harmonious proportions.” He insisted that the designs on Canada were a real threat but only if Texas were admitted for if “our Southern friends will content themselves with the Sabine, we shall never cross the St. Lawrence.” The editor ended by reiterating his faith in the status stating “may our happy and

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> *Detroit Daily Advertiser* April 27, 1844.

glorious Union, as it is, last forever.” For this author opposition to expansion was not inextricably tied to slavery. The admittance of a new free state would be just as unacceptable. He feared the United States had reached its limits in terms of size and sought to cultivate and maintain what territory already existed. Further expansion could cause more fracturing and divisions a sure recipe for the dissolution of the fragile republic. The threat to invade Canada was merely that, a threat. Annexing Canada could prove just as troublesome as Texas. The author hoped that the expansionists would see the folly and silliness in annexing Canada and apply it to Texas.<sup>201</sup>

A few months later the *New-Hampshire Gazette* offered additional rationale for the annexation of Texas. The editorial stated that “it is not uncommon to hear opponents of Texas annexation, especially at the North, denounce the people of that republic as immoral, and therefore unfit to be associated with the present members of the federal union in the government of this country.” The editorial also claimed that the influence of Mexican Catholicism so close to Texas may promote problems with the mostly Protestant Texans. In order to solve these issues the *Gazette* advocated annexation. The editorial asked “Would it not be better to place them within the moralizing influence of our free institutions, where a difference of religion is tolerated, and where the true faith may be freely advocated and extended?” Annexation would be the correct course of action because “Christ sought the company of publicans and sinner, to redeem them from error.” The editorial assured its readers that “that the people [of Texas] are orderly and behaved; and observe the Sabbath with the utmost strictness” and have shown “every symptom of a well governed people.”<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> *New-Hampshire Gazette*, July 30, 1844.



Although some northern newspapers like the *New-Hampshire Gazette* pushed for the annexation of Texas many others did not. The *Portsmouth Journal* and *Berkshire County Whig* both published articles that denounced annexation. These northern papers were primarily concerned with upsetting the sectional balance of power. They claimed that the admission of Texas would give the South too much influence and worried that annexation may provoke a war with Mexico. The *Farmers Cabinet* from New-Hampshire adopted a similar stance and claimed that annexation would mean the United States would have to assume any and all Texan debt as well as “protect it against any foreign invasion.” The *Cabinet* feared that “its colored population would be the basis of an increased representation in Congress, [which is] in violation of the original [Missouri] compromise.”<sup>203</sup>

One sentiment that both North and South shared was the continual fear of the British. The British government vehemently opposed the annexation of Texas because they hoped that Texas would become a prime competitor to the United States regarding the sale of cotton. Some Americans saw such a stance as a further example of British meddling. The *Charleston Mercury* reminded readers that the British attempted to take control of Oregon and would do the same in Texas. The authors claimed “we desire the annexation of Texas not as a commercial or agricultural speculation ... [but] to repel the dangerous intervention of Europe in the affairs of this continent.” The *Pittsfield Sun* claimed that “Great Britain shall not advance another step

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<sup>203</sup> *Portsmouth Journal* as it appeared in *Berkshire County Whig*, December 12, 1844; *Farmers Cabinet*, April 18, 1844.

upon the soil of the new world, nor her policy or threats deter us from fulfilling the great mission of our beloved country to extend the area of freedom.”<sup>204</sup>

John O’Sullivan, expansionist and coiner of the phrase Manifest Destiny, professed similar sentiments in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*. In the 1845 article “Annexation” he cautioned Americans to stop bickering over Texas and just accept the reality of the situation. He claimed that “Texas has been absorbed into the Union in the inevitable fulfillment of the general law which is rolling our population westward.” He argued that the American population is “destined within a hundred years to swell our numbers to the enormous population of two hundred and fifty millions, if not more, is too evident to leave us in doubt of the manifest design of Providence in regard to the occupation of the continent.” O’Sullivan believed that this westward march was unavoidable and denounced those that believed Texan independence was part of a plot perpetrated by the United States, “if Texas became peopled with an American population, it was by no contrivance of our government but on the express invitation of that of Mexico herself.” Furthermore, according to O’Sullivan, no conquest had taken place. The citizens in Texas of their own volition had decided to rebel and were now peacefully and respectfully requesting admission to join the great bastion of liberty, the United States.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Lelia Roeckell, “Born in Bondage: British Opposition to the Annexation of Texas”, *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Summer, 1999) 257-278; *Charleston Mercury*, undated; *Pittsfield Sun*, October 30, 1845; *Georgia Telegraph*, January 21, 1845; *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, August 1, 1844.

<sup>205</sup> John O’Sullivan, “Annexation” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, August 1845, Volume 17, Issue 85, 5-7. There has been some debate on who exactly penned some of the more well-known expansionist magazine articles such as the “Great nation of Futurity” and “Annexation.” Much conventional wisdom and tradition claims the magazine editor John O’Sullivan to be the author. Author Linda Hudson in her work *Mistress of Manifest Destiny*, disagrees with this viewpoint. Hudson claims that another writer for the *Democratic Review*, Jane Storm, an ardent female expansionist and author, actually penned them. Comparing syntax, grammatical errors and writing styles, Hudson concluded that Storm was actually the true author behind the phrase Manifest Destiny and the above mentioned articles. This claim has subsequently been criticized by Robert Sampson in his work *John O’Sullivan and His Times*. After looking at both claims I have found Hudson’s to be the least convincing as her

President John Tyler hoped to capitalize on this fear of British meddling in Texas and reintroduced a bill regarding the annexation of Texas to Congress. Knowing that the bill might not garner the two-thirds majority needed in the Senate, Tyler instead called for a joint resolution, meaning the bill only needed a simple majority in the House and Senate to be approved. The bill passed and Tyler signed it one day before James Polk took office.<sup>206</sup>

Although the annexation would not go as smoothly as many hoped, for the moment many pro-expansionist Americans were delighted and felt the annexation of Texas to merely be the beginning in a series of territorial admissions to the United States. Historian Frederick Merk in *Manifest Destiny and Mission* claims that “Texas was considered a pattern which would be followed in all future cases.” He asserts that many Americans felt “the door to the temple [of freedom] must be wide open to peoples who were panting for freedom.” This was still considered to be in accord with Jefferson’s idea of “conquer without war” as members must *apply* to become part of the United States, “any forced admission would be a contradiction in terms, unthinkable, revolting.”<sup>207</sup>

One such example of Americans wishing to repeat events in Texas occurred right before the joint resolution regarding its annexation, when an Illinois Congressman, John Wentworth, addressed the body. In his speech Wentworth called for further American expansion and claimed “Many of this body would live to hear the sound from the speaker’s chair, ‘the gentleman from Oregon...the gentleman from Nova Scotia...the gentleman from Canada...the

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evidence seems more anecdotal and coincidental than anything concrete. Consequently, I shall continue to refer to O’Sullivan as the author of the *Democratic Review* articles and the originator of the term Manifest Destiny.

<sup>206</sup>Seymour Connor and Odie Faulk, *North America Divided: The Mexican War 1846-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press 1971),18-20.

<sup>207</sup> Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny And Mission*, 24-25.

gentleman from Cuba...the gentleman from Mexico, aye even the gentlemen from Patagonia.””  
Wentworth argued that God did not want the United States to “be the only abode of liberty on earth, on the contrary he designed them as the great center from which civilization, religion, and liberty should radiate and radiate until the whole continent shall bask in their blessing.” The *Pittsfield Sun* in a summation of the speech claimed that Wentworth “believed that our free principles would eventually extend not only over South America but over the world itself.”<sup>208</sup>

John O’Sullivan was particularly eloquent in describing the continued expansion of Americans. He was impressed with how intrepid settlers had expanded into Texas and felt it to be distinctly different than European style domination. In his editorial the “Great Nation of Futurity,” he clearly explained where the United States was heading. He stated that America’s democratic institutions and belief in self-government “separates us from the past and connects us with the future only.” He claimed the “development of the natural rights of man, in moral, political, and national life, we may confidently assume that our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity.” O’Sullivan argued that Americans had an innate sense of morality and watched out for the “rights of man.” He argued that a nations “happiness, its greatness, its duration, were always proportionate to the democratic equality in its system of government.” Thus he predicted that the American people were destined for greatness because of their sense of morality and dedication to democratic institutions.<sup>209</sup>

This stood in stark contrast to the peoples of Europe. There the people were forced to see the “interests of the many sacrificed to the aristocracy of the few” or worse yet the “rights and interests of all given up to the monarchy of one.” O’Sullivan challenged his readers to find any

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<sup>208</sup> Merk, 27-29; *Pittsfield Sun*, February 6, 1845.

<sup>209</sup> John O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, November 1839, Volume 6, Issue 23.

example of an aristocracy or monarchy from history and “not deplore that they ever existed?”

Instead, Americans could be rest assured that:

America is destined for better deeds. It is our unparalleled glory that we have no reminiscences of battle fields, but in defense of humanity, of the oppressed of all nations, of the rights of conscience, the rights of personal enfranchisement. Our annals describe no scenes of horrid carnage, where men were led on by hundreds of thousands to slay one another, dupes and victims to emperors, kings, nobles, demons in the human form called heroes. We have had patriots to defend our homes, our liberties, but no aspirants to crowns or thrones; nor have the American people ever suffered themselves to be led on by wicked ambition to depopulate the land, to spread desolation far and wide, that a human being might be placed on a seat of supremacy.

He reminded Americans to take pride in their democratic institutions and warned that looking to Europe for advice or emulating them in any way would be “absurd and injurious.”<sup>210</sup>

O’Sullivan went on to characterize the United States as the “nation of human progress” and asked “who will, what can, set limits to our onward march?” He confidently answered that “Providence is with us, and no earthly power can.” He reminded readers that “American patriotism is not of soil, we are not aborigines, nor of ancestry, for we are of all nations; but it is essentially personal enfranchisement. For ‘where liberty dwells,’ said Franklin, the sage of the Revolution, ‘there is my country.’” Such rationale meant that Americans could settle wherever they wished in order to spread the wonders of democracy. This wonderful occurrence had already happened in Texas and O’Sullivan was anxious for the pattern to repeat.<sup>211</sup>

While O’Sullivan championed the expansionist cause, his opinion was far from universally accepted. An eloquent and passionate critique of expansionism appeared in *Brownson’s Quarterly Review*. The author was clearly familiar with the writings of O’Sullivan and in a long editorial sought to remind readers that expansion was not always necessary for the

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

betterment of society. The writer stated he was tired of hearing the bombastic claims of the greatness of the American people and the necessity of expansion. He and other clear-minded Americans were “thoroughly disgusted with the ignorance and inflated vanity of our pretended patriots. We have no sympathy with those who are continually saying ‘isn’t this a great country?’” He explained that while Americans lived in a “great” society in terms of sheer territorial size other facets of greatness had yet to appear. “We have shown ourselves to be great neither in art nor science, neither in religion nor morals, neither in statesmanship nor general or special intelligence. We have, in fact, nothing whereof to boast.” Worse still, “under rigid self-examination” any American would find “that we have made, instead of the most, the least of the advantages with which Providence has favored us.” He claimed that perhaps, in time, the United States may achieve “great” status but it was certainly not the case in the 1840s. This author was unmoved by cries of American exceptionalism and unlike many of his contemporaries did not automatically sneer at Europe. While he never explicitly praised Europe it was evident that he admired their ability to create art, poetry and literature, though he still claimed he had no wish to emulate their every move. What Americans did possess was a strong work ethic and the *potential* to be “great.”<sup>212</sup>

The biggest obstacle blocking American attainment of that level of desired “greatness,” the editor construed, was the insipid idea that expansion was a necessity for a successful society. He explained that the United States in 1846 already possessed more territory than it needed. Making aggressive overtures for more land was ridiculous as the nation already had “half a continent of unoccupied land.” More importantly, even with such a great bounty of natural resources and land the United States still had many troubles. Not only was poverty a serious

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<sup>212</sup> *Brownson's Quarterly Review*; April 1846, Volume 3, Issue 2.

concern but “public and private morals are daily deteriorating; crime is on a rapid and startling increase; law has lost its sanctity; and loyalty is extinct.” Americans should seek to correct these more serious problems and stop agitating for more land with which to squander. The author also, quite astutely, claimed that Americans were becoming more and more parochial and warned “the evil here [in America] is greater than most people, even intelligent and well-disposed people, suspect.” He feared that Americans had no real shared history since they came from many different “ethnicities” and this disconnect would only be exacerbated by the addition of more territory. The only hope, he concluded, was for the American people to “consolidate order and liberty within the state, rather than to extend our territories, and captivate us with the false glow of a delusive external splendor.” Interestingly, this author while critical of expansion, never mentions the “peculiar institution.” Poverty, crime, and a lack of cohesive patriotism should be the focal point for Americans. Less crucial was the plight of African-Americans and the free labor ideology debate. For this author expansion was a sideshow that distracted Americans from the more important problems with society.<sup>213</sup>

The most constant and vociferous opponents of the admission of Texas were abolitionists. Their stance was perfectly summed up in an editorial published in the *Boston Daily Atlas*. Reporting that the vote for annexing Texas into the Union had recently passed the editor curtly noted “the infamous act is consummated.” He found the very idea of extending American slavery over a “territory forty times as large as Massachusetts” to be “nefarious” and the fact that Congress approved ensured that it was a “deed of darkness...conceived in sin and brought forth in inequity.” The greatest danger and evil, however, was the stipulation that the new State be

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<sup>213</sup>Ibid; the ethnicities mentioned by the author were simply English, Irish and German. Other notable groups such as Native Americans, Blacks, or the newly acquired inhabitants of Texas, Tejanos were left out of his calculations.

given “two representatives when the best evidence we have in the case shows that she is scarcely entitled to one.” Upsetting the political balance was of far greater concern than any humanist plight. The editor concluded with rhetorical statement “If the God of Heaven rules among nations and sin is the bane among empires, we have reason to say with Jefferson, ‘We tremble for our country, when we consider that God is just.’”<sup>214</sup>

Once again the vociferous public debate that permeated throughout the country demonstrated the uncertainty that many Americans had toward expansion. While expansionists agreed that Texas should be part of the United States they could come to no consensus as to exactly why such a union was justified. At the same time significant opposition arose which also failed to come to any consensus. Some pointed to economics as the greatest factor in their decision, others pointed to notions of racial superiority while still others clung to reasons of morality. Each side also battled to have their own “vision” for the United States take precedent. Would the United States be a true bastion of liberty of all people or just whites? Was expansionism acceptable through filibustering or only peaceful settlement? Was it more important to focus on international diplomacy and make money through trade or create a “Republican Empire” that stretched throughout the continent? The debate surrounding Texas is but another example that the destiny of the United States was not manifest.

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<sup>214</sup> *Boston Daily Atlas* December 23, 1845.



## **Chapter 5 - “A Cold, Inhospitable Country”: The Attempted Acquisition of Canada and the Annexation of Oregon**

For much of the nineteenth century some expansionists looked northward with a longing sigh. Unlike many of the other expansionistic endeavors undertaken by the United States any attempt to acquire Canada normally met with failure. Even the “successful” acquisition of Oregon was a compromise and yielded only half of what expansionists originally called for. Much of the difficulty stemmed from the strength of the British, but also important was the sizable opposition to expansion that some Americans expressed. This chapter shall demonstrate that Americans expressed a variety of opinions regarding the conquest of Canada, annexation of Oregon and their nation’s relationship to Great Britain. Initially, the majority of Americans were most interested in discussing British “outrages” or impressments. As the war of 1812 continued, Americans became more concerned with the invasion of Canada as both a method to win the war and a province ripe for annexation. By the end of the war those who opposed the conflict claimed the invasion was a blatant attempt at a land grab and the administration had no legitimate cause for war. The war would also have a profound effect on the American psyche as evidenced by the hesitation to engage the British militarily during the 1830s and 1840s. Although there was some heated anti-British rhetoric during the 1840s the two nations remained at peace. The average American reader was well aware of the diverse opinions being circulated and some chimed in with their own viewpoints.

Historiographically, there are several camps regarding the causes of the war of 1812. The first is that the war was primarily inspired by an American desire to seize Canada and annex the

territory after the war. This viewpoint is championed by Julius Pratt's *Expansionists of 1812* and to a lesser extent Walter Borneman's *1812: The War that Made America*. Conversely Reginald Horsman in *The Causes of the War of 1812* and Donald Hickey in the *War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* contend that the decision for war had less to do with expansion and more a reaction to British maritime and economic constraints placed upon the United States. J.C.A. Stagg in *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic 1783-1830* bridges the above interpretations by arguing that President Madison ordered the invasion of Canada to give himself more options. The province could be incorporated into the United States or be used as a bargaining chip against the British and eventually returned. All of these works are united in their tendency to focus almost exclusively upon the thoughts and decisions of prominent American politicians. Consequently, it is difficult to ascertain how the American public viewed the causes of the war. This chapter shall attempt to remedy such a shortcoming and examine the diverse opinions that circulated regarding expansion into British controlled territory.<sup>215</sup>

By 1811, many Americans felt were they were being drawn into a European war against their will. The British, attempting to defeat Napoleon, needed sailors. According to them many British citizens were attempting to hide out aboard American ships. If they truly were British citizens the Royal Navy had the right to conscript them. Unfortunately, record keeping in 1811 was not exactly stellar and it was often difficult to determine who was or was not a British citizen. Consequently many Americans were unfairly forced to serve under the Union Jack. The

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<sup>215</sup> Julius Pratt, *Expansionists of 1812* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925); Walter Borneman, *1812: The War that Made America* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004); Reginald Horsman, *The Causes of the War of 1812* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962); Donald Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995); J.C.A. Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic 1783-1830* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

policy of forcing sailors to work onboard ships was known as impressment and caused a firestorm of controversy back in the United States. For many Americans this flagrant lack of respect justified action and perhaps even war. Outrage and evidence of Americans being forced to serve on board British ships appeared in newspapers from across the country. One particularly well circulated article appeared in Ohio, North Carolina and Washington D.C. The author claimed that there were “almost daily proofs of the continued outrages of the British commanders of ships by impressment and holding in bondage the native and regular citizens of the United States.” This was no simple matter of perceived honor violations. According to the author, this was blatant slavery. Worse still the “outrages” were being perpetrated on purpose. Contrary to the official British rationale, these were not merely cases of mistaken identity. Instead, the British needed sailors and took them with no regard for neutral nations. The author insisted that “British armed vessels” were constantly “hovering on our southern coast.” He recounted a recent “outrage” when a ship from Baltimore was stopped outside of Charleston harbor. Several of the men on board were impressed into the British navy and that “all the men, save one, were American citizens, having paper protections.”<sup>216</sup>

The editor of the *Boston Patriot* commented on further impressment “outrages.” He claimed that a young man named Hallet Hamlin from Barnstable, Massachusetts was the latest victim of British kidnapping. A witness to the event inquired as to what ship the boy would be transferred was rebuffed and given no information. The young man was simply escorted off the ship under guard and forced into British servitude. The editor noted that “though we detest as much as any person can, the perfidious conduct of Bonaparte towards America, yet the whole catalog of wrongs inflicted on us by him, will not equal in enormity one single act of this nature;

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<sup>216</sup> *Scioto Gazette* March 27, 1811; *Raleigh Register* March 28, 1811; *National Intelligencer* March 16, 1811.

because *pecuniary theft* will bear no comparison to *man stealing*.” Such articles were designed to enflame public opinion against the British. While many Americans viewed Napoleon as a tyrannical thug relations between France and the United States were still more cordial than the Anglo-American relationship. The blatant kidnapping or “man-stealing” of this unfortunate sailor was a horrific wrong that demanded satisfaction.<sup>217</sup>

While nearly all Americans were upset over British “outrages” some hoped for Anglo-American rapprochement. The editor of the *National Intelligencer* reprinted several articles from British papers which contain matters “interesting to the American politician.” Of particular note was the letter to the editor from the *London Times* which demonstrates “whatever may be the disposition of the British ministry, there are still some men in England, who are anxious for an honorable adjustment of differences with us.” The British author, fittingly referred to as “Pacificus”, favored a more equitable relationship with the United States.<sup>218</sup>

“Pacificus” claimed Great Britain would be better served if she refrained from antagonizing the United States. He confidently argued that British “Merchants and manufacturers [are] deeply interested in the trade of the United States.” The current policy of impressing sailors into the Royal navy was a poor one as it severely antagonized the United States. He did not approve of “the manner in which we are treating the United States and found himself agreeing with American grievances since they were not “demanding anything inconsistent with her neutral rights and character.” The French under Napoleon were a serious threat to not only the British but the world. That argument coupled with British desire for increased trade with the United States meant that Americans should “make common cause with

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<sup>217</sup> *Boston Patriot* as it appeared in the *Raleigh Register* May 24, 1811.

<sup>218</sup> *National Intelligencer* May 16, 1811; excerpt from *London Times*.

us.” Such a relationship could only develop if the British refrained from impressment and trampling on American rights. The editor of the *National Intelligencer* found himself in agreement, unsurprisingly, with “Pacificus.” War and conflict could be avoided if only the two nations treated each with respect. Not all Americans clamored for “satisfaction” or war. Instead it was more prudent to stay calm and find a way to amicably solve the current crisis.<sup>219</sup>

Unfortunately, cooler heads did not prevail. On June 19, 1812 President Madison asked Congress to declare war and his request was granted. According to the administration and other pro-war advocates the British “outrages” had simply become too much for the nation to tolerate. According to historian J.C.A. Stagg, Madison’s decision for war was a long time coming and was “the climax of nearly three decades of troubled relations between the two countries.” The primary objective of the war was to seize Canada. As to what would be done with the territory was a matter still up for debate. Capturing the northern territory, Madison hoped, would economically hurt the British and force them to negotiate its return. Annexation was not an immediate goal but was still being considered. Of course the invasion had to be successful for these theories to go into effect.<sup>220</sup>

Not all Americans were united in thinking England was the sole threat. The editor from the *Alexandria Gazette* argued that the United States should be wary of both France and Great Britain. The editor feared that the President and his cronies were manipulating the public into thinking that England was the source of their problems. In reality, the French were perpetrating crimes just as grievous yet were getting a pass from the administration. He offered readers a short comparison which he hoped would make the issue clearer. He claimed he had an Uncle

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Stagg 3, 46-47.

who was a veteran of many battles who loved to regale his mistresses with tales of his exploits. The uncle was exceedingly careful however to avoid any mention of the groin wound he also received. The administration was like the uncle who “never failed to let us know of every British wrong, while the insults and injuries of France [wound]... would remain forever unnoticed and unknown.” The reason for the subterfuge was simple. Had both the administration and his uncle offered full disclosure “it would prove that they were not the men they would appear to be and that in the midst of their great professions of zeal in the cause of their country’s rights and honor, they were privy and consenting to the violation of both.” The editor argued that while all the reported British injustices were true, they were only half the story. The French, since 1800, were responsible for the “capture of five hundred and sixty American vessels!” Yet this was a nation “with whom we are in the bonds of peace and good friendship.” He argued that the American people demanded a full disclosure from the administration regarding French “outrages.” The French were just as big a threat as the British and had offered ample examples of national wrongs. Both nations were the enemy of the United States and he was confident that the American public would push for punishment against the French once their actions were widely reported.<sup>221</sup>

Some Americans saw the invasion of Canada as an answer to many of the young republic’s problems. A short letter to the editor revealed one such opinion. The author, known simply as “Whig,” outlines many of the benefits. He argued that “with the loss of Canada, England must lose her supplies of naval stores, timber, pitch etc, so necessary to her gigantic navy.” This was important for if the British navy was put out of commission the hated policy of impressment would cease. It would also cause a power vacuum on the high seas, a position

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<sup>221</sup> *Alexandria Gazette* December 12, 1812.

Americans might be able to fill. A successful invasion of Canada would soon lead to “our occupation of the Canadas.” Not only would such an occupation hurt the sale of British “manufactured goods” but add to American coffers “by duties on imports.” Thus the economic woes of the nation could be easily rectified by a successful invasion. The occupation of Canada would also see the “savages would lose an instigator that offered gold for innocent scalps; and we should be relieved on our borders from a brace of enemies, savage and British, the one excelling in cruelty, the other in perfidy.” For Americans living in 1812 the above two examples were the only enemies that had been fought. According to this author, the fall of Canada would eliminate them both. The British were a huge military threat and animosity with them was still at an all-time high. Native Americans on the other hand were a constant menace and the British encouraged their “savagery.” In one swift move these military obstacles could be forever removed. The author was unconcerned with domestic Indian tribes since they would be ineffective without British intervention. Ultimately, the author declared that “until the Northern provinces be ours then let the American never sheath their swords.” For some Americans the war went beyond mere anger over impressment as capturing Canada could alleviate difficulty in “pacifying” Native Americans.<sup>222</sup>

The editor of the *Raleigh Register* also foresaw the acquisition of Canada as a great boon to the United States. He advocated that Americans rally together and launch a massive assault against Canada. He predicted that the enemy would fight fiercely but eventually be overwhelmed by American military prowess but not before “much precious blood will be spilt.”

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<sup>222</sup> *Raleigh Register* August 14, 1812; Until this conflict the western lands acquired under the Louisiana Purchase, specifically the Arkansas Valley, were under the influence and rule of Native Americans, who had been remarkably successful in minimizing white encroachment. Their success would falter after the War of 1812 as more and more Americans poured into the region and turned what had once been a political struggle into a racial one. For more information see Kathleen Duval’s *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent*.

