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Lyon Rathbun
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

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THE DEBATE OVER ANNEXING TEXAS AND THE EMERGENCE OF MANIFEST DESTINY

LYON RATHBUN

Scholars have long understood that the ideology of manifest destiny congealed out of the millennial ideals embedded in American culture. However, they have not fully appreciated that manifest destiny only became a national ideology by overwhelming the arguments that were first voiced during the Monroe Administration to resist the incorporation of Texas into the Union. Understanding how the secular ideals of the classical republican tradition were used to resist the inclusion of Texas can help us understand the crystallization of manifest destiny into a theologized ideology in the 1840s.

All students of American history are familiar with the astonishing burst of expansion in the 1840s that began with the annexation of Texas and culminated in the huge territorial gains of the Mexican-American War. Fewer, however, appreciate how vigorously many Americans sought to block expansion into the Far West by opposing the annexation of Texas.

Opposition began in the early 1820s and crystallized into a movement led by Conscience Whigs and abolitionists between 1836 and 1844. During these years, opponents of annexation fervently warned that acquiring Texas would ignite war with Mexico and set the nation on a path of empire building. Appealing to the civic principles of the Revolutionary generation, opponents urged the nation to cultivate the inner resources of the republic rather than pursue an expansionist policy that would transform the nation into an empire. "We have a republic," boomed Daniel Webster in one of several orations he delivered denouncing annexation in 1844. "Instead of aiming to enlarge its boundaries let us seek, rather, to strengthen its union, to draw out its resources, to maintain and improve its institutions of religion and liberty, and thus to rush it forward in its career of prosperity and glory."¹ Arguing that expanding slavery across the Southwest would corrupt the civic foundations of the republic, Whigs and abolitionists impeded expansionists in the Jackson, Van Buren, and Tyler administrations from annexing Texas.

Lyon Rathbun is Assistant Professor of English at Penn State University in Worthington/Scranton, Pennsylvania

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Standard surveys of the nineteenth century typically depict westward expansion as inevitable and unopposed. Even an historical overview as sensitive to the contradictory impulses of American culture as Eric Foner's *The Story of American Freedom* depicts white males of the antebellum period as broadly endorsing expansion.² The most recent and most nuanced histories of antebellum expansion make only passing reference to the activists who blocked the annexation of Texas until the election of James Polk in 1844. Texas, after all, *was* annexed; the United States *did* become a continental empire. The outcome of events has focused historical attention on the causes and consequences of antebellum territorial expansion. Those who resisted the seemingly inevitable march of the republic across the continent typically receive little more than passing mention.³

Not only living historians, but contemporaneous observers assumed that expansion was problematic but inexorable, and therefore did not see opponents of expansion as important players in events. Although Ralph Waldo Emerson himself joined the petition campaign against the annexation of Texas, he wrote in his journal that "It is very certain that the strong British race which have now overrun so much of this continent, must also overrun that tract [Texas] & Mexico & Oregon also, and in the course of ages be of small import by what particular occasions & methods it was done."⁴ Likewise, the distinctive dynamism of American life left Alexis de Tocqueville convinced that the United States would soon acquire Mexico's northern territories. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville observed that the "vast provinces extending beyond the frontiers of the Union towards Mexico are still destitute of inhabitants." Inevitably, American citizens would expand across the northern Mexican territories. "They will take possession of the soil and establish social institutions, so that when the legal owner at length arrives, he will find the wilderness under cultivation, and strangers quietly settled in the midst of his inheritance."⁵

Notably, Tocqueville saw the apparent inevitability of American expansion as a cause for alarm rather than celebration. "The Americans contemplate this extraordinary and hasty progress with exultation," he wrote, "but they would be wiser to consider it with sorrow and alarm."⁶ Tocqueville, however, wrote these words before the debate over annexing Texas had complicated the issue of territorial expansion. He never heard the bull whip of John Quincy Adams's oratory cracking across the floor of the House of Representatives; he never saw the mountain of petitions, both for and against the annexation of Texas, dumped by the wagon load in the capital; he never read the dire warnings in the Whig and abolitionist press that seizing the territories of a sister republic would transform the United States into a new version of the Roman Empire. Had Alexis de Tocqueville witnessed the national debate over the annexation of Texas between 1836 and 1844, he would have heard abundant expressions of "sorrow and alarm."

Contemporaneous observers, like contemporary historians, have had ample cause for focusing on the seeming inevitability of expansion in the 1840s. Yet to overlook the opponents of annexation because they were fighting a battle that seemed doomed even to themselves is to flatten our understanding of the very dynamics that did, finally, result in the annexation of the Far West during Polk's administration. Appreciating the arguments used to resist the incorporation of Texas into the Union can help us understand why manifest destiny emerged with such concentrated intensity during the heady days of Polk's administration. In a more generalized sense, the national controversy over annexing Texas is worth revisiting because it mirrors how conflicted Americans of the antebellum period actually were over their political heritage and over their collective future.

THE POLEMICAL REVIVAL OF THE OLD SPARTAN ETHOS

The question of admitting Texas to the Union emerged within a political climate of deepening national discord over slavery. The impasse over admitting Missouri as a slave state back in 1820 had been a watershed in the emerging polarization between North and South; another defining moment had been the confrontation over South Carolina's effort to nullify tariff rates in 1832. Tensions had intensified in the wake of the Turner slave revolt and the British abolition of slavery in the West Indies; the militant American Anti-Slavery Society was formed in 1833; efforts to distribute anti-slavery literature in the South were blocked through violence and intimidation; the petition campaign to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia prompted the Pinckney gag rule that prevented members of the House from receiving anti-slave petitions and from debating any issue connected with slavery. The claustrophobic defensiveness felt by many Southerners grew increasingly brittle when Andrew Jackson anointed the moderate New Yorker Martin Van Buren to lead the Democratic ticket in the presidential election of 1836.⁷

In the spring of 1836, as divisions over a complex of issues concerning slavery were deepening, the emergence of a new controversy, whether to add Texas to the Union, added grease to a fire that was already crackling hot. In March 1836, Texas had declared independence from Mexico; in April, Sam Houston had defeated Santa Anna's army at San Jacinto; in May 1836, while the House was debating the gag rule and the Senate was considering federal measures to block "incendiary" literature from being sent through the U.S. mail, both houses began considering petitions calling for the recognition and annexation of Texas.⁸ Abolitionists and Conscience Whigs had a new, immensely provocative, Jacksonian initiative to oppose.

The debate that began in 1836 over annexing Texas added a new element to the array of disagreements over slavery that were intensifying in the late 1830s. The debate was also the culmination of sectional differences over expanding slavery into

the Southwest that had first erupted a generation earlier over terms of the Adams-Onís Transcontinental Treaty of 1819. How national leaders began differing over the expansion of slavery in 1820 is critical for understanding the debate over Texas that began in 1836.

While ratifying American sovereignty over Florida, the Trans-continental Treaty had also relinquished all American claims to the southwestern territories west of the Sabine River, a measure that deeply threatened many Southerners. While the 1819 treaty blocked Southern expansion into the Southwest, the Compromise of 1820 excluded slavery north of latitude 36° 30', the southern boundary of Missouri. Many Southerners responded with a pronounced sense of entrapment.⁹ Before 1820, John Calhoun, Andrew Jackson, and John Quincy Adams had all embraced Jefferson's vision of the Empire of Liberty spreading across the continent, "doubling the numbers of mankind, and of course the quantum of existence and happiness."¹⁰ After the Missouri Compromise was forged and the Transcontinental Treaty ratified, these three national leaders began developing their mutually antagonistic visions of the nation's future. Deeply felt differences over Texas were decisive in shattering the consensus that had united Republicans in the wake of the War of 1812.

In the teens, Americans were finding common ground in the core principles of the "American System" promoted by the National Republicans: Through the integrated development of agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce, fueled by incremental expansion across the continent, the country would become economically self-sufficient, as Hamilton had desired, while maintaining the moderate level of development that Jefferson had hoped to preserve.¹¹ As Hezekiah Niles explained in an 1817 editorial, agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce were all necessary for the nation's prosperity. "The three," Niles wrote, "in certain and just proportions, must exist to render and keep us a free, happy and prosperous people."¹²

Notably, the National Republicans were helping to legitimize the commercialized civic faith that so many Americans were embracing in the teens. The commonwealth would not find its social cohesion through the promotion of civic virtue, as members of the Revolutionary generation had advocated, but in the collective opportunities for private gain created by a nationally integrated market system. During a speech endorsing internal improvements delivered on February 4, 1817, John Calhoun epitomized the National Republicans' faith in state-directed private enterprise when he stated, "Let us, then, bind the republic together with a perfect system of roads and canals. Let us conquer space."¹³

For a brief period in the teens, future enemies united around a commercialized vision of national development and expansion that was commonly eulogized as a fulfillment of the nation's providential destiny. In helping extend the nation's border to the Pacific, Adams saw himself as an agent of destiny. After negotiating the final terms of the Transcontinental Treaty, Adams wrote in his diary, "It was near one in the morning when I closed the day with ejaculations of fervent gratitude to

the giver of all good. . . . It [the treaty] is the work of an intelligent and all-embracing Cause."¹⁴ For his part, in defeating the Creeks and Seminoles during the War of 1812, and in effecting the removal of the Civilized Tribes west of the Mississippi during his presidency, Jackson was a veritable embodiment of the divinely sanctioned mission to expand across the continent.¹⁵ The commitment to territorial expansion that Adams shared with Jackson was underscored when the refined New Englander defended the rough-hewn Tennessean for his audacious 1818 Florida invasion. But this was before Jackson, and other Southerners, began accusing Adams of "giving away Texas" while negotiating the Adams-Onís Transcontinental Treaty of 1819.

The Adams-Onís Treaty had been negotiated around a simple formula: On the one hand, American claims on the Columbia River and Pacific Coast would be safeguarded and American neutrality in the Spanish colonial conflict would remain intact. On the other hand, the United States would surrender all territorial claims west of the Sabine River while Spain would surrender all claims east of the Mississippi.¹⁶ At the time, Adams believed that relinquishing the country's dubious claim to the Southwest was temporary. The very territorial gains won through the treaty, Adams assured the cabinet in November 1819, "rendered it still more unavoidable that the remainder of the continent should ultimately be ours."¹⁷

Seeking to realize his vision of continental expansion as president, Adams himself sought to purchase Texas from Mexico. Yet at the same time, the impasse over admitting Missouri as a free state had left him apprehensive about adding territory to the Union that would augment the power of the South in the national government. Adam's vision of national progress had presumed that slavery would gradually disappear in the South, as it had in the North after the Revolutionary War.¹⁸ However, the Missouri crisis had demonstrated that Southerners were determined to protect slavery, even at the cost of seceding from the Union.¹⁹ At the time of the Missouri Compromise, Adams wondered in his diary if Northerners should not have stood their ground over slavery in Missouri. This would have forced a showdown with the slave states and resulted in a new union of free Northern states. "If the Union must be dissolved," Adams concluded, "slavery is precisely the question upon which it ought to break. For the present, however, this contest is laid asleep."²⁰ The Missouri crisis had convinced Adams that only a cataclysmic confrontation could eliminate slavery; it had also left him fearful that expanding slavery would hasten the awful day of reckoning.

