RISING TIDE OF EMPIRE: GULF COAST CULTURE AND SOCIETY DURING THE ERA OF EXPANSION, 1845-1860

By

MARIA ANGELA DIAZ

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For my family
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The dissertation explores territorial expansion, its impact on port communities within the American Gulf Coast, and the region’s connections to Latin America during the antebellum period. I argue that an expansionist discourse was compiled of images of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, oppressed Cuban Creoles, and threats to the economic security of the Gulf of Mexico. Southerners living within the Gulf of Mexico used this language to capitalize on the nation’s bid for territorial gains in Latin America and attempted to expand their Southern slave society into Texas, Mexico, and Cuba.

This work draws attention to the Gulf South’s transnational connections. Many historians have shed light on the importance of the Gulf of Mexico’s ports to the Atlantic World, yet the Gulf ports also played central roles as sites of social and economic connection for other parts of the Americas as well. This dissertation posits that the Gulf South served as a major site of connection for the Atlantic World, Latin America, the U.S. South, and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands during the antebellum period. An examination of this region during the period of U.S. territorial expansion serves to unite the complex histories of both North and South America at a time of great upheaval in
the latter half of the nineteenth century. By studying the confluence of spaces, images, and ideas in this particular region the language of territorial expansion becomes evident.
CHAPTER 1
THE VALUE OF THE GULF OF MEXICO

Harriet Martineau, an English social theorist and writer, wanted to be the first among her traveling companions to see the Gulf of Mexico. She stood on the pier near the steamboat, and with her finger traced the landscape until the forest turned to marsh. She tried to make out the point where the Gulf emerged out of this setting, but as she attempted to get her bearings the clouds opened up, thunder burst above her, and "rain poured down in floods." Finding her umbrella broken, she ran for the safety of the waiting ship, escaping a rain the likes of which she had never before experienced. Yet she felt it was "well worth while getting wet for such a first sight of the Gulf of Mexico." Almost a decade later, Matilda Charlotte Houstoun, an English writer, and her husband sailed throughout the Americas, spending a great deal of time in the Gulf. During the mid 1840s their journey through Texas ended where it began, on the Gulf Coast as they prepared to set sail for New Orleans. Matilda, like many others journeying through the Gulf, often remarked on the volatility of its weather and the violent storms, which loomed on the horizon during the summer and fall months. "They burst forth with wonderful suddenness and tremendous violence," she remarked.¹

The warm and calm waters of the Gulf of Mexico belied the unpredictability of the weather there. How could such a seemingly quiet and isolated place bring forth such power and violence? Like the changeable nature of the weather, few could have predicted that the region’s experiences with territorial expansion into Latin America

¹ Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect on Western Travel* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 122; Matilda Charlotte Houstoun, *Texas and the Gulf of Mexico; Or Yachting in the New World* (London: John Murray, 1844), 126.
would bring about violent power struggles, but during the late antebellum period this was what happened and it irrevocably changed the Gulf of Mexico and its people.

The antebellum Gulf South moved according to its own rhythm. Visitors often remarked on the exotic nature of the region as compared to the plantation districts and urban areas of the southern interior. In the sub-tropical heat of the summer months, the fear of yellow fever struck the region, and those that could escape the cities often did so as soon as the seasons changed. Business slowed, parties were few and far between, and urban life seemed quieter. However, with the return of chillier winds social life in the region resumed its frenetic pace. Winter was the time of carnival and cotton sales.² Alfred Mercier describing New Orleans in 1848, wrote: “winter is the return of affairs of pleasure; all the people return from the country, & the strangers whom the plague [yellow fever] no longer repulses flock to all parts.”³ Yet beyond this yearly cycle of heat, sickness, cool winds, and profits were the broader national trends of Manifest Destiny that capture the Gulf South’s attention. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, the rapacious desire for land beyond the South’s borders developed into yet another export for the Gulf South.

This dissertation argues that through an examination of the confluence of spaces, images, and ideas, the rhetoric of expansion emerges. This rhetoric of expansion was both constructed and used by those within the Gulf port cities. The emergence and evolution of this discourse allowed port residents to capitalize on the

³ Alfred Mercier, *Biographie Pierre Soule*, translated By Marietta Millet of New Orleans, 1848, Bound Volume- Soule (Pierre) Papers August 31, 1901- Undated (Department of Archives and Manuscripts Louisiana University, 1939), Special Collections- Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
process of U.S. territorial expansion, and as they did so, it fundamentally reshaped their communities. Alternately, the forces at work within their region also changed the social and cultural makeup of the antebellum South. I contend that these popular understandings rarely matched the reality of the process of expansion, which at times challenged the rhetoric and at others upheld it. These challenges heightened the anxieties and fears of southerners living in the Gulf of Mexico, which in turn, caused them to react.

The many ideas and images used to propel the United States into violent clashes with Latin American nations, specifically Mexico and Cuba and the outcomes of these clashes form the subject of this dissertation. Four main themes govern this study. The first and perhaps central thrust of the dissertation is to examine the transnational and global connections of port communities in the Gulf of Mexico. How did these connections define the region as different from the rest of the South and how did they shape the worldview of those living in the ports? The second is to reconsider the perceptions and ideas of territorial expansion as they evolved during the years before the Civil War. How did southerners living within the Gulf experience, interpret, and comprehend territorial expansion? And how did expansion shape these communities? Thirdly, I contend that race and racialized rhetoric decisively shaped the project of territorial expansion within the Gulf of Mexico. How did Anglo southerners racialize the Latin American peoples they encountered along the South’s borders, and what part did these racial constructions play in the perpetuation of southern expansion? Furthermore, how did the Gulf South’s diverse social makeup shape the evolution of this racialized discourse? Fourth, the emerging debate over secession and the origins of the Civil War
is grounded within the ideas and experiences of expansion into Latin America that took shape. How did the prior two decades shape the context of secession in the Gulf of Mexico? This story begins with the annexation of Texas, follows through the U.S.-Mexican War, filibustering expeditions to Cuba, and the development of secessionist ideas in the major port communities of the American South in 1861. While the entire American Gulf Coast is the focus of this study, New Orleans, Pensacola, and Galveston provide case studies through which to explore these larger themes and questions from a variety of perspectives.

Throughout the antebellum period, many different worlds intersected in the Gulf of Mexico. Historians of the antebellum South have yet to address this region and its experiences during the 1840s and 1850s in terms of the region’s connections to expansion and the breakup of the Union. My study also contributes to the literature of Manifest Destiny and antebellum expansion by focusing on the cultural experience of expansionism and the construction of the discourse surrounding it, rather than the political consequences that resulted from slavery’s spread to the western territories. Through the bustling import and export trade of port cities such as New Orleans, the military defenses at Pensacola, and the rapid growth of smaller communities such as Galveston, the region became a staging ground for expansion into the Latin America.

The Gulf of Mexico was a world where size did not necessarily denote importance. New Orleans was one of the largest cities in the nation, but the Gulf valued its small port towns just as much as its large cities. Locale was as important as population along the coast. Throughout this period, the Gulf South evolved into a center for trade, as well as cultural and political exchange for the Atlantic World, the
Caribbean, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, and the southern United States. The Gulf South connected East with West, the Old South with the new southwestern territories, and was a place truly entangled with multiple worlds and buffeted by a multitude of local, regional, national, and transnational forces. During the years leading up to the Civil War, the region was a center of developing international trade with Europe and Latin America. As a result of the region’s global connections multiethnic and multiracial communities evolved within the ports. Military conflict plagued the region decades after it had ceased to be an integral part of the lives of others living in points farther north. At the heart of these forces was the process of national expansion, which was built on the multiple transnational and national connections found within the Gulf South ports.

For my purposes here, I define the Gulf South as the communities along the coast that were directly tied together through trade, cultural, and social similarities. In the 19th century, port communities of all sizes dotted the landscape of the Gulf of Mexico. However, for the purposes of this study, I chose three cities that could illuminate the various aspects of discourse and experience that made up territorial expansion. In the antebellum South, New Orleans became a center of expansionist thought and action. Its newspapers overwhelmingly supported expansion, and as the nation’s largest urban era closest to Mexico, Cuba, and South America, it was the obvious location from which to launch the nation’s first real drive for territory in Latin America. New Orleans dwarfed Pensacola and Galveston in terms of size and status in the South, however the small populations of these two communities were dealt with the same intersection of forces experienced by New Orleanians. In so doing, they revealed much about how southerners and Anglo Americans contemplated what it meant to be,
southern, white, and American in the years before the nation’s greatest drama. Pensacola was not economically significant to the Gulf South’s import/export trade, but the town’s position near the Florida Straits, and its military fortifications made it essential for defense, a fact even New Orleans and Mobile southerners understood. As a port, Galveston was largely a product of expansion into Texas. It did not exist before the Texas Revolution in 1836, and depended on exporting cotton from the Texas agricultural regions. As a result, the city was deeply connected Texas borderlands.

Texas features prominently in this study for two main reasons. First, many of the ideas about race concerning Latin American peoples were primarily formulated through the settlement and annexation of Texas. Second, for the lower South, of which the Gulf South was a part, Texas was one of the main sites of settlement in the antebellum period. The annexation of Texas, and later the U.S.-Mexican War, served as prime examples of what territorial expansion could accomplish. The Gulf Coast, and Gulf Southerners, are the primary focus here, but transnational connections and international warfare make Latin American nations important to consider. Mexico and Cuba figure as prominently in the evolution of the discourse of expansion as Texas. The images of all three were integral to southerners’ thinking on expansion. Following from Elliot West’s model, I argue that it is not only important to study the places where people settled, but also the places they came from and the regions they passed through. He maintained that for too long “we have kept our gaze on what was rushed to rather than what was rushed over.” On the surface, the Gulf ports bear little to no resemblance to the grassy plains, but by their very nature they became places through which people, goods, and
ideas passed. The communities’ people left and the territories they migrated to were both changed by the journey.\textsuperscript{4}

In recent years southern and Civil War historians have begun to study the manner in which the nineteenth century United States was affected by a larger transnational context. Much of this work focuses on the Atlantic World, Britain’s influence on the United States, and English abolitionism’s affect on southern slaveholders. Others, such as Walter Johnson, have explored transnational aspects of nineteenth century capitalism and the cotton market, which the Gulf plays a significant role in establishing. Scholars such as Matthew Guterl have reimagined southern slaveholders as a part of a hemispheric slaveholding class in the Americas. In rethinking the South and its transnational context, scholars have emphasized the cosmopolitanism of the region. England and France were both powerful naval powers and both became identified with abolition and anti-slavery at the same time that the South expanded further into the Gulf of Mexico and the cotton market developed.\textsuperscript{5} What would happen if these European nations gained footholds in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands? What would happen if they negotiated Cuban independence while demanding that Cuban slave owners give up their slaves?

These questions plagued those living along borders of the South and in the Gulf’s port cities perhaps more so than those living in the region’s plantation districts. Most of this scholarship has focused on the north Atlantic, and does not often place the


Gulf of Mexico at the center of these transnational connections. Likewise, the connections between the South and the southwest borderlands, which became the U.S.-Mexico borderlands in the mid-nineteenth century, still require additional study. U.S. territorial expansion viewed from a Gulf Coast perspective sheds light on these emerging connections.

The comparisons and connections that have emerged between Latin American slave societies and the southern United States have begun to bridge both Northern and Southern American histories. Southerners did not always view these connections as positive, and they often viewed their slave system and society as being superior to others. Anglo southerners often viewed Latin America with as much curiosity as they did fear. They did not seek unification between these worlds. They sought control and dominance as they always had when it came to those they viewed as racially inferior.6

Much of the literature on expansionism concerning the Gulf concentrates on the colonial and Early Republic periods, making the region appear to have become “Americanized,” by the 1820s. Daniel Usner’s study of the Lower Mississippi Valley and Adam Rothman’s Slave Country reveal the lengthy process of expansion and settlement that took place in the lower South. Antebellum expansion in the Gulf South was a particular moment in which the nature of expansion began to shift away from expansion into territory once held by European colonial empires, and a move toward acquiring territory held by other independent nations. In addition, the added sectional tension and

beginnings of southern nationalism alter the context of these processes. The manner in which Anglo Americans constructed the discourse of expansion within the Gulf South, and their participation in the U.S.-Mexican War, affected some of the most fundamental and far-reaching aspects of southern society, namely race and slavery. While this work will focus on the formation of Anglo discourses of expansion, Mexicans, Cubans, Native Americans, and African Americans provide perspectives that deepen our understanding of how other racial and ethnic groups in the Gulf of Mexico asserted themselves against the onslaught of Anglo settlement in the Gulf’s far flung borders. Where their voices emerged, I have tried to listen and incorporate their stories into my larger project. In doing so, it becomes evident that these various groups constructed their own discourses of expansion that emphasized American greed and violence.\(^7\)

Historians interested in expansionism focus much of their attention on the national political conflicts that arose from the introduction of new territory into the United States, and the South’s interest in expanding its slave society into these same regions.\(^8\)

This dissertation considers local views of the national process of expansion, and the ideas used to export it to Latin America. In so doing it reveals that the nation failed in its

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attempts as much as it succeeded and that expansion west did not immediately result in
domination further south. Southerners within the Gulf of Mexico viewed themselves as
the vanguard of expansion into Latin America. In so doing they revealed the extent to
which the expansion of the slave South was an integral part of the nation’s movement
west. Southern expansion was not only retracted from above, but also pushed away
from below. More recent literature on expansionism seeks to incorporate a more cultural
perspective as seen in Amy Greenberg’s work on gender and Manifest Destiny, and
Amy Kaplan’s edited volume on cultural imperialism, which demonstrates rich avenues
for southern historians interested in the South’s bid for more territory in both the West
and Latin America. Gulf South communities attempted to utilize ideas about the
process of U.S expansion to gain national attention both economically and socially.

The concept of borders and the ideas of expansionism require that this study use
a methodology that addresses the construction of space, identity, and the dissemination
of ideas within that particular space. The concept of borderlands proves useful for
understanding how these southerners viewed the world around them and interacted
with it. Historians such as Andres Resendez and Peter Sahlins have noted that, in
frontier regions borders have a complex relationship with local interests as two or more
cultures interact over an extended period of time. These local interests made real, but
also destabilized the abstract geopolitical borders determined by nation states. As

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9 William Barney, The Road to Secession: A New Perspective on the Old South (New York: Praeger
Publishers, 1972) xv; Ernest McPherson Lander, Reluctant Imperialists: Calhoun, the South Carolinians,
and the Mexican War (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980); James David Miller, South
by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South (Charlottesville: University Press of
Virginia, 2002); Morrison, Slavery and the American West 4-8.

10 Andres Resendez, Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850
(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 169; Peter Sahlins, Boundaries: The Making of France
Samuel Truett and Pekka Hämäläinen have noted, the field of borderlands studies needed to consider new and different spaces such as trading centers and port cities in places such as the Gulf of Mexico.\textsuperscript{11} While these spaces do not appear to be borderlands, they are intimately connected to them. Building on this observation, I examine the Gulf as both a world akin to the Atlantic World and a borderland.

The Gulf South ports inherited notions about race that were often at odds with those imported by southerners from the Upper South, which developed out of British colonial biracial societies. The French and Spanish ideas about race incorporated a number of mixed-race categories not often recognized by Anglo Americans from the Upper South. Black and white Creoles remained long after U.S annexation, posing continued obstacles for white southerners attempting to enforce their own racial categories and slave laws. When Anglo southerners began moving into the region in the early 1800s, there were many different cultures, and this trend continued throughout the following decades. Many historians and historical actors insisted that the South’s borders eventually became just like the southern interior, but, even in Florida, this was not necessarily the case. The incorporation of the Gulf Coast region altered the South, as much as the South altered it.\textsuperscript{12}


From the annexation of Texas, to the filibustering expeditions to Cuba, Southerners within the Gulf South racialized Mexicans and Cubans to justify territorial expansion into their countries. However, these images changed and evolved throughout the period and came to define each other, especially during the expeditions. During the U.S.-Mexican War, rhetoric created in support of the war used images of Antonio López de Santa Anna and the Mexican government to focus the nation’s wrath on their sister republic. These notions of Mexicans as the descendents of Spanish, Indians, and Africans stemmed in large part from Anglo Americans’ early conflicts with Mexicans over Texas’s independence. Certainly, these notions influenced how Mexico and Mexicans were viewed during the U.S.-Mexican War.\textsuperscript{13} During the filibustering expeditions to Cuba, Cuban Creoles were imagined against the background of this Mexican miscegenation as a downtrodden and oppressed people similar to Anglo Americans though not exactly alike. Naturally the institution of slavery in Cuba helped bolster this idealized image. However, Cubans in Cuba did not always agree with this idea of similarity among “slave owning” peoples of the Americas, and at times saw themselves much more in kind with the Mexican people who had already thrown off their colonial oppressors and were hard at work building their republic.\textsuperscript{14}

Once southerners had developed narratives and images of expansion, once they had attempted to fulfill these narratives and interpret Latin American societies through their own understanding of race and slavery, how did these ideas shape the debate


over secession in the Gulf of Mexico? In the years leading up to the Civil War, southerners used these narratives to contemplate the choices that lay before them. Their relationship with Cuba and Mexico as well as the state of the U.S.-Mexico border framed their thinking on sectionalism. While scholars have debated over what aspect of political discourse, or which political event, ensured the split between the North and South, this is not my focus here. Rather, I seek to understand how the previous narratives became a part of both unionist rhetoric and secessionist rhetoric. Secession was more than a fight between Republicans and southern Democrats, it was also the beginning of a new political and social philosophy, and it was steeped in a culture that grew out of the ideas that existed at the time. Many of these ideas were linked to the trend of expansion and the language of expansion that took shape in the Gulf of Mexico.

While this is a story about people and places, it is also a story about an imagined world and a proposed future that this population, living on the edges of the South, believed would unfold if they pursued expansion. They made decisions, at times

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incredibly risky ones, based on how they imagined the future might be. But the imagined world was also a product of knitting together present experiences and desires through the evolution of expansionist discourse. A project spanning fifteen years, one war, and three distinct port cities requires an organizational strategy that is both expansive and focused. I use case studies in three Gulf Coast cities, but I also chose to explore the construction of expansionist rhetoric by using a Gulf-wide perspective to understand the evolution of ideas about race and expansion. The dissertation is organized in a way that enables me to present wider views that incorporate all three cities and more focused treatments of each at a specific moment of expansion.

Each chapter examines the central questions and themes stated above from a different perspective. Chapters 2 and 3 examine the development of both rhetoric concerning the image of Texas and the racialization of Mexican people using a Gulf-wide perspective during the annexation of Texas and the onset of the U.S.-Mexican War. Texas annexation was shaped by the many images that travelers, Texans, and Gulf South expansionists created concerning the fertility of Texas land and fears Mexican invasion and European intervention. In addition to exploring the formation of these early ideas, Chapter 2 also places the annexation of Texas within the larger context of expansion into the Gulf that came before it, and considers how the inclusion of Texas reshaped the map of the Gulf. Chapter 3 explores the emergence of the racialized rhetoric concerning the U.S.-Mexican War, as well as the experiences of soldiers during Zachary Taylor's northern Mexico campaign. Through the Gulf South we see the convergence of national and local narratives of expansion during the war.
The war’s rhetoric continued the construction of racist ideas about Mexicans and Mexican culture that began with annexation. These images and experiences during the war created the negative view of Mexican culture against which later views of Cuban society were formed. Chapter 4 is the first of three case studies that take a closer look at how individual port communities dealt with the process of expansion and the language used to maintain it. In this fourth chapter Pensacola’s fight to gain funds for internal improvement projects to the naval yard and the Gulf Squadron’s conduct during the U.S.-Mexican War reveal the anxieties over British and French naval dominance in the region. Chapter 5 addresses Galveston’s role in the settlement of Texas during the 1850s, and the reactions of slaves, Anglo settlers, Mexicans, and European immigrants within the Texas borderlands. Often times the Texas hinterlands appeared threatening rather than inviting to Galveston boosters eager to link their port town to the growing Texas cotton trade. They supported both military presence in the borderlands and efforts to open trade along the Texas river system. Chapter 6 focuses on New Orleans and the filibustering expeditions to Cuba that happened in the aftermath of the U.S.-Mexican War. The filibustering expeditions revealed the nature of the transnational discourse over the identity and race by utilizing images of Creoles within the Gulf of Mexico and the U.S.-Mexican War to frame their movement to annex Cuba. Sympathetic images of Cuban Creoles were used to bolster enthusiasm, and economic support for the expeditions and their efforts to spark revolutions in Cuba. Chapter 7 addresses the many ways in which these images and their connections with Latin America shaped the debates over the virtues of sectionalism in the Gulf South in the years before the Civil War. It explores how Cuba, the slave trade, and conflicts along
the U.S.-Mexican border contributed to the tension between unionists and secessionists.

In 1851, a correspondent for the *Mobile Daily Register* stood on the balcony of his rented room in New Orleans. Turning his spyglass toward the levee, he marveled at the volume and variety of peoples, goods, and ships that populated the edges of the city and sailed for places within and beyond the Gulf of Mexico. Those visiting the queen of the Gulf South ports for the first time took in these sights. In 1847, one such young man, William Morton, traveling through the South from his home in Farmville, Virginia, took a walk on the levee, where he experienced “the greatest sight of produce and shipping business going on that I ever saw.” Vessels crowded the landings of the Mississippi River, bobbing serenely in a line stretching for five miles toward the Gulf Coast entrance. Shortly after his stay in New Orleans, Morton set sail for Havana, where again the multitude and diversity of the city surprised him. Morton’s reaction to this Gulf Coast culture is significant, but it is only one half of the story. The reaction of the individuals who watched him walk the levee is the other half of that story, and one that deserves to be told.

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17 *Mobile Daily Register*, March 17, 1851.

CHAPTER 2
THE MOCKINGBIRD’S WILD SONG: TEXAS ANNEXATION AND THE IMAGINED
GULF SOUTH IN 1845

Introduction

In June of 1844, the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* published one of its popular “Pardon Jones” letters—a series by journalist C.M. Haile—that were meant to depict the perspective of southwestern Louisianans on various political issues of the time. Jones affirmed that he was for Texas annexation, but only *conditionally*, because Texas had “rich lands” that could raise sugar and cotton. “We’d ought to have her,” he wrote, “to add wealth to our country, instid of somebody elses havin on her.” The “somebody elses” referred specifically to England and Mexico. He compared Great Britain to a spider that threatened to “spin her cobweb round Texas,” forcing them to give up their slaves, which according to Jones’ reasoning, would then force the South to do the same, and the United States to give up its independence. “As to Santy Anny and Mexico,” he said, “we can’t wait a hundred years for them to whip Texas, and you know, as well as I do, that they can’t du it, no how.”¹ Haile’s satirical letter summed up the central questions concerning annexation and provided a window into the reasoning behind Gulf South annexationists’ interest in Texas. They imagined Texas as both a promising and imperiled land. While it seemed counterproductive for annexationists to emphasize imagined perils, doing so consistently called attention to the necessity of annexing Texas to the United States.

In 1845, the annexation of Texas marked a major achievement for southern expansionists. Their persistent drive to obtain new territory and protect the institution of slavery had resulted in a steady expansion into the Gulf Coast. In that particular moment, southern expansionists in the Gulf stood victorious, having vanquished their anti-annexation foes and gained hundreds of thousands of square miles of new land.

Historians often study the moment of statehood by focusing on the divisions that annexation caused within antebellum party politics. In the most familiar version of the story, Texas annexation either becomes the last great moment of unity, or one in a series of missteps along the road to secession. A focus on congressional politics obscures the experiences of Gulf South communities at the time of annexation. Though the United States had long been interested in nearby Spanish colonies, the emergence of independent Mexico as a political force in North America, and Great Britain’s interest in both Texas and Mexico, gave them a new sense of urgency when it came to securing the Gulf South under U.S. authority. Many Southerners, especially those within the Gulf ports, supported Texas annexation from the moment Texans achieved independence through a short-lived revolution in 1836. Annexation was part of a much longer history of expansion in the Gulf of Mexico stretching back to the colonial period, and should be understood within this context.²

Texans and Gulf South expansionists couched their decisions within cultural as well as political and economic terms. Images of Texas and Texans framed the political debate over annexation. The idea of Texas as an endangered but fertile region bordering the Gulf of Mexico’s vital trade routes shaped the politics of annexation along the coast. While Texas sustained the process of expansion in the Gulf of Mexico began by European colonization, it also played an integral role in shaping the region’s interests in Latin America during the post-independence period. Through the annexation of Texas, newly-independent Latin American nations became incorporated into the larger scheme of U.S. territorial expansion. This was a significant shift because the United States no longer solely obtained land under European colonial control, but also independent democratic nations. Such a shift required the language of expansion to evolve to include racialized stereotypes of those inhabiting these new nations. Yet, it remained founded within the larger history of territorial aggrandizement within the Gulf of Mexico. Following from this logic, Chapter 2 argues that the annexation of Texas was part of an earlier trend of expansion, but also a departure from it, marking one of the earliest clashes between the United States and an independent Latin American nation.

By examining literary sources and the personal correspondence of those living within Texas, Chapter 2 addresses the various ways that Gulf South annexationists imagined Texas during the 1840s. In addition to drawing out several major themes that will be addressed throughout this dissertation, Chapter 2 also provides a glimpse into the society of the Gulf of Mexico and how Texas fits within it.

1836 and equally heated entrance into the nation, the story of Texas became an integral part of the Civil War story. Many U.S. historians emphasize the North/South divisions that occurred during the annexation debate. In the aftermath of U.S. annexation, the nation was left more politically unstable.
By 1845, English interests in the Texas Republic, Mexican military incursions, and—for those living within the Gulf of Mexico—a lack of military presence by the U.S. made annexation a favorable and seemingly necessary process. These particular issues persisted past annexation, and came to form several major themes within the discourse of Gulf Coast expansion throughout the antebellum period. The annexation of Texas’ small port towns in 1845 redrew the map of the Gulf of Mexico, and relations between the various ports within the region changed.  

Expansion into Texas was often depicted as a highly militaristic process. The landscape, particularly the prairie, played a significant role in the imaginary of Texas as did the image of Texans as intrepid Anglo-Saxon frontiersmen. Texas was often depicted as a wild and threatened space, which needed the guiding hand of Anglo Americans, especially slaveowning southerners, to protect it from immediate threats such as the Mexican Government and English abolitionism. The image of the land was both forbidding in its foreignness and beautiful in its fecundity. These imaginings corresponded to the ones that travelers formulated about the Gulf South and her port cities, and were related to the larger history of expansion.

In the sixteenth century, expansion in the Gulf of Mexico moved from south to north rather than north to south. Prior to European colonization, many different cultures

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3 Charles Sellers, The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 132; Harry P. Owens, Steamboats and the Cotton Economy: River Trade in the Yazoo-Mississippi (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003); Robin W. Doughty, At Home in Texas: Early Views of the Land (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1987), 62-63; 79-81. Steam travel fundamentally changed the process and speed of trade in U.S. ports. Texas’ independence and annexation occurred during this development. Merchants and shipping agents valued the land for the cotton it produced, but also for the navigable rivers running through it which might grant them access to further land within the Southwest. Doughty’s At Home in Texas concerns the ways that Texans viewed the environment around them, and points the way towards thinking about how expansionists used images of landscapes and peoples to further their ends in the Gulf of Mexico.
existed along the Gulf Coast, which extended 4,000 miles from the Florida Keys to Cabo Catoche, the northwestern most point of the Yucatán Peninsula. Several distinct Native American cultures lived within this immense coastline. Choctaws and Hoamas lived in and around what became New Orleans in order to escape the Chickasaw and Biloxi Indians. The Panzacola and Apalachee peoples inhabited land that extended from the upper Florida Coast through present-day Louisiana. All of them contended with the mighty Creeks who made their home further inland. On the western side of the Gulf of Mexico the Karankawa—whom the Spanish believed to be cannibals, but were largely farming and fishing peoples—dominated the Texas coastline around Galveston Island, and on the Mexican Coast the Tabasco and Campeche grew and traded cotton, beans, and corn.⁴

The Spanish were the first to colonize the Gulf of Mexico, beginning with Hernán Cortés de Monroy y Pizarro conquest of Mexico in the early 1500s. Amerigo Vespucci became the first European to sail along the Gulf Coast in 1497. By the time the French landed in Louisiana, the Spanish had explored the Gulf extensively, and encountered the various Indigenous peoples that lived there. When the English founded Jamestown in 1607, Spaniards had inhabited St. Augustine, Florida for fifty years. Spain’s first attempt to settle present-day Pensacola also pre-dated the struggling British colony by several decades. Tristan de Luna, Governor and Captain General of La Florida and Santa Elena, set sail from Veracruz on June 11, 1559, intent on settling Pensacola. The Viceroy later characterized the bay as the “finest jewel possessed by His Majesty,” and

several hundred years later Pensacolians continued to believe that their bay was a jewel waiting to be discovered. De Luna’s expedition, the largest Spanish venture to that date, numbered an impressive fleet of eleven ships carrying 1,500 persons. His group was larger than the initial parties sent by the English to found Roanoke, Plymouth, and Jamestown combined. However, this expedition was plagued with similar struggles as those experienced by many English settlements, and they eventually abandoned the project. The Spanish would not return to Pensacola Bay for another 135 years.5

During the European conquest, the Gulf of Mexico became the crossroads of empire. The French, Spanish, and English fought for the spoils of the marshy coast and the mighty rivers that flowed toward it. Native Americans, particularly the Comanche in Texas fought against Spanish control. In colonial Louisiana and Florida they worked largely within the French, Spanish, and English colonial structures though many continued to resist colonial subjugation. As many historians, prominent among them Daniel Usner, have noted, relations between different ethnic and racial groups were incredibly complex in the “backwater” of the French colonial empire, Louisiana. They were forced to construct their own economic system among Native Americans, African Slaves, and European colonists. Spanish colonies along the Gulf Coast had differing levels of importance and success within the empire.

Throughout the region the mixture of different peoples also meant the evolution of unique food ways, religious practices, folklore, and even architecture. Slavery proved vital toward the formation of the colonial economy and society throughout the Gulf of

Mexico. Spanish and French colonial societies formed ideas about race and laws concerning slavery that were, in many ways, malleable and far more varied than those that eventually took hold in the English colonies of the Upper South. However, slavery was no less oppressive in the colonies of the Gulf of Mexico than it was in the English colonies. Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans in North and South America experienced both conflict and cooperation. A variety of racial and class groups developed out of these complex social and economic interactions. Yet, whether it was the labor and crops extracted from Native Americans through Catholic missions and the Spanish *Encomienda*, or the capture and transport of Africans, forced labor regimes lay at the heart of European colonization in the Gulf of Mexico.\(^6\)

The centrality of slavery to expansion did not change under the influx of Americans coming from the newly born United States. In fact, it persisted and increased. The rapid development of cotton and sugar agriculture increased the migration of southerners from the middle and upper Souths, and a society with slaves became a slave society. Louisiana’s population increased throughout the 1830s by 63 percent, and Alabama’s population increased by 91 percent. As they would do throughout the antebellum period, Americans, primarily from the South, established and further entrenched their own systems of slavery while Latin American nations worked to abolish the practice during the early nineteenth century. Within Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas the spread of American settlement brought new

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cultural encounters and conflicts. As settlers moved into these areas they also sought to establish the social and economic systems they left behind. While they were largely successful, the older French, Spanish, African American, and Native American peoples persisted under this new rule and challenged Anglo-Americans’ attempts to “Americanize” the region. As Adam Rothman observes, a combination of government policy and personal choice contributed to the spread of slavery and settlement in the Gulf South during the early nineteenth century. The settlement and annexation of Texas grew out of the South’s expansion into the Gulf of Mexico as well as the long history of empires that grew out of European and American colonization.  

Imagining Texas and Imagining Expansion

Throughout the 1820s, Mexico was plagued with internal divisions, and regional interests. As a result, the centralists in the Mexican government sought to establish a formidable state power. In order to achieve this stability, it instituted new policies to encourage settlement of its northern states. From the beginning of settlement in Texas, southerners saw the region as an outlet for their ever-growing slave population. American settlement was a marriage of convenience. The depression and panic of 1819 made settlement on the cheap and fertile plains of Texas far more appealing than the more expensive land in the United States. Mexico granted settlers 640 acres for the head of the family, 320 for his wife, 160 per child, and an additional 80 per each slave.

Many Americans went to Texas in the hopes of escaping debt, which is, in part, why Texans were thought to be a criminal sort. Due to the mixture of Mexican and Americans settlers, Northern Mexico, of which Texas was a part, was rife with tensions between the state and settlers as well as amongst settlers themselves. As one of Texas' visitors observed, the South West states of the Gulf interacted frequently with the colonists of Texas, who, “for the most part had gone from their midst.”

In 1829, the Mexican government abolished slavery, but allowed American-born slaveholders to keep their slaves. Still encouraging American settlement, the Mexican government decreed that settlers in Texas would be able to keep their slaves for an additional year after 1829. Thereafter, some slaveholders converted their slaves to indentured servants in order to circumvent the law. Southerners also continued to bring slaves with them, and ignore Mexican laws. In the early years of settlement the Mexican state only loosely enforced the policy of conversion to Catholicism. Still, many Anglo-Americans disliked these requirements as well as the additional requirement that they pay taxes after five years of residence.

Most Americans settled in the east along the rivers, the coastal plains, and the banks of the Rio Grande. During the 1820s and early 1830s Anglos and Mexicans, especially in the Rio Grande Valley, formed a tenuous foothold on the southern prairie.

