up his camp within twenty-four hours and to retire beyond the Nueces River, and in the event of his failure to comply with these demands announced that arms, and arms alone, must decide the question. But no open act of hostility was committed until the 24th of April. On that day General Arista, who had succeeded to the command of the Mexican forces, communicated to General Taylor that "he considered hostilities commenced and should prosecute them." A party of dragoons of 63 men and officers were on the same day dispatched from the American camp up the Rio del Norte, on its left bank, to ascertain whether the Mexican troops had crossed or were preparing to cross the river, "became engaged with a large body of these troops, and after a short affair, in which some 16 were killed and wounded, appear to have been surrounded and compelled to surrender."

The grievous wrongs perpetrated by Mexico upon our citizens throughout a long period of years remain unredressed, and solemn treaties pledging her public faith for this redress have been disregarded. A government either unable or unwilling to enforce the execution of such treaties fails to perform one of its plainest duties.

Our commerce with Mexico has been almost annihilated. It was formerly highly beneficial to both nations, but our merchants have been deterred from prosecuting it by the system of outrage and extortion which the Mexican authorities have pursued against them, whilst their appeals through their own Government for indemnity have been made in vain. Our forbearance has gone to such an extreme as to be mistaken in its character. Had we acted with vigor in repelling the insults and redressing the injuries inflicted by Mexico at the commencement, we should doubtless have escaped all the difficulties in which we are now involved.

Instead of this, however, we have been exerting our best efforts to propitiate her good will. Upon the pretext that Texas, a nation as independent as herself, thought proper to unite its destinies with our own she has affected to believe that we have severed her rightful territory, and in official proclamations and manifestoes has repeatedly threatened to make war upon us for the purpose of reconquering Texas. In the meantime we have tried every effort at reconciliation. The cup of forbearance had been exhausted even before the recent information from the frontier of the Del Norte. But now, after reiterated menaces, Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil. She has proclaimed that hostilities have commenced, and that the two nations are now at war.

As war exists, and, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of Mexico herself, we are called upon by every consideration of duty and patriotism to vindicate with decision the honor, the rights, and the interests of our country.

3. A Mexican Assesses the War, 1848

It is difficult to write with sincerity and impartiality about the great events that have been happening here when, aside from the factions which convulse the citizenry and disturb the inner peace of families, these same families find themselves infiltrated

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From *The View from Chapultepec: Mexican Writers on the Mexican-American War*, ed. Cecil Robinson (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), pp. 58–59, 64–73.

by an espionage that aims its fire from within private society, covering itself with a hypocritical mask, which, when it falls, has already produced the ruin of a family. Such is the position in which Mexicans find themselves today. Their natural enemies are the officers and soldiers of the North American army which dominates them through martial law, but also their enemies are the ungrateful foreigners of other nations whose only desire is the gold from our mines. Enemies too are the horde of citizens who have acted as guides to the American army. As legitimate descendants of the ancient Tlaxcalans, they glory in their immorality and maintain the same hatred as did those who aided in the taking of Mexico City while in the service of Hernan Cortés. . . . Such is the position in which he, who now aspires to write this history, finds himself. *Nevertheless*, he will do it, because truth prevails over terrorism and imposture. Truth is for all times; it is from God, and not even the Lord himself can make what really happened cease from having happened. . . .

The complaints of Mexico against the United States before the annexation of Texas are the following:

The introduction of troops from the United States army in the course of Mexico's campaign in Texas. A considerable number of cavalry under General Gaines crossed the Sabine. This was protested by our minister in Washington. The public enlistment and military equipping of troops, which has been done on various occasions in the port city of New Orleans, in order to invade Mexico through Texas and other points, despite the fact that the United States maintained diplomatic relations with Mexico and the guarantees of treaties of peace and commerce remained in force. This also has been the subject of altercations between the two governments. Mexico has never had the forthrightness to ask of the United States that it lend its assistance against Texas, but Mexico certainly has had the right to demand of the United States that it maintain absolute neutrality. The above mentioned palpable actions demonstrate that the United States has not done so.

As for the recognition of the independence of Texas by other nations, there is nothing unusual in that. The various powers recognize de facto governments, but that in no way takes away from Mexico the right to recover, if it were possible, the territory which it had lost. The independence of Mexico was equally recognized by the European powers and by the United States itself, but nevertheless Spain did not recognize Mexico until a great deal of time had passed, and it made an attempt in the year 1829 to invade Mexico without opposition from any nation.

Now, if Texas were to be considered strong and capable of backing up its declaration of independence, why did it attach itself to the United States? Why did it seek this method to get the United States to come to its support in Mexico? This is just one more proof that Texas cannot be compared to other nations, including the United States, that have declared their independence and by deed have been able to sustain it and triumph.

As for the annexation, the person who is writing this piece was in the United States when these events were happening and was a witness to the fact that the greater part of the press in the northern states clamored strongly against this step, calling those who belonged to the annexation party thieves and usurpers, and setting forth strong and well-founded reasons, which at this point I will not repeat in order to prevent this exposition from becoming too lengthy. If the wise and honorable Henry Clay had attained the seat of the presidency, would the annexation of Texas have

come to pass? Certainly not. The bringing in of Texas was the result of the intrigues and machinations of the Loco Foco party, and that which is done by such a farcical group cannot be considered rational or just.

The question of annexation was much debated in the Senate, and only by one vote (I believe that of Mr. Benton) was the measure passed.

In the Texas Convention [which voted for annexation] the majority present consisted of persons from the Southern states, notably partisan, and the newspapers [presumably of the United States] published their names and inveighed against this intrigue.

Thus matters have arrived at the state in which they are now, because evil parties and evil men, of which there are as many in this country as in the United States, have operated according to their partisan tendencies and have not attended to the well-being and justice of both republics. Can you deny this, American citizens, if you are not blind? Will you not confess that Mexico has suffered more than any other nation? The act of annexation was the equivalent of taking away from Mexico a considerable part of its territory, which had, rightly or wrongly, carried on a dispute with Mexico, but in no way can a nation be construed as friendly which has mixed itself in this affair to the point that Mexico has been deprived of its rights. Did not our minister in Washington protest against the annexation? Did he not declare that it would be a hostile act which would merit a declaration of war? Who, then, provoked the war—Mexico which only defended itself and protested, or the United States which became aggressors and scorned Mexico, taking advantage of its weakness and of its internecine agitations.

The administration of General Herrera, which was in fact one of the best that the country has had and that history will in time do justice to, had arranged the affair in a satisfactory manner to the considerable advantage of both Mexico and the United States, because the administration, composed of illustrious people, looked forward to the future, considering questions not only in terms of politics but from the vantage point of humanity as a whole and in particular of this generation of Mexicans whose fate has been to suffer throughout the last thirty years the lashes and calamities of war. The dignity of the government demanded, in effect, that the [American] naval forces withdraw, which in fact they did. Was it the administration of General Herrera that broke its word? Surely not, and the U.S. commissioner [John Slidell] was not received because the administration had changed. In effect, a cowardly general without honor or patriotism [Mariano Paredes] turned his back to the enemy while at the same time proclaiming a war that he had no intention of waging. Thus, like the villain he was, he destroyed the most legitimate and most popular government that Mexico has had. But I ask: Was this a failure on the part of the nation? Can it be blamed for some of this? And I must answer: Did not the nation manifest in all possible ways its displeasure, to the point of overthrowing this intrusive and evil government? Does not that general pine away in exile, one which he imposed upon himself in order to escape the vengeance of the nation?

Up to this point things could still have been arranged through diplomatic channels, and the rights of Mexico could have been guaranteed by a treaty, but the Loco Foco party was absolutely determined that Mexico should not only suffer the loss of its territory but it should bear the shame and humiliation of having its territory torn from it by force of arms. The sending of troops into Mexican territory doomed

all moderation, and Mexico was left with no other recourse but to engage in battle. The territory between the Nueces and Rio Grande rivers neither by fact nor by law could have belonged to Texas. Not by fact because it was not populated by Texans. For ten years there existed only one little ranch in Corpus Christi, inhabited by Mr. Kyney and Mr. Aubry [sic], who had served as double agents, having had dealings with the Texans and with various Mexican generals, using them for the purpose of carrying on contraband trade. Nor did this territory belong to Texas by law because all this coast, through a territorial division recognized by all the nation and by the Texas colonists themselves, has belonged to the state of Tamaulipas. Thus, from the point of view of the Mexican government, the occupying of Corpus Christi by troops of the United States amounted to the same thing as if they had occupied the port of Tampico. In every way it was a violation of all treaties, of friendly relations, and of good faith. I wish now that you would judge these events with a Mexican heart and would ask yourself: Which has been the aggressor country? What would your government have done in the controversy with England over the Maine border if that nation had brought in troops, large or small in number? Without any doubt your government would have declared war and would not have entertained any propositions put forth until the armed force had evacuated the territory.