Before the Missouri crisis, Adams had seen no internal obstacles to the expansion of the nation to the Pacific. Yet afterwards, Adams saw the acquisition of Texas as endangering the Union. In April 1820, Adams wrote that the nation was threatened by the combination of "the overgrown extent of its territory and the slavery question." By reviving the slavery issue, acquiring Texas might "split us in two."²¹ As Adams's vision of expanding the nation to the Pacific had been expressed in the language of

providential destiny, so his emerging doubts echoed the classical warning that as republics expanded, internal differences made civic dissolution increasingly likely. Others began expressing the same fear of national fragmentation in similar terms.

In the fall of 1819, Monroe's cabinet had belligerently considered occupying Texas if Spain continued to withhold its ratification. Yet after the Missouri crisis, Monroe warned that acquiring more "territory, to the west & south, involve[d] difficulties, of an internal nature, which menace[d] the Union itself."²² In 1836, Adams would explain that President Monroe had favored the Sabine River as the nation's southwestern boundary in 1819 because "more expansive borders would make our Union so heavy that it would break into fragments by its own weight."²³ Dropping the trope of providential destiny, Monroe, as remembered by Adams, had embraced the language of classical republicanism: republics could not expand without self-destructing.

For some, the prospect of adding Texas to the Union had revived old secular fears that republics could not expand beyond finite limits. For others, particularly from southwestern states like Tennessee and Kentucky, abandoning Texas betrayed the country's providential future. In 1820, Henry Clay introduced legislation that would annul the Transcontinental Treaty. Echoing editorials across the West that denounced the treaty for giving up Texas, he explained that it was "in the order of providence and an inevitable result of the principle of population that the whole of this continent, including Texas, was to be peopled in process of time."²⁴ "The magnificent valley of the Mississippi is ours," declared Senator Thomas Hart Benton in one of several editorials he wrote denouncing the cession of Texas, "and woe to the statesman who shall undertake to surrender one drop of its water, one inch of its soil, to any foreign power."²⁵

After 1820, national leaders no longer agreed that acquiring Texas, along with the whole western half of the continent, was necessary to achieve integrated national development. While some continued using the language of providential destiny in calling for the acquisition of Texas, others had begun echoing the civic vocabulary of classical republicanism in expressing their fears of social disintegration. The emerging division over slavery had given new saliency to the old Montesquieuian warning that diverging interests within an expansive republic made its dissolution inevitable.

We can easily forget that the generation of Adams, Clay, and Jackson came to political consciousness in the 1780s, when Montesquieu's conception of republics still dominated American political thought. During his youth, Andrew Jackson had involved himself in secessionist intrigue in Tennessee and later supported the Burr conspiracy. As an undergraduate at Harvard, John Quincy Adams was swayed, for a brief time, by the Anti-Federalist critique of the federal Constitution.²⁶ As recently as 1786, Jefferson himself had assumed that territories west of the Appalachian Mountains would become autonomous republics as they developed distinctive

social habits and economic interests. "If they see their interests in separation," Jefferson wrote of Kentuckians in 1786, "why should we take sides with our Atlantic rather than our Mississippi descendants? God bless them both and keep them in union, if it be for their good, but separate from them, if it be better."²⁷ Jefferson's implicit assumption that republics could not expand beyond finite limits had undergirded the Articles of Confederation and became a key tenet of the Anti-Federalist opposition to the Federal Constitution. As Samuel Beer writes in *To Make a Nation: The Rediscovery of American Federalism*, "It was Montesquieu's model of the confederate republic, set in its larger intellectual context, that gave coherence to the argument of the Anti-Federalists."²⁸ For the Anti-Federalists, only small republics could be assured of representation by virtuous leaders who would retain their ties to local communities. Of course, ratification of the Constitution in 1787 had discredited the Montesquieuan republican vision. The new institutional framework rendered federalism a workable mechanism for making territorial expansion compatible with republican government.²⁹

Jefferson, and expansionists who followed his lead throughout the antebellum period, grounded their providential vision of territorial enlargement in the new institutional framework provided by the Federal Constitution. Notably, the three authors of *The Federalist Papers*, John Jay, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton, collectively signed these polemics with the name "Publius" after the founder of Rome immortalized by Plutarch in *Life of Publius Valerius Publicola*.³⁰ They deliberately associated the new constitution with the dynamic of Rome as opposed to the inertia of Sparta that had characterized the Articles of Confederation.

In contrast to the Anti-Federalists, supporters of the Constitution believed that expansion could stabilize the civic foundations of the new nation. In his famous "Federalist Number Ten," Madison-Publius explained the central dynamic of the new Constitution. Because the new framework would be rooted in the sovereignty of citizens, not of states, regional and national concerns would harmonize as the population and territory of the republic expanded. What had been a threat under the Spartan Articles of Confederation was a blessing in the new expansive republic. As Madison put it, "In the extent and proper structure of the Union, therefore we behold a republican remedy for the diseases most incident to republican government."³¹

With the demise of the Articles of Confederation, the classical republican heritage had lost its institutional base. Nevertheless, the Montesquieuan view that republics had to remain territorially limited remained a vibrant thread within the tapestry of traditions comprising the political culture of the United States. It helped buttress the states' rights position that South Carolina advanced during the nullification crisis and that would eventually rationalize the secession of the South in 1860. Calhoun's theory that the Constitution was essentially a contract between the states drew directly on Montesquieu's idea of confederated republics in which secession was a fully acknowledged right.³² Montesquieu's "Spartan" version of republican doctrine

also provided a familiar vocabulary for comprehending the vexing sectional divisions that began threatening to fragment the republic in the 1820's. That vocabulary would prove rhetorically expedient for blocking the efforts to annex Texas that began in 1836.

THE OPPONENTS SEIZE THE REIGNS

By the 1830s, the federal framework was well established and leaders across the political spectrum had been eulogizing the promise of territorial expansion since the opening of the new century. Why, then, did opponents of annexation resurrect the seemingly outmoded allegation that adding new territory would overextend the nation's boundaries? Because the claim added resonance to the Whig charge that Jackson posed a despotic threat to the civic foundations of the republic. In contrast to the ideological contests between Federalists and Republicans, the emerging competition between the Jacksonian and Whig parties, played out before a vastly increased national audience, was much more figural in nature.³³ As Jackson had elevated himself into a national symbol of yeoman virtue protecting the nation from aristocratic domination, so Jackson's disparate foes were finding their own symbolic identity as defenders of the revolutionary heritage against the threat of executive tyranny. The Whigs did not congeal into a national party until the election of 1840. Since the battle over rechartering the Second Bank of the United States, Jackson's deeply divided political foes had united around the symbolic ideal of preserving republican liberty from executive tyranny. They found common ground in the claim that Jackson was consolidating federal power in the executive branch of government.³⁴ The 1834 New York Whig Convention was echoing this charge in its shrill announcement that "OUR LIBERTIES ARE IN DANGER at this moment. If by your votes you concede the powers that are claimed, your president has become your monarch."³⁵

Following the shrewd council of his advisors, Jackson refused to take any action towards Texas in the culminating year of his presidency that could tarnish his image as an icon of republican liberty or damage the prospects of his successor in the upcoming election of 1836. He would not risk giving his ardent critics any pretext for embellishing the rallying cry of the emerging Whig Party that "King Andrew" was bent on consolidating the powers of the government in the executive branch, undermining the liberties of the people, and wrecking the republic. Considering his longstanding desire to add Texas to the Union, Jackson's restraint in 1836 was remarkable.

Of all the national figures who had opposed the Transcontinental Treaty, none had been more convinced than Andrew Jackson that the western boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase extended, at least, to the headwaters of the Rio Grande River. Early in his first administration, he wrote Van Buren, "The god of the universe had

intended this great valley to belong to one nation.”³⁶ Significantly, Jackson did not pursue Texas primarily to expand slavery but to fulfill the vision of national development that he had shared with Clay, Calhoun, and Adams in the teens.³⁷ Expressing his ardent desire to realize the ambitions for empire that Jefferson and John Quincy Adams had done so much to initiate, he wrote shortly after taking office, “I have long since been aware of the importance of Texas to the United States, and of the real necessity of extending our boundary west of the Sabine. . . . I shall keep my eye on this object and the first propitious moment make the attempt to regain the Territory as far south and west as the great Desert.”³⁸ Having failed to purchase Texas during the first seven years of his presidency, Jackson was given a new opportunity when Texas won its independence from Mexico during the last year of his presidency. Jackson’s critics, however, were making the cost of action prohibitively high.

In the same months that Texas was separating from Mexico, the abolitionist activist Benjamin Lundy was disseminating a volley of electrifying polemics that provided Jackson’s critics with all the materials they needed to formulate a powerful new territorial dimension to their Whig critique of Jacksonianism.

Born in 1789, Benjamin Lundy was a fourth generation Quaker who became devoted to the abolitionist cause after serving an apprenticeship as a saddler in Wheeling, Virginia.³⁹ In 1815, after opening a saddle shop in St. Clairsville, Ohio, Lundy organized his first antislavery association, the Union Humane Society, that became a model for the nearly 1000 antislavery societies that began agitating to prevent Texas from being annexed to the Union in 1836.⁴⁰ In the mid-1820s, Lundy had attempted to establish Negro settlements in Canada and Haiti where emancipated slaves, in possession of their political rights, could demonstrate their innate capacity for full civic existence. By 1828, Lundy began viewing Texas as an ideal locale for a Negro settlement.

After an initial visit to Texas in 1828, Lundy wrote that under Mexican rule, Texas was a region “where man, without distinction of color or condition, is looked upon as the being that the Deity made him, free and independent.”⁴¹ A thriving Texan colony of emancipated slaves, Lundy wrote in another issue, would prove to Americans that the man of color, “may be fitted for freedom and self-government with perfect ease and safety.”⁴²

After three trips and three years of effort, Benjamin Lundy finally received an empresario grant for a colony from the governor of Tamaulipas in the spring of 1835. Allowed 138,000 acres, the exact location to be selected by himself, Lundy was permitted to settle 250 families within two years.⁴³ When the eruption of hostilities in Texas rendered his colonization plans unfeasible, Benjamin Lundy returned to the United States convinced that the Texan rebellion posed a dire threat to the future of the republic.

Lundy condemned the Texan Rebellion in a barrage of nine essays first published in the *National Gazette* and later republished in a pamphlet titled *The Origin and*

True Causes of the Texas Revolution Commenced in the Year 1835. In an expanded version this became *The War in Texas: A Review of Facts and Circumstances, Showing That this Contest is the Result of a Long Premeditated Crusade against the Government, Set on Foot by Slaveholders, Land Speculators, etc. with the View of Re-Establishing, Extending, and Perpetuating the System of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Republic of Mexico*. The culmination of Lundy's enchantment with the harmony between Hispanics, Blacks, Indians, and Anglos that he had witnessed in northern Mexico, *The War in Texas* became a primary source for the Whig and abolitionist opposition to annexation over the course of the next nine years.