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9 Frederic Leclerc, “Texas and Its Revolution,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 7, no. 6 (June 1841), 403.
Interruption with Mexican women was one of the early methods for Anglo-American men to gain property and land in South Texas. This practice changed with the new settlers that came after 1836, when Texas became an independent Republic. When Texas won its independence from Mexico in 1836, the population was small, comprised of 30,000 whites, 5,000 African Americans including slaves and free blacks, 3,470 Hispanics, and 14,200 Native Americans. Throughout Texas’ Republic period, the population increased 7,000 inhabitants per year. By the time of the U.S.-Mexican War the population of the entire state stood at 135,000, including 39,000 slaves.\(^{11}\)

Despite the fact that pro-annexationists viewed Texans as heroic, many others believed Texans were a destitute bunch fleeing their native country for fear of being prosecuted as debtors or criminals. Texans fought against this image through the 1820s and 1830s. Stephen F. Austin, one of Texas’ most prominent empresarios, expelled “men of infamous character and bad conduct” from his original colony in San Felipe. William Kennedy wrote about this phenomenon in 1841 when he penned his history of the Texas Republic, *Texas: The Rise, Progress, and Prospects of the Republic of Texas, Vol.1*. Kennedy wrote, “no representation could be more unfounded or unfair.” He emphasized the measures Austin took to ensure that “fugitives from justice” did not find their way into the settlements. Matilda Charlotte Houstoun, an English traveler in the Gulf of Mexico, also hoped to repudiate the image of settlers as criminals. “Do felons, thieves, and assassins fight for their country, as the Texans have done? I should

say, certainly not,” wrote Houstoun. She felt that even if Texas was bereft of courts and law, they were not any worse than their neighbors in the other Gulf States when it came to criminality. One man’s criminal was another man’s adventurer, and some viewed Texans as fearless frontiersmen, striding into the unknown Mexican wilderness to make inroads for their nation to follow. The fact that Texas achieved its independence through war aided the shift in Anglo perceptions of Texans from criminals to conquerors.¹²

Of all the port cities in the region, New Orleans with its cotton-hungry merchants and expansionists was most involved in American settlement in Texas. The city played a central role in both Texas’ settlement and independence. New Orleanians contributed vast sums of money to the cause. During the Texas Revolution, the Texas army gained more men by advertising 800 acres of land and free passage from New Orleans for those willing to go and fight on the revolutionaries’ side. After annexation, a large body of creditors in the city filed a petition with the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate intent on recouping the money they had lent the late Republic of Texas. Most of Texas’ slaves were transported from New Orleans, and many settlers made their way through the city before going on to Texas. Once in Texas, the cotton they produced was eventually shipped to New Orleans. By 1835, the majority of Texas cotton wound up on New Orleans’ wharves.¹³

¹² Joe Bertram Frantz, Mike Cox, and Roger A. Griffin, Lure of the Land: Texas County Maps and the History of Settlement (College Station: Published for the Texas General Land Office by Texas A&M University Press, 1988); Stephen F. Austin, quoted in Cantrell, Stephen F. Austin, 177; William Kennedy, Texas: The Rise, Progress, and Prospects of the Republic of Texas, Vol.1 (London: R. Hastings, 1841), 333; Matilda Charlotte Houstoun, Texas and the Gulf of Mexico, or, Yachting in the New World (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1844), 79.

However, Texans were not always happy with this arrangement. Commenting on the rise of Texas cotton markets and their interest in maintaining trade relationships with Europe, an early article in the *Houston Telegraph and Texas Register* observed that proximity was the main factor in the Republic's trade with New Orleans. However, they hoped that with the arrival of the English steamship *Forth* in Galveston might provide a way to transport cotton directly from Texas. A new English steam line promised to link the Atlantic, Cape Horn, and the Gulf of Mexico in a large trade network. Galvestonians hoped to be at the center of that new network, leaving their entanglements with New Orleans far behind them. Such a thing could be accomplished in a republic, but could not be easily done as a state. The close connections between Texas ports and the other cities along the Gulf were deeply and historically rooted. That did not stop smaller ports from attempting to compete and move out from under the shadow of the larger cities. These connections became the new crossroads of empire and replaced the ones that allowed initial European colonization.\(^1\)

Like the imagery of Texas and the Gulf South as exotic and economically important places, the route toward annexation evolved throughout the period between revolution and statehood. Texas minister to the United States, Memecun Hunt Jr., proposed annexation in 1837, and Texans overwhelmingly voted in favor of it. Yet when Hunt brought the proposal to Martin Van Buren's administration he was told that annexation was not possible. Van Buren's administration cited fears of possible war with Mexico and concerns over the constitutionality of the proposal. The question of slavery's expansion played a large part in Van Buren's decision to shelve the idea. The Texas

\(^{14}\) Edward L. Miller. *New Orleans and the Texas Revolution* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2004); *Houston Telegraph and Texas Register*, February 9, 1842.
Republic’s first president, Mirabeau B. Lamar, opposed annexation and no longer pressed the issue during his time in office, believing Texas was better off on its own. The possibility that annexation might never happen seemed a reality in 1837, and made the land appear all the more vulnerable.¹⁵

The depiction of Texas as a fertile but untamed land was not so different from earlier frontiers in the Gulf of Mexico. As Texans attempted to annex themselves to the United States, the Second Seminole Indian War threw Floridians into chaos and bloodshed. Along the borders of the Gulf, in Texas and Florida Native Americans, Commanche and Seminoles among them, fought to maintain a hold of their lands against the onslaught of Anglo settlers. Whites within the Gulf ports not only read about the continued presence of Native peoples, they saw them in their cities. Matilda Houstoun wrote about seeing them in the New Orleans streets “scantily clothed, with an old blanket wrapped about them for their only covering.” Matilda and her husband even visited imprisoned “Florida Indians,” perhaps Creek or Seminole, while she was there. In Texas, Sam Houston did his best to make peace treaties with the Commanche, Kiowa, and other nations in the late 1830s. Constant conflict with Native Americans persisted from the Colonial Era into the nineteenth century. The idea that Anglo Saxons would triumph over their “savage” neighbors formed a fundamental part of the idea of expansion thus placing the settlement of Texas within the centuries old contest between empires and Native Americans. Interspersed throughout descriptions of Texas’ rich soil and wild prairies was the idea that perhaps Anglos could settle the region successfully,

and the constant push on the part of Native Americans and Mexicans combined with the U.S. reluctance seemed to doom the prospect of annexation.16

Travel narratives touched on both the importance of slavery to Texas which only served to emphasize the region’s vulnerability in light of Mexico’s stance on slavery. Frederic Leclerc, a French physician, arrived in Texas in 1838. He remained for only a few months, but the country and its recent history made such an impression on him that he felt the need to contribute his own voice to the region’s evolving narrative. Leclerc’s *Texas and Its Revolution* was part history and part travel journal. He used previously published materials to construct his version of the Texas Revolution. Leclerc saw southern fears concerning the growing population of slaves and the need to expand into new territory as the main impetus for settlement and annexation. Texas, he wrote: “offered an almost limitless field to slave-labor, one practically boundless both in area and in the types of agriculture which might prove profitable on its rich virgin plains.”

While traveling from Texas to Havana, Matilda Houstoun observed that the central topic of discussion among her fellow travelers was slavery in Texas, and that this question concerned Galvestonians most of all. She recalled that Galvestonians had been so indignant over the presence of abolitionists in their town that they banished them from the city. “The person in question,” she remembered, “was conveyed in a boat to the

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mainland, and there turned adrift to preach to the inhabitants of the woods and prairies.” Another abolitionist, an African American man, who attempted to preach about abolitionism in the market place attempted to claim British citizenship. Unfortunately, Houstoun was silent as to what happened to the man, but, more than likely, he fared worse than the abolitionist they exiled to the woods and prairies.17

The conflicts between Texas and Mexico perpetuated the idea that Texas was continually threatened both within the young Republic, and within the South. The Mexican government refused to recognize Texas independence and flatly rejected the Treaties of Velasco in 1836, which had supposedly settled the matter shortly after the war. They argued that Santa Anna signed the treaty under duress as he lay wounded and prone on the battlefield. Mexico believed this treaty was not legal and that the boundaries that Texans claimed were erroneous. Texas claimed the Rio Grande as its national boundary, but Mexico claimed it was the Nueces River over a hundred miles north of the Rio Grande.18

However, in 1840 and 1841 Texans were more interested in extending its western border to include the lucrative Santa Fe Trail, which further emphasized their image as intrepid and militaristic frontiersmen. The Santa Fe Trail carried much needed trade into Mexico, and Texas President, Mirabeau B. Lamar hoped instead to divert the commerce toward Texas’ interior. George Wilkins Kendall, editor of the New Orleans Picayune, journeyed with the expedition. While the main point of the expedition was to open trade routes, Kendall’s primary objective was to travel to the far off western

17 Leclerc, “Texas and Its Revolution” Southern Literary Messenger, 67; Houstoun, Texas and the Gulf of Mexico, 243-244.

18 Fehrenbach, Lone Star, 252-254, 262-263.
prairies, which stemmed from a desire to visit “regions inhabited alone by the roaming Indians, as well as to partake in the wild excitement of buffalo hunting and other sports of a border and prairie life.” Texans hoped to establish outposts near Santa Fe thereby bolstering their failing economy. Matilda Houstoun believed that had the Texans been able to secure the Santa Fe Trail trade they would have had a distinct advantage over Americans and thus they would have had little reason to continue to support annexation. However, that was not to be. The southwestern border between Texas and Santa Fe was a territory they could not wrest from the Mexicans nor the Comanche. This amplified continued anxieties over invasion in Texas.¹⁹

These fears became reality in 1842 as the Santa Fe Expedition collapsed and Mexican forces crossed into Texas, intent on taking back the rebellious state. Rumblings of possible Mexican movements against Texas began in the fall of 1842. By March Mexican troops under Rafael Vasquez crossed into the Lone Star Republic. Prior to leaving Monterrey, General Mariano Arista, then in command of the army and under the authority of Santa Anna, issued a statement exclaiming that it was useless for Texans to continue their fight for independence, and promising amnesty for those who remained neutral during the ensuing invasion. Mexican troops marched through Texas and occupied many of the settlements and towns where they had fought during the War of Independence. The small number of volunteers that guarded San Antonio quickly abandoned it to the Mexican army. Three hundred citizens living in Austin, the Republic’s capital city, signed a letter to President Sam Houston claiming that they were

¹⁹ George Wilkins Kendall, “The Texan Santa Fe Expedition,” Clarksville Northern Standard taken from the New Orleans Picayune, August 27, 1842; Matilda Charlotte Houstoun, Texas and the Gulf of Mexico, 75.
well prepared for the invasion. They believed their position toward Mexico had always been antagonistic and that they had grown stronger and more capable of defending themselves. The Austinites insisted that Mexico steadily became “less capable of annoying” them. They asked, when was the time that Texas was not threatened by Mexico? Their belief in their own martial prowess and their simultaneous dismissal of the Mexican army demonstrated both the persistence of conflict within the region, and also a formation of an idea of Anglo-Texans as superior to Mexicans.20

The invasion was short lived, and did little damage. However, it was followed by another attempt in the fall, which also did not succeed. The fear that other incursions might arise lingered, and Sam Houston became convinced that the Mexican government was preparing to carry out yet another “war for the subjugation of Texas.” John Reagan, then a justice of the peace in Nacogdoches, remembered that many Anglo Texans called for retaliation against their old Mexican enemies. The Texas Congress passed a bill providing for a war against Mexico, and even proposed a blockade of Mexico’s Gulf ports. Houston stated that all traffic going toward Mexico from other ports in the region would be stopped by the small Texas Navy. According to Reagan, fears of Mexican invasion coupled with hostilities between Native Americans, “kept the people of Texas in an almost continuous state of war up to the time of annexation to the United States.” Texans were not the only ones in the Gulf of Mexico to feel continuously at war with Mexico. During this period newspapers in New Orleans and Pensacola also saw phantom Mexican political machinations stemming from the real invasions. The Picayune suspected that a report of two war ships built in New York

20 “Petition to Sam Houston from the people of Travis County,” Civilian and Galveston Gazette, April 11, 1842.
were meant for Mexico then intent on invading the Texas coastline. Public meetings were held in New Orleans to show support for the Texans, and to organize militia groups. Eventually Houston got hold of his senses and vetoed the bill declaring war between Texas and Mexico. This, however, did not stop private citizens in Texas from organizing armed expeditions to Mexico for revenge. Continued conflict with Mexico, as well as with Native Americans, contributed to Texans' desires for more political and military assistance from other nations. It also added to the romanticization of Texan soldiers at the same time that it emphasized Texas' vulnerability.

A poem written in the 1843 concerning the ill-fated relationship between a Mexican woman and a white Texan soldier fighting in the revolution embodied these complex notions about the settlement of Texas and Texan soldiers. George B. Wallis' “Arabella,” opened with a description of a spring morning on the Texas prairie.

Campbell, the poem’s male protagonist and Texan soldier remarked on the prairie that he described by stating, "Like islands in the blue Aegean,/ The forest-isles arise,/ Surrounded by a sea of flowers,/ That scent and tint the skies--/ Was not—is not this Paradise--/ This charming land of ours?" Amidst the prairie background, the Texas rebels became blue-eyed Anglo saviors as compared to the Mexican people as supporters of an oppressive government. The poem’s heroine Arabella, abandoned her “nation’s duty” to fall in love with its foe. The character of Arabella was headstrong,

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rebellious, dramatic, and much more sexual than the “Yankee” women of Texas. She exemplified the defeminization of female racial others and the feminization of Mexican men. In the poem she wondered: “Why do Southern daughters, all,/ Love thy country’s daring sons? They are noble, brave and tall; Ours are weak and treacherous ones.” While this paragon of Spanish fieriness initially attracted the Texan Campbell, he eventually married a blue-eyed American woman named Mary, thus emphasizing the importance of such relationships on the southern frontier. On his wedding night, Campbell had a dream in which a vulture searching for a possible meal, “changed into a hideous snake,/ And coiling round the bird in strangling folds,/ After a mighty struggle down it brought/ The eagle to the sea, where both were lost.” Within the context of the poem and the period, it likely represented the author’s concerns about the struggle between the U.S. and Mexico to secure Texas.\(^\text{23}\) In the second installment the readers met with Campbell’s men, one of whom was a Creole from New Orleans. This character met with an untimely death as he was discovered to be the one who defiled another member’s sister some years ago. The depiction of the Creole soldier as a lascivious and unscrupulous character spoke to the often times tense relationship between Anglo-Americans and French and Spanish Creoles in the Gulf South.\(^\text{24}\)

The image of the Texan soldier as a rugged individual persisted in imaginings of the Texas frontier and the 1836 revolution. However, as annexation become increasingly probable the Texan soldier needed domesticating. The poet, Pablo, likened him to an untamed steer roaming the pampas of South America. The Texan soldier was

\(^{23}\) ibid. 766-769.

transformed into a man who had been on the prairies so long that he scarcely resembled the white race that the earlier figure of Campbell embodied, and instead “his Swarthy brow has lost the hue, that marks the Anglo Saxon race.” According to Pablo, the violence of the battlefields and the memories of the death of his comrades at the Alamo and San Jacinto clung to the Texan Soldier and made him so frightening that, “Acapulco’s matrons still their infants with that name of fear.” The plants and animals of Texas, such as the prickly pears and mockingbirds, awaited the Texan Soldier’s return, and with the creation of the Texan state the author wrote: “Brother, toil! No foe retards thee; thy brow in Labor’s moisture lave; Brother, peace! The Eagle guards thee! The Stars and Stripes shall o’er thee wave.” This poem also exposed some of the many ways that the revolution and the men who fought it were remembered during annexation as both fierce but also in the process of becoming part of the Union.  

Stories such as these demonstrated the extent to which Texas and Texans were seen as both alluring and frightening. Compared to other parts of the United States they seemed foreign, with the presence of Latin American peoples and African Americans existing alongside whites. The Texas frontier, the Lower Mississippi Valley, and the Gulf South were all seen as places both threatened by racial others and economically prosperous. While Americans settled territory in the Gulf of Mexico once ruled by France and Spain, the influx of Anglo Americans into Texas marked the first real experience Americans had with the newly established Mexican nation. The United States’ interests in Texas not only furthered conflict between the U.S. and European

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nations interested in diplomatic relations with Texas, but such interests also began to supplant the original contest of empires, which was most evident in the way that those within the Gulf South and Texas began to view the Texas landscape.\textsuperscript{26}

Frederic Leclerc traveled into the plantation districts of eastern Texas. As he did so he marveled at floating down the San Jacinto River, the site of the last battle of the Texas Revolution and its final victory. The revolution was ever in the minds of Texans at the time of Lerclerc’s visit, and thoughts about the battle floated through his head. Looking out at his surroundings as he traveled down the river on a steamboat, the contrast of seemingly untouched land and new technology fascinated Leclerc and, for him, formed a complete picture of man’s destiny, to conquer all that lay before him.\textsuperscript{27} He characterized the appeal of the region as being “the natural resources of the country, the beauty of its climate, the possibility of establishing steamboat navigation on its rivers.” These he claimed were well known to the nation especially in the West and the South. Florida, Louisiana, and Alabama were all seen similarly as places where surplus slaves could be sold and surplus whites could move.\textsuperscript{28}

Ferdinand Roemer, a German geologist, toured Texas in 1844 and 1845 as a part of a geological survey of North America. Fascinated by the German settlements, prairies, and cities, Roemer published a separate travelogue covering Texas and the Gulf of Mexico. In 1847, he published his account, \textit{Texas}. Roemer’s narrative reported


\textsuperscript{27} Houstoun, \textit{Texas and the Gulf of Mexico, or, Yachting in the New World}, 165.

the condition of Texas, and Germans’ successful settlement in it. Like Leclerc, Roemer marveled at both his means of travel and the scene before him. In 1845, scarcely a month before the United States officially annexed the young republic, Roemer embarked at New Orleans and headed for Galveston aboard a steamship of the same name. He observed that Galveston looked out onto the low-lying plains, which he described as the “largest and most beautiful region of the cultivated parts of Texas.” He believed that “Galveston offers as remarkable an example as any other city in the western part of the United States such as Buffalo or Chicago, which, like mushrooms, shot up over night.” For him, eastern Texas was beautiful because it was cultivated and settled by Anglo Saxon people who had conquered both the landscape and the people.

Roemer combined racist views of Mexicans and the landscape around him. Also remarked on Texas’ early inhabitants, describing them as being of “Spanish extraction.” The Mexicans who remained in the town, Roemer observed, “belong to a lower class of Mexican and their features plainly show a mixture of Castilian and Indian blood.” He maintained that they were a “lazy and indolent race.” Throughout Roemer’s Texas he describes Mexican settlements as crude or deteriorating from lack of upkeep. He characterized San Antonio as giving the impression of “decay, and apparently at one time had seen better and more brilliant days.” About the German colony of New Braunfels, on the banks of the Comal River, Roemer remarked on its pleasing appearance and its uniqueness in Texas and North America. He was thrilled to see familiar German people and customs taking root in Texas. 29 These statements

emphasized the differences between the German, Mexican, and Anglo settlements. German and Anglo communities were described as growing and bustling. Apprehension over whether or not such growth could be sustained become one of the major reasons why annexationists continued to push for Texas statehood.30

The importance of protecting the Gulf ports as global trading centers drove much of the debate concerning the vulnerability of the region. John Tyler’s administration renewed U.S. interest in annexing Texas to the United States. Tyler and Houston, now in his second term as Texas president, negotiated a treaty, which was sent before Congress in 1843. The fear of English abolitionism and economic dominance possessed deep roots in the region. Southerners continued to identify the West Indies with the dangers of the Haitian Revolution and England’s overtures to Texas made it appear as though abolitionism might spread there next.

In 1844, the Gulf South waited to hear news concerning the outcome of the annexation treaty as it moved through the Senate. The New Orleans Picayune predicted that if the United States did not annex Texas, it would lose its commerce along with that of Mexico and Central America. They feared agricultural staples produced in Texas might displace those from the southern states. In a few years, the Picayune asserted, Texas would raise every bale of cotton that the English used in their factories. They said “English emigration, English capital, English commerce, English enterprise and English influence will overwhelm and swallow up everything that is American, and estrange the people of Texas from their loyalty to the United States.”31 The desire to protect the Gulf

30 Roemer, Roemer’s Texas, 29, 37, 77,61.
31 New Orleans Picayune, April 11, 1844.
in the early 1840s came from both the existence of independent Texas and the presence of European powers in the West Indies. The presence of two new nations on the borders of the United States as well as remnants of old colonial powers created a complex political atmosphere for Gulf annexationists.

England’s overtures toward Texas, and its antislavery policy, roused many Americans, particularly in the South, from their ambivalent feelings over Texas annexation. Though the British Empire had no real interest in adding Texas as a colony, it was interested in checking U.S. westward expansion and trading with the newly formed nation. In 1829, Parliament denounced the efforts of the U.S. to obtain Texas. Leclerc claimed that England’s early opposition to Texas annexation came from its fears “that Mexico should be maintained in control of Texas since American opposition had been responsible for failure of negotiations between England and Spain regarding the cession of Cuba.”

During her travels in Texas, Houstoun observed the Texans discussed the fate of their country as if they were talking about a “matter of business,” and remembered one gentleman traveling on the same ship to Cuba who believe Texas should become an English colony. Southerners worried that Great Britain wanted to take advantage of the tense relationship between Texas and Mexico, and use Texas’ precarious position to further extend their influence into the Southwestern region. The fact that British diplomats had been sent to Galveston heightened worried annexationists in Texas and the United States. Beyond diplomatic dinners, Charles Elliot, chargé d'affaires, hoped to

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32 Leclerc, Texas and its Revolution, 78.
be able to negotiate between the Texas Republic and Great Britain, and work to make Texas a free nation. A year later, the Houston Telegraph and Texas Register reported that a treaty of commerce and navigation had been signed between the Texas Republic and England. When Texas newspapers reported interest in selling their cotton and establishing trade relations with Great Britain, it also caused many to worry over the security of slavery within the Gulf South.\(^3\)

The English also worried about how the presence of a wholly new republic would alter the balance of power on the North American continent, and for that reason they did not recognize Texas’s independence from Mexico. In 1844, echoing the beliefs of many Gulf South annexationists, the Picayune maintained that annexation was absolutely necessary to do away with the, “necessity of protecting a long line of frontier from smugglers; to defeat the insidious policy of England.” The paper wrote: “she is aiming to attack us in our slave property by erecting another Canada upon our borders.” It also warned that Texans doubted their government could sustain the nation, and might be tempted to form closer ties with Great Britain. “On these and other grounds the South will almost to a man sustain the policy of the President in bringing about annexation,” they declared.

Yet, what Mexico would do in the event of annexation remained central to political negotiations. In March, the Mexican government passed an act that made speaking out in support of annexation or Texas independence an act of treason. The U.S. consul at Vera Cruz wrote to James Buchanan, then Secretary of State, regarding

Mexico, explaining that “it was believed that a large majority of Congress would not agree to declare war with the U. States, but send an Army herself to Texas and Compell the U. S. to declare War with Mexico and this cause I am inclined to think will be resorted to.”

In February the *Houston Telegraph* published a rumor that the United States was about to ratify the treaty. The news may have been “too good to be true,” but the paper hoped it could be achieved. Texas was the key to U.S. imperial interests; the *Picayune* wrote: “the broad banner of Washington may be unfurled in glory on our Western border, and the burnished arms of American troops will be reflected from the sparkling waters of the Nueces. ‘Westward! The star of empire takes its way!’” While in New Orleans, Rice Ballard, one of Johnston’s business associates there, wrote to Albert Sidney Johnston concerning the excitement over the prospect of annexation. “I am in hopes we shall have Texas annexed to our country,” wrote Ballard. He felt “both North and South are interested to have Texas annexed to our country. . . we shall in this respect suffer a small diminution in the price of cotton, but we are compelled to have it annexed, or abandon our slaves if it is to be a British Colony of abolitionism.” By July 1844, the measure was dead, the parties sharply divided, and the prospect of annexation a major issue in the next presidential election, which expansionist Democrat James K. Polk won.

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34 *New Orleans Picayune*, March 26, 1844; U.S. Consul at Veracruz, F. Dimond to James Buchanan Sec. of State, April 2, 1844.

35 *Houston Telegraph*, February 10, 1844; *New Orleans Picayune*, February 14, 1844; Rice Ballard to Albert Sidney Johnston, April 17, 1844, Albert Sidney and William Preston Johnston papers, Manuscripts Collection 1, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans.
Prominent Texans such as Albert Sidney Johnston and Sam Houston had been surprised by the tepid reception of annexation under the Van Buren administration. Texan hopes rose again with the Tyler administration, but when the treaty failed those hopes were again dashed. When Polk became president he renewed expectations for Texas statehood. Houston consistently fought for annexation, going so far as to play the British and Americans against each other in order to gain further support for statehood. Johnston’s feelings toward annexation were far more ambivalent. If the United States remained hesitant, then perhaps being a nation was for the best. Both Johnston and Houston were born in upper South states, but found a home in Texas, and felt a strong sense of loyalty towards it. Johnston’s fealty toward Texas emerged from his family’s connection to the territory and the Lower South. In his youth, Johnston encountered Americans migrating to Texas while he lived in Alexandria, Louisiana, a border town. Several of his siblings took part in the 1813 Gutierrez-Magee expedition, an early joint Mexican and American filibustering expedition that aimed to wrest colonial Texas from the Spanish at the start of the Mexican War of Independence. Johnston’s eldest son recalled that his father claimed that despite these familial connections with Anglo expansion into Texas his real reason for going there was to help bring it into the Union. He wanted to “add another star to the American constellation.” Johnston eventually became Secretary of War for the Texas Republic.

After 1837, Johnston spent most of his time drilling the small Texas army and pursuing the Cherokee who had settled on Texas’ western border. However, he was not in Texas during the actual process of annexation. In 1844, Johnston’s friend, Henry Clay Davis, urged him to run for president of Texas, telling him that he would find ample
support in the western Texas border counties. Davis wrote, “‘Western Boys’ think of you a great many of them say if you are not a candidate they do not intend to vote at all.” In 1845, Johnston traveled to Shelbyville, Kentucky where he married his second wife, Elizabeth. In March J.S. Mayfield wrote to him, begging Johnston to return. Mayfield reminded Johnston that he had always answered the Republic’s call to service. “When she needed your aid, counsel & sacrifices,” wrote Mayfield, “you extended them with alacrity & now that she is about to pass an ordeal that must forever affect her destiny & happiness you must not stand back.” James Love, perhaps the most outspoken of Johnston’s companions, wrote to Johnston regularly, giving him updates on the proceedings of the Texas congress. In a letter written on March 30, 1845 he wrote that if the Texas president, Anson Jones, refused to “call congress and take the mandatory steps to ascertain the will of the people, we will take the matter in our own hands, have a convention unseat him, and hang him if necessary to carry our purposes and all that may abide by him.” Militarism and military men were important to Texas, and Texans’ conceptions of themselves. Men like Johnston and Houston were seen as powerful voices for annexation within the Texas Republic, and were expected to stand in support of annexation and for the benefit of the state.36

In January 1845, in order to keep spirits high over the possibility of annexation, the Picayune claimed that passengers aboard the steamship New York who had come from Galveston said “a large majority of the people of Texas are warmly in favor of annexation, and entertain strong hopes that a bill to that effect will pass before our

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present Congress closes its session.” From their reading of the Texas papers, the Picayune claimed that Texans objected to conditions in the bill that emphasized negotiation with Mexico over the future state’s borders, or the prospect that their laws concerning slavery might change under the justification United States.  

Texas President, Anson Jones, put the resolution before Congress in June as a choice between Mexican recognized independence, which involved Great Britain’s backing, and annexation to the United States.  

The Texas constitutional convention drew up a state constitution, which was then approved by popular vote in October 1845. The formal transfer of authority occurred during a special ceremony in which Anson Jones lowered the republic’s flag and proclaimed, “the final act in this great drama is now performed, the Republic of Texas is no more.” He then transferred power to James Pinkney Henderson, Texas’ first governor. The steamship Alabama brought news of the approval of annexation to New Orleans, where according to Ferdinand Roemer, the news made a profound impression on New Orleanians.  

While Texas had always been a part of the import and export trade through the Gulf South, its entrance into the United States reshaped the region in many ways. Though annexation seemed merely a formality, it changed how Gulf trade functioned due to the fact that the United States significantly redrew the region’s borders. By 1845, the major port cities of the Gulf South were larger, and more established communities. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s trade and social connections grew stronger, and Gulf trade thrived.  

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37 New Orleans Picayune, April 11, 1844; ibid, January 10, 1845;  

38 Herbert Pickens Gambrell, Anson Jones: the last President of Texas (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1948).  

39 Ferdinand Roemer, Roemer’s Texas, 36.
South annexationists stood ready to welcome Texans. Thus, the picture of the Gulf in 1845 was of a region bordered by new land in Texas and Florida. It containing port cities with citizens who believed they were on the verge of conquering Latin America, and becoming the richest part of the nation.

**The Most Fertile Coast in 1845**

The completion of Texas annexation meant a variety of different things to Gulf South southerners in the port communities. Trade and security played important roles in the justification for annexation early on in the movement. In Texas, as in much of the American South, Galvestonians possessed trade relations with the larger ports in the Gulf, but were more cautious about annexation due to their fear of losing their pride of place in the young nation’s pantheon of growing towns. Becoming a part of the United States meant that they no longer held that same importance, and were instead subjected to the rules and regulations of the United States customs office. In addition, ports such as Galveston continued to send their cotton to New Orleans rather than establishing independent trade routes and relations with English and northern factors. Many Pensacolians supported annexation, as did those living in Mobile, citing increased trade and a grand addition to the nation’s growing republic. Those that had been interested in obtaining Texas argued that it would be against the “law of nations” to refuse to make treaties with Texas because the “question of slavery has been closely connected with the events which have separated it from the Mexican Republic.” Once annexation became a reality, Texans joined in the South’s fight to protect their institution.\(^{40}\)

In 1845, with the acceptance of the joint resolution, came deeper connections within the Gulf South. The Gulf South was connected by far more than just settlement, imports, and exports. Harriet E. Amos, in her study of antebellum Mobile, argues that the ports and large cities of the Deep South did not constitute a regional system. Each city, she contends, had little community ties with each other, based on the movement of imports and exports that moved mostly from northern to southern cities. However other historians such as Kimberly Ann Lamp noted that intra-regional trade of foodstuffs increased in the 1840s. While this may be the case, the Gulf South was built on more than imports and exports. The Gulf South ports were connected through shared characteristics, cultural events, food ways, and more mundane aspects such as mailing systems, newspapers, and shipping lines. Boarding houses such as the M.D. Hernandez house in Pensacola served up food cooked in the best style by both “American and Creole Cooks,” and the Pensacola Florida House advertised its large and airy bedrooms in both the Mobile Herald and Tribune as well as the New Orleans Picayune.

Food ways also united the Gulf Coast, and travelers commented on it as much as they did on the people and places. Matilda Houstoun recorded a description of some of the dining establishments and their offerings. Soups served at soup houses principally consisted of “oyster and gombo, the latter a root peculiar to the country, and collected by the Indians.” While in Texas she noted that the “Texas gentlemen” gobbled down fresh beef steaks in addition to the ever-present oysters. She even remarked that

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on one occasion the cook delayed the dinner while he went ashore and “shot a beef.”

While in Mexico she remarked on the spiciness of the food, which both “Indians and Creoles” cherished. A correspondent of the *Montgomery Journal* marveled at the sheer variety of fish to be found on his trip to Pensacola, and during a dinner at the Navy Yard, he remembered “The dinner was such a one as we up country people never see at home; we lack the fish, gophers, fruits & c., that cannot be had away from this or a similar climate.”

Throughout the 1840s reliance on steam travel increased, and the newly available land united Gulf South southerners into a community as much as did trade and cultural commonalities. As a region that was in the midst of expansion, mobility became a large part of life for Gulf South southerners. Trade also tied them to the North and the black belt South. Gulf South ports, regardless of size, exported cotton and sugar, which became their top exports by 1845. These developments elevated the importance of cities such as New Orleans, Galveston, and Pensacola in the South, the nation, and the wider world. Southerners living in the region often went back and forth between the major ports. Many of the planters and merchants owned land in the plantation regions of the Gulf South states and property in the cities themselves. Wealthy New Orleanians owned property in the city and retreated to plantations in the summer time, hoping to escape the deadly yellow fever outbreaks. Following a similar pattern, elite Galvestonians owned property in town and plantations on the mainland. The Pensacola *Gazette* advertised a Mobile Stage Line, which left for Mobile, Alabama every Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday at 5 o’clock in the afternoon after the arrival

of the eastern mail.\textsuperscript{44} Ships began plying routes along the western gulf early in the 1830s. By 1841, steam packets began running regularly back and forth between Galveston and New Orleans. At the time Galveston was merely a collection of small shacks on a sand bar off the coast of Houston.\textsuperscript{45} More dire issues such as sickness also united the Gulf ports into a community. If yellow fever broke out in New Orleans, then often spread to Mobile, Galveston, or Pensacola. Newspapers and citizens often reported the health of other cities especially in the summer time when the fever usually popped up.

At the time of annexation, Gulf Coast ports contained similar populations, though they ranged in size. 102,193 people lived in New Orleans and in Mobile there were 12,672. By 1850 just over 2,000 lived in Pensacola. Galveston was also a small town on the edge of two big cities with a population of 4,000. European immigrants were a large part of the region’s population. After annexation, European immigration to these cities continued to rise. The majority came from Germany, Ireland, and France, but there were also Cubans, Mexicans, and Spanish people that found their way to the ports. Galveston and its neighbor, Houston became major depots for slaves brought to Texas. The New Orleans slave market was the largest in the region, and many slaves who were forced into the South’s frontiers were bought and sold in the Crescent City. The racially and ethnically diverse populations within the port cities challenged the black-white race binaries encountered in other parts of the upper and lower South, and demonstrated the fragile nature of such racial constructions. Thus, by 1845 white

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Pensacola Gazette} March 29, 1845.

American-born southerners and African Americans made up the majority of the region’s population, but they lived in communities very different from those in the southern interior.\textsuperscript{46}

New Orleans and Mobile remained the epicenter of culture and trade in the Gulf South. Even though New Orleans was not located directly on the coast, it still dictated the pace of economic and social life in the Gulf South. New Orleans consistently outpaced New York in terms of total exports throughout much of the 1830s and 1840s. In 1846, the total value of produce imported from the Gulf South hinterlands and exported out of New Orleans was roughly $75,000,000 as compared to New York’s total value, which was $25,000,000. Mobile was not to be outdone, in the 1850s the cotton business would amount to $30,000,000. While cotton remained king in the Gulf South, the sugar industry developed through the 1830s and 1850s partly in response to increased demand in the United States. The center of sugar production was the Mississippi River, but when Texas entered the Union, planters in the coastal prairies increased sugar production thereby competing with Louisiana sugar barons. Albert Sidney Johnston wrote frequently to friends about his plans for his own sugar plantation on the Texas Gulf Coast. In a letter to George Hancock he remarked on a small patch he had grown, stating “I do not think there can be better anywhere—My land from its long cultivation is peculiarly adapted to the immediate culture of the cane & the adjacent prairie which is uncommonly good is said by the luminaries, to be the \textit{true} locality for sugar.” The majority of Texas’s cowhides, cotton, and sugar went to New Orleans.