The war began because there was no other course, and Mexico will always be able to present a serene front before the world and maintain its innocence despite whatever misfortunes might befall it. . . .

The events and future prospects of the present war are prejudicial for Mexico, but nonetheless so are they for the United States. Can there be a comparison between the domestic joys of illuminating the streets of the United States on the one hand and on the other of the immense waste of sacrificing peaceful Germans, Irishmen, and native-born Americans who might otherwise be tranquilly at home, enjoying the harvests of the fertile fields of the North? What peace of mind can the United States enjoy while invading and destroying a nation that far from having offended it has clasped it to its bosom as a brother? Could not the Americans have availed themselves, through peaceful means, of the gold and silver of Mexico? Do you believe that the American nation will not lose, even though it triumphs over us completely, in the poor repute that it will have deserved among the nations of Europe?

Mexico finds itself in this contest absolutely alone. Spain was helped by England, and the Duke of Wellington with a powerful army routed the hosts of Napoleon. The United States had General Lafayette and the fleets and armies of France. The most powerful nations of Europe gathered together to defeat Napoleon. Mexico is alone, but that does not matter, nor do the reverses which it has suffered as long as it maintains its constancy. That is what made the United States triumph in its war of independence, and that is what will make us triumph. I imagine that the American army will triumph over Mexico, but what will happen if it cannot find anybody to make peace with?

It is necessary that you keep these considerations in mind and that you be persuaded that Mexico will prefer ruin before treating for peace while enemy forces still remain on Mexico soil.

The lower classes of Mexico generally believe that you are heretics, barbarians, and bloody-minded types. That is an error like the one that persists in the United States where we are judged as being the same as barbarians. The educated people of the Mexican Republic that know your history and have traveled and lived in the

North judge the country with a proper impartiality, respect your human and democratic institutions, appreciate the industrious character of the people, and rightfully admire a nation that in a short time has become powerful, but at the same time these Mexicans have become seriously alarmed about the future fate of Mexico as they remember certain tendencies which are proved by events in that nation's history.

Before the Americans began to advance, the French held Louisiana, Canada, and parts of the banks of the Mississippi. The French population, one might say, formed a strip that encircled the coastal area where the American colonies had established themselves.

What has happened to the French race? It has almost totally disappeared and has been supplanted by the English race, invaders by character and ambitious of possessing more territory than they need.

History records that in addition to the sword, gunfire, and the dagger, which they used against the Indians, they practiced the infernal device of introducing smallpox among them.

Did they not send police dogs against the Seminole Indians to destroy them? And finally uproot them from their Florida lands to transplant them on the remote banks of the Missouri?

As a strange anomaly in the freest country in the world, slaves are sold, and the most beautiful women in the world, some of them well educated and amiable, are looked down upon because they are quadroons and are therefore irremediably condemned to dishonor and prostitution.

Does the United States need Texas? Is it not true that fifteen or twenty million more inhabitants could fit into the territory of the Union? Once they have Texas, does not that seem enough? And they still want three more provinces and California? Does not the press of the United States daily vociferate that the country should acquire those territories? They talk to us of peace, and they take California. They talk to us of peace, and they send expeditions to New Mexico and Chihuahua. They talk to us of peace, and the troops of General Taylor, according to his own admission, commit atrocities in the provinces of the north.

Thinking men do not believe the same things as do the lower classes, but they entertain more serious and well-grounded fears and consider the possibility of an interminable and profound war between the races, a war in which Mexico cannot yield without evident danger to its independence. These considerations pose still more obstacles to the peace. . . .

4. Antislavery Congressmen Concoct the Wilmot Proviso to Halt Slavery's Advance, 1846

Provided, That, as an express and fundamental condition to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic by Mexico by the United States, by virtue of any treaty which may be negotiated between them, and to the use by the Executive of the moneys herein appropriated, neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of said territory, except for crime, whereof the party shall first be duly convicted.

From *Congressional Globe*, 29th Congress, 1st session, p. 1217.

the roar of the waters is heard; and if a few short-sighted ones seek to withstand it, the surge, terrible in its fury, will sweep them too in the ruin.

6. Abolitionist Frederick Douglass Decries the War, 1846

London, August 18, 1846

My Dear Friends:

. . . I confess I feel sad, and sick at heart, by the present posture of political affairs in the United States. The spirit of slavery reigns triumphant throughout all the land. Every step in the onward march of political events is marked with blood—innocent blood; shed, too, in the cause of slavery. The war with Mexico rages; the green earth is drenched with warm blood, oozing out from human hearts; the air is darkened with smoke; the heavens are shaken by the terrible roar of the cannon; the groans and cries of the wounded and dying disturb the ear of God. Yet how few in that land care one farthing for it, or will move one inch to arrest and remove the cause of this horrible state of things? I am sad; I am sick; the whole land is cursed, if not given over to destruction. Massachusetts, the brightest of every other state, is now but the tool of Texas.

Texas may be said to give laws to the whole Union. She leads the way in plunder and murder; and Massachusetts, with all New England, follow in the crusade like hungry sharks in the bloody wake of a Brazilian slaveship. What a spectacle for men and angels!—Gov. Briggs [of Massachusetts] issuing his order to send the sons of those who fell in the cause of freedom on Bunker Hill, to fight the battle of Slavery in Mexico! Gov. Briggs, the teetotaller! Gov. Briggs, the Baptist! issuing his order to raise troops in Massachusetts, to establish with fire and sword the man-blasting and soul-damning system of slavery! Who would have thought it? And yet it was to be expected. The deed was done long ago. The foundation of this frowning monument of infamy was laid when the States were first declared the *United States*. This is but another link around your necks of the galling chain which your fathers placed about the heels of my race. It is the legitimate fruit of compromise—of attempting a union of freedom with slavery. . . .

7. James Russell Lowell Satirizes the War, 1848

A letter from Mr. Ezekiel Biglow of Jaalem . . . inclosing a poem of his son, Mr. Hosea Biglow

Thrash away, you'll *hev* to rattle
On them kittle drums o' yourn,—
'Taint a knowin' kind o' cattle
Thet is ketched with mouldy corn;

From *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, October 15, 1846.

From *The Biglow Papers* (Cambridge: George Nichols, 1848), pp. 3–7.

To abuse ye, an' to score ye,
An' to plunder ye like sin.

Aint it cute to see a Yankee
Take sech everlastin' pains
All to git the Devil's thankee,
Helpin' on 'em weld their chains?
Wy, it 's jest ez clear ez figgers,
Clear ez one an' one make two,
Chaps thet make black slaves o' niggers
Want to make wite slaves o' you.

8. Northern Whig Charles Sumner Protests the War, 1846

Charles Sumner to Robert Winthrop, October 25, 1846

. . . By virtue of an unconstitutional Act of Congress, in conjunction with the *de facto* government of Texas, the latter was annexed to the United States some time in the month of December, 1845. If we regard Texas as a province of Mexico, its boundaries must be sought in the geography of that republic. If we regard it as an independent State, they must be determined by the extent of jurisdiction which the State was able to maintain. Now it seems clear that the river Nueces was always recognized by Mexico as the western boundary; and it is undisputed that the State of Texas, since its Declaration of Independence, never exercised any jurisdiction beyond the Nueces. The Act of Annexation could not, therefore, transfer to the United States any title to the region between the Nueces and the Rio Grande. That region belonged to Mexico. *Certainly* it did not belong to the United States.

In the month of January, 1846, the President of the United States directed the troops under General Taylor, called the Army of Occupation, to take possession of this region. Here was an act of aggression. As might have been expected, it produced collision. The Mexicans, aroused in self-defence, sought to repel the invaders from their hearths and churches. Unexpected tidings reached Washington that the American forces were in danger. The President, in a message to Congress, called for succors.

Here the question occurs, What was the duty of Congress in this emergency? Clearly to withhold all sanction to unjust war,—to aggression upon a neighboring Republic,—to spoliation of fellow-men. Our troops were in danger only because upon foreign soil, forcibly displacing the jurisdiction and laws of the rightful government. In this condition of things, the way of safety, just and honorable, was by instant withdrawal from the Rio Grande to the Nueces. Congress should have spoken like Washington, when General Braddock, staggered by the peril of the moment, asked the youthful soldier, "What shall I do, Colonel Washington?" "RETREAT,

From Charles Sumner to Robert Winthrop, October 25, 1846, in *Charles Sumner: His Complete Works* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1899), vol. 1, 317–29.