Historians of the Whig Party and abolitionist movement have often pointed out that antebellum reformers, influenced by the Second Great Awakening, and by Scottish common sense philosophy, emphasized absolutist moral appeals in their rhetoric.⁴⁴ Benjamin Lundy's polemical writings were embroidered with Christian imagery and infused with an absolutist ethos of moral certainty. Yet Lundy's argument against the annexation of Texas was grounded in classical republican doctrine rather than in strictly religious or moral principle. *The War in Texas* asserted that appropriating Texas would wreck the secular foundation of the republic. As an organic entity, the republic would implode if an active citizenry did not maintain the institutional balances that alone insured political stability. Lundy explained,

We cannot longer disguise the fact that the advocates of slavery are resolved, at all hazards to obtain the territory in question, if possible, for the avowed purpose of adding five or six more slaveholding states to this union. Let it be duly considered and let the public voice, from every quarter of the republic, denounce in tones of thunder, the unhallowed proceeding. It must be borne in mind that the system of slavery has been abolished in Texas, by the Mexican government. It is now a free state. A GREATER CURSE could scarcely befall our country, than the annexation of that immense territory to this republic, if the system of slavery should likewise be re-established there.

The "curse" that Lundy invokes is not biblical, but civic: the acquisition of Texas would put the nation under the "yoke" of one faction, the slaveocracy, that would subordinate other interests within the republic. "The hope is entertained," Lundy explained fervently,

That the efforts of the Mexicans may be thus paralyzed, and the possession of the territory retained by the revolutionists until the next meeting of the congress of the United States, when the independence of the Texian [*sic*] Republic may be formally acknowledged that soon thereafter admitted, as an independent state, into this confederacy. This "The Combination" is fully determined upon. It is the ultimatum of their grand design. Its members have a majority in the councils of the nation; and as the sentiments of the executive head coincides with theirs, the government is com-

pletely under their controlling influence; and their object will certainly be accomplished, unless the people of our free states arouse from their apathy and by an open, decided expression of their sentiments, induce their senators and representatives in congress to oppose this measure. *LET THE PUBLIC VOICE BE RAISED IN TONES OF THUNDER* . . . Let the nation be thoroughly awakened, and all may yet be well. Otherwise, the Demon of Oppression will triumph, and our children must wear his chains—or blood will flow in torrents, and the land will be drenched with their crimson gore.

The language, charged with Christian imagery, is explicitly employed to make a civic claim: appropriating Mexico's northern territories would barbarize the American citizenry and transform the republic into a despotic empire. "Will you sanction the abominable outrage?" Lundy asked, concluding *The War in Texas*, "involve yourselves in the deep criminality, and perhaps the horrors of war, for the establishment of slavery in a land of freedom? And thus put your neck and the necks of your posterity under the feet of the domineering tyrants of the South for centuries to come?"⁴⁵

Lundy's sense of righteous urgency, and his civic claim that annexing Texas would undermine the secular foundation of the republic, were taken up by opponents everywhere. On March 18, 1836, a leading Whig paper, *The National Intelligencer*, echoed Lundy in claiming that the "plot" to acquire Texas would be "a deep and lasting curse to the country." In Congress, John Quincy Adams acted on Lundy's call to oppose the incipient efforts to annex Texas. He did so in a famous speech, "On the Joint Resolution for Distributing Rations to the Distressed Fugitives from Indian Hostilities," delivered before the House of Representatives on May 25, 1836. Adams used the speech both to refute the first article of the Pinckney gag rule, that Congress possessed no authority over slavery in the states, and to advance Lundy's claim that expanding slavery imperiled the civic foundations of the republic. Because it was so widely reproduced both in Mexico and in the abolitionist press, Adams described the speech in his diary as "by far the most noted speech that I ever made"⁴⁶

Turning from other issues to Texas, Adams echoed Lundy in transforming Mexico into a symbol of freedom while transmuted Texas into an emblem of despotism. "The war now raging in Texas," Adams charged,

is a war for the re-establishment of slavery where it was abolished . . . and every possible effort has been made to drive us into the war on the side of slavery. What will be your claim in the upcoming war with Mexico? Aggression, conquest, and the re-establishment of slavery where it has been abolished. In that war, sir, the banners of freedom will be the banners of Mexico; and your banners, I blush to speak the word, will be the banners of slavery.⁴⁷

In advancing his provocative assertion, Adams was relying—directly—on the overheated evidence that Benjamin Lundy had accumulated during his three excursions into Texas and Tamaulipas. Adams had met Lundy in 1835 and read many of his articles before recognition became an issue for congressional debate. Shortly after Adams began making his arguments in the House, he thanked Lundy for supplying him “with nearly all the facts” he had employed in the congressional debates.⁴⁸ One month later, Adams confided to Lundy, “I see no alternative, but that the whole Mexican confederation is destined to be overrun by our landjobbers and slavemakers, and that the dissolution of our own Union must precede the final struggle between slavery and freedom.”⁴⁹

By highlighting the abolishment of slavery in Mexico, Adams underscored the maleficence of annexing Texas. Yet in defending Mexico’s civic integrity, Adams also denounced Jacksonian expansion as threatening to overextend the republic’s boundaries. Explaining that Monroe had favored the Sabine River as the nation’s southwestern boundary so as not to over-expand the boundaries of the republic, Adams asked his fellow congressmen,

As to the annexation of Texas to your confederation, for what do you want it? Are you not large and unwieldy enough already? . . . Is your Southern and South-Western frontier not sufficiently extensive? Why are you adding regiment after regiment of dragoons to your standing army?⁵⁰

Colleagues who had seen Secretary of State Adams set the nation on a diplomatic course of continental expansion must have listened to Adams with incredulity. Yet however hypocritical or outmoded Adams’ argument might have appeared to his listeners, it was a rhetorically effective means of linking Jackson’s desire to acquire Texas with earlier Whig efforts to depict Jackson as threatening the underpinnings of the republic. And indeed, Whig efforts to discredit expansionistic aspirations were effecting Jackson’s response to the unfolding events in Texas.

Throughout the months leading up to the 1836 election, Jackson reacted to events in Texas with extraordinary caution. Privately, Jackson itched to deal with Mexico as he had with the Seminole Indians. Informed during a cabinet meeting that Mexican officials were intimidating American residents at Tampico, he heatedly ordered a letter written to the local Naval commander with instructions, in the event that any American citizens were harmed, “to batter down and destroy their town and exterminate the inhabitants from the face of the earth.”⁵¹ Yet Jackson did not dare act. In July 1836, a delegation of Texan commissioners arrived in Washington to lobby for American recognition of Texan independence. Though “favorably disposed” to their objectives, Jackson would not take any action as president, “lest the censures of the world, or at least the civilized world, might fall upon him.”⁵²

Throughout this period, Jackson was judiciously heeding the council of advisors who cautioned him to take no action regarding Texas that could be used by his political opponents. During the Texan Revolution, General Gaines, commander of American forces along the boarder between the United States and Mexico, violated his ambiguous orders to respect neutrality. Frank Blair, his eye focused on public opinion, informed Jackson that Gaines was “bringing upon our character as a people the infamy of the Carthagenians.”⁵³ Amos Kendall, also making direct reference to public opinion, implored Jackson to recall Gaines from the border. Kendall explained, “I would wish our government to maintain such an attitude as not only to be right but to appear so before the world. Our people are already considered responsible for the warfare carried on against Mexico in Texas, and that sentiment will gain strength, day by day throughout the world.” Jackson immediately saw the wisdom of avoiding public censure and informed Kendall that his was “certainly a just view, and one which you will find I have adopted. I have determined to maintain a strict neutrality.”⁵⁴

Suggesting his sensitivity to charges of exercising executive despotism, Jackson conspicuously left Congress with the prerogative of recognizing Texas. “I think it most congenial with the principles of our government,” he wrote in December 1836, “to leave the question to Congress, as the proper power, being in session to advise, upon the propriety of acknowledging the independence of Texas.”⁵⁵ Determined to remain a national icon of republican principle, he would not risk energizing his critics by recognizing Texas.

As the issue of Texas emerged onto the national stage, Benjamin Lundy’s *War in Texas* enabled opponents to characterize annexation as dangerous to the civic foundations of the republic. In the antiquated but familiar language of republican doctrine, opponents of annexation gave voice to Northern anxieties that acquiring Texas would give the South disproportionate political strength in the federal government. Jacksonians would have to saturate the national culture with the transcendent creed of manifest destiny to muffle their opponents’ civic arguments.

Between 1836 and 1844, opponents of annexation resorted to a wide spectrum of arguments that appealed to differing constituencies, interests, and values. Many abolitionists focused on the immorality of slavery; some Whigs, and Democrats, argued that incorporating the “Anglo-Gallo-Americans” of the Southwest would threaten the integrity of Anglo-Saxon culture; others insisted the Constitution offered no provisions for incorporating a foreign people; still others maintained that the Northeast, or Southeast, would lose population and economic leverage if Texas joined the Union.⁵⁶ While these appeals were compelling in local contexts, the argument that resonated most deeply in the collective political conscience of Americans was the charge that acquiring Texas was not merely immoral, impolitic, or unconstitutional: Annexing Texas would imperil the republic itself.

Appealing to the old Montesquieuian tradition, opponents of annexation repeatedly invoked the antithesis between Spartan consolidation and Roman conquest.

Again and again, polemicists emphasized the need to fortify and embellish rather than expand and accumulate; they insisted that the republic had no divine protection against the corrosion of time; they warned that expansion would multiply external enemies while creating extremes of privilege and dependence within.

Robert Mayo's 1839 pamphlet, *Political Sketches of Eight Years in Washington*, illustrates how opponents of annexation employed Montesquieuan appeals to resist the annexation of Texas. By encouraging the Texan rebellion, Mayo insisted that Jackson had already corrupted the republic's civic foundations. "Your boasted masterpiece of political systems," Mayo wrote in his introduction, "has already far degenerated into the deplorable condition of a practical revolution which but too probably shadows forth the reality of the coming catastrophe that threatens speedily to manifest itself to every eye."⁵⁷ Mayo shrilly warned that if the republic dared to seize Mexican territory, the impending ruin of the United States would be complete. The conspiracy to "dismember the Mexican dominions" would "pervert the sacred name and principles of republicans, to the private purposes of peculation, power and self."⁵⁸ Acquiring Texas would violate Mexican sovereignty, overextend the borders, swell the army, increase political patronage, and augment executive power. In short, the annexation of Texas would wreck the republic.

Using a strikingly classical metaphor, Mayo warned that conquering Mexican lands would quicken the turning wheel of fortune that dictated the fate of all human societies. Having put too much faith in perfidious public servants, Americans were, "CAREERING THE CYCLE OF POLITICAL DESTINY WHICH AUTHENTIC HISTORY ASCRIBES TO ALL NATIONS OF A MORNING'S DAWN, A MERIDIAN RENOWN, AND AN EVENING'S DECLINATION TOWARDS THE GLOOMY ABYSS FROM WHENCE THEY EMERGED."⁵⁹ According to Mayo, acquiring Mexican territories would take the United States down the wretched decline of empire-building.