While such a price was high, it was not too high for the great benefits that awaited Americans from a successful occupation of Canada. He simply stated “we want the Canadas to complete the northern section of the empire.” Doing so would “deprive a restless, powerful and invidious foe of the means of frustrating our plans and contriving our dismemberment.” The “plan” included free navigation of the St. Lawrence River and the establishment of a bustling trade network. The British could not and should not be tolerated and thus they should be “expelled from every inch of the North American continent.” The author was confident that once the British were removed the United States would find “a population of 300,000 souls, who want our government.” Removal of the British would also weaken the “savages of the west and the Mohawks of the east.” Such sentiments dovetailed neatly with other pro-invasion Americans. The land itself was just a bonus. The real rationale for expanding into Canada was the removal of the hated and feared British. From them stemmed much of American ills. With them gone Americans could welcome the 300,000 Canadians into their fold and not need to fear any further problems from Native Americans.<sup>223</sup>

This author went a step farther than most of his contemporaries and envisioned what the United States would be like in just three years. He predicted that by the year 1815 “members from Montreal and members from Florida” would be meeting in Congress with other representatives “debating the preliminaries of a glorious peace, founded on permanent concessions of all the points in dispute.” In just a few years the United States would have won the war, stopped impressment, thrown the British out of North America, as well as acquired and made states out of the Canadas and Floridas. He looked forward to 1815, which would see “the whole continent [under] our own dominion, the ocean thrown open to our commercial enterprise,

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<sup>223</sup> *Raleigh Register* May 15, 1812.



our internal navigation and trade flourishing, our national renown reinstated.” No less important would be the chance to “teach mother countries the arts of true national prosperity.”<sup>224</sup>

Early reports regarding the invasion of Canada revealed the incursion to be going well. Letters to the editor that appeared in the *National Intelligencer* revealed a “shock and awe” stratagem. A published but unsigned soldier’s letter boasted that his unit crossed the Detroit river “without the loss of a man” and claimed the “Ohio volunteers behave like veterans.” The American soldiers faced little resistance to their invasion and subsequently captured a border town. In response, the soldier reported that “the Canadian militia are deserting from Maldin [Canadian fort in southern Ontario] in large parties.” The fact that the American flag waved on both sides of the contested Detroit river “astonished the natives, and they are retiring to their villages and already holding councils to advise all the Indians to remain neutral.” The most pleasing tidbit of information stated that the “citizens of Canada... appear satisfied with our visit.” This letter is similar to ones that appeared praising various filibuster expeditions. American troops often meet little resistance and the natives are in awe of them. Most importantly, the Canadians, if not welcoming, were at least “satisfied” with the appearance of Americans. Such points were important if Canada was to be incorporated into the Union. Also promising were the supposed reactions of Native Americans. Instead, of launching ferocious guerrilla assaults they were impressed with American military prowess and prefer to stay out of the way. This non-interference would hopefully continue in the event of American annexation. Of course much of this was wishful thinking but the letter nonetheless offers invaluable insight into how some Americans saw the invasion of Canada.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>224</sup>Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> *National Intelligencer* as it appeared in the *Raleigh Register* August 7, 1812.

An audacious move like invading Canada was often met with opposition. The editor and publisher of the *Maryland Gazette*, Jonas Green, asked his readers to consider the cost such an invasion would have on the United States in his editorial “Plain Calculations.” His column sought to answer some commonly asked questions regarding the war. He reminded readers that Americans inhabited a “free country” and that no man “should be the slave to any man’s ambition.” The author encouraged readers to carefully consider the cost this war would take on their livelihoods. For they, the ordinary “farmers and mechanics” would be the ones forced to bear its burden. Every American should “count the cost and count the grain” and “decide for yourselves” if the price is too high. He encouraged readers to imagine the war had just ended in an American victory that saw “no disappointment, no disaster, no disgrace—we shall get all we expect.” Yet what was expected? He answered, rather nonchalantly, as merely the “conquest of Canada.” Green wondered what this “promised land...will be worth once we get it.” The only thing the United States would have to show would be “a cold inhospitable country, full of fortifications, military ports, and containing a large fortified city [Quebec], all of which must be maintained at enormous expense from our own treasury.” Although he was unsure of its actual long term value, he was certain that the capture of Canada would cost much “men and money.”<sup>226</sup>

Green was also confident that the United States would have a problem acquiring the requisite number of troops needed for a successful invasion in any comfortable fashion. He reminded readers to consider “how many forts and military ports it [Canada] contains.” Green expected the conquest would take no fewer than “Thirty Thousands Lives... What sort of men will be the thirty thousand slaughtered and lost? Will they be a gang of vagabonds such as are

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<sup>226</sup> *Maryland Gazette* October 15, 1812.

picked in Europe for standing armies? No-they must be good and useful citizens, the honest yeomanry of our country, fathers of families.” He was also sure that no amount of “land, rum and the promise of glory” could induce enough volunteers to carry out the invasion since “we love our families and our homes, our fields and our firesides, too well to exchange them for the misery of a camp and the tyranny of military upstarts.” Relying on militia was also out of the question. Green claimed that constitutionally “the militia cannot be compelled to march out of the United States-they are for defense and not for invasion.” The only “solution” then was to force the United States to adopt conscription. This would be in the “French” style and utterly repugnant to American ideals and values. If such a policy was adopted in “this land of liberty” then Americans would become “wretched slaves of military despotism.” He warned his “fellow citizens” that they must “look to this before it is too late, before your children are torn from you under the walls of Quebec and you are drawn like criminals to a foreign land, to return to your peaceful homes no more.” Green’s editorial was not just a warning but an admonishment. If Americans refused to open their eyes to the real dangers of the war they would be just as culpable as the administration. American “farmers and mechanics” would be forced to fight, to lose their homes and their children. Most tellingly, if the virtuous American citizen did not stand up now they would become “like criminals.”<sup>227</sup>

If such dire warnings about morality and death did not sway Americans, Green had another tactic; talk about money. He estimated that for every year the war lasted the government would need “Thirty millions of dollars.” Coupled with his projection that the war would take six years to complete that was quite a sum of money. Worse still the money would come from neither trade nor commerce but from “the hands and mouth of labor.” He claimed the

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<sup>227</sup>Ibid.

government had already outlined a series of taxes which would be levied soon after the November elections. The provisions targeted a wide array items including land, wine, “spirituous liquors” salt, sugar, “foreign merchandize” and even a “STAMP TAX.” Worse still until the requisite funds could be bled from the average American the nation will be forced to pay its balance using “PAPER MONEY; by which the national debt will be increased many millions, and by which so many honest people were ruined in the last war.” The only people who would benefit from this farce of a conflict would be the “President and his friends and parasites.” Green foresaw the President abusing his authority as commander-in- chief by appointing numerous but incompetent political allies to positions of power. As for the average American, the author concluded that they had “EVERYTHING TO LOSE AND NOTHING TO GAIN.” Green’s editorial was not only clear and relatively concise but specially designed to sway readers. He was not just some crank editor spewing anti-establishment propaganda. He was careful to avoid inciting any British hatred and thus refrained from making any mention of their policy of impressment or similar “outrages.” Instead he addressed the many of the biggest fears Americans of the day faced. For one, tangling with the British would not be an easy task especially considering their fortification of the Canadian border. The capitalist, freedom loving American public could not stomach the introduction of excessive taxes and forced conscription, measures which the author found were essential to a victory over the British. The choice then, was either to muddle along with dignity intact and lose the war or abandon all those things dear to Americans and win. Neither of these scenarios was acceptable to Green so he staunchly advocated for a simple end to hostilities. For this editor expansion was not inherently wrong but the current political climate was currently ill suited to such a venture.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

The diversity of viewpoints regarding the invasion of Canada also manifested themselves in toasts made at public functions. The *Orange County Patriot* concisely and proudly reprinted a toast to “the American flag-may it boldly wave over the territory of the Canadas, and even on the walls of Quebec, or Britain learns to respect ‘free trade and sailor’s rights.’” Here the invasion was seen as largely a military gambit and objective. Acquiring Canada was useful only to get the British to bow to American demands. The invasion would be successful *or* the British would relent and discontinue their policy of impressment. The Wilkes-Barre *Gleaner* toasted “the Constitution-A garment made for the people of the U. States; its skirts torn off to cover the inhabitants of Louisiana. What part of it is reserved for the Citizens of Canada?” Here the constant tendency to expand was a satirical joke. The wonders of the Constitution was seen as a finite resource that could only be stretched so far. Expending this valuable commodity on Canada may prove troublesome down the road.<sup>229</sup>

As the war continued with negligible gain some Americans saw the conquest of Canada to be crucial for the war effort and must be successful at all costs. One concerned citizen, identified only as “Farmer”, argued that Canada must be conquered and advocated some startling proposals. The “Farmer” claimed that the recent and abysmal battlefield prowess of American soldiers can be attributed to a both a lack of urgency and a lack of manpower. He felt that relying upon volunteer enlistments and a small cadre of professional soldiers was a recipe for disaster. He bemoaned that not enough Americans were answering the call to fight and that traditional ways to bolster units, by offering bounties or enlistment bonuses, were failing. He argued that these types of soldiers were too mercenary to be effective as “men who prefer the life or the pay of a soldier, to the life and earnings of a civilian, can certainly feel no anxiety to

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<sup>229</sup> *Orange County Patriot* August 3, 1813; *The Gleaner* August 13, 1813.

terminate a war...on the contrary they must naturally desire its protraction.” The conquest of Canada was in peril because American soldiers loved to bilk the government out of pay and thus did not have the desire to fight hard enough to achieve victory.<sup>230</sup>

What the United States needed were Americans who did not want to fight. He claimed the best soldiers were those “who when placed in the ranks shall have no powerful motives to induce them to desire continuance there, but on the contrary shall be actuated by the strongest inducements to return to the bosom of their families, to the enjoyment of their domestic felicities, to the prosecution of their civil avocations, men in short whose pursuits and interests must render them eager to reap the fruit of their military toils.” By sending these men to war, he assured readers, would “hasten its termination.” According to the rather loquacious “Farmer” this war can only result in an American victory by soldiers who hate soldiering. Only they would prosecute the war vigorously enough to obtain the “conquest of Canada.” Attempts to encourage more recruits “by pecuniary temptation or enlistment” would only attract more unsavory mercenaries and not the needed types of soldiers.<sup>231</sup>

The only solution then was to turn toward more drastic measures. The “Farmer” blamed Congress for the current military crisis and advocated that they grant the President “discretionary power over the physical force of the nation.” More simply put; the conquest of Canada can only be obtained through the use of a draft. Compulsory service would provide the needed numbers of unwilling recruits he feels are so desperately needed. The author was confident that “our lives, our liberties, our interests, our tranquility at home, our respectability abroad, are at this moment suspended in doubtful scales.” The only way to salvage the situation was to have

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<sup>230</sup> *National Intelligencer* January 28, 1814.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

Congress grant the executive the power to “call upon the state governments” and compel them to enact “political obligation or draft.” The time for action was now, that needed action was conscription and the objective was the “conquest of Canada.”<sup>232</sup>

A contradictory stance was put forth from the concerned citizen “Germanicus.” He too felt that the conquest of Canada to be a prerequisite for victory but his means to do so differed greatly. Rather than advocate conscription, “Germanicus” wanted more time spent training and developing a professional and volunteer army. His proposal would provide a mechanism that would both safeguard the nation from any outside assault as well as allow for offensive expeditions. He railed against the current system in place and found it be ineffective and chaotic. In contrast his ideas promoted coordination and training. He proposed bolstering already existing state militias but wanted to use these soldiers in a strictly defensive way. Each of these militias would be clothed and fed by the U.S. government and given copious amounts of training. These militias would be forbidden from leaving the country and were to be utilized solely as “the means of self-defense against any sudden invasion.” These militias were only allowed to leave their jurisdiction if asked to bolster a neighboring states militia.<sup>233</sup>

“Germanicus” praised his scheme as “it gives to the states safety, yet they remain dependent on the federal government.” He envisioned these state militias to operate as well trained and effective roadblocks to any invasion. Most interestingly, this defensive force would always be on alert in wartime and thus would not need to organize in an emergency. Keeping the soldiers in their home vicinities would increase their dedication to the cause and he foresaw each region defending its own states. Thus the western provinces would “protect its rights in

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<sup>232</sup>Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> *National Intelligencer* January 13, 1815.

New Orleans; by doing so will do most for itself and most for the nation” and as an added bonus the presence of such a force “will also keep the Indians in awe, preserving our infant territories.” Not only would the author’s idea safeguard the United States against the very real possibility of a British invasion but serve to deter and pacify Native Americans. The militia would not even be needed to actually fight against the savages but their mere presence would serve to keep them in their place and out of “our infant territories.” Most interestingly was the lack of concern “Germanicus” had for Native Americans. Although many local militias spent considerably more time fighting the Indians than they did the British this was lost on this author. Instead, like many of his contemporaries, he saw Indians as a domestic annoyance rather than as an authentic threat to the United States. Although the mighty British Empire had some success containing the United States, he felt no such fear in regards to Native Americans. The Natives could be culled into obedience simply by exhibiting a show of martial strength.<sup>234</sup>

With a rock solid defensive force in place the United States would be free to develop its offensive capabilities. The first thing this professional force would need is lots of federal funding. This could be accomplished by an increase in taxes and the author speculated that the public would accept this new war measure as they will “know that that taxes paid by them are for their protection, and, feeling so sensibly the benefits of the national government will understand how essential it is to their preservation.” The author envisioned this offensive force to be made up of a “regular army, formed by voluntary enlistments.” These soldiers would be highly trained “completely disciplined, abundantly supplied with every requisite to procure success” and

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid.



“commanded by intelligent and active officers.” These soldiers would be responsible for bringing the war to the enemy and “Germanicus” had a very specific objective in mind.<sup>235</sup>

Their objective would be the “conquest of Canada.” He admitted that such an endeavor had been attempted before and met with little success. That failure was due to “hasty, anxious impulse.” This new attempt would be carefully orchestrated for “to be victorious we must take time and never act with a hurry.” The successful invasion would be considerably larger than the previous attempt and would be carried out by “a force so strong as to hold what, by hard fighting, we shall conquer.” He admitted that this envisioned strike force would take time to train, equip and make ready. In the interim, “Germanicus” proposed that the United States seize the Canadian frontier. He argued that this policy would be far more beneficial than another ill-conceived invasion. The British would be forced to “strengthen himself [on the frontier] or be conquered.” Tying up the enemy in the frontier would also prevent any further “destructive or permanent invasion into any of the states and all minor attempts will be repulsed by the state armies.” Ultimately, the “scheme” proposed by “Germanicus” was fanciful at best. Equipping and training a gigantic offensive force; while simultaneously sustaining multiple state armies was far beyond the capability of the federal government. This article does demonstrate, however, the diversity of American viewpoints in regards to expansion. For “Germanicus” his elaborate plan would not only result in an American victory but attain the “conquest of Canada.”<sup>236</sup>

Of course not all Americans were eager to fund a war that seemed to be going nowhere. The editor of the *Maryland Gazette* found the war to be a catastrophe of the first magnitude. In a short anti-war article, the editor lamented the supposed lack of patriotism in the country.

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<sup>235</sup>Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> *National Intelligencer* January 13, 1815.

Although he personally was against the war he found it surprising that so many Americans vocally supported it. The author found it troubling that the military was having difficulty meeting its quotas and noted that enlistments were dropping. He facetiously asked “surely, if the people be really fond of the war, and believe as many of them say, that it is waged for our dearest rights, no apology can be received for their backwardness to enlist...and rally around the standard of their country.” Now that the nation faced a manpower shortage he speculated “where are the men who at the time of elections harangued so eloquently in favor of the war, and abuse so unmercifully all those who refuse to give it their support?” The author wondered “is it really true that all their promises and professions were mere vapping-that after pledging their lives in support of the nation’s rights and the nation’s independence, they will continue to stand off and withhold their services when the nation so loudly demands them.” Perhaps most distressing of all was that without their much needed support “their darling object, the conquest of Canada, cannot be effected.” For this editor the acquisition of Canada was not merely a military objective needed to end the conflict, but a pet prize that war hawks salivated over. He argued that all anti-war advocates should join him in encouraging all those whom support the war to enlist and prove their dedication. If this occurred “surely those who profess to be in the majority everywhere, and who certainly on election days often prove the most numerous, would be sufficient for the conquest of Canada.” Yet “if these men still hold back, and for the want of soldiers the conquest of Canada is abandoned, and our national rights surrendered, how can they excuse themselves?”<sup>237</sup>

An enthusiastic supporter of the editor’s anti-war stance penned an article that appeared in the same edition of the *Maryland Gazette*. This author, known as Aulus, had a convincing

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<sup>237</sup> *Maryland Gazette* February 24, 1814.

though bleak prediction. He immediately expressed his anti-war credentials by referring to the conflict as “our mad and wicked war.” He reminded readers that “our friend and August ally” Napoleon was having difficulties on the European continent. If Britain makes peace on the continent they would be able to turn their full attention toward North America then “even our most redoubted heroes begin to fear that our affairs may not be in the most enviable situation.” He was one of the few authors who truly grasped the precarious situation the United States found itself in. Most authors tended to view the conflict in a very parochial way, a war simply between the British in Canada and the United States. If peace returned to the European continent the dynamic of the war would shift very quickly. “Aulius” blamed the Madison administration for the current woes. It was they who “plunged us into a war with England, when every consideration, whether of prudence, humanity or patriotism forbade us to mingle in the conflict- they commenced a system of most unrelenting warfare against commerce, and therefore beggared the treasury, as well as ruined the people.” He concluded that the Madison administration had brought about “disgrace, disaster and ruin.” The author railed against members of the Democratic Party who unflinchingly buttressed the President and demanded they “cease to give a blindfolded and implicit support to the measures of the administration.” He then, comically considering his previous political vehemence, asked readers to stop blaming the Madison administration for suspected power abuses and war mismanagement. Instead, it was time to find a solution.<sup>238</sup>

The only way to “save the nation”, the author determined, was to “conclude an armistice.” He understood that some Americans would oppose such a measure but he dismissed those people as war profiteers who were “fattening upon the distresses of the land.” He was

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<sup>238</sup>Ibid.

confident that the average American would welcome an armistice as it would enable the citizenry to “stay at home, instead of performing tours of militia duty, our houses and farms on the seaboard will be saved from pillage and destruction, and our wives and children permitted to sleep undisturbed.” The author was also an advocate of “free trade” and demanded an immediate end to the embargo. “Aulus” claimed “neither the merchant nor the seaman, wishes the government, any longer to take especial care of their interests; such friendship is death, such protection is ruin.” Instead, the United States should return to free and open trade which would bring about “wealth to every occupation, and again fill the national coffers, and national and individual prosperity can alone make us respectable abroad or happy at home.” The war was a misguided conflict from the outset that left no reasonable alternative but to sue for peace. The possibility of acquiring Canada was such a forlorn hope that he didn’t even bother to mention its impossibility. More important than dreams of extending the border northward was the return of a vibrant free trade network. This author fervently believed that economic productivity would make the United States great, not war for territorial expansion.<sup>239</sup>

Ultimately, “Aulus” proved prophetic in his desire for peace. The United States simply could not continue the costly war once Great Britain turned her full attention to North America. The subsequent Treaty of Ghent brought peace to the continent and a return to antebellum conditions. News of the peace reached North American shores by early 1815 and in nearly all quarters the announcement was welcomed. The editor of the *Maryland Gazette* declared “it is with no small degree of pleasure, that we are able to lay before our readers a copy of the Treaty of Peace.” This remarkable document “relieves us from the distressing embarrassment of war, and enables every class of our citizens to return to their usual occupations.” The editor was

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<sup>239</sup>Ibid.

unnerved that the treaty did not specifically address issues relating to “trade” or “sailor’s rights” but was hopeful that further deliberations would take place. Nonetheless, he was confident that “it must be a gratification to the majority of people that hostilities have terminated.” Less comforting, however, was what “the government acquired by this contest.” The only thing the nation received was a “heavy debt” “hundreds of individuals totally ruined” and the public was left off in a situation worse than when hostilities began. The author also mockingly addressed why the war was even undertaken in the first place. The two prominent reasons he argued were that “our territory would have been extended by the conquest of Canada” and that the “sanctity of the flag should protect, everything, and everybody that sailed under it.” He reiterated to readers that neither of these objectives had been met; Canada still remained under British control and the British still retained the right of impressment. He ended with a reminder to readers to compare the pros and cons of the war for purposes of posterity. While the ending of the war was an event to be celebrated the rationale for causing such a conflict was to be derided. It was evident that although the author sympathized with concepts of sailor rights and potential for acquiring Canada they were not sufficient reasons to start a war. The fact that the war failed to accomplish these goals made the whole endeavor even more of a farce.<sup>240</sup>

An essay that was even more critical was published by another anonymous author known as “Peace-Man.” He too welcomed the end of bloodshed but thought it necessary to reflect upon what was gained and at what cost. His findings were hardly complimentary. He asked reader to consider “in sober seriousness; the cost and the profit of this war.” Upon doing so he was confident that “public indignation must fall upon the heads of the guilty authors of the war.” Although he was glad no more soldiers would be killed in battle, he was upset over some of its

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<sup>240</sup> *Maryland Gazette* February 23, 1815.

provisions and concluded “we have lost much, and have gained nothing.” In particular he regretted the loss of some fishing rights but this paled in comparison to the bigger question of territorial expansion. He rhetorically asked “but have we really gained nothing? Is the cause of free trade and sailor’s rights abandoned? Is the conquest of Canada given up?” He was sorrowful to report that the answer to both questions was a simple “yes.” “Peace-Man” declared that “Canada which was to be conquered in six weeks after the declaration of the war; is not to be conquered at all.” Also disturbing was the news that “England’s right to impress seaman on board of our merchant vessels is now recognized.” The author was appalled at the conduct at the war and found it nearly incredulous that both objectives of the conflict had failed to be achieved. He chided those whom had initially supported the war were now celebrating its end. If the war was necessary, and the United States failed to achieve its goal, why celebrate its end now? Perhaps most alarming for those who lived in the western states was the further failure of the United States to prevent the British from offering aid to hostile Native Americans. He feared that soon “the baleful influence of that nation [England] may still be exerted to let them loose upon our frontiers.”<sup>241</sup>

In short the author felt betrayed by the administration. They had promised an end to impressment, the acquisition of some new territory and the curbing of Indian threats yet produced nothing. If the administration was willing to go to war they should be willing to continue it until those objectives are achieved. The treaty or “honorable’ conclusion” was anything but. He also found the mere idea of celebrating because the United States “preserved our territory, whole and entire” was ridiculous as those were the conditions prior to the commencement of hostilities. It was inconceivable that “we continue the war almost three

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<sup>241</sup>Ibid.

years, incur a debt of two hundred millions of dollars, sacrifice many thousand lives, impoverish and ruin an entire nation, and now we are to rejoice because England consents that we shall finish this war of our own making without paying our independence as the price of it.” The author claimed the real villains of this travesty were “war-men.” These were the individuals who misled the public and embroiled the United States in a poorly managed war and now had the gall to celebrate its termination. He declared that “surely those who made the war ought not to rejoice” and that those same men “answer to their country and to their God, for the horrid waste of blood and treasure which it has produced.” He demanded that those responsible repent and declare the war “unnecessary and unrighteous.” The only people he absolved were those whom opposed the war from the outset. They understood the dangers early on and should now be permitted to “rejoice that a wicked and unnecessary war is terminated...that a stop is put to the effusion of human blood.” The author ended on a peculiar note by again forgiving those whom always opposed the war and assured readers that they at least could sleep soundly at night knowing the “blood of their countrymen has not been shed by them.”<sup>242</sup>

Accounts regarding the peace were considerably more positive and upbeat in the *Rhode Island American* and *Poughkeepsie Herald*. The former declared that “the spontaneous and tumultuous effusion of joy which bursts upon us on the receipt of the glad tidings of peace was instantaneously demonstrated by the ringing of bells, firing of cannon, and splendid illuminations.” The editor claimed that “troubled nights depart and the star of PEACE returns.” The *Herald* presented a similar atmosphere of revelry but entitled their article “Victory and Peace.” This editor saved the majority of his praise for “the great, unparalleled, and as we trust, decisive victory obtained by Gen. Jackson, over the enemy at New Orleans.” The fact that this

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<sup>242</sup>Ibid.

editor called the battle decisive is crucial. To him the victory contributed to the peace. This last ditch moment of triumph made the whole war worthwhile. The failure to capture Canada or stop impressment was forgotten. The author made no mention of the financial or economic cost of the war but instead recounted the “general joy and hilarity that was manifested on the happy occasion.” While some Americans would continue to point out the failed objectives of the war many more adopted a more selective memory. Forgotten were the manpower shortages, British invasions and soaring debt. Instead, many chose to remember the glorious victory at New Orleans and since Britain defeated Napoleon their need for sailors halted which subsequently led to the end of impressment. The other major catalyst for war, the conquest of Canada, was also largely ignored. Since the war ended with antebellum conditions, the war hawks never faced any repercussions for their failed attempt at conquest. That American longing for expansion into Canada would continue as would the debate.<sup>243</sup>

For much of the next twenty years most Americans satiated their expansionist desires with incursions into Florida and Texas but designs on Canada never entirely went away. In 1837, democratically minded Canadians rose in rebellion against Great Britain. Two separate insurrections broke out, one in Upper Canada the other in Lower Canada, each attempted to set up governments modeled on that of the United States. Many Americans saw this as a wonderful indicator that the contagion of democracy was spreading. A detailed editorial that appeared in the *Democratic Review* offers some excellent insight. The author declared that much of Canada was in a state of revolt and remarked that such a development was far from unusual. He argued that the most remarkable aspect was that Canada had not revolted sooner since they border the United States and have thus been closely “exposed” to “the salutary contagion of democratic

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<sup>243</sup> *Rhode Island American* February 14, 1815; *Poughkeepsie Herald* February 15, 1815.



institutions and democratic principles.” He claimed that Canadian grievances were valid and that they had the right to revolt just as the American forefathers did.<sup>244</sup>

While the author sympathized with the concept of Canadian independence, he hoped the new nation would be a friendly neighbor and nothing more. He was confident that “there is nothing to be desired by us in the prospective annexation of the Canadas to our Union.” In the event of successful independence he reminded readers that the United States would see neither an increase in “safety or prosperity.” Interestingly, however, he argued that expansion itself was a good for the United States. The author disparaged large empires as being bloated and inefficient but insisted that a democratically run government, such as the United States, was immune to such troubles. Thus expansion in a general sense was beneficial but the particular idea of merging with Canada was undesirable. While direct annexation with Canada was out of the question the author hoped the “contagion” of democracy would continue to spread “over the whole North American continent from the isthmus to the pole.”<sup>245</sup>

If the Canadian people truly believed in self- government their revolt would succeed without any outside interference. The author was adamant on this point. He claimed “If the Canadian *people* will to be free from their dependence on a foreign country; they have but to arise in their strength of mass and say so; they need no assistance of money or volunteers from us.” He explicitly and repeatedly stressed that the United States should offer words of encouragement but otherwise remain strictly neutral. The author ended the article with an appropriately bombastic but ultimately toothless statement that “it is impossible to repress [our]

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<sup>244</sup> *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* (Jan 1838).