Sir! RETREAT, Sir!" was the earnest reply. The American forces should have been directed to *retreat*,—not from any human force, but from *wrongdoing*; and this would have been a true victory.

Alas! this was not the mood of Congress. With wicked speed a bill was introduced, furnishing large and unusual supplies of men and money. In any just sense, such provision was wasteful and unnecessary; but it would hardly be worthy of criticism, if confined in its object to the safety of the troops. When made, it must have been known that the fate of the troops was already decided, while the magnitude of the appropriations and the number of volunteers called for showed that measures were contemplated *beyond self-defence*. Self-defence is easy and cheap. Aggression and injustice are difficult and costly.

. . . This was adopted by a vote of 123 to 67; and the bill then leaped forth, fully armed, as a measure of open and active hostility against Mexico. . . .

This Act cannot be regarded merely as provision for the safety of General Taylor; nor, indeed can this be considered the principal end proposed. It has other and ulterior objects, broader and more general, in view of which his safety, important as it might be, is of comparative insignificance; as it would be less mournful to lose a whole army than lend the solemn sanction of legislation to an unjust war.

This Act may be considered in six different aspects. It is six times wrong. Six different and unanswerable reasons should have urged its rejection. Six different appeals should have touched every heart. I shall consider them separately.

First. It is practically a DECLARATION OF WAR against a sister Republic. By the Constitution of the United States, the power of declaring war is vested in Congress. Before this Act was passed, the Mexican War had no legislative sanction. Without this Act it could have no legislative sanction. *By virtue of this Act* the present war is waged. *By virtue of this Act*, an American fleet, at immense cost of money, and without any gain of character, is now disturbing the commerce of Mexico, and of the civilized world, by the blockade of Vera Cruz. *By virtue of this Act*, a distant expedition, with pilfering rapacity, has seized the defenceless province of California. . . .

Secondly. This Act gives the sanction of Congress to an *unjust* war. War is barbarous and brutal; but this is unjust. It grows out of aggression on our part, and is continued by aggression. The statement of facts already made is sufficient on this head.

Thirdly. It declares that war exists "*by the act of the Republic of Mexico.*" This statement of brazen falsehood is inserted in the front of the Act. But it is now admitted by most, if not all, of the Whigs who unhappily voted for it, that it is not founded in fact. It is a national lie.

> "Whose tongue soe'er speaks false
> Not truly speaks; *who speaks not truly* LIES."

Fourthly. It provides for the prosecution of the war "*to a speedy and successful termination*,"—that is, for the speedy and successful prosecution of *unjust* war. Surely no rule can be better founded in morals than that we should seek the establishment of *right*. How, then, can we strive to hasten the triumph of wrong?

Fifthly. The war has its origin in a series of measures to extend and perpetuate slavery. A wise and humane legislator should have discerned its source, and found fresh impulses to oppose it.

Sixthly. The war is dishonorable and cowardly, as the attack of a rich, powerful, numerous, and united republic upon a weak and defenceless neighbor, distracted by civil feud. Every consideration of honor, manliness, and Christian duty prompted gentleness and forbearance towards our unfortunate sister.

Such, Sir, is the Act of Congress which received your sanction. . . .

9. Senator John C. Calhoun Offers a Southern Perspective on the War's Outcome, 1847

. . . Mr. President, it was solemnly asserted on this floor, some time ago, that all parties in the non-slaveholding States had come to a fixed and solemn determination upon two propositions. One was, that there should be no further admission of any States into this Union which permitted by their constitution the existence of slavery; and the other was, that slavery shall not hereafter exist in any of the Territories of the United States; the effect of which would be to give to the non-slaveholding States the monopoly of the public domain, to the entire exclusion of the slaveholding States. Since that declaration was made, Mr. President, we have abundant proof that there was a satisfactory foundation for it. We have received already solemn resolutions passed by seven of the non-slaveholding States—one half of the number already in the Union, Iowa not being counted—using the strongest possible language to that effect; and no doubt in a short space of time similar resolutions will be received from all of the non-slaveholding States. But we need not go beyond the walls of Congress. The subject has been agitated in the other House, and they have sent you up a bill "prohibiting the extension of slavery" (using their own language) "to any territory which may be acquired by the United States hereafter." At the same time, two resolutions which have been moved to extend the compromise line from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific, during the present session, have been rejected by a decided majority.

Sir, there is no mistaking the signs of the times; and it is high time that the southern States, the slaveholding States, should inquire what is now their relative strength in this Union, and what it will be if this determination should be carried into effect hereafter. Sir, already we are in a minority—I use the word "we," for brevity sake—already we are in a minority in the other House, in the electoral college, and, I may say, in every department of this Government, except at present in the Senate of the United States: there, for the present, we have an equality. Of the twenty-eight States, fourteen are non-slaveholding and fourteen are slaveholding, counting Delaware, which is doubtful, as one of the non-slaveholding States. But this equality of strength exists only in the Senate. . . .

Sir, what is the entire amount of this policy? I will not say that it is so designed. I will not say from what cause it originated. I will not say whether blind fanaticism on one side, whether a hostile feeling to slavery entertained by many not fanatical on the other, has produced it; or whether it has been the work of men, who, looking to political power, have considered the agitation of this question as the most effectual mode of obtaining the spoils of this Government. I look to the fact itself. It is a policy now openly avowed as one to be persisted in. It is a scheme, Mr. President,

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From *Congressional Globe*, 29th Congress, 2nd session, pp. 453–55.

which aims to monopolize the powers of this Government and to obtain sole possession of its territories.

Now, I ask, is there any remedy? Does the Constitution afford any remedy? And if not, is there any hope? These, Mr. President, are solemn questions—not only to us, but, let me say to gentlemen from the non-slaveholding States: to them. Sir, the day that the balance between the two sections of the country—the slaveholding States and the non-slaveholding States—is destroyed, is a day that will not be far removed from political revolution, anarchy, civil war, and widespread disaster. The balance of this system is in the slaveholding States. They are the conservative portion—always have been the conservative portion—always will be the conservative portion; and with a due balance on their part may, for generations to come, uphold this glorious Union of ours. But if this scheme should be carried out—if we are to be reduced to a handful—if we are to become a mere ball to play the presidential game with—to count something in the Baltimore caucus—if this is to be the result—wo, wo, I say, to this Union!

Now, sir, I put again the solemn question—does the Constitution afford any remedy? Is there any provision in it by which this aggressive policy—boldly avowed, as if perfectly consistent with our institutions and the safety and prosperity of the United States!—may be confronted? Is this a policy consistent with the Constitution? No, Mr. President, no! It is, in all its features, daringly opposed to the Constitution. What is it? Ours is a Federal Constitution. The States are its constituents, and not the people. The twenty-eight States—the twenty-nine States (including Iowa)—stand under this Government as twenty-nine individuals, or as twenty-nine millions of individuals would stand to a consolidated power. It did not look to the prosperity of individuals, as such. No, sir; it was made for higher ends; it was formed that every State as a constituent member of this great Union of ours should enjoy all its advantages, natural and acquired, with greater security, and enjoy them more perfectly. The whole system is based on justice and equality—perfect equality between the members of this republic. Now can that be consistent with equality, which will make this public domain a monopoly on one side—which, in its consequences, would place the whole power in one section of the Union, to be wielded against the other sections of the Union? Is that equality?

How, then, do we stand in reference to this territorial question—this public domain of ours? Why, sir, what is it? It is the common property of the States of this Union. They are called "the territories of the United States." And what are the "United States" but the States united? Sir, these territories are the property of the States united; held jointly for their common use. And is it consistent with justice, is it consistent with equality, that any portion of the partners, outnumbering another portion, shall oust them of this common property of theirs—shall pass any law which shall proscribe the citizens of other portions of the Union from emigrating with their property to the Territories of the United States? Would that be consistent, can it be consistent with the idea of a common property, held jointly for the common benefit of all? Would it be so considered in private life? Would it not be considered the most flagrant outrage in the world, one which any court of equity would restrain by injunction—which any court of law in the world would overrule?