The classical premises that Mayo employed in *Political Sketches* were echoed across the polemical literature written in opposition to the annexation of Texas. Even Church-affiliated polemicists usually cast their arguments in explicitly classical terms. One of the best known pamphlets, widely distributed in the United States and Mexico, was written in 1837 by the prominent Unitarian minister William Channing. Titled "Letter to the Hon. Henry Clay, on the Annexation of Texas to the United States," Channing's epistolary manifesto made a clarion appeal to the same classical suppositions that are so evident in Mayo's and Lundy's writings.

For Channing, as for Mayo, the annexation of Texas portended the ruin of the American republic. Seizing Texas, Channing warned, "will be linked by an iron necessity to long-continued deeds of rapine and blood. Ages may not see the catastrophe of the tragedy, the first scene of which we are so ready to enact."⁶⁰ If the republic had learned from history, "it would feel the necessity of laying an immediate curb on its passion for extended territory. It would not trust itself to new acqui-

sitions. It would shrink from the temptation to conquest.”⁶¹ The annexation of Texas, Channing warned, would precipitate the same consequences of empire-building dramatized in so many modern and ancient histories of republics.

For Channing, the consequence of violating Mexico’s sovereignty would be civic ruin. “Great armies will require great revenues and raise up great chieftains. Are we tired of freedom, that we are prepared to place it under such guardians? Is the republic bent on dying by its own hands?”⁶² The annexation of Texas would transmogrify the republic into an empire.

No public figure was more passionately opposed to annexing Texas than John Quincy Adams. Adams had launched his own campaign against the annexation of Texas in his 1836 speech “On the Joint Resolution for Distributing Rations to the Distressed Fugitives from Indian Hostilities.” When the 25th Congress began deliberations in December 1837, Adams presented a package of petitions protesting annexation. He also presented petitions of the recently organized New York Peace Society to establish an international Court of Nations where the outstanding differences between Mexico and the United States could be arbitrated.⁶³ When the administration majority voted to table the anti-Texas resolutions, the House was inundated with a flood of new petitions against the “annexation of foreign territories of immense and unknown extent for the purpose of encouraging the propagation of slavery.”⁶⁴ The state legislatures of Rhode Island, Vermont, Michigan, Ohio, and Massachusetts delivered to the House more resolutions denouncing annexation. In response, Tennessee, Alabama, and other Southern states presented the House with memorials endorsing the annexation of Texas.⁶⁵

By June 1838, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs recommended that all petitions and resolutions for and against annexation be tabled. The motion, however, did not impede Adams. During the three weeks that Congress remained in session, Adams held the floor during the morning hour reserved for Foreign Affairs Committee business. His marathon speech condemned the tabling of petitions and the conspiracy to seize Mexico’s northern provinces. The pamphlet compiled from the daily fragments of his three week speech filled 130 pages of small print.⁶⁶ By the end of the 25th Congress, Adams and his abolitionist allies had made the political cost of supporting annexation so high that Van Buren could not be persuaded to support the cause. Preoccupied with economic depression, and fearful that annexation would precipitate a war with Mexico, Van Buren repudiated persistent Texan demands for annexation.⁶⁷ In October 1838, the Texas delegation in Washington formally withdrew its proposal for annexation.⁶⁸

TYLER’S BID FOR TEXAS

Soon after John Tyler became president in April 1841, he began seeking the dubious glory of annexing the Lone Star Republic. Though a strong partisan for Southern

interests, Tyler still saw territorial expansion as an economic imperative for the whole country. The ongoing economic depression that had begun with the banking crisis of 1837 had convinced Tyler that opening new territories and acquiring new markets were necessary to sustain national economic growth into the foreseeable future.

As Tyler renewed efforts to acquire Texas, thousands of Americans ruined in the economic downturn were beginning to covet the untapped resources of the Far West. A plethora of new travel narratives such as *The Personal Narrative of James O. Pattie* (1832) and Albert Pike's *Prose Sketches and Poems Written in the Western Country* (1834) were bringing the Far West to the attention of American readers. These narratives, glorifying the presumed superiority of Anglo-Saxons over other races, did much to popularize the cultural ideals of Romanticism that were leaving many Americans increasingly receptive to the transcendent claims of manifest destiny. While the Great Plains and Rockies inhibited agrarian expansion between the 1820s and 1840s, a wide assortment of writings depicting the Far West would help promote the great wave of western settlement that took place between the mid-forties and the mid-nineties.⁶⁹

George Bancroft's *History of the United States*, grounded in the motifs of Romanticism rather than the imperatives of Republicanism, legitimized the ideal of territorial expansion in the phrase embossed across the spine of every volume, "Westward the course of empire holds its sway." Although earlier histories of the United States had been published, Bancroft's *History* was the first to find a wide readership.⁷⁰ Bancroft explained, in the introduction to the first volume, that his history revealed how the Divine Will was enfolded within the historical development of the American nation. "It is the object of the present work," Bancroft wrote, "to follow the steps by which a favoring Providence, calling our institutions into being, has conducted the country to its present happiness and glory."⁷¹

History of the United States provided Americans of the Jacksonian Era with a portrait of the republic as infused with divine purpose that left it impervious to the vicissitudes of time. The polity mirrored in Bancroft's history did not depend on the civic virtue of its citizens nor on maintaining a medium level of commercial development. The nation was not precariously poised between the extremes of decadence and savagery; it was steaming, infallibly, toward the millennium. The republic, Bancroft reassured his readers, could expand across the continent without riding the wheel of fortune and sinking into the abyss of empire building. By the time James Polk nominated Bancroft to be his secretary of the navy, the first volume of *History* had gone through ten editions.⁷²

While Tyler could rely on an increasingly receptive cultural climate, he could also point to a host of potential economic benefits in renewing the Jacksonian bid for California and the far Southwest. By acquiring Texas, Southern planters would monopolize the production of cotton while Northerners would acquire a vast new

domestic market for manufactured goods. By acquiring California's ports, all regions of the country could sell in the vast, untapped markets of Asia.⁷³ To his first secretary of state, Daniel Webster, Tyler wrote, "Our course is too plainly before us to be mistaken. We must look to the whole country and to the whole people."⁷⁴ However, to acquire Mexico's northern provinces for the whole nation, John Tyler first had to refute the damning charge, buttressed by seething sectional animosities and an array of cultural tensions, that acquiring Texas would destabilize the republic.

Tyler's propaganda campaign for Texas was a fumbling dress rehearsal in comparison to the remarkably intense and coherent promotional blitz that peaked after Texas had been annexed and the Polk administration was seeking public support for acquiring the Far West, from New Mexico to Oregon. Tyler's efforts to win public support for his expansionist program began in earnest when Virginia's Whig congressman, Thomas Gilmer, wrote an impassioned editorial endorsing annexation for the *Baltimore Republican and Argus* on January 10, 1843.⁷⁵ Gilmer's article was followed by a host of supportive editorials in leading Democratic papers such as the *St. Louis Enquirer*, the *New York Herald*, the *Daily Madisonian*, and the *Democratic Review*.⁷⁶

By frequently eulogizing the destiny of Anglo-Americans, and denouncing the incapacity of Mexicans, Tyler's propagandists appealed to the cardinal tenets of what became known as "manifest destiny." For example, Gilmer's letter condemned opponents of annexation as lacking faith in the common destiny of the nation. "These [patriotic] sentiments are already extinct," Gilmer explained, "in that bosom which does not kindle at the contemplation of our country's unexampled prosperity and grandeur, as they are heralded by the dawning future."

Declaring that "nations like individuals must live up to their destiny," Gilmer called on the nation to expand into Mexico's northern territories. Because Mexico lacked the civic capacity to either hold or develop its frontier lands, annexing Mexican territories to the United States was warranted. Mexico, Gilmer explained, was "destined for some time to continue in a state of civil chaos, giving no signs of energy but occasional spasmodic convulsions."⁷⁷ In drawing his sharp antithesis between the "destinies" of Mexico and the United States, Gilmer was appealing explicitly to the nationalistic ethic that would triumph during Polk's administration.

That Tyler's propagandists proclaimed his expansionist program to be providentially sanctioned is hardly surprising. What is remarkable about their campaign is the extent to which appeals to providential favor were blunted by the dynamic of controversy over annexing Texas. In renewing Jackson's bid for Texas, Tyler's propagandists first had to meet the damning civic arguments against annexation that Adams and others had been advancing since 1836. Tyler's ideologues, however, could never convincingly refute the charges advanced by their political foes. Unable to redefine the terms of debate, they lost yet another round in the Jacksonian effort to acquire Texas.

With marked clumsiness, Tyler's propagandists sought to disarm their opponents by inverting their central arguments. Tyler's polemicists claimed that the republic was not threatened by a Southern conspiracy to conquer Mexican territory. Rather, the country was threatened by a conspiracy of abolitionists, working in league with Great Britain, to transform Texas into a British protectorate and inspire Southern slaves to rebellion. Secondly, they made the provocative counter-claim that annexation would actually decrease slavery by "draining" the slave population of the upper South. Both assertions were compelling to many voters and would be resurrected during Polk's bid for the Far West. Nevertheless, neither assertion could take the sting out of Adams's bullwhip or win sufficient support to pass Tyler's annexation treaty.

The notion that abolitionists were conspiring with Great Britain to abolish slavery in Texas originated with Duff Green, a wealthy Missouri land speculator. After championing the cause of slaveowners during the Missouri controversy of 1819, he had purchased the *St. Louis Enquirer* to promote Andrew Jackson's presidential aspirations.⁷⁸ A close friend of President Tyler, Green traveled to Great Britain in 1841 as a confidential executive agent with the ostensible purpose of discussing trade issues. Soon, Green was sending inflammatory reports back to Tyler, John Calhoun, and Secretary of State Upshir that British Prime Minister Peel was seeking to promote "rebellion and servile war in the South by purchasing and emancipating the slaves of Texas." The "monomaniacal ravings" of John Quincy Adams and the "fanatical representations of the abolitionists" were promoting the British plot by keeping the American electorate divided over Texas and slavery.⁷⁹ Green's charges were subsequently printed in Green's the *St. Louis Enquirer*, as well as the *New York Herald*, the *Daily Madisonian*, and numerous other regional and municipal papers.⁸⁰

Conceding that the republic was vulnerable to civic corruption, and not infallibly guided by providence, Green's counter-conspiracy theory was soon being exposed as fabrication by members of Tyler's own administration. The American minister to Britain, Edward Everett, brought one of Green's letters to the attention of the British foreign secretary, Lord Aberdeen, who informed Everett that it contained notions "too absurd and unfounded to need serious contradiction."⁸¹ Tyler's minister to Mexico, Waddy Thompson, wrote in 1844 that he had "seen or heard nothing to justify the suspicion that Great Britain has made the abolition of slavery in Texas the condition of her interposition."⁸² Debunked by Tyler's own appointees, the alleged plot to emancipate Texan slaves would be easily discredited by Tyler's abolitionist foes.