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

emotion of candid good will towards them and of ardent aspirations for the honorable success of this new family of worshippers at the holy shrine of Liberty.”<sup>246</sup>

This cautious approach to the Canadian rebellion was further expanded upon in the *New York Spectator*. The editor rightly feared and respected the British military and commented that it was considerably more powerful now than it was in 1776. He suspected the rebellions would fail without outside aid. As for the possibility of Americans coming to the rescue, this author thought that out of the question. He claimed that while words like “liberty” and “independence” were moving more than rhetoric was needed. He demanded proof of actual “oppression” and he concluded that the Canadians were reasonably well integrated and treated by the British and thus deserved no assistance. He admitted that the cause was just but the means were in their hands and insisted the United States stay neutral.<sup>247</sup>

The author also hoped to quash any mutterings that the United States hoped to annex Canada. He calculated that “our territory is already too large; our population ample for all the purposes of defense, and the annexation of Canada, besides ensuring us a long war to begin with, would only weaken us when acquired.” Furthermore, the author claimed he spoke for the majority of citizens as his position was “the general sentiment, among our population, far and near, with some few local exceptions, of little or no importance.” Although he was against acquiring Canada he wanted all to understand that “we are not afraid of a war with England, or any other power, for just cause.” He had yet to find sufficient cause to warrant such a war. Instead, he argued that conflict with England would lead to the loss of “millions upon millions” of dollars, the “destruction of our commerce” and “thousands of valuable lives.” The correct

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid. Several other newspapers including the *Richmond Enquirer* and *New-Hampshire Gazette* echoed the sentiment that sympathy but nothing else should be given to the Canadians.

<sup>247</sup> *New York Spectator* December 7, 1837.

course of action was strict neutrality and the hope that commerce with Great Britain would continue unimpeded.<sup>248</sup>

The *Fayetteville Observer* printed a short blurb stating that General Winfield Scott had been sent to the “Northern frontier” to keep the peace. The editorial also announced a presidential proclamation that called upon “all American citizens who have gone to Canada to aid the patriots [in reality a minuscule amount] to return” as “the protection of this government will not be extended to them.” The *Richmond Enquirer* described a rally in Buffalo, New York where “handbills were posted up, calling for Canadian volunteers.” The editor quickly dismissed the sincerity, arguing that the posted handbills were “probably but an outbreak of feeling.”<sup>249</sup>

While the vast majority of Americans identified with the plight of the Canadians few were willing to risk another war with Great Britain. This stood in sharp contrast to how events unfolded in Florida or Texas. There many Americans were eager to lend support, aid and even volunteers to make their dreams of independence a reality. There were two major reasons for this hesitation when dealing with Canada. The most obvious was that there were no Americans embroiled in the insurrection and thus no cause for immediate concern. In the case of both Florida and Texas, American emigrants were often the ones most loudly clamoring for separation, which was not the case in Canada. No less important was the strength of the British military. The wounds incurred from the War of 1812 had yet to fully heal. An editorial published in the *Richmond Enquirer* and *New Bedford Mercury* claimed that “if the British government do not voluntarily assent to [Canadian independence], it will not be accomplished without difficulties of great magnitude.” The editor further claimed that Canada “is now

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> *Fayetteville Observer* January 10, 1838; *Richmond Enquirer*, December 12, 1837.

bristling with the bayonets of British soldiers” who “are bent on intimidating the reformers and suppressing the rising spirit of rebellion.” He stressed that “the St. Lawrence [River] is commanded by an impregnable fortress [and is] in the hands of the government.” With this in mind, America declined to get involved in Canada for the time being.<sup>250</sup>

Although the insurrections were eventually crushed within a year they had a lasting effect on the United States. Many Americans saw the speed and efficiency with which the British military put down the rebellions and rightly feared any future conflict with them. Such anxieties were in direct opposition to the way the war in Texas developed. Many Americans considered the Mexicans to be incompetent soldiers and thus had little qualms in wishing to initiate hostile action toward them. The British military on the other hand had proven their mettle in battle and Americans viewed them with a considerable amount of trepidation. Such fear would arise again when boundary disputes broke out regarding Oregon.<sup>251</sup>

The geographic location of the Oregon territory made it a likely candidate for annexation. The Oregon Territory consisted of the current states of Washington, Oregon and Idaho and led all the way up to the fifty fourth parallel. The territory’s potential for trade with its Pacific ports and the navigable Columbia River ensured that both the British Empire and the United States would compete over the land. While the Anglo-American treaty of 1818 stipulated that the territory be “free and open” to settlers from both nations with the United States and Great Britain jointly governing Oregon, the idea of sharing did not suit many Americans and the joint occupation faced stout criticism. Many of the treaty’s critics claimed the entire territory belonged to the United States. As early as 1829 the editor of the *Daily National Journal* claimed

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<sup>250</sup> *New Bedford Mercury*, November 30, 1837; *Richmond Enquirer*, November 21, 1837.

<sup>251</sup> Horsman, 207-211,220-223.

Oregon as part of the Louisiana Purchase but cautioned that the “remote situation of the regions west of the Rocky Mountains will forever disqualify them from becoming a profitable...portion of this Republic.” Such a sentiment would be similarly expressed in California. On the one hand the author would claim the territory as under American jurisdiction but dismiss its value due to its far off location. As Americans moved westward this hesitancy quickly evaporated.<sup>252</sup>

As the population of the United States increased, almost 32% between 1830-1840, so too did stories of the territory’s potential. The *Richmond Enquirer* in 1838 described emigrants rushing to the “lovely and fertile plains of Oregon.” The *Barre Gazette* declared that “the fertility of the soil, the salubrity of the climate, and the ample extent of territory through the fine valley of Oregon, present strong inducements to the seekers of a new home.” The *Waldo Patriot* from Maine claimed that Oregon “will prove [to be] the finest grazing country in the world-that the climate of Oregon is far milder than that of the United States, resembling more that of France.” The author also claimed that Oregon “contains at least 14,000,000 acres of land of the first quality.” Such descriptions closely resemble those used to attract settlers to Texas. Just as Texas was the “Italy of America”, Oregon was compared to France. The images of excellent soil, ample grazing land and “salubrious” climate worked just as well to induce settlement in Oregon as they had in Texas.<sup>253</sup>

Some newspapers termed this influx of emigrants the “Oregon fever.” Historian David Pletcher claims only around four hundred Americans resided in Oregon in 1841. By 1845 the number had reached five thousand. *The Macon Georgia Telegraph* reported that “the Oregon

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<sup>252</sup> Jones and Rakestraw, 151-158; H.C. Allen, *The Anglo-American Relationship Since 1783* (London: Adam & Charles Black publishing, 1959) 216-218; *Daily National Journal*, May 4, 1829.

<sup>253</sup> US. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Bicentennial Edition, Part 1*, Washington, D.C., 1975; *Barre Gazette* February 25, 1842; *Waldo Patriot*, September 28, 1838; *Baltimore American*, August 21, 1838; *Richmond Enquirer*, September 4, 1838; Stuart, 85-87.

fever is raging in almost every part of the union.” The authors surmised that “it would be reasonable to suppose that there will be at least five thousand Americans west of the Rocky Mountains by next autumn.” Entire families moved out west to both seek their fortunes as well as establish American institutions. The *Barre Gazette* claimed that as “preparations [are] in operation to organize among settlers a regular form of government [and] immigration has increased rapidly.”<sup>254</sup>

Another such expedition, launched in May of 1842 from Independence, Missouri predicted that it would “be but the prelude to a vast avalanche of emigrants to Oregon.” The *Baltimore American* stated Oregon would soon be populated by “thousands whose states will induce them to abandon the scorching heats and intense cold of the eastern side of this vast continent.” The *Newport Mercury* covered a rally in Illinois where speakers were “highly laudatory of the soil and climate of the portion of our continent above named.” The editorial mentioned that the “Oregon fever” had already induced a group of emigrants to “proceed towards this land of promise.”<sup>255</sup>

The *Newport Mercury* also offered a philosophical explanation as to why this phenomenon occurred. “It would seem that no limits can be assigned to the migratory desires of our people, who no sooner become habituated to a place than they seek to fly off to another, judging from their restlessness it might be supposed that locomotion is a part of the American character.” The *Mercury* claimed that these wanderings “will require the Pacific to put a stop to our roving.” The *Barre Gazette* offered its own explanation as to why Americans were destined to control Oregon, asserting that “among a people such as ours, possessing extraordinary

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<sup>254</sup> David Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon and the Mexican War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 216-217; *The Macon Georgia Telegraph*, May 9, 1843; *Barre Gazette* February 25, 1842.

<sup>255</sup> *Baltimore American*, undated; *Newport Mercury*, May 4, 1839; *Berkshire County Whig*, May 12, 1842.

qualities of energy, vigor, boldness, and hardihood, with an ever moving impulse toward action, there must be expansion and progression.” Such writings coincided with O’Sullivan’s earlier musings, agreeing that Americans were destined to settle anywhere they wished and wherever they went their democratic institutions followed. According to these Americans, moving west was an inherent part of being an American and as Jefferson surmised decades earlier, such a characteristic allows “a means of delivering to us peaceably what might otherwise have cost us a war.”<sup>256</sup>

Many of the above sentiments mirrored those regarding the settlement of Texas. Both territories were, at least at one time, considered part of the Louisiana Purchase and both were seen as economically lucrative. The American public encouraged settlement to both territories and those that stayed behind expected the pioneers to spread and establish the institutions of democracy. While similar in key ways, the rationale behind expanding into Oregon differed significantly from that used to justify expansion into Texas. In Texas, Anglos argued that the Mexicans, in part because of their race and religion, had proven incapable of self government and thus Americans were needed to take charge. In regards to Oregon, debates over race and religion gave way to discussions of economics. Many Americans saw the British as greedy and not just unable but unwilling to properly make the most of the fertile Oregon Territory. The *Southern Patriot* lamented the fact that the British were unfairly monopolizing the territory. “A powerful agent and instrument of the British influence, the Hudson Bay Company, has fixed itself upon the territory and has extended its operations over a vast region.” The article went on to accuse the Hudson Bay Company of improperly utilizing the land. The *Barre Gazette* noted

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<sup>256</sup> *Pittsfield Sun*, June 16, 1842,; *Southern Patriot*, April 12, 1839; *Newport Mercury*, May 4, 1839; *Barre Gazette*, November 21, 1845; Sofka, 58; Jones & Rakestraw, 180-183.

that “the subjects of the United States far outnumber those of England beyond the Rocky Mountains and what is a more important circumstance, they are established tillers of the soil; while the English are mostly agents and servants of the Hudson Bay Company who do not subdue and cultivate the earth.” Once again the innate sense of superiority allowed many Americans to justify why they deserved the territory. Since many of the prior justifications, such as superiority in religion or race did not apply to the British new rationalizations were utilized.<sup>257</sup>

Some prominent Americans expressed similar sentiments. John Quincy Adams argued that the United States would use Oregon “to make the wilderness bloom as the rose, to establish laws, to increase, multiply and subdue the earth, which we are commanded to do by the first behest of God Almighty.” Great Britain on the other hand would only allow the territory to be used by “her hunters to hunt wild beasts.” John O’Sullivan offered his own take on the dispute. Although he had coined the term Manifest Destiny to promote the annexation of Texas, he applied it again in reference to Oregon. O’Sullivan stressed it was “our Manifest Destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty.” He too felt the land would be misused by Great Britain. “Oregon can never be to or for her, anything but a mere hunting ground for furs and peltries.” These sentiments hearken back to Jefferson’s ideal of an agrarian nation where American farmers, not foreign merchants and traders, held the rights to “this newly found Elysium.”<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Frederick Merk, *Oregon Question: Essays in Anglo-American Diplomacy and Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), ix-xi; *The Pittsfield Sun*, August 8, 1839; *Southern Patriot*, February 1, 1840; *Barre Gazette*, November 21, 1845; *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, July 18, 1844.

<sup>258</sup> Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission*, 31-32; *The Pittsfield Sun*, August 8, 1839; *New York Morning News*, December 27, 1845.



While many of the speeches and editorials offered noble rationales for annexation to spread democracy and make better use for the land, fear of the British Empire was just as important a motivator. The *Waldo Patriot* found the British warlike who sought to abrogate American rights and steal its territory. “The occupation of this territory by Great Britain is only a part of that system of colonial impudence which has characterized that mercenary power for centuries.” The author decided that such British ruthlessness must not be tolerated and that the topic “deserves the deliberate consideration of the people of the United States.” The *Ohio Statesmen* published a speech in 1839 by a Senator Lewis Linn in which he argued that “England has just as little claim to the territory of Oregon as she has to Maine.” Linn stressed that the British had “built and armed several forts, equipped ships” and were “scattering arms and munitions of war and foment[ing] discontent against the United States.” Linn argued that lasting peace could not occur with the British in North America and “should war ever take place between the two countries, I hope it will not cease until she is driven from the continent.” He ended by pleading with the President and Senate for immediate action. *The Newport Mercury* feared “hostile [British] troops might be introduced by the way of the Oregon River.” To prevent any such aggression “it is deemed advisable that a settlement be formed at the mouth of the Oregon.”<sup>259</sup>

In order to secure this agrarian paradise from the malicious and avaricious British, many other Americans demanded action from the federal government. The *Pittsfield Sun* claimed that in addition to families and settlers a group of scientists “has been appointed, whose duty is to keep an accurate record of everything on the road which may be of interest to the government.” The *Sun* also hoped that the “subject of occupation and annexation...will inspire an immediate

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<sup>259</sup> *Waldo Patriot* September 28, 1838; *Ohio Statesman*, March 3, 1839; *Newport Mercury*, August 25, 1838; *Rhode Island Republican*, August 29, 1838.

action upon the subject by Congress.” The *Southern Patriot* reported that a letter sent to the Senate claimed “the inhabitants of the Oregon territory” have endured “many acts of oppression by the British occupants, and are asking protection as American citizens.” A letter sent by a ship’s captain revealed that the potential for trade in the Pacific was great and that the United States should act quickly to break the British monopoly in the area. He further stated that “it is hoped that our government will soon do something to break up British settlements in the Oregon territory and thereby destroy the source from which emanates the most dire evils to American interests in the Western world.”<sup>260</sup>

The *New Hampshire Gazette* also pushed for immediate federal action in relation to the Oregon territory. The editors were incensed that important issues like annexation were being ignored in favor of meaningless negotiations. The editorial claimed that Daniel Webster, who was negotiating with the British, had “a British heart” and was spending too much time addressing minor violations of American rights. The *Gazette* claimed that the “British are attempting to expel us, not only from our present possessions, but to prevent us from getting any further foothold. They have no just and legal claim to the country. It is a vast region of much value, capable of being rendered very fertile and supporting an immense civilized population.” The author was quick to add, however, that “We hope our happy and prosperous country will not be plunged into a state of war.”<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> *The Pittsfield Sun*, August 8, 1839; *Southern Patriot*, February 4, 1839, December 20, 1841; *Berkshire County Whig*, May 26, 1842; Jones & Rakestraw, 170-171.

<sup>261</sup> *New Hampshire Gazette* July 27, 1841; Jones and Rakestraw, 21-25. The major violation of American rights the author dismissed as unimportant was the commandeering of an American ship the *Caroline* by British sailors near Niagara Falls. During the seizure, an American citizen was killed and many in the United States called it an act of war and demanded action. For more information see Jones and Rakestraw’s chapter “Remember the Caroline.”

*The New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* recounted the various evils and indiscretions perpetrated by the British, reasoning “We should think it was high time that the eyes of the American people were opened.” The editor argued that:

there can be no permanent peace until the whole of North America is independent of foreign domination and that such will be the case if England provokes a contest. The course of the Government is a plain one, it never will submit to injustice or aggression come what may. We have no thirst for blood but rather than see our soil invaded, our rights trampled upon, and the nation insulted, we say, *war before dishonor!*”

The *Gazette* did warn that the United States should build up its military or its citizens may “find themselves on the eve of a war, without preparation, without defenses, and with but the mere skeleton of an army.”<sup>262</sup>

These articles allude to some of the inconsistencies inherent in America’s approach to Oregon. On the one hand many Americans vehemently denounced the British and demanded total control of Oregon. At the same time many others cautioned restraint. Although many Americans rightly feared the mighty British Empire, this was not the only reason for such hesitation. The relationship between the United States and Great Britain at this time was a strange one. In spite of the animosity some Americans expressed toward the British, others, usually wealthy whites, felt a natural kinship with the Anglo-Saxons of the home country. Historian Reginald Horsman claims that some Americans at this time saw the British as racial brethren. Horsman believes this kindred feeling is why Americans were more prone to negotiate with the British rather than go to war like they did with the Mexicans. In addition to the kinship some felt toward the British, many Americans assumed that being Anglo-Saxon made them fiercer opponents. Congressman John Pendleton of Virginia worried that if war should break out over Oregon “We should meet men of our mettle, it would be Saxon against Saxon and there is

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<sup>262</sup> *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* April 20, 1840.

no child's play there." Both the racial similarities as well as the perceived strength of the British military forced many Americans to demand more governmental assistance and tread more carefully in Oregon than in Texas.<sup>263</sup>

The fear of British annexation of Oregon finally prompted congressional action. In late 1841 a bill was introduced that called for further settlement of the territory. Congressman Linn introduced a bill that stated "it is an important subject unless our government is willing that so fine a country should be occupied by the British; [there is] no time for further delay." A few months later another bill was introduced to establish military posts in the Oregon territory. Both of these bills were eventually defeated. For some in Congress direct opposition to the British Empire was ill advised since it might jeopardize the security of the nation as well as perhaps cost it its largest trading partner. Congressman Linn would not be dissuaded and reintroduced the bill "at every favorable opportunity." Each time it was defeated and the American calls for formal governmental interference would remain unanswered until 1844.<sup>264</sup>

The Presidential election of that year brought issues of expansion to the forefront of American politics. The Whig candidate Henry Clay felt that further expansion would jeopardize the balance of slave and free states and thus opposed the annexation of Texas and Oregon to the United States. The Democrats meanwhile, nominated a relatively unknown James K. Polk. A staunch supporter of Andrew Jackson, Polk believed that annexation of new territories was critical for the future prosperity of the United States and ran on a very hawkish pro-expansionistic platform. The American public supported his designs on American growth and

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<sup>263</sup> Horsman, 221-223; Jones and Rakestraw, 10-13; Certainly not all British were Anglo-Saxon but the language and rhetoric at this time regarding them usually describes them as such.

<sup>264</sup> *Southern Patriot*, December 20, 1841; *Berkshire County Whig*, May 26, 1842; *Pittsfield Sun*, June 9, 1842; *Macon Georgia Telegraph*, May 3, 1842; *Daily Ohio Statesman*, March 2, 1843; *Vermont Gazette*, June 18, 1843; Stuart, 100-102.

elected him the 11<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. Following through on his campaign promise of fulfilling the “re-occupation of Oregon” he opened negotiations with the British for the province.<sup>265</sup>

The American public meanwhile expressed their views regarding what sort of stance the United States should take. Song sheets played an important role in attracting public support for expansion, much as they had in the Texan War for Independence. One such highly partisan song in the *Pittsfield Sun* demonstrates the idea that Oregon was considered American soil.

And when our soil's invaded and  
Our rights trampled on  
Well gather round young Hickory  
From Maine to Oregon  
And British Whigs and Yankee Whigs  
Shall rue the day  
For while we flog the British boys  
We'll use up Henry Clay.

The song made it clear that the acquisition of Oregon was important for all Americans not just those who wished to move there. It also claimed that only through the guidance of Polk could Oregon be safe from outside aggression. Since “our soil's invaded” Americans could still claim they were resorting to violence only out of self-defense.<sup>266</sup>

Some Americans saw themselves as defenders against aggression that sought to eradicate those democratic institutions that they and their brethren had painstakingly exported. The *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* published an article that recounted various toasts at a banquet during the fourth of July. The celebrants offered a toast “to the Constitution of the

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<sup>265</sup> Polk, xiii-xv; For more information regarding the election see Sam Haynes, *James K. Polk and the Expansionistic Impulse* (New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc, 1997).

<sup>266</sup> *Pittsfield Sun* October 31, 1844; *New Hampshire Patriot* September 5, 1844.

United States” that reinforced the idea of defending democracy. “Not a monopoly for the old thirteen. Let it embrace Oregon and Texas, and its broad shield protect alike the native and the naturalized.”<sup>267</sup>

Less partisan songs depicting Oregon also began appearing in newspapers. The majority of these had a martial air to them and advocated the annexation of Oregon through military means. One song “Ho for Oregon” reiterated the earlier sentiments that Americans were a migratory people, who thirsted for adventure and exploration and were unfettered by rules or regulations. The tune spoke to those:

Who love adventure,  
Who scorn a sluggish life,  
Who seek unbounded freedom,  
The chase and forest life  
Throughout the union rally  
Our frontier livery don  
Ho! For Oregon!<sup>268</sup>

The song also called for the whole nation to unite and support expansion.

A thousand strong we gather  
By old Missouri’s tide,  
The cottage born and humble,  
Those nursed in wealth and pride;  
There is a tie that binds them-  
These thousand hearts in one-  
It is the thrilling watchword-  
Ho! For Oregon!

Here the lyrics appeal to a sense of presumed solidarity among those who trekked westward. All white men were entitled to the spoils of Manifest Destiny since social standing supposedly

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<sup>267</sup> *New Hampshire Patriot*, July 18, 1844.

<sup>268</sup> *Barre Gazette* August 22, 1845.

wouldn't matter as both rich and poor would work hand in hand toward the goal of settling Oregon.

Oh! These are not the spirits  
To quail in dangers hour  
Or yield their sacred birthright  
To any monarchs power  
As freeman they are gathered  
And when the war is won  
As freemen they will hold it-  
The glorious Oregon!

This final stanza is a direct attack against the British and appeals to American's fear and hatred of monarchies. It alluded to the fact that only those who are free are capable of winning such a war and their reward shall be the entire territory. Again the song reinforced the belief that Oregon was part of the United States and that Americans were ready for a war to defend "their sacred birthright."<sup>269</sup>

The *Tri-Weekly Ohio Statesmen* published another song that reiterated the militarism that was sweeping the nation. The editor stated that the song they published "points to certain founts of popular feeling which must not be overlooked by politicians." Interspersed throughout the song are cries of "Hurrah! Hurrah!" It incorrectly stated that American troops were bound for Oregon and would raise the American flag when they arrived. Such tunes echoed similar sentiments concerning Texas and the exportation of democracy, predicting "to the shores of the mighty western sea, we shall spread the empire of the free." Of course once democracy had been spread to these new lands it had to be meticulously defended. The song is unusual because it

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<sup>269</sup>Ibid.

also mentioned Native Americans as being a hurdle to the westward trek, “For a few stout hearts can lead the mass, through the hostile tribes in the mountain pass.”<sup>270</sup>

The *New York Evening Post* published a poem set up to resemble a letter addressed to John Bull. It recounted the defeats he suffered at the hands of Americans over the years. “I wonder John if you forget some sixty years ago, when we were very young, John, your head was white as snow, you didn’t count us much John and thought to make us run, but found out your mistake, one day at Lexington.” It went on to reference the British defeat at Yorktown and heavy casualties at Bunker Hill. Allusions to the War of 1812 were scant since the Americans lost most of the battles but the poem did mention “that day below New Orleans.” It claimed the reason for all these victories is that Americans fought for freedom, while British soldiers were merely puppets of the king. The letter ended “I thought your memory I would refresh, you like old things and times, so these events to please you, I have tumbled into rhymes, and don’t forget your old tried friends, because you’re now the ton, but John, just think of ’76 and give up Oregon.” The *Pittsfield Sun* recounted a meeting held in Illinois regarding Oregon. The resolutions adopted at the meeting stated “that it is unanimously agreed by the whole union, without regard to political parties, that the Oregon territory forms an integral part of the United States.” The delegates then expressed their “solemn and decided determination to maintain the occupation of the Oregon territory at all hazards...that we will resist in force, if necessary all and every foreign power from interfering with our domestic relations with our territory.”<sup>271</sup>

An editorial in the *Barre Gazette* stressed that the annexation of Oregon could not be stopped because “the progress of civilization westward since first the vigorous gems of a

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<sup>270</sup>*Tri-Weekly Ohio Statesmen* May 7, 1845.

<sup>271</sup> *Vermont Gazette*, September 3, 1844; *New York Evening Post* as it appeared in the *Georgia Telegraph* April 21, 1846; *Pittsfield Sun*, June 12, 1845.



freedom loving race were planted in the bosoms of the old thirteen communities of transplanted Englishmen has been uninterrupted and so it must continue under all circumstances to go on.” The author avoided the militant attitudes many other Americans expressed and hoped that the British and Americans could work together. He claimed that the process of expansion was not aggressive and claimed “the conquests which we go forth to make are not indeed over our fellow-men; it is to subdue the forest, to subject the uncultured soil to the plough, to remove the obstacles which nature has interposed in the way of mutual intercourse, so that enterprise, industry, and art, may have free scope and human happiness be increased.” The author were confident that “the process may go on as easily in Oregon as in Iowa or Wisconsin.” The editor observed that “no blood marks the tracks of the advancing army of civilization; but the signs of culture appear-fields and gardens are seen rich with grain or variegated with flowers, emblems of abundance and beauty. Never were a people called to empire under happier auspices.”<sup>272</sup>

Another alternative approach can be found in the *Southern Patriot*. It proposed, in a very short poem, a policy reminiscent of the acquisition of Texas.