Pensacola lumber and bricks were purchased by merchants in both Mobile and New Orleans. Business life coincided with social life in the Gulf Coast ports when merchants and planters alike gravitated to the cities in the fall and winter to sell their goods. If summer was a time of sickness and death, then winter was a time of frenzied social life. Mobile and New Orleans celebrated Mardi Gras, and All Saint’s Day was observed in Pensacola. In 1842, the *Picayune* boasted that if Charles Dickens wanted to a new experience he ought to get out of Boston and set out for New Orleans. What would he make of their town and the fetes to be found there? Mardi Gras celebrations began with the French colonists in Mobile when they organized the first mystic societies in 1703. When the capital of French Louisiana moved from Mobile to New Orleans in 1723, the celebration of Mardi Gras was also transferred. Later, the tradition became much more formal in Mobile with the organization of the Cowbellion de Rakin Society. Though groups masqueraded regularly in New Orleans throughout the early nineteenth century, the formal and predominantly white organization of mystic societies did not begin there until the mid-1850s. Through much of the colonial and antebellum periods, free and enslaved African Americans participated in these festivals and congregated at Congo Square in New Orleans every Sunday to socialize and sell produce and various wares. New Orleans and Mobile also possessed theaters and shops to encourage travelers, merchants, and planters to stay a little longer and spend a little more money in the cities. Galveston possessed a number of drinking establishments, and the *Pensacola Gazette* regularly advertised eating and drinking establishments in its columns.

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47 Lamp, “Empire for Slavery: Economic and Territorial Expansion in the American Gulf South, 1835-1860,” 5-6; Amos, *Cotton City*, 231; Johnston to George Hancock, April 22, 1848, Johnston papers.
Pensacolians’ social life also revolved around boat rides, balls, and dinners held for the naval yard and army fortifications. Due to some of the more raucous establishments, fetes, and customs in the Gulf ports they were often seen as far more foreign and amoral than other parts of the antebellum South.\textsuperscript{48}

The burgeoning cotton trade and social life of the ports often times masked the instability of the region. Military fortifications were of the utmost importance of the antebellum Gulf South. Violence persisted in the region; during the first half of the nineteenth century a number of wars and violent conflicts happened. The War of 1812 ended in New Orleans, but was also tied to beginnings of the Creek and Seminole Wars in Florida. The nation’s largest slave rebellion happened in Louisiana in 1811. The Cherokee War erupted in north Texas in 1837, and Comanche and Anglos clashed on in Texas’ southwest borderlands throughout the 1830s and 1840s. The Gulf South witnessed several armed expeditions to Mexico, Nicaragua, and Cuba. Continued conflicts between Anglos and Mexicans erupted into the U.S.-Mexican War. When we look at the entirety of the Gulf of Mexico this trend bares out with slave rebellions and uprisings in Cuba, the Haitian Revolution, and the Independence Wars of Central and South America. As a result, Gulf Coast expansionists welcomed the military in their midst. The lack of a strong naval presence was always a source of concern amongst the communities of the Gulf. Many of the fortifications in Mobile, New Orleans, and Pensacola dated back to Spanish and French colonial rule. Pensacola, though small, was considered an important aspect of any military defense of the region due to its

fortifications and naval yard. Any talk about the defense of Gulf South shipping routes against the British, French, or Spanish focused on improving forts and navy buildings in the small Florida town to such an extent that it became dependant on the influx of federal money. Due to its youth, Galveston did not possess an established fort, but it had once been the home of the small Texas Navy. There were also several militia groups established in Galveston during the antebellum period. Since 1823, the presence of the U.S. Navy shaped the Pensacola community, characterized by George Pearson as a “long, friendly, and profitable relationship.” The convergence of both national and local expansionist discourses developed out of Gulf South expansionists’ desires to defend their region’s economy and social structures against threatening internal and external forces.  

Conclusion

To expansionists, Texas reflected the Gulf South’s concerns about abolitionism, Latin American territory, and European dominance. This reinforced most southern visions of the frontier, however, annexation and settlement did not simply reproduce an older understanding of the South. Expansion into the Gulf shaped southern identity whether southerners wanted it to or not. While the upper plantation districts of the Lower South did, for the most part, take on aspects of plantation culture similar to those found in older southern states, the Gulf itself remained an alluring and at times frustrating

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enigma bordering the plantation South. The strength of its external ties to Latin America and into the Southwest influenced the region’s southern identity, which was based in both their urban centers and the expanding Southern frontier.

In 1845 Texas became a part of the nation, a new state and a new place open to a waiting flood of settlers. Throughout the late 1840s and into the 1850s Gulf South southerners both within and outside of Texas continued to be concerned with the state of the frontiers in Texas and Florida, and the security of its richest port cities. These urban spaces viewed themselves as sophisticated, worldly, wealthy, and important to the entirety of the South. Yet they continued to promote expansion into Latin America. In so doing the fate of the frontier, westward expansion, and southern interests became increasingly tied to Latin American countries.

Early involvement with Texas provided the basis for later formations of ideas about the Mexican and native peoples, the country of Mexico, and the notion of the frontier as important to the future of the South. Within the Gulf South, Anglo southerners saw the continuation of the process of southerner territorial expansion. During the Early Republic, the South spread out over the lower South, capturing vital trade routes and ports. Gulf South slave holders believed they had remade the malingering Spanish and French colonies of the Gulf into prosperous American port cities, and it had bested one of its new sister republics in the form of Mexico with Texas statehood. The coming war would prove to Americans their superiority over the new republican nations of Latin America.

Chapter 3 addresses the continued evolution of racial depictions of Mexicans, which began with the Gulf South’s forays into Texas. As the United States annexed
Texas, Manuel Rincon, Governor of the Department of Mexico, ordered that a decree be printed denouncing Texas statehood. Rincon stated that the joint resolution between the United States and Texas was a “serious danger to the peace of the world and threatened the sovereignty of all nations.” Rincon argued that annexation was the latest in a long list of offenses perpetrated by the United States against Mexico, and challenged its sovereignty and rights. The decree not only condemned the U.S. and its policy toward Texas, but also called the Mexican nation to arms, claiming that Mexican law authorized Rincon to raise a military force capable of defending Mexico’s claims to Texas. The Mexican nation therefore called on “all its sons to the defense of national independence, threatened by the usurpation of the territory of Texas.” When Mexico objected to the Rio Grande as Texas’ boundary, supporters of war would utilize ideas about Mexicans and the Mexican government, which first took shape in Texas during the transition from republic to statehood.

CHAPTER 3
THE GHOST OF SANTA ANNA: U.S.-MEXICAN WAR RHETORIC AND REALITY

Introduction

The Nueces Strip, that ribbon of land between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande, was hardscrabble country. A mixture of short brushy bushes and stumpy live oaks, it was a far cry from the thick marshy coastal land and bayous that most Gulf South Anglos were used to seeing. During the 1830s and 1840s travelers to Texas often viewed the land between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande as essentially worthless, with its only real use as a boundary between Texas and Mexico. In 1845, Ferdinand Roemer described this territory as, “an arid, unfruitful wilderness, overgrown with a peculiar vegetation of barren, thorny shrubs, and is inhabited only by herds of mustangs or wild horses and small bands of roving Indians.”¹ Yet after 1845, the United States and Mexico fought over this “unfruitful wilderness.” Mexico claimed the strip for itself; the United States demanded that Texas stretch to the Rio Grande. It was here that the two young republics met each other in the first clash of the U.S.-Mexican War. This was not the first time that Mexicans and Anglos fought over this territory. Mexicans and Anglos both settled the region that became Texas. They fought. They intermarried. They formed communities. These interactions created a deeply complex and shared past out of which the U.S.-Mexican War grew.²

² These interactions are a large part of Chicana/o and borderlands historiography. For a selection see the following: Armando C. Alonzo, Tejano Legacy: Rancheros and Settlers in South Texas, 1734-1900 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998); David Montejano, Anglos and Mexicans: In the Making of Texas, 1836-1986 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); Arnoldo De Leon, They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); David Gutierrez, Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Raul A. Ramos, Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Identity in San Antonio, 1821-1861 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,
The beginning of the U.S-Mexican War exposed several aspects of the Gulf South’s views of Manifest Destiny and territorial expansion. The United States pursued the war for a variety of reasons, many of which had little to do with Texas’ border. The prize of California was never far from President James K. Polk’s mind, but within the Gulf of Mexico conflicts between Anglos and Mexicans over Texas remained the central issue. Chapter 3 examines the U.S-Mexican War in two different contexts. First, it explores the localized context of the war and the manner in which the history of past conflicts created the context for the war in Gulf Coast society. Supporters of the war often used the history of Anglo-Mexican conflict within Texas to further develop a rhetoric based on the racialization of Mexicans as mongrels and the Mexican government as insufficient and despotic. Both ideas were first shaped during settlement, independence, and annexation in Texas. This local context then became part of the national discourse and propaganda surrounding the war with Mexico. Through the war with Mexico a justification of Anglo-American superiority over Mexicans, first articulated during the annexation of Texas, further evolved and would be used to bolster enthusiasm for later armed interventions into Latin America. Second, the war is analyzed from a perspective in which battlefront and home front blur by examining the experiences of soldiers and their families often living across the Gulf in

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U.S. port cities. Their views at times challenged the overriding public discourse on the war and at others upheld it.\footnote{James M. McCaffrey, \textit{Army of Manifest Destiny: The American Soldier in the Mexican War, 1846-1848} (New York: New York University Press, 1992), xii; Paul Foos, \textit{A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict during the Mexican War} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 13-17; Richard Bruce Winders, \textit{Mr. Polk’s Army: The American Military Experience in the Mexican War} (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 3, 12-14. McCaffrey’s work on the experience of soldiers is one of the most complete to date, and gave me cause to think of the experience of soldiers from the Gulf South. Foos’ work does an excellent job of exploring the class of men who served in the war and its impact on class relations amongst the officers and men as well as race relations. The experiences of the career soldiers who fought in earlier conflict with Native Americans along the nation’s borders provide an added level context to soldiers’ experiences. It is noteworthy that many of the men who fought in the Civil War also participated in the Texas Revolution, Seminole Wars, U.S.-Mexican War, and countless other wars committed against Native Americans before they marched into battle against each other. Very little has been done to understand what kind of impact of warfare against racial others might have had on these career soldiers and volunteers.}

As has happened with the history of annexation, historians often treat the U.S.-Mexican War in broadly national terms. They rarely consider how people within different regions may have reacted to the war, or the Gulf South’s unique wartime experience. The U.S.-Mexican War has also been swept up in the great story of secession and the Civil War. Many young men who fought in Mexico later went on to fight in the Civil War, and many historians argue that the political battles over the territory won during the war finally split the country apart. This has also been the case with southern history. For instance, William Freehling in his extensive two-volume treatment of southern secession assesses the importance of annexation and the war along these lines. However, his treatment of the actual war and its effect on local regions is limited. While southerners such as John C. Calhoun may have been against annexing territory beyond the Rio Grande, those in the Gulf South, and Texas especially, coveted Mexico and places such as New Mexico. They believed that the South’s cotton agriculture and its slave-based society could extend to the Pacific Ocean and remake or displace the “mongrelized” populations living in Mexico. However, for expansionists in many parts of the South, the
war was more than a blatant land grab. It was also a way to shore up slavery in an increasingly uncertain political climate. To do this, southern war supporters needed to cast their foes as inherently inferior and thus, undeserving of consideration as a neighboring democratic state similar to their own. They deployed the arguments used to settle and annex Texas in order to achieve these goals.5

For many Anglo Americans the war was distant and foreign, but in the Gulf ports the experience of war was far more intimate and invaded daily life. Soldiers swarmed the ports. From the perspective of those living in the Gulf of Mexico, the nation’s victory over Mexico brought a decades-long border war to a close. In 1848, Anglos believed they had triumphed over their age-old opponents, and that Latin America could be theirs.6

A multitude of past events and people shaped the rhetoric of the war. The Texas War of Independence and views on the Mexican government and its people all formed a historical context that influenced the war's outcomes. The past Civil War historians cast support for the war in stark North/South terms. Painting with broad strokes they asserted that the South was pro-war and the North largely against it. But others, Freehling among them, also noted the role partisanship played in the war. The Gulf South was quite supportive of the war, but opposition to the war did exist there though this chapter does not focus heavily on it. Much work is left to be done concerning how different regions reacted to the war. Indeed, the U.S.-Mexican War remains one of the least well-understood wars of the nineteenth century.

5 William W. Freehling, Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854, Vol.1 of The Road to Disunion (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 448-459; Ernest McPherson Lander, Reluctant Imperialists: Calhoun, the South Carolinians, and the Mexican War (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980). In the past Civil War historians cast support for the war in stark North/South terms. Painting with broad strokes they asserted that the South was pro-war and the North largely against it. But others, Freehling among them, also noted the role partisanship played in the war. The Gulf South was quite supportive of the war, but opposition to the war did exist there though this chapter does not focus heavily on it. Much work is left to be done concerning how different regions reacted to the war. Indeed, the U.S.-Mexican War remains one of the least well-understood wars of the nineteenth century.

6 Jack K. Bauer, The Mexican War: 1846-1848 (New York: McMillan, 1974); John D. Eisenhower, So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000); David A. Clary, Eagles and Empire: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle for a Continent (New York: Bantam, 2009), 438-449; McCaffrey, Army of Manifest Destiny, 208-209; Robert Johannsen, To The Halls of Montezuma: The Mexican War in the American Imagination, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Foose, A Short Offhand Killing Affair, 6; Freehling, Road to Disunion, Vol.1, Secessionists at Bay, 488-490; Brian Delay, War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 229-33; Resendez, Changing National Identities at the Frontier, 237-265. More recently historians such as Andres Resendez, and Brian DeLay published works that explore different aspects of the U.S.-Mexican War, and continued border conflicts. DeLay’s exploration of the impact of Native American presence during the war, and Resendez’s work on identity formation within the Southwest borderlands during this period are some of the few who address different experiences of the war and different forces exerted on the nation during the war.
part of this discourse. Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna—a central and intensely controversial figure—proved to be emblematic of the past that formed the foundation for the war. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s both Mexicans and Anglos were both fascinated and infuriated by Santa Anna. They often painted him as treacherous, vain, capricious, and, at times, completely immoral. While Santa Anna played an important part in the initial propaganda of the war, the experiences of soldiers and their views of Mexicans that evolved out of the process of invasion and warfare further entrenched the racist views of Mexicans within the region. These images, like the conflict itself, evolved over several decades. The intensity of warfare solidified them within the public discourse.7

Creating a Martial Rhetoric

Toward the end of 1845, annexation transformed into war as tensions between the United States and Mexico intensified. Polk’s decision to place soldiers within the contested territory north of the Rio Grande did not help matters. At the time of annexation, Mexico still objected to Texas’ boundary claims as well as its independence. At the time of annexation Mexico still objected to Texas’ boundary claims as well as its independence. Like the Republic of Texas, the U.S. also claimed the Rio Grande boundary when they annexed the territory, and in July 1845 sent General Zachary Taylor along with 3,500 troops to the Nueces River in the event of a Mexican invasion. At the same time, Polk ordered the Pacific Squadron to seize ports in California should Mexico declare war. In November of 1846, Polk commanded John

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Slidell, minister to Mexico, to purchase the Nueces Strip, Alta California, and Santa Fe from Mexico. He offered the Mexican government $25,000,000 for the California territory. Due to political upheaval and fears over what a loss of so much territory might mean for its national honor, Mexico refused to negotiate and sent Slidell packing.

After this rejection, Polk ordered Taylor’s men to march south toward the Rio Grande, where they built a makeshift fort directly across from the city of Matamoros. Mexico immediately objected to Taylor’s troop movements and demanded that the United States withdraw its troops from the strip. When Taylor refused to withdraw back to the Nueces River boundary, General Mariano Arista dispatched 2,000 cavalrymen into the region. On April 25, 1846, they attacked a small U.S. patrol, killing 16 men. After learning of skirmish, Polk famously declared that Mexico had “shed American blood upon American soil,” and Congress declared war on May 13, 1846.8

For many Americans, the war was their first exposure to a foreign culture. Those living within the Gulf South had long since formulated an idea of Mexican culture. Several thousand Mexicans lived within Texas’ borders at the time of war. New Orleans housed the site of the Mexican consul in the United States, and at one time or another many Mexican political exiles made their homes in the Crescent City. Ships once used for trade and delivering mail bore men and arms to Mexico and the wounded and sick back to hospitals in New Orleans and Pensacola. Galveston served small weapons depot, amassing arms and supplies in preparation for the Texan volunteers soon to storm their streets. Pensacola became one of the main sites from which the Gulf Squadron sailed in 1846, and also another hospital. Santa Anna remarked that the

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Texans had no problem receiving supplies from New Orleans and Mobile. “These filibusters,” Santa Anna claimed, “combined in such great numbers” during the revolution. Gulf South ports provided money, soldiers, and aid during the Texas Revolution. They did so again during the U.S.-Mexican War.⁹

During the early stages of the war, as Americans clamored for information about their new foe, the idea of the Conquest resurfaced in the Gulf South. Imagining themselves as inheritors of Spain’s authority over Mexico, many newspapermen and soldiers used the language of *La Conquista* to heighten expectations of speedy success. The *Civilian and Galveston Gazette* remarked on the number of articles concerning the history of Mexico published in papers throughout the nation. An article reprinted from a St. Louis paper retold the story of Cortez’s conquest of Mexico, and asked, “how long will our army be marching to the same place?” The *Pensacola Gazette* reported that the Paris journals all sided with the U.S., and predicted an “early conquest” of Mexico. Placing the nation’s war with Mexico within the context of Spain’s conquest of Latin America not only created links between the U.S. and Latin America’s history of European colonial expansion, but also placed the United States’ efforts in Mexico on equal footing with its former colonial ruler.

In his memoir of the war, Raphael Semmes, repeatedly used the term “conquest” to discuss different aspects of America’s territorial expansion and the U.S.-Mexican War. He thought that the Spanish Conquest ultimately brought with it all the trappings of civilization to New Spain, much the way English colonization brought Anglo-Saxon civilization to North America. The difference between the two was that Anglos

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displaced Native Americans when they arrived in the New World, and Spain had incorporated them, rendering the Mexican people weaker than his own race. He recorded a speech given by President Mariano Paredes in 1846 in which he also viewed the oncoming war as a new form of conquest, claiming that they would “never, never permit new conquests, and new advances of the government of the United States of America.”

The idea of conquest functioned in different ways in the discourse of the war. First, it revealed much about how those within the Gulf South, as well as other Americans, thought about the war and Mexico. Secondly, the Spanish conquest of Mexico provided a vision of the U.S. that linked it to massive and rapid expansion of the Spanish colonies in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. They would do to the Mexicans what Cortez had done hundreds of years before them. Mexicans were well aware of the power of the history of the Conquest. Within the Gulf Coast borderlands these two ideas converged. Anglo fears of Mexican violence and the border along the Rio Grande proved to be an important motivation for action. In the aftermath of the 1842 Mexican invasion of Texas, Texans and other Gulf South southerners considered invading Mexico. In many ways, the conflicts between Mexicans and Texans provided a dress rehearsal for the larger national invasion. Texans felt they had conquered Mexico. Conquering the rest of the nation was almost expected and became a crucial part of the larger narrative of the war.

10 Civilian and Galveston Gazette, December 5, 1846; Pensacola Gazette, July 7, 1846; Raphael Semmes, Service Afloat and Ashore during the Mexican War (Cincinnati: WM. H. Moore&Co., Publishers, 1851), 17.
In order to reaffirm this narrative for themselves, Texans spent the initial months of the war honoring past heroes and past wars. The citizens of Washington City wrote Sam Houston on October 8, 1846 and offered to hold a public dinner to honor him for his civil and military service to Texas as well as his service to the “great cause of American Republicanism.” The sentiment expressed in the *Galveston Civilian and Gazette* concerning the war was that through the past twenty years worth of hostilities in Texas a war between the United States and Mexico had become inevitable. It was a war between “widely different races on the continent.” The press cried out for another “San Jacinto style” victory over their Mexican opponents. The battle of San Jacinto, in which Houston’s forces overtook the Mexican Army under command of Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, ended the Texas Revolution. The battle held special meaning for those who had lived through it, as well as those who had learned of it when they migrated to Texas. The Anglo Americans already living in Texas, especially those who had fought against the Mexican Army during the Texas Revolution possessed deeply ingrained ideas about Mexico as a land of “barbarism, superstition, ignorance, and social disorder.”

Within the Gulf South, feverish enthusiasm became the order of the day, and those criticizing the war did so cautiously. Joel R. Poinsett, once the nation’s first minister to Mexico in 1822, commented on the beginnings of war with Mexico in the *De Bow’s Review*. He expressed feelings of “deep regret” on his part and a “vast majority” of the journal’s readers that the boundary dispute between the United States and Mexico could not be resolved peacefully. Poinsett, a first-hand witness to the political

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11 *Austin Texas Democrat*, October 21, 1846; *Civilian and Galveston Gazette*, December 7, 1846.
struggles between conservative monarchists and liberals in Mexico, described the outbreak of war between the United States and Mexico as “a quarrel for territory between the only two great independent republics in North America.” Like many others, he feared that such a conflagration would “strengthen the prejudices elsewhere existing against our form of government, and [would serve] to furnish additional force to the arguments of the monarchical party in Mexico.” Poinsett worried that “however feeble, the Mexicans will be found obstinate foes,” and he wondered if pursuing more negotiation would actually serve the county better rather than declaring war. “In our opinion,” he stated, “no triumph of our arms, no accession of territory, can ever compensate for having in any wise contributed to the establishment of kingly government in North America.”

Opposition to the war in other parts of the U.S. used similar language focusing on Mexico’s weakness as a nation. While the Gulf South ports largely supported the war, those that opposed used also used the region’s past history with Mexico to frame their critique. The Galveston Weekly News collected and published a number of criticisms concerning the war, and agreeing with its “northern friends,” declared that the coming war should be regarded with more caution than was currently being displayed in the nation. Recalling the war, former Republic of Texas president Anson Jones flatly accused Polk of intentionally starting the conflict by placing troops within the contested territory, claiming that Mexico might “bluster a little,” but having no real intention of invading Texas. The troops he had requested during the annexation process were supposed to watch over the disputed territory, not enter into it and become involved in a

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firefight with Mexican troops. Jones further stated that the war was completely unlawful and “in like manner ended without law; and a feeble, distracted, and an imbecile nation,” was divested of its territory. Yet even Jones’ objections to the war ended with hopes that the gained territory would be a boon for the United States in a way that it never had been in Mexican hands, which had been declared insufficient for handling such a task. Jones’ objections to the war were emblematic of an opposition that felt war was unfair to the Mexican nation because of its weakness. Whereas pro-war Americans thought that the nation should conquer Mexico because of that weakness, others felt that they should not attack their southern neighbor for precisely the same reason.⁴³

In the South, opposition to the war remained couched in ideas about Mexican weakness. Jones’ views of the Mexican nation had been shaped during decades of interaction and conflict in Texas. During the war, Southern Whigs who opposed the war did so on grounds that it would bring an unwanted race of people into the nation, and into the South. Two major proponents of this line of opposition were John C. Calhoun and Waddy Thompson. Neither favored annexation of further territory south of the Rio Grande, and used the idea of a mixed race people in Mexico as a major reason against it. Thompson once said he would “consent to be gibbeted, or, if dead, that his bones be dug up and made manure of,” if the United States ever made slave states out of Mexico. He had seen what would happen if the United States persisted in its attempts to gain more Mexican territory. Some southerners may have wanted to avoid a war with

Mexico, but in the Gulf South, most welcomed it and wanted to expand slavery into Mexico. Calhoun was much more skeptical about expansion further into Mexico.\textsuperscript{14}

Past conflicts and tense negotiations between Mexico and the United States made it appear as though war was eminent. Alexander Lander, in his history of the Galveston Riflemen, wrote that he, fully expected annexation to lead to war. Lander thought that the seeds of the war were planted with the first shots of the Texas Revolution, and “at last worn out with the unceasing aggression of the inhumane enemy, the people—the sons of free and independent ancestry—began to look upon the old mother states from whence they came.” For these Texans, the presence of General Taylor on the Rio Grande was an immense relief. He was on their frontier “hourly expecting to have the trouble of chastising this same treacherous foe, for their outrages.” The foe Lander identified was “naturally understood to be the Mexican Army” just across the river. Lander echoed a long held expectation that the U.S. Army would ride to the rescue.\textsuperscript{15}

Polk’s annual message to the Senate in December 1846 requires careful scrutiny because it summed up the past twenty years of discourse about Mexico. The speech was also a moment where local border struggles influenced national discourse over the war. Polk argued that, “after years of endurance, of aggravated and unredressed wrongs on our part; Mexico in violation of solemn treaty stipulations, and of every principle of justice recognized by civilized nations, commenced hostilities, and thus, by

\textsuperscript{14} Waddy Thompason, quoted in Freehling, \textit{Secessionists at Bay}, 457, 456-457; Greenberg, \textit{A Wicked War}, 89-91.

\textsuperscript{15} Alexander Lander, \textit{A Trip to the Wars, Comprising the History of the Galveston Riflemen, Formed April 28, 1846, At Galveston, Texas: Together with the History of the Battle of Monterey; Also, Descriptions of Mexico and its People} (Monmouth, N.J.: Printed at the “Atlas Office,” For the Publisher, 1847), 7-9.
her own act forced the war upon us.” Polk vehemently denied the accusations that it was a needless and baseless war. He cited Mexico’s failure to pay back loans and their repeated seizure of American vessels, trade, and sailors in the ports of the Gulf as major reasons for the war. According to Polk’s line of thinking, “scarcely had Mexico achieved her independence, which the United States were the first among the nations to acknowledge, when she commenced the system of insult and spoliation, which she has ever since pursued.” He criticized Mexico’s unstable political climate, and he blamed it for continued depredations.

When the U.S. government attempted to file claims for their citizens against Mexican destruction of property, Polk continued they were “answered by the perpetration of new outrage.” These “wanton insults to our national flags” served as Polk’s justification for the war. Comparing the position of the U.S. to that of European nations, he went on to claim, “such measures of redress, under similar provocations, committed by any of the powerful nations of Europe, would have been promptly resorted to by the United States, cannot be doubted.” For Polk, as for many pro-war Americans, the nation’s honor, the protection of its citizens, and its self-respect made war absolutely necessary. Polk further emphasized Mexican instability by describing the nation as a “sister Republic on the North American continent, occupying a territory contiguous to our own, and was in a feeble and distracted condition.” Polk’s message demonstrated the manner in which the discourse of national expansion was shaped by the experiences of those living in regions that were in the process of expanding the United States. This discourse first took shape through the Gulf South’s support of Texas independence and annexation, and was then incorporated into national rhetoric and
national policy toward Mexico. Mexico’s weakness and treachery combined with the
decades long history of conflict in the Gulf of Mexico gave the U.S. the right to
confiscate territory and commit war.

Polk argued that the annexation treaty was not annexation at all, but a
“reannexation.” During the 1844 election campaign, he had made “reannexation” a part
of his platform. Senator Robert J. Walker, an ardent expansionist from Mississippi, first
coined the phrase as a way to argue that the United States owned Texas under the
Louisiana Purchase and that it should not have been traded back to Spain under the
Adams–Onís Treaty. In this interpretation of the treaty, Texas constituted a part of
Louisiana, ceded to the U.S. in 1803. The United States ceded all of the land that then
made up Texas back to Spain in 1819, but since the United States originally owned
Texas, they were simply reclaiming what was always theirs. Those who supported this
theory asserted that Texas had a right to secede and form a nation of its own under the
provisions of the Mexican Constitution. Polk’s message was emblematic of an evolving
image of Latin American republics that saw them as neighbors but beneath the status of
the United States and flawed in their ideas about democracy. He also participated in a
reimagining of Texas as having been American territory for as long as the other Gulf
South states. Arguing that Texas had, in some way, always been American further
asserted the feelings of those living within the Gulf South that the spread Anglo-Saxon
peoples could remake foreign countries.

To lend further credence to his reasoning, Polk emphasized the fact that Mexico
welcomed American immigrants. American citizens expected that they would be
“protected by constitutional governments similar to those which existed in the republic
they had left.” According to this narrative, Mexico was not a republic similar to the United States, Texas was never a part of Mexico, and Mexico had no real right to her. The fact was that the Mexican state was unstable and there were many revolts in Mexico throughout the early nineteenth century. Polk and many pro-war expansionists exploited the instability and the highly racialized rhetoric in the Gulf South and Texas as the basis for their argument that Mexico could not govern itself and could not manage such a large territory as the southwest. Polk reiterated: “Texas, at the period of her annexation to the United States, bore the same relation to Mexico, that Mexico had borne to Spain for many years before Spain acknowledged her independence.”

According to Polk, in every conceivable way, Texas had never been Mexican. Anglo Texans strongly agreed. Even before the Texas Revolution they viewed themselves as Americans in Mexico, not Mexicans. The policies and later, the atrocities, committed by Santa Anna only drove Anglo Texans further toward the arms of their American cousins.

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The Return of Santa Anna

Although Santa Anna lived in exile in Havana when Mexico and the United States exchanged their first shots, supporters of the war often invoked his name and his part in the narrative of Texas nationhood to justify the war effort. He was called the “Napoleon of the West,” and his image as a sinister, anti-republican, aristocratic, and temperamental figure helped to define Mexico as a nation that was the complete

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opposite of the young United States.\textsuperscript{19} Within the wider U.S., citizens came to see Mexico as a nation of republican-minded citizens hijacked by an enfeebled government. However, a more localized view of Mexico as a nation filled with an undesirable race that had plagued Anglo-Americans since they first set foot on Texas soil, also helped to bolster the Gulf South southerners’ support of the war. While these two ideas seem contradictory they were intimately related and created a critique of Mexico’s entire society from its elites to its poorest citizens.

Since the close of the Texas Revolution, Santa Anna exemplified all of the negative aspects that Anglo Americans saw in Mexico. Even within Mexico he proved to be a controversial figure. Lauded as a patriot one moment and vilified the next, Santa Anna was eventually forced to step down after the 1842 expedition to Texas and went into exile in 1845. Even though he was no longer welcome in the country, the close link between Santa Anna and the idea of Mexican weakness persisted. Frederic Leclerc stated that once Santa Anna assumed office in 1833 Mexican history became “one with the personal history of Santa-Anna.”\textsuperscript{20} Further emphasizing Santa Ana’s reputation in the Gulf of Mexico, Raphael Semmes, captain of the USS Somers during the war, described him as having been “the archdemon of discord in Mexico, for more than a quarter of a century.” During her trip through the Gulf of Mexico in the early 1840s, Matilda Charlotte Houstoun observed that it was well known that Mexicans were not well “disposed towards Santa Anna.”\textsuperscript{21}


\textsuperscript{20} Leclerc, Texas and Its Revolution, 85.

\textsuperscript{21} Raphael Semmes, Service Afloat and Ashore during the Mexican War, 25; Matilda Charlotte Houstoun, Texas and the Gulf of Mexico, or, Yachting in the New World (London: John Murray, 1844), 144.
The *norteamericanos*, as Mexicans called Anglo Americans, may not have been the only ones in the Gulf who maligned Santa Anna after the Texas Revolution, but his harsh actions at the siege of the Alamo and the attack on Goliad caused whites to vilify him. His boastful attitude and disdain for those he deemed beneath his station did not help matters.\(^{22}\)

Mexicans remembered both sides of his reputation. During the 1820s, Mexicans celebrated him for the key role he played in the fight for Mexican Independence. In 1821 he had driven Spanish forces from Vera Cruz after which he retired to his hacienda, Manga de Clavo, declaring that he would remain there unless his country needed him. He stayed there for only a year before he decided that he was again needed. Following Mexican independence, Santa Anna switched sides from self-appointed emperor Agustín Cosme Damián de Iturbide y Arámburu’s royalist camp and transformed himself into a supporter of republicanism, helping to overthrow the would-be ruler. To Mexicans, he had been both a villain and a hero. Their relationship with Santa Anna was far more complex than many Anglo outsiders fully realized or were willing to admit. This lack of comprehension made it easy for Anglos to incorporate Mexicans’ changeable views of Santa Anna into reasons why the republic should not be allowed to own the territory that existed under their flag.\(^{23}\)

In 1828, Santa Anna aided yet another coup against Presidente Vicente Guerrero, who was succeeded by Gudalupe Victoria. Shortly after Victoria gained the presidency, Santa Anna defeated Spain in their final attempt to recapture Mexico,

\(^{22}\) Matilda Charlotte Houstoun, *Texas and the Gulf of Mexico, or, Yachting in the New World* (London: John Murray, 1844), 144.

thereby gaining more support for himself. Years later, in 1832, he was at the head of yet another rebellion, which finally led him to the presidency. This cyclical pattern of gaining a government office, then resigning and retreating back to his hacienda only to reemerge as a public figure, also contributed to his image. Santa Anna often blamed his need to retire from office on “ill health,” yet it seemed as though he felt that the offices he attained were beneath him in some way. They paled in comparison to the thrill of military glory and immediate national adoration.