The second counter-assertion advanced by expansionists was that annexing Texas would actually curtail slavery. After quietly circulating in the Democratic press for several years, the claim acquired national prominence with the publication of Robert Walker's 1844 pamphlet, *Letter on the Annexation of Texas*. Walker wrote

his influential epistle as a favor to President Tyler, a personal friend and former Senate associate.⁸³ First published in January 1844, *Letter on the Annexation* circulated during Senate debate over annexation in the spring of 1844 and was subsequently employed to legitimize Polk's expansionist platform in the presidential campaign of 1844.

A cunning polemicist, who played a pivotal role in nominating James Polk at the Democratic nominating convention of 1844, Mississippi Senator Robert Walker had been leading the proannexation faction in the Senate since 1836. Endorsing the federal system as capable of infinite expansion, while calling for the annexation of the entire western half of the continent, *Letter on the Annexation of Texas* did much to popularize the core tenets of manifest destiny during Polk's administration. In the context of Polk's 1844 presidential campaign, *Letter on the Annexation of Texas* endorsed Polk's campaign pledge, which Walker himself authored, to "reannex" both Oregon and Texas. The pamphlet was so central to Polk's election that the editor of the *Democratic Review* described it as the "text book" of the party in the presidential campaign.⁸⁴

During the last year of Tyler's presidency, when the stasis of debate centered on the annexation of Texas, the more salient aspect of Walker's *Letter* was its "safety valve thesis." As the slave-holding states emancipated increasing numbers of slaves, Walker argued, they would be "diffused" into Mexico and Central America, "where nine-tenths of their present population are already of the colored races, and where they are not a degraded caste but upon a footing of actual equality with the rest of the population."⁸⁵ Seeking to make annexation palatable to voters who wanted to expand market opportunities while curtailing slavery, Walker's "safety valve thesis" was infused with the righteous ethos of an abolitionist tract written by Benjamin Lundy.

Widely endorsed in editorials across the country, Walker's thesis did appeal to moderates who still hoped that slavery would die a natural death that would render any federal action concerning slavery unnecessary.⁸⁶ However, Walker's claim was contradicted by the South's growing economic dependency on slavery. To many thinking people, Walker's thesis was simply implausible. As one Alabama senator put it, "The idea of slavery going off by a sort of insensible evaporation into the great desert between Texas and Mexico is, to say the least, preposterous."⁸⁷ Moreover, Walker's "thesis" implicitly conceded that slavery was a social evil that threatened the body politic: it did not meet Southerners' growing ideological need to defend slavery in positive terms. As Waddy Thompson explained in a letter published in the *National Intelligencer* on July 6, 1844, "I confess for myself that it will afford me very little consolation in riding over my fields, grown up in broom-sedge and washed into gullies, to be told that slavery still exists and is prosperous in Texas."⁸⁸

Both Walker's "safety valve thesis" and Green's "counter-conspiracy theory" would be taken up by expansionists in later polemical battles. Nevertheless, during

the debate over Tyler's annexation treaty in the spring of 1844, neither argument had sufficient appeal to overcome the charges being made by Tyler's foes, or to garner the necessary support for the annexation treaty that Tyler's last secretary of state, John Calhoun, submitted to the Senate on April 12, 1844.⁸⁹

THE OPPOSITION FIGHTS BACK

Emboldened by Adams's audacity in Congress, and moving with the momentum of earlier victories, the opposition mobilized against Tyler's renewed bid for Texas. In Congress, and throughout the Whig and abolitionist press, Tyler's counter-charges were easily exposed as subterfuge. Deflating Tyler's counter-arguments, opponents reasserted their Spartan claim that seizing Mexico's northern provinces to expand slavery would set the United States on a course of empire-building. Not since the Anti-Federalist opposition to the Constitution had a Montesquieuian prescription for preserving the republic been championed so conspicuously in a debate of national import.

Echoing Lord Aberdeen, most opponents derided expansionists for suggesting that Texans, having won independence from Mexico, were now prepared to become the stooges of Britain. On April 13, 1842, Henry Wise inaugurated Tyler's campaign in the House with a fervid appeal for annexation as the sole alternative to either England colonizing Texas, or Texas conquering Mexico.⁹⁰ In responding to Wise's speech, John Quincy Adams exclaimed, "I am inclined to consider all this rather as approaching to what is sometimes called rhomdomontade." To prick Wise's ire, he added, "I look forward to the time when, in the records of history, the gentleman's [Wise's] name shall be place side by side, not with the names Ghengis Khan or Tamerlane, but with that of a still more glorious conqueror by the name of TOM THUMB."⁹¹ Adams could dismiss Wise's warning of British intrigue with blunt ridicule.

Lampooning the notion of Texas becoming a British protectorate, opponents also disputed the claim that annexation could diminish slavery. For example, in a sermon published by the Abolitionist Society, Unitarian minister James Clarke pointed out that Walker's claim was more image than argument. "As slavery happens to be not a fluid but an institution," Clarke stated, "we do not see how strengthening its foundations in Texas is to make it 'disappear into Mexico.'"⁹² Little effort was required to question the plausibility of Walker's "safety-valve thesis."

Casting doubt on Tyler's counter-claims, opponents vigorously reestablished their own Spartan case against appropriating Mexico's northern territories. Throughout the last year of Tyler's administration, Whig and abolitionist papers overflowed with sermons, articles, essays, and speeches reiterating the familiar civic argument against annexation that Lundy and Adams had begun broadcasting in 1836.

Most polemicists doubted the civic capacities of Mexicans even as they defended Mexico's sovereignty over the Southwest. In a series of articles originally published

in the *New York Evening Post*, Theodore Sedgwick expressed the same anti-Mexican sentiment that countless newspapers had conveyed in reporting news of the Texan War for Independence. That war, Sedgwick commented, had been particularly remarkable for the “mingled imbecility and ferocity of the Mexicans.”

While he stereotyped Mexicans as barbaric, Sedgwick nevertheless called on the United States to promote Mexico’s political stability rather than conquer her territories. “The annexation of Texas,” Sedgwick wrote, “instead of strengthening the Union, weakens it, just so far as it adds a great line of frontier to be occupied and defended. A friendly or neutral republic on our border is of vastly more importance to us in every military point of view.”⁹³

Indeed, Sedgwick warned that conquered Mexican territories would propel the United States into the same abyss of civic anarchy that plagued Mexico and other former Spanish colonies. “Justice not merely to ourselves but to all mankind is essential to a republican form of government,” Sedgwick explained. “Change the scene; breathe a spirit of violence, injustice, aggression and contempt of right, and your social family becomes a horde of banditti—this Union sinks to the level of the cut-throat republics of South America, and perishes amidst the scorn and execrations of mankind.”⁹⁴ To preserve its own civic integrity, the United States had to respect the sovereignty of the Mexican Republic.

Throughout the opposition literature, Mexico emerged repeatedly as an emblem of civic liberty threatened by the encroaching slaveocracy. The page of one typical abolitionist pamphlet, *The Legion of Liberty! and Force of Truth!* (December 1843), announced that the American Anti-Slavery Society had resolved “that we regard the project of annexing Texas to these United States . . . as unjust and perfidious to Mexico and to this country, and equivalent, if accomplished, to a dissolution of the Union.” Above these small, closely spaced words hovered an imposing image of the Mexican Eagle holding a writhing snake in its beak. An accompanying caption explained, “THE FREE EAGLE OF MEXICO GRAPPLING THE COLD BLOODED VIPER, TYRANNY OR TEXAS”⁹⁵

As proannexation propagandists like Walker and Gilmore sought to vilify Mexico, so their opponents defended Mexico—where slavery was banned—as incontestably civilized. In a typical speech, the pugnacious Kentucky abolitionist Cassius Clay exclaimed, “I protest against this appeal to our sympathies in behalf of Texas, and these unjust denunciations of Mexico.” The Mexican people, Clay stated, were “inspired by that declaration of American Independence which recreant Texas had renounced.” In 1821, Mexico had won independence from Spain; in 1824, constitutional government had been established; in 1829, “this much abused Mexico” had outlawed slavery. Clay insisted that annexing the land of a neighboring republic infused with America’s revolutionary ideals would give Mexico claim to “the universal sympathy and aid of all nations.” Overlooking the fact that Texas had seceded from Mexico in 1836 and won its independence, Clay asserted that annexation

would violate Mexico's sovereignty, corrupt the federal Constitution, and dissolve the republic of the United States.⁹⁶

In claiming that annexation of Mexican territory would dissolve the Union, the opponents of annexation were asserting that new slave states would exacerbate the sectional conflict between North and South. Condemning slavery as intrinsically abhorrent, they were also claiming that the republic could not expand beyond its capacity to reconcile internal conflicts or repel foreign enemies. "It is not territory that we want," Cassius Clay explained in the same speech quoted above. "Our wide unoccupied domain stretches from the Mississippi to the far Pacific: we have already more land than we are able to defend from savage incursion and British usurpation." Revealing why the republic could not tolerate the annexation of Texas, Theodore Sedgwick stated, "interests and prejudices necessarily increase with every extension of territory, and it is in this light that every great augmentation of the Union becomes formidable."⁹⁷

Defending Mexico's sovereignty over the West, opponents regularly sounded the Spartan warning against excessive territorial expansion. "A union resting as one terminus on the Pacific Ocean, as another on Mexico, as a third on N. Brunswick and the Atlantic, could not be held together for six months," declared an anonymous author in the *Richmond Whig*. "It would crumble to pieces by its own weight and overwhelm all in its ruins."⁹⁸ "Our country is quite large enough now," another wrote in the *New York Tribune*, deeming it "incredible that any sane man should favor the annexation of Texas."⁹⁸

In opposing Tyler's campaign for Texas, John Quincy Adams reached the apogee of his own transmogrification into a Spartan opponent of Jacksonian expansion. Continuing to speak out against annexation with the same arguments he had been making since 1836, Adams submitted a proposal to the Committee of Foreign Affairs in September 1843 that dramatized how completely his stance had changed since the days of his ardent expansionism. The Congress, Adams proposed, should declare "that any attempt by act of Congress or by treaty to annex Texas would be a violation of the Constitution, null and void, to which the free states of the Union and their people ought not to submit."⁹⁹ Although Adams's proposal died in committee, the Massachusetts legislature took up his call with a widely published resolution that the people of that commonwealth would regard the annexation of Texas as "dangerous to its continuance in peace, in prosperity, and in the enjoyment of those blessings which it is the object of a free government to secure."¹⁰⁰ Publicly endorsing Adams's stance, the Massachusetts state legislature offered itself as a final rampart against a central government that would become despotic, ipso facto, by annexing territories still claimed by the sovereign nation of Mexico.

By February 1843, Adams was preparing a definitive statement on the annexation of Texas. "I wish to leave behind me," Adams wrote in his diary as he was preparing his manifesto for publication, "something which may keep alive the flame of liberty

and preserve it in that conflict between slavery and freedom which is drawing to its crisis.”¹⁰¹ As a final means of thwarting the annexation of Texas, the seventy-four-year-old former president was ready to publicly urge the Northern states to secede.