A word to War-Hasteniers  
Snatches at Oregon  
All of you stop  
Wait till the pair [sic] is ripe  
Then it will drop

This article realized the futility in starting a war with Great Britain when it can be won through peaceful means. An almost identical sentiment appeared in the *New York Evening Post*. “Let Oregon remain, as it is, for the next fifty years. When it is ripe it must drop where it is destined to fall.” Some people, the above authors included, believed that the policy that evolved in Texas

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<sup>272</sup> *Barre Gazette*, November 21, 1845.

was the best course of action. They felt that the government should stay neutral and avoid conflict, then at the territories behest welcome them into the union. Thus Manifest Destiny could be accomplished without governmental interference or unnecessary bloodshed.<sup>273</sup>

In the end skillful negotiation won the day. By 1846 the dispute with Mexico turned from a simmering hostility to all-out war. Polk, a pragmatist more than anything else, realized it was impossible to win a war against Mexico and Great Britain concurrently. Re-examining his precarious position he gave up his most extreme territorial demands. The British were willing to cooperate because many of their top leaders found Oregon to be a remote and uninspiring province. The British also feared that Mexico may surrender quickly which in turn might incite Polk to demand the whole of Oregon. The resulting compromise set the border at the 49' parallel and kept the Columbia River open to both nations. The Oregon Treaty easily sailed through the Senate on June 18, 1846 by a vote of 41-14. Back east, many Americans were thankful that another war with Great Britain was avoided and applauded Polk's diplomacy. The *New Hampshire Sentinel* reported on the Senate's decision and claimed "this result, though precisely what was anticipated, will be received with acclamation of joy in every part of the country." The *Southern Patriot* announced that "the blessings of peace, as they now exist between Great Britain and the United States, will remain undisturbed and unimpaired." The *Barre Gazette* stated that the Oregon Treaty "seems to be hailed with joy in nearly all quarters."<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> *Southern Patriot* June 6, 1845; *New York Evening Post*, May 6, 1845; Pletcher, 239-241.

<sup>274</sup> Jones and Rakestraw, 233-263; Pletcher, 239-253; *New Hampshire Sentinel*, June 26, 1846; *Southern Patriot*, June 22, 1846; *Barre Gazette*, June 19, 1846; *Berkshire County Whig*, June 25, 1826; *Tri Weekly Ohio Statesman*, July 17, 1846. Not every newspaper agreed with the treaty the *Tri-Weekly Ohio Statesman* offered a more militant viewpoint and wished that Polk had pushed harder for all of the Oregon territory (to 54-40). They finally concluded, however, that "we do not like them [the treaty's articles] we wish that it had been avoided...but the deed has been done and we must submit."

The American relationship to the British during the “era of expansion” was a tricky one. Although the attempts to annex Canada ultimately failed, Oregon was successfully appropriated. The war of 1812 proved to be both expensive and in due course fruitless. A multitude of opinions were also expressed during the war. The vast majority of papers chose to criticize the war and offered suggestions on how to win the conflict. These opinions spanned the political spectrum. Some merely reiterated the necessity of conquering Canada to end the war, some advocated a national draft, and still others thought the French were just as much of a threat as the British. Some Americans thought the whole war to be an unjust attempt at a land grab and wanted peace at all costs. The United States incurred debt and death during the war yet received nothing in return. On the other hand, the victory at New Orleans and generous conditions of the treaty of Ghent helped keep the concept of expansionism alive. There had been no real long term repercussions for the failed attempt at expansion and pro-expansionists would continue their forays across the continent. While the concept of expansion did not die with this failure, most Americans did maintain a healthy respect for the British. The Canadian rebellions during the 1830s and ultimate reluctance to go to war over Oregon reinforced this new unofficial policy. The attempted acquisition of Canada and annexation of Oregon serve as further examples that Americans were divided over the wisdom of expansion and were not afraid to voice their opinions. The debate continued.

## Chapter 6 - Empire to the Pacific:

### The Settlement of California

California possessed many qualities that made it a likely candidate for American expansion. It was sparsely populated, possessed a pleasing climate, was capable of growing a variety of foodstuffs and had access to valuable trading ports on the Pacific Ocean. Yet it remained a distant and rarely mentioned territory for much of the nineteenth century. Americans preferred to debate the wisdom of acquiring land closer to home. Once Oregon began to be settled some of the more intrepid headed farther south and found California to possess excellent soil and fantastic weather. Even more crucially, many Americans started to see the potential for trade and shipping out of Pacific ports. Ultimately, this interest would compel Polk to first offer to buy the territory from Mexico and when this was refused go to war to acquire it. Unsurprisingly, not all Americans saw the wisdom in attempting to settle California and even more protested the extremely heavy handed way in which it was acquired. Once again the American press was at the forefront of the expansionistic debate.

While some historical works do an admirable job explaining American designs and settlement to California, few showcase the debate over expansionism. Dale Walker in *Bear Flag Rising: The Conquest of California, 1846* argues that the concept of Manifest Destiny was a “virulent force” that made the capture of California “inevitable.” Neal Harlow in *California Conquered: War and Peace on the Pacific 1846-1850* also argues the acquisition to be “inevitable” and that Americans felt they “were destined to subdue the continent.” Such statements grossly oversimplify American attitudes regarding expansion into the California

region. While both works offer excellent accounts of the haphazard, ill-conceived and carried out conquest of California, they neglect to address how many Americans actually opposed acquiring this new province with the only real “virulent” force being the debate over the wisdom of further expansion. Furthermore the claims that the American conquest of California was “inevitable” are simply untrue. Public opinion was divided on the issue with thousands of Americans opposing the acquisition. The American conquest of California, like every other expansionistic attempt during the first half of the nineteenth century, was anything but inevitable.<sup>275</sup>

Although California would not become a major area of interest to Americans until the 1840s, it was not completely ignored in the press. Initially the first mentions to California appeared as shipping news or in a traveler’s account depicting the West. *The Enquirer* from Richmond published a detailed and informative article regarding California in 1805. The author reminded readers that the Pacific Coast possessed many areas suitable as harbors and insisted that lucrative trade with China could be undertaken from said ports. He claimed that the area was suitable for a variety of agricultural and mercantile pursuits. He believed the current inhabitants of the region were wasting these natural resources as they chose to spend all their time engaged in the fur trade. He derisively remarked that fur was “acquired without much knowledge and manufactured without much labor.” The editor also insisted that Americans had a legitimate legal claim to the Pacific Coast “either by right of first settlement or because we have gained it as a part of Louisiana.”<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Dale Walker, *Bear Flag Rising: The Conquest of California, 1846* (New York: Tom Dougherty Associates, 1999), 13-15; Neal Harlow, *California Conquered: War and Peace on the Pacific 1846-1850* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), xv-xvi.

<sup>276</sup> *The Enquirer* August 9, 1805; The idea that the economy of the Pacific Northwest was based solely on

Incredibly, the author, after establishing the regions attractiveness to merchants and legal right to settlement, proceeded to explain why the American government should *not* annex California and Oregon. He claimed that European nations often engaged in non-contiguous colonization and by “imitating their policy, we should be exposed to their misfortunes.” He felt the economic cost of maintaining a colony would be too great and feared the Pacific Coast could be easily seized by the many European powers that coveted the region. Instead, he asked Americans to consider that “we have land enough already for the cultivation of the richest productions; why should we divide our population and capital by the erection of new forts or the establishment of colonies.” Americans should be content with what they now safely possess and focus their attentions on the territory already in the Union. Although the author was against colonizing the region in 1805 his major points of contention, that it was too far away and too costly to protect, would evaporate in the years to come.<sup>277</sup>

For many other Americans, California was portrayed as being a lonely and isolated place. A letter to the editor that appeared in the *Daily National Journal* explained this sense of emptiness. The author was a sailor who had recently stopped at ports in Santa Barbara and Turtle Bay. He observed that the latter was “one of the best harbors in the world” and remarked upon the natural beauty and peacefulness of the area. He also claimed that very few people lived in the area and even fewer ships visited, concluding the port was a “solitary place.” He ended by gleefully recounting that he would be heading back toward “my own dear native America.” For this homesick American, California was less an earthly paradise and more a lonely place to

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the fur trade was often brought up by Americans as a way to justify why they were better suited to the area, as they would also cultivate the land. In truth The Hudson Bay Company, chief target for disparaging remarks, was actually quite diverse in their economic activities. For more information see Richard Mackie’s *Trading Beyond the Mountains*.

<sup>277</sup> *The Enquirer* August 9, 1805.

gather seashells. The sailor's letter, however, does offer the reader hope. California had great potential, the harbor was deemed in excellent condition; perhaps in the future the once "solitary place" could prove useful. For the time being, however, many people saw the territory as desolate. The *Arkansas Gazette* published a short blurb regarding a new ordinance passed in the Mexican State of Pueblo in 1831. This new law stated that anyone belonging to a Masonic Lodge would be penalized. The ordinance proclaimed "whoever shall be convicted of having belonged to a lodge shall be sentenced for the first time to one year's imprisonment, to two year's confinement for repetition of the offence, and for a fourth infraction of the law to four year's detention with the presidial of California." Apparently being sent to California in the 1830s was a fate far worse than being imprisoned elsewhere.<sup>278</sup>

Another article in the *Arkansas Gazette* reiterated how empty many Americans saw California. In a humorous editorial entitled "crowding" the author recounts visiting an acquaintance in Missouri. The Missourian continually derided his current home as being far too crowded and unsuitable for any American. When asked how close the nearest neighbor was, he replied "right down upon me" close enough to be "right down in my very teeth." Upon closer questioning the offending neighbor was found to be "fifteen miles" away which the Missourian found unsettling as "I'll never live where a neighbor can come to my house and go home the same day." After leaving the acquaintance the author pondered what he had heard and facetiously found that most Americans were living much too close to one another. He found that traveling from the mouth of the Ohio to New Orleans to be less a major journey and instead a "mere morning visit." He concluded that perhaps only "the mouth of Columbia...[or] California are the only country places for a family." Although this piece was obviously meant to be

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<sup>278</sup> *Daily National Journal*, August 2, 1831; *Arkansas Gazette* August 31, 1831.

humorous, as the author clearly felt the concept of “crowding” to be silly, it is still illustrative. The author reiterated what many Americans felt; that California while pretty, was too remote to be of much use.<sup>279</sup>

Other Americans, however, found the remoteness of California to be its greatest asset to the security of the United States. A letter to the editor, penned by gentleman known only as Warburton, appeared in the *National Intelligencer* in 1819 insisted that California would be the perfect dumping ground for African Americans. In his carefully worded letter, the author was convinced that slavery was a “disgusting and ugly monster” which if left alone could destroy the nation. He hoped that the entire institution would be abolished soon but even free blacks could prove to be trouble and the author needed to find an alternative place of habitation for blacks separate from white society. Sending them back to Africa would be too difficult and expensive and instead they should be settled on a region “more within the reach of our national means.” He advocated that the federal government include an addendum in the treaty that ceded Florida to include the California as well. He was convinced that “California is the most convenient spot to send the colored free people to, and I am sure, would be more acceptable to them than Africa.”<sup>280</sup>

Warburton was adamant that just shipping blacks to the West Coast with no supervision would be cruel. Instead, he envisioned the territory to be “an independent government, remaining during its infancy, under our protection. Its constitution and laws should be founded on equality; merit only, and not color, should give distinction.” He enthusiastically declared that if his idea was adopted “in a century, there would not be among us a black slave, perhaps even a black man. Such is the distance of California, none sent there would return.” To further

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<sup>279</sup> *Arkansas Gazette* January 19, 1830.

<sup>280</sup> *National Intelligencer* December 20, 1819.



demonstrate his altruism the author also discussed the many benefits blacks would enjoy. Their new home would be “situated within the temperate zone, neither too cold nor too warm, and a soil variant and productive, well stocked with all kind of domestic animals; myriads of fish swarm in the surrounding waters, and to be caught without much trouble...they will be comfortable.” He was confident that in a few generations worth of time, the new nation would thrive with a “government of perfect equality, they will enjoy all the delights of social life, all the comforts of industry, all the blessings of a pure religion, teaching love to God and duty to man.” All this could be achieved because the transplants after witnessing the wonders of the United States (minus all that bondage and oppression nonsense) “will be acquainted with social rights and from being accustomed to subordination, they will easily be formed into a political society, and they will not have to...mingle their blood with the natives or any other race of mankind.” The author gushed that not only will the United States be free of blacks but the newly formed nation of California could serve as a bulwark against European aggression. The new nation would be a “friendly frontier, and will be the propagators of more good than all the European powers-who are afraid of liberty.”<sup>281</sup>

Although Warburton’s idea never got off the ground, the idea was once again laid out, by another author, in a letter to the editor in the abolitionist paper *The Liberator*. This author, known only by his initials D.W.E. also envisioned the United States free from both slavery and Africans in general. Although his plan was far less specific than Warburton’s, the gist was the same. D.W.E. acknowledged that colonization efforts to Africa were too expensive to be realistic and instead offered several alternatives. For those whom resided in the North he recommended they be forced to go to Canada, while Southern blacks, upon being freed would be

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<sup>281</sup>Ibid.

encouraged to head west and settle. He made it clear that this was in their own best interest as the Western portion of territory known as California was lightly populated and perfect for settlement. He predicted that as more and more of these blacks arrived the territory “might be obtained of the Mexican Government, by the Jeffersonian mode of acquiring territory.” This author felt the previously successful “conquer without war” stratagem would be worthwhile. No war would be necessary to make his dream a reality just the will to “encourage” blacks to settle out west. His plan was half-baked at best and lacked both the specifics and altruism of Warburton’s idea. All D.W.E was concerned with was simply eliminating Africans from the United States as he “earnestly wished that the fair map of our Union...might be nowhere shaded by a complexion darker than that of the sun-burnt operative of New Orleans.”<sup>282</sup>

Other Americans saw California as a territory with great promise to white settlers. The *St. Louis Beacon* printed a short blurb about the California territory that served to whet the appetites of Americans eager for further movement westward. The article recounted the exploits of two adventurers who had recently returned from the West Coast. They had traveled all through the territory from the “Gulf of California to the mouth of the Columbia” and had “done well.” In addition to returning with many furs they traded with many of the inhabitants and were “richly rewarded for their perils and enterprise.” The Gentlemen had found the natives to be both peaceful and the climate pleasing as the expedition had “no men killed by Indians, nor we believe any deaths.” Encouraging articles like this one helped reinforce the idea that California, while still relatively unknown, held great promise and riches just waiting to be seized.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> *The Liberator* February 25, 1832.

<sup>283</sup> *St. Louis Beacon* as it appeared in *the Augusta Chronicle* November 6, 1830. While some newspapers

The *St. Louis Commercial Advertiser* and *National Intelligencer* proclaimed California to be “one of the most interesting regions of America” and also alluded to the peacefulness of the natives. The account, written by a “gentlemen of the army”, noted the regions sparse population and natural beauty. The “gentlemen” claimed that gazing upon “the mountain of Saint Gabriel, with her volcanic fires...present to the eye the most awfully sublime view that man can behold.” He claimed that Spanish missionaries had little trouble converting the Natives and was astonished to learn they did so “without the assistance of military force.” This implied tractability of the Natives would prove to be a popular sentiment among Americans heading to California. Just as important, however, was the quality of the foodstuffs; with the author insisting “the olive, orange, pomegranate, fig and date grow abundantly here and too much perfection.” The *St. Louis Enquirer*, and *Pittsfield Sun* published a similarly glowing account from a recent traveler to the area. The author provided a sketch of California and detailed the major waterways and mountains in the region, making particular note that the territory possessed “many of the best harbors in the known world.” The letter also offered insight into what sort of professions would be useful to the area. Mining seemed to be scarce as “silver and lead are the only minerals yet discovered.” Farming on the other hand, was encouraged as “apples, peaches, pears, oranges, figs, cherries, &c, &c come to fine perfection. Oats and clover grows spontaneously and are of superior quality.”<sup>284</sup>

A letter to the editor in the *National Intelligencer*, signed by only his initials D.L., also remarked upon the regions natural beauty and resources. The author quoted several recent

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played up the notion that the Natives were friendly, this attitude unfortunately was not reciprocated. As evidenced by historian Alberto Hurtado the natives populations suffered greatly from white encroachment dwindling from 150,000 to 30,000 in just ten years. For more information see Hurtado’s *Indian Survival on the California Frontier*.

<sup>284</sup> *National Intelligencer* as it appeared in the *St. Louis Commercial Advertiser* June 1, 1836; *St. Louis Enquirer* as it appeared in the *Pittsfield Sun*, January 5, 1843.

travelers to the area and pointed out its many benefits. Including excellent harbors, such as San Francisco, “climate as salubrious as any in the known world”, potential for foodstuff productions and “the abundance of game.” He concluded that “however neglected and remote the provinces of California may be, they are not considered as valueless or unimportant by disinterested and intelligent travelers. Consequently he believed the United States should acquire the territory. The only means he mentioned in his article was through “purchase.” This author, like many of his contemporaries saw the intrinsic value of annexing California but differed in large measure of the means to do so. He made zero mention of any filibustering expeditions, encouraging Americans to settle there and rebel or any other militaristic endeavor. Instead for this American the only acceptable way to get this bountiful and useful province was to pay Mexico for it.<sup>285</sup>

In addition to praising the geography of California, some newspapers reported on the inadequacies of the Mexican people living there. The *Pittsfield Sun* noted that “the number of inhabitants does not exceed 3,000. They are an ignorant, indolent people, spending most of their time on horseback.” The *Tri-Weekly Ohio Statesman* claimed “A Californian will not work, if he can avoid it. The time will come, must come when this country will be peopled by another race, that is fully expected here.” These sentiments are similar to the racial justifications which developed in Oregon and Texas. The British in Oregon were feared, in part because of their Anglo-Saxon heritage, which many Americans considered a superior race. In Texas, many Americans considered the Mexicans “superstitious” and “lazy.” The Californians were far too lethargic to be an effective people and would inevitably be replaced by a more industrious

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<sup>285</sup> *National Intelligencer* January 16, 1841.

population. The author expected the replacements to come from the United States who would have little difficulty overtaking and controlling the province.<sup>286</sup>

Other Americans opposed expansion to California regardless of its natural beauty or the inadequacy of its inhabitants as the addition of new territory would further erode the stability and political advancement of the United States. The editor of a paper out of Philadelphia, the *North American and Daily Advertiser* reminded readers that “The annals of empires by no means prove that substantial greatness increases with extended domination.” It was crucial for all Americans to understand that the vast empires of antiquity such as the Mongols or even the Romans were despotic and ultimately collapsed under their own weight. The United States was supposed to be different, its citizens were encouraged to debate and come to a consensus. Compromise was becoming more and more difficult as the nation expanded. The author was even opposed to expansion even when the local government wanted such a Union. Admitting places like Texas not only upset “the share of power and influence” between North and South but allowed for greater differences in “popular sentiments.” More simply put, more territory begot more citizens with diverse and often differing viewpoints to the rest of the country. Such variety, according to the editor, was a clear detriment to stability. Instead he believed in a more homogenous society as “the closer the community of interest and the more perfect assimilation of the people, the more certain their strength and general progress. It is with these views that we look with doubt and distrust upon the project of adding to our present territory.” The editor was also concerned that the wishes of the majority of Americans to be heard and listened to. While he himself opposed any further expansion, if the majority willed it then so be it. He hoped that the question

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<sup>286</sup> *Pittsfield Sun*, January 5, 1843; *Tri-Weekly Ohio Statesman*, October 27, 1845.

of Californian annexation “be maturely debated, and ample time allowed for the expression of public opinion, before any final action is taken upon it.”<sup>287</sup>

Another concerned citizen, known only as P.H.B., voiced his opinion in New York’s *Weekly Herald*. The author that trade on the Pacific was integral to maintaining a strong and economically booming nation. He claimed the United States needed formal harbors and bays to outfit their ships so that trade could ramp up with the Sandwich Islands and farther East. He enthusiastically declared that “we have China within our reach, and all the islands of the Pacific.” He argued the best place to achieve this goal however, was somewhat surprising. He considered “Oregon as superior to California” and hoped the United States would focus upon settling that region. He found California to be “too warm for men to have any commercial enterprise” as hot weather made people lethargic and less industrious. Oregon, on the other hand, had climate “warm enough...and more fine timber than they have in California.” He urged readers to settle in Oregon over California and hoped the government would not waste time trying to acquire the unnecessary province. Instead, Americans should invest in building up Oregon as it was vastly superior for commercial and agricultural interests. He was confident that with more emigrants to Oregon the “timbered land will be the best wheat land in this country.” This article demonstrates once again how diverse American opinions were in regard to expansion. This author was not opposed to the concept of expansion but neither was he blinded with unbridled growth. For him the wisest course of action was to continue to populate the northern portion of the Pacific Coast and leave the hot tempered climate of California to the Mexicans.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> *North American and Daily Advertiser* December 13, 1842.

<sup>288</sup> *Weekly Herald* December 28, 1844.

European interest in California often lent credence to the expansionists' call for annexation. Historian David Pletcher claims in the *Diplomacy of Annexation* that California was sought after by the British, Mexican and Americans. According to Pletcher "The stakes were high,-fertile lands, rich deposits of minerals, and the fine harbors of San Francisco and Puget Sound." He argues that California "offered an ambitious United States the ingredients for future greatness." European designs on California also sparked considerable interest in the United States press. The British were most often seen as the likeliest and most threatening of these interlopers. Two papers from New Orleans, the *Bulletin* and *Courier*, agreed that British control of California could be a serious threat to the national security of the United States. The fear stemmed principally from a letter from an American observer in Mexico City. The observer claimed that British officials were "negotiating with every prospect of success" in securing California. Doing so would grant them harbors perfect for "Man of War" ships. Even more alarmingly, according to the author, would be British attempts to send "colored battalions" to the region. These units were made up of both "yellow skinned sepoy's from the East" and "black battalions from the West Indies." Incredibly ,the author concluded that such actions would result in "the unscrupulous fanatics of England, would find argument for their abolition doctrines, such as it would require all the energies of our Southern states to resist." He hoped that the federal government would see the danger and "compel the imbecile Mexicans to reject the dangerous proposal of England."<sup>289</sup>

Although the letter's contents were alarmist, untrue and absurd they were lent an air of credibility when both New Orleans papers reprinted it in all seriousness. The *Bulletin* remarked

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<sup>289</sup> Pletcher, 89-90; *New Orleans Bulletin* February 15, 1840; *New Orleans Courier* as it appeared in the *New York Spectator* March 9, 1840.

that the letter was the only concrete proof of any such deal between Britain and Mexico but found that such a sale was “highly probable” as England was in desperate need of good harbors on the Pacific coast. More importantly such an acquisition would “provide a barrier to the encroachments of the Texans and Americans.” The editor was confident that within a century the American tide of emigration would have reached the Pacific and thus securing California could forestall such access. Regardless, the editor wanted the United States to remain vigilant and oppose any such agreement between the two nations.<sup>290</sup>

Similarities to Texas appeared almost immediately in regard to the settlement of California. The *Southern Patriot* claimed the “this country is represented, by all who have had the opportunity of judging by experience as being of extraordinary salubrity.” The *Houston Telegraph* stated that “the most flattering accounts are received of the extraordinary fertility and salubrity of the soil and climate” and that “some weeks ago over 300 men left for Upper California.” The *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* reported that a recent traveler from California claimed that “the climate is salubrious and the soil is good.” The traveler stated that California “has swung loose from its moorings of Mexican dominion and that its affiliation with the United States government is inevitable.”<sup>291</sup>

Another feature that could prove just as enticing to an Anglo adventurer as land was the availability of women in California. The *Raleigh Register* reprinted a story from the notebook of world traveler Sir George Simpson regarding the basic temperament and condition of women living in California. The editor claimed California to be “a point of great interest to the American reader” and thus found it pertinent to include the story. The author, Sir George

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<sup>290</sup> *New Orleans Bulletin* February 15, 1840.

<sup>291</sup> *Southern Patriot*, April 8 1846; *Houston Telegraph*, March 6, 1844; *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, November 20, 1845; *Barre Gazette*, November 21, 1845.



Simpson, reported that “white” women were relatively scarce and instead focused the article on those that lived in the cities among civilized society. Consequently, the editor’s term the “women of California” was rather narrow as he really only referred to Hispanics. The editor claimed the women possessed “sparkling eyes and glossy hair” and lacked fine clothing or adequate “provisions.” He also argued that women of California were by far “the more industrious half of the population” and were often treated coarsely and roughly by their menfolk. He found that they performed the “duties of their households with cheerfulness and pride.” Such an article could prove to be enlightening to the observant and prospective American male settler. The women of California would be grateful for an enterprising, hard-working Anglo who could provide for them. In exchange these women with the “sparkling eyes and glossy hair” would happily run the household and be thankful for the opportunity to be around adventurous Anglos.<sup>292</sup>

Some of those Americans adventurous enough to head to Oregon continued south into California. Rumors abounded that California was already being quickly populated by Americans and that Mexican governance was either very lax or completely non-existent. While it is true that Mexican authorities were lax in protecting the borders actual American immigration to California was far less than what was seen in Texas and Oregon. By the eve of war in 1846 American settlers made up less than 10% of the sparsely populated territory. This reality, however, did not deter many newspapers from publishing flattering accounts of California. The editor of the *Nashville Union* extolled the virtues of the territory and claimed that newly arrived

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<sup>292</sup> *Raleigh Register* June 08, 1847; A longer reprinted section of the same story appeared in the *Boston Daily Atlas* May 24, 1847. After the acquisition of California the male population dramatically exploded, thanks in large measure to the gold rush, and women were often viewed as a rare but useful commodity. The hodgepodge of cultures, Hispanic, Indian and Anglo, each with their own sense of culture and gender identity also made life for women in early California chaotic and difficult. For more information see Albert Hurtado’s *Sex, Gender and Culture in Old California*.

emigrants to the area “affirm that Oregon is but a bleak barren waste compared to California.” He dubiously stated that the territory was in a state of rebellion and that “the struggle shall be short.” The editor concluded that they “refer to these facts to show it is not unreasonable to assume that California may be in a condition at a very early day to be annexed to our Union.” The editor of the *Cleveland Herald* called California “a very desirable country” and was happy to report, falsely as it turns out, that Californians had thrown off the “Mexican yoke” and created a “Republican Government modeled after that of the United States.” This wonderful event was made even more glorious as it occurred “without bloodshed.” Greater still, he predicted that “as soon as Texas is secured, we presume the friends of enlarging our country will open negotiations for the annexation of California.” Not only was there significant debate regarding what to do with California but Americans often argued over what sort of events had even transpired.<sup>293</sup>

One of the many expressed views was that expansion must follow a set procedure and unfold in a certain way. Historian Sam Haynes argues that Americans were confident that California would fall to “American dominion by gradual peaceful annexation.” The *Southern Patriot* detailed the process of expansion. “Our settlers go into a Mexican province and take up their abode; others follow them; they take occasion to rise against the local authorities, sure of assistance from their countrymen in the United States, they struggle for liberty, they prevail and they and their country are in a condition to be annexed.” The editor insisted that this process “which has given us Texas and which promises to secure California” was infinitely “more convenient than a warlike invasion.”<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> Weber, 205-206; *Nashville Union* as it appeared in *Boston Courier* May 5, 1845; *Cleveland Herald* June 3, 1845.