While writing his autobiography in 1878, Santa Anna remarked that he felt he had been unfairly persecuted from the time he initially became involved in Mexican politics. “From the time when the people first took me to their hearts, hatred and envy followed me,” wrote Santa Anna. He described himself during this period as “young, inexperienced,” and he went on to say “without a cloud on my conscience.” Santa Anna explained becoming president in terms that many politicians, American or Mexican, would have used. It was something that was foisted upon him, not something he actively sought out. “Seduced by the flattery of others, during these days of glory,” Santa Anna, “I allowed myself to be elevated to the office of President. Ah, then the disappointments, then the disillusions!” Santa Anna’s attitudes about himself and his actions shed light on how and why he was seen as so capricious by others, and his public image often pushed him to act in many ways that did affect the course of relations between the United States and Mexico. He both embodied U.S. understandings of Mexicans and Mexico, and also affected their evolution.24

24 Santa Anna, The Eagle, 4-5.
Delving further into the complicated views Mexicans expressed about Santa Anna during the years leading up to the U.S.-Mexican War, it becomes apparent that his choices as president were also a crucial part of his spotty reputation. His loss of Texas at the hands of people he thought of as rabble counted as an embarrassment both to the Mexican nation and to himself personally. The defeat and Santa Anna’s humiliation formed the basis of what became Texas’ foundational mythology. Leclerc wrote about Sam Houston’s defeat of the Mexican Army as if it was a predestined event, stating he was “destined to defeat Santa-Anna on the fields of San-Jacinto.” For Mexicans, Santa Anna committed a disgraceful performance at the final battle of the Texas Revolution. Santa Anna blamed the outcome of the revolution on the men who served beneath him. To him they were the true disgrace. As General Mariano Paredes, once a confidante of Santa Anna’s proclaimed, “the shameful reverse of San Jacinto raised the indignation of the public.” After the fiasco in Texas, Santa Anna resigned and went back to Manga de Clavo. He felt disillusioned and resentful toward Mexico, believing his nation had abandoned him.\(^{25}\)

In 1838, the Pastry War, a short-lived French invasion of Veracruz, allowed Santa Anna to regained the presidency, which he did in 1841 when he joined a revolt against the current president, Anastasio Bustamente. In 1842 Santa Anna attempted yet another invasion of Texas, while simultaneously trying to put down a rebellion in the Yucatan. In 1844 General Paredes charged Santa Anna with a misuse of power. He claimed that “it would have been more glorious for Mexico to have failed in Texas, after

making the efforts which outraged honor demanded, than to gain in Yucatan, with the loss of four thousand valiant men, immolated in a war of brother against brother.” Both military campaigns had been missteps, and they cost Mexico honor and men. Since the loss of the war in 1836, Santa Anna had, according to Paredes, produced nothing but chaos and cronyism in the national government.26 Such things were unforgivable in the Mexican Republic, but then, turning away from the republican and liberal cause was even more treacherous. It was shortly after this speech that Santa Anna left Mexico for Cuba and exile.

While Texas was in the midst of celebrating its acceptance into the union, Santa Anna left Mexico. He arrived in Havana on May 19, 1845, after fifteen days of travel from Veracruz. Santa Anna had originally planned to continue on to Venezuela. However he felt he had been so well received in Havana that he decided to stay. Santa Anna made his home in Havana until the outbreak of the U.S-Mexican War. “While I was there,” Santa Anna stated, “the government of the United States, having annexed the province of Texas, coveted the rich and vast territories of Alta California and New Mexico.”27

The Picayune’s Cuban correspondent related that Santa Anna sulked in grand style. He remained ensconced in his estate where, the correspondent claimed, he had erected an amphitheater and welcomed the city’s gamblers each night to bet on cockfights. The gentleman explained that he had only stayed long enough to watch the ex-president suffer yet another exorbitant loss to a young American from one of the

26 Mariano Paredes, “Address of General Don Mariano Paredes,” Houston Telegraph and Texas Register, December 14, 1844.
27 Santa Anna, The Eagle, 88.
nation’s “first families.” While Santa Anna may have appeared to have been gambling the days away, he was actually preparing to leave for Mexico. Aside from demonstrating the manner in which Americans, Mexicans, and Cubans circulated in the same society, the correspondent’s depiction of Santa Anna’s doings in Cuba lent further credence among American readers of the Mexican ex-president’s weakness and degeneracy. Americans then used this track record to accuse the entire country of capriciousness and illegitimacy as a nation.

Removed from the theater of war, Santa Anna categorized the conflict between the two Republican nations as the United States swooping down on its “sister and neighbor, Mexico, already torn by civil wars.” While living in exile, he claimed he watched the events of the war and waited for his country’s call to service. He said he wished to “shed the little blood which is left in me in defence of her liberties, and in defeating foreign influences, direct or indirect.” It took several months before Santa Anna answered what he referred to as his country’s call to service. The Picayune believed it to be a hoax, but then felt that the audacity of returning to Mexico from forced exile was so characteristic of the former Mexican president that it must be true, and expected Santa Anna in Mexico by the time they published the letters.

In September 1846 the Picayune and its readers eagerly awaited word of the outcome of negotiations between the U.S. and Mexico over the Texas boundary. They worried that Santa Anna might step in to sabotage the negotiations in some way by denouncing the possible treaty. “He is a monster of duplicity, and his affected reluctance

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28 New Orleans Picayune, March 21, 1846.
29 New Orleans Picayune, April 25, 1846.
to assume the reins of power at once and openly, may be a subterfuge by which to escape from the fulfillment of pledges which he has given,” the newspaper declared. The paper suspected, “that this reluctance is affected, is false and hallow . . . the only question with us is, who is to be made the victim of his duplicity?”

In the early months of 1846 leading up to the outbreak of war along the Rio Grande, the ghost of Santa Anna was ever present. His name pervaded discussions of the possible outcomes of annexation and the subsequent fallout. On a ship back to Vera Cruz, Santa Anna sailed through the blockade and returned to his home country on September 12, 1846. He claimed that he “caused a sensation” when he landed and that the applause of people made him forget the indignities of exile.

Viewed from the perspective of Americans and Texans, Santa Anna’s querulous nature far outweighed, if not completely obliterated, the past glories for which he was once exalted in Mexico. For Americans it seemed a mystery why he continued to come to power time and time again throughout Mexico’s early national period. The multiple times he managed to capture the presidency, plus his return from exile, contributed to the view on the part of Americans that Mexico’s government was somehow naturally flawed in comparison to the supposedly more stable U.S. national government. Santa Anna accomplished yet another rise to power during the war by promising both sides that he could help them end it quickly. To the Mexicans and President Valentín Gómez Farías, he had promised that he would fight the Americans, but not attempt to gain the presidency. To the Americans, Santa Anna suggested that he might be able to broker a peace between the U.S. and Mexico and avoid further bloodshed. More importantly, he

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30 *New Orleans Picayune*, September 16, 1846.
promised that once he gained entry into the country, he would broker the sale of the
U.S. the territories that Slidell had attempted to purchase before the start of the war.
Such overtures were the main reason that the Gulf Squadron blockade permitted him
into the country. For Mexicans, the war truly began with the return of Santa Anna and
the mounting blockade that would end with the U.S. invasion of Veracruz, before its
march into the heart of the great Mexican valley. However, the invasion remained
several months off when Santa Anna arrived back in the blockaded port of Veracruz in
September 1846.

Almost as soon as he landed Santa Anna recanted his promises to the U.S. and
Mexico. He did not bother trying to negotiate a Mexican surrender, nor did he keep his
promise to the Mexicans to remain a general. In early December, he reestablished the
Constitution of 1824, which he claimed was the desire of “immense majority of the
Mexican people,” and a way to unite the mission of the army with the spirit of the
people. The constitution reestablished a federalist system in Mexico, replacing the
centralist system that the country adopted in the 1830s. During the U.S.-Mexican War,
Mexico was in the midst of extreme political turmoil and Santa Anna took advantage of
this to assume the presidency yet again in March 1847.31 Before then the army
remained largely in the north Mexican states, and it continued to be largely a border
dispute.

The soldiers who fought in Taylor’s northern Mexico campaign were the first to
experience Mexico and write back about their observations. While the highly racialized

31 Antonio López de Santa Anna to Senior de Compana, December 31, 1846, Antonio López de Santa
Anna Collection, 1821-1878, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The
University of Texas at Austin.
rhetoric of the war is the central focus, the experiences of individuals during the war also shows how they confronted the larger forces of international warfare and politics. Many of the young men who fought in the U.S.-Mexican War had never been to a foreign country before, and most of what they knew about Mexico came from the newspapers that had covered the political drama of Texas’ annexation and Taylor’s exploits in the Nueces Strip territory. Career soldiers and those from the Gulf South were more familiar with the region they invaded, but still remarked with curiosity about Mexican culture and society. In certain instances they used the established rhetoric to interpret the world around them used the established rhetoric, but in many ways their perceptions of Mexico challenged that discourse and demonstrated its fragility.

The Brothers’ War Experiences

While the Gulf Squadron conducted its blockade of Mexico’s Gulf ports, the U.S. army under General Zachary Taylor descended down through northern Mexico. The combination of both Taylor and the blockade intensified the conflict. The experiences of soldiers and sailors during the war shaped their view of the role they played in the war and as a part of territorial expansion. Their time in Mexico revealed the limits of those early racial constructions, but in certain ways their combat experience also hardened their view of racial others. For many of the men fighting the war, even those who came from the Gulf South, their march into Mexico was the first time they saw first hand what their enemies looked like and how a foreign people lived. Their experiences and ideas were sometimes at odds with the prevelent rhetoric in the United States, but at other times they served to uphold racist notions of Latin America, and even further entrench them.
At the outbreak of the war, the U.S. army was a small force, numbering only 5,500 men and officers who were stationed throughout the territories and newly created states. Many were fighting the Native American nations that lived in Texas, Florida, and the western territories. In an effort to strengthen the army’s numbers and compensate for the flaws within the militia system—many states refused to allow their militia to fight on foreign soil, and most of them were only authorized to fight for a period ninety days—Congress opted to expand the army. On May 13, 1846, Congress authorized Polk to raise up 50,000 volunteers for twelve months, calling men from across the states to serve in Mexico. The government first called up troops from the states closest to Mexico. Throughout the South, elite men in cities and towns created volunteer regiments.\(^{32}\)

While Albert Sidney Johnston and his family’s experience with war are not entirely representative of every soldier’s time in Mexico, they shed light on the ways in which individuals encountered both the rhetoric and reality of territorial expansion. Retired from military life and enjoying the seclusion of his plantation, China Grove, on the banks of Oyster Creek near Galveston, Albert Sidney Johnston read the news of war along with everyone else. Even though Johnston intended to become a Texas planter, he saved an extra that was published by the *Galveston Gazette* on the day that the U.S. declared war on Mexico. This gesture suggests he either longed for military life, or simply thought it was a noteworthy event. Either way, in March 1846 his part in the war remained uncertain.

As Taylor recognized that the Mexican army across the river greatly outnumbered his own, the Texan legislature raised the state’s military quota. Governor James Pinckney Henderson wrote to Johnston, urging him to join the Texan regiments at Point Isabel as they prepared to follow Taylor’s force into Mexico. Henderson even pushed a mutual friend to urge Johnston to command the regiment, claiming that Johnston would receive a rank next to his own once he made his way to Point Isabel. Much to Henderson’s dismay, Congress did not allow him to make appointments to the regiments, and instead, as Johnston told Hancock, “the Legislature referred the appointments to the troops; so that, on my arrival here, I had to stand a canvass.” Johnston was elected colonel of the First Regiment of Foot Riflemen of Texas as he had hoped he would be, and was “ready and anxious to take the field.”

The War Department gave each state a quota for volunteers that they were asked to fill during the beginning of the war. By July, volunteers continued to fill state quotas throughout the nation, and men who were eager to serve in the war with Mexico began to make their way toward the Gulf South. Charles G. Bryant, a Texan adventurer and architect originally from Maine, wrote to Johnston while in New Orleans at the beginning of the war and observed that if Texas wanted to raise several companies that it could be easily accomplished by looking for them in Louisiana. Those disbanding units, Bryant wrote, “would be very glad to pay their expenses over here and enlist for six or even twelve months provided they could be assured that they would be used.” A friend of his who had served as a volunteer in Texas during the invasion was “very

33 Albert Sidney Johnston to George Hancock, July 10, 1846, Albert Sidney and William Preston Johnston papers, Manuscripts Collection 1, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans.
desirous of coming out with a company from Alabama—I think if you desire to fill up the foot Brigade, it can be done in ten or fifteen days at the farthest.” Bryant even offered to raise his own company for Johnston. He had seen many letters, he said, looking for positions in whatever Texas regiments might be raised.

The enthusiasm over participation in the war that Bryant displayed in his letters spoke to the pressure men felt to serve in the military as a part of their manly duties. It also revealed the extent to which New Orleans and the Gulf South became the natural staging ground for the war, and supported it as the next step in the region’s steady expansion into Latin America. Within the Gulf South, many of these men volunteering for the army had been involved in some way in the border disputes and conflicts between Texas and Mexico, and were willing to continue the pursuit of the enemy now into Mexico.34

Johnston’s previous military experience against Native Americans in Texas and Illinois framed much of his impressions about the arid northern country of Mexico when his regiment marched through it on its way to Camargo. Johnston had not been in the regular army for some time, but his military expertise provided him with an understanding of the war that reflected other career military mens’ experiences. Shortly after Johnston’s regiment was organized he received orders to march for the town of Santa Rosalia de Camargo in the northern state of Chihuahua. Before leaving he penned a letter to Hancock describing the eagerness of his troops to get under way. The discharge of the Louisiana regiments “created a great uneasiness among the Texas regiments, lest they, being six months’ men, should also be discharged.”

34 Charles G. Bryant to Albert Sidney Johnston, July 10, 1846, Johnston Papers.
Johnston hoped that the war would end in a “speedy termination,” and that it should be conducted directly against Mexico D.F. “the seat of vitality and strength.” He compared the Mexican capital to Paris. If Mexico fell, he wrote, “her dependencies fall with her.” Johnston often criticized the manner in which the war was being conducted. He asked: “why, then, waste a cartridge on the castle of San Juan de Ulúa, or throw away the public treasure in a war of marches against a country without population comparatively, as Santa Fe, Chihuahua, or California?” To his mind the southwest was a region that Mexico did not “pretend to defend against the Indians.” They embarked on a six-day journey up the Rio Grande. Steamboats had excessive trouble navigating the Rio Grande. At one point Johnston complained about the inability to receive supplies while stationed along the Rio Grande. He recorded his impressions of the people and their surroundings in a letter to Hancock in August. “There is a much greater portion of the land on the river under cultivation than I had supposed,” Johnston wrote, “and the population greatly more numerous--on a river the inhabitants of the Rio Grande, an inferior, resembling in color the indians of the U. States & not much superior to some of them in civilization.”

35 Johnston to Hancock, July 30, 1846, Johnston Papers.

The comparison between Native Americans in the U.S. and the Mexicans living along the Rio Grande exposed the manner in which the public discourse of expansion and the U.S.-Mexican War had shaped the frame of mind many soldiers had as they entered Mexico, but also the confluence of personal experience and national event. Traversing the landscape of Northern Mexico, Johnston described the thatched roofs of the houses along the banks, and men and women’s dress. Despite the heat, Johnston
noted “there is no want of modesty in their dress or absence of it rather.” Johnston’s understanding of his environment had been shaped by his previous experience on the edges of the expanding nation, fighting in the Black Hawk War and along the Texas-Mexico border. The sense of surprise over the amount of cultivation found along the Mexican border stemmed in part from the view that the Nueces Strip, of which the Rio Grande was a part, was largely barren. Yet the rest of the Rio Grand Valley was quite fertile, under cultivation, and populated by a variety of peoples including both Mexicans and Native Americans.

Johnston’s volunteer riflemen suffered from the onslaught of disease that made the U.S.-Mexican War so deadly. Due to sickness and the nearing end of their enlistment, Johnston’s regiment voted to disband just before the battle of Monterrey in August. After losing his regiment, Johnston joined volunteers under General William Orlando Butler as Inspector General, extending his stay in Mexico. He continued to participate in Zachary Taylor’s campaign in northern Mexico.

In the early months of his service, John A. Quitman echoed many of Johnston’s views of Mexican society in the northern states along the Rio Grande. Quitman was originally born in Pennsylvania but eventually moved to Mississippi where he established a law practice and was elected to Congress. He had been a long-time supporter of nullification, Texas annexation, and territorial expansion into Mexico. During the Texas Revolution, he mailed Sam Houston a polish knife with a note encouraging him to fight for Texas freedom, before leading a regiment called the “Natchez Fencibles,” to Texas to participate in the war there. Other southerners like him taking part in Taylor’s initial campaign were eager to get into the war. He wrote to his
wife and children often, and discussed both troop movements and his views of the
teaming numbers of Mexicans who lived on ranchos in the region. In a letter to his
children, Henry, Louisa, and Antonia, Quitman described how the Mexicans in Camargo
“delighted” in the sight of Americans. The elite families had moved back toward the
interior, fearing the ravages of war. This left many Mexicans of lower classes, and these
were among the first Mexicans that many American soldiers saw. This was partly the
reason that many soldiers compared Mexicans to Native Americans. He described
Mexicans to his children as a very “lazy race” who remained filthy despite bathing
regularly.  

Quitman’s regiment of Mississippians and Alabamians proceeded into the Battle
of Monterrey with Taylor, just as Albert Sidney Johnston’s men packed up and headed
home. He participated in the opening movements of the battle and wrote about them to
his wife almost before the battle was over. Eliza Quitman was not at all thrilled with his
decision to sign up for service in Mexico. Exchanging letters regularly, she expressed
worry on more than one occasion. She also articulated a sense of ambivalence toward
the war and the manner in which it was fought that many Americans felt. In the
aftermath of the battle of Monterrey Eliza wrote, “it appears to me that peace is now
farther off than ever, and that there are many bloody and desperate battles yet to be
fought. I am not one of those who hold the Mexicans in contempt. I think they have been
greatly underated.” Eliza’s fears about the war and thoughts about Mexicans
suggested that soldiers’ families did not always completely imbibe the racist

36 John A. Quitman to Eliza Quitman, August 14, 1846, Quitman Family Papers #616, Southern Historical
Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; John A. Quitman to Children,
August 18, 1846, ibid.

37 Eliza Quitman to John A. Quitman, October 29, 1846, Quitman Family Papers.
propaganda found in the pages of New Orleans newspapers. While she did not
demonstrate outright opposition to the war, her worries represented those of many
Americans who feared the war might last longer than expected, and the Mexicans might
be harder to fight than at first thought.

The soldiers entering Mexico later in the war came through the Gulf ports and
through the Rio Grande. Many were part of the invasion of central Mexico. Their
experience was somewhat different in that they moved through the Valley of Mexico and
Vera Cruz, which was a very different landscape. A year after Johnston returned to
Galveston, his brother-in-law, William Preston, decided to enlist. Johnston again wrote
his friend Hancock to tell him of the news he had received in November of 1847.
Johnston worried more for Will’s health and the impact that the climate might have on
him. By 1847, many Americans had tired of the war despite the newspapers’ intensive
military coverage. The army had already won several battles, and the war was coming
to a close. “I have from the beginning regarded it as a contest,” Johnston remarked,
“which many years would not terminate & the present position of things fully justifies my
anticipations.” For this reason, he hoped that Will’s regiment would not be involved in
combat. About the army Johnston wrote: “War like any other business can not progress
prosperously in the hands of pidlers & there must be means adequate to the end.”
Johnston believed his regiment had the means to bring the war speedily to a close, but
“instead of concentrating its power with the paralyzing shock of the thunder bolt on
some vital point it has wasted its momentum by breaking up the force into army corps
which from the vast extent of the country they operated in have in every instance been
isolated.” Despite the victories that the armies had won, Johnston displayed a sense of frustration with the way the war was being managed.  

William Preston’s time in Mexico came much later in the war. He kept a diary throughout 1847 and 1848 when he served as Lieutenant Colonel of the 4th Kentucky Volunteers. Whereas Johnston crossed the Rio Grande, Preston sailed from New Orleans on November 11, 1847, where his regiment only stayed a night before heading down river and reaching the Gulf of Mexico. From Kentucky, for Preston the trip to Veracruz was the first time that he had ever seen the Gulf. Like many soldiers who had come from other parts of the South, the trip through New Orleans or Mobile was just as surprising and intriguing as was the experience of a foreign country. Of the Gulf, Preston wrote, “when they are at rest & only agitatedly slight winds, the sapphire sky, the light, fleecy, clouds drifting before the winds, the clear waves and delightful breeze, create a pleasant languor, which renders you careless of everything save the scene around you.” When his regiment landed at Vera Cruz it was a conquered city. Preston remarked on the dilapidated state of the harbor which he wrote “scarcely deserves the name, it is dangerous in the extreme.” He noted the remnants of the siege and battle surrounded them as they camped on a plain between the city and the sea where General Winfield Scott’s troops had marched 10 months earlier. Preston recorded the scene “the trenches are still there & the fragments of the shells and round shot scattered over the plain still show the range and direction of the Mexican batteries.”

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38 Johnston to George Hancock, November 1, 1846, Johnston Papers.

39 William Preston, November 11, 1847, Diary of Lieutenant Colonel William Preston, Mexico, 1847-1848, Johnston Papers.
As his unit marched their way through the Mexican countryside, Preston spent more time observing the landscape and animals than had Johnston a year earlier. For Preston, the experience of Mexico was wholly foreign. He had little on which to base his experience on. After over a week of marches, Preston recorded in his diary that “Small birds similar to the oriole of gaudy plumage, & myriads of flowering shrub presented to the eye of one from the temperate zone a landscape as novel as it was beautiful.”

On the road from Veracruz to Mexico City, Preston’s regiment passed Santa Anna’s hacienda. He described in detail the house, which posed a great curiosity to the men of the 4th Kentucky. He noted the imposing quality of Mango de Clavo, which was more like a fortress than a “country house,” and remarked on a discussion between himself and another officer over the agricultural capacity of the land, stating “I differ from Mr. Thompson, who thinks it would produce cotton & sugar profitably as the land can have no means of irrigation being to elevated and remote from the mountain & the alternations of wet & dry seasons being the marked to permit its being tilled very advantageously.”

Whatever their differences, they both viewed the world around them as what it would produce once it was under U.S. control.

The soldiers who entered Mexico through Taylor’s northern campaign experienced a very different world from that experienced by the soldiers during Winfield Scott’s Mexico City campaign that commenced in 1847. The northwestern Mexico campaign was framed more by the Texas/Mexico disputes of the past and the Native American/Anglo disputes. Later, soldiers who entered through Veracruz and central

40 Preston, Diary of Lieutenant Colonel William Preston, November 27, 1847.
41 Preston, Diary of Lieutenant Colonel William Preston, November 29, 1847.
Mexico arrived during the final acts of the war. Though in 1846 the largest and most spectacular battles still remained to be fought, the northern campaign exposed soldiers to the reality of war that often challenged the rhetoric.

**Conclusion**

The physical experience of invading Mexico, fighting against Mexican troops, and seeing the Mexican people first-hand at times presented images that conflicted with those depicted in the American newspapers. Many on the home front read about the war being conducted against this foreign people on the North American continent, but soldiers saw them first-hand. For some it was a wholly new experience, and for others it was couched within a longer history of service.

Yet U.S. newspapers, with their hyper-racialist discourse, and the invocation of the past glories of the Texas War of Independence, along with the imperiled border, pushed young men to enlist. These factors also provided the images and narratives necessary for supporting a war that often times disturbed life within the port cities. The soldiers’ need to explain the exotic environment around them meant that they often relied on previous experiences to develop a language of their own, revealing that the language of expansion as dictated by public discourse was in fact limited. What was familiar to them, from their past, was what they used to describe and understand the country in which they found themselves.

Albert Sidney Johnston’s prior experiences along the borders of the South and the United States provided the foundation for his experiences of Mexican villages along the Rio Grande river, much the way that the prior victories and Mexican-Anglo conflicts allowed Texans and those within the Gulf South to shape the early narratives of the U.S.-Mexican War. John Quitman’s wholehearted support of expansion influenced his
choices to go to Mexico, and his ideas about the world he encountered. William Preston had no such prior experience with the region and thus he relied on his own understandings of American wildlife and landscapes to try to come to terms with the different world around him.

The language and images used to construct the rhetoric of war revealed much about the role that local history played in constructing a justification for the war against Mexico. The decades-long conflict over Texas provided a context within which to situate the new war, much the way it influenced the discourse of annexation. American newspapers and even American generals vilified Mexican officers throughout the war, but the manner in which Santa Anna became involved in not only Mexican but also Texan and U.S. history in the 1830s and 1840s lent his name a level of significance that few others possessed. His white Creole ancestry and relatively high status within Mexican society made it difficult to castigate him as a member of the lesser “mongrel race” that many claimed existed within Mexico, but his fiery reputation remained a part of Anglo stereotypes foisted upon Mexican peoples. The U.S.-Mexican War came at a time when Mexico might still be saved in the eyes of Americans, despots might still be brought to justice, and the security of the nation preserved.

Taylor’s campaign descended down through Texas and the Rio Grande before moving into the arid mountains of Northern Mexico, but that experience was only a tiny fragment of the events that took place during the war. On the home front, Gulf southerners attempted to utilize the war to their own benefit. In Chapter 4 we will consider how Pensacolians interested in boosting their standing in the Gulf of Mexico

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used the war’s rhetoric, and combined it with lingering anxiety over European
dominance in the Gulf and Caribbean, to gain further funds for the completion of the
Naval Yard’s dry dock and other military improvements. From the small port of
Pensacola, the sailors’ experiences of war and life afloat on the Gulf of Mexico during
the 1840s comes into focus and reveals an alternate view of both the experience of the
U.S.-Mexican War and its value as a path toward territorial expansion in Latin America.
CHAPTER 4
UNPROTECTED TREASURE: NAVAL DEFENSES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PENSACOLA

Introduction

In 1845, Captain John Sanders of the Army Corps of Engineers published a report about the Ohio River Valley. His report—a collection of essays and newspaper articles on the valley’s natural resources—explained how its economic advantages could help defend the Gulf Coast. In 1836, when Sanders became chief army engineer in charge of improvements on the Ohio River, he quickly realized that its timber and iron ore deposits could spur a growing number of steamships traveling to the Lower South’s waterways and Gulf ports. In addition, westerners could provide the extra labor needed to complete improvement projects on the Gulf. With the increased trade down the Mississippi River Sanders posed an important question: “Is it possible that the Coast of the Gulf receiving these rivers, can be our weakest and most vulnerable frontier?”¹ It was a question that also plagued those living in the Gulf ports. Aside from the Texas border, Gulf South southerners often felt that the Florida Straits was one of its most vulnerable and important borders. Most of the import and export trade conducted in the regions’ port cities entered and exited through the straits. It was the gateway to the Gulf of Mexico.

During the 1840s, the relationship between economic resources and national defense occupied the minds of Gulf Coast southerners, and was often used to justify the need for internal improvements to the region’s fortifications. When Sanders observed

¹ John Sanders and James Louis Mason, Memoirs on the Military Resources of the Valley of the Ohio, as Applicable to Operations on the Gulf of Mexico; and on a System for the Common Defence of the United States. With a Review of the Same, Concisely Exhibiting the Proper Functions and True Relations of Forts and Ships, Their Mutual Dependence and Harmonious Action, When Properly Combined, Published with the authority of the War Department (Washington: C. Alexander, Printer, 1845), 3.
the weakness of the Gulf and the strength of the Ohio River Valley, he reminded readers that the southern ports and the western territories were intimately connected. He spent his childhood years on the banks of the Ohio “to discover the means by which the patriotic arms of his own native and other riveraine states... could further give efficient assistance in protecting the products of their shops and lands wherever wafted on the ocean to a market.”

Territorial expansion and trade linked the South and the West together, making the defense of one a priority for the other. Even during the opening salvo of the U.S.-Mexican War, U.S. interests in the Caribbean and South America continued. Among the strongest opposition to U.S. expansion in both the borderlands and the West Indies were European countries, specifically England.

Chapter 4 explores the manner in which Gulf South expansionists attempted to capitalize on this discourse and fervor of territorial expansion as a way to curtail European influence in the region. It examines the construction of a dry dock at Pensacola, and the manner in which it was discussed in the region’s newspapers. A stronger naval presence was an alternate part of the region’s push for improved fortifications, and before the war, Pensacolians fixated on a possible naval war with Britain’s superior navy. A substantial body of scholarship considers the evolution of U.S.-British relations during the Colonial and Early Republic periods; the Civil War era has historically been considered a time when the United States retreated inward. However, historians now seek to understand how global dynamics shaped the events leading up the Civil War. Transnational forces confronted Americans throughout this

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2 Sanders and Mason, Memoirs on the Military Resources of the Valley of the Ohio, 3.
period, and the Gulf’s interest in naval fortifications exemplifies the impact of these forces.  

By examining Pensacolians’ interests in improving their naval yard and military fortifications, the many national and transnational forces that buffeted the Gulf Coast during the U.S.-Mexican War become evident. When the naval war they had predicted came it was with a weaker naval force, but Britain and France both continued to play a role in how the Gulf South saw the navy and naval fortifications in area. The Gulf South and the Navy struggled with the effects of the blockade. It was not as exciting as the U.S. Army’s campaigns into the Mexican interior, and some Gulf southerners feared it would disrupt the region’s trade with Veracruz. The experiences of the navy, interest in naval fortifications in Pensacola, and fears concerning European presence in the Gulf offer a counterpoint to the racialized rhetoric discussed in Chapter 3 and demonstrate yet another facet to the war with Mexico. The debate over Pensacola’s military defenses reveals the manner in which fears concerning European presence in the region, and the conduct of the Gulf Squadron to show how the larger currents of U.S. expansionism affected even the most far-flung and seemingly insignificant parts of the Gulf South.

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Pensacola sought to benefit from the U.S. military presence, and eventually became economically as well as socially dependent on its presence. Within these small spaces we see the manner in which expansionism shaped the Gulf Coast during the height of the U.S.-Mexican War.\textsuperscript{4}

To sailors, Pensacola and the Gulf of Mexico seemed isolated when it came to the distance that ships sailed for repairs. Along the entire length of the U.S. Gulf Coast there was no place to repair the larger merchant or navy ships, and southerners in the region worried incessantly about the lack of a proper naval yard. During the U.S.-Mexican War, the navy yard provisioned the Gulf Squadron, and provided minor repairs for the ships participating in the blockade. It also housed a small hospital where many wounded, sick soldiers and sailors found shelter. When improvements to the naval yard lagged, frustrations in Pensacola and New Orleans heightened their sensitivity to the idea that the federal government was either unable or reluctant to provide adequately for the Gulf ports.

By the 1840s, railroad companies had laid thousands of miles of track, but the majority of American commerce, products, and travelers still relied on the nation’s rivers, lakes, canals, and coasts as its primary form of transportation. It remained important for the United States to secure its dominance over these waterways. Although the U.S. hoped to secure the nation against foreign intervention in the Gulf South, European powers remained a presence in the Gulf of Mexico. Thus, Gulf South southerners and the military argued for increased military presence to ensure that the

United States established its authority on the coast. To do so the Gulf South needed forts, improved naval yards, and a navy.

Prevailing wisdom in the government was to concentrate on building up coastal fortifications, especially those along the Atlantic Coast to which the British Navy had come during the War of 1812. The war with England often dictated both memories of war and military strategy. However, the merchants and citizens of the Gulf ports argued that without a navy to stave off a blockade from a foreign power, fortifications would do little good. They argued as much for an improved navy as they had for improved forts and naval yards. When the next war with a foreign power came, it was with Mexico. Their sister republic, like themselves, was not a naval power by any means, so focus on the army was not entirely without logic. The navy’s main goal after the War of 1812 had been to ensure the growth of maritime trade by patrolling the Caribbean, the Gulf, the South American Coast, West Africa, and far flung destinations in between. The Gulf Squadron was on such a patrol when war broke out in 1846.5

At the outbreak of the war with Mexico, the United States Navy was relatively small compared to the more imposing European fleets that still plied the waters of the Caribbean and the Atlantic. It was separated into several squadrons, two of which, the Pacific and the Gulf or Home Squadrons, played significant roles in the Mexican-American War. The Gulf Squadron consisted of thirteen ships, three fifty-gun frigates among them the squadron’s flagship, *Cumberland*, several smaller sloops and brigs of war, as well as steamers that primarily ferried supplies back and forth. While estimates

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of the actual number of men who served aboard these ships vary, roughly 13,000 total served during the war. This number was quite small when compared to the 70,000 soldiers and militia that marched across the Mexican landscape between 1846-1848.6

By the U.S.-Mexican War, the United States had acquired the entire northern Gulf Coast from Texas to Florida. The war offered the nation a chance to dominate militarily a good part of the southern portion of the coastline. Expanding American influence into the region thus became a key aspect of the naval improvement projects at Pensacola. To Americans, the Gulf was the United States’ own Mediterranean, an image used repeatedly to capture its importance to U.S. commerce. When newspapers discussed the importance of defending the coastline, they often considered French defenses in the Mediterranean. By the 1840s, New Orleans had a small dry dock, and there were army barracks established just beyond the city. However, its location on the Mississippi River was not ideal for the Gulf ships in need of repair. In the 1820s, Pensacola quickly became the ideal location for a formidable set of fortifications, and the dream of becoming a major shipping center for the Gulf of Mexico began.

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Throughout its early history, Pensacola had been a victim of Florida’s tumultuous past. Each time it changed hands—of the French, the Spanish, the British, and then the Americans—the town’s future came under new supervision, new intentions, and new concerns. From its earliest days to the establishment of Florida as a state in 1845, Pensacola felt the brunt of diplomatic shifts as West Florida exchanged hands throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Pensacola remained part of a world where no one nation possessed complete domination. When France began making inroads into the lower Mississippi, Spain decided to establish fortifications in Western

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7 A Chart of the Bay and Harbour of Pensacola, 1780, 1780 map, Special Collections Department, University of South Florida.
Florida. In 1698, Spain built a presidio near what became the location Fort Barrancas. While the Spanish had been the first to recognize the city’s importance as a military outpost against British and French incursion, the Americans’ arrival in 1819 brought the first real improvements to the defenses of Pensacola.⁸

After Florida became an American possession in 1819, Pensacola’s population declined from 4,000 inhabitants to a meager 1,000. The significant population drop in the 1820s signaled troubled times. Despite the small population, it remained remarkably diverse. Rachel Jackson, wife of Andrew Jackson, wrote her friend Eliza Kingsley in 1821 remarking on the population. She wrote: “the inhabitants all speak Spanish and French. Some speak four or five languages. Such a mixed multitude, you, nor any of us, ever had an idea of. There are fewer white people by far than any other, mixed with all nations under the canopy of heaven, almost in nature’s darkness.” A Spanish census taken in 1820, before Spain transferred the territory to the United States, found that French and Spanish Creoles dominated the town and surrounding countryside. One-third of the population was mixed race, and three individuals were identified as mestizos with 30 households comprised of a white man and a mixed-race or black woman. Unlike New Orleans, Galveston, Mobile, and many other ports along the Gulf of Mexico, Pensacola never became a major depot for the agricultural hinterlands. During Pensacola’s first decade under U.S. rule, southerners flooded Florida, eager to take advantage of the newly acquired territory. While this benefited the young territory overall, it did not benefit Pensacola. The town lacked sufficient river access to the most prosperous cotton districts, and much of that trade was shipped out through other ports.