Printed in the *National Intelligencer* on May 4, 1843, and reprinted in *Niles Register* on May 13, 1843, Adams’s “Address to the people of the free states of the Union” entreated its readers to lobby against the seizure of Mexican land as a last means of preserving the Union. Annexation, Adams warned emphatically, would compel the North to secede from the slave states. “We hesitate not to say,” Adams asseverated, “that annexation, effected by any act or proceeding of the Federal Government, or any of its Departments, WOULD BE IDENTICAL WITH DISSOLUTION.” By utterly violating the fundamental principles of the Constitution, annexation would “fully justify” the dissolution of the Union.¹⁰²

Adams had devoted his career to expanding the Union and defending the federal Constitution. Now, in calling on the Northern states to prepare for secession, he was implicitly drawing on the same states’ rights principles that Southern fire-eaters were using to justify Southern secession as a ultimate means of protecting slavery. Rather than making a serious policy proposal, Adams was provocatively raising the rhetorical stakes: He was matching the loud threats being made by Southern secessionists to pull the Southern states out of the Union if Congress did not annex Texas.¹⁰³

THE DEFEAT OF CALHOUN’S TREATY OF ANNEXATION

On April 27, 1844, the *New York Evening Post* published the treaty of annexation, with its supporting documentation, that Secretary of State John Calhoun had completed secretly with Texan officials and submitted to the Senate on April 12, 1844.¹⁰⁴ The damning materials, leaked to the *Evening Post* by Benjamin Tappan, an anti-slavery senator from Ohio, brought the national debate over annexation to its climax. When the Senate finally rejected the treaty in June 1844, moderates in both the Whig and Democratic parties had embraced Adams’s assertion that seizing Mexican lands to expand slavery would, indeed, wreck the republic.

Unlike the ideologues who would justify President Polk’s expansionist program, Calhoun never portrayed the annexation of Texas as fulfilling providential destiny. Rather, he drew explicitly on Green’s counter-conspiracy theory. Annexation, Calhoun declared, was necessary to protect the South’s “peculiar institution” from British intrigue and from radical abolitionists. Calhoun was brazenly justifying the annexation of Texas on sectional rather than national grounds: To promote his own states’ rights agenda, he was forcing moderates in both parties to reveal whether they could be counted on to support Southern interests.¹⁰⁵

Calhoun made his most emphatic defense of annexation in two letters addressed to British Minister Pakenham that were included among the documents published in the *New York Post*. In these letters, Calhoun argued that annexing Texas would

prevent Britain from emancipating slaves in Texas and fomenting a servile rebellion in the slave states. Calhoun explained that it was not possible “for the President to hear with indifference the avowal of a policy so hostile in its character and dangerous in its tendency, to the domestic institutions of so many States of this Union, and to the safety and prosperity of the whole.”¹⁰⁶

Echoing Green’s contrived assertions, Calhoun also defended his treaty by making an emphatic defense of slavery that blatantly contradicted Walker’s claim that annexation would help “diffuse” it into Mexico. Relying on data from the census of 1840, Calhoun asserted that where slaves had been emancipated, they had “invariably sunk into vice and pauperism accompanied by the bodily and mental afflictions incident thereto—deafness, blindness, insanity, and idiocy, to a degree without example.” Where slavery existed, blacks had “improved greatly in every respect, in number, comfort, intelligence and morals.”¹⁰⁷ Failure to protect Southern slavery, Calhoun insisted, “would involve in the greatest calamity the whole country and especially the race which it is the avowed object of her exertions to benefit.”¹⁰⁸ Nobody reading Calhoun’s arguments for annexation in the *Evening Post* could doubt that he sought Texas, and adjoining Mexican territories, to protect and expand the South’s “peculiar institution.”

On the same day that Calhoun’s stunning letters appeared in the *Evening Post*, the leading Whig and Democratic presidential candidates, Henry Clay and Martin Van Buren, publicly denounced Calhoun’s treaty. Each feared that supporting Calhoun’s treaty would undermine the broad national support their respective campaigns would need to win the presidency.¹⁰⁹ In rejecting the treaty, both men echoed the same civic arguments that Adams, and other opponents of annexation had been voicing for eight years.

“Annexation and war with Mexico are identical,” Henry Clay asserted in his famous “Raleigh Letter,” first published in the *National Intelligencer* on April 27, 1844. “I consider the annexation of Texas, at this time, without the assent of Mexico, as a measure compromising the national character, involving us certainly in war with Mexico, and dangerous to the integrity of the Union. . . .”¹¹⁰ Later clarifying his position, Clay invoked the same Spartan ethos others had adopted in opposing annexation. “I think it better to harmonize what we have,” Clay explained, “than to introduce a new element of discord into our political partnership, against the consent of existing members of the concern.”¹¹¹ Having led the effort to acquire Texas back in 1820, Clay was now sounding like a sage Massachusetts statesman who had recently re-read Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Law*.

Like Clay, Van Buren employed familiar civic arguments in condemning Calhoun’s annexation treaty. “We have a character among the nations of the earth to maintain,” Van Buren announced in explaining his opposition to Calhoun’s treaty. While “the lust for power” had led other countries down the path of conquest and aggrandizement, “our movements in these respects have always been regulated

by reason and justice.”¹¹² Van Buren had never actively supported the annexation of Texas. Now, as a presidential candidate, he was condemning Calhoun’s treaty with a Spartan admonition to avoid the calamitous path of empire building.

Though both presidential candidates issued subsequent qualifications that complicated their positions, Clay and Van Buren initially condemned Calhoun’s treaty of annexation with the same arguments that opponents of annexation had been advancing for years. In doing so, both men poisoned their bids for the presidency in the election of 1844.

THE ELECTION OF JAMES POLK AND THE TRIUMPH OF MANIFEST DESTINY

On June 9, 1844, the eve of adjournment, Congress overwhelmingly rejected Calhoun’s treaty by a vote of 16 to 35. Every Whig in the Senate, except for John Henderson of Mississippi, opposed. Seven Van Buren Democrats, along with Missourian Thomas Benton, also opposed.¹¹³ Adams and his allies, aided by John Calhoun, had derailed Tyler’s bid for Texas.

The aging Massachusetts congressman expressed his gratitude writing,

I record this vote as a deliverance, I trust, by the special interposition of Almighty God, of my country and of human liberty from a conspiracy comparable to that of Lucius Sergius Catilina. May it prove not a mere temporary deliverance, like that, only preliminary to the fatally successful conspiracy of Julius Caesar! The annexation of Texas to this union is the first step to the conquest of all Mexico, the West India Islands, of a maritime, colonizing, slave-tainted monarchy, and of extinguished freedom.¹¹⁴

Adams had every reason to feel triumphant: he had participated in an extraordinary polemical victory. Yet his apprehensions were equally well justified: the imperatives of market expansion, intertwined with deepening sectional rivalry, were creating overwhelming political pressure to expand across the entire continent. The finger that Adams and his allies had placed in the dike could not hold back the flood waters much longer. Their dilemma can be illuminated by comparing the Montesquieuan opposition to Texas in the 1830s with the Anti-Federalists resistance to the Federal Constitution in 1787.

In 1787, the Anti-Federalists had appealed to the Montesquieuan extremity of the republican tradition. They opposed the new Federal Constitution with the classical assertion that a republic was only viable if it remained territorially contained. Appealing to impeccable republican doctrine, they righteously opposed; yet they could only propose the continuation of a politically fragmented and economically constrictive governmental framework. Their arguments carried all the civic righteousness of the revolutionary tradition, but remained static, and did not speak to the imperatives of national economic development.

Likewise, Adams, along with his Whig and abolitionist colleagues, could claim the moral high ground with his own Spartan opposition to Jacksonian expansion. They pointed convincingly to the fraying bonds between North and South in asserting that internal divisions increased as the republic expanded outward. But while they could block annexation by hurling thunderbolts of righteousness at their hapless foes, they could only propose a vision of the republic that had already been inadequate in 1787. While parts of the Anti-Federalist tradition had been appropriated by Southern states' rights theorists, the Spartan ethic had been superannuated by the market system, created by the federal Constitution, that was pushing the country westward in the 1840s. The high-toned opponents of annexation offered little to the hard-bitten immigrants who were finding their way into the Eastern cities from the bowels of the old European empires. Their arguments could not replenish the accounts of farmers ruined in the Panic of 1837.

Significantly, the Anti-Federalists initiated their polemical campaign when political deliberation was still largely restricted to properly educated and connected gentlemen who identified with specific regional communities rather than with national political parties.¹¹⁵ While the revolution had begun to collapse the hierarchical nature of colonial society, key actors in the controversy were drawn from a geographically diverse but relatively homogenous elite who were deliberating how to restructure the institutional foundations of the republic.¹¹⁶ Compared with later national disputes, the debate between Federalists and Anti-Federalists was conducted at an astonishingly high level of intellectual sophistication: In the context of 1787, *The Federalist Papers* were polemics, calculated to sway delegates in the New York ratifying convention.¹¹⁷ Today, they are collectively considered a classic statement of American political philosophy.

By 1844, politics had become mass politics, structured by the reductive ideological polarities promoted by the new, fully entrenched, two-party system. Increasingly, political differences during the Jacksonian era were expressed in simplified alternatives that were conducive to mass persuasion. By 1844, the "Spartan" argument against annexation was not a serious statement of political philosophy but a polemical weapon wielded in party warfare. In the electric moment of enunciation, the "Spartan" argument was sincerely expressed and gave audiences serious cause for reflection. Nevertheless, it was advanced in the context of party strife; it was an extension of the Whigs' effort to figuratively project themselves as the true defenders of the Revolution. And by 1844, the potential economic benefits of expansion were beginning to outweigh the danger that annexation would precipitate civic ruin.

Even as Calhoun's treaty was going down in defeat, a new coalition of Northern and Southern expansionists had congealed at the Democratic Presidential Nominating Convention in Baltimore. They had already orchestrated Polk's nomination when the Senate rejected Calhoun's treaty in June 1844. They were dusting

off the compelling arguments made by the “Publius” authors of *The Federalist Papers* that the republic was enhanced by territorial expansion. They were repolishing Adams’ old nationalistic faith that the new nation—the new city on the hill—was not bound by the turning wheel of fortune. Finally, they would obliterate the Montesquieuian argument that had blocked the acquisition of Texas for nine years.

How Texas was annexed, and what then ensued, are fixtures of antebellum history. Van Buren was replaced with the avowed expansionist, James Polk, at the 1844 Democratic nominating convention. With a mere 1.4 percent lead in the popular vote, Polk won the election vowing to “reannex Texas and reoccupy Oregon.” Considering Polk’s election a mandate to annex the Lone Star Republic, the reconvened 28th Congress began reconsidering annexation at the beginning of January 1845. An impasse over competing annexation resolutions was finally broken after two months of debate when Robert Walker offered a compromise bill that passed the Senate by a mere two votes. The war with Mexico that broke out thirteen months later, along with the gigantic territorial gains formalized in the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hildalgo, were all justified with the exalted tenets of manifest destiny.