<sup>294</sup> Sam Haynes, *James K. Polk and the Expansionistic Impulse* (New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 1997), 111; *Southern Patriot*, April 25, 1845; *Georgia Telegraph*, March 22, 1845; *Berkshire County Whig*, May 15, 1845.

John O'Sullivan, coiner of that most famous expansionistic phrase, agreed with many of the pro-expansionist opinions and also selected California as the most likely province to be granted the blessing of Manifest Destiny. He felt the territory to be of utmost value and decided it could be obtained through non-aggressive means.

California, will probably next fall away from the loose adhesion which, in such a country as Mexico, holds a remote province in a slight equivocal kind of dependence on the Metropolis. Imbecile and distracted, Mexico never can exert any real governmental authority over such a country. The impotence of the one and distance of the other, must make the relation one of virtual independence, unless by stunting the province of all natural growth, and forbidding that immigration which can alone develop its capabilities and fulfill the purposes of its creation, tyranny may retain a military dominion, which is no government in the legitimate sense of the term. In the case of California this is now impossible. The Anglo-Saxon foot is already on its borders. Already the advance guard of the irresistible army of Anglo-Saxon emigration has begun to pour down upon it, armed with the plough and the rifle, and marking its trail with schools and colleges, courts and representative halls, mills and meeting-houses...All this without agency of our government, without responsibility of our people.<sup>295</sup>

O'Sullivan reiterated several components of what made up the proper way for Americans to expand. This process must be strictly followed or the United States could dissolve into European style imperialism. The first is that the process of American expansion should continue to be initiated by American immigrants who voluntarily settle in an area until they make up the majority. When these inhabitants inevitably declare independence they shall set up democratic institutions. This process, according to O'Sullivan, need not be accompanied by bloodshed. He was convinced that Mexico was weakening and would have neither the ability nor inclination to interfere in the actions of their faraway province. The racial element inherent in expansion was now also fully fleshed out. No longer were sympathetic Mexican citizens allowed to assist in the grand crusade for democracy, as Tejanos were in Texas, now only Anglo-Saxon's had the right

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<sup>295</sup> John O'Sullivan "Annexation" *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* (July, 1845), 7-8.

and ability to spread democracy. Most importantly, the American people and government must stay neutral throughout this process. Sympathy and even indirect aid was acceptable but no direct intervention was allowed. Doing so would destroy the idea that American expansion was unique and the utter antithesis of European style of conquest. It is crucial to note that O’Sullivan, coiner of the phrase Manifest Destiny and ardent expansion, did not want unabashed American conquest. Certain conditions were to be met before Americans could enjoy their Manifest Destiny.<sup>296</sup>

Some Americans as well as the Polk administration felt that O’Sullivan was behind the times. Although many wanted to see a unified continent, they were reluctant to wait for the provinces to rebel. The *Tri-Weekly Ohio Statesman* for example, was concerned with American whaling ships off the California coast. They demanded that the port of San Francisco be free of European interference. “In a war with England, France or Russia, should one of these nations own the port and at some future day declare war against the United States, what will be the result? San Francisco must be obtained.” The *Farmers Cabinet* reported that an American citizen who had just returned from California deemed it “ripe for annexation.” The justification for such a move came because it was in “a state of quasi- indifference, having to all intents and purposes cut loose from Mexico; and being fully ready to be affiliated with the Government of the United States, and embraced in the area of freedom.” Walt Whitman, who later became famous as the author of *Leaves of Grass*, also supported further annexation. He too saw Texas as just the beginning in a series of eventual annexations. “There is California, in the way to

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<sup>296</sup> O’Sullivan, 8. Attacks regarding Mexican ethnicity and culture would continue in the coming years and grow more vociferous during the Mexican-American war.

which lovely tract lies Santa Fe; how long a time will elapse before they shine as two new stars in our mighty firmament.”<sup>297</sup>

The editor of the *Washington Constitution* stated that “whilst it is not our policy to acquire new territory for the mere purpose of national glory, it does fall legitimately within the great objects of republicanism to extend the area of freedom, and diffuse the blessings of liberty and peace.” He warned that the British had started negotiating with the Mexicans and stationed their fleet near Californian harbors. Fear of the British prompted them to recommend that “our government cannot fail to see the importance of preventing any such acquisition by that power.” The editor claimed that the only solution was to “acquire the Californias.”<sup>298</sup>

The *Tri-weekly Ohio Statesman* in 1846 claimed that many territories within Mexico were rebelling against the government and “wish to follow the example of Texas.” However, the *Statesman* did not wish to wait for the independence stage but instead demanded annexation immediately. The editorial declared that “California we want very much, as it is not less important to us than Oregon itself...if Mexico should persist in her foolish conduct and not come to terms, but fight, it may prove to be a prize of war.”<sup>299</sup>

Some Americans quickly saw through these thinly veiled attempts at land-grabbing and felt “extending the area of freedom” to Mexicans, made little sense since, presumably, they were a “lazy” “superstitious” sub-race. Since few Americans lived in California and the United States had no legitimate claim to its soil, justification for annexation could no longer rely on ideas of

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<sup>297</sup> Walt Whitman, “Annexation” *The Mexican War: Crisis for American Democracy* (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1969), 48; *Farmers Cabinet*, November 20, 1845; *Tri-Weekly Ohio Statesman*, October 27, 1845.

<sup>298</sup> *Georgia Telegraph*; March 22, 1845; *Washington Constitution* as it appeared in the *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, September 4, 1845; *Pittsfield Sun*, September 4, 1845.

<sup>299</sup> *Tri-weekly Ohio Statesman*, March 20, 1846.

protecting fellow citizens or defending American land. As a result, ardent expansionists were forced to call for unabashedly aggressive tactics to achieve their means. This in turn led some Americans to criticize the concept of Manifest Destiny. The *Morning News* from Connecticut ran the *Nashville Union* story under the headline “What can Mexico Do?” The *News* claimed that Mexico had cause for alarm from the United States and asked “how much more Annexation can Mexico stand? Bear in mind that her territory is limited.”<sup>300</sup>

A more substantial and incredibly astute protest came from the New Orleans *Tropic*. The editor was inspired to respond to a recent publication of the *New Orleans Courier*. The editor of the *Courier* felt settlement to California was a wondrous event and that it was “destined before long to be annexed to the United States. He was certain such information would be found “acceptable” to his readers. The *Tropic’s* editor staunchly disagreed. The author lamented the *Courier’s* position and felt they exemplified the “spirit of aggression and national plunder which has seized upon the minds of a portion of our people.” He recounted in precise detail how Texas was wrenched away, unfairly, from Mexico by American interlopers. He believed the tales of fertile soil and abundant land in both Texas and California to be “greatly exaggerated” and was unsure why so many Americans allowed themselves into being fooled. Although the editor deplored the events that transpired in Texas only a “portion of our people” were predisposed to such conduct. Most Americans, he reasoned, would oppose such lunacy if they only paid closer attention to what was going on.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> *Morning News*, May 17, 1845.

<sup>301</sup> New Orleans *Tropic* April 28 as it appeared in the *National Intelligencer* May 7, 1845; *Barre Patriot*, May 16, 1845.

The editor of the *Tropic* felt there was no mandate for expansion, the United States “had no shadow of claim” to California as it “has been for years in quiet possession of a neighboring friendly power.” He admitted the beauty and desirable attributes of California and predicted the likely and unfortunate chain of events that would follow if Americans did not wake up to what was going on.

thousands upon thousands will accept this invitation, it requires no seer at all; the roving propensities of our people are sufficiently known and wherever there is a foot of available soil in any other country than their own, they are sure to be found...and the American population will soon be sufficiently numerous to play the Texas game. The standard of revolt will be raised, the government will be overthrown, the cry of liberty will be raised in this country and thousands of the young and adventurous will fly to the relief of their oppressed countrymen in California. Torn by civil wars and intestine commotions, Mexico will be unable to reduce her refractory province to obedience and in a brief period of time another ‘Lone Star Republic’ will spring up on the shores of the far off Pacific. A little while longer the ‘Republic of California’ will be knocking at our doors and then we shall, we suppose have the absurd and ridiculous cry of the ‘re-annexation’ of California. It will be all right of course; it will be extending the ‘area of freedom’ and there can be no possible objection to that...will the spirit of robbery stop in its rapacious career? By no means...we shall soon have marauding parties wandering into Mexico, making settlements, rebelling against the government and robbing churches, until the whole of that country is ‘re annexed’ and the star spangled banner flouts from the turrets of the city of the Montezumas.<sup>302</sup>

The editor beseeched his readers “to ponder upon these things; to ask themselves where all this is to end, and see if disunion, anarchy, bloodshed and confusion are not to be what we are to receive in lieu of our present great and glorious Union.” Acquiring California was simply wrong, it was robbery on a grand scale. Talk of extending the “area of freedom” and “spreading liberty” were merely talking points designed to obscure what was really going on, blatant theft of territory. For this editor, the process of acquiring territory as laid out by O’Sullivan was flawed. No matter how carefully expansionists tried to phrase it, taking land from non-belligerent neighbors was paramount to bullying and stealing. He felt the United States was already “great

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

and glorious” at its present size there was no reason to further expand the borders, especially through such unsavory means. In addition to his articulate and impassioned anti-expansionist stance the author also made some fascinating predictions. The “Republic of California” would briefly exist thanks to the Bear Flag Revolt of 1846 and the territory would shortly fall under American domination. The conclusion of the Mexican-American war would also see the American flag flying over Chapultepec Castle, the home of the Montezumas, and a slew of atrocities committed by American volunteer troops in search of plunder would realize his fear of “marauding parties wandering into Mexico.”<sup>303</sup>

A small minority of settlers in California, however, disagreed with the anti-expansionists. They, hearkening back to O’Sullivan’s rigid process of expansion, wished to become independent and then peacefully annex to the United States. Small, sporadic instances of rebellion, in most cases just talk of becoming independent, erupted around the region in 1845. While none of these rebellions would prove successful they did spark considerable interest back in the United States. The majority of editors saw these revolutions to be simply attempts to duplicate what happened in Texas. The editor of the *Charleston Patriot* had few illusions that Americans were chiefly responsible for the recent revolution. He claimed, erroneously, that the “revolutionaries” had successfully and completely driven out all Mexican officials and set up their own independent government. He was confident that the event was likely to end in the same way the “conflict between Texas and Mexico terminated” with the United States soon to take control of California. The editor then insisted that Mexico’s inability to maintain control of her provinces lent credence to the idea that “she may soon be numbered among the Republics that were.” As to who was exactly responsible for Mexico’s misfortunes was still up for debate.

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid.



He wondered if Mexicans were responsible then “we will have to regret the existence of such a crazy race.” Conversely, “if others have wronged her, impartial history will do her justice-and her sons, though conquered, will still have their *honor*.” Such a statement is truly fascinating. The editor clearly understands the “others” to be the United States and admitted that the Mexicans had been wronged. Stating that future generations of Mexicans, bereft of independence but with honor intact, implicitly meant that those responsible of taking Mexican lands were dishonorable. It was evident here that the editor was unsure if the “process of annexation” was in fact an honorable way of acquiring territory. It must be stated, however, that regardless of how uncomfortable he may have felt, he never came out directly to condemn the United States, merely stating that “impartial history” may criticize the “others” responsible and that the Mexicans themselves may be the sole source of their misfortune.<sup>304</sup>

Most editors were a lot more direct in their opinions. The *Fayetteville Observer* notified its readers of an expedition that was “intended to get up a revolution in California.” Any readers adventurous enough to go were expected to be “well armed with a rifle or heavy shot gun, 16lbs of shot or lead, [and] 4lbs of powder.” The expedition would leave from Fort Smith, Arkansas in April of 1846. The editor concluded that any emigrants who go “shall be just in time to make another Texas affair of it, to be followed by annexation.”<sup>305</sup>

Other publications saw the Californian insurrections of 1845 as events that warranted scant attention. The *Scioto Gazette* remarked simply that the recent rebellions “don’t amount to much” and dismissed any serious talk of impending annexation. The editor of the *New Orleans Bulletin* agreed that the rebellion was trifling but insisted that in time Anglo led rebellion would

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<sup>304</sup> *Charleston Patriot* as it appeared in the *Greenville Mountaineer* June 6, 1845.

<sup>305</sup> *Fayetteville Observer* November 25, 1845; *The North American* August 22, 1846.

soon “lead to annexation.” He claimed “there are not enough Americans yet settled on the shores of the Pacific to sway an influence on public opinion.” This editor refrained from the sugar-coating or double speak many pro-expansionists utilized and merely made his case. A revolution would, he reasoned, naturally lead to annexation just as it did in Texas. At the moment, however, there were simply too few Americans available for such an insurrection to be successful. He did not even attempt to disguise the revolutionaries as “native inhabitants,” instead they were simply Americans. He quickly reassured his readers that “emigrants are coming in rapidly from Oregon, and the vicinity of that growing settlement cannot fail to have an effect on the adjacent districts of California.” He was confident that soon the “anarchy that has so long prevailed in Mexico”, coupled with larger American populations would lead to successful revolution and then annexation in the near future.<sup>306</sup>

The editor of the *New York Herald* was also confident that soon more American emigrants would arrive in California. He recounted, again erroneously, the news that Californians had thrown off their allegiance to Mexico and “organized itself into a republic.” He was absolutely confident that “if such be the case, it is probable, that in addition to the Texas Question and the Oregon Question, we shall have a California Question in a very short time.” The tendency of referring to annexation attempts as questions is perhaps the single best reason why any mention of inevitability to expansion is wrongheaded. Nineteenth-century Americans understood that nothing was set in stone. There were far too many disparate viewpoints for anyone to “know” what would happen. Debating the merits of an expansionistic “question” was the duty of any serious minded American. While few “knew” what would happen, they were all interested in converting others to their cause. Further evidence for this was the editors prediction

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<sup>306</sup> *New Orleans Bulletin* June 21, 1845; the same editorial also appeared in the June 30<sup>th</sup> edition of the *New York Herald*; *Scioto Gazette* June 19, 1845.

that even now “vast numbers of emigrants” were heading for Oregon and that “many of them will now doubtless be attracted southward to California.” In less than five years he predicted the “young republic with its numerous fine harbors, its fertile soil, and its delightful climate, will also be knocking for admission into this confederacy.”<sup>307</sup>

President Polk initially attempted to avoid a war but still felt the acquisition of California to be critical to United States interests. Echoing the rationale for obtaining Oregon, he coveted the Pacific coastline to deny it to the British. In his diary he claimed that he would protect American interests “and reaffirm Mr. Monroe’s ground against permitting any European power to plant or establish any new colony on the North American continent.” Polk felt that the American people would never allow California to be governed by any foreign monarchy. To counter any move by Great Britain and satisfy the American impulse to expand, he sent ambassadors to Mexico to purchase California. They were authorized to spend between \$15 and \$40 million for just Upper California. The Mexican government, still protesting the annexation of Texas, refused to consider the request. By May of 1846 the United States was formally at war with Mexico. Incredibly, many of the war hawks argued the war had nothing to do with expansion, but the events in California demonstrate otherwise.<sup>308</sup>

In June many Anglo settlers in California deduced that now was the most opportune time to strike. Around eighty, armed revolutionaries or drunken adventurers, depending on the author, rode into the nominal capital of the region, Sonoma, and forced the Governor to surrender the province. The Anglo settlers were inspired but not directly led by the often maligned American adventurer John Charles Fremont. Fremont had been tasked by President

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<sup>307</sup> *New York Herald* June 1, 1845.

<sup>308</sup> Polk, 15-18; Connor and Faulk, 21-22;

Polk to scout the area and in typical filibuster fashion exceeded his orders. He and his small contingent of fellow adventurers encouraged the rebellion but technically remained neutral. Upon removing the governor from power, the revolutionaries promptly declared the entire province of California to be free from Mexico and established the Bear Flag Republic. All were keenly aware that American troops were heading to the territory and anxiously awaited the chance to hand control over to the United States. As one astonished Mexican spectator, Antonio Maria Osio, reported “they [the Anglo revolutionaries] decided to camouflage the flag of Stars and Stripes with a temporary flag which depicted a brown bear on a white field.” Less than two weeks later Fremont and his men rode to Sonoma and officially took the territory over for the American government. Nonetheless the “proper” way to acquire territory was followed.<sup>309</sup>

Some Americans felt it necessary to prove their support for expansion by organizing expeditions to assist the Anglo settlers in their revolutions. Not all of these expeditions ended smoothly. The *North American*, published in Philadelphia, announced that charges were being leveled against a Colonel Stevenson for misconduct in his own expedition to California. The volunteer unit was supposed to enter the territory under the official guidance of the United States Government. The editor remarked that an expedition to California was of “great importance” to both the war effort and in acquiring the territory. Stevenson was charged with “fraud” as he procured “a large quantity of clothing, not American in its fashion, nor suited to the climate of California, which he designs to compel his men to purchase from him at prices far above the real value, his son-in-law being the pretended contractor.” The charges also included an indictment of excluding “all men of capacity and experience” from the expedition so that Stevenson would have no one challenge his authority. Sources reported that Stevenson had “publically declared”

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<sup>309</sup> Walker, 116-128; for more information regarding Fremont and his exploits see *Bear Flag Rising's* Chapter Six or Tom Chaffin's *Pathfinder: John Charles Fremont and the course of American Empire*.

that once he arrived in California he would “no longer obey the President of the United States nor any other authority of the government.” The antipathy that many Americans had toward unsavory filibusters was still a prevalent notion in 1846. Assisting the regions inhabitants with rebelling was a noble objective but trying to profit from it, as Stevenson was charged with, was simply unacceptable.

The editor of the *Dover Gazette and Strafford Advertiser* feared the conflict may devolve into a “second thirty years war” and was concerned that England would be drawn into the fray. He predicted that the Mexican government would find the “loss of California to be inevitable” and pass the territory on to the English for safe keeping. Tensions between the two countries were already high in regards to Oregon and this new development could be the start of a cataclysmic new war. A deal between Mexico and England would be a “consummation not to be desired by a moderate and patriotic people like ourselves.” The only solution, he claimed, was to open negotiations with England to try and peacefully resolve the “California question.” This author, unlike many of his contemporaries, displayed no forceful opinion regarding the acquisition of California. He was neither entirely accepting of the event but nor was he wholeheartedly against it. Instead, he concerned himself more with the political repercussions and the likely stance England would take. He had the utmost pride in the military’s ability to trounce Mexico but this certainty waned if England declared war. Thus for him negotiating with Great Britain was necessary even if it meant losing out on acquiring California.<sup>310</sup>

The diverse viewpoints of Americans regarding expansion is perhaps best summed up by an editorial from an unnamed correspondent from Milwaukee’s *Daily Sentinel and Gazette*. He enthusiastically declared that all Americans are “rejoicing very sincerely in the success of Gen.

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<sup>310</sup> *Dover Gazette and Strafford Advertiser* June 27, 1846.

Taylor's army." He praised the army's "prowess and discipline" and was confident in an American victory. The correspondent hoped that Americans who "gloriously fell" in battle would be remembered. He offered one stark example and praised the courage of a Col. McIntosh "who leaves five children, motherless before and now orphans wholly." He expected that the country would rally together to provide for these unfortunate children. That sentiment accepted, the author wholeheartedly believed "this war unnecessary and that it was deliberately provoked by the executive." He found war to be a "rude appeal of semi-barbarous man" and a stark barrier to "happiness, civilization and to moral and religious progress." War was especially dangerous in a republic as it is "the enemy to Liberty and to the institutions that guarantee Liberty." The American people must realize that:

the lust of war and of conquest, of military glory and extended dominion, is fatal to popular rights; to the ascendancy of law, to the security of property, to free well-ordered and well-established representative institutions-The moment the sword of the soldier is more honored than the spade of the laborer, and that the pruning hook is beaten into a spear...[then] Wo! To the nation

He fervently wished for the administration to offer the "Olive Branch to Mexico" as peace "is our great and first duty and want. It ought never to have been broken-but having been the next step is, as soon as possible with honor, to restore it."<sup>311</sup>

He felt, nonetheless, that it was his duty to serve his nation and joined the military. He praised the morale and training of the army and while he "never doubted about victory," he feared that it "would be bought at a much more fearful cost of life on our side." He was pleased to report that such had yet to occur and hoped the Mexicans would soon "be willing to accept overtures for peace." Yet while he so fervently decried war in general and this conflict in particular, he stated that when the two nations finally agreed to end hostilities that would be "as

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<sup>311</sup> *Daily Sentinel and Gazette* June 4, 1846.

good an opportunity to settle the question of California as any other” since “Upper California must be ours.” This article perfectly captures the complex and often contradictory attitudes Americans expressed regarding expansion. In this author’s opinion a war for territorial conquest was contradictory to the principles of a good republic yet those who were killed in such a war “gloriously fell.” He considered the war to be unjust and criticized it for being a blatant land grab yet hoped California could be acquired as it “must be ours.”<sup>312</sup>

While there was little consensus there was never a shortage of articles that extolled the virtues of the region. The *Mississippi Free Trader* printed a short excerpt from Fremont’s memoir that praised the climate and natural abundance of California. Fremont noted that the vicinity around Sacramento contained gold and referred to it as the fabled “El Dorado” but curiously made no more mention of the mining prospects of the state. Instead, he focused his attentions on the climate which he found to be “remarkably healthy” and the wildlife which included copious numbers of “wild horses, elks, deer, antelopes, grizzly bears, partridges, water fowl, salmon etc.” Farmers would be pleased to learn that “all the products of the United States from potatoes to sugar cane, may be produced in the valley of San Joaquin and Sacramento.” The article ended with Fremont summarizing the region’s bounty and stating “such is the great acquisition of the late war with Mexico.”<sup>313</sup>

Fremont’s role in acquiring California was not universally accepted. The editor of the *Californian*, printed in Monterey, published several articles that were critical of the adventurer. While much of the criticism was unrelated to expansion, one article showcased the importance of memory in reference to how Americans perceived expansion. The editor claimed that it is a

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<sup>312</sup> *Daily Sentinel and Gazette* June 4, 1846.

<sup>313</sup> *Mississippi Free Trader* December 29, 1848.

matter of great doubt in the United States, where the first flag of the American Revolution was hoisted.” He wished to set the record straight for Californian history and announced that “on June 14, 1846, a party of Americans without a leader, gathered and took possession of the fortified town of Sonoma.” The revolutionaries then organized themselves as the “Republic of California” and hoisted the Bear Flag. Interestingly, the revolutionaries were not considered native Californians, but instead were referred to as Americans. This is a distinct change in how Americans saw these revolutions. In Florida and Texas the key feature to a successful rebellion was for the *native inhabitants* to overthrow their oppressors. While the majority of these peoples were invariably American they were more often portrayed as assimilated settlers to the regions. Here there is no pretense or careful wording, they were simply Americans who declared independence and then relinquished control to the United States government shortly thereafter.<sup>314</sup>

Other Americans were concerned that the remote location of California may invite unsavory elements to try and take control of the province and prevent the United States from acquiring its Pacific paradise. The editor of the *Scioto Gazette* suspected that naval officer Robert Stockton, the senior military officer in California, may try and set up his own country. The editor claimed “the thirst for power, it seems, is not confined to Presidents and overseers.” He claimed that Stockton was refusing to obey orders from Washington and relinquish control of the region to army General Kearney. Instead, the Commodore, since “the conquest had been made by him” felt he had the right to form a civil government loyal to him. The editor was appalled at such insubordination and advocated the United States “send a considerable force to California” to regain order. The editor of *The Floridian* announced to his readers that he had “startling intelligence” regarding California. He announced that Mormon settlers in tandem with

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<sup>314</sup> *The Californian* February 13, 1847.



the Mormon Brigade “have risen and rebelled against the American government...taken possession of the country and established an independent government of their own.” The editor claimed there was “foundation for the rumor” as the Mormons “had designed to establish an empire in California, and taken some steps towards the enterprise.” Although both of these rumors would ultimately prove to be completely false the existence of such articles lends further credence to the idea that no consensus existed regarding expansion. Not only did Americans argue with each other over what to do with a particular region but they endlessly debated options for events that had never even occurred.<sup>315</sup>

Even the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo could not stifle the annexation debate. Although the question of whether or not to take possession of California had been answered, Americans, now, debated whether or not it should be allowed into the Union as a full-fledged State. This question was a matter of great interest and importance to not just politicians but all Americans. Many editors were especially incensed and felt that only politicians debated the question and did not seek out their constituent’s wishes. To rectify the matter several cities organized rallies to debate this “momentous question.” In the *National Intelligencer* a short blurb appeared in the classifieds that reminded readers to attend “a discussion of the question ‘Should California be admitted into the Union.’” The *Natchez Semi-Weekly Courier* announced that in one weeks’ time “every man in the county” should come to the courthouse and “express their honest opinions on the exciting topic at issue, freely, fully and independently.” The editor promised the event would be “no party meeting...it will be a meeting of the people, the real people-not of the politicians.”<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> *Scioto Gazette* June 2, 1847; *The Floridian* August 7, 1847.

<sup>316</sup> *National Intelligencer* April 16, 1850; *Natchez Semi-Weekly Courier* March 5, 1850.