Mr. President, not only is that proposition grossly inconsistent with the Constitution, but the other, which undertakes to say that no State shall be admitted into this

Union which shall not prohibit by its constitution the existence of slaves, is equally a great outrage against the Constitution of the United States. Sir, I hold it to be a fundamental principle of our political system that the people have a right to establish what government they may think proper for themselves; that every State about to become a member of this Union has a right to form its own Government as it pleases; and that, in order to be admitted, there is but one qualification, and that is, that the government shall be republican. There is no express provision to that effect, but it results from that important section which guarantees to every State in this Union a republican form of government. Now, sir, what is proposed? It is proposed, from a vague, indefinite, erroneous, and most dangerous conception of private individual liberty, to overrule this great common liberty which the people have of framing their own constitution! . . .

10. The Political System Fractures: Party Platforms, 1848

Democratic Party Platform, 1848

Resolved, That the American Democracy place their trust in the intelligence, the patriotism, and the discriminating justice of the American people.

Resolved, That we regard this as a distinctive feature of our political creed, which we are proud to maintain before the world as the great moral element in a form of government springing from and upheld by the popular will; and we contrast it with the creed and practice of Federalism, under whatever name or form, which seeks to palsy the will of the constituent, and which conceives no imposture too monstrous for the popular credulity.

Resolved, therefore, That, entertaining these views, the Democratic party of this Union, through their Delegates assembled in general convention of the States, coming together in a spirit of concord, of devotion to the doctrines and faith of a free representative government, and appealing to their fellow-citizens for the rectitude of their intentions, renew and reassert before the American people the declaration of principles avowed by them when, on a former occasion, in general convention, they presented their candidates for the popular suffrage. . . .

That Congress has no power under the Constitution to interfere with or control the domestic institutions of the several States, and that such States are the sole and proper judges of everything appertaining to their own affairs, not prohibited by the Constitution; that all efforts of the Abolitionists or others made to induce Congress to interfere with questions of slavery, or to take incipient steps in relation thereto, are calculated to lead to the most alarming and dangerous consequences; and that all such efforts have an inevitable tendency to diminish the happiness of the people, and endanger the stability and permanence of the Union, and ought not to be countenanced by any friend to our political institutions. . . .

From Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789–1968* (New York: Chelsea House, n.d. [1971]), vol. 2, 897–905.

of public policy, which will promote, in various ways, the interest of all the States of this Union; and we therefore recommend it to the favorable consideration of the American People.

Resolved, That the obligations of honor and patriotism require the earliest practical payment of the national debt, and we are therefore in favor of such a tariff of duties as will raise revenue adequate to defray the necessary expenses of the Federal Government, and to pay annual instalments of our debt and the interest thereon.

Resolved, That we inscribe on our banner, "FREE SOIL, FREE SPEECH, FREE LABOR, and FREE MEN," and under it we will fight on, and fight ever, until a triumphant victory shall reward our exertions.

ESSAYS

What did Manifest Destiny and the Mexican War mean to the American people? Both were sources of intense patriotic fervor as well as emotional dissent. Some scholars have long pointed to expansionists' genuinely idealistic notions about spreading democracy and ridding the New World, once and for all, of meddlesome, aristocratic, and European influences. Others, like Thomas Hietala of Grinnell College, find at the core of the expansionists' premises not a confidence but a cultural and political anxiety, deeply rooted in the Jeffersonian tradition and in the nation's abiding racial antagonisms. The historian Robert W. Johannsen of the University of Illinois looks beyond Manifest Destiny to the Mexican War itself. Especially for the literary and political set that called themselves "Young America," the war marked a coming of age for the new nation, establishing it once and for all as a model for other democratic nations to follow. The final essay, by Jonathan Earle of the University of Kansas, illustrates how the war and the millions of acres of land that came with it brought the issue of slavery and its expansion to the forefront of the minds of certain Democrats in Congress. "There is no probability," President Polk wrote in his diary, "that any territory will ever be acquired from Mexico in which slavery would ever exist." Thousands of Americans, including David Wilmot and his northern Democratic allies in Congress, were not so sure.

The Anxieties of Manifest Destiny

THOMAS HIETALA

When John O'Sullivan coined the felicitous phrase "manifest destiny" in mid-1845, he provided Americans then and since with an invaluable legitimizing myth of empire. During the final phase of the Texas annexation crisis, he accused the European nations of "hostile interference" in American affairs, "for the avowed object of thwarting our policy and hampering our power, limiting our greatness and checking the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions." In his justification for American expansion, O'Sullivan reconciled democracy with empire

From *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* by Thomas Hietala (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 255–58, 261–64, 267–70.

while he implicitly sanctioned the dispossession of all non-Anglo peoples on the continent. During the mid-1840s, he repeatedly stressed that the United States must acquire abundant land for "the free development" of its "yearly multiplying millions"; without territorial expansion the novel experiment in free government and free enterprise might collapse.

The recurring emphasis on material factors in the Democrats' speculations about the need for expansion raises some important questions about the purported idealism of both "Jacksonian Democracy" and manifest destiny. To O'Sullivan and other Democrats, previous territorial acquisitions had been indispensable to the success of the American political and economic system. And though the Jacksonians were convinced of the superiority of popular government, they were much less certain about its viability. Their ambitions for a continental empire represented much more than simple romantic nationalism: they demanded land because they regarded it as the primary prerequisite for republican government and for an economy and society based upon individual acquisitiveness, geographical and social mobility, and a fluid class structure. These beliefs—best expressed by O'Sullivan but articulated by other Democrats as well—were crucial to most Jacksonian policies, especially those promoting territorial and commercial expansion. To consider manifest destiny in the context of such principles of political economy is a way of making more comprehensible the sustained drive for empire in the 1840s.

Misconceptions about manifest destiny still influence Americans' impressions about their nation's history. . . . Prevailing ideas about westward expansion are inextricably linked to the values associated with American exceptionalism and mission, fundamental components of the Jacksonian creed. . . .

Jacksonians exalted the pioneer as the epitome of the common man, and they celebrated American expansion as an integral part of their mission to obtain a better nation and a better world based on individual freedom, liberalized international trade, and peaceful coexistence. The Democrats equated American progress with global progress and repeatedly argued that European oligarchs were actually opposing the interests of their own people by trying to discourage the expansion of the United States. Geographically and ideologically separated from Europe, the United States, under Jacksonian direction, tried to improve its democratic institutions, utilize the land's rich resources, and demonstrate to the world the superiority of a system allowing free men to compete in a dynamic society. Consequently, the impact of the pioneering process transcended the concerns of the frontiersmen. In forming "a more perfect union" on a continually expanding frontier, Americans thought that they were actually serving the cause of all mankind.

Such a melding of exceptionalism and empire permitted the Jacksonians the luxury of righteous denunciation of their critics at home and abroad. Their domestic foes could be paired with European monarchs as spokesmen for an old order of aristocracy, privilege, and proscription; American expansionism and the Jacksonian domestic program, on the other hand, represented the antithesis of traditional systems. Since territorial acquisitions and Democratic policies fostered opportunity and democracy, they liberated men from oppressive social and economic relationships. The Jacksonians' program promised so much for so little; no wonder messianic imagery appeared so frequently in their rhetoric.

Skeptical Whigs often challenged the Democrats' sincerity, however, sensing that the Jacksonians' motives for aggrandizement were more selfish than they usually admitted. The Democrats' rhetoric proved more resilient than the Whigs' trenchant criticisms of "manifest destiny," however, and so subsequent generations of Americans have underestimated the extent and the intensity of opposition to the policies behind expansionism in the 1840s, especially the Mexican War. . . .

The expansionism of the 1840s acquires a new significance, however, when it is considered within the context of the cultural, social, and political factors that motivated the Jacksonians to pursue a continental empire. In promoting the acquisition of new lands and new markets, the Democrats greatly exaggerated the extent of European hostility to the United States and refused to admit the duplicity and brutality behind their own efforts to expand their nation's territory and trade. By joining their concepts of exceptionalism and empire, the expansionists found a rationale for denying to all other nations and peoples, whether strong or weak, any right to any portion of the entire North American continent. If a rival was strong, it posed a threat to American security and had to be removed; if a rival was weak, it proved its inferiority and lent sanction to whatever actions were taken by pioneers or policy makers to make the territory a part of the United States.

The confusion surrounding expansion results in part from the ambivalence of the Jacksonians themselves, who demonstrated both compassion and contempt in their policies, depending on the racial and ethnic identities of the peoples to be affected by Democratic measures. Generous and humane toward impoverished Americans and poor immigrants from Europe, the Democrats showed far less concern for nonwhites whom they dispossessed or exploited in the process of westward expansion and national development. Removal, eclipse, or extermination—not acculturation and assimilation—awaited the Indians, blacks, and mixed-blood Mexicans on the continent. Despite occasional statements to the contrary, the expansionist regarded the incorporation of nonwhite peoples into the country as both unlikely and undesirable. Without hint of hypocrisy the Jacksonians sought lenient naturalization laws and opportunities for newcomers while strenuously defending policies to separate Indians and Mexicans from their lands and programs to relocate blacks to Africa and Central America.