While students of antebellum history have illuminated many aspects of manifest destiny, one dimension has not been sufficiently appreciated: The theologized ideology of expansion that crystallized during Polk’s administration emerged in dialectical opposition to the Montesquieuian argument that had impeded annexation for nine years. Jacksonian ideologues saturated the culture with the transcendent tenets of manifest destiny between 1844 and 1846 as a way of tranquilizing the apprehension, massaged so effectively by opponents since 1836, that annexing Texas would undermine the vulnerable foundations of the republic.

Opponents of annexation, of course, were not the only polemicists of the period who were warning of impending social ruin. Antebellum America as a whole was enduring wrenching dislocations that were sparking widespread social anxieties. The growing concentration of wealth, efforts to organize propertyless workers, and an increasingly xenophobic fear of Catholics testified to the social anxieties of the period, as did the banning of federal mail in the South, the mobbing of abolitionists in the North, and the shrill exhortations voiced by Conscience Whigs and abolitionist orators. Across the entire political spectrum, polemicists were voicing fears of social collapse. John Tyler had been as apprehensive of industrialization and British commercial power as Benjamin Lundy was of the slaveocracy bending the republic into an empire.¹¹⁸ The theologized ethic of manifest destiny was an ideological tonic for the whole range of seething anxieties that infused antebellum America. As Karen Armstrong points out in her *History of God*, “Calvinist theologies of election have been largely instrumental in encouraging Americans to believe that they are God’s own nation. As in Josiah’s Kingdom of Judah, such a belief is likely to flourish at a time of political insecurity when people are haunted by the fear of their own destruction.”¹¹⁹

While opponents of annexation had not caused the anxieties felt by antebellum Americans, they had legitimized fears of social collapse by resurrecting the idea, popular in the late eighteenth century, that the republic was a corporal network of human relationships, vulnerable to the ravages of time and human folly, that would implode if its vital institutional balances were upset. Manifest destiny became a national ideology by neutralizing the unsettling vision of society that opponents had used to dominate the debate over annexing Texas until the election of James Polk in 1844.

Becoming a chorus during the presidential campaign of 1844, the editorials, speeches, and articles that called on the country to fulfill its “manifest destiny” reached a crescendo in the spring of 1846, as Zachary Taylor’s army was encamped on the eastern side of the Rio Grande opposite the Mexican town of Matamoros. The sustained propaganda blitz that continued until the declaration of war on May 13, 1846, was like a giant shower of confetti shredded from the pages of Bancroft’s *History of the United States*.¹²⁰

Seeking to build broad national support for Polk’s expansionist policies, appeals to manifest destiny were sounded in Democratic papers across the country. The greatest cacophony came from the Democratic papers of New York, which included John O’Sullivan’s the *New York Morning News* and *Democratic Review*, James Bennett’s *New York Herald*, and Moses Y. Beach’s the *New York Sun*. Repeatedly, these and other papers echoed the distinct national vision of futurity that Bancroft had evoked in *History of the United States*. Echoing the same appeal made by papers across the country, the *New York Herald* announced on July 2, 1845, “The flight of the eagle is toward the West, and there it is he spreads his wings for freedom.” On October 10, 1845, the *St. Louis Missourian* reported that the American people would merely be displaying “great political sagacity, and carrying out a decree of the Almighty in acquiring any territory from Mexico.” Lifting the motto off the spine of Bancroft’s *History*, the *New York Sun* declared on May 19, 1845, “WESTWARD! THE STAR OF EMPIRE TAKES ITS WAY.”

In writing the editorial that gave birth to the term, “manifest destiny,” John O’Sullivan was himself simply extrapolating the central theme of Bancroft’s history. “By the right of our manifest destiny,” O’Sullivan wrote in the *New York Morning News* on December 27, 1845, the United States was entitled to “overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence had given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federative self-government entrusted to us.”¹²¹ In proclaiming that the historical development of the nation was inevitable, and not subject to temporal constraints, O’Sullivan, Bennett, and so many others who popularized the core premise of manifest destiny, drew upon the theologized conception of the republic that George Bancroft had popularized in *History of the United States*.

Implicitly, the absolutist creed of manifest destiny mollified fears that the viability of the republic was contingent and therefore threatened by annexation. Claims

that providence guaranteed the propriety of expanding across the continent were declarations of self-evident faith. They constituted grounds for argument but did not themselves require argumentative demonstration.¹²² The creed of manifest destiny was reducible to rhetorically self-sustaining political slogans that required simple repetition to soothe the secular fears that opponents had been stoking for nine years. Through sheer repetition, faith was solidified; anxiety was mollified; certainty was hardened.

Sometimes, Jacksonian ideologues did explicitly refer to the opponents of expansion who had maintained the rhetorical upper hand until Polk's election in 1844. The "pioneers of Anglo-Saxon civilization now seek distant territories, stretching even to the shores of the Pacific," declared the *New York Herald* on September 25, 1845. They were no longer "bounded by those limits which nature had in the eye of those of little faith [in] the last generation."¹²³ The phrase "Men of little faith" had been used to disparage Anti-Federalists in the 1780s.¹²⁴ Now, the phrase referred to those who rejected Bancroft's theologized republicanism. They were citizens still swayed by the classical notion that a republic could not expand beyond finite limits and was sustained by the fallible conduct of citizens rather than the infallible power of God. The "men of little faith" still heeded the old Spartan warning that the yeoman republic could become a debauched empire.

With his historical themes trumpeted in newspapers and magazines across the country, George Bancroft assumed full stature as the high priest of manifest destiny when he stepped up to the podium on the east portico of the Capitol in August 1845 to deliver Andrew Jackson's funeral oration. After reviewing Jackson's career, Bancroft venerated Jackson as a God who would bless the movement of "cultivated man" to the Rio Grande and the Pacific. As "Old Hickory" had pacified the old Southwest, so his spirit would now sanctify the expansion that "Young Hickory" was beginning to consummate in 1845. Concluding his oration, Bancroft declared, "his spirit rests upon our whole territory; it hovers over the vales of Oregon, and guards, in advance the frontier of the Del Norte."¹²⁵ Portraying Polk's expansionist program as an extension of Jackson's accomplishments, the high priest of manifest destiny deified both presidents as agents of the national destiny that Bancroft was himself helping to orchestrate.

When news arrived in May 1846 that a Mexican force had crossed the Rio Grande and ambushed two companies of dragoons, Polk, assisted by Bancroft, finalized his already prepared war message. Presuming that Mexico's northern provinces already belonged to the United States, the declaration stated that "Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon American soil."¹²⁶

George Bancroft, Robert Walker, and other ideologues in the popular press had decisively defeated the civic arguments that opponents of annexation had wielded successfully for nine years. When both houses approved a war bill by overwhelming

majorities on May 13, euphoric rallies of support were held across the country. Owing to the number of volunteers, recruiting centers in many towns made their selection by lot.¹²⁷ From Lansingburgh, New York, Herman Melville wrote that “people here are all in a state of delirium. . . . A military ardor pervades all ranks. . . . Nothing is talked of but the ‘Halls of the Montezumas.’”¹²⁸

Amid the national euphoria, few remembered the Spartan warnings against expansion that had dominated the national debate over territorial expansion until the summer of 1844. Citizens across the country had embraced Bancroft’s faith that the continued progress of the American republic was assured by the unerring, and thereby divine, force that had activated American history from its beginning.

Manifest destiny provided a *theologized* image of the nation that was far more reassuring to anxious Americans than the *secular* conception of society that opponents of annexation had been forcefully articulating since 1836. Soothing the myriad social fears that afflict antebellum Americans, manifest destiny emerged as a national ideology by overshadowing the Montesquieuan argument, advanced since the Monroe Administration, that adding Texas to the Union would undermine the vulnerable foundations of the republic.

NOTES

1. “To Citizens of Worcester County, Mass.,” *Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1903), 418–26.
2. Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1998), 75–79.
3. Recent histories of antebellum expansion include Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); William W. Freehling’s *The Road to Disunion, vol. 1, Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Michael A. 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).
4. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, ed. William H. Gilman et al., 16 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960–82), 9:74–75. Emerson’s involvement in the petition campaign against Texas is described in Len Gougeon and Joel Myerson, eds., *Emerson’s Antislavery Writings* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), xxvii.
5. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Vintage Classics, 1990), 1:431.
6. Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 1: 435.
7. The complex social tensions of the period are described in “Part VI, The Annexation of Texas,” in Freehling’s *The Road to Disunion, 1776–1854*. Also see William Lee Miller, *Arguing About Slavery* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).
8. Justin H. Smith, *The Annexation of Texas* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1911), 53.
9. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 23.
10. Thomas Jefferson, “Observations on Demeunier’s Manuscript” [1786], in *Jefferson Papers*, ed. Julian P. Boyd et al., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950–), 10: 310.
11. Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and Making of Liberal America, 1790–1820* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). See chapter 5, “Politics and Productivity: War and the Emergence of Liberalism,” 209–274.

12. *Weekly Register*, Saturday, June 7, 1817.
13. *Annals of Congress*, 14th Cong., 2d sess., 854.
14. John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, 12 vols. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1874–1877), 4:274.
15. This point is eloquently made in Michael Paul Rogin, *Fathers & Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), 301.
16. James E. Lewis Jr., *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood, 1783–1829* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 112.
17. Quoted in Lewis, *The American Union*, 146.
18. Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Union* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 24–5; 64–5.
19. An excellent description of how the Missouri crisis began exacerbating sectional tensions is Freehling “The Missouri Controversy,” chapter 8 in *The Road to Disunion*, 144–161.
20. Adrienne Koch and William Peden, *The Selected Writings of John and John Quincy Adams* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), 307.
21. John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs*, 5:68.
22. Stanislaus Murray Hamilton, ed., *Writings of James Monroe* 7 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1898–1903), 6: 119–23. Monroe expressed the same view to Jackson on May 23, 1820, and to Gallatin on May 26, 1820. (6:126–52). The entire episode is discussed in Harry Ammon, *James Monroe: the Quest for National Identity* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), 409–426.
23. John Quincy Adams, “Speech of John Quincy Adams on the Joint Resolution for Distributing Rations to the Distressed Fugitives from Indian Hostilities in the States of Alabama and Georgia” (Washington, D.C.: National Intelligencer Office, 1836), 6.
24. Calvin Colton, ed., *The Works of Henry Clay* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1904), 6:216.
25. Thomas Hart Benton, *Thirty Years’ View* (New York: D. Appleton and Co. 1854), 1:15.
26. Robert Abraham East, *John Quincy Adams, The Critical Years: 1785–1794* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1962), 45–54. Rogin, *Fathers & Children*, 135–37.
27. Quoted in Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *The Burr Conspiracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 4.
28. Samuel H. Beer, *To Make a Nation : The Rediscovery of American Federalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 232. The classical republican premises of the Anti-Federalists are developed in Cecelia M. Kenyon, “Men of Little Faith: The Anti-Federalists on the Nature of Representative Government,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 12 (1955), 3–43; Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1969), 499–516; Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism & the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788–1828* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).
29. Historians who argue that the Constitution transfigured classical republican premises to accommodate territorial expansion include Peter S. Onuf, *Statehood and Union: A History of the Northwest Ordinance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). See chapter 1: “Liberty, Development, and Union,” 1–21. Also, Gordon Wood, “The American Science of Politics” chapter 15 in *The Creation of the American Republic*, 593–619.
30. Thomas L. Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 43.