A letter to the editor, signed by a “Southron,” echoed the call for more public involvement in the admission process. The author claimed “this California Question was never before the people for them to discuss and decide.” Instead, when concerned Americans organize and conclude that admission would be a mistake they “are denounced as traitors and submissionists” and told “that it ought to be left to the politicians.” He fervently declared that such a “doctrine” was the “essence of despotism.” Free discourse and debate was integral to the survival of the Republic and he warned readers to “pause, and reflect well on this matter and on the course and conduct of politicians in connection with it.” Allowing California to be annexed as a free state without the approval of the masses was an example of “real undoubted charges of northern aggression.” This was a shrewd and clever move. He was incensed not only because he feared the slave states power might wane but by the “despotic” way in which it was done. No free thinking American, be they from the North or South, would dare argue that public discourse was unimportant to the stability of the country. His fervent call for debate further demonstrates that most Americans were simply uncomfortable with unbridled expansion. Opposing or supporting expansion took on a myriad of forms and justifications, but all Americans were united in their staunch belief in debating the issue.<sup>317</sup>

The editor of the *North American and United States Gazette* agreed wholeheartedly that the question of admitting California should be debated. He concluded, however, that the debate had already ended. He claimed that in true American fashion the inhabitants of California had organized and petitioned for admission into the Union as a free state. They had already carefully debated the issue and applied for statehood. The only choice left up to the United States then was for California “to be admitted at once as a state or by virtually by rejection, expelled and

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<sup>317</sup> *Natchez Semi-Weekly Courier* March 15, 1850.

driven out of the union” there was no third alternative. It was clear then to all thinking men...for obvious reasons, political, commercial, and geographical, California must immediately become a state of the union or an independent government; and in the latter instance she must carry with her Oregon and, we may say, all the as yet unsecured territories of the reputable west of the Rocky Mountains.” An independent California would be a detriment to the United States as not only would it bar Americans access to the Pacific but the new nation may draw the attention of the European powers. The sparsely settled region would be hard-pressed to adequately defend itself. Since no sane American would want a European power in the area the only solution was honor the request of Californians. The editor concluded that “California will be saved-the Pacific Territories will be saved-the Union will be saved by the immediate and unrestricted admission of the new State now knocking at the gates of the Capital.”

Ultimately, the debate over expanding into California was multi-faceted and heated. There was simply no “inevitability” to acquiring California. Not only was there disagreement over whether or not to acquire the territory at all there was debate on what means would be used or what the province should be used as. Some felt the addition to be unnecessary as the Union was already large enough; others felt the commercial advantages of the region warranted annexation. Some felt the region to be desirable but only if acquired through treaty, others preferred its acquisition by any means necessary. Some envisioned California to be an agrarian paradise; others saw its ports as gateways to Asia, while still others felt the area could be used as a haven for freed slaves. Although Americans took great pains to debate expansion into California it paled in comparison to the vociferous and caustic debate that erupted over the Mexican-American War.

## Chapter 7 - “Chastisement” or Greed:

### The Mexican-American War

The heated debate over American territorial expansion reached its most heated levels during the Mexican-American war. This war was far more complicated than is often depicted. The conflict is often portrayed in both academic and non-academic circles as a war of aggressive and blatant imperialism supported by a land-hungry populace bent on creating a European style empire to attain their Manifest Destiny. In reality, the war was far from universally accepted and Americans endlessly debated the war’s causes, its objectives and how the rest of the world would view their actions. This chapter shall demonstrate that American viewpoints regarding expansion and the Mexican war do not neatly fall into categories. Americans expressed a wide range of viewpoints that defy sweeping characterizations. Some Americans supported expansion but criticized the war while others wished to demonstrate American superiority in battle but refrain from annexing new territory. Some ardent democrats opposed the war while some abolitionists supported rampant expansion.

The diverse viewpoints expressed by Americans during the Mexican-American War have often been ignored by historians. Josefina Vazquez’s article “Causes of the War with the United States” in *Dueling Eagles* argues that Americans were simply obsessed with expansion and welcomed the war to obtain their goals. David Weber’s *The Mexican Frontier* does an outstanding job chronicling Mexican and Indian attitudes but claims American sentiments were simply unabashedly expansionist. Robert Johannsen in *To the Halls of the Montezumas* does an excellent job of exploring how Americans viewed the war through a cultural as well a political

lens. Unfortunately, he significantly downplays the importance of opposition to the war, confining all critical viewpoints to only one chapter. This paints an unrealistic portrayal of the war as being incredibly popular and supported by most Americans. Other works like Ernest Lander's *Reluctant Imperialists* discusses some of the rampant opposition but relegates his study to just include the opinions of prominent South Carolinians. John Schroeder in *Mr. Polk's War* does an outstanding job exploring the different types of Americans that opposed the war and expansion but neglects to fully explain the many nuances of their viewpoints. Few Americans were simply for or against the war or expansion, their views ended somewhere in between, rarely reflected much commonality and were exceedingly diverse.<sup>318</sup>

The major flashpoint for the Mexican-American war occurred not in fiercely contested California, but in Texas. The treaty that joined Texas and the United States did not adequately clarify any boundaries, instead vaguely stating “the Republic of Texas, acting in conformity with the wishes of the people and every department of its government, cedes to the United States all its territories, to be held by them in full property and sovereignty, and to be annexed to the said United States as one of their Territories.” Historically, the boundary of Texas was the Nueces River, but when Santa Anna was captured he agreed to make the boundary the Rio Grande, 125 miles to the south. Since such an agreement was made under duress, the Mexican government, and some Americans, never accepted it. From 1836 to 1845 the land between the two rivers was essentially considered no-mans land and few settlers from either country lived there. President Polk and other expansionists demanded the Rio Grande serve as the border and when the treaty

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<sup>318</sup> Josefina Vazquez, “Causes of the War with the United States”, *Dueling Eagles: Reinterpreting the U.S. Mexican War* (Arlington, University of Texas Press 2000), 61; David Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press 1982); Robert Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1985); Ernest Lander *Reluctant Imperialists: Calhoun, the South Carolinians and the Mexican War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980); John Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973).

of annexation was confirmed ordered American troops under General Taylor to the disputed territory.<sup>319</sup>

There are two primary schools of thought regarding President Polk's intentions. The first is that he placed American troops in the disputed boundary in order to elicit a violent response from Mexico. This would enable him to declare war and then get the desired California. The emphasis of blame is placed on Polk and expansionists who sought to attack a weaker neighbor. Historian John Schroeder claims that Polk stationed troops on the border to the Rio Grande to provoke the Mexicans and when a skirmish broke out, this "gave Polk the incident he needed to ensure the war he sought." While the above viewpoint is often supported, there is some evidence that tends to complicate it.<sup>320</sup>

The second explanation is significantly less imperialistic in tone. President Polk, in his diary, claimed that a Colonel Atocha offered him a way to gain California and the disputed section of Texas without having to resort to war. Atocha claimed he spoke for Santa Anna, who was in exile in Cuba, and stated that he was willing to cede the desired territories for \$30 million. Atocha claimed that the Mexican public would never allow such a sale unless there was no alternative. To pull off such a stunt, Atocha requested that American troops be stationed on the border so it would appear to the Mexican public that Santa Anna had no choice in the matter and sold the territory only to save the rest of Mexico from the United States. Polk stated that "He [Atocha] is evidently a man of talents and education, but his whole manner and conversation impressed me with a belief that he was not reliable, and that he would betray any confidence

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<sup>319</sup> James McCaffery, *Army of Manifest Destiny: The American Soldier in the Mexican War* (New York: New York University Press, 1994) 5-6; Bauer, 10-13.

<sup>320</sup> Foos, 6-7; Schroeder, 8-9.

reposed in him, when it was in his interest to do so.” Polk thanked Atocha for visiting but gave no indication of whether he would agree to such a deal. Polk makes no further mention of this discussion in his diary and it is not known for sure if he agreed to the deal. If the Atocha story is true, it certainly complicates the argument that American forces simply declared war to militarily grab the desired territory by force.<sup>321</sup>

Regardless of whether Polk’s intentions were aggressive or not, American troops were deployed in the disputed region and a skirmish broke out which resulted in the death of sixteen Americans. When news of the attack reached Polk, he immediately asked Congress to declare war. In his speech to Congress, Polk claimed that “Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded its territory and shed American blood on American soil. As war exists, and notwithstanding our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of Mexico herself.” Many Congressmen felt they had little choice in the matter because Mexico had already declared war against the United States. Polk also attempted to stampede the bill through and only a few hours were allotted for debate. On May 13<sup>th</sup> the declaration of war was approved by the House 174-14 and in the Senate 40-2. The President was also authorized to raise fifty thousand volunteers.<sup>322</sup>

Several influential citizens also expressed their displeasure regarding the war. A new congressman from Illinois, Abraham Lincoln, introduced a series of resolutions that demanded to know the exact spot where “American blood” had been shed. Lincoln also claimed that Polk had

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<sup>321</sup> Polk, 50-53; Several notable historians validate the story including Jack Bauer in the Mexican War, 27-29, William Goetzman When the Eagle Screamed, 63 and Frederick Merk, "Dissent in the Mexican War." *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, 81 (1969), 134; Santa Anna did return to Mexico and seize power from the government. Upon his arrival, Santa Anna made no attempt to negotiate, instead rallied the Mexican forces and unsuccessfully tried to expel the American invaders. See Bauer’s *The Mexican War* for more information.

<sup>322</sup> McCaffery, 7-8; Merk, “Dissent”, 123-134; *Southern Patriot*, May 14, 1846. Although Polk’s original intentions may not have been aggressive, he quickly made the best of the situation. He declared to his cabinet that although the war was not about seizing California, it may become necessary to acquire the territory to help defray the costs of war. For more information see Haynes, *James K. Polk and the Expansionistic Impulse* p.132.

been seduced by ideas of glory and stated “military glory is a rainbow which rises in the heavens and dazzles with its luster but it comes forth from the clouds of desolated cities and showers of American blood.” *New York Tribune* publisher and ardent expansionist, Horace Greeley, questioned the whole point of the war. “We can easily defeat the armies of Mexico, slaughter them by the thousands, and pursue them perhaps to their capital, we can conquer them and ‘annex’ their territory; but what then... Who believes that victories over Mexico, the annexation of half their provinces will give us more liberty, a purer morality, a more prosperous industry than we now have.” John O’Sullivan also initially opposed the war as it contradicted his ideas on non-aggressive continental expansion. Historian Robert Samson claims that “O’Sullivan was sure that this destiny could be fulfilled without resorting to force of arms.” O’Sullivan also questioned the circumstances that started the war. “What particular urgent business General Taylor had under the walls of Matamoros, with his batteries commanding the town, we confess has never been clear to us.” After it became apparent that war was unavoidable, however, O’Sullivan changed his stance and demanded that Mexico must be punished to atone for starting the war. Many of those who supported the war rarely mentioned the noble causes of Manifest Destiny, such as spreading liberty or better utilizing the land; instead they wanted Mexico punished.<sup>323</sup>

One proponent of such “chastisement” was Walt Whitman. Immediately following the declaration of war on May 11<sup>th</sup> 1846, Whitman penned an editorial entitled “The Mexican War Justified.” He claimed that Americans “ten to one are for prompt and effectual hostilities” and

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<sup>323</sup> Horace Greeley as it appeared in Merk, “Dissent”, 126; Greeley, most famous for his often repeated phrase “Go West, Young Man” saw expansion as an important way to relive the congestion and overcrowding of American cities. He disagreed however with blatant land grabbing, and found the ends did not justify the means in regards to the Mexican-American war; Robert Samson, *John L. O’Sullivan and His Times* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003), 200-204. Schroeder, 151-153; Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission*, 148-149. Some other notable Americans that opposed the war: former Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin, Poet James Lowell, author of civil disobedience Henry Thoreau and African-American leader Frederick Douglass.



insisted that “Yes; Mexico must be thoroughly chastised!” He claimed Americans “are justified in the face of the world, in having treated Mexico with more forbearance than we have ever yet treated an enemy. For Mexico though contemptible in many respects is an enemy deserving a vigorous lesson.” Whitman also asserted that the Mexicans had perpetrated several massacres against Americans and was sickened by those “who so ruthlessly and needlessly slaughtered His [Gods] image.” He ended his rant “let our arms now be carried with a spirit which shall teach the world that, while we are not forward for a quarrel, America knows how to crush, as well as how to expand.” Whitman offered no noble justifications for war or for expansion. The Mexicans, in his eyes, needed to be punished and if the United States got some territory out of the deal so much the better. It would also seem that Whitman did not want America to serve as a shining example to Europe anymore but rather imitate them. He expressed no sentiments regarding the exportation of democracy but simply advocated expanding for expansion’s sake which resembled European imperialism.<sup>324</sup>

These changing priorities in the justification for expansion also manifested themselves with soldiers. Many Americans went to war in order to “chastise” the Mexicans. Young men from all over the nation flocked to join the regular army or volunteer regiments. At this time each state was responsible for enlisting a specific number of troops who were to see action in Mexico. Almost every state met or exceeded their initial quotas. Schroeder claims “in the initial months of fighting, few Americans doubted that Mexico had to be chastised for her continued insults and provocations of recent years, and thousands of eager young men rushed forth to seek military glory.” Many of these recruits, however, cared little for the spreading of democracy or defending American soil from foreign encroachment. Instead, many Americans and the federal

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<sup>324</sup> Whitman, “The Mexican War Justified” *The Mexican War: Crisis for American Democracy*, 47.

government, Schroeder explains, “were more concerned with the reality of territory than with abstractions of republican virtue.” Historian Richard Gamble claims some Americans enlisted simply as a free way to go out west and see new things. Scholar Paul Foos claims many Americans joined up hoping to earn money and glory. Author James McCaffrey asserts that many Americans joined up out of a sense of excitement and “war fever.”<sup>325</sup>

One song published in the *Southern Patriot* in 1846 perfectly illustrates the changing sentiments many Americans expressed regarding expansion. It is entitled “Song of the Anglo-Saxon Going South.”

Away! Away for Mexico  
Dark clouds are lowering there  
The bandits have refused to yield  
Unto a nations prayer  
And now a lesson we will give  
That they must deeply feel  
On land our leaden complement  
At sea a row of steel

Away! away for Mexico  
There is a chance for fame  
And in the Montezuma’s halls  
To write a victors name  
Our nations insult is too deep  
Ever to be forgiven  
And now we’ll teach the Mexicans  
The shortest way to heaven

Away! away for Mexico  
That land is passing fair  
Whose fadeless vales of verdure lie  
Her mines both rich and rare  
And if Humboldt tells the truth  
There’s billions yet untold  
To overflow our treasury  
With heaps of yellow gold

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<sup>325</sup> Schroeder, 162; Richard Gamble, "Garrison Life at Frontier Military Posts, 1830-1869." (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1956), 40; Foos, 7-11; McCaffrey 18-20.

The song continues, calling upon each state to do their part in the war. The title itself makes an immediate distinction that the war is a racial one as the Anglo-Saxon's are on the march. The Mexicans are seen as degenerate "bandits" incapable of standing up to the might of the Anglo-Saxons. The song alludes that war, far from being feared, should be embraced by Americans. This is a chance to win "fame" and glory. This fame went beyond just the local level. A successful invasion and war would demonstrate to Europe the fighting prowess and professionalism of the American military. The song reiterates the idea that Mexico has gravely wronged the United States. The only way to address such a grievance was to "chastise" or punish the Mexicans. Those Americans who answered the call would be richly rewarded with "heaps of yellow gold." This song demonstrates that pro-war advocates felt Americans had the might, will and "right" to exploit their southern neighbor.<sup>326</sup>

Initially, many volunteers were eager to punish the Mexicans and anxious to win money and glory. The *Barre Gazette* reported that citizens were volunteering with great enthusiasm. In New Hampshire "the people of this state are responding to the call for volunteers with an alacrity that is gratifying." The *Gazette* also reported that "800 or 900 volunteers were inspected and mustered into service" in Ohio. The article offered little explanation as to why men were volunteering but did report a story about a man from Cincinnati. This man they claimed had been captured in Texas before the war and served two years as a street cleaner in Mexico as a prisoner until he escaped and returned to Ohio. Now, he eagerly joined the volunteers hoping for revenge. Another article from the *Barre Gazette* claimed that "there can be no question in the mind of any sane man that the responsibility of involving the two nations in a war, must rest entirely on Mexico...She has opened the gates, and must not complain if she be overwhelmed

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<sup>326</sup> *Southern Patriot*, February 20, 1846.

with the flood.” The sense of hesitation many Americans expressed regarding a war with the British over Oregon had largely vanished. Most were confident that they could quickly and efficiently defeat their “barbaric” southern neighbors.<sup>327</sup>

Many Americans felt they were justified in punishing the Mexicans since they were a lesser race, guilty of perpetrating terrible atrocities and even worse being Catholics. Although numerous white Americans had always felt racially superior to the Mexicans in some measure, the outbreak of the war heightened this sentiment. Many, even those that opposed the war, claimed the Mexicans were a substandard race. The *Southern Patriot* hoped that the “Mexican race must soon be absorbed by the superior one” but worried that Mexicans may not be capable of assimilation. The *New-Hampshire Sentinel* printed a letter regarding the Mexican population and claimed the following description “is not far from accurate.” The letter accused the Mexicans of being uneducated, lazy and having “no master mind among them to point out evil and direct the right-they move on without rudder or compass.” The authors also alleged that the Mexicans “have all the blood-thirstiness and depravity of the French canaille in the worst days of the revolution but not one tithe of the courage of the amicable co-laborers of Murat.” A similar article appeared in the *Albany Argus*. This editorial provided a census for Mexico and claimed that “all authorities concur in representing them [the Mexicans] as vile and imbecile a population as ever disgraced any country. They are mostly a mongrel breed of Indians and Negroes-about as lazy as the Hottentots, ignorant as slaves and passionate as savages.” The author then supposedly justified his claims by stating that “we know that we speak strongly; but an

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<sup>327</sup> *Barre Gazette*, May 15, 1846, June 12, 1846.

examination of their history shows a character so beneath the most reasonable expectations that we are astonished at their degradation.”<sup>328</sup>

Calls to “chastise” the Mexican “mongrels” stemmed also from their initial firing on American troops and subsequent “atrocities.” The *Georgia Telegraph* reported that after battles the Mexicans “dealt barbarously upon those Americans who fell in action” and that “those killed were hideously mutilated.” Another article in the *Telegraph* claimed that more Americans were massacred in New Mexico and that those responsible are “to be dealt with as outlaws, bandits or pirates.” The *Pittsfield Sun* claimed that a body of a missing American Colonel was later found “frightfully mutilated and entirely destitute of clothing.”<sup>329</sup>

Many American soldiers were also appalled at the presumed excesses of the Catholic Church. Such distaste further reinforced ideas of American cultural superiority. The *Barre Gazette* attacked Mexicans for allowing the Catholic Church to wield such influence and claimed “one fourth of the property of the country is in the hands of the priesthood.” The *Gazette* also stated that the “great mass of people [in Mexico] are little more enlightened than were their ancestors in the time of Montezuma, and their religion is very little less an idolatry than that of the grotesque images of stone and clay which it has taken the place.” The fear and loathing many Americans had for the Catholic Church further reinforced the belief that American White Anglo-Saxon Protestantism was superior.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> *Southern Patriot*, October 19, 1847; *Pittsfield Sun*, September 4, 1846; *New-Hampshire Sentinel*, December 2, 1847; *Albany Argus*, undated; Allan Nevins, Frank Weitenkampf, *A century of Political Cartoons: Caricature in the United States from 1800-1900* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1944), 64-65; Horsman, 227-237.

<sup>329</sup> *Georgia Telegraph*, May 26, 1846, April 6, 1847; *Barre Gazette*, May 15, 1846; *Pittsfield Sun*, May 14, 1846.

<sup>330</sup> Foos, 127-128; McCaffrey, 71-73; *Barre Gazette*, June 12, 1846.

A few Americans felt the Mexican “popery” could be corrected by bringing Protestantism to their land. This notion was severely attacked by the editor, of the improbably named *Portland Pleasure Boat*, Jeremiah Hacker. The editorial entitled “Killing for the Glory of God” slammed such crusader logic. Hacker, a devoted abolitionist, reformer and preacher, felt the war to be unjustified and horrific. He claimed that American soldiers, repeatedly, visited atrocities upon the Mexicans and justified their excesses by claiming they were introducing true Christianity into their lives. Hacker found this logic to be troubling and did not think “shooting the gospel into people, in the shape of cannon and musket balls, and sacking their towns and ravishing their wives and daughters” was effective. He also found that such horrors were unfortunately not new to history and were especially prevalent in Europe. He claimed pillaging and raping in the name of God was common among “the Spaniards” who subsequently inspired such horrors in their previous subjects. Hacker argued that while the Mexicans were guilty of racism and atrocities so too were the United States, especially in reference to their “cruelty to the Indians and Negro slaves.” Instead, Americans should look to distance themselves from Europe and their degenerate offspring and repent for their past sins, not create new ones.<sup>331</sup>

American Catholics also found fault in the war. To them attacking the Mexican faith was not only immoral but impractical. The editor of Boston’s *Catholic Observer* denounced any ill treatment of the Church in Mexico. He claimed that while the official stance of the federal government was to discourage the desecration and pillaging of Catholic churches it was acceptable for church lands to be seized. The editor admitted that such a policy had yet to go in to effect and hoped to rile up domestic opposition before it did. He was particularly disturbed that most newspapers were silent in the matter. He took their silence as an indication that they

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<sup>331</sup> *Portland Pleasure Boat* as it appeared in the *Liberator* January 8, 1847.

supported such measures. He clearly stated “as Catholics we, of course, denounce such a base and sacrilegious policy. We hold the property of the Church, the gift of the faithful, the pious, and the charitable, to be sacred and that it cannot without sacrilege be diverted from the purposes intended by the donors.” He argued that if the government be allowed to seize Church lands in Mexico they should do so back in the States so as not to appear hypocritical. He reminded readers that the government “is itself no more Protestant than it is Catholic.” All religions were supposed to stand on equal footing and such a policy undermined such a promise.<sup>332</sup>

The editor warned that such a policy turned the war into a religious conflict and that no Catholics should be expected to fight Catholicism as well as the Mexicans. He asked readers to consider how they would feel if Protestants were told to wage war against their own faith in wartime. Practically, such a policy was also counterproductive for several reasons. The editor argued that many Mexican Catholic priests were “in favor of peace.” Instead of making the war religious in tone “we should have shown that we made no war on their religion and worship, and declared that we hold their church and its property inviolate.” Refusing to do this sensible action pushed the Mexican clergy into the waiting arms of the ardent insurrectionists. He warned that while “we may beat them in regular engagements, but subdue them we cannot.” A partisan war would prove to be “the end to our glorious victories.” The abused clergy, meanwhile, would serve to galvanize the opposition and “fire their zeal, console them for their losses, and animate them with indomitable courage and perseverance.” Waging war against Catholicism in Mexico would also bring sympathy to her from other Catholic nations. Mexico’s cause then would

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<sup>332</sup> *Catholic Observer* as it appeared in the *National Intelligencer* June 5, 1847.

become “sacred” and under “divine protection.” Such a shortsighted policy could not only bring about the wrath of partisans and other nations, but God himself.<sup>333</sup>

The editor was very quick to point out, however, that he and other Catholics were Americans first. The proposed policy appalled him more as an American than as a Catholic. As a loyal citizen he fervently hoped that the government would always seek to act in an honorable and civilized manner. He was made “indignant,” however, when he learned of the government’s “attempt to carry on a war in a manner that is contrary to the rules of civilized warfare.” Such a lapse in judgment should not “be tolerated in open day.” The editor was also perplexed as the current administration “has no reputation to throw away, and it can ill afford to indulge itself in acts of superfluous barbarism.” He reiterated that the “American people are by no means unanimously agreed that the war was necessary and just” and reminded readers that the current war could be easily construed as a “strong and healthy man flogging a weak and sickly neighbor, not yet off his bed, though it is thought a decent flogging may do him good.” Although this author’s opposition to the war mostly stemmed from a religious angle he was clearly well versed in the opposition’s rhetoric. A strong bully beating on a weakling was a common metaphor. Where was the honor in such a war? Many Americans agreed that Mexico was arrogant and ought to be “chastised” but an all-out war seemed like an excessive punishment to this editor. Also interesting was the phrase “not yet off his bed” another indicator that Mexico was still a young Republic who had yet to adjust completely to self-governance. Perhaps their “arrogance” could be attributed to growing pains and forgiven. Regardless such thoughts were further proof “chastisement” should not lead to war.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>333</sup>Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.



The editor, unlike many of his fellow anti-war advocates, did not inherently blame the administration. He understood why such a policy was being considered. The government had “failed to render the war popular” and thus sought to appeal “to the anti-Catholic prejudices of the country.” The administration’s thinly-veiled attempt at blatant aggression had failed to find many converts and now Polk and his ilk sought to change tactics. The editor was hopeful, however, since once the public becomes fully aware of this “barbaric” policy they would “doubtless protest with one voice against its injustice...and if the government chooses to relapse into barbarism, the people will not sustain it.” This may not be necessary, though, as the administration may “see the wickedness and folly of the proposition...and disavow it in terms which can leave no doubt in any mind.” This expansionistic inspired conflict was neither universally supported nor even accepted by many Americans. For this Catholic editor, expansion and war were not divinely inspired events. Manifest Destiny was not a promise from God to Americans but a political ploy concocted by the administration.<sup>335</sup>

Many Americans, distraught over the unwarranted invasion, chose satire as their primary way to voice opposition. The *New-Hampshire Sentinel* published an article titled “the objects of the war.” The authors claimed that there is some confusion as to “the objects of the present war with Mexico.” They then enumerated several of the reasons being used, “crusade against popery”, revenge for “instances of wanton murder, robbery and aggression” “to enlarge our domain” or “fulfill our Manifest Destiny.” The article ended by stating that “at last the matter is settled by General Pierce who says ‘the great object of this war is peace’ there can be no mistake the General ought to know.” This article helps showcase one reason why the war faced

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

opposition; there was not a clear cut objective. Even advocates of the war could not point to the “actual” reason for the conflict.<sup>336</sup>

Similarly satirical was an article from Connecticut in the the *Constitution*. The editor claimed American actions in Mexico were “similar to a practice common among buccaneers, of first overcoming a vessel, then putting to death its officers and disarming its crew, and finally leaving it optional with the latter becoming pirates with the captors or ‘walking the plank.’” An article in the *Manchester American* attacked the initial justification that Polk used to declare war. The author recounted the invasion of Mexico, the seizing of several of her provinces and claimed “the Mexicans, goaded to madness by the appearance in their own corn and cotton fields of an invading army, resist by opposing force to force; and we are very gravely told that ‘our territory has been invaded, and American blood [has] been shed on American soil.’ The civilized world views it in a different light.” For these authors the whole war was so blatantly wrong it was almost comical. The American military had wantonly invaded Mexican soil with a hardly believable pretense and then the public was supposed to accept the war was self-defensive. As so elegantly explained in the *Constitution*, such conduct was more usual for a pirate crew than an American presidential administration.<sup>337</sup>

The *National Era* from Washington D.C. published a song entitled “Manifest Destiny.” The song compared the United States to Sparta and Rome and expressed passionate antiwar sentiments with stanzas like:

Destiny, Destiny,  
Tis our mission to pour out the tide  
Of our heart-blood and die

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<sup>336</sup> *New-Hampshire Sentinel*, December 2, 1847, October 28, 1847.