The Apalachicola River and the city of Columbus, Georgia served the growing cotton trade, bypassing Pensacola. Despite this fact, Americans did make their way into Pensacola and by 1840 the population increased with Anglo Americans outnumbering the small French and Spanish Creole society. However, this small population remained along with the Free People of Color and a small Creek Indian population that often attempted to pass as white or mixed-race. The 1850 census recorded 2,164 total inhabitants. In the 1820s Pensacolians sought for a way to make their town prosper, and when it appeared that political and economic power shifted to the middle counties, they sought economic development through other methods.\(^9\)

The first attempt to remedy the stagnant economy was with support of a Gulf Coast Canal, which would link East and West Florida together. During the early nineteenth century, internal improvements and canals were the order of the day. Pensacolians looked on at the work done on the Erie Canal and thought canals might save there dull economy. Historian Ernest F. Diddle described how this “faith in canals” offered a chance to open the West to trade with the more established East, all of which would travel through Florida. In 1827, John Lee Williams, completed a survey of West Florida for a plan of improvements to Pensacola Bay. He described the bay as being “by far the best harbor on the Gulf of Mexico, or indeed south of the Chesapeake Bay.” Even though it possessed a favorable harbor, the canal plan failed, and led to other schemes for economic salvation. Throughout the remainder of the antebellum period,

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Pensacola boosters touted railroads, but many of these ventures never got much closer to completion than the proposed canal. More important for Pensacola’s future, was the location of the navy yard and army forts in Pensacola Bay after 1825. Thereafter, Pensacola became a military town, with developing small industries in brick and pine lumber, utilizing the tall thin pines that littered the countryside around the town.\textsuperscript{10}

More important for Pensacola’s future, was the location of the navy yard and army forts in Pensacola Bay. During the 1820s, Central and South American Spanish colonies fighting for independence spurred an increase in piracy. From 1815 to 1825, pirates and privateers attacked an estimated 3,000 ships. These concerns led the United States to choose Pensacola as the center of the coast’s defenses in 1825. This same year, Congress made the first appropriation for the construction of a naval yard at Pensacola and authorized improvements to the fortifications that already existed there.\textsuperscript{11} The importance of defenses to the Gulf trade was immediately recognized during this period when a Board of Engineers recommended Pensacola Bay because it possessed “positions admirably adopted to the repairing, building and launching of vessels of any size, for docks and dock yards in healthful positions and as being perfectly defensible.” Thereafter, Pensacola became a military town. It developed small industries in brick making and pine lumber, utilizing the tall thin pines that littered the countryside around the town. Brick making primarily developed through the Army’s need


for bricks to build the new forts along the mouth of the harbor. They had originally come from Mobile, but in the 1830s the army began purchasing local bricks.\textsuperscript{12}

During the 1840s, Pensacola remained a small town compared to its largest neighbor to the west, Mobile. There was both a shipping and stagecoach line to Mobile suggesting the two ports’ close ties. In early June 1846, Fitch Waterman Taylor, a recently arrived sailor in the Gulf Squadron took a trip into town while his ship was being outfitted for war. He found the town much as he had left it. Taylor described it as a series of “monotonous rectangular streets.” Along the streets were one and two story wooden houses with “light piazzas—some prettily embowered in green foliage and luxuriant shrubs and flowers.” Despite the sprinkling of lovely cottages, Taylor observed that many of the houses were dilapidated or “patched up and comfortless, as the hot sun was reflected back from the arid sand of the streets.” He described flowering myrtle and althea as tall as forest trees and fig trees “richly laden with their luscious fruits.” The foliage and the orange trees gave shade against the intense sun of a Florida summer.

Beyond the houses there was a town square, still reminiscent of Spanish presidio layouts. Boarding houses, restaurants, and Oyster houses also existed on these streets. Some touting, St. Andrews Bay oysters, liquors, and candies \textit{al a mode de New Orleans}.\textsuperscript{13} It was not only a seaport but also a frontier town for much of this period. Despite the fact that a canal would never join East and West Florida, the town still possessed ties to both. Pensacolians used both the bay’s favorable depth and its location to drive the debate over fortification of the Gulf of Mexico. Its position on the

\textsuperscript{12} Miller, \textit{The U.S. Navy: A History}, 85; Pensacola \textit{Gazette}, August 18, 1843.

Florida Gulf Coast meant that Pensacola was near enough to Mobile that supplies, and passengers could make the trip in just a few days.

The distance from the Gulf of Mexico to the North Atlantic ports was much further than the length of the coastline would suggest. The currents and wind dictated that a ship traveling from the north Atlantic ports had to travel along the southern edge of Cuba before sailing into the crescent shaped coast of the Gulf of Mexico. The powerful Gulf Stream made it easy for sailing vessels to travel out of Gulf and up the East Coast, but sailing down and back into it the Gulf was much more time consuming. Depending on wind and tide, a trip from an eastern port like Norfolk could take anywhere from 30 to 50 days. Thus, it was no real exaggeration when Charles Stewart claimed that “the ships of our northern ports would be still less available than the French ships,” currently sailing in the Mediterranean.14

Foreign naval superiority provided both the drive for increased naval defenses, and the language used to support it. Europe’s dominance of the Mediterranean provided a potent symbol for the Gulf South concerning what their region could be in terms of trade and military dominance. Sanders referred to the Gulf in this way when he wrote about the necessity of a strong Navy on the southern coast. He wrote that a navy for this “Mediterranean could only be furnished by the seaports around Cape Florida,” and then Cape Hatteras farther north. Commodore Charles Stewart commented in the that Pensacola Bay was to the Gulf of Mexico what Toulon was to the Mediterranean for the French. Toulon had a prominent naval depot, the U.S. government selected Pensacola in an attempt to build such a presence in the Gulf. France fashioned Toulon into its

14 Quoted in Pensacola Gazette, February 28, 1846.
primary military port on the Mediterranean. By 1820, it had become the staging ground for France’s conquest of its North African colonies when the fleet set sail from the port to Algiers.  

Comparisons between the Mediterranean and the Gulf recalled the success of European colonization in both the Americas and the Mediterranean. The image of the Mediterranean encapsulated much about the region’s conception of itself, and also its conception of the threats that surrounded it. Beyond trade, empire building, and cultural exchange, the Mediterranean was also an ancient site of naval warfare. Pensacolians hoped that their town could become the same type of staging ground for further expansion into Latin America and the Caribbean, much the way that Spain had used the island of Hispanola and France had used Toulon.

**Defending the Coast and Improving the Bay**

In order for the town to become a successful starting point for U.S. expansion into Mexico and the Caribbean, it required the expansion of the naval yard located five miles away, specifically the construction of dry docks and a seawall. Dry docks were used for constructing and repairing ships. The New Orleans dock was not equipped to handle the brigs and man-of-wars used by the Navy. A dry dock at Pensacola could provide a facility for ship repairs, so that the navy would not have to travel all the way around the peninsula of Florida to reach the dry docks at Charleston, Portsmouth, or Norfolk. The dock would be made available for use by merchant ships in the region, and Pensacolians hoped it would lead the way to the development of a ship building industry in the Gulf South. A new stage of military construction began in earnest during the

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1840s. Many of Pensacola’s citizens felt that if Congress approved the appropriations for naval improvements, the city might finally become a major shipping center rather than merely a struggling small town on the edge of the Gulf of Mexico. Construction began in 1826, when the Navy issued the first contracts to local businesses for lumber. Despite the use of white craftsman to begin construction, the yard’s second commandant, Captain M.T. Woolsey, began the practice of hiring slaves to do the majority of the work on the new yard. In 1828, Captain William H. Chase arrived to begin building forts McRee and Pickens. He relied on Pensacola brick makers to supply millions of bricks for their construction. The first two decades worth of construction at the forts and navy yard bolstered the city’s economy.16

When Fitch Taylor’s ship landed in Pensacola during the U.S.-Mexican War, he described the navy yard as “neatly laid out” and ornamented with shrubs and trees. When first entering the bay, the ship passed forts Pickens, McRee, and Barrancas before arriving at the Navy Yard. The Spanish built Fort Barrancas at the site of a clash between Andrew Jackson’s forces and British troops during the Battle of Pensacola in the War of 1812. After the U.S. obtained Florida, it expanded Fort Barrancas and constructed two other forts, McRee and Pickens, to guard the entrance of the bay. In the yard, smaller houses used by the Navy’s other officers surrounded the commandant’s house. Taylor noted the piazzas that were so typical of the sub-tropical

climate. The center of the yard consisted of two large octagonal buildings, one of which
held a chapel in an upper room.\textsuperscript{17}

The search for a dry dock began in 1840, when the naval appropriations
committee introduced legislation into the Senate, and John C. Calhoun added an
amendment for a dock at Pensacola. He considered the need to protect commerce in
the Gulf by providing funding for an improved naval station in the region to be vital
toward the South’s prosperity. Pensacola remained the most obvious choice. A number
of other southern Senators supported Calhoun and the committee, maintaining, as one
did, “that the whole south and west were deeply interested in the work,” because
commerce from both regions would need to be protected by a naval force in the event of
war. The bill was eventually defeated, but the essential elements of the argument that
surrounded improvements to the navy yard had been made. The specter of war and
protection of commerce formed some of the most essential parts of discourse over
increased military presence in the Gulf of Mexico.\textsuperscript{18}

Throughout the 1830s and 1840s proponents of Gulf Coast defenses supported
an increase in the number of ships as well as improvements to the coast’s fortifications.
Captain John Sanders eagerly promoted the involvement of western states in providing
for both aspects of Gulf defenses. His interest stemmed partly from the extent to which
the Gulf of Mexico was seen as the major point of connection between the eastern
states and the western states. Sanders believed that the eastern-born army and navy
officers responsible for creating the defenses along the nation’s southern coast was one

\textsuperscript{17} Taylor,\textit{ The Broad Pennant}, 177.

\textsuperscript{18} Pensacola Gazette, July 5, 1840.
of the reasons why it was so poorly defended. Westerners, who relied on the Gulf ports as much as southerners, might be better able to appreciate the region’s importance toward their economic security. The landscape of abundance that had surrounded him since boyhood inspired in him a desire to act.

In 1840, Sanders traveled to Washington, where he met the like-minded Joel R. Poinsett, the first U.S. Minister to Mexico. Throughout his long career he had supported the idea of a strong navy and army, along with internal improvements, which supported U.S. expansionism. Poinsett supported many of Sanders’ ideas, presenting them to the President and Congress. In 1842, Sanders urged the federal government to approve the construction of steamships on the western rivers, two of which lay in the “contractor’s yard in the city of Pittsburgh,” and were “destined to the Gulf of Mexico or the high seas.” The Gulf’s importance as a major site linking the South and West grew in 1845, when the U.S. annexed Texas and its ports. As Sanders reflected on the significance of Texas statehood, he recalled it signaled the need for a stronger military presence in the region in order to raise the U.S. “a position fully equal to cope with England for the mastery of the Gulf of Mexico, if not, indeed, for that of the high seas.”

By 1840, the navy yard had existed near Tartar’s Point for over ten years. After the Depression of 1837, progress slowed, and disappointed Pensacolians subsequently monitored closely developments of fortifications along the East Coast. Pensacola newspapers described the progress of the docks in New York, charging that the federal government treated the South unfairly and left it unprotected, while the North possessed

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19 Ibid, August 18, 1843; Sanders, *Memoirs on the Military Resources of the Valley of the Ohio*, 3-4.
20 Ibid, 4-6.
several military installations and naval yards. However, in 1843, Congress appropriated $40,000 to upgrade Pensacola’s yard, including repairs to the hospital buildings as well as provisions for the dry dock.\footnote{Dibble, \textit{Ante-Bellum Pensacola and the Military Presence}, 3-5; \textit{Pensacola Gazette}, April 25, 1843.}

Pensacolians and Gulf South southerners interested in the navy improvements felt embittered by what they saw as an unfair distribution of funds. They saw the northern ports going ahead with repairs, while the South was left open to possible invasion. During a House debate over a bill to allow the president to direct transfer of appropriations for the navy, David Levy Yulee approved the bill based on the fact that the Secretary of the Navy took money away from proposed improvements to Pensacola, and used it for other navy yards. In August 1843, Pensacola claimed that the New Orleans newspapers leveled charges of the misappropriation of funds against those supposedly in charge of the improvements at Pensacola. They claimed that much of the funds appropriated for the improvements had been squandered by the “extravagance or criminal heedlessness of the administration.” Feeling cheated by the federal government, they proclaimed: “Yes—let it be known now, and to all future generations, that while New York, strong enough in herself and her dense population, was made to bristle with guns and to resound with notes of preparation against threatened war.” Meanwhile in the South the ports in the Gulf were left to their fate “weak and defenceless.” According to the \textit{New Orleans Picayune}, forts in Louisiana, at Mobile Point, and Pensacola lacked the same level of arms and ammunition, and were “thus left exposed, in the sudden advent of war, to fall into the enemy’s hands,” who they warned, would turn their own defenses against them. Despite the fact that war did not
appear eminent, the invocation of it, and how it might affect the great emporiums of the Gulf, New Orleans and Mobile, perpetuated the desire for stronger fortifications. However, they required an enemy, and before the U.S.-Mexican War, it was most often found in the image of the British Empire.22

Fears about British dominance in the Caribbean continued to play an important role in the growing debate over defenses in the Gulf. In response to an appropriations bill passed some months prior, the Pensacola Gazette reported in August that “the late threatening aspects of our relations with England, one would think, should have opened the eyes of Government to the fact of the extremely defenceless state of our commerce in the Gulf.”23 A report sent to Congress in February 1844 compiled the opinions of local naval officers, members of the committee, and proposals for the dock’s construction. Yet despite all of this preparation, building at the naval yard floundered and was plagued by many of the same problems it had been in the 1820s. Frances Webster informed her husband Lucien—then stationed at Fort Pickens near Pensacola—of the reaction to the Oregon news back in New York. She wrote to her husband that she had overheard several gentlemen mention that the ship Caledonia had recently arrived from England bringing news that the Queen had ordered steamships of war to be outfitted with men and provisions. “All the talk now is of war with England,” wrote Frances, “on


23 Pensacola Gazette, August 12, 1843.
account of Oregon.” The “late threatening aspects of our relations with England,” that the \textit{Pensacola Gazette} referred to was the strained relations between the U.S. and Great Britain over the Oregon territory and the fate of Texas, which reached Pensacola through the exchange of letters between loved ones and news from New Orleans and New York.

The First Seminole Indian War and the War of 1812 solidified what historian William Belko called “American Anglophobia” in the minds of antebellum Americans. Southerners were no different despite the fact that a significant share of the South’s cotton crop made the Atlantic crossing to English factories. Decades after they had conquered the Florida territory, Americans, especially those in the Gulf South recalled the early days of their fragile republic and its conflicts with the old mother country. Yet these most recent entanglements with Great Britain took on added significance in light of the U.S. and Britain’s shared interests in territorial expansion within the Gulf of Mexico.

The British Abolition Acts of 1807 and 1833 and the gradual emancipation of slaves within British held colonies near the Gulf of Mexico added a new dimension to American Anglophobia, especially among the slave states. The early conflicts between Americans, Europeans, and Seminoles served as precursors for later stages of territorial expansion in the mid nineteenth century before the eruption of the Civil War.

From Florida, Southerners expanded into Texas where the British had attempted to

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mediate a truce between the Republic of Texas and the Republic of Mexico in an attempt to resolve the border dispute that had festered between the two. As relations between the U.S. and Mexico deteriorated, the British attempted to intercede in an effort to stave off what many within the United States felt was an inevitable war.²⁶

Even though relations with Mexico and the United States collapsed in 1846, their fear of Britain remained a strong commonality between the two nations. In the years preceding the U.S.-Mexican War, England loaned a considerable sum of money to Mexico, enforcing a favorable trade policy for itself. By 1845, the Picayune reported that Veracruz looked with “some trepidation” at the impending arrival of the British fleet. In response the Mexican squadron, fearing it would be blockaded, sailed to Aleverda in the hopes of getting out of its way. What was evident was that in many parts of the Gulf of Mexico, the British fleet remained a significant threat.²⁷

The United States and Great Britain were not the only powers pressing for expansion in the Gulf of Mexico, and Pensacolians knew it. In the eyes of the Pensacola Gazette, France pursued a “grasping policy,” in which it was “looking for the moment when she may seize on Cuba.” France joined Britain in its opposition to the U.S. belligerence against Mexico. The Baltimore Sun and Pensacola Gazette reported that the French fleet was also en route to the Gulf to protect its interests there. Fitch Taylor believed that both countries had “no just voice to raise,” against the United States. Fears of European intervention in North American activities and U.S. expansion

stemmed both from England’s anti-slavery policies, and from a sense of competition for dominance of the young republics of Central and South America.\textsuperscript{28}

Support of the dry dock was driven primarily by the English presence in the Caribbean, but competition between the Gulf and the north Atlantic Coast also played a significant role in Gulf South desires for further improvements to the region’s fortifications. Southerners believed that the Gulf was neglected in comparison to the North Atlantic Coast, and the distribution of navy yards was, according to those in Pensacola, decidedly unfair. “Concentrated within a length of 500 miles of the most densely populated part of the coast,” they argued, “are six Navy Yards, three of which, being admitted in practice to be totally superfluous, might very well be dispensed with, leaving the Boston, the Brooklyn and the Norfolk stations as they are, or even adding to their present facilities.” By comparison the 2,500 miles of coast from Cape Charles to the mouth of Sabine River in Texas possessed only one naval yard. As a result of the disparity between the southern and northern coasts vessels within the Gulf had to sail some 2,000 miles in order to be properly refitted in the event of an accident. Newspapers used examples of ships forced to sail to a northern port to get simple repairs done, such as the revenue schooner \textit{Decatur} that had to leave the Gulf “to get so slight a repair as caulking her sides.” The paper described the Gulf as a place of “baffling winds” and “furious gales” as well as reefs and shallow shores all of which were the mortal enemies of sailors. Ships moved gingerly through the Straits, while their “probable enemy, from some one of his secure Depots” stood ready to pounce “upon the unprotected merchantman, about whose movements he would have more certain

\textsuperscript{28} Pensacola Gazette, August 12, 1843; Taylor, \textit{The Broad Pennant}, 204; Pensacola Gazette, July 4, 1846.
and speedy intelligence” then the Gulf’s ships could obtain. The *Pensacola Gazette* combined frustration over the government’s focus on the northern ports and the belief that they were under eminent threat from foreign naval forces.²⁹

The distances between the northern and southern ports meant that many sailors and officers referred to sailing to the Atlantic Coast by saying the were to “go home to the U.S.” The charm of the navy yard in Pensacola with its landscaping and houses wore thin, and Taylor, like many sailors who wound up there, observed that it was still an “out-of-the-way place.” He felt a “deep desolateness hanging about it, as if it were more of a foreign than a home station.” Yet, he believed it was “a most important station in view of the national interests” both in peacetime and war, and especially in the U.S.-Mexican War.³⁰ Sailors regularly referred to both the Gulf and Pensacola as being beyond the bounds of the United States and almost like a foreign country.

The start of the U.S.-Mexican War coincided with rumors that Pensacola would finally commence the naval improvements. The declaration of war must have seemed like the realization of a prophecy in the Gulf South. Gulf South papers had long talked of war, but the war that came was not the one they expected. In January, the *Picayune* announced that the improvements at Pensacola would finally commence beginning with the construction of a seawall around the naval yard. In 1846, Pensacola’s population swelled with the influx of sailors, workmen, and soldiers at Fort Pickens, while the town

²⁹ *Pensacola Gazette*, August 18, 1843.
also housed the families of many serving in Mexico.\textsuperscript{31} The Navy contracted James P. Kirkwood, a civil engineer living in Pensacola, to oversee the construction of a sea wall, and the paper hoped the possibility of war with Mexico would speed up the work “so necessary for strengthening the position of Pensacola,” and give to the navy a “port on the Gulf absolutely indispensable for maintaining permanent ascendancy there.”\textsuperscript{32}

Despite all of the construction and improvement in Pensacola, the long-awaited floating dock remained a pipe dream. Impatient with the slow progress on the project, the \textit{Picayune} reminded its readers that Congress had instructed the Secretary of the Navy to begin construction two years prior to 1846. The dock would now cost over $1 million to construct, with $200,000 appropriated that year. The \textit{Pensacola Gazette} quoted the \textit{New Orleans Bulletin}'s complaint that, “year after year, it has been the subject of resolutions in Congress. The successive secretaries of the navy had favored improved defenses on the Gulf for several years, but according to the \textit{Gazette} they had “accomplished literally little or nothing,” while the dock at New York was progressing rapidly. They declared that it was time they spoke out against what they viewed as injustices against the South and Southwest. The \textit{Gazette} also pleaded with congressmen from the southwestern states to pay more attention to the subject of the naval yard at Pensacola. The senators and representatives of the Southwest, they believed, were sympathetic to the necessity of speedy construction, and those in


\textsuperscript{32} Secretary of the Navy, \textit{Register of the Commissioned and Warrant Officers of the Navy of the United States Including Officers of the Marine Corps and others for the Year, 1846} (Washington DC: Alexander Printers, 1846), pg. 76; New Orleans \textit{Daily Picayune}, January 21, 1846.
Pensacola hoped that they would make more of an effort to move the project further along. They reiterated the fact that engineers drew up plans; all money had been set aside, and all the work on naval yard improvements commenced. There was nothing to hold back the construction of their cherished dry dock so the work should have started in earnest, but not much had been built besides the sea wall.  

Captain William K. Latimer, who had previously served in the Gulf Coast, returned to Pensacola in 1846 to take command of the navy yard, where he would be for the remainder of the U.S.-Mexican War. In May 1846, the *Picayune* reported that naval engineers were traveling to several dock sites for the purpose of determining which type of dock would best suit each of the different environments in Pensacola, Philadelphia, and New York. But by 1847, Pensacolians saw their cause taken up by those on the Atlantic coast when the *Charleston Mercury* published an article in support of the improvements to the Pensacola harbor. The *Pensacola Gazette* claimed, with growing frustration “for twenty years past, there has been comparatively, no necessity for a Dry Dock *any where but here*; and yet, under one pretext or another, it has been entirely neglected.” The paper blamed the yearly delays on northern speculators attempting to take over the dry dock project, and in 1843 the Secretary of the Navy had actually withheld the appropriated funds from being used in Pensacola. Floridians thought that once Florida became a state that the naval improvements would commence immediately but “so far nothing has been done; so that now every ship of the blockading squadron, which needs repairs, must go a thousand miles out of way to procure them.” The dire predictions concerning what would happen in the event of a war

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33 *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, February 11, 1846.
on an ill-prepared Gulf seemed to be coming true. Town boosters touted the improvements made to their naval facilities such as the construction of a new sea wall, but used the Gulf Squadron’s blockade of Mexican ports as reason to speed up the work, complaining that the naval yard could not offer anything but the most rudimentary repairs.  

The war in Mexico was well underway and Pensacola’s haste quickened with every day. Several civil engineers proposed plans for the dry dock at Pensacola, and newspapers debated the merits of the two most likely models, either a floating dock, or a stone dock. The *Charleston Mercury* speculated that the sandy bottom of the bay in Pensacola would be unable to support the weight of a heavy stone dock, while they also worried that the construction would take far too long. They feared that the efficiency of the Gulf Squadron would be compromised, if the Pensacola improvements were not completed as quickly as possible. The fact that the balanced dock was strong enough to handle the weight of the larger ships currently blockading the Gulf of Mexico, the simplicity of its day-to-day operation, and the speed with which it could be built lent credence to the paper’s belief that it was the best model for Pensacola. By June 1847, the proposition for docks at Philadelphia, Pensacola, and Portsmouth, New Hampshire had been approved. The Secretary of the Navy authorized $350,000 to be allocated for the purpose of completing the Pensacola dock as quickly as possible, but during the

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35 *Charleston Mercury*, December 30, 1846.

36 *Pensacola Gazette*, January 9, 1847; *New Orleans Picayune*, June 16, 1847.
next month the *Picayune* reported that the appropriation made by Congress for the dock would not be sufficient to finish the work, and completion would be delayed yet again.\textsuperscript{37}

By September, with no builders in sight and not enough money, the *Pensacola Gazette* could do nothing but forlornly remark: “well, it is our luck--Pensacola luck, and there is nothing like it in the annals of misfortune, except the luck of the poor fellow who could throw nothing but deuce ace, until he was so exasperated that he swallowed the dice--the readers know the story.” They went on to state that while the navy yard had been in existence for over a quarter of a century, it was no more a navy yard than a ship was a ship without a mast and sails. The navy yard was but a “body without a soul.” Suspicion that Congress continued to favor the naval fortifications of the North over those of the Gulf South reared its ugly head yet again. The paper suspected that the delays were the result of the “a contrivance of the north, to keep among themselves all the public money expended in building and repairing” war ships.\textsuperscript{38} Many felt that improvements to costal defenses were absolutely vital toward perpetuating U.S. expansion and naval dominance in the Gulf of Mexico. Yet an increase in the navy’s presence was also important, especially with the war between the United States and Mexico.

At the outbreak of the U.S.-Mexican War, fears of England persisted, but during the next two years the Gulf Squadron primarily focused on maintaining a strict blockade of all Mexican ports, as well as keeping the army well stocked, as they marched toward Mexico’s capital. The growing presence of steamship technology in the region required

\textsuperscript{37} *New Orleans Picayune*, July 31, 1847.

\textsuperscript{38} *Pensacola Gazette*, September 7, 1847.
not only improved naval defenses, but also newer ships. The war happened at a time when the majority of the Navy’s ships were sailing vessels. It created additional pressures to keep up with European powers that also increased their use of steam power. “The fleets of Steamers which now literally swarm in these seas, have diminished vastly the value of sail vessels under the most favorable circumstances,” proclaimed the *Pensacola Gazette*.39 They further warned that, unless they built at least one or more fortified naval depots on the Gulf, a war on this coast would result in great numbers of casualties in the first month. Many felt that furnishing the Gulf with at least one large dockyard and twenty steamers of war would overcome these dire predictions. Despite these warnings from the Gulf South ports, construction of the dock had been slow going, and there had been no increase in the number of ships that made up the Gulf Squadron.

**Patrolling the Gulf and Protecting the Borders**

The navy’s experience during the U.S.-Mexican War was quite different from that of the army. Navy, merchant, and mail ships ferried the ground troops back and forth between the theater of war and the home front. Their main duty was to blockade both the Pacific and Gulf ports. They were an integral part in the siege and fall of Veracruz, and in the aftermath of Veracruz’s surrender, they participated in the amphibious landing of troops on Mexican soil, which began the invasion of the Mexican interior. The experiences of sailors during the blockade directly connected Pensacola, their concerns over the security of the Gulf Coast, and the U.S.-Mexican War.

39 Ibid, August 13, 1843.
On May 14, 1846 Commodore David Conner, then in command of the Gulf Squadron, declared a blockade of the Mexican Gulf ports including Matamoros, Tampico, Alvarado, and Vera Cruz. The last port on the list quickly became the focal point of the invasion of Mexico. Naval power in the Gulf increased in the months between the annexation of Texas and the outbreak of the war. Like Zachary Taylor’s troops, who occupied and “monitored” the Texas-Mexico border region, the Gulf Squadron also took measures to militarize the maritime borders between the two nations. Stephen Perry was appointed Commodore and took command of the Independence. In February, the Picayune received word from their Pensacola correspondent that the ships of the Gulf fleet were either actively patrolling the Gulf or docked at the naval yard, ready to sail at a moment’s notice. During the blockade other ships arrived in Pensacola from ports throughout the U.S. such as the Schooner Refer, which sailed from New York. The Picayune reported they went out “armed to the teeth, for the protection of our Commerce in the Gulf, and blockading the ports of Mexico.”

While the nation focused on the glorious battles fought by the army, sailors had been as much of a part of American territorial expansion as their landlocked counterparts. The army sought to extend the U.S. into the borderlands and the navy was to do the same on the sea. However, sailors experience of war was far different from that of the soldiers. With newspaper correspondents relaying back the details of battles, the Gulf Squadron was pushed to the background of the main story. The Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register detailed troop movements on the Texas and

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40 New Orleans Picayune, February 13, 1846; Pensacola Gazette, July 7, 1846.
Mexico coastline. While transporting troops to the Brazos Santiago, a small barrier island off the coast of Texas, the officers of the *Cincinnati* commented that the “troops of Gen. Taylor, were in high spirits, and anxious to encounter the main army of the Mexicans.” They made no comment about how the officers felt.\(^{41}\) Many men in the army wrote of their adventures marching through Mexico. By contrast, men in the navy experienced a great deal of monotony during the blockade and the patrols conducted throughout the Gulf. Sailors were often relegated to commentators and spectators of the movement of the American army across the Latin American landscape.\(^{42}\)

Several of the regular mail packets that sailed from the Gulf ports had only been established a decade prior to the start of the U.S.-Mexican War. The *Galveston* started carrying mail and passengers on a route between Galveston and New Orleans only five months before the outbreak of hostilities along the Rio Grande. Some of the regular commercial packets used for military transport were the *New York*, the *Galveston*, and the *Alabama*. The *Picayune* reported several ships having been commissioned to transport several companies to Veracruz, Matamoros, and Corpus Christi where General Zachary Taylor had set up his camp. By May 1846, thousands of young men throughout the states had answered many of the calls for volunteers and they began flooding into the main ports. The *Picayune* announced that the steamship *New York* had taken four companies from the barracks located a few miles south of New Orleans and was headed for Brazos Santiago, a small island on the border between The United States and Mexico. The *Alabama* was bound for Point Isabel, off the coast of Texas,

\(^{41}\) *Houston Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register*, May 13, 1846.

\(^{42}\) Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*. 
carrying five more companies packed in amongst her decks. And yet more steamers busily brought down young men from the towns and parishes further up river. The constant influx of unknown young men and soldiers erupted into a riot when volunteers stormed the streets. New Orleans was inundated with volunteers and soldiers. Hotels filled to capacity and men camped in the country surrounding the city. It tested even the most staunch supporters of Manifest Destiny, who complained of the unruly mass in their midst.

Raphael Semmes’ account of the blockade reflected the experience of many aboard naval ships in the nineteenth century and during the war. Like their counterparts in the army, and even like the small town of Pensacola they were caught up in forces much larger than themselves. Semmes supported the United States’ efforts to expand into Latin American territory and denigrated the Mexican people as unfit to rule over such a large territory. Yet he was critical of the U.S. strategy during the war. The initial conflict between Taylor and Arista’s troops left several thousand men on the banks of the Rio Grande, which meant that they were the first into Mexico. General Winfield Scott’s troops would be the first into Mexico City taking a route across the Mexican Gulf Coast plains rather than marching from the top down through the most arid parts of the Sierra Madre Oriental mountains. Still, for sailors such as Semmes, this was too much army. He described the government’s strategies as “it was evidently its policy--indeed the only policy--to carry on the war wholly on land, leaving the navy to act the subordinate, but not less onerous part of harassing and annoying the enemy on his sea-

43 Ibid, May 13, 1846
board . . . and of aiding our and forces, in the duties of transport, convoy, making descents, etc.”

Born in Charles County, Maryland, Semmes grew up on his uncle’s tales of his nineteen transatlantic crossings and his numerous other naval exploits. As a young man, Raphael enrolled in the Charlotte Hall Military Academy and shortly after graduation joined the Navy as a midshipman in 1826. In 1837, Semmes was called into duty and served aboard the USS Constitution during the Seminole Indian War. He married shortly after and eventually settled in Pensacola, purchasing a piece of property called Prospect Hill across the Perdido River near the naval yard. He eventually moved his family to Mobile in the hopes of providing his children with better education, however, his duties kept him primarily based in the Pensacola naval yard.