31. "Ten: The Utility of the Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection," in *The Federalist Papers* ed. J. E. Cooke (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1961), 82–84.
32. Beer, *To Make a Nation*, 224.
33. Andrew W. Robertson, *The Language of Democracy: Political Rhetoric in the United States and Britain, 1790–1900* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995). See chapter 4, "Creating a National Audience: Jacksonian America, 1828–1860," 68–95.
34. The ideology of the emergent Whig Party is discussed in Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). See chapter 2, "To Rescue the Government and Public Liberty," 19–32.
35. Quoted in Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1945), 276.
36. John Spencer Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1926–1935), 4:57.
37. John M. Belohlavek, "Let the Eagle Soar!" *The Foreign Policy of Andrew Jackson* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 22.
38. Quoted in Robert Remini, "Texas Must Be Ours," *American Heritage* 37 (March 1986): 42.
39. Thomas Earle, ed., *The Life, Travels and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy, including His Journeys to Texas and Mexico; with a sketch of Contemporary Events, and a Notice of the Revolution in Haiti* (Philadelphia, W. D. Parrish, 1847), 14–15.
40. Lundy claimed that his plan "was nearly the same as that which was in efficient operation twenty years afterwards, and then embraced nearly 1000 anti-slavery societies." Earle, *The Life*, 17.
41. Benjamin Lundy, *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, December 12, 1831.
42. Benjamin Lundy, *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, November 22, 1832.
43. Merton L. Dillon, "Benjamin Lundy in Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 63 (1959): 48.
44. Daniel Walker Howe developed this interpretation in his influential *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). See chapter 2, "Language and Values of the Whigs," 23–42.
45. Benjamin Lundy, *The War in Texas: A Review of Facts and Circumstances, Showing That this Contest is the Result of a Long Premeditated Crusade against the Government, Set on Foot by Slaveholders, Land Speculators, etc. with the View of Re-Establishing, Extending, and Perpetuating the System of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Republic of Mexico* (Philadelphia: W. D. Parrish, 1836), 2–4.
46. John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs*, 9:431.
47. John Quincy Adams, "On the Joint Resolution for Distributing Rations," 6.
48. Adams to Lundy, May 20, 1836, in "Benjamin Lundy in Texas," 61.
49. Adams to Lundy, June 27, 1836, in "Benjamin Lundy in Texas," 61.
50. Adams, "On the Joint Resolution for Distributing Rations," 3.
51. Quoted in Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy, 1833–1845* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 358.
52. Reported in Carson to Burnet, July 3, 1836, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, American Historical Association, Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1907), 1:101. The meeting is also described in Stanley Siegel, *A Political History of the Texas Republic, 1836–1845* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1956), 44.
53. Blair to Andrew Jackson, August 25, 1836, *Jackson Correspondence*, 5:412.
54. Kendall to Andrew Jackson, July 30, 1836, *Jackson Correspondence*, 5:420.

55. Richardson, *Messages and Papers*, 2:1485.
56. An overview of the range of arguments used by opponents of annexation is provided in Morrison, *Slavery and the American West*, 22–24; and in Michael A. Morrison, “Westward the Curse of Empire: Texas Annexation and the American Whig Party,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 10 (1990):222–249.
57. Robert Mayo, *Political Sketches of Eight Years in Washington* (Baltimore: F. Lucas Jr., 1839), 11.
58. Mayo, *Political Sketches*, 16.
59. Mayo, *Political Sketches*, 17.
60. William E. Channing, “A Letter to the Hon. Henry Clay, On the Annexation of Texas to the United States,” *The Works of William E. Channing* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1952), 760.
61. Channing, “A Letter,” 745.
62. Channing, “A Letter,” 765.
63. Bemis, *Adams and the Union*, 364.
64. Bemis, *Adams and the Union*, 365.
65. Bemis, *Adams and the Union*, 365.
66. The pamphlet was titled, *Speech of John Quincy Adams, of Massachusetts, upon the Right of the People, Men and Women, to Petition: On the Freedom of Speech and of Debate in the House of Representatives. . . . on the Resolutions of Seven State Legislatures, and the Petitions of More than One Hundred Thousand Petitioners, Relating to the Annexation of Texas to this Union* (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1838).
67. James C. Curtis, *The Fox at Bay: Martin Van Buren and the Presidency, 1837–41* (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1970), 152–56; 166–69.
68. Justin H. Smith, *The Annexation of Texas* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co. 1911), 65.
69. Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800–1890* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), 111. For the connection between American literature and westward expansion see, in addition to Slotkin’s works, William H. Goetzmann, *When the Eagle Screamed: The Romantic Horizon in American Diplomacy, 1800–1860* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966); Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire Building* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).
70. Before the first volume of *The History of the United States* was published in 1834, Abiel Holmes had published *The Annals of America, from the Discovery by Columbus in the Year 1492, to the Year 1826*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Hilliar and Brown, 1829). David Ramsay had written *History of the United States from their first Settlement as English Colonies in 1607, to the Year 1808*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1818).
71. George Bancroft, *History of the Colonization of the United States* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1834), 1:4.
72. Russel B. Nye, *George Bancroft, Brahmin Rebel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 102.
73. Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 61.
74. Smith, *The Annexation of Texas*, 104.
75. Gilmore’s essay is conveniently available in Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 200.
76. Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 10–40.
77. Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 201.
78. Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 15.

79. "Duff Green to John Tyler," London, May 31, 1843, printed, along with other representative samples of Green's dispatches from England, in Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 217–34.
80. Hietala discusses Green's trip to England and how his reports were disseminated in the democratic press in *Manifest Design*, 15–25.
81. Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 18–19.
82. Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 18.
83. Frederick Merk, "A Safety Valve Thesis and Texan Annexation," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 49 (1962): 416. For a more recent study of Walker's *Letter* see Stephen Hartnett, "Senator Robert Walker's 1844 *Letter on Texas Annexation: The Rhetorical 'Logic' of Imperialism*," *American Studies* 38 (1997): 27–54.
84. Merk, "A Safety Valve Thesis," 434.
85. Walker's letter is conveniently reproduced in Merk, *Fruits of Propaganda in the Tyler Administration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 221–246.
86. William Freehling is particularly insightful on this point. See "Southern Democrats' Decision," chapter 23 in *The Road to Disunion*, 418–25.
87. Quoted in Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 420.
88. *National Intelligencer*, July 6, 1844. The letter was republished in *Niles Register*, 16 (1844): 316–19.
89. President Tyler appointed John Calhoun secretary of state when the acting secretary, Abel P. Upshur, was killed in an accident on February 28, 1844. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 407.
90. The speech is printed in Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 192–200.
91. Adam's retort was made in a long speech subsequently published as a pamphlet titled, *Mr. Adams's Speech on War with Great Britain, with the Speeches of Messrs. Wise and Ingersoll to which it is in Reply* (Boston: Emancipator Office, 1842).
92. James Freeman Clarke, "The Annexation of Texas, A Sermon Delivered in the Masonic Temple," *The Emancipator*, April 9, 1844.
93. Theodore Sedgwick, *Thoughts on the Proposed Annexation of Texas to the United States* (New York: D. Fanshaw, 1844), 31.
94. Sedgwick, *Thoughts*, 46.
95. *THE LEGION OF LIBERTY! and FORCE OF TRUTH, Containing the Thoughts, Words and Deeds of some Prominent Apostles, Champions and Martyrs* 2d (New York: American Abolitionist Society, 1843).
96. "Speech of Cassus Clay versus the Annexation of Texas" *Niles Register*, December 30, 1843, 212–14.
97. Sedgwick, *Thoughts*, 29.
98. *Richmond Whig*, May 7, 1844, 2; *New York Tribune*, May 12, 1844, 4.
99. Adams detailed his proposal and its reception on February 28, 1843. *Memoir*, 11:330.
100. The Massachusetts Resolution was printed, with a long essay by Charles Francis Adams, as a separate pamphlet, *Texas and the Massachusetts Resolutions* (Boston: Emancipator Office, 1844).
101. Adams, *Memoir*, 11:359.
102. John Quincy Adams, "Address to the People of the Free States of the Union, Washington, March 3, 1843." Reprinted in Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 205–11.
103. Since the controversy over nullification, states rights purists, led by John Calhoun, had continued to threaten secession if slavery were not protected by the federal government. *The Road to Disunion*, 407.
104. Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 57.

105. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 409.
106. Merk, *Slavery*, 691.
107. Merk, *Slavery*, 692.
108. Merk, *Slavery*, 693.
109. On the opposition of Henry Clay and Martin Van Buren to Tyler's annexation treaty, see Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 426–28. Also see Holt, "The Whigs are in High Spirits," chapter seven in *The Rise and Fall of the Whig Party*, 162–207.
110. *National Intelligencer*, April 27, 1844
111. Clay to Porter, January 26, 1838, in Clay, *Papers*, 9:135.
112. Quoted in Smith, *The Annexation of Texas*, 244.
113. Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 81.
114. Adams, *Memoir*, 12:49.
115. An excellent description of the deferential political culture that still existed in the wake of the American Revolution is Gorgon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992).
116. More than their political opponents, the Anti-Federalists drew support from the whole socioeconomic spectrum of enfranchised citizens. See, Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 258–59; Cornell, *The Other Founders*, 19–50, provides an overview of the "elite," "middling," and "plebian" factions that made up the Anti-Federalist camp.
117. All except the last eight were first printed in New York newspapers and widely read as they first appeared, *The Federalist Papers* ed. Cooke, iv.
118. The social anxieties of the period are described in Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984). Notably, the essential thesis of Hietala's *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* is that the entire expansionist project of the Jacksonians was motivated by the deep social anxieties that infused the period. See chapter 1, "Magnificent Distances, Magnificent Intentions," 1–10.
119. Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4000 Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 55.
120. The best discussion of how the popular press popularized the tenets of manifest destiny remains Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History*.
121. *New York Morning News*, December 27, 1845.
122. In *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958) Hannah Arendt illuminates the difference between legitimizing political claims that are grounded in absolutist assertions and those that are grounded in contingent, human, and essentially rhetorical premises, (179–240).
123. *New York Herald*, September 25, 1845.
124. See Cecelia M. Kenyon, "Men of Little Faith: The Anti-Federalists on the Nature of Representative Government," *William and Mary Quarterly* 12 (1955):13–43.
125. George Bancroft, "Oration Commemorative of Andrew Jackson, 1845," in *Literary and Historical Miscellanies* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1855), 480.
126. Quoted in Sellers, *James Polk, Continentalist*, 408.
127. Robert W. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 11.
128. Johannsen, *To the Halls*, 10.