When expansionists did express concern for nonwhites, they did not question the basic assumptions behind racial proscription and dispossession. They trusted masters to treat their slaves humanely; they urged that the federal government compensate Indians adequately for their territorial cessions. Few expansionists, however, could see any alternative to the removal or extermination of Indians or the enslavement or proscription of blacks. Indians had no legitimate claim to land; blacks no legitimate claim to freedom. Even Free-Soilers who opposed the extension of slavery had little sympathy for the slave, arguing, in essence, that black freedom was detrimental to the white status. The racism in Washington was matched by racism on the frontier: pioneers in both Oregon and California adopted restrictive measures in the late 1840s to discourage or prohibit the migration of free blacks to the far West.

The expansion to the Pacific was not primarily an expression of American confidence. Anxiety, not optimism, generally lay behind the quest for land, ports, and markets. A powerful combination of fears led the neo-Jeffersonians of the 1840s to

embrace territorial and commercial expansionism as the best means of warding off both domestic and foreign threats to the United States. The Jacksonians were proponents of laissez-faire only in a limited sense, and their sustained efforts to acquire land and markets were their equivalents for what they saw as the Whigs' dangerous propensity to meddle in the domestic economy. Rather than give an "artificial" stimulus to the economy through protective duties or privileged charters, the Democrats preferred to assist American producers by means of territorial acquisitions, reciprocity treaties, improvements in the navy, and a liberal land policy. Frightened by rapid modernization in the United States, the Democrats warned that both European monarchs and the Whig opposition were threatening the Republic—the Europeans by their attempts to contain American expansion, the Whigs by their resistance to Jacksonian foreign policy and their support of legislation that would hasten industrialization, urbanization, and class polarization in the United States.

Jeffersonian ideology, especially its romantic agrarianism, its fear of industrialization, and its conviction that the United States had a natural right to free trade, contributed significantly to the ideology of manifest destiny. To the Jeffersonians and Jacksonians, American farms raised good republican citizens as well as corn, cotton, and wheat: cultivated fields produced virtuous, cultivated people. Whatever the realities of the late Jacksonian period, the expansionists insisted that agricultural societies fostered opportunity and political equality, the essential features of American uniqueness. Moreover, the neo-Jeffersonians contended that only industrial nations became international predators; agricultural countries were self-contained and did not need colonies or privileged markets. These misconceptions cloak some of the more unflattering aspects of antebellum economy and society: slavemasters, not sturdy yeomen, dominated the social and political life of the South; the country's most important export crops, cotton and tobacco, were produced by forced labor; Indians were cruelly dispossessed of their lands and often their culture to make room for American producers; "go-ahead" Americans frequently seemed more interested in land speculation schemes than in patient tilling of the soil; and the United States, like other empires, did prey upon other peoples and nations to augment its wealth, power, and security.

The fact that the United States acquired contiguous rather than noncontiguous territory makes American aggrandizement no less imperial than that of other empires of the mid-nineteenth century. The United States enjoyed several advantages that facilitated its enlargement and made it more antiseptic. Mexico's weakness, the inability of Indian tribes to unite and resist dispossession, the decline of France and Spain as colonizing powers in the New World, and geographical isolation from Europe all served the interests of the United States as it spread across the continent. In addition, the preference for an anticolonial empire embodied in the concept of a confederated Union also contributed to American success. But many Democrats wanted to venture beyond the continent, and had the party not become so divided during and after the Mexican War, the Polk administration probably would have taken steps to add Yucatán and Cuba to the United States, thereby extending the empire into the Caribbean.

The urge to expand beyond the continent was diminished by the fact that the continent itself was incredibly rich in resources. Those abundant resources provided the basis for unparalleled economic growth at home and power in relations

with countries abroad. The expansionists regarded the nation's productivity as an irresistible weapon that could counterbalance the military strength of Europe. Here, again, an old Jeffersonian perception dating back to the 1790s came into play: the world desperately needed American commerce and would sacrifice a great deal to obtain it. Although the expansionists never had cause to drive the masses of Europe to starvation and revolution through an embargo on grain and cotton, their speculations on the subject showed them to be far more imperial than philanthropic in their attitudes toward their nation's wealth.

Distressed by many trends in American life, the Democrats formulated their domestic and foreign policies to safeguard themselves and their progeny from a potentially dismal future. They hoped to prevent domestic disturbances by acquiring additional territory and markets. Other measures were also devised to protect the country from various perils: the Democrats discouraged the growth of manufacturing and monopolistic banking, attempted to minimize the conflict over slavery, encouraged the sale and settlement of the national domain, and tried to discredit the efforts of dissidents to form third parties that might jeopardize the two-party system. . . .

The expansionists' far-fetched notions about nonwhites precluded their thinking constructively about racial questions. By denying the likelihood of a permanent black and Indian population on the continent, antebellum Americans had difficulty preparing themselves and their descendants for racial heterogeneity in the United States. The acceptance of racial diversity as a reality of national life came largely through necessity, not choice. As most European visitors realized, racial prejudice permeated the country and transcended the sectional dispute over slavery. Americans, however, hardly seemed to question the intense racial animus across the nation; it was such a commonplace of life that it drew only isolated comment or criticism. There were many gradations of racial feeling among Americans, of course, and a small corps of radical abolitionists indicted the North for its failure to practice racial egalitarianism in the free states. But there is no denying that racial prejudice was a basic determinant of American domestic and foreign policy during the Jacksonian period.

The expansionists' ethnocentrism also sowed the seeds of future discord between the United States and the peoples of Latin America. The annexation of Texas and the Mexican War created a legacy of suspicion and anger toward the United States among peoples south of the Rio Grande. However much the United States professed to be a "good neighbor" to other countries in the hemisphere, those countries often held more ambivalent views. . . .

In many respects the expansionists' outlook turned out to be strikingly unrealistic. The United States was hardly overcrowded in the early 1840s: millions of acres within the existing national domain remained to be occupied and cultivated. Racial fears were also exaggerated. When southern slaves attained their freedom in 1865, no war between blacks and whites ensued. After the Civil War, scores of large cities and hundreds of factories and corporations spread across the country, yet democratic institutions and capitalism survived the transformation. Despite the undeniable hardships and radical adjustments precipitated by rapid industrialization, few Americans would argue that manufacturing weakened rather than strengthened the United States. The Democrats also overestimated the hostility of Britain. The British ministry acquiesced in the annexation of Texas; it did not incite Mexico to

make war upon the United States; and it did not try to acquire California before the United States seized it in 1846. Several major premises behind the expansion of the late Jacksonian period proved erroneous.

The decade of the 1840s should be placed in a different historical context: United States policy in this crucial decade prepared the way for both late-nineteenth-century and twentieth-century imperialism. . . .

Young America and the War with Mexico

ROBERT W. JOHANNSEN

The war with Mexico was the first major national crisis faced by Americans during this period of unprecedented social and economic change, and it immediately became a significant element in the effort to define a role for the young republic. Whether we call it romantic nationalism or the spirit of the age, Young America or manifest destiny and mission, the popular feeling was critical to the country's growth and development. Beneath all the exaggerated rhetoric that it generated were ideas of substance that exerted a profound and powerful influence on the shaping of the nation. They provided the back-drop before which the drama of the war with Mexico was played out.

In 1848, as Americans awaited news of Mexico's ratification of the peace treaty, thoughts turned toward the need for a history of the war. The would-be historian was cautioned to give due attention to the spirit that lay behind the facts. Those who believe "that the *facts* of history are given when every statement is made out with accuracy," mistake the nature of their task, for the "greatest fact of all is the feeling which originated the movement, and the enthusiasm which bore it onward."

What was called "feeling," or what others called "spirit," was evident at the war's beginning in the response of young Americans to the call for volunteers. Many of those who responded were motivated by a thirst for adventure mixed with a sense of patriotic duty. They perceived themselves as travelers, as explorers and as pioneers (the "go a-head" volunteers), opening one more window through which Americans back home could view a remote and exotic clime, pushing back the horizons of knowledge, experiencing a strange and ancient land they had only dreamed of before, sharing their romantic fascination with alien manners and customs and with an antiquity that they could not find in their own country.