<sup>337</sup> *Manchester American* as it appeared in the *Hudson River Chronicle*, September 18, 1848; *Constitution*, June 2, 1847.

With a foeman's corpse stretched ghastly by our side  
Or to live and trample him in vengeful pride  
This is our mission high  
Gospel of Liberty!

This song suggests that the supposedly sacrosanct concept of Manifest Destiny led to the deaths of countless Americans. Most disturbingly, they fell in the supposed spreading of liberty. This liberty, however, was a farce. How could one spread such a sacred principle at gunpoint? Attempting to do so only brought death to the invader and oppression for the Mexicans<sup>338</sup>

Sometimes indignation and outrage trumped satire. Perhaps the most caustic and convincing tirade against the Mexican War and Manifest Destiny was a letter published in the *National Intelligencer*. The astute nature of the letter proved to be popular among readers and it appeared in several other publications. The author, known only as an “old farmer,” found the concept of Manifest Destiny to be utterly absurd. He believed that Americans who bought into its promises were more apt to commit atrocities since they were merely following God’s plan. He asked readers to critically consider several stories. He began with the story of a thief who was about to be sentenced for his crimes and his only defense was that he had no choice as his “Manifest Destiny” was to steal. This was no problem for the judge who promptly declared that it was his “Manifest Destiny to be hanged for stealing.” Just as Napoleon’s Manifest Destiny was to take over all of Europe it was also his destiny to “die a miserable exile on the rock of St. Helena.” While it was the “Manifest Destiny of the Romans to conquer and plunder half the world” they were forced to endure “incessant civil wars” oppression by “ferocious despots and finally conquered and plundered by innumerable hordes of pitiless savages.” The lessons of history had already provided Americans with a glimpse of their future if they continued on this

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<sup>338</sup> *National Era*, January 27, 1848.

path of exploitation. If the United States continued to justify her actions using such a ridiculous concept it will be:

the ‘Manifest Destiny’ of the Anglo-Saxon race to possess the territory of Mexico but if we are to pursue this ‘Manifest Destiny’ by wantonly invading her soil, harassing her people, breaking up her civil liberties and murdering men, women and children it will most assuredly be our ‘Manifest Destiny’ to be punished for our crimes or, what is the same thing, Divine Providence will permit using the indulgence of our ferocious passions, to punish ourselves.”

The “old farmer’s” astute comments would prove eerily prophetic during the Civil War. He chose not to directly attack the concept of Manifest Destiny but instead critique its supposed infallibility. Blatantly following such a policy was fine as long as Americans could accept its repercussions. Considering the horror that was unfolding in Mexico, few Americans would be willing to accept a punishment that fit their crimes.<sup>339</sup>

The “old farmer” also sought to educate readers as to why going to war to obtain territory from Mexico was not only morally repugnant but also unnecessary. If the absorption of territory was so crucial to American development he proposed alternative ways to secure the land. The Mexican people, if they truly were “as wretched as they are represented” would in short order destroy themselves. Such an event would then allow the United States “to take possession of their vacant territory without bloodshed and without crime.” Although his last prediction was clearly in jest, he masterfully reiterates the ridiculous comments made by some of the expansionists. Another proposal would see the “forty thousand men” who had gone to Mexico to fight return to the United States and engage in good old fashioned hard work. By working in “their farms and workshops” and by constructing “canals and railroads, improving harbors,

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<sup>339</sup> *National Intelligencer*, August 6, 1847; *Boston Recorder*, August 12, 1847; *Christian Reflector*, August 19, 1847.

building cities, and clearing out western forests,” their labor would soon result in enough money to purchase all of Mexico outright.<sup>340</sup>

The extra territory, the “old farmer” explained, was superfluous. He argued that “our present territory is amply sufficient for three hundred millions, which is more than our population will amount to for a century to come.” The “old farmer” reminded readers that the oldest republic on earth, San Marino, was also the smallest. That was no coincidence. Governing a smaller territory ensured the citizens all had similar objectives and concerns. He argued that not only did Mexicans possess a foreign culture to Americans but that even Anglo emigrants to the area would be difficult to govern. He feared that annexing Mexican territory would make it “impossible to frame laws equally acceptable to all parts of our population.” The distance would also make it exceedingly difficult to enforce what few laws were already in place. Simply put it would be injurious to the United States to try an annex territory so far from the governing center of Washington D.C.<sup>341</sup>

The “old farmer” also sought to correct the notion that the war was “good” for both the United States and Mexico. Invading Mexico served no purpose other than to facilitate rage against the United States. He wondered what “good” did it serve to “murder her people, destroy their property, batter down their cities, break up their civil institutions and expose the peaceable portion of her population to the insults of unprincipled men from this country.” He insisted that if war was “good” then the bloodthirsty barbarian Tamerlane should be heralded as a “philanthropist.” The “old farmer” finally wondered if it is:

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

any good for the United States to entice away our valuable citizens to be killed in a foreign land, to create a national debt, to exasperate the feeling of all Mexico against us and to neglect all improvements at home so that we may have more money to spend murdering our neighbors.

The author pulled no punches in his tireless critique. The United States had lost its way and Americans needed to wake up and realize the dangers of becoming imperialist. If they were not careful, Americans could find themselves behaving and acting exactly like their most hated and maligned enemies, the Europeans.<sup>342</sup>

This letter to the editor perfectly captures the anger and disappointment many Americans felt in the 1840s. The supposedly grand and popular concept Manifest Destiny was a farce. The war in Mexico was a blatant land grab which resulted in the deaths of countless innocents. At least in Texas and Florida there was a semblance of self-defense at work as American emigrants were portrayed as being oppressed and rising in revolt. Outside of California that fantasy simply did not exist. The “old farmer’s” carefully worded letter exemplifies the bewilderment many Americans felt. How could the United States, once a great republic and guarantee of liberty and freedom, have become a blatant imperial power? Contrary to what its advocates claimed Manifest Destiny entailed “invading” “murdering men women and children” and neglecting “improvements at home.” Not only was the war destructive and immoral, it threatened economic productivity and the survival of the republic itself. Even the author’s signature is significant as it hearkens back to the original and untarnished image of a true and proud American. The Jeffersonian agrarian still has the answers and understands that expansion is not always beneficial.

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

One of the more audacious notions that developed during the Mexican-American war was the “all of Mexico” movement. Proponents felt that Mexico had squandered her shot at self-governance and that it was in both their and the United States best interest for the whole nation to be annexed. The Mexicans would be allowed to partake in the wonders of democracy and live in a stable society. In exchange the United States would inherit territory that would nearly double the size of the country. In the majority of instances this plan was derided by the American press as too massive an undertaking but there was no shortage of author’s debating the matter.

The most thought-provoking of these articles appeared in the *National Era*. In an interesting bit of irony the *Era*, a fervent abolitionist paper, put forth one of the most persuasive articles advocating *acquiring* “all of Mexico.” The editor first explained that States were beholden to the Union only through agreement. He argued that those hotheads in South Carolina, “as she often threatened” had the right to secede if they chose too. He also believed the New England States had the right to “secede from a Government which has been prostituted to the support of slavery, and to set up for themselves.” He insinuated that this defining characteristic separated the United States from other imperial powers. Conversely, he argued that any territory that wished to join the Union had such a right. He acknowledged that while he would welcome Oregon’s admission, he had the addition of the vast slave state of Texas but “never doubted its perfect right to dispose of itself as it saw proper.”<sup>343</sup>

It was only natural then to apply such logic to the current situation on how to handle the ongoing Mexican debacle. The author admitted that he had often derided the war but hoped this new measure could in some way repair the soured relations. He argued “in relation to right or

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<sup>343</sup> *National Era* as it appeared in the *Vermont Patriot*, September 9, 1847. The editor of the *Vermont Patriot* claimed he reprinted the article for its “novelty and boldness.” He also felt it “would be a new move in politics, if the abolitionists, become the most ardent advocates of the extension of the area of freedom, and clamorous for the annexation of all Mexico.”

justice there could not be the slightest objection to the submission of a proposition of annexation to each of the sovereign states of Mexico.” Most importantly such an offer must be fair as to allow each territory to “be left perfectly free to decide for itself, and its decision ought then to be respected.” In simpler terms, if the Mexicans were truly panting for liberty and freedom, let them ask for it. This would be more in line with the principles of the United States than the recent European style of conquest.<sup>344</sup>

Confident that he had settled any issue of “constitutionality,” the author moved to explain the eminent “practicability” of his plan. He claimed that arguments insisting that Mexico was too distant to properly govern were ludicrous. The author argued that going from Washington to New Orleans took only seven days and from New Orleans to Vera Cruz only another three. A journey to visit Mexico City was merely another four from Vera Cruz. He predicted that soon after annexation road conditions would be dramatically improved which would speed travel up even further. Conversely, traveling to Oregon from St. Louis could take over “three months.” Communication would be even easier as he was confident telegraph wires would quickly be strung from Washington to Mexico City and result in news in merely “a few hours.” The editor also disagreed with the notion that expansion hurt “American political institutions.” Quite the opposite, he argued, since the addition of new territory “weakened the proportionate influence of faction.” He concluded the States were in far more danger during the last war, and before it, of falling apart, than they have ever been since.” The addition of Mexican territory would strengthen the United States politically and the advances of technology made governing a simple matter of building infrastructure.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> *National Era* as it appeared in the *Vermont Patriot*, September 9, 1847.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*



Upon satisfying his requirements for legal and practical concerns the author sought to address the “advantages” from acquiring “all of Mexico.” He enumerated several advantages that both Mexicans and Americans could enjoy if such a union becomes a reality. He was confident that both nations would benefit economically as union “would extend the principles of free trade...to nearly the whole of North America.” He was certain that Americans could quickly construct a canal through the “isthmus of Tehuantepec, the shortest point between the Gulf and Pacific Ocean in Mexico. The canal would provide not only new opportunities to facilitate trade but cut down even further on communication and transportations costs. Such a union would “settle our present difficulty with Mexico at once, without any unpleasant controversies about indemnity, without any humiliation to our sister Republic” and prevent “any opportunity or chance for future collisions.” The newly available lands would also prove useful to “enterprising immigrants” and “add vastly to the commerce of this whole country and open a new field for the enterprise of our citizens.” The manufacturing center of New England, in particular, would find a “new and valuable market for their wares.” This also had the double advantage of hurting the British as it would end their “profitable and brisk commerce” with Mexico. Perhaps most importantly, annexation would “forever put to rest all projects for the establishment of a monarchical system upon this continent.” Mexico had proven itself incapable of properly governing itself and the author and many other Americans feared a European takeover to be imminent. Annexation with the United States removed this outcome and insured that democratic institutions remained the dominant political system in North America.<sup>346</sup>

Mexico too would benefit immensely from the author’s plan. The Mexican people under American tutelage could enjoy “religious toleration” and in a nod to Catholics worldwide, the

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<sup>346</sup>Ibid.

United States would refrain from “interfering with her religious faith.” He claimed that union would “put an end to military rule and wasting revolutions” and that the Mexican public could finally have “personal security.” The author was also very pleased to announce that annexation would enable Mexicans to enjoy “free institutions” and the introduction of “the common school system of education.” Clearly, union would be a blessing to the Mexicans. Allegiance to the United States offered them stability, freedom, peace and lucrative economic opportunities. Best of all the Mexicans would be grateful for the chance as they had to petition for statehood and would thus refrain from any partisan activities.<sup>347</sup>

The editor also hoped that the annexation of Mexico would “not offend the pride of the South.” He was confident that if these territories petitioned for statehood they would do so as “Free States.” Mexico had already abolished that most horrific of institutions and its people would never consider returning to it. He claimed the South had no cause for complaint since the Union had recently accepted Texas as a slave state and it was only fair for the opportunity for other territories to come in as free. The author provided a population breakdown of the Mexican provinces and concluded that nineteen of twenty four provinces had the requisite number of citizens to apply for statehood. This would add “thirty eight senators and about eighty Representatives” all of whom would be anti-slavery. This would serve the dual purpose of not only “advancing the cause of human rights” but following the “doctrine of Calhoun and South Carolina, [whereas] each state must determine and regulate its own peculiar institutions.” The author’s plan would solve the controversy of slavery expansion by using the South’s own doctrine. He also brought up the predominantly Southern notion that Mexicans were “heterogeneous, ignorant, and unfit for republic institutions.” The editor concurred but found

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<sup>347</sup>Ibid.

them no more “heterogeneous than the hordes of immigrants who are pouring in upon us every year.” He expected that in time, like immigrants, the Mexicans would become “assimilated and elevated, under our strong native population and regenerating institutions.” In a final parting shot to the South, he declared that Mexican ignorance would not be much of an issue as they were “generally as educated, at least, as those of South Carolina and some other Southern States which are nevertheless capable of maintaining republican institutions.”<sup>348</sup>

If the country refused to buy into the author’s audacious plan he offered one simple alternative. The United States could “bring back our armies, withdraw all of our posts within the Nueces [and] leave Mexico to recover from the anarchy to which we have reduced her.” At this point one may have concluded that the entire article was a ploy to get Americans away from the “all of Mexico” movement, but it was not. Instead, the author earnestly hoped that Americans “make use of our present position to save her from anarchy, and ourselves from dishonor, by giving her states the privilege of becoming equal members of our own political family.” Their acceptance of such a generous offer would grant the United States:

a basis of 4,000,000 of square miles for our empire, establish freedom as the fundamental and unchangeable law of the North American continent and give republicanism the perpetual ascendancy over all other forms of government. The United States would appear then before the world not as a robber of a sister Republic, but its greatest benefactor; not as the foe, but the friend of Christendom. Can the administration rise to the full height of this idea? Will it have the magnanimity to disdain all petty efforts to dismember Mexico, to abhor all bloody schemes to coerce Mexico, to trample underfoot all those conspiracies to extend slavery, and embrace the grand conception which would really enlarge the area of freedom, by the fraternal offer to free Mexico to a name and place in our Union, which would then indeed, be the glory of the Earth.”

This editorial masterfully demonstrates that sweeping generalizations that abolitionists opposed expansion or expansionists automatically supported the war are patently false. Editors and concerned citizens forcefully and carefully expressed a wide and diverse range of viewpoints.

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

The editor of the *National Era*, was a devoted abolitionist yet fervently hoped for the acquisition of “all of Mexico.” He opposed the efforts and conduct of the war but still felt expansion to be a good and useful policy. He also destroys the stereotype that American expansionists were blatant imperialists. His plan was pacific in nature as he made it clear that Union was only acceptable if the Mexicans agreed to the deal. Although he brilliantly explained the benefits he understood and demanded that they still have the option to remain independent.<sup>349</sup>

An editorial in the *National Union* promised to reveal to its readers the viewpoint of Commodore Stockton, a man who they have had at “length heard of.” This was the same Naval commander that some feared would attempt to turn California into his own personal playground. The editor claimed that Stockton, at a speech given in St. Joseph MO, pushed for the absorption of all of Mexico and beyond. The editorial quoted Stockton as having “no sympathy for the Mexicans” and that they were “a doomed people.” He felt the best course of action would be for the United States to extend “the area of liberty over the whole continent, even unto cape horn.” Such an acquisition would see the United States in complete control of not only Central but also South America. Although the editor never explicitly expressed his disapproval for such an idea the manner in which Stockton’s viewpoint was presented indicates he found the notion overzealous.<sup>350</sup>

By 1847 opposition to the war had reached dizzying heights. Many Americans felt they had been manipulated by the President and ardent expansionists. The bloody conflict was not the grand lark and adventure that had been promised. Even previously pro-war papers started to push for peace. The editor of the *Southern Patriot* claimed “it would be a happy thing for both

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> *National Union* January 5, 1848.

nations were an honorable peace to be concluded.” The war had gone on for far too long and the editor felt the Mexicans had already been sufficiently “chastised.” While he was an opponent of the “all of Mexico” plan he still felt the United States deserved some spoils stating “we suspect that our rulers shall waive such extravagant pretensions [all of Mexico movement] and conclude a treaty on equitable terms. We believe they are tired of the war, and would be glad to have it concluded with no other acquisition than that of Upper California, and that remuneration be given for that cession. A treaty found on that basis would, we think give general satisfaction.” For this editor the war goals were to punish the Mexicans and California was only a happy bonus. The United States was not in the business of European style conquest, however, and would gladly pay for any territory that was obtained.<sup>351</sup>

The editor of the *Pennsylvania Telegraph* was considerably more jaded. He simply stated “we are now engaged in a war which the people abominate.” He specified further by defining the “people” as a collection of “laborious agriculturalist, the skillful and painstaking mechanic, the quiet industrious and sober citizen, the enterprising merchant and the busy manufacturer.” He claimed that any American who preferred “the pleasant and harmonious influences of the home fireside, the cultivation of the blooming fields and the bleating of flocks and herds, to the clangor of the battle horn, the din of cannon, rattling of musketry, groans of the dying, and screams of departing spirits” opposed this ridiculous conflict. The editor found not just the war repugnant but also its “inception, objects and ultimate results.” He defined the “ultimate results” as what pro-expansionists had promised in the event of victory, such as new territory like California and felt any such acquisition to be not worth the price the United States was paying. He admitted that there were a small minority of Americans who supported the war,

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<sup>351</sup> *Southern Patriot*, November 25, 1847.

“vagabond editors,” “unprincipled politicians,” “greedy speculators” and “bankrupt merchants.” He stressed, however, that the “*people are opposed to the war.*” The true Americans, the “industrial workers” and “farmers”, they wanted an end to the bloodshed and did not feel the war was warranted. For them the war was unprovoked and imperialistic in style and tone. They, the editor knew, wanted peace. The Polk administration and his pro-war goons had misled the public but now “the united voice of American freemen have hurled back in defiance.”<sup>352</sup>

The editor claimed that by invading Mexico the United States was “striking down a Republic in embryo.” Mexico, he argued, was just now beginning to “emerge from despotism” and a war hurt the cause of international liberty. The United States should be encouraging and assisting these regions in establishing self-governance. Instead, “we are engaged in a crusade against its growing liberties; against the principles of republicanism; [and] against the doctrine of rational freedom.” The editor reiterated the pro-war faction’s claim that conflict was necessary in order to “chastise” the Mexicans for refusing to repay American debt. He found such a pretext preposterous. He admitted that perhaps Mexico had reneged on her debts, maybe that did insult American honor but he rhetorically asked “is war the only remedy for these grievances?” Going to war over a debt was stunningly shortsighted. American troops were being killed in a far-away land for pecuniary purposes. Worse still, he postulated that Mexico would have an even harder time repaying debt now that she was engaged in bloody conflict with the United States. The longer the war went on the likelihood of Mexico reneging on her debts increased.<sup>353</sup>

The editor feared, however, that “chastisement” was only the pretext for the real reasons for the war, “conquest and slavery.” Like many other Northerners he was convinced that any

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<sup>352</sup> *Pennsylvania Telegraph* as it appeared in the *National Intelligencer* June 5, 1847.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*

territory gleaned from Mexico would allow slavery and that the extension of that institution would lead to the downfall of the United States. Prior to the invasion, Mexico had banned slavery yet if the United States conquered and then annexed her slavery would be re-admitted. Thus freedom and human liberty would have been retarded by the supposed bastion of liberty the United States. He asked his readers to ponder an important question. What will the United States have “achieved in the eyes of mankind” if it re-implements a policy as heinous as slavery. “Where then will stand the temple of human liberty, at whose shrine our fathers worshipped?” He feared the answer would find “our existence as a Republic will be blotted out” and history would condemn the once great nation. The epitaph for the United States would read “Lust for power, false national pride, and military ambition, coupled with the extension of the bondage of our species, will ultimately overthrow the pillars of our republican superstructure, and leave but a wreck behind.” He concluded that “the present war...conceived in sin, brought forth in iniquity-nursed by unholy passion and unsanctified desire will be a long stride (we fear) in our downward spiral.”<sup>354</sup>

This editor’s opposition typified the complex viewpoints that surrounded the Mexican-American War. He stringently opposed neither war nor expansion outright but felt certain conditions must be met before such actions would be deemed acceptable. In this case he found war to be an overreaction in response to a defaulted loan. Similarly, expanding the boundaries of the United States to allow for more slave states was also appalling, especially since the territory had been previously free of such a horror. The editor was also typical in his belief that America was a bastion for liberty. Liberty and self-governance were wonderful American exports. In his eyes the United States had an obligation to Mexico and her people to assist them in utilizing

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

democratic institutions. A war not only endangered Americans but put the further exportation of freedom and liberty into jeopardy. Americans should be held to a higher standard. He feared that this unjust war not only affected international opinion but would negatively affect the United States in the historical record and in posterity. Thus while disapproval for the expansion of slavery was certainly important it was not the sole reason to oppose the war.

The *Cincinnati Daily Atlas* was critical of the heavy handed way in which President Polk orchestrated the war. He carefully offered readers a history of the British monarch Charles I and of the differences between the British and American systems of government. He explained that Charles I overstepped his authority, specifically in his decision to declare war, and was deposed and then executed by his people. In contrast, he explained, how the American system was superior and gave much power and authority to the People as represented by Congress. He argued that Polk grew up in the United States and was thus exposed to this, more democratic system of government. The editor was appalled that Polk after assuming the Presidency “gave such orders for the movement of the army as were calculated necessarily, if not designed purposefully, to produce inevitable war with a neighboring sister Republic, *of which Congress, the sole war making power, though then in session, was kept profoundly ignorant.*” Essentially the editor was calling Polk the vilest name he could think of, a British-like monarchist. At least the British had the good sense to execute Charles when he overstepped his bounds but Polk, even after orchestrating his war, was continuing to flagrantly disregard the power of Congress. The editor lamented that as soon as anyone brings up these facts or attempts to protest the war they are branded as Mexican collaborators who give “aid and comfort to the enemy” and are guilty of “moral treason.” For this editor the finer points of how to declare war were infinitely more important than the moral reasons. He chose to protest the war not out of a hatred of slavery or a



fear of overextending democratic institutions but because Polk did not go through the proper channels in order to declare war. The promise of acquiring new territory at the cessation of hostilities was unimportant to him. Instead, Americans needed to wake up and protest this flagrant usurpation of power. More importantly they had to stop allowing “monarchists” to wield authority and desecrate American institutions.<sup>355</sup>

The editor of the *New Jersey Fredonian* also made unfavorable comparisons between the United States and Europe. In this case the editor found France to be a more accurate comparison than Great Britain. He argued that initially France “defended the integrity of its own limits, and ended by aiming to break down the boundaries of every nation it could reach.” This is a reference to the relatively defensive French Revolutionary wars and then the more expansive and aggressive Napoleonic Wars. Similarly, the United States had initially acted defensively, according to the editor, when it positioned troops in the disputed region of Texas yet “now finds herself exclusively in the enemy’s country, in a war of rapine and political extermination.” The United States was once a great and unique nation; it was a beacon of liberty and had never, in the eyes of this editor, fought an offensive war. He feared that this “dreadful, indeed, this atrocious war” was more in line with European dominance, a fate in which no American would want. He claimed, quite erroneously, that initially “no man, public or private, had the hardihood to whisper a word of conquest for territory; we had only aimed to defend what was clearly our own.” Now the “administration”, without the support of free thinking individuals, “demands indemnity for all the expenses of war” and would only accept “territory” as payment. Worse still, he felt the public was being manipulated, that the war “engulfs the reason of the Nation, perverts its judgment, captivates its feeling, spills its precious blood, squanders with more than prodigal

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<sup>355</sup> *Cincinnati Daily Atlas* as it appeared in the *National Intelligencer* June 5, 1847.

waste its millions of money, paralyzes all its warm and virtuous affections, and fixes its eager gaze only upon fields of gory battle and bounds of provinces won.”<sup>356</sup>

All was not lost, however. While the United States was demonstrating some European tendencies it was still a Republican government, and the people could demand change. Contrary to what he claimed the administration said, the government’s hands were not tied that “it is in our power at any moment, and has been from the day the first blow was struck, to effect an honorable peace.” The editor insisted that it was necessary for Polk to be removed from power and replaced with “men who have some reason about them.” Once that was accomplished these reasonable men could enact a peace that would be free from “conquest” from any attempted “annexation” but instead would see the United States return to “our own boundaries.” Even anti-war advocates had trouble coming to a consensus. This editor didn’t have much of a problem with “chastisement” or even with the constitutionality issue of how the war began. Instead he was concerned that the war had devolved into a simple attempt at land grab. He felt the war was justified initially but that Polk, driven by greed, turned it into an expansionistic crusade. The editor also refused express any indignation over expansion itself just regarding how the territory would be acquired. For him the ends did not justify the means.<sup>357</sup>

The editor of the *Boston Journal* disapproved of the war because he too felt the American people had been misled. For him the initial impetus for war had little to do with unbridled expansion or “chastisement.” Instead, “it was confidently stated in various quarters...that the population of Santa Fe and California were dissatisfied with Mexican government and laws, were ready to act in any enterprise which would free them from the thralldom in which they were

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<sup>356</sup> *New Jersey Fredonian* as it appeared in the *National Intelligencer* June 5, 1847.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*

held.” These oppressed people would “welcome a military force from this republic with open arms and gladly place themselves under the government of the United States.” Echoing back to the “proper” way to expand American borders, the author insisted that the annexed region must, of their own accord, agree to the Union and prove themselves unwilling to live under the previous administration. The rebellions that were supposedly occurring in the Southwest was evidence that these benighted people wished to be free from their Mexican masters. Americans had no right to invade an enemy land unasked but these revolutionaries were in dire need of assistance. What is most interesting here is that his definition of “proper” expansion is not totally in line with what happened in Texas. There the revolutionaries were assisted not by the federal government but by concerned American citizens. Here the author is pushing for direct military intervention. Such an incursion would be deemed acceptable since the inhabitants were already in a state of rebellion. Unfortunately for the author, the acquisition did not go as smoothly as he predicted. Once the American forces arrived in the supposed area of rebellion they found “the people unprovided with military stores, destitute of a warlike spirit, and unwilling as well as unprepared to resist” the Mexican authorities. He admitted that American forces had an easy time taking over these lethargic peoples but they did so without any help from the locals. This meant the captured provinces of California and New Mexico were “conquered by the sword.” That was not the “proper” way to expand and was cause for serious alarm.<sup>358</sup>

Furthermore the once lethargic people started to resist this unprovoked intrusion. The American people had been wronged, this was not a region in turmoil crying out for American assistance; it was wanton invasion. Simply put the American government “has invaded and conquered Santa Fe and California without any cause of offense against the people of these

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<sup>358</sup> *Boston Journal* as it appeared in the *National Intelligencer* June 5, 1847.

provinces.” Perhaps there were grievances against the Mexican government but the inhabitants of these conquered regions were innocent of any wrongdoing. Eerily foreshadowing later American attempts at “liberating” benighted regions, the author stated that “whenever we have actual possession of a city or province, by a sufficient military force, the people are submissive and respectful...but the moment our troops are withdrawn the slumbering volcano bursts forth.” The author heaped scorn not upon the rebellious subjects but on the American military for its harsh response to revolution. He claims that these people, who are only fighting to preserve their homes, are termed “brigands” or “assassins.” Any land that they own is confiscated and in many unfortunate cases the revolutionary is “hanged” or “scourged in the public streets.” He too was very interested in how history would record such horrors and predicted that its “page of history...will be a disgrace not only to this country but to the age in which we live.”<sup>359</sup>

Such conduct, once again, smacked of a European influence. This author chose Czarist Russia as the most appropriate comparison nation. The oppressed peoples of Poland, he argued, were very much like those who lived in the American southwest. He claimed the way in which the Russians put down a Polish rebellion was as “cruel and inhuman to an extent unparalleled in the history of mankind; but it falls short of our treatment of the people of New Mexico.” The difference, he argued, was that the Czar inherited the Polish territory which stood in stark contrast to the unprovoked American invasion. Worse still “we have not yet got through the first chapter in the history of its evils. We fear there are other and fearful ones to follow.”<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>359</sup>Ibid; These partisan activities played a much larger role in the war than is normally attributed. Not only did the insurrectionaries attack American troops but they also fought against the Mexican government and sometimes each other. Eager to clamp down on these revolts many Mexican elites found themselves accepting the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. These lesser known events are clearly and masterfully explained by Erving Levinson in *Wars within War: Mexican Guerrillas, Domestic Elites and the United States of America 1846-1848*.