Before the war, the Squadron primarily patrolled throughout the Gulf and the West Indies. From 1840 to 1845 Semmes served on several ships, doing survey work in and around the Gulf. He became well acquainted with the winds and currents of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. One of the Gulf Squadron’s patrol routes required them to sail from Pensacola to the Mississippi and then out to Cape Antonio along the north side of Cuba, before passing between Cuba and St. Domingo and returning to Pensacola. Semmes and his shipmates found themselves sailing this same route when they got the news that the war had commenced in earnest. The brig to which Semmes was assigned was temporarily ordered from the Gulf and sent on a cruise of five weeks to the West Indies and the Island of St. Domingo. At the time of their departure Semmes claimed that the naval officers “we partook of the incredulity of our brethren of the army, in regard to the probability of a war with Mexico.” The declaration of war did not occur
immediately after the initial short firefight so Semmes and his men left the Texas coast not knowing the war had actually started. While at Puerto Plata, “a town of the White Republic,” of the newly born Dominican Republic, the ship finally received U.S. newspapers. Their patrol routes into the Caribbean and throughout the Gulf of Mexico signaled the importance of the Caribbean to the U.S. and the intense interests that the nation had in eventually expanding into the the islands still dominated by European powers.44

The fact that many of the Navy’s ships were not in the theater of conflict during the start of the war led Gulf South southerners to wonder at the navy’s ability to aid the army. The Picayune confirmed that many stated “Nothing but the battles of the 8th and 9th of May could convince the navy that the quarrel would come to extremities; and reasoning from their own inactivity, it would not be wonderful if the operations of the army on the Rio Grande were even now looked upon by many in the Gulf squadron as fabulous—the creations of the letter writers.” The sailors poured over every detail of the army’s movements, and Semmes “felt the more proud of our brethren of the army, from the circumstances of having received the intelligence of their exploits in a foreign land.” Despite wanting to set sail for Mexico, Semmes’ ship remained in the Dominican Republic. After sailing to Port Au Prince, the ship finally made its way back to Pensacola, sailing into the bay on July 1, 1846, a full four months after the start of the war. Only after having received fresh water and provisions did the ship finally set off for Veracruz to join the rest of the Gulf Squadron and participate in the blockade of

Mexican Gulf ports. Other officers showed up at the naval yard eager to set sail for the Mexican coast despite the fact that they had missed the squadron.\textsuperscript{45}

The experience of the blockade, especially in the early days was one of monotony and waiting. Between the declaration of the blockade and the capture of Vera Cruz, Semmes believed “no duties could have been more irksome than those which devolved upon the navy.” During this period they were largely confined to their ships, and “engaged in the most arduous and active cruising.” The blockade stopped almost all merchant marine traffic coming out of Mexican ports throughout the duration of the war. In his memoirs, Semmes wrote the oppressive heat of the cramped quarters aboard the brigs, frigates, sloops, and schooners during the summer months, and the wild northerns of winter evenings. Much of Semmes’ time during the first half of the war was not spent monitoring Mexican ports and stopping Mexican ships, but spent aboard the squadron’s flag-ship, which was almost continuously moored at Anton Lizardo, a natural harbor formed by several small barren islands that barely stood above sea level.

Here the crew experienced much of the hardships of naval life without any of the movement or excitement of the blockade. They lived off meager ship’s rations and the only clean laundry they had was often washed in salt-water and hung to “rough-dry” in the ropes of the ship’s rigging. For Semmes, the experience of war aboard a ship that never went anywhere was far more exhausting than service aboard a blockading ship that was, at the very least, moving. “We looked forth from our ship, as from a prison,” recalled Semmes.\textsuperscript{46} Often, it was only at sunset that the men were allowed to stroll

\textsuperscript{45} Pensacola Gazette, March 26, 1846.

\textsuperscript{46} Raphael Semmes, Service Afloat and Ashore during the Mexican War (Cincinnati: WM. H. Moore & Co., Publishers, 1851), 74-76.
about and stretch their legs, at which time they talked about the war as if they were not complete participants in it, and speculated over the army’s movements. It was a war that, for the Gulf Squadron, was comprised of toils and vigils “without the prospect of either excitement or glory.” Unlike the army, the navy had no enemy to actively fight. It was much harder for them to display their bravery to the satisfaction of those back home. On the Somers, Semmes experienced some of the most exciting events of the blockade though it had nothing to do with battle, and everything to do with the unpredictable weather of the Gulf of Mexico. It nearly sank in a terrible storm. Many of the men abandoned ship and were fished out later by a British ship, which demonstrated the continued presence of European powers during the war. During a funeral for an American sailor, Taylor was angered by the fact that the Spanish and French did not lower their flags to half mast as was the custom. He blamed this lack of manners on Catholicism, which he deamed a “false system,” and those that worshipped it were degenerate. The British, French, and Spanish ships that also clustered around the blockaded Mexican ports created some tensions among the various ships sailing up and down the Mexican coast.

In June, the Barbados Globe reported that one of England’s ships was en route to Veracruz, acting on a report that the U.S. Navy prevented the English sloop Rose from entering the Mexican port. The rumor about town was “that this vessel has brought orders to the commander of the Endymion, to proceed at once to Vera Cruz, there to join the Vindictive and other ships of war, in consequence of her Majesty’s sloop Rose

47 Semmes, Service Afloat and Ashore, 76.
48 Semmes, 93.
having been prevented by an American squadron from entering one of the Mexican ports.” In response the *Picayune* claimed “We do not believe a word said about the refusal to allow the Rose to enter a Mexican port. At last accounts, we think, she was lying at Vera Cruz.”49 Small conflicts such as these, as well as the presence of European ships, transformed the mundane nature of patrolling during the blockade, but they also demonstrated that even this war between neighbors on the North American continent still garnered attention from Europe.

The squadron and blockade drew much controversy throughout the war from Americans back home, as well as sailors aboard the Squadron’s many ships. In 1846, Judah P. Benjamin wrote an article in the *De Bow’s Review* in which he called into question whether Gulf Coast merchants were abiding by international law. He wrote: “already have questions occurred, growing out of this new state of things . . . already have vessels, fitted out in New Orleans, been turned away from Mexican ports, without being permitted to land their cargoes; and already have controversies arisen in relation to the effect produced by this interruption of their voyages in the respective rights, duties, and obligations of freighters, ship-owners, and insurers.” He then proceeded to outline all the reasons why a blockade is just during war and why New Orleans merchants should not be surprised to be turned away. When Antonio López de Santa Anna entered Mexico and slipped through the blockade unharmed, Fitch Taylor bemoaned the event. He wrote “but our squadron . . . say ye no more to this gallant force, for the blockade of the Mexican ports; and worst of all, for the strict blockade of the harbor of Veracruz, if a steamer with a Mexican General on board, with hostile

49 Barbados Globe June 4, 1846; New Orleans Picayune, July 4, 1846.
intentions against the American government can be allowed to pass through the blockade uninterrupted and unquestioned." Later, in a speech during a debate in the Senate, Stephen Douglas claimed there was no reason that Santa Anna should not be allowed into the country, as he was a private citizen and there was no blockade against private citizens. Controversy over the blockade revealed that at times economic expansionism and military expansionism were not always one and the same. Gulf Coast port cities such as New Orleans and Pensacola often prized both forms of territorial aggrandizement making their position in the Gulf of Mexico quite complex and multifaceted.  

Panic struck Veracruz as rumors mounted of an impending siege, and the Picayune believed that from this news it was evident “that the people and Government of Mexico have come to think that the United States have borne as much tom-foolery and insult as ought to be expected of her.” The navy’s reluctance to destroy one of Mexico’s most cherished and wealthy cities drew criticism from some citizens as had the slowness and conduct of the blockade. Semmes claimed that the Gulf Squadron remained too weak to undertake a full attack on Veracruz during the siege of the city. He thought they expected “us to lay waste to the whole of the enemy’s coast, by fire and sword.” San Juan de Ulua, the large and imposing stone fortress guarded the opening of the bay of Veracruz. As a result, the city was the only Mexican port city on the entire coast capable of defending itself against an American attack. Being one of the most prosperous cities with one of the largest ports as well as roads leading directly to the

50 “Speech of Mr. Douglas,” Northern Standard, June 3, 1848.
51 New Orleans Picayune, April 2, 1846.
heart of the Mexican interior, made it the most obvious point of entrance for the Americans. 52

The siege of Veracruz ended on March 29, 1847 with the landing of the American force on Mexican shores. From there, the army cut a swath through the valley of Mexico until it marched through the streets of the capital city. By mid-December, the army held the center of Mexico. The capital city itself, William Preston felt was without equal in the entirety of the Americas, and from his ship anchored on the coast, Fitch Taylor imagined what the army must have experienced. As it marched into Mexico City, Taylor wrote “even the unlettered could not but feel the influence of the distant prospect; and the well-read had a rush of historic associations pouring into their thoughts, while they recalled the story of the past, as they had, with the interest of romance, traced the march of the braze but bloody Cortez.” As the war came to a close, ideas of La Conquista again flooded the minds of those that participated in it. Whereas Albert Sidney Johnston had regarded the Mexican population as largely impoverished, and Raphael Semmes had seen a distasteful mix of races, William Preston shared Fitch Taylor’s romanticized views. He described the scene in Mexico City as “its mixed & picturesque population combine to render it an object of more interest to the traveller than any other place upon the American Continent.” 53 On Christmas Day, Preston recorded that the treaty between the U.S. and Mexico had passed the Mexican Lower House. There was much excitement in the city. The next twenty four hours, Preston

52 Semmes, 77-78.
53 Taylor, The Broad Pennant, 410; New Orleans Picayune, December 19, 1848.
wrote, would “decide the greatest event in the relations of the United States & Mexico, whether the latter is to retain her nationality or become a province, nous verrons.”

**Conclusion**

In Pensacola, construction on the dry dock picked up toward the end of the war. Afterward, the army no longer regularly used Fort McRee and Fort Pickens. In 1853, the dry dock was finally completed. That same year the *Montgomery Journal* published several letters from a young man identified as Harry. On a trip to the Gulf of Mexico he stopped at Pensacola and wrote about the general state of the city. During his stay in Florida he and several friends were treated to a tour of the naval yard and dry dock. After a ride around the bay and a tour of the forts he remarked that “the first object that attracted my attention was the Dry Dock, which cost upwards of one millions of dollars.” Harry then spent the rest of the day with the Commodore at the naval yard and dined with him.

The Gulf South had much to celebrate in the early 1850s. It had aided in what appeared to be a second conquest of Mexico. The United States had defined its border along the Rio Grande, which many Anglo Texans argued was part of the original treaty between Mexico and Texas. The Gulf of Mexico was now guarded by a larger naval yard and dock at Pensacola. Yet the struggles of the Navy throughout the war, and frustration of Gulf South southerners over the sluggish development of the Pensacola naval yard had exposed the raw nerve of North-South relations as well as continued anxiety over the presence of European powers within the Gulf of Mexico. The ways in

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54 *New Orleans Picayune*, December 25, 1848.

55 *Pensacola Gazette*, August 6, 1853.
which Pensacolians looked upon the English and French became similar to the ways they began to see the North, not as friends, but as a threat. Pensacolians, naval officers and engineers produced reports and articles that warned against a possible war on the sea with a superior naval power. What is interesting to note is that their only real naval engagements during the years after the annexation of Texas were with a weaker naval power such as Mexico. Advocates of Gulf Coast hoped that they could continue to protect and expand into this most valuable space between the East, the West, the Old South, and the new southern frontier.

The end of the war made many Anglos in the Gulf South feel as though they had accomplished a long held goal of expansion into Texas and Mexico. However, as the years progressed after the victory in Mexico, the war and the vast new territory would pose more questions than it answered about borders, expansion, and the future of the South in the nation. The war dramatically reconfigured the balance of power on the North American continent, and dramatically refigured the map of North America. With the United States in control of a large portion of the continent, foreign spheres of influence became absolutely intolerable. The Gulf South set its sites on Cuba and finishing the business of conquering the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. As historian, Sam Haynes has noted, after the war newspaper editors and Washington policymakers broadened and solidified the meaning of the Monroe Doctrine. The United States had founded a territorial empire much the way the old colonial powers had done, and the South thought it would play a large part in settling that new territory, but it was not to be. The question of whether or not all of Mexico would be annexed was hotly debated. Eventually, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was ratified without these states. Many
Americans, including some in the South, felt that such a large mixed race population should not be brought into the Anglo-Saxon dominated United States. Within the Nueces Strip, the war had settled the border as the Rio Grande. The dividing line between New Mexico and Texas, also a contested border, now took precedence for many Texans.\(^{56}\)

As the troops withdrew, and the sailors went back out to sea, American traders and settlers flooded the once heavily contested land south of the Nueces Strip. The end of the war opened up the Rio Grande to American trade and transportation. Rio Grande City, which later became the seat of Starr County, was set to become one of the primary import/export points along the river. Henry Clay Davis, founder of the city, embarked on a trip to Corpus Christi, the island upon which Zachary Taylor had made his initial headquarters at the outset of the war, to ascertain the shortest route between his home and the island. He anticipated that it would be a major trade route, bringing freight from New Orleans to the island before it moved into the Rio Grande and arrived in their city. In the Chapter 5 we examine how ports along the Texas Gulf Coast, specifically Galveston and Houston looked upon the growing river trade and the coming settlers with great interest. Their next steps would be to attempt to capitalize on these new developments, as they found their place within the Gulf of Mexico.\(^{57}\)


CHAPTER 5
SETTLERS, LAND, AND SLAVES: GALVESTON AND THE TAMING OF THE TEXAS BORDERLANDS

Introduction

A month after Mexico and the United States signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in March 1848, Texans celebrated the anniversary of Texas Independence. It was an auspicious time for them, a time to take stock of the past five years. Anglo Texans had much to celebrate and much to ponder. The *Houston Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register* published a lengthy article commemorating both the end of the war and the anniversary. “The twelfth anniversary has just passed by, and lo the astonishing change! The proud banner of the Union floats triumphant over the battlements of the Mexican Capital,” it announced. The newspaper marveled at the difference a year had made. The “proud banner of the Union” floated above the Texas state capital, and by March 8, 1848, when the treaty was ratified by the United States Senate, the Rio Grande became state’s southern border. The newspaper’s celebration of the U.S. victory as a part of Texas independence signaled a belief that one stage of expansion had come to an end, and the expansion of agriculture and trade could now proceed with vigor.¹ For Anglo Texans, territorial expansion again shifted direction away from the invasion of Mexico, and back to the Texas hinterlands. After the war, the Gulf South faced a central question: Now that the war was over, the treaty ratified, and the old villain supposedly put to rest, how was the actual process of expansion going to proceed in Texas and the rest of the Gulf South?

¹ *Houston Telegraph and Texas Register*, April 19, 1848.
Chapter 5 considers how the discourse of expansion evolved after Texas annexation and the U.S.-Mexican War, and will explore several central questions. How did Galvestonians, living in one of the more prosperous port towns in Texas, work to solidify their place in Texas and the larger Gulf South? How did increased migration of immigrants, southerners, and slaves affect Texas? How did slaves, Mexicans, European immigrants, and Native Americans resist the narratives perpetuated by Anglos?

In the aftermath of the war, the smaller port towns of the western Gulf sought to solidify their status by connecting the cotton-growing counties of Texas with the coast. These port towns also vigorously advocated for the further settlement of the Texas interior. While Pensacola relied on military funds, Galveston sought to become a leading port of entry for immigrants and the primary site for trade in Texas. In order to encourage further settlement in Texas, Galvestonians supported efforts to open up trade along East Texas’ main rivers. All ports along the Texas Coast continued to encourage new steamship lines that connected them to the eastern Gulf cities. In addition, the coastal communities supported the continued militarization of the newly established U.S.-Mexico border, and participated in the spread of slavery throughout Texas. The process of expansion included securing lands along the border for further Anglo settlement. Yet, the military and local governments not only protected settlers, they also aided in policing the state’s racial order during the 1850s.

By examining the many ways that slaves, Mexicans, immigrants, and Native Americans resisted the pressure of Anglo control, we see that the U.S.-Mexico War was not so easily put to rest and many issues that concerned Texans continued to press
them to action. Though Galvestonians did not use the continued growth of slavery to gain the recognition they so desired, the city became one of several growing slave markets in Texas.

To understand the growth of slavery in Texas, Chapter 5 considers how African Americans, who were as vital to the project of expansion as soldiers, sailors, and newspaper editors, reacted to their forced migration and enslavement in the Texas borderlands. The stories that the slaves told speak to the uncertainty they faced and the manner in which they perceived their part in their masters’ expansionist efforts. As often happened in other parts of the South, slaves sometimes voted with their feet: many attempted to escape slavery by crossing into Mexico. This alternate “underground railroad” amplified white anxieties about racial order and physical borders. Anglo Texans suppressed the political voices of European immigrants and Mexicans during the 1850s partly because they believed that both communities harbored antislavery sentiments. Following from these fears, continued violence between settlers and Native Americans in the western counties and between Mexicans and Anglo Americans on the Rio Grande caused many to question the federal government’s ability and willingness to monitor this region. Thus, the presence of Latin American peoples, Native Americans, and European immigrants within the Gulf Coast took on new meaning as settlement in Texas increased, and the slave population grew.²

After the war with Mexico, Texans focused their attention on Mexicans inside and outside their borders. During the U.S.-Mexican War, Anglo Texans focused primarily on the Mexican government. By the 1850s, Mexicans and Germans had managed to carve out a small amount of economic and political space for themselves in the Gulf South. Most Mexicans and Tejanos—Texans of Mexican descent—lived in San Antonio, one of the largest towns in Texas aside from Galveston, and the last major urban area between east and west Texas. Many also lived in the Rio Grande Valley. European immigrants were mostly German, but there numbers also included Czechs, Polish, and French. By the 1850s, the German population numbered 20,000 and the Mexican population numbered 15,000. Both groups created newspapers and organizations, while they also participated in local politics. In Galveston, German immigrants formed societies to help their fellow immigrants become acclimated to life in Texas.

While Galveston is the primary focus of Chapter 5, it also examines the connections between Galveston and neighboring port communities, as well as the public discourse concerning the Texas frontier, which helps to illuminate how the Gulf South viewed the agricultural regions beyond their coast. Gulf ports along the Texas coast competed with each other for the lion’s share of the exports to be had from the Texas hinterlands. Despite the level of competition between the small ports such as Galveston, Houston, and Indianola, they often times worked together as the gateway to the rural plantations and farms beyond. Yet, Galveston remained a symbol of what the western Gulf could become.³

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Galveston in 1850

Galveston Island is a barrier island off the coast of Texas that extends roughly thirty miles long and three and one half miles wide. It is a thin strip of sand between Galveston Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. Early Spanish and French visitors remarked on the barren nature of the little island, which the Caddo Indians had once called home. Three hundred miles west of New Orleans, the city of Galveston occupied a small nub of land on the island’s northeastern tip. Smaller port towns interspersed throughout large tracts of coastal prairie dotted the area between Galveston and mainland Houston.

4 “Galveston Bay, 1860,” African American Civil War Memorial [online blog]; (accessed April 12, 2013); available from http://afroamcivilwar.blogspot.com/2012/06/juneteenth-flag-day-celebration.html; Internet.
By 1850, Texas had a total population of 212,000, and within a decade that number would grow to over 604,000. According to the 1850 census, Galveston’s population stood at just under 4,000, with 300 slaves and 30 free blacks. Galveston’s free black population was never as substantial as those of the eastern Gulf South ports, and it did not possess the deep historical roots of the Creoles of color.\

Locating a city on what was essentially a glorified sand bar seemed madness, but potential profit often trumped logic in the development of port cities. New Orleans was built on a bend in the Mississippi River that often flooded; Galveston was built on a barrier island five feet above sea level at its highest point. When compared to the other older communities in the Gulf South such as New Orleans, Mobile, or even Pensacola, Galveston seemed out of place, and little more than a rudimentary small community on a spit of sand at the very edges of the region. Yet, Galveston remained one of Texas’ largest and most important cities. As Ferdinand Roemer had stated in 1834, it was primarily important because of its proximity to New Orleans, the safety of its harbor, and its connection to the San Jacinto and Trinity Rivers. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Galveston Bay entrance was the only channel deep enough for ocean going vessels. There were several other minor harbors along the Texas Coast, which were available to shallow draught vessels. Sand bars impaired the entrance of the San Jacinto River and, further south, Matagorda Bay.\

Many different peoples had used Galveston Island, including the Karankawa people, its earliest inhabitants, as well as Europeans, Mexicans, and Anglo Texans.

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Jean Lafitte, among the most infamous visitors, once used the island as a temporary home. He abducted Africans from slave ships and held them on the island until he could sell them. During the war in 1836, the Texas Army employed the island to house Mexican prisoners of war. During the Texas War of Independence, Michel Menard, Thomas McKinney, and Samuel May Williams formed the Galveston City Company, which obtained the city’s original charter. Each had ties to the Independence War. Williams and McKinney furnished close to $100,000 worth of goods and services to the Texas army, while Menard was one of the signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence. During this early transitional period, Mexican regulations concerning the sale of land remained in place. According to the Monclova legislature only Mexican-born citizens could purchase land grants on Galveston Island. In order to gain access to this land, Menard advised one of his Mexican-born clients, Juan Seguín, to apply for rights to land on the eastern end of the island. Seguín then transferred the 4,600-acre land grant to the trio, and the company was born. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century the Galveston City Company controlled much of the comings and goings in the city including the sale of lots, general city planning, and many aspects of municipal politics. Thus, Galveston was born.

Shortly after the end of the Texas War of Independence, Lucy Clark, a recent New England immigrant, described the rough look of the island and town. According to Clark, the island was quite flat, and while it possessed lovely flowers and tall green grasses, it still looked “bare in consequence of having no foliage.” Many of the first

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7 Cartwright, Galveston, pg. 72.
8 Cartwright, 76-78.
houses and structures were built low to avoid the high coastal winds. Emigrants also found it difficult to adjust to the tumultuous Texas weather and abrupt shifts in temperature, as well as the storms that blew through the area in the fall and winter.

By the time of the U.S.-Mexican War, the city began to look much more permanent with brick structures and bustling streets full of a myriad of different peoples. “The population of Galveston is a medley of all nations, stimulated and urged onward by the universal and indomitable spirit of Yankeeism, a spirit that is to revolutionize the world,” proclaimed the Texas Planter. The paper promised that agricultural and cultural comforts of civilization would soon become available, tying together the city’s prosperity and rapid growth with the language of expansion and the “indomitable spirit” of American Yankeeism. Such articles demonstrated to those living in the region that the city was well on its way to becoming as sophisticated, the city founders hoped, as New Orleans or Mobile. Galvestonians boasted that the growth of their city made it the “Queen City” of Texas. The city possessed a foundry and a sugar mill, and the newspaper advised sugar planters to use Galveston’s facilities rather than going farther afield to New Orleans or Havana. Though cotton was Galveston’s main export throughout the 1850s, its export of sugar also grew steadily. In 1850, Galveston exported 2,782 hogsheads of sugar and roughly the same in molasses. By the close of the decade these numbers reached 15,000 barrels of sugar and 9,000 barrels of molasses.9

In the antebellum era, Galveston paved the main streets with bleached white shell and imported fragrant oleanders, which eventually led to its nickname as the

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9 Texas Planter, November 11, 1845; The Texas Almanac, for 1858, 182.
“Oleander City.” The city’s wharves lined the water’s edge along the backs of the merchant buildings of the Strand, the city’s main thoroughfare, and rental houses popped up on the city’s streets at a record pace. Because space for merchant houses, rental houses, and wharves were at a premium, the city’s residential space became connected through a system of alleys and back yards. During the 1840s, slaves along with the city’s free blacks and lower class whites, inhabited these spaces. Housing for slaves also included other outbuildings, such as carriage houses and kitchens, and these remained in the back of most lots, creating a network of pathways used primarily by servants. Melinda Rankin wrote in 1850 that the “appearance of Galveston is imposing, and cannot fail of striking the stranger with a favorable impression.”

By the 1850s, shipping routes between Galveston and New Orleans had become firmly established, with the vessels running back and forth weekly between these two cities. The Picayune reported the establishment of new shipping lines between its city and Galveston, carrying mail, goods, and passengers and establishing weekly communication between the two cities. Incoming ships transported European immigrants as well as goods. By 1853, Galveston’s neighbors touted the growing trade between small western port towns and the larger eastern cities. By the latter half of the 1850s, Galveston received over sixty-five vessels from Europe and 483 from the Gulf Coast cities in one year. The Indianola Bulletin boasted “a regular line of packet schooners has been established to run from Philadelphia to Galveston, Indianola and Port Lavaca . . . and hereafter two vessels per month may be expected.”

10 Beasley, The Alleys and Back Buildings of Galveston, 13-14; Melinda Rankin, Texas in 1850 (Boston: Damrell & Moore, 1852), 157-158.

11 New Orleans Daily Picayune, January 1, February 20, 1846.
gratified,” wrote the *Bulletin* “to see these increasing developments of our trade, and the growing facilities springing up to enable our country to carry on its trade with the larger cities with speed, certainty and cheapness.” Galveston provided other services for sailors such as room and board and sail making.\(^\text{12}\)

These ships transported the wealth of Texas’s inland plantations, which extended from the coast back toward the frontier counties in the western section of the state. In addition, they also brought slaves who traveled with their owners or traveled to the Texas port cities for sale. The development of new shipping lines, and the continued arrival of European immigrants, became the primary way that Galveston connected both the settlement of Texas with the growth of the maritime economy in the Gulf South.

When newspapers announced passenger lists for recently arrived ships, they also stated the number of African Americans brought aboard the ships. These small numbers were a potent reminder of the Gulf’s part in the internal slave trade and forced migration of slaves to the southern hinterlands. The movement of free and enslaved Africans through Galveston as well as the presence of immigrants caused Galveston’s municipal government to enforce strict racial hierarchies through ordinances and city laws.\(^\text{13}\)

While the state continued to attempt to remove Native Americans and peoples of Mexican descent and limit the political agency of European immigrants, Galveston’s boosters began to organize their city in ways similar to older southern ports. The mayor and aldermen worked to transform Galveston and the surrounding coast from a

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\(^{13}\) *Galveston Weekly Journal*, December 24, 1850, March 27, 1851, March 13, 1851, July 22, 1851; *Civilian and Galveston Gazette*, August 23, 1851.
wilderness once inhabited by pirates to an agricultural landscape and a sophisticated port city. Whereas Indian depredations were the main concern in the western borderlands, the movement of slaves remained residents’ chief concern in the early 1850s. Throughout the antebellum period, Galveston slave owners and city officials alike attempted to establish control over the movement of slaves, free blacks, and immigrants. During the 1840s, there was little in the way of regulation, but by the end of the decade, the city passed ordinances attempting to limit fraternization.14

All of these processes of expansion, the physical expansion of Anglo settlement as well as the extension and solidification of state and city power, happened simultaneously and were intimately connected. As settlers moved farther into west Texas, coastal towns began to see the value of the interior and its importance to the coast’s economic viability. Galvestonians believed that “Western Texas must ever be eminently a producing State.” Such a region, “with a territory as large as several of the largest States in the Union, must ere long, in the progress of events furnish cargoes for more vessels than any States in the Union, and hence build up a tremendous commerce.” This was the next step in the process of expansion for the Anglos living on the Texas coast.15

Now that the land was secured through annexation and a war of conquest, the trade between the border South and the interior South had to be protected and increased. As early as 1838, travelers to Texas coastal towns remarked on the flood of settlers. On his way through Houston, Roemer noted “a great number of those whom I

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15 Indianola Bulletin, October 19, 1853.
saw entering the city did not stop in it: but their passage gave it a most animated appearance." While the city attempted to capitalize on the exploits of land agents and merchants, the real work of transforming the city from a backwater stop to one of the fastest growing cities in the western Gulf South was accomplished by free blacks, poor whites, and, most importantly, by slaves.

**Connecting to the Settlers and Selling the Slaves**

Though Galvestonians were far from the state’s western border, merchants and city fathers interested in expanding its economy and position within Texas took an interest in western counties. Many efforts to construct railroads and strengthen river transportation were aimed at enhancing connections between western Texas and the Gulf ports, as well as supporting military actions in the frontier. One of the more widely supported schemes was the Galveston, Houston, & Henderson Railroad, which many believed would connect coastal and western counties. In order to make these counties safe for further economic development, Galvestonians urged further military protection in the western counties.

Texas’ land had always attracted settlers to the region, and the state fought to maintain favorable land policies to keep the settlers coming. As a part of Mexico, Texas had been allowed to administer its own public domain. During annexation, Texas insisted on maintaining this tenet of Mexican federalism. For example, as a state, Texas continued many of the same land policies it had practiced as an independent nation. In 1854, the state legislature passed the Texas Preemption Act, offering homesteaders

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160-acre plots of land for fifty cents an acre, a price which was significantly lower than the federal government’s.17

The June 1851 issue of DeBow’s Review contained instructions for emigrants on what to expect in Texas. The authors warned settlers about the cold north winds, but also attempted to show these aspects of Texas in a positive light. “These periodical winds,” they advised, “doubtless tend greatly to purify the atmosphere.” The DeBow’s Review also listed the best times of the year to travel and which routes to take, depending on the settler’s place of origin. If a person’s main destination was the Gulf Coast or the western frontier, the article recommended a sea route, as driving oxen, a wagon, family, and belongings across the entirety of Texas was a much harder prospect than disembarking at Galveston and proceeding from there. New Orleans emigrants, according to the DeBow’s Review, could purchase passage on several steamships for a “trifling expense.” “The active and enterprising New Engander, the bold and hardy western hunter, the chivalrous and high-spirited southern planter meet here upon common ground, divested of all sectional influence, and lend their combined energies to the improvement of this infant but delightful and prosperous country.”18

The DeBow’s Review warned those going to Texas, including European immigrants, to be cautious about purchasing land. There were three main forms of land titles, all with varying degrees of authenticity. The Spanish colonial and Mexican titles, thought to be more dependable, were the most prized because they were awarded to


the old Empresarios. Those titles issued under the Texas Republic were the next best thing. The titles issued under the state required greater scrutiny because they were the grants that unscrupulous land agents most often sold. A poorly informed settler might purchase land they thought was located in a different part of the country, perhaps even well into Comanche territory. No matter which form of title an emigrant possessed, the Review advised that “the best way for emigrants to gain correct information is to go and examine personally for themselves.”19 Land was fundamentally important to all settlers, but the planters intent on settling Texas also valued the slaves forced to work it. The system of slavery had drawn southerners to support annexation and the war. Its entrenchment in the state became a fundamental part of continued expansion and settlement.

Galvestonians attempted to capitalize on land hunger in a variety of ways, but after the war enhancing the river trade became paramount. Attempts to improve the region’s river transportation system began before the war, gaining further support thereafter. While the bay remained the central reason for Galveston’s existence, their pride of place among Texas’ urban centers was tenuous. Throughout the first three decades of American settlement, settlers stayed primarily in the coastal plains and surrounding prairie, but after the war they began to move even further inland. Opening up navigation to the plantations and farms far north on the Trinity River was a primary goal toward the close of the U.S.-Mexican War. Several Galveston newspapers reported on a meeting in Livingston calling for a convention of the surrounding counties.

19 Clinton Machann and James W. Mendl. Czech Voices: Stories from Texas in the Amerikán Národní Kalendár (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1991); Fornell, The Galveston Era, 85-86; “Texas.,” DeBow's Review 10, no. 6 (June 1851), 636.
of the Trinity River to send men for the purpose of clearing the river of logs and removing shallow shoals to make steam transport easier. Other plans consisted of canals to be built along the Brazos River, allowing access to Galveston Bay. On February 8, 1850, the Galveston Brazos Navigation Company gained a charter to construct a canal connecting the bay and the Brazos. Unlike the doomed canal projects in Florida, the Brazos Galveston canal was eventually finished in 1855. However, the onset of railroad construction drew capital away from the canal. While canals and river transportation brought cotton down to the factors waiting in Galveston, the city’s participation in the extension of slavery also upheld its prominence in the region.

In 1833, Stephen F. Austin concluded that “Texas must be a slave country.” “Circumstances and unavoidable necessity compels it,” he claimed, and “it is the wish of the people there, and it is my duty to do all I can, prudently, in favor of it.” As Galveston developed, the institution of slavery underwent significant changes. These changes continued the process of expansion in the urban and rural parts of the western Gulf South. Slaves moved from the interior and upper South through the internal slave trade or with their owners. They formulated images and thoughts of the Texas frontier, which created an alternate view of Manifest Destiny. Historian Sean Kelly cites several major groups migrating during the antebellum period. While his work focuses on the Brazos region of eastern Texas, these stages of migration correspond with the experience of slavery in other parts of Texas and shed some light on Galveston’s place in its growth.

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20 Fornell, The Galveston Era, 27-28; Galveston News, March 27, 1848; Civilian and Galveston Gazette, April 28, 1848.
The first stage of migration took place during the initial settlement of Texas starting in the 1820s and 1830s when Anglos first brought their slaves with them. The second took place during the transitional period from annexation to war, and the third during the early 1850s, many of who were the properties of slave trading firms. However, many slaves in the eastern coastal plains of Texas also came through the developing markets in both Houston and Galveston. In addition to African American slaves from the interior of the South, slavers shipped recently enslaved Africans from Cuba to Texas during the early antebellum period making them the fourth and smallest migratory group. Because of this, Galveston and Houston slave traders became interested in the debate over reopening the slave trade.\(^{22}\)

The presence of slaves as well as new residents forced cities and their municipal governments to regulate interactions. The intermingling of different racial groups in the city’s boardinghouses and on the city’s streets resulted in some of the first ordinances in 1840, which required free blacks to register with the Mayor’s office upon first entering the city. Many of Galveston’s other ordinances, including curfews, restrictions on slaves’ ability to sell goods, and racial segregation within the boarding houses, were also found in other southern cities. Slavery within Galveston functioned much the way it did in other southern cities. Slaves worked as household servants as well as on the wharves where they intermingled with lower class whites. By incorporating these statutes, Galvestonians attempted to make their city fit into southern social mandates.

Galveston mayor, John Sydnor, issued several ordinances that attempted to codify and dictate how free and unfree African Americans interacted in the city. In his first year in office Sydnor approved vagrancy laws as well as those dictating the movement of teamsters into the city. Most teamsters during the antebellum period were of Mexican descent, which was one of the reasons that they were so heavily regulated. Sydnor passed ordinances that made it unlawful for anyone to “buy, sell, or receive from any slave or slaves any commodity of any kind of whatsoever, without the written consent of the owner or employer of said slave.” Breaking this ordinance resulted in a ten-dollar fine. Secreting or hiding slaves within town limits resulted in a fifty-dollar fine. Slaves were not permitted to hire themselves out. Free persons of color were prohibited from hosting gatherings for other free persons of color or slaves. Free blacks arriving in the city were required to pay a tax to the mayor upwards of $500, or be sentenced to work hard labor in the city. They required free persons to keep up the appearances of their houses and be “peaceable.” Other ordinances targeted all lower-class individuals, such as those found “begging, or drunk in and about the streets, or loitering in and about tippling houses, all who can show no reasonable course of business in said city, all who have no fixed place of residence.” These people could be rounded up by Galveston police forces and brought before the mayor. The ordinance also targeted “public” prostitutes and women leading “notorious lewd or luscious” lives.