The "dare-devil war spirit" of the volunteer soldiers aroused the admiration of New England historian William Hickling Prescott, who had chronicled the sixteenth-century Spanish conquest of Mexico and who many thought would be the logical historian of the nineteenth-century American conquest. Although he opposed the war, Prescott saw in the volunteers the "pioneers of civilization," proof of the "indomitable energy" of the American people. "We go ahead," he wrote, in language that echoed those who saw in the war a coming of age. "We go ahead like a great lusty brat that will work his way into the full size of man."

From Robert W. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination*, 1986, pp. 163–72. By permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.

To Walt Whitman, America's fighting men also reflected the patriotism of the country's common people. The mass demonstrations that celebrated the victories in Mexico in city after city moved Whitman to declare that there was no more "admirable impulse in the human soul than *patriotism*." The large gatherings convinced him that the Mexican War was a great democratic mission. Although he argued that military superiority was not by itself a sign of national greatness, he believed that the triumphs on the battlefield would "elevate the *true* self-respect of the American people" to a point commensurate with "such a great nation as ours really is." Like many others, he found the roots of patriotism in the nation's revolutionary origins. The American Revolution was a continuing revolution, one without end that called for vigilance and sacrifice if midcentury Americans were to prove worthy of their past. Analogies were constantly drawn between the "spirit of '76" and the "spirit of '46," and the volunteers were as often admonished to show the world that the patriotism of the fathers could still be found in the hearts of the sons.

The war touched American lives more intimately and with greater immediacy than any event to that time. Coinciding with the "print explosion" of the mid-nineteenth century, of which the penny press was but one manifestation, the war was reported in more detail than "any previous war in any part of the world." Fast steam presses, innovative techniques in news gathering, the employment of war correspondents for the first time (including many volunteers who reported the war for their home-town newspapers), the use of the new magnetic telegraph, and the rapid proliferation of books and periodicals, all combined to carry the war into people's lives on an unprecedented scale. The episodes of the war, the experiences of its combatants in camp and field, even the intentions and feelings of the enemy were "more thoroughly known by mankind, than those of any war that has ever taken place."

The race to supply the public with accounts of the war began as soon as news of the first battles at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma appeared in the nation's press, and it continued unabated through most of the war. Writers were impatient, publishers were impatient, and, most important, the reading public was impatient. Publishers raced against time and their competitors to put their histories and biographies before the public, fearing that the war might end before they could reap the rewards of the war-spirit. Every soldier, it was said, fancied himself a historian of the war; some of the histories that appeared as soon as the fighting began were little more than collections of newspaper reports. The result was a veritable "Niagara of books," books "foaming with excitement" with pages that "blaze ever with *red*." Reviewers complained loudly of the flood that inundated their desks, protesting that they could barely keep up with the multitude of books generated by the war. No conflict, it seemed, had ever had so many chroniclers. The literature, complained an opponent of the war, "enters every nook and corner of the land."

Some of Young America's spokesmen, encouraged by the effusion of printed material, hoped that the fighting would produce the great national literature they felt the country so badly needed. The war, they predicted, would form a distinct epoch in the history of American letters, for out of the contest would come all the elements of romance and drama, of heroism, sacrifice and patriotic devotion that writers would need for years to come. The war with Mexico, they hoped, would do for American literature what the Napoleonic wars were doing for English literature.

Among the first to respond to the challenge were the nation's poets. Hardly a month after the war began, a New York newspaper reported that a "poetical mania" was sweeping the land. It was an age of poetry, when newspapers regularly featured original poems on their front pages, when new books of poetry were announced almost daily. Some would-be Homers—like William C. Falkner, a Mississippi volunteer and great-grandfather of the twentieth-century novelist—saw in the war a conflict of epic proportions, and they set themselves the task of providing Young America with its own *Iliad*. Three years after the war's end, Falkner published at his own expense his epic poem *The Siege of Monterey* in 493 stanzas, about 4000 lines, described by one recent critic as the "strangest poetical composition in the language." Others, less ambitious, decided that there was no need to create another *Iliad*, for the whole country was "engaged in acting an Epic." More popular were those poems inspired by battles. There were so many poems entitled "Monterey" (as the name was often spelled by people in the United States) that it was difficult to keep them apart, but even Monterrey was soon eclipsed by Buena Vista. Abolitionists like John Greenleaf Whittier, James Russell Lowell, even William Lloyd Garrison himself, protested the war in poetic form, sometimes to good effect.

Those writers whose names have long been acknowledged as major figures in the remarkable flowering of American literature known as the American Renaissance were generally silent on the conflict. Herman Melville's only contribution was a series of unsigned comic articles satirizing Zachary Taylor that appeared in a humor magazine. Nathaniel Hawthorne's response to the war was published four years later when he wrote a flattering biography of wartime brigadier-general and 1852 presidential candidate Franklin Pierce. Emerson was ambivalent toward the war, opposing it on the one hand while on the other expressing admiration for the American people who, he said, were "fast opening their own destiny." Rejecting the war as a means for expanding the nation, Emerson believed that Americans, with their superior civilization, would "in the course of ages" overrun the continent peaceably. Only James Fenimore Cooper, then in the last years of a distinguished and productive career, published a Mexican War novel: *Jack Tier; or, The Florida Reef*. A strong supporter of the United States Navy, Cooper was disappointed that the navy did not play a greater role in the fight. He made up for it by writing a novel of the war at sea, a fanciful fiction that had little impact.

For all the outpouring of literary efforts, the war with Mexico did not meet the expectation that a great national literature would result. Indeed, many of Young America's leaders began to question whether wars in general truly inspire great literary effort. While many of the productions—especially the cheap paperbound Gothic romances with Mexican War settings—have value as both reflecting and shaping popular perceptions of the war, they hardly represented the national character and aspirations in the ways Young America expected.

What did the end of the Mexican War mean to the American people? For one thing, as the *Democratic Review* suggested, it meant the "reduction of our enormous expenses by the withdrawal of the army, and the cessation with it of the excessive jobbing which has been so long going on." The war had cost the nation about 100 million dollars; its demands had resulted in a drain of specie to Mexico that had been only partially offset by unprecedented exports of American grain to Europe.

The news of Mexico's ratification of the peace treaty coincided with the opening of bids in Washington for a new government loan, and the impact of the announcement that the war had ended was immediately apparent. The entire new loan was taken by American and British banking houses on terms that were highly advantageous to the government. "Shrewd capitalists as the large European bankers are," crowed the *New-York Tribune*, "they must be convinced that this Government is no longer an experiment, and that its bonds are as good security as those of any debt-ridden State of Europe."

Vast new territories had now become part of the United States, although some Americans felt that these areas—the "impenetrable mountains and dry narrow valleys" of California and the "trackless, treeless . . . and utterly uninhabitable" New Mexico—would prove useless to the country. Most of the new land, it was thought, would become the haunt of savages and outlawed desperadoes, a drain on the national treasury and a constant threat to the nation's frontier settlements. Mexico, some believed, had forced a shrewd bargain, ridding herself of her worthless territory and receiving fifteen million dollars from the United States for the sacrifice. One Whig newspaper complained that "it cannot be seriously urged that the distant deserts which Mexico grants us, are any equivalent for the money she receives."

Americans quickly assigned a significance to their triumph in Mexico that reflected national pride. It was the country's first foreign conflict, fought on foreign soil far from the centers of population. The vast area covered by the military campaigns and the difficult terrain over which much of the fighting took place had raised serious problems for supply, communication and transportation. For the first time, the nation was obliged to raise, train and equip large numbers of volunteer troops, and to move the troops quickly to the areas of military operation. The efficiency with which these problems were met seemed to demonstrate the energy and strength of the young republic.

Some critics now conceded that the war had shown "that a people . . . devoted to the arts of peace, possessing free political institutions, can vanquish a military people, governed by military despots." The war, many agreed, had won new respect for the "model republic" and had convincingly refuted those who had argued that republics, lacking a powerful centralized government, could not successfully wage a foreign war. The language of contempt so often voiced by Europeans, wrote New York's wealthy Whig merchant Philip Hone, "is heard no more; the little foibles of Brother Jonathan are forgotten in contemplation of his indomitable courage."

For Young Americans, the war with Mexico marked the advance of the United States from youth into manhood. "The young Giant of the West" now stood forth "in the full flush of exulting manhood," while still retaining the enthusiasm, the boldness and the enterprise of youth. The war, according to historian Nathan Covington Brooks, displayed to the world "a majestic power and energy, a youthful freshness of spirit combined with a manly vigour." Even critics hailed the new blend of manhood with "the ardor and activity of youth." It was a theme that was echoed in the popular print. "The nation," wrote Cooper, had passed "from the gristle into the bone."