<sup>360</sup> *Boston Journal* as it appeared in the *National Intelligencer* June 5, 1847.

His comparison to Russia was specifically and carefully chosen to rile up his readers. The Russians were an often maligned people in the American press who were frequently portrayed as backwards and barbarous. Stating that American conduct was even worse than Russia's was sure to catch people's attention. Yet again this editor's viewpoint did not fit neatly into the pro or anti-expansion category. It was perfectly acceptable to obtain territory and allow for admission into the Union so long as the regions inhabitants wished for such a deal. The blatant and uncalled for invasion of territory, whose inhabitants were not pro-American, was a clear violation of this principle. Americans were travelling down a dangerous European-like road and if they continued down this path they would exceed the Old World as the bastion of aggression and tyranny. Even more importantly was the author's lack of vitriol for slavery. The paper was published in the abolitionist haven of Boston. Yet the author steered clear of taking on that large elephant in the room. He still opposed the war and the subsequent expansion which significantly sophisticates the idea that Northerners opposed the war because of slavery.

Some editors chose to draw parallels to antiquity in their efforts to criticize the war. An editorial in the *St. Louis Daily New Era* revealed the incompatibility of democracy with warfare. The editor explained that "war is the natural enemy and destroyer of written constitutions and liberty." It turned Presidents, who are forced to govern through compromise and consensus, into "commanders" who are supposed to be obeyed without question. The author was uneasy with the principle that the "highest virtue of a soldier is obedience" and felt such blind devotion stood in stark contrast to American principles of liberty and freedom. He clearly outlined the issue "determined no longer to be thwarted and perplexed by constitutional restrictions and Congressional obstinacy, he [Polk] no longer relies upon his powers and influences as *Civil President of the United States*, but as *commander of the army*, he raises men and money by his

own inherent prerogative.” Thus the Mexican War profoundly changed the American system, turning President Polk into a despot and participating citizens into unwitting automatons who are forced to obey. In war, Polk has been unilaterally allowed to do previously unthinkable actions such as “incorporate with our country conquered foreign states” create a new political system for these provinces and even turn them into Citizens of the United States without ever consulting his constituents.<sup>361</sup>

He claimed the despot Polk was using to war to illicitly line his own pockets as revenue from the war “is not to go to the Treasury of the United States, nor to be accounted for by Congress.” Instead, this wealth would go to “Commander Polk” and expended for military purposes, with such actions again being done without the public or Congress’ consent. Even more troubling was Polk’s tendency to rely upon unsavory elements to do his bidding. Allowing Fremont to hand pick his men and enter California prior to the opening of hostilities meant that he was free from direct supervision and operating outside the bounds of American jurisdiction. He also feared that raising a “battalion of Mormons” would prove troublesome as they too operated under little oversight and were promised to be discharged in California “with arms in their hands.” The author was seriously disturbed that the power to raise and pay for armies had been usurped from Congress. The President was clearly overstepping his authority.<sup>362</sup>

The editor felt his fears justifiable as a similarly great Republic once went down such a path, ancient Rome. Their Emperors wielded absolute power and had troops loyal not to the nation but to themselves. He remarked that Caesar had performed analogous actions just as Polk was doing such as such as sidestepping congressional power and utilizing the nation’s

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<sup>361</sup> *St. Louis Daily New Era* as it appeared in the *National Intelligencer* June 5, 1847.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*

troops for his own purposes. In Rome, the Emperor had officers loyal only to him who would perform his will. The author found that adventurers like Fremont were dangerous as they owed their allegiance to Polk and no one else. He concluded by lamenting that “it is to be feared that that portion of history is not forgotten by our lawless rulers.” The biggest issue at stake for this author was the apparent usurpation of power by Polk and not necessarily the pretense for starting it or the supposed atrocities taking place. He also had a problem with expanding into the provinces of California and New Mexico but not for the usual reasons. Typically opposition arose regarding the justification for war or its treatment of citizens but here the author was upset because the public and Congress had no say in the matter. If the public will determined that seizing the provinces were lawful then so be it but the fact that Polk was making such important decisions alone is what truly rankled him.<sup>363</sup>

Even after most of the fighting subsided in Mexico, disagreement continued to rage back in the United States. The editor of the *New York Herald*, James Gordon Bennett, initially a staunch supporter of Polk, expressed conflicted opinions over what to do with Mexico. He claimed that the bulk of the American public were in the midst of debating “the annexation of the whole of Mexico to the United States.” He was convinced that this topic was the “great question of the century.” The ramifications of this decision would be of “greater magnitude than any question that ever came before a free people...it is equally important as that of the revolution of 1776 itself.” The question was not only about enlarging territory but in what moral path the United States would head in. Considering that the United States was the protector of freedom

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

and liberty such a decision could give “a new direction to the history of civilization, in the new world, and even in the old.”<sup>364</sup>

Although Bennett argued that the majority of Americans were for annexation he still felt the issue should be debated. Merely absorbing Mexico after a war was barbaric and imperialistic. Doing so would mean the United States followed “the beaten track of conqueror’s in all ages of the world-The Persians, the Carthaginians, the Grecians, Romans, Goths, Franks, Normans and the British.” Once again a reference to the British was not anecdotal. For Bennett and many other Americans the British represented all that was wrong and despotic in the current world. While comparing the United States to any European nation was normally considered an insult, being like the British was particularly galling. The days of Spanish, Russian and French dominance had passed. Great Britain was still the premier imperialist power. While their military abilities were to be respected, their political institutions and imperialist ways were to be despised. The author admitted that “the splendor, the magnificence, and the brilliancy of annexing the whole of that great republic to the United States, with all its natural and artificial wealth” made a union desirable but it was not worth the risk of becoming like the Europeans. It is very interesting to note here his referral to Mexico as a “great republic.” The people of Mexico were often portrayed as lazy, papist, chaotic and often insurrectionary. The government was seen as inefficient, arrogant and wasteful. When mentioned in the abstract, however, the nation becomes a “great republic” brimming with resources. Such an abstract characterization was nearly always followed with a rationale as to why no annexation should occur. A sister “great republic” should be respected and assisted, never absorbed. The Mexicans were inspired

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<sup>364</sup> *New York Herald* February 6, 1848.



by the American Revolution and its promise of equality and self-governance. The United States was supposed to be the embodiment of such principles not the agent who removed them.<sup>365</sup>

True to form, Bennett then proceeded to explain the benefits of not annexing all of Mexico. Instead of absorption the United States should take her victorious army back home and bask in “moral magnificence.” This would demonstrate to the world that not only did the United States possess a first class military but a code of conduct to match it. Bennett did not think small and hoped that by “confining ourselves, within our own natural limits, and, with our own undisputed population and power, we may create a new national code of morality for all nations that are to follow hereafter.” More importantly such an action would “astonish the people of Europe, with our magnanimity, our national victories and moral self-denial.” For Bennett it was crucial for the United States to be able to stand tall in the world community. Anything that resembled Old World imperialism was to be avoided. He exhibited no problem with the war’s dubious justifications, rumors of anti-Catholic practices, or the growing guerrilla attacks against American forces. He also had no issue with the war itself as it served its purpose for “chastisement.” Now that the lesson had been given, however, the United States must have the moral fortitude to refrain from becoming an imperial power. Maintaining the moral high ground meant no absorption of new territory and instead a chance to revel in its own sense of accomplishment.<sup>366</sup>

This growing disillusionment in the United States, in part, forced Polk to finally accept an armistice. The hostilities had effectively ended with the capture of Mexico City in September of 1847 but Polk neglected to end the war until he extracted the most land possible from Mexico.

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<sup>365</sup>Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

Dissent against the war and the “all of Mexico” policy helped him reconsider his position. A solution presented itself when Nicholas Trist, ambassador to Mexico, offered Polk the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in February of 1848. It stipulated that Mexico would be absolved of any debt to the United States in exchange for the current day states of California, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada and parts of Colorado and Wyoming. In addition the United States would pay Mexico \$15 million. The Treaty passed through the Senate 38-14, but delighted few Americans. Some expansionistic hawks felt Polk should have held out for more territory while many others felt any cession of land was unfair.<sup>367</sup>

Not long after the treaty went into effect, some Americans began to have buyer’s, or more appropriately conqueror’s remorse, over their new provinces. The editor of the *North American and United States Gazette*, from Philadelphia, had little issue with the war itself but feared the acquisition of territory would bring about an unexpected burden. In an article entitled “Our Savages in Mexico” he exposed Americans to a looming issue that came with their newly acquired land, Native Americans. He claimed the entire southwest, including Texas, was overrun with Apache and Comanche Indians the “principal of the robber-tribes, the very Huns and Vandals of the Mexican world.” The author explained that while both tribes operated out of different areas they both enjoyed sending out hunting parties to kill Mexicans and were “uncivilized.” Normally, the “degradations” of the Indians did not interest this editor but with the annexation of Texas and treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo finalized, he regretfully concluded that these “savages” were now “American tribes.” This meant that they now resided “within our American frontiers, subjects, necessarily, to our American power and authority; they are *our*

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<sup>367</sup>Foos, 153-155; Horsman, 238-245. An interesting aside, John Quincy Adams one of the leaders of the opposition movement died on the floor of Congress while the treaty was being negotiated. For more information see Foos *A short, offhand, killing affair*, 154.

subjects-or dependents, or protégés, or whatever we may choose to call them-our Indians, our savages, our robbers and murderers; for whose acts we are responsible , and whom we are bound to restrain from all such outrages.” This editor wanted pro-expansionists to understand that the newly won territories hid a dark secret. For decades, he argued, the savages had contented themselves with hunting down Mexicans, what would happen now? Would they turn their murderous ways toward Americans or be content to cross the border and strike the Mexicans. Either scenario was unpalatable to the author. If Americans were killed by the “savages” then a new war would be in order. Conversely, if they continued to strike at the Mexicans, the United States was obligated, by treaty, to curtail such actions.<sup>368</sup>

The author proceeded then to give a specific breakdown of the treaty. It read, in part, that the United States was obligated to “prevent” any such warlike actions “and that when they cannot be prevented, they shall be punished.” Furthermore the United States was expected to be diligent in the matter and exact a high toll on the perpetrators and treat the incursion as if it were “committed within its own territory, against its own citizens.” Such strong parameters were no doubt inspired by the Seminole raids originating from Spanish Florida in the early nineteenth century. This demonstrates once again that the United States wished to distance themselves from any comparison to Europe. Unlike the lethargic and lazy Spanish, Americans would “control” their “subjects.”<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> *North American and United States Gazette* April 12, 1849. According to historian Brian DeLay the issue of Native American raids was of far larger importance than previously imagined. The American duty to actively prevent Indian raids into Mexico was a demanded provision by the Mexican ambassador and as DeLay notes one of the few articles that benefited them. For more information see Brian DeLay’s *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S. Mexican War*.

<sup>369</sup> *North American and United States Gazette* April 12, 1849.

The threat from further Indian raids was also more than idle chatter. The editor included several brief quotes from various tribal chiefs demonstrating their bloodthirsty ways. One Apache chief, upon allying with American forces to push out the Mexicans, claimed “we care nothing for land, we fight for the laws of Montezuma and *for food*. The Mexicans are rascals; we hate and will kill them all.” The editor feared that acquiring all this new territory may be pyrrhic as these savages would prove extraordinarily troublesome. He claimed “it will prove no easy task to bridle such a people” who are only interested in food and killing. The author insisted that the Comanche were similarly bloodthirsty who reserved “the right to make war with Mexico whenever they please.” Worse still this chief considered his tribe “as a sovereign power, having as ample a right to make war or peace as either Mexico or the United States.” The editor determined that the Indians “inborn hatred of Mexicans” coupled with “high notions of their national independence and sovereignty” would make it “difficult to bring these fierce brigands to their senses.”<sup>370</sup>

The only solution then was to compel the “savages” so that the United States could live up to their treaty obligations. He argued that Americans had to “fight them-reduce them- bring them under the yoke-compel them to be civilized-to change their whole natures-to refrain forever more, from the delightful privilege of hunting Mexicans.” The editor envisioned this crackdown to be “no trifling matter” and would require “numerous military posts, established and supplied at great expense along the whole vast new frontier.” Unfortunately, he felt the “expenses and blood arising from the performance of this duty” would prove that “the country has paid-or is to pay, a considerably higher price than has been ordinarily calculated on.” This article epitomizes

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<sup>370</sup> *North American and United States Gazette* April 12, 1849. The Comanche chief’s insistence on autonomy and his people’s power supports Pekka Hamalainen’s assertion that the Comanche were just as much an imperial power as the United States. For more information see Pekka Hamalainen *The Comanche Empire*.

how many Americans viewed Indians. Negotiation with them was out of the question and the very idea of seeing them as anything more than “subjects” was laughable. The broad stroke characterization of the Indian also helped justify even further why Americans were special. Unlike the Indians who “care nothing for land” and enjoyed fighting and killing, Americans would carefully utilize the land and only fight when absolutely necessary. This article also demonstrates the incredible lengths Americans would go to avoid being compared to Europeans. The Natives could not possibly be much of a serious threat to Americans but they could prove to be dangerous in tarnishing the image of the United States. Americans would protect their weaker southern neighbors from “our own savages” quite unlike the unscrupulous and often incompetent Europeans. Most importantly this article helps to further validate the idea that expansion was a complicated affair. This author neither deplored nor applauded the recent territorial acquisition but instead wished to remind readers of an upcoming problem.<sup>371</sup>

Some Americans, regardless of how they felt about expansion, sought to profit from the United States’ aggressive foreign policy. The *Tri-Weekly Flag and Advertiser* from Montgomery, Alabama printed a short advertisement for a new map available for purchase. The editor claimed it to be “the best and most complete map we have ever seen. It is also very handsomely executed, colored and varnished, and is as ornamental as useful.” The map depicted the “whole of the United States territory, from British America to the Gulf of Mexico, without a single break.” Also included in this imagined empire was the “island of Cuba.” In addition to showcasing the vastness of the soon-to-be-enlarged United States, the map detailed “the

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<sup>371</sup> *North American and United States Gazette* April 12, 1849.

locations of the different Indian tribes.” The four foot flag was available in Montgomery for “the low rate of Five Dollars.”<sup>372</sup>

Ultimately, Americans were of many minds about expansion and the Mexican-American war. They exhibited a wide variety of viewpoints, each with a distinct “destiny” for the United States. For most Americans the war failed to confirm their version of the nations “destiny.” Ardent expansionists wanted more land while some fervent anti-expansionists felt any acquisition of territory was too much. Some abolitionists were disappointed that so much territory was annexed and dreaded slavery would now take root, while others were upset that more wasn’t taken in order to secure additional Free States. While some applauded the military for teaching the Mexicans a lesson in “chastisement” they worried that violent partisan activities would continue for years. Others were pleased in the amount of territory acquired but dreaded they inherited too many troublesome Indians. Some abhorred the unwarranted invasion and felt the only “destiny” that awaited them was punishment. In the era of Manifest Destiny, there was no such thing.

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<sup>372</sup> *Tri-Weekly Flag and Advertiser* April 15, 1848.

## Conclusion

As argued in this dissertation there was no universal consensus among Americans regarding expansionism during the first half of the nineteenth century. Not only were there many Americans who opposed expansion but the rationale for doing so was also multifaceted. The same held true for pro-expansionists. The arguments they used to justify why the United States should acquire territory were similarly complex. This rhetoric, written for and sometimes by the “common” man, was exceedingly diverse and substantially more nuanced than previously thought.

While on the surface it may appear that opposition to expansion prior to 1850 was ineffective, that was not necessarily the case. In some instances such as in Florida and Texas, opponents to expansion delayed the process of annexation. In other, more extreme cases, domestic opposition to expansion assisted in ensuring that the “All of Mexico”, all of Oregon and annexation of Canada movements failed. While British strength had much to do with the latter examples domestic opposition also played a role. Most crucially, the opponents to expansion were an integral part of the debate. While some of their advice and ideas were not adopted, their viewpoints were disseminated, read and discussed throughout the nation.

Acknowledging that such a debate existed brings about a re-conceptualization of American society during the first half of the nineteenth-century. There was no grand expansionist strategy or ideology that Americans followed. Some Americans were united in their desire to see America expand, but disagreed on why such expansion was necessary. Opponents to expansion also differed on their rationale. This study also confirmed that the American public was neither ignorant nor misled by elites regarding expansion. The “common”

man was aware of a multitude of opinions and sometimes offered up his own viewpoints. It was clear to him that there was nothing “manifest” about the nation’s destiny. Every territory acquired was carefully and thoroughly discussed. Nothing was taken for granted.

These wildly divergent viewpoints first became evident during the Louisiana Purchase, the United States’ first major territorial acquisition. Proponents for the annexation of this large swathe of territory utilized a multitude of justifications. One of the more common of these justifications was that the United States must acquire the territory to remove the possibility of another European power taking it. Depictions of the region’s economic potential were overshadowed by concerns of national security. Once the inept Spanish lost control of the Louisiana Territory, many proponents insisted the United States grab it so that the burgeoning nation wouldn’t be surrounded by more “active” neighbors. Opponents argued that democratic institutions were most effective on a smaller, more localized scale. They preferred to focus the nation’s energies on internal improvements over westward expansion. Although Jefferson got quite a bargain, not all Americans were convinced it was a good deal.

Debate over expansion continued in heated fashion in regard to the Spanish Floridas. In this instance the main piece of contention revolved around the issue of legitimacy. Whether or not the territory was worth acquiring was overshadowed by the question of whether or not the United States had legal right to it. Americans, both pro and anti-expansionist, agreed that the Spanish authorities were lazy, inefficient and impotent. Some pro-expansionists argued that Florida was a part of the Louisiana Purchase and thus already belonged to the United States. Spanish inadequacy merely made the process of acquiring West Florida easier. The movement of Americans into the area was deemed acceptable, expansionists argued, since the region was already owned by the United States. Opponents found such actions outrageous and felt the



United States had clearly overstepped its boundaries. They argued that the United States had no rightful claim to the territory and thus allowing armed Americans to flood into Florida could be constituted as an act of war. These filibusters often met with derision in the press and were seen as uncouth adventurers. General Jackson's later incursion met with similar debate. Opponents did not have much of a problem with the territory of Florida itself but rather in the heavy handed ways in which it was being pursued.

A similar debate erupted in regard to Texas. The major question was once again of legitimacy. After Mexico won her independence the debate shifted. Although issues of legitimacy were still in play the rhetoric shifted. Pro-expansionist claimed American settlers to Texas were being mistreated and oppressed by Papist loving Mexicans. Liberty and freedom itself were at stake. Much of the pro-expansionist rhetoric played up this shift. Settlers were uplifting the region and spreading the wonders of democracy. While early expansionists often played up the importance of national defense, now expansion was portrayed as more of a benevolent good. Anti-expansionists rejected such explanations. Instead, they painted many settlers and filibusters as pathetic ruffians who were incapable of finding success back in the States. They charged that settlement had less to do with expanding liberty and more to do with a simple opportunity for economic success. Opponents claimed this success only came at the expense of the original Mexican inhabitants. Although Texas would eventually obtain its independence it did so without any official aid or assistance from the American government. When the question of whether or not to admit Texas into the United States came up the debate shifted once again. Opponents largely refrained from attacking the legality of expansion and instead attacked the dangers of allowing the plague of slavery to expand. The deliberations over Texas reiterate the notion that Americans were of many minds about expansion.

The American relationship with her oldest and strongest enemy, Great Britain, was also a subject of much contentious debate. Expansion into British controlled Canada unfolded differently than the other endeavors studied. The vast majority of expansionists saw the conquest of Canada merely as a military move designed to help win the war of 1812. Actually annexing the territory was a question that was still up in the air. Opponents of the war argued the War of 1812 was a blatant and ill-conceived attempt to snatch Canada. Attempts to acquire Oregon also fell short. Some proponents sought to control all territory up to Alaska and offered incendiary anti-British rhetoric. Interestingly, there were very few Americans who outright opposed acquiring Oregon but many advocated for caution when dealing with the British. This group felt the United States would be best served by staying neutral and allowing the province to, in time, revolt and then annex peacefully. The fact that the British were an “active” and militarily powerful rival helps explain why the Oregon Question was ultimately settled without bloodshed.

Justifying the acquisition of California took on a variety of permutations. Some Americans advocated that California should be acquired in order to deny its important coastal ports to the British in a preemptive strike. Others felt the soil could be better utilized by American settlers than by the Mexicans already living there. Some even argued the territory would be the perfect dumping ground for freed African-Americans. Once again relatively few Americans were opposed to the *concept* of acquiring California but did object when the United States began using increasingly violent and heavy handed ways to force annexation. Once war was declared against Mexico the debate ramped up in intensity. Some pro-expansionists claimed the war was to merely “chastise” the Mexicans and that any land gained would just be a bonus. Opponents railed against the conduct of the administration and claimed the conflict was just

another shameless attempt at conquest. Once details of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo were released a new salvo of opinions erupted. Some were upset that more land was not taken, others that far too much was acquired. Some were content with the amount of territory gained but feared it was full of hostile Indians who would cause decades of unrest.

After the Mexican-American war the debate over expansion took on a decidedly political and one-dimensional tone. The focus on slavery had been gradually becoming more and more prevalent over the years but by the 1850s the debate over its extension had taken center stage. The debate in the newspapers would continue to rage just as ferociously as it had done but now with a categorically regional and political bias. This perilous and contentious road to the Civil War has been admirably addressed by such works as David Potter's *Impending Crisis* and Steven Woodworth's *Manifest Destinies*.<sup>373</sup>

Most importantly, this dissertation demonstrates, by surveying the mass communication medium of the age, newspapers, that the present continental borders were the result of a number of ideas, opinions, plans and plots. Some succeeded, most failed, but all were vociferously debated and discussed by the "common" American. The actions, agendas, and viewpoints of countless overlooked citizens were instrumental in shaping American society. America's destiny during the first half of the nineteenth-century was not preordained, America's destiny was manifestly uncertain.

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<sup>373</sup> Pro-expansionist forces would not be content with the spoils of the Mexican war either. Lacking arms with ardent slavery advocates these adventurers began looking farther south. Central and South American countries were often seen as ripe for the taking. Offshoot political groups such as the Knights of the Golden Circle, who advocated the spreading of slavery to Latin America, often by any means needed, began appearing across the nation. Most of these individuals were full of bluster but some ardent adventurers went South in search of fame and fortune. The lives of these filibusters, like William Walker, are wonderfully explored in works like Charles Brown's *Agents of Manifest Destiny* and Amy Greenberg's *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire*.

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