Sydnor introduced these laws in an effort to maintain the racial order, which was under attack in other parts of the state. These measures may also have been a reaction to the movement of soldiers through the Gulf ports during the war, which unsettled the day-to-day order of life. In the early months of the war, a ship filled with soldiers had
almost paralyzed the city with their carousing and drunken antics. The situation became so alarming that Sydnor was forced to tell soldiers crowding the town center that they had to leave the city and go back to their ships. Ordinances became one path through which he attempted to achieve this goal, and maintain control over the unpredictable environment of a southern frontier port city.\textsuperscript{23}

The slave trade through Galveston occurred through auctioneers who dealt in land as well as slaves. Unlike other ports throughout the South, such as New Orleans and Mobile, Galveston did not initially possess a main site of sale. However, after his time in office, Sydnor became one of the city’s slave traders, primarily selling slaves out of the warehouse he used for his cotton business. The \textit{Houston Telegraph} maintained that Sydnor’s market was the largest slave market west of New Orleans, though Sydnor did the auctioning himself. Sydnor placed an ad in the \textit{Civilian} establishing himself as an auctioneer of “merchandize, Produce, Real Estate, Negroes.” Josephine Ryles, a former slave, recalled that she was sold in Galveston, and that slaves were not shipped elsewhere to be sold. Another woman, Mintie Maria Miller, remembered being sold in Houston and described the market there as an “open house, like a shed.”\textsuperscript{24} These types of sales emphasized the shifting and fluid manner of slave markets beyond the more traditional sites of the Old South. Ex-slaves not only told stories of being sold in Texas, but also tales of forced migration. Fredrick Law Olmsted’s travels through Texas elicited similar stories from slaves. While camped on the banks of the Guadalupe River,

\textsuperscript{23} “Acts and Ordinances of the City of Galveston,” \textit{The Civilian and Galveston Gazette}, September 25, 1857.

Olmsted met with an elderly black man and woman riding toward the railroad. The husband related his life as a slave, telling Olmsted about his birth in Maryland, and subsequent life in diverse places such as South Carolina, Arkansas, Tennessee and finally, Texas. Sydnor sold hundreds during the 1840s and 1850s, but was not the only slave dealer on the island. Dealers came from different parts of Texas to sell slaves in Galveston.  

While most slaves came from the interior parts of the South, some came to Texas from Cuba through the illegal African slave trade. There has been much debate on the extent of this trade and the numbers of slaves that entered the United States via Cuba. Describing the continuation of the African slave trade in Texas, Randolph Campbell maintains that illegal cargos of Cuban ships never amounted to more than a few thousand of the state’s growing number of slaves. Campbell estimates that some 2,000 African slaves came through Galveston during the antebellum period, while Fornell put it at several hundred throughout the 1850s.  

Before the Texas War of Independence free blacks had migrated to Texas of their own accord. Like white settlers, they went searching for a better life for themselves and their families, and had settled in many of the coastal towns. The separation of Texas from Mexico was a devastating blow to them. The Texas Republic’s new congress passed a law expelling free blacks from the state. Free blacks had to obtain

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26 Campbell, Empire For Slavery, Chapter 1; The Civilian and Galveston Gazette, December 24, 1850; Galveston Weekly Journal, May 13, 1851; Galveston Weekly Journal May 27, 1851; Galveston Weekly Journal, July 22, 1851; Civilian and Galveston Gazette, September 23, 1851.
special dispensations or leave by January 1842. This law touched off a feverish race on the part of the state’s free black population to obtain petitions from their local communities supporting them. They first petitioned the Republic’s congress, and later, after annexation the state legislature to allow them to remain in the state.

Free black petitions came from all over Texas, many of them explicitly detailing the good character of the free person of color. Petitioners were described as industrious, peaceable, courteous to whites, and not a “bad influence” on slaves. Likewise, their standing in the community and whether or not they had obtained property was often mentioned, as was the length of time they had been in Texas. An 1840 petition filed by fifty-six Anglo citizens in Houston requested that a freewoman named Zelia Husk and her daughter Emily be allowed to stay in the Republic, as they had been residents of the country since 1835. They described her as a “good and industrious woman peaceably earning her own livelihood,” who “has not the means to transport her own child beyond the limits of the Republic.” The petitioners used Husk’s status as both an asset to the community and as a mother in the hopes of gaining permission for her to stay in Texas. For Husk and her daughter the result was positive, but for others the experience did not turn out as well.27

In Harris County, another free woman of color, Fanny McFarland, filed a petition to stay in the Republic, in which she justified her continued residence in Texas by emphasizing that she, like many of the white men in power, had moved to Texas during Mexican rule. McFarland maintained that her master freed her for good service, and that she lost all she had in the Mexican invasion. By mentioning the loss of her property at

27 Zelia Husk, “Petition to the Republic of Texas Congress,” Harris County, December 14, 1840, Texas State Library-Archives Division, Records of the Legislature, Memorials and Petitions, Record Group 100.
the hands of Mexicans in her petition, she invoked the shared experience of the Texas War of Independence as a part of her claims to citizenship. In addition to these justifications, she, like Husk, also emphasized motherhood, as well as her old age.\textsuperscript{28} Sadly, the historical record remains silent about the result of her petition, but McFarland’s words demonstrate at least one way that African Americans understood the narrative of expansion and used it toward their own ends. Though free African Americans’ expulsion from Texas meant their expulsion from the Anglo narrative of expansion, some nevertheless appropriated those narratives. Free African Americans continued to be important parts of Texas and continued to live and work within the coastal cities.

Slaves’ experiences of migration and sale in the southern borderlands speak to the extreme level of displacement slaves often felt, and how that displacement and constant movement provided a record of the narrative of expansion as violent and oppressive as the wars of conquest Anglos fought to win Texas and the Mexican Cession in 1848. Galveston’s involvement in the perpetuation of slavery through its market and as a main port of entry linked it to this larger process of expansion, as did its interest in pushing settlement further into the Texas interior, past the coastal plains. The Gulf ports aided in the visions of prosperity that drew settlers to Texas, and slaveholding settlers attempted to impart those visions to their slaves as they migrated to borderlands. \textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{28} Fanny McFarland, “Petition to the Republic of Texas Congress,” Harris County, October 30, 1840, Memorials and Petitions.

\textsuperscript{29} Olmsted, \textit{A Journey Through Texas}, 229-231.
In order to keep their slaves from escaping, some slaveholders concocted fanciful tales concerning the Texas landscape. Slaves remembered and recounted them as part of the story of their journey to the southern borderlands. Betty Farrow, born in Virginia, was forced to migrate to Texas with her master’s family. She remembered the children treating their departure like a celebration, but the journey over the mountains was so perilous that it quickly drained them of any excitement. According to Farrow, another woman recalled that the women and children rode in wagons while the male slaves were chained together and walked alongside during the passage to Texas. Ex-slave Lewis Jenkins claimed he had emigrated with his owners from Green County, Alabama as a child, fleeing family scandal. Jenkins’ mother was one of the white Jenkins women, and his father a slave owned by the Jenkins family. Rather than acknowledge an interracial child born of a white woman and the subsequent scandal that would ensue, the family moved to Texas, forcing young Lewis to go along as their slave.

John White, unlike Jenkins, was sold from an eastern plantation to a woman in Linden, Texas. Remembering the long and tedious journey from the east coast, White claimed that it seemed “like we going to wear out all the horses before we gets to the place.” The passage to Texas was often dangerous and lengthy for southerners, immigrants, and slaves alike, but for slaves, the uncertainty of their condition there, the violence they encountered, and the forced separation from family over so long a distance made up much of their experiences of Texas.

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The passage of slaves from the southern interior to the Texas borderlands was a vital part of Anglo southerners’ attempts to dominate the region. Anglo Texans’ agricultural production, as well as their own identity, was dependent on the slaves they brought with them. Slaves’ experiences in the growing slave markets of the Gulf Coast provide a window through which one can see the evolution of Texas’ slave society. For them, forced migration was a significant part of their lives, and also a significant part of the process of expansion. While the discourse of expansion focused on Anglo-Saxon superiority, the reality of southern expansion continued to be grounded in the region’s dependency on slave labor.

Many of the stories which masters and traders used to coerce slaves into migrating to Texas reveal much about how they themselves imagined Texas and what they thought might best appeal to slaves in order to keep them from running away. As discussed in Chapter 2, southerners imagined Texas in a variety of ways throughout the prior two decades of its settlement; those ideas remained a vital component of settlement. Such imaginings shaped the way that white southerners explained the Texas borderlands to the enslaved men and women they transported there. Van Moore, a slave born in the upper South, recalled his mother’s story. As her owner prepared to move his slaves and family to Texas, he announced that they would find the lakes were “full of syrup covered wid batter cakes, an’ dey won’t have to work so hard. Dey told ‘em dis so dey don’t run away.” Another woman, Ann Ladly, remembered hearing from her sister that their master said that, in Texas, “all dey has to do is shovel up money” so they wouldn’t run off, but, as Ladly tells it, when they got there all they shoveled was cotton.
Once they arrived in Texas, slaves described being forced into pens as protection against the animals on the prairies and in the woods. Texas slave owners were known for being particularly harsh. For many, the frontier became a far off place where owners sent slaves who misbehaved. Others told stories of harsh conditions similar to what Edward Baptist described in his work on the Florida frontier. Plantations in the southern borderlands, Baptist reminds us, were often rudimentary organizations that demonstrated the extent to which they were little more than moneymaking enterprises. In many ways, the process of expansion stripped the South bare of its imaginings and narratives, just as southerners worked ever harder to create a discourse of expansion about their superiority over Latin American nations and even other slaveholding cultures. The experiences of slaves, their migration, and the stories that slaveholders told them about Texas, reveal the fragile nature of this discourse, and the brutal reality of expansion along the South’s borders.\(^3\)

The border, not predatory animals, formed the primary worry for slave owners. Slaves did not view the Rio Grande as a barrier, but as a possible gateway toward freedom; many of them escaped through it. The end of the U.S.-Mexican War did not alleviate anxiety over the border between the United States and Mexico. Slaves invested the state’s boundaries with just as much meaning as their captors, perhaps even more. For them, the borderland meant hope and refuge. The line between free and slave that others saw dividing North and South also existed in the boundary

\(^3\) Van Moore, District 7, Tarrant County, Slave Narratives, Works Progress Administration Records, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin; Ann Ladly, WPA Slave Narratives, Texas, District 7; Jim Johnson, WPA Slave Narratives, Texas, District 6; Lu Lee, WPA Slave Narratives, Texas, District 6; Isabella Jackson, WPA Slave Narratives, Louisiana; Edward E. Baptist, *Middle Florida’s Plantation Frontier before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 191-219.
between the United States and Mexico. Scholars have estimated that about 4,000 slaves escaped to Mexico in the 1850s.

While the exact number of runaways is debatable, it was still high enough to threaten planters. Newspaper advertisements for runaways frequently cited the slaves’ intended destination as Mexico. The *Civilian and Galveston Gazette* published a lengthy article taken from the *Houston Telegraph* in which it reported the observations one Anglo Texan, W. Secrest, made about the presence of runaways on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande. Secrest estimated that 270 slaves crossed the ferries at Eagle Pass and Laredo in 1850. He claimed that at least 1,800 runaways from Arkansas had crossed through the border towns and lived in Mexico with 500 Texas slaves. The *Civilian* remarked that if the numbers ascribed were correct, “we have a worse Free Soil settlement on our immediate border than any at the North, and one which cannot be permanently tolerated.” The *Galveston Weekly News*’ San Antonio correspondent related the story of an African American thief who had been arrested that week along with a “fine stout negro fellow, doubtless belonging to some of our planters on the coast.” The correspondent anticipated that both were headed for the “negro’s promised land—Mexico.” The *Texas Almanac* warned settlers that the counties along the Rio Grande desperately wanted slave labor, but “many slaves escape, every year, into Mexico.”

Some Texas newspapers lamented the lack of protection for slavery in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848. This did not, however, stop masters from marching down

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to the border to retrieve their runaway property. During the latter half of the 1850s, the Texas Rangers functioned as a border patrol and helped to enforce the boundaries that Anglo slaveholders sought to create in order to control their slave populations. Others crossed the border to capture runaways, but without much success. Mexican state officials did not look kindly on armed bands of strange Anglos arriving unannounced and invading their northern frontier. On the other hand, some Mexicans worked as slave catchers, allying themselves with the east Texas planters.

While in East Texas, Olmsted was struck by a “peculiarity in the tone of the relation between master and slave.” He described a warlike mentality on the part of the masters in regards to their slaves. “Damn ‘em, give ‘em hell,” was said to be a frequent expression of the “ruder planters.” Olmsted claimed “whenever slavery in Texas has been carried in a wholesale way, into the neighborhood of Mexicans, it has been found necessary to treat them as outlaws . . . and forbidden, on pain of no less punishment than instant death, to return to the vicinity of the plantations.” In correspondence between General Bravo and Sr. Bustamente in 1836, Mexican concerns about American settlers became evident. “The disturbances they [settlers] have caused in the country, the interests of the new colonists, the revolts which they stir up among the adventurers and the Indians,” Bravo wrote, “become the subject of notes in which

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moderation and justice receive only lip service.” The Mexicans living in the area had long viewed the Anglo settlers as greedy and accused them of unfair treatment.

**Policing the Borders and Dominating the Others**

Although the Rio Grande was several hundred miles from cities such as Galveston and Houston, the rural communities located on the Texas coastal plains and port towns worried about the different populations living along Texas’ borders and supported military presence to police them. In the aftermath of the U.S.-Mexican War, Anglo Texans reaffixed their racial constructions on those Mexicans living and working within Texas as well as those living directly across the border. In fact, at times it seemed as if the war had not settled anything at all with continued conflicts between Mexican and Anglo border towns and competition amongst Mexican and Anglo merchants. Tensions along the border were a potent reminder of the resistance of Mexicans against Anglo rule, suggesting that the U.S.-Mexican War did not end tidily. Much like other American wars before and after, it had ended chaotically and with much uncertainty. Gulf southerners fought to reinforce their superiority and maintain the narrative of expansion into Latin America even as slaves, Mexicans, and Native Americans continued to push against that discourse.

On May 13, 1851, the *Galveston Weekly News* published several letters from Brownsville and Roma, two such border communities experiencing skirmishes between Mexican troops and Anglo militiamen. It is difficult to piece together the exact series of events that led to the particular firefight. While one letter stated that Mexican troops fired on Roma merchants for exporting cowhides to Mexico, another from Brownsville

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35 Leclerc, *Texas and Its Revolution*, 75.
claimed that Roma citizens crossing the border to attend a dance in the town across the river were fired upon by the Mexican guard. Either way, it ended with “red flag hoisted on both sides of the river, and a war of extermination declared by both parties.”

When commenting on Anglo Texans’ continued hunger for more of Mexico’s northern frontier, Olmsted revealed prevalent attitudes about Mexicans. “The Mexican masses,” according to Olmsted, “are vaguely considered as degenerate and degraded Spaniards; it is, at least, equally correct to think of them as improved and Christianized Indians. In their tastes and social instincts, they approximate the African.” The difference between Africans and Mexicans, he further noted, was “less felt” than those he saw between northern and southern Europeans. There were “many Mexicans of mixed negro blood,” and Olmsted felt that even the thousands “in respectable social positions whose color and physiognomy would subject them, in Texas, to be sold by the sheriff as negro-estrays who cannot be allowed at large without detriment to the common wealth.” For Olmsted, it seemed that “between our Southern American and the Mexican, an unconquerable antagonism of character, which will prevent any condition of order where the two come together.”

Anglo Texans feared that lower-class Mexicans sympathized with the plight of enslaved African Americans and thus helped to funnel them across the Mexican border. Farther into the interior, communities such as San Antonio attempted to curtail displays of Mexican culture such as bullfights and cock fights while also monitoring the entry of Mexican peoples from outside the community.

In 1854, a letter to the editor of the Gazette actually celebrated Mexican immigration, at least of wealthy migrants. “Many Mexicans of standing and owners of

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considerable wealth,” the letter writer suggested, “have already commenced making arrangements to move out of the country all they have and settle with their families on this side of the river.”

Anglo-Texans’ tentative approval of Mexicans of higher social status, coupled with their simultaneous denigration of Mexican migrant laborers, created a class aspect to the developing internal social boundaries and geopolitical borders in Texas.

The Galveston Weekly News’ San Antonio correspondent kept readers back on the Gulf Coast and throughout the state well informed about life in the western frontier town, and focused much of his attention on Mexicans within the city, often describing murders and crime involving the Mexicans who migrated in and out of the city. While riding through the countryside in the vicinity of San Antonio, Olmsted observed instances of elite Mexicans directing their slaves to work alongside Mexican laborers on their “plantations.” Though Olmsted intended only to observe and record images of Texas slaveholding society, as an Anglo-American, he also participated in creating a distinction between Mexican social classes by conflating elite Mexicans with notions of “civilized” gentlemanly mannerisms and increased participation in slavery.

Just as slaveholders in Galveston sought to restrict the movement of free blacks and slaves on the island, Anglos in western Texas also tried to limit the mobility of Mexicans. El Bejareno, one of San Antonio’s two Spanish language newspapers,

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37 Olmstead, A Journey Through Texas, 321; Texas State Gazette, February 7, 1854; Texas State Gazette, February 13, 1854.

reported that the town of Seguin in central Texas had decided to expel all Mexican laborers from the county. Vigilantes destroyed carts belonging to Mexican teamsters and drove Mexican families from the area. *El Bejareno* commented on the irony created by this situation. The expulsion of Mexicans may have preserved the stability of Anglo mastery over the local slave populations, but it forced planters to transport their cotton crop to San Antonio, where Mexican teamsters were available to haul the crop down to Port Lavaca on the Gulf Coast.\(^{39}\) Curtailing the movement of Mexicans throughout the state continued throughout the decade. Suspicion of German immigrants also grew with continued immigration.

Because of anti-Mexican and anti-German attitudes, during the 1850s the Know Nothing Party enjoyed a brief surge in popularity. Texas Know Nothings addressed many of the same anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant issues as did their counterparts in the North. In the mid 1850s, the San Antonio Know Nothings sought to make it harder for Tejanos to participate in politics by discontinuing the practice of publishing government documents in Spanish and German. Meanwhile, Anglos in the Texas hinterlands also scrutinized German communities and their attitudes towards slavery.

All of this put Gulf ports such as Galveston in an awkward position. The city was home to a large number of German immigrants and one of the main sites of German immigration. In Galveston, the Know-Nothing party often focused its ire on issues concerning the construction of railroads from Galveston to the western counties. These accusations were given credibility in 1854, when, during a yearly festival, many German

\(^{39}\)“Seguin,” *El Bejareno*, April 25, 1855.
representatives from towns across the state stood together to criticize slavery.\textsuperscript{40}

Spanish speakers asserted the right to remain culturally Tejano while being American citizens, just as Germans in Galveston and Houston also asserted their heritage through celebrations and associations. In these places where different ethnic groups converged, instances in which Mexicans, Germans, and Anglos fought over control of space and society, demonstrating the fluidity and permeability of the Anglo language of expansion.

Throughout 1855, Sam Houston made several speeches in Texas about the subject of American nativism. In Washington, Texas, a small town near the coast several miles north of Galveston, he spoke to an audience where years earlier he had witnessed the signing of the Texas Declaration of Independence. Although the local paper critiqued his argument, calling the speech a “very tame and a very lame effort,” Houston moderated the anti-immigrant stance of the Know Nothings by arguing that it was no more anti-immigrant than the Whig or Democratic Party. At a barbecue in the Austin, Texas’ capital, Houston explained that he opposed the Nebraska bill because he thought if the Indians “were dispossessed of this territory which had been so solemnly guaranteed to them, they would be thrown within the borders of my own state.” Houston focused on the imperiled western border in order to legitimize his decision to oppose the Nebraska bill in front of his Texan audience.\textsuperscript{41} His fixation on the frontier was not unique.

\textsuperscript{40} The article in the \textit{San Antonio Ledger} was found in the \textit{Texas State Gazette}, February 24, 1855; \textit{Texas State Gazette}, October 14, 1854; \textit{Ibid}, April 7 1855; Ramos, \textit{Beyond the Alamo}, 227-229; \textit{El Bejareno}. February 7, 1855; “Know Nothing Convention,” \textit{Texas State Gazette}, June 23, 1855; \textit{Texas State Gazette}, September 9, 1854; “Origins of the Know Nothing Party,” \textit{San Antonio Ledger}, July 7, 1854; “Indignacion, Junta De Know-Nothings,” \textit{El Ranchero}, July 28, 1856.

\textsuperscript{41} Dale Baum, \textit{The Shattering of Texas Unionism}, 9; Sam Houston, “Synopsis of Speech at Washington, Texas, August 2, 1855,” “Speech Delivered At A Know-Nothing Mass Barbecue At Austin, November 23, 1855,” \textit{Writings of Sam Houston}, v. 6, 201, 209-234; \textit{The Texas Ranger and Lone Star}, August 11, 1855.
By 1849, the U.S. army had constructed a line of forts in an attempt to maintain the fragile peace that Houston and Comanche leaders had constructed. The conduct of the army in west and south Texas became a subject of controversy for those throughout the state and in the Gulf Coast towns. The Houston Telegraph criticized their policy claiming “Gen. Brooke is all wrong.—He does not need more troops, but he should compel those now on the frontier to use their legs more, and their mouths less.” In response the Galveston Weekly News “We think the course adopted by a certain officer who issued a proclamation to the Indians, threatening them with severe chastisement was better calculated to ‘frighten them awfully’ than to march all the infantry in the U.S. service against them.”

Albert Sidney Johnston hoped that his plantation, which was near Galveston, would make it easy to sell and alleviate him of his debts, but this did not occur. He then went on to plant sugar and cotton in the hopes of turning a significant profit, but could not make enough to completely pay off his debts. In 1853, Johnston reenlisted in the army as paymaster before becoming colonel in the Second Cavalry, one of two forces designed to patrol the western Texas borderlands and Indian Territory. In 1855, Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis created four regiments to patrol the Texas frontier. In a report published in the Galveston Weekly News, Davis recommended the establishment of new posts west of the Mississippi, and in Texas especially, where the majority of “Indian depredations” occurred.

The army had been instructed to scout locations for fortifications along the Rio Grande. After the border had been determined, it now had to be protected, and, like the

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42 Galveston Weekly News, December 24, 1850.
Gulf itself, white settlers within the borderlands felt that it require both a patrolling force as well as forts. The Second Cavalry was perhaps the most celebrated among these, becoming known as “Jeff Davis’ Own.” The regiment was known for its officers, who were primarily from the South. Among them were several who would serve as Confederate generals during the Civil War: Albert Sidney Johnston, Edmund Kirby Smith, Robert E. Lee, and John Bell Hood. When Johnston was placed with the regiment in 1855, the Texas legislature celebrated his involvement due primarily to his service in that region during the years of the Republic. Johnston worked as paymaster in Austin for several years before he was assigned to the regiment. He traveled hundreds of miles on his route, often in the frontier to which Davis assigned the regiment. He, his wife Eliza, and several of their young children had been out with the Second Cavalry regiment in West Texas. At the outset of their journey she wrote: “Well, here am I soldiering, my gude man appointed Colonel of the Second Regiment of Cavalry, a new Regiment just enlisted. We are on the march with 850 man for the Texas frontier.” She confided in Johnston’s eldest son, William that it was a hard and busy life for Albert, “camping night after night and riding through a rough country filled with hostile Indians 30 to 40,000 in charge at a time and an escort of only 4 men, all that can be spared from these badly manned frontier posts, this offers a great temptation for whites as well as Indians.” 43 Much of the anxiety displayed by those in West Texas as well as those along the coast stemmed from the feeling that they were improperly protected and policed. Shortly after the war the Houston Telegraph and Texas Register

echoed Eliza’s opinion of the “badly manned frontier posts,” when they criticized the current state of the military on the Texas borders. They stated that “while the military posts and trading houses remain close to the settlements, there will always be danger of collisions.”

It took them several months to reach San Antonio. During this period Eliza recorded their experiences in her journal, and counted the number of miles they marched each day and the conditions of camp as well as her children’s enjoyment at being on the march with the military. Federal soldiers and scattered forts guarded a 1,000-mile frontier region from Arkansas’ western border to Eagle Pass, a border town that overlooked the Rio Grande. In August, Johnston wrote an acquaintance explaining his regiment had driven the Comanche farther back into the interior of the Indian country, and though many may have celebrated the seeming peace, it could not last. The country, Johnston wrote, “is as open as the ocean. They can come when they like, taking the chance of chastisement. If they choose, therefore, it need only be a question of legs.” The malleable nature of racial constructions and the experience of expansion at the ground level in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands had many comparisons and connections to those found within the Gulf of Mexico.

In the late 1850s, frustration and hostility best described the state of relations between Indians, settlers, federal and local governments. The federal government dictated Indian policy, but the state government controlled the public land that Indians often inhabited. When the federal government took over relations with Native

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44 Houston Telegraph and Texas Register, April 2, 1848.
45 ASJ to _______, August 8, 1855, Johnston Papers.
Americans, the state no longer saw any need to maintain an Indian policy. This meant that Texas could sell the land on which Indians lived, but had no power to deal with the individual Native Americans. Eventually, the convoluted relationship between Indians, state and federal governments, and Texas land, frustrated the state legislature to the point that it eventually adopted its own policies towards Native Americans. The relationship between the federal government and Mexicans, land, and citizenship also remained murky in the decade before the Civil War. On many occasions Texans living in west Texas lashed out at both governments for failing to protect their lands.46

**Conclusion**

With the increase in slaves in Texas, worries about Mexicans and Tejanos amplified, but the direction of Anglo anxiety changed during the 1850s. Anglo Texans refocused much of their attention and suspicion on immigrants and Mexicans within Texas. Caught in the middle of these larger forces was Galveston, Texas' largest city and port during the 1850s. But the city’s merchants and municipal government struggled to turn their frontier town into a big Gulf port city. Unlike Pensacola, which pinned its future prosperity on military fortifications, Galveston hoped that trade with the Texas’ hinterlands and connection between the Gulf and borderlands would provide future economic growth. Racism toward Latin American peoples evolved, as did the centrality of slavery to southern expansion. The belief that Anglos should venture farther into Latin American territory gained increased popularity at the same time that Texans were attempting to find their place within the larger Gulf Coast community.

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46 Buegner, 106-111; Fehrenbach, 294.
American calls for the annexation of Cuba grew more insistent in the 1850s, and southerners were among the most vocal proponents. Chapter 6 explores the impact of the racialization of Mexicans and the narrative of the U.S.-Mexican War—a fundamental part of the discourse of territorial expansion in the 1850s—had on propaganda surrounding the filibustering expeditions. This powerful discourse converged with racial ideas concerning the place of French and Spanish Creoles in the Gulf of Mexico. Southerners in New Orleans would come to contrast Cuban Creoles with Mexicans during the filibustering expeditions in 1851; those living within Texas created images of “good” and “bad” Latin Americans through the use of class and racial distinctions.

Galvestonians supported Cuban annexation as much as New Orleanians. Newspapers recorded and posted meetings held in the city by the nation’s leading filibusters, and in 1850 a party of 250 men left Galveston and Corpus Christi to participate in Cuban filibustering. Texas Governor Peter Hansborough Bell addressed a large meeting in Galveston calling for the immediate annexation of Cuba to the United States. Later in 1851, Governor Sam Houston traveled to New Orleans where he addressed a large fund raising meeting of citizens and also pledged Texas’ support of Cuban annexation. As they fought to establish their place within the Gulf South, Galvestonians and Texans also considered the Gulf South’s place within the wider world.⁴⁷

By the 1850s, New Orleans’ place within the Gulf South had long been established, but the expansionists there focused on their standing within the larger world and their connections to Cuba. All three port cities, Pensacola, Galveston, and

New Orleans provide different avenues through which we can understand how it was that the Gulf South viewed and experienced the outside world during the antebellum period. In New Orleans, Anglo Americans from the middle and upper South mingled with a multitude of different peoples from Europe and Latin America. In the aftermath of the war, the city played host to Cuban exiles and became an alternate site of struggle between Cubans and Spanish colonial authority. They had helped to annex Texas, fight the U.S.-Mexican War, now they would be the staging ground for Cuban revolution.
CHAPTER 6
FILIBUSTER FORAYS: THE CUBAN FILIBUSTERING EXPEDITIONS AND RACIAL RHETHORIC IN NEW ORLEANS

Introduction

“The Cuba question is the slumbering volcano of this continent, and in my opinion will, ere long, pour forth fire and smoke in the land” wrote the Texas State Times. At the top of the paper’s list of the nation’s most pressing business was the fate of Cuba and many other Spanish American locations that had piqued the United States' interest over the last decade. The editor of the Times stated emphatically that “Cuba must be had this session or not at all,” reminding readers who doubted Southern interests in Cuba that Mexico was the country that had been called “the forbidden fruit.” Southern Democrats such as John C. Calhoun supported Cuban annexation despite not having favored war with Mexico. Cuba was the “destiny of the South, and hence the safety of Democratic institutions.”

While Galvestonians focused most of their expansionist efforts in dominating the Texas hinterlands, New Orleanians concentrated on pursuing the annexation of Cuba. Texans were not unaffected by Cuba’s allure. However, in the 1850s New Orleans became the staging ground for the next phase of territorial expansion into Latin America when filibusters set sail for the island intent on sparking a revolution.

In the aftermath of the U.S.-Mexican War, several military expeditions to Nicaragua and Cuba captured the United States’ attention. The story of two particular expeditions conducted in the early 1850s is the central focus of Chapter 6. It explores the manner in which local racializations of Creoles in New Orleans and Cuba, as well as

the narrative of the U.S.-Mexican War, shaped the discourse of the Cuban annexation in the 1850s.

Two seemingly divergent narratives, one of Creoles in the Gulf of Mexico, another of American victory over Mexico, converged to paint a broader picture of the goals of territorial expansion and Latin American peoples’ place within it. The drive to seize Cuba from Spain represents a perpetuation of the South’s expansionist fantasies, but also a reaction to the South’s fears that they might not be able to fulfill those fantasies elsewhere, and that they would be restricted by an increasingly antislavery North in their ability to expand further into the Southwest borderlands.

In the past few decades, scholarship on the filibustering expeditions has undergone a significant transformation. The filibusters were often thought of as curious side stories to the larger narrative of American antebellum history. Robert E. May has been instrumental in rethinking their importance, motivations, and consequences. His work, and the work of other scholars, has revealed the crucial part that these expeditions played in the history of territorial expansion, which provides a foundation for my inquiries here. Ideas about race were central to the perpetuation of these expeditions, and my work here reveals that they were far more nuanced than has been generally considered. The Gulf South did not view all Latin Americans and their countries in the same way. Mexico was valued for its land, but not necessarily for its people. Cuba was valued for its land, its crops, its slaves, and to an extent, its Creole slaveholders.²

² Robert E. May, The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1845-1861, 2nd ed. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 4-6; Robert E. May, Manifest Destiny’s Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum
Chapter 6 begins by establishing the many ways in which Anglos, both American and European, viewed New Orleans and Cuban Creoles, and the ways they sought to establish themselves amidst the onslaught of American southern culture and power. Anglo southerners worked to erase Creoles of color from their depiction of the New Orleans Creoles, and did the same when it came to those living in Cuba. Erasing racial mixing from the idea of Creoles allowed Anglo southerners the ability to find some sense of commonality with Cubans, and coexist with Creoles in New Orleans. The process by which New Orleans Creoles were first imagined provided the foundation for later conceptions of Cubans during the expeditions. To explore these issues Chapter 6 focuses on the inclusion of Pierre Soulé, a French immigrant, into the Creole community, and a case study concerning the abduction of a Cuban Creole exile by the Spanish consul. Following from a study of these imaginings and events, I then considers the idea that victories in Mexico led expansionists to include the vision of Cuban Creoles as people in need of Anglo-American guidance. Newspapers and filibusters alike used the war’s victories to define the expectations of the invasion of Cuba. Aside from the discourse, veterans and young men eager to become involved in the next stage of territorial expansion participated in the expeditions to Cuba in order to establish a connection between filibustering and the war. Chapter 6 ends by noting the shift away from overwhelming support of militaristic expeditions as the Gulf South began

to support the purchase of Cuba through the Ostend Manifesto, but also notes that hope for a future including Cuban annexation grew dim and was soon overtaken by the division between North and South.

A small Cuban exile contingent, among them Narciso López, espoused annexationist views believing that Cuba fared better under United States authority rather than under their Spanish rulers. Using newspapers that reprinted letters allegedly written by annexationist on the island, and clandestine meetings with Creole exiles, advocates of annexation in the U.S. made the case that Cubans were eagerly awaiting a revolution. Yet, as the filibusters discovered, Cuban Creoles remained much more ambivalent about the United States and its involvement in the fight for Cuban freedom. The first expedition into Cuba ended abruptly and without revolution. The filibusters landing in Cuba on May 19, 1850, quickly chased back onto their ships by Spanish troops, were arrested when they arrived back in the United States. López and his accomplices were acquitted. He immediately began to plan a second expedition, which landed in August 1851. But this ended in death and disaster when López and several of his men were executed. Shocked New Orleanians responded by rioting, targeting symbols of Spanish colonial power.

In the nineteenth century, “filibuster” did not refer to the parliamentary procedure of extending debate in an attempt to delay or prevent a vote. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries “filibusters” were men who sought to take over other countries through military force without any governmental sanction. The alternate meaning of the
word was “pirate,” and the Spanish viewed men such as Narciso López in that way. López’s efforts to invade Cuba formed part of the story of the nation’s early efforts to conquer the island across the Florida Straits. López belonged to a community of Cuban exiles who worked within the Anglo-American context of territorial expansion.

In Gulf Coast port communities, “Creole” often referred to those claiming descent from French and Spanish colonial settlers, especially when differentiating themselves from the Anglo Americans who had moved into the region after the Louisiana Purchase. Some historians insist that this group of people only began using the term as a cultural marker in the aftermath of U.S. settlement. The free people of color who also descended, in part, from Europeans had taken to calling themselves Creoles as well, yet Anglo Americans preferred to use the term to refer to only whites of European descent within Louisiana. During the 1850s the social, political, and physical mobility of gens de couler was severely curtailed as southern Anglos attempted to enforce their notions of a strictly bi-racial slave society. The modicum of liberties, which they gained under the code noir, would be challenged in New Orleans and elsewhere in the Gulf South during this period. As in the Gulf South ports, Creoles in Cuba were not solely of European descent.