The transition seemed complete when, in mid-March 1848, about six weeks after the peace treaty had been signed and less than two weeks after its ratification by the United States Senate, news reached New York of a revolution in France, the abdication of the French King, and the proclamation of a French Republic. The news sent

shock waves throughout the country. Mass demonstrations were held in the cities at which editors, orators and politicians sounded the death knell of monarchical absolutism. *La Marseillaise* was played and sung, shops displayed the French tricolor, and men wore liberty caps.

The role of the United States was unmistakable. "This republic," declared the *New York Herald*, "is the model and exemplar of the revolutionists in France, and all of Europe." With the victorious war with Mexico just ended, commented another paper, "we possess one of the highest characters in the world, at this time." The new prestige and respect gained from the war had propelled the United States into a position of leadership in the "history of civilization and the human race." The French revolution, it was widely assumed, was an unexpected consequence of the war with Mexico. To George Wilkins Kendall, correspondent in Mexico during the war and now relaying dispatches to his newspaper from Paris, it seemed especially appropriate that the anniversary of the battle of Palo Alto should be observed in the French capital.

On July 4, 1848, the long-awaited ratification of the treaty by the Mexican congress arrived at the White House, the same day that the cornerstone of the Washington Monument was dedicated—an auspicious coincidence. The dedication address was delivered by Robert C. Winthrop, leader of the Whig party, Massachusetts congressman and speaker of the House of Representatives. The day, he noted, not only commemorated the achievement of American independence but also marked "the precise epoch at which we have arrived in the world's history." A war against a foreign foe had just been won, and he paid tribute to the "veterans of the line and the volunteers" who stood before him. Winthrop pointed to the revolutions at that moment convulsing Europe, popular uprisings in which the "influence of our own institutions" and the "results of our own example" could be seen. "The great doctrines of our own Revolution," he said, "are proclaimed as emphatically this day in Paris, as they were seventy-two years ago this day in Philadelphia."

Finally, Winthrop invoked the language of Young America. The "great American-built locomotive, 'Liberty,'" he declared, still held its course, "on the track of human freedom, unimpeded and unimpaired; gathering strength as it goes; developing new energies to meet new exigencies," with a speed that "knows no parallel."

Jacksonian Antislavery and the Roots of Free Soil

JONATHAN EARLE

The dinner table conversation at Masi's rooming house on Pennsylvania Avenue rarely, if ever, centered on the food. Politics was the main course on the evening of August 8, 1846, as it was most other nights when Congress was in session. Every one of the house's residents was a member of the 29th Congress, a northerner, and a Democrat. Yet on this sultry Saturday night, the penultimate night of the session, the housemates' conversation was particularly heated. At issue, each lawmaker believed,

was whether millions of acres of western land would remain free (as it had been since 1821) or fall into the hands of slaveholders.

Earlier that day, President James K. Polk had submitted a message to both houses of Congress requesting $2 million to make peace with Mexico and to purchase California and New Mexico. To a growing number of the Democrats representing northern districts—for years the South's staunchest political allies—the president's request seemed the latest in a series of moves intended to increase slave territory (and the power of slaveholders) at their constituents' expense. This feeling was particularly intense for Democrats known as Barnburners, who believed slaveholders had been responsible for defeating their leader, Martin Van Buren, in 1840 and 1844; for capitulating on extending Oregon's northern boundary; and for carving out a new empire for slavery in Texas and the Southwest. The Barnburner Democrats in residence at Masi's and elsewhere on Capitol Hill seized on Polk's request as the moment to make their increasing opposition to new slave territory heard.

Uneasy with the prospect of dealing squarely with the controversial addition of new territory so late in the session, a group of northern representatives moved to kill the president's request by referring it to committee. Failing this, they unsuccessfully attempted to table it. Finally, in confusion, the House agreed to take up the matter at the evening session on August 6.

During the brief dinner recess, separate groups of disgruntled northern Democrats lamented that the southern wing of their party seemed poised to snatch yet more territory for slavery. As Masi's, a first-term congressman from remote northeastern Pennsylvania named David Wilmot announced that if the Speaker introduced Polk's request as a bill, he would move "an amendment to the effect that slavery should be excluded from any territory acquired by virtue of such an appropriation." Opinion on Wilmot's plan was far from uniform. Robert Dale Owen of Indiana objected, fearing the amendment would tear apart the Democratic Party. Two other companions, Robert P. Dunlap of Maine and Jacob S. Yost of Pennsylvania, heartily approved of Wilmot's proposal.

On the short walk back to the Capitol, Wilmot encountered Democrats Martin Grover of New York, Jacob Brinkerhoff of Ohio, and Hannibal Hamlin of Maine, who were plotting a similar strategy while standing in the street. This new, larger group agreed to "advise with our northern friends" when the evening session began and to press the measure "if it met with their approbation." Apparently it did, since Wilmot recalled that during a brief canvass on the House floor, "Northern Democrats were unanimous in favor of the movement."

The $2 Million Bill was called up just before 7:00 p.m., and the core group of northerners, joined by Preston King of New York and James Thompson of Pennsylvania, again gathered "to agree on the form and terms" of the amendment. Different drafts of the slavery-restricting amendments were submitted, discussed, and altered, the final draft being "the result of our united labors," according to Wilmot. The wording and strategy chosen to introduce the amendment were hardly unusual; in fact, they were lifted straight from Thomas Jefferson's Northwest Ordinance, which the group hailed as a founding document of Democratic antislavery. After agreeing on language, each member of the cadre wrote out a copy and attempted to gain control of the floor during debate. As Brinkerhoff had predicted, Wilmot, heretofore "a favorite of the Southern members," was the first of the group so recognized.

Wilmot's speech was brief. He fully endorsed the ongoing war with Mexico and the annexation of Texas (accomplished three years earlier) as a slave state. If territory from the free nation of Mexico was gained by a peace treaty, however, Wilmot thundered, "God forbid that [Congress] should be the means of planting this institution upon it." He concluded by endorsing the president's request for funds, "*Provided*, That, as an express and fundamental condition to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico by the United States . . . neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of said territory, except for crime, whereof the party shall first be duly convicted."

The quiet House chamber quickly sprang to life. A small group of women fanning themselves in the gallery was quickly joined by capital luminaries such as Gen. Winfield Scott, Senator James Buchanan, Postmaster General Cave Johnson, and Secretary of the Navy (and historian) George Bancroft. After a loud, angry, and hurried debate, the proviso passed the House 77–58—but the margin itself did not make the vote significant. Every member from a district south of the Mason-Dixon line or the Ohio River, excepting two Kentucky Whigs, opposed the proviso. Put another way, the Northwest and Northeast united almost unanimously behind Wilmot's proviso, as acrid party distinctions melted away. For a brief moment in the Congress of the United States, the North and West, led by a band of disenchanted Democrats, stood united against an angry and defensive South.

This first vote over the proviso placed slavery squarely at the center of American politics, where it was to remain until the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865. Yet for the recalcitrant and little-known northern Democrats who hatched the scheme to halt the expansion of slavery in 1846, the events of that sweltering evening proved more of a culmination than a beginning. Antislavery Jacksonians like Marcus Morton of Massachusetts traced the origins of the revolt against the "Slave Power" to the congressional debates over the Missouri Crisis in 1819–21, at which time he had joined a determined group of northern Jeffersonians to marshal Constitutional arguments opposing the extension of slavery into the new state. These arguments—that the federal Constitution was an antislavery document and that Congress had the power and duty to bar slavery's extension into territories of the United States—resurfaced a quarter of a century later in debates about land gained during the war with Mexico. In the interim, controversies over the censorship of abolitionist mailings in 1835, Texas annexation, the throwing aside of their political leaders, and the growing willingness of slaveholders to defend their "peculiar institution" as a positive good convinced a growing number of northern Democrats that the South had begun to trample on the rights of white freemen as well as black slaves.

Consider Morton's comments of 1837: "To say that I am utterly opposed to slavery in every form, civil, political, or domestic, is saying very little," he wrote in a published letter to fellow Jacksonian George Bancroft. "I deem slavery to be the greatest curse and the most portentous evil which a righteous God ever inflicted upon a nation; and that every effort . . . be made to mitigate, and, if possible, to extirpate it from the land." . . .

Democratic veterans of the antibank and antimonopoly battles of the 1830s fashioned their own arguments against slavery and its extension. These arguments, rooted in Jacksonian notions of egalitarian democracy and producer's rights, were

political and economic and owed far more to the radicalism noted by Schlesinger than to the evangelical perfectionism commonly linked with the antislavery movement. This Democratic strain of antislavery thought and action, born and nurtured far from the abolitionist salons of Boston and Philadelphia, greatly enlarged the antislavery movement by injecting it with that dynamic political ideology called free soil. Free-soil Democrats went beyond simple hostility to the Slave Power and its pretenses, linking their antislavery opposition to a land reform agenda that pressed for free land for poor settlers, in addition to land free of slavery. The resulting union between radical Jacksonianism and the antislavery movement, as will be shown, is far more important than historians have allowed. Blending hostility to slavery with traditional Democratic ideas like land reform and hard money, free-soil Jacksonians brought hundreds of thousands of new voters to the antislavery political coalition. Free soil, as an ideology and a movement in its own right (one that often acted in concert with its better-known cousin, free labor) forced a major realignment in local, state, and national politics between 1846 and 1854, greatly intensifying the sectional crisis. . . .

Free Soilers' opposition to slavery did not imply the abandonment of other established ideas or positions. Indeed, this particular antislavery impulse grew straight from the roots of the Democracy's long-standing commitment to egalitarianism or, put in opposite terms, the rank and file's ingrained hostility to centralized power and its perceived tendency to promote social and economic inequalities. As Marvin Meyers noted in the 1950s, radical, hard-money Democrats developed a shorthand description for this interlocking set of powerful individuals and institutions they called the Money Power. Vaguely defined and characterized in pictures and prose as a multitentacled monster, the Money Power exerted its majesty through privileged access to the nation's banking system. In fact, the radical Jacksonians' original raison d'être had been to elevate the nation's farmers and laborers at the expense of the Money Power, which supposedly exploited them.

By the mid-1830s, however, Democratic dissidents, reasonably satisfied that Jackson and his administration had the Money Power on the run, discovered that another enemy—slavery—had arisen in its place. To make matters worse, this Slave Power (a phrase coined by Jacksonian dissident Thomas Morris in the 1830s and popularized by Abraham Lincoln and the Republicans in the 1850s) was allied with the New England textile barons to ensure a profitable future for cotton, market capitalism, and slavery. "The slave power of the South and the banking power of the North, are now uniting to rule this country," Morris told the Senate in a speech attacking the gag rule and defending organized abolitionism. "The cotton bale and the bank note . . . have at last met and embraced each other, both looking to the same object—to live upon the unrequited labor of others." Instead of adhering to the orthodox Democratic view of slaveholders as upright producers, the dissidents saw them as grasping aristocrats who endangered the American experiment. "The northern man must be false to his education, and blind to his interests, who does not, inch by inch, and hand to hand, resist the extension of the slaveholding power," wrote the Jacksonian Theodore Sedgwick III. "The institution is in every way a blight and a curse [that has] plunged the laboring class into degradation, and made labor itself dishonorable." Thus, dissidents like Sedgwick pointed to the

Jacksonian principles of political democracy and economic equality as the foundation of their hatred for slavery.

Of course not every radical, hard-money Democrat came to Morris's or Sedgwick's conclusions about slavery and slaveholders. In fact, many of them veered off in an opposite direction. Jacksonian labor editor Orestes Brownson, for example, embraced the thinking of the slaveholding John C. Calhoun after the Democrats' defeat in the election of 1840. The devastating loss altered Brownson's long-held views about the virtue of popular majorities. "Experience proves," he wrote in 1842, "that the more extended the suffrage, the greater will be the influence and more certain the triumph of wealth, or rather the business classes." If workingmen and their champions constituted a minority only, he reasoned, then other minorities should constitute their natural allies. This new, antimajoritarian view drove Brownson into the arms of Calhoun, who had long volunteered the "minority" South as a bulwark against the tyranny of the northern business elite. By 1843 Brownson described the master-slave relationship as "of a more generous and touching nature" than that between employer and worker. Fitzwilliam Byrdsall, the former secretary of the Democratic splinter Locofoco Party—a group inspired by William Leggett's editorials for the *Evening Post* and *Plain-dealer*—went further still. In 1842 he launched a "free-trade association," supported by several veterans of the New York labor movement, that was little more than a front for Calhoun's presidential campaign. Five years later, while many of his former allies were forming the national Free Soil Party, Byrdsall wrote to Calhoun that "never was there any social institution more unfairly vilified than that which is termed Southern slavery."

Byrdsall's and Brownson's political evolution, as much as Leggett's and Morris's, prompts a thorny question: How could committed Democrats—who shared nearly identical beliefs on centralized authority, workers' rights, egalitarianism, and the Money Power—come to such different conclusions about the threat of slavery and slaveholders? Put another way, Why did some Democrats who held these same principles and hostilities to centralized power in any form become Free Soilers while others did not? The answers to these questions lie at the heart of the study of political ideology. The simplest answer . . . is that every antebellum Democrat (or Whig, or Know-Nothing) fashioned himself and his allies adherents to the "true" and "pure" principles of his political party. As Major Wilson and Michael Morrison have shown, party members who shared the same beliefs commonly wound up on different sides of an issue, especially one as contentious as slavery. Conversely, party members could arrive at similar beliefs for very different reasons—witness the variety of (often contradictory) arguments mobilized by Democrats against the Second Bank of the United States. Hard-money Virginia Democrats, for example, opposed the bank because they believed paper money robbed planters and workers of the value of their crops or labor. Soft-money Ohio Democrats, however, also opposed the bank but believed restricting the use of paper currency to commercial transactions would likely choke off western development.

Responses to the Slave Power proved to be as varied as earlier reactions to the Money Power. The comparison is particularly apt because free-soil Democrats adapted (in a process Lawrence Kohl calls "transference of feeling") the rhetoric and substance of the Money Power ideology and used it to make sense of, and formulate a critical response to, the emergence of the Slave Power. At the same time, other

Democrats reached the opposite conclusion about the relation between slavery, slaveholders, and national politics. They charged that Free Soilers were dangerous latitudinarians intent on enhancing centralized power (in this case, the power of Congress to ban slavery in the territories) against the rights and liberties of individuals. These anti-free-soil Democrats fashioned their opposition to central power into the formula of popular sovereignty, which allowed residents of a territory to decide whether to admit or ban slavery.

How, then, is it possible to explain the rising hostility to slavery among some northern Democrats and not others? Obviously, opposing centralized authority and the paper economy was not, in and of itself, enough to prompt a Democrat to become a Free Soiler. Historians have long privileged the political causes of the free-soil revolt, focusing on one Democratic faction's desire for "revenge" against the party's southern wing and its office-seeking northern allies. No doubt for some Free Soilers, the decision to bolt their party was based on naked political maneuvering. But this study will show that by 1848, northern Democratic dissidents—even those who were politicians—sincerely believed their party had been hijacked by southern aristocrats bent on subsuming the party's goals to one issue: the expansion of slavery.

Party politics, however, was seldom the sole factor in a Free Soiler's making. Other influences, often in combination, were necessary to motivate this type of action, as well as to influence the timing with which it was taken. Searching for explanations of who bolted—and who stayed—prompts the historian to look for hitherto unexamined similarities linking those individuals who became Free Soilers. To begin, an analysis of the areas where the free-soil revolt emerged in the 1840s offers a picture of political antislavery vastly different from the one historians usually present. Free-soil voting clusters stretched from the remote, eastern border of New Hampshire, through upstate New York, and west to the recently settled towns in Wisconsin territory. Although there were no "typical" free-soil areas, they tended to be long settled, fairly isolated, and off the mainstream of western migration. They were largely untouched by the speculative mania that caused wildly fluctuating land prices, and they suffered from chronic shortages of cash. The depression of the late 1830s and 1840s was especially severe for the people who lived in these communities, leaving them extremely hostile to banks, joint-stock corporations, and paper money. Not surprisingly, these districts provided the Democratic Party, especially its radical, hard-money wing, with some of its largest electoral victory margins. After 1854 these former Jacksonian strongholds—in places such as New Hampshire, northern Pennsylvania, central New York, and the northern borders of Ohio and Illinois—were solidly, and suddenly, in the Republican column. Many of them still are.

In addition to these socioeconomic similarities, a number of other factors emerged repeatedly—although not universally—in the intellectual biographies of free-soil politicians and the constituents with whom they corresponded. The most significant of these include nonevangelical religious affiliations (sometimes verging on deism, free thought, and "irreligion"), radical ideas about landownership, and an outsider relationship to the emerging market economy. Again, not all Free Soilers exhibited these characteristics, and not all those who did became Free Soilers. Nevertheless, each of these factors emerges as a leitmotif in free-soil editorials, manifestos, speeches, and correspondence.