A long tradition of intermingling created a racially mixed society that often challenged Anglo-American racial sensibilities. However, Cuba was by no means a paradise free from racial inequality and injustice. Quite the opposite: Many of the early attempts at Cuban independence depended on the Creole, or Criollo—to use the

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3 May, Manifest Destiny’s Underworld, xi.
equivalent Spanish term—planters’ support. In order to gain their allegiance, those interested in an independent Cuba had to assure planters that slavery would not be abolished. *Criollo, mulatto, negro, indio,* and other terms used to define and differentiate peoples within Latin America spoke to the complex class and racial system that had developed over centuries of colonization and enslavement. Louisiana also inherited French notions of race from its colonial forefathers. The Gulf of Mexico was far more racially complex than many Anglo Americans were willing to admit.⁴

Ties between Cuba and New Orleans extend far back into the history of both, and in this period of intense territorial aggrandizement, the complex cultural and racial connections become evident. Anglo Americans within the Gulf of Mexico negotiated these complex racial structures, using them to their advantage. While they often saw themselves as kindred spirits to Cuban and French Creoles, they maintained a sense of superiority over both. Through the processes of Texas annexation and war, Mexicans came to be depicted as inferior to Anglo Americans. Cuban Creoles, meanwhile, were not necessarily considered inferior but they were not denigrated to the extent of Mexicans.⁵ Spain played its part in the shaping of racial identity and the use of expansionist discourse during this period. Spanish authorities warned that filibustering

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and revolution would bring the pox of race war and U.S. economic domination upon the houses of Creole sugar planters.⁶

**New Orleans and Its Creoles**

By 1850, the year of Narciso López’s first expedition, New Orleans had become the third largest port in the nation, and the largest in the South. Its population had grown steadily since its incorporation into the United States and stood at 115,000. By 1850, the city’s African American population stood at 18,068 slaves and 9,961 free people of color. This economic boom resulted from the emergence of the steamboat packet trade, which, after the late 1830s, began ferrying goods and passengers from towns and cities down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. New Orleans’ population was very diverse, with Anglo Southerners rubbing elbows with German immigrants, free African Americans, African American slaves, and the ever-present Creoles of the city. At the close of the 1840s, settlers, gold seekers, cotton, sugar, and travelers moved in and out of the city as steady as heartbeats pumping the lifeblood of commerce through the region’s veins. The late antebellum contest over U.S. territorial growth coincided with the city’s growth and an intense debate over its consolidation. Since its inception as a backwater port in the hinterlands of the colonial French empire, the city grew steadily.⁷

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In 1836, in an effort to relieve social and political tensions between the Americans and Creoles of the city, New Orleans was separated into three municipalities. The old town or city proper—what would one day be known as the French Quarter—made up the largest part of the first municipality. This was where the majority of Creole and French families lived. The second was later called the “American city,” where the majority of Americans settled. The third was described as a “potpourri of French, mulattoes, and Germans.” Each municipality possessed its own government and a general council, with the mayor overseeing all three. Many refugees from Saint Domingue first lived in Cuba before being deported and ending up in New Orleans.

By this time the Creoles of French and Spanish ancestry shared the city with Anglo Southerners as well as the many French and German immigrants who had begun to migrate. They had their own newspapers, markets, and schools, many of which existed within the first municipality. For New Orleanians of the 1850s, especially those Anglo Southerners who attempted to dominate the city’s political structure and economic markets, this was a world filled with different racial and ethnic groups, trade in slaves, cotton, and sugar, and much anxiety. As with territorial expansion, municipal expansion and consolidation was fraught with as much peril as it was promise.

New Orleans and Cuba remained entwined throughout the first half of the 19th century as a result of slavery, economic markets, and to some extent politics. Past 1845---

Mercantile and Commercial Interests, Banking, Transportation, Struggles Against High Water, the Press, Educational, Literature and Art, the Churches, Old Burying Grounds, Bench and Bar, Medical, Public and Charitable Institutions, the Carnival, Amusements, Clubs, Societies, Associations, etc (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1900), 127.

slave prices remained similar the two major slave markets, though they remained slightly lower in Cuba than in the United States. With merchants strongly encouraging expansion to Latin America, especially Cuba, New Orleans became a hotbed of militaristic expansionism. During the Mexican-American War steamboats and the transportation of cotton had been complicated by the demands of the army, which also needed transport of troops to Mexico. In 1851, Alexander Jones, writing about the economic and social state of Cuba during the filibustering expeditions, estimated that roughly $114,000,000 in exports per year—the majority leaving from New Orleans—made their way through the Gulf of Mexico. Jones believed that the entire extent of trade in imports and exports from the Mississippi and California was an estimated $200,000,000. Thus, the majority of trade was in exports of sugar and cotton from the Mississippi, most of which passed through New Orleans on its way out into the Gulf. Jones, a journalist who advocated Cuban annexation, feared that this trade would be put in serious jeopardy “in the event of war with a strong maritime power.” Fears of domination by stronger naval forces from England and France were used to advance U.S. interests in Latin American nations. “Should the enemy occupy Havana on one side, and Yucatan on the other,” Jones reasoned, “he could do much towards destroying the trade of New Orleans.” He went on to link this nightmare scenario with the mounting threat to New Orleans trade posed by the advance of canal and railroad transportation, which could and was beginning to redirect trade of the Mississippi back toward the Atlantic coast ports.  

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Essentialized images of Gulf South Creoles allowed Anglo Southerners to interpret the racial identity of white Cubans in a way that separated them from black and enslaved Cubans as well as from the notion of hybridity, which so many southern whites found repugnant. They had begun crafting this image since the early nineteenth century when Americans began moving into Louisiana en masse. Those who traveled to New Orleans always commented on the Creole people.\(^\text{10}\)

Though in most of the U.S. South notions of racial identity were framed around the distinctions between white and black denizens, the Gulf South’s diverse population oftentimes challenged this simple racial binary. Early in the nineteenth century, while Americans migrated into the new state of Louisiana, tensions between the Anglo-Americans and their Creole counterparts stemmed from issues over language and custom.\(^\text{11}\) While the United States press often conflated Cuban Creoles with the Spanish colonial government, Cubans moving to New Orleans settled in a community with an already established notion of Creole people due to the presence of French and Spanish white Creoles and Creoles of color.\(^\text{12}\) In 1834, while traveling through the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico, Harriet Martineau, wife of a British naval officer, observed the interactions of the French and Americans living in New Orleans. She noted that the division between the American and French factions was visible “even in a

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drawing room.” The French complained that the Americans refused to speak French, and would not “meet their neighbours even half way in accommodation of speech.” The Americans ridiculed the French ladies’ makeup practices for their liberal use of rouge and pearl powder. Yet, this did not stop the Americans from attempting to emulate French toilette practices. Martineau witnessed with disgust “the efforts of a young lady from Philadelphia to make herself as French as possible by these disagreeable means.”

Eliza McHatton Ripley, a woman from an elite slaveholding family who spent her youth in New Orleans, remarked fondly on her memories of the French and Spanish Creole families who lived near her during her childhood in the 1840s and 1850s, but was also careful to keep the division between Anglo Southerners and Creoles. She described them as “pure and simple,” maintaining “the simple natives . . . afforded an unending source of interest to a wide-awake American girl to see, listen to, and talk with them.” For Ripley, as well as many other Anglo Southerners in New Orleans, Creoles remained remnants of Louisiana’s colonial past. For travelers, Creoles were part of the cityscape, and while their interactions with southerners were an amusement to travelers, they also signaled the manner in which Creoles continued to find a place for themselves within the city and the state.

Whether indifferent or hostile, the French and Spanish Creoles of New Orleans were often depicted as a dying race. Anglo Southerners in the region portrayed them as in decline, just as the Anglo-Saxon newcomers were on the rise. In 1845, Benjamin

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13 Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 150.

14 Eliza Ripley, *Social life In New Orleans*, 173-174; Guterl, *American Mediterranean*, 28-29, 90-91. Guterl is right to consider southerners in a Caribbean and Latin American context in that these areas possessed slave owning aristocracy classes as well, but it is equally important to keep in mind the conscious boundaries that white southerners drew between themselves and outsiders, even outsiders perceived as allies.
Norman Moore, the owner of a bookbinding and printing office, published a guidebook for the crescent city in which he detailed its municipalities, neighborhoods, and peoples. In comparing the first and second municipalities where the majority of Creoles and Americans lived, Moore revealed American notions of the differences between these two groups. The “city proper,” as Moore called the French Quarter, was composed of brick buildings with a few “ancient and dilapidated structures” at its heart. Meanwhile the “modern” structures of the Faubourg St. Mary, where many Americans had settled, was described as being three to four stories high with lots of embellishment. The public buildings were supposed to be the envy of New Orleans’ sister cities. Moore claimed that the Frenchmen rarely ventured into the American part of the city, but that when they did venture “three squares beyond their favorite cabaret” they were incredulous at the amount of construction happening in St. Mary. Emphasizing the gleaming structures and granite fronts, Moore, like many interested in emphasizing the importance of Americans to the growth of the city, focused on the progress of the second municipality. Throughout his observations Moore consistently referred to the Creoles and their buildings as either “ancient” or “foreign,” out of date and out of place with an American city. This being the basis for his description of New Orleans as a place more at home in a foreign country than in the United States of America. Moore widened his definition of Creoles to include all those who were born in the city, but stated that the French and Spanish were the original inhabitants of the region.

Not all authors used such a wide definition. Despite differing definitions, Moore described them similarly, stating, “they are remarkably exclusive in their intercourse with others, and, with strangers, enter into business arrangements with extreme caution.” He
went on to claim that they were once the “patricians” of their land. To Americans, this “emporium is indebted, for many of those vast improvements which, as if by magic, have risen to the astonishment and confusion of those of the ancient regime, who live in a kind of seclusion within the limits of the city proper—to whom beautiful and extensive blocks of buildings have appeared in the morning, as though they had sprung up by enchantment during the night.”

In 1851, on the eve of the filibustering expeditions, the San Antonio Ledger related a story about New Orleans’ old Creole mansions. As the paper’s correspondent described the “interesting relics” that existed in the city’s second municipality, which was populated primarily by the French Creoles. The sight of the old homes drew their attention, which had “frequently been arrested by a few interesting relics, still allowed to exist, of the time when, where rows of warehouses and blocks of brick buildings now fill the eye, swaying cane field, the white cottages of the negroes and the picturesque mansion of the old Creole planter, made up the features of the landscape.” The paper lamented that the Creoles were reminders of “many pleasant episodes of early life in the ‘Sunny South.’” Like Norman, the San Antonio Ledger compared the houses built by the Creoles and those built by the more recent Anglo-American residents. Whether in jest or not, the comparison of the houses, neighborhoods, and public works buildings denoted the American perception of the Creoles as being a people of the past who had been brought to heel by the industrious new race of men that populated New Orleans in the 1850s.

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15 Norman, Norman's New Orleans and Environs, 65-78.
16 San Antonio Ledger, October 16, 1851.
Pierre Soulé, a French immigrant, moved to the city at the same time that Americans had begun to settle there after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Soulé became one of most celebrated Frenchmen in Louisiana. At the time of the López expeditions, Soulé served as a U.S. Senator for Louisiana. Originally born in a small village in the French Pyrenees, like López and many Cuban Creoles, Soulé experienced both exile and imprisonment for opposing the government and supporting revolutionary activities. He was imprisoned several times during his youth. The first arrest was for conducting anti-Bourbon activities. He was pardoned in 1818, but was again arrested during his time as a law student for publishing revolutionary articles in Paris. In 1825 he escaped and traveled from Great Britain to Haiti and finally settled into a new life as a lawyer in New Orleans.

The Creole community welcomed him as one of their own. Soulé came to support expansionist policies during his first term as senator in 1847, when he sat for a brief six months as a Democrat from the state that had given him shelter after his dramatic journey. About his inclusion in the Creole community Alfred Mercier, a biographer writing in 1847, wrote: “Married a young Creole woman--the most beautiful & most envied of all his fortunes.” “That union,” wrote Mercier, “further attached him to his adopted country; the birth of a son finished identifying to the soil of La. & from then on he found himself completely creolized.” Mercier's use of the term “creolized,” along with Norman's definition made apparent the fluid nature of Creole identity within the Gulf of Mexico.

When he arrived in New Orleans, Soulé spoke very little English, which was quickly becoming the most commonly used language in the city. Soulé learned it as quickly as he could, and became a master of oratory in both languages which, as one later biographer put it, gave him incredible influence with the French and Spanish Creoles of the city. As Americans encroached further on Creole property and power within the city, many gathered together to protect their interests in New Orleans, Soulé was “one of the first to see this danger, and at the head of his co-citizens of french origin, he disputed the ground piece by piece with the anglo-americans, as orator in the meetings.—This mission accomplished, the two peoples shake hands and Soulé found himself the most important man of the country.”

By 1850, Soulé was in the midst of his second Senate term during the height of the filibustering mania in New Orleans, which coincided with the political fights over the extension of slavery into the newly gained territory. It was rumored that he cared very little for the opinions of those in New Orleans about the package of bills that created the Compromise of 1850 because “Yankees” from the north had unduly influenced them. In response to these supposed insults newspapers in Louisville, Kentucky, vilified Soulé, claiming that he was “by birth a Frenchman.” “The impudence of a foreigner who comes to the United States and tells, the people of one section of our country that they should

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18 F. Galliardet, “Pierre Soule who died in New Orleans, was the most remarkable Frenchman of the New World. He was the only one of our compatriots who came to be so popular in the United States that he became a Senator at Washington, having declaimed with the most eminent orators, and having been given the honor of representing his adopted country as Special Envoy and Plenipotentiary minister in a strange court,” Louisiana Liberte, Nos. 19, Pierre Soulé Papers, April 22, 1870, 25.

not tolerate the residence among them of the countrymen of another section is beyond all endurance,” it continued. “Mr. Soulé deserves to be hissed out of the republic.”

The criticism lobbed at Soulé focused entirely on the idea that an outsider, a foreigner, had dared to criticize Americans. His critics charged that he wrongly emphasized the divide between North and South, ratcheting up sectional tensions. Yet, if Soulé had actually stated these views than he had also related his own sectional preferences and identity as both French and Southern, but not entirely Americanized, which challenged the notion that Creoles and immigrants, would eventually become Americans.

Alfred Mercier used this incomplete Americanization to describe Soulé’s views about the mixing of Anglo southerners and Creoles. Mercier believed that “understood & accepted willingly the future fusion or the population of La. And of the Anglo-American race, he saw there one of the providential decrees to which reason commands us to obey.” Soulé remembered that “Creole population was never to abdicate the traditions nor the genius of the Mother—country; for they could demonstrate on evoking the past, that the cities which have had great destinies, would enclose two races.” Soulé helped to construct the St. Louis Hotel, which became a symbol of the Creole community in New Orleans. “It was necessary to establish a center of rallying,” Mercier wrote, “which called the affairs from the side of the Franco-American population.”

The French and Spanish Creole community underwent a variety of changes during the antebellum era, and the shifting definitions of Creole identity, as well as the

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20 *Trenton State Gazette*, November 18, 1850.

Anglo-American narrative of the “dying race,” signaled those changes. During the height of the excitement over the Cuban expeditions, Cuban Creoles were cast as a weakened race as well. However, their weakness then became a justification for the expeditions, which would bring the “stronger” Anglo-Saxon Americans to their aid. The presence of exiles in the immigrant neighborhoods in New Orleans provided an immediate example of Cuban Creoles that required American assistance.

**Struggles Between Cuban Creoles and Spain Come to New Orleans**

During the 1850s, Cuban Creoles also experienced dramatic changes. The arrival of exiles into the United States, including Narciso López, was the result of tensions within Cuban colonial society. New Orleans became another site of tensions between Spanish colonial authorities and Cuban exiles through the expeditions. Rey’s abduction, ensuing court case, and its aftermath demonstrate how Cubans saw New Orleans as a possible refuge from Spanish persecution. It also illustrates the extent to which New Orleanians became invested in seeing Spain removed from power in Cuba.

Juan Garcia Rey served as jailer in the *Real Caracel* in Havana for five months before March 1849, when he aided two inmates who had allegedly taken part in a Creole plot to create an uprising. On March 31, 1849, he and one of the other inmates sailed to New Orleans, where they took shelter in various boarding houses throughout the city. Rey hid among other Cubans in the city cigar shop, but Carlos de España, the Spanish Consul, eventually learned that he was hiding in the city, arrested him, and shipped him back to Havana. Hearing of the arrest, possible assault, and abduction of Rey, Mayor Abdiel Crossman promptly wrote de España, requesting more information. De España responded with two letters. The first was a cordial note that invited the Mayor to his home for a private discussion about the matter. The second, sent a day
later, was a lengthy letter accusing the mayor of putting de España’s career in jeopardy and insulting his honor by implying his involvement in the arrest of Rey. Eventually, de España was arrested on charges of abduction.22

Rey declared that de España’s men forcibly abducted him under forged orders from the recorder of the Second Municipality and asked to be taken back to the United States. As a result of de España’s acquittal, and Rey’s published story, the city’s newspapermen treated the trial as another example of Spain denigrating American authority.23

Annexationists used the case as another example of the threat of Spain’s colonial presence so close to U.S. borders, and its burdensome rule over the island. Reviewing the recent history of diplomatic relations and Spain’s actions in Cuba, the New York Daily Times’ New Orleans correspondent recalled the efforts of Cuban Creoles on the island to “throw off the shackles of Spain.” The Times correspondent accused the U.S. government of allowing Spanish spies to infiltrate the crescent city’s Cuban exile community, which, according to the correspondent, “A.,” was what led to the abduction of Juan Francisco Rey.24 The Daily True Delta called the outcome of the trial an “insult to the community.” It also lambasted the choice of men for the jury,


23 Juan Rey Garcia, translated by Daniel Scully, Abduction of Juan Francisco Rey: Narrative of Events From His Own Lips, From The Time He Left Havana, In Company With Villaverde and Fernandez, Until His Return to the United States, Embracing a Relation of What Occurred on His First Departure From Havana; the Intrigues and Violence by which His Abduction was Accomplished in New Orleans; His Voyage Back to Havana on the Mary Ellen; His Imprisonment There, and His Imprisonment There, and His Release and Return to the United States, Together with a Compilation of the Testimony in the Preliminary Investigation Before Judge Bright and Commissioner Cohen, a Review of the Same. (New Orleans: New Orleans True Delta Office, 1844), 8-12.

arguing that several were close friends of de España. The paper declared that the selection of the jury to try the issue between de España and the United States only proved that the trial was a travesty of justice and “the composition of the jury is evidence of it; the tone of the papers defending the Spaniard, and laboring to defeat the enforcement of the laws against him establish it.”

New Orleanians questioned the jurors' ties to Havana industry and trade just as much as their ties to de España himself. Newspapers claimed there was nothing wrong in these connections, but the choice of men with such ties did smack of conspiracy. The irony here was that scarcely half a year later, pro-annexationist news organs would support a militarized expedition to conquer Cuba, and ties with Havana would be celebrated in the city.

The de España/Rey case occurred during the planning of the second López expedition, and both Rey and López existed within a larger power struggle of Cuban nationalism and Spanish colonial rule as well as the shifting space of Creole within New Orleans. The American newspapers were also involved in this power struggle and used it to foster further support for Cuban annexation. The Delta opposed the jury’s decision on Carlos de España case. In reference to the Spanish consul’s apparent triumph over American sovereignty, the paper wrote: “Is it come to this, that an American Secretary of State has dared to tamper with the administration of our laws, and in order to conciliate a power, contemptible for its imbecility to the whole of Europe, has covered the national escutcheon with dishonor, and bowed the heads of the people in shame?”

To many Cuban annexationists, the sovereignty of the United States had been defied,

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its borders weakened by this action in New Orleans. Newspapers in New Orleans used the case as both an example of Spain’s trampling over American sovereignty and as an example of their cruelty because of the manner in which they treated Rey. In addition to challenging the sovereignty of the United States, the *Delta* also believed that the federal government had also overstepped its boundaries by interfering with what it felt was a city matter, not a federal issue.

The *de España* case occurred in the midst of what many in the city had come to see as a series of instances in which the Spanish government often depicted as an inherently effeminate and weak body, had triumphed over the United States, a nation of strong Anglo Saxon citizens. These events would help shape the depiction of Cubans and the Spanish. The bitterness exhibited by the press hinted at the expectation that Spaniards were supposed to lose and Americans win. The value of Cuba as an additional slave state made Rey’s story more appealing.

Cuban annexation proved to be an intensely divisive issue for Cuban exiles as well as Americans. While many southerners thought that they could solve the South’s racial and economic issues through westward expansion, for many Cubans the issue of U.S. expansion and imperialism left several possibilities and questions. Many Cuban exiles, including a revolutionary junta operating in both New York City and New Orleans, vigorously lobbied for intervention, generally supporting filibustering. There were, however, many others within Cuba as well as in the exile community, who believed that total independence would not come with American domination. Cubans, interested in wrestling Cuba from Spanish control, thought that encouraging America’s current zeal for territory in Latin America might help them in their cause, and that even if it meant
becoming a state rather than an independent country at least they would be a part of nation based on republican ideals. Others viewed U.S. interest in Cuba as an immediate threat, and an exchange from one colonial power to another.  

The Expeditions Take Shape

Narciso López spent his entire adult life drifting throughout South America and the United States. The son of a wealthy merchant, he was born in 1797 and grew up in Caracas, Venezuela. During Venezuela’s battle for independence, López experienced his first brush with revolution. Ironically, López ended his time in Venezuela by fighting on the side of the Spanish against Simon Bolivar’s faction. In the aftermath of Bolivar’s victory in Venezuela over the Spanish, López migrated to Cuba, where he soon turned against Spain. López attempted to find his place in Cuban society through various business ventures, and each failure soured his fealty toward Spain’s management of Cuba. He joined the annexationists of the island, began planning for Cuba’s independence, and eventually favored annexation by the United States. After an early bid to begin an armed uprising in Cuba in 1847, López narrowly escaped arrest by immigrating to the United States and settling among the Cuban immigrant community in New York City.

López’s bitter feelings towards the Spanish colonial government stemmed from his inability to rise through the ranks of the army and maintain a government

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28 Chaffin, Fatal Glory, 37-39. Thomas W. Wilson, An Authentic Narrative of the Piratical Descents upon Cuba Made by Hordes from the United States by Narciso Lopez, a Native of South America; To Which Are Added Some Interesting Letters and Declarations from the Prisoners, with a List of Their Names (Havana 1851), 5-7.
appointment in Cuba. Spurned by Spain, he turned against them and became a Cuban revolutionary. His charisma allowed him to connect with those around him, which made it easy for him to gain followers. López spent his life carefully navigating the different cultures found in Venezuela, Cuba, New York, and New Orleans. López attempted an earlier expedition in 1849 with a part of his expedition leaving from New York, and another ship leaving from Mississippi. Unfortunately, for him and his expedition, the filibusters, some 600 departing from the Gulf, were stopped by a U.S. Naval blockade near Mississippi’s Round Island. The men eventually surrendered and the expedition dissolved.

Conflating the histories and peoples of Texas, Mexico, Cuba, and Spain, the Mississippian proclaimed that the Spanish rulers of Cuba belonged to the same race as the Mexican federales who had murdered “Crockett, Bowie, and their companions in Texas.” By casting the Spanish in the same light as the Mexican opponents of Texas revolutionaries, the Mississippian not only used the memory of Texas to incite similar outrage against Spain, but also linked ideas about the Spanish to those of the Mexicans who were consistently denigrated as mixed race. Eager not to miss the new expansionist opportunity that had dropped into their laps via López’s aborted expedition, the Vicksburg Whig argued for the “re-annexation of Cuba to the United States.”

Evident in the staging of Narciso López’s expeditions was a need to maintain a racialized boundary between the American participants and their Cuban Creole...

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29 Chaffin, Fatal Glory, 2; Wilson, Authentic Narrative, 1.

counterparts, while still engendering public sympathy for the Cubans living on the island. To do this the filibusters painted the Cuban Creoles as tragic figures. Anglo southerners believed Cubans loved America and needed Anglo-American support and guidance. During the early months of preparation for the expedition, men interested in taking part traveled to New Orleans to meet with López. Francis Boggess recalled that the men involved “were to be put in charge of the Cubans and all to be perfect in military tactics.” Those favoring Cuban annexation often cast the Cuban Creole population as a downtrodden and oppressed people, impoverished due to the excesses of an antiquated imperial ruler. Annexationists consistently differentiated the Cuban Creoles from the Spanish government. In contrast, during the U.S.-Mexican War soldiers as well as newspapers often viewed lower-class Mexicans as oppressed and degraded due to the excesses of the upper class.

In discussing Cuba, New Orleans newspapers and filibusters viewed Cuban Creoles similarly. In considering a history of Cuba published during the expedition, the Daily True Delta stressed the oppressed state of the “natives of the Gem of the Antilles,” and that “poverty, filth, degrading and hideous vice stalk every where abroad.” The New Orleans Picayune announced that it had received letters from the nation’s wealthy merchants who claimed that all of Cuba was in favor of independence and annexation.

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These American observers assumed that the oppressed Cuban natives would rise up in rebellion as soon as the filibusters landed.\textsuperscript{33}

Cuban newspapers that supported or were controlled by the Spanish government focused much of their attention on the racial discourse behind U.S. interest in the annexation of Latin American countries. These newspapers became the most outspoken opponents against U.S. interests in the Caribbean and South America. The Spanish government used annexation and U.S. expansion as a warning against Cuban independence partially by lobbing accusations against Narciso López and the filibusters intending to sail to Cuba. They also used the age-old nightmare of slave insurrections as tools to keep Cuban Creoles from revolting. Like their counterparts on the southern mainland, Cuban Creoles feared their slaves and, despite the absence of a strict black/white racial binary, also feared the prospect of race wars. Ever present and always shaping racial fears of the planter classes in both the Gulf South and Cuba, the recent history of Saint Domingue remained useful for causing action or in-action. New Orleanians did not often view Cuban slaves as a threat to their own slave populations or to their plans to conquer Cuba. Filibuster expedition supporters did not seem to contemplate the possible involvement of slaves in Cuba or their reaction to these invasions. Cuban slaves became a part of the fabric of an idealized Cuban landscape where all of the South’s problems would be solved and their own fantasy of racial mastery perpetuated. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, this was similar to the way that Mexicans and Native Americans had become part of the natural setting of Texas during the process of annexation. So too did Cubans, and especially Cuban slaves, fade into

\textsuperscript{33} New Orleans Daily True Delta, April 13, 1850; New Orleans Daily Picayune May 1, 1850.
the background. While the construction of Cuban Creole identity as prostrate victims became a central aspect of the rhetoric of the armed expeditions, another important thread was the way in which the Mexican-American War bolstered enthusiasm for continued expansion into Latin America. In 1850, while planning the second expedition to Cuba, López targeted not only Anglo-Southerners interested in expansion, but also Mexican-American War veterans.

Throughout the months leading up to the second expedition, López circulated throughout the Gulf South states seeking support. Sitting in the front parlor of the Governor’s Mansion in Jackson, López offered command of the filibuster army to John A. Quitman, a veteran of the Mexican-American War, and ardent pro-South expansionist. López even hinted at the possibility that Quitman might rule over a Cuban republic. Later, Quitman wrote to a former aide-de-camp in the U.S.-Mexican War: “Your old commander is invited to become the Liberator of a beautiful and rich island in the Gulf.” Quitman went so far as to wonder if his old comrades might join him in a military expedition to Cuba, where he would become prime minister. His spirit often reverted back “to the free air of the camp,” he confided, for he was by nature a soldier. Writing as Governor of Mississippi, Quitman reflected, “no other life charmed [him].” He used the term “liberator” instead of “filibuster.”

Quitman originally formed his opinions of Latin America and expansion before the war in Mexico, where he observed the people as he marched through the villages and towns of northern Mexico. He exchanged many letters with his family back in Mississippi relating his opinions of them, which were either dismissive or hostile. He had

34 John Quitman to Mansfield Lovell, March 15, 1850, Quitman Papers.
written an acquaintance living in Texas and promised that southerners would “never permit an Indian and Negro colony to be planted on the frontier.” In the aftermath of the U.S.-Mexican War, in Quitman’s first taste of the possibilities of expansion, he began to take any real notice of what lay beyond the warm water of the Gulf Coast.

Quitman eventually restrained these fantasies of Cuban invasion and rule. He chose to remain in Mississippi, though he supposedly aided López in preparing his expedition. That it was done in secrecy makes it difficult to gauge the level of Quitman’s involvement in these preparations, but Quitman did put López in touch with his friend, John Henderson, then working in New Orleans as a lawyer. Through both men, López was able to make contact with others in the city who were able to help him outfit his growing army.\(^{35}\)

Although promoting Cuban independence was one of the purported motivations for the filibusters in 1850, annexation to the United States remained the root cause. The Spanish colonial government used the threat of U.S. annexation against Cuban independence. An April 1850 article taken from *El Diario de la Marina* questioned the wisdom of following the Americans into the fray of revolution and territorial aggrandizement. The paper answered the optimism of American expansion by arguing that aggrandizement had been the ruin of Rome and Carthage. It warned readers that “the same greed and the same spirit of domination” took possession of the United States “by way of the annexationists.” It also accused the United States of imposing the yoke of its own civilization on other Latin American countries. This critique predicted the

downfall of the United States at the hands of its own territorial greed, but it also warned that American territorial aggrandizement would not bring independence, but merely another form of colonialism. *El Diario* linked the filibusters with the soldiers of the U.S.-Mexican War but with a negative connotation that delegitimized the nation’s interest in Cuban independence.\(^{36}\) Its views of both the war and the expeditions added yet another layer of interpretation to the meaning of the U.S.-Mexican War which emphasized the United States’ desires for additional land and the idea of subjugation under American rule.

Articles in the Havana paper stressed the importance of the Gulf South’s growing sugar industry as one of the major economic impetuses for the region’s involvement in and support of filibustering expeditions. The authors went on to accuse American or English merchants of starting rumors of an expedition in order to distract the island’s planters and merchants from their interests in the island’s tobacco, sugar, or coffee industries. It warned their readers, who doubtless were not only Cubans but also American port city residents, that the filibusters were little more than pirates, undisciplined, ill equipped and led by a *canalla*, a scoundrel. Meanwhile, the paper declared, the well-trained and outfitted Spanish army lay in wait for them, and the Cuban people remained loyal to the crown, which had watched over them, guided them, and allowed them to prosper for over three hundred years. The number of exiles then living in United States cities such as New York and New Orleans, and the excitement over the Juan Rey Francisco case, betrayed the truth of the island’s strained political

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\(^{36}\) *El Diario de la Marina*, April 11, 1850.
reality. Yet the Havana newspaper maintained that the filibusters would be unable to find Cubans willing to rise up against the mother country’s representatives on the island.

As he prepared to sail for Cuba in May 1850, López addressed his fellow filibusterers with a proclamation outlining their mission. He tied the expedition to American participation in the U.S.-Mexican War, stating “even if you were not already the men of the field of Palo Alto and Churubusco, or brethren and worthy peers of the men of those immortal victories.” Further invoking the victories of the U.S.-Mexican War, he predicted that the patriotic Cuban people would rise up against the Spanish once the filibusterers unveiled the tri-color flag of independence on Cuban shores. The Cuban flag would be guarded by a “legion of choice spirits amply powerful to deal Buena-Vista fashion with any force” that the Spanish Government could muster against them. In describing the types of men López aimed to recruit, Francis Boggess, a filibuster, stated that the expeditions were to be made up entirely of U.S.-Mexican War veterans. He commented on the thousands of unemployed discharged soldiers who would willingly engage in the expeditions despite the danger. As the expedition set sail, the New Orleans True Delta surmised that three-fourths of the filibusters “served with distinction in Mexico.”37 By emphasizing connections between the war and the expeditions, López and the Delta further shaped the expectation that they would be successful in their attempts.

López projected a vision of Cuba as “unarmed, unable to effect the first beginning of organization for insurrection, and menaced by Spain’s perpetual threat of converting into a worse than San Domingo, the richest and loveliest of Islands beneath

37 New Orleans Daily True Delta, May 12, May 17, 1850.
the sun.” He pushed the filibusters to action by claiming that their “Cuban brethren have been compelled to wait and long for the hour when a first nucleus for their revolution shall be afforded them by a gallant band of sympathizing friends, like that which I esteem it now the highest honor of my life to lead to this brilliant enterprise.” López went so far in his planning of Cuban independence as to assure his American-born soldiery that their first order of business would be to create a provisional constitution, founded on “American principals.” He claimed they, as “American Citizen-Soldier,” would provide an example to the Cubans and the entire world. He promised them laurels and victory in Cuba, and beyond that, perhaps most importantly, he claimed he wished that when it was all over that the Americans would “establish permanent and happy homes on the bountiful soil of the Island.” “You go to free, and there long enjoy the gratitude which Cuba will never fail generously to bestow on those to whom she will owe the sacred and immeasurable debt of her LIBERTY,” he announced. López cast the Cubans as people in need of American assistance, prepared to repay their aid with material gains.

American aid meant the migration of Anglo-American settlers to the island. Cuban Creoles would play a very small part in their own liberty, and in the annexation process according to this vision of the future. López thus linked the rhetorical context of the expeditions to its economic reality of expansion into Latin America. The rhetoric of the filibustering expeditions emphasized the freedom of Cuban Creoles, however López could not escape the expectation that Cuban revolution and annexation meant more territory for the South.

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The filibusters landed in Cardenas on May 19, 1850. López went ashore with 520 men, and they spent most of that day walking through the town like tourists, greeting people and drinking. The invaders were polite enough to pay for what they consumed. The *Filibuster*, an anonymous author of a memoir recalling the events of López’s expeditions, recalled López’s plan to leave Cardenas in the hands of the Cuban Creoles once the filibusters had taken control of it. Yet the Creoles at Cardenas did not aid the men at all. According to the filibuster, López hardly knew what to think of their lack of enthusiasm. It seemed impossible for López to reconcile their unwillingness with the “promises and statements of the Cubans.” The *Filibustero* described López’s reaction and the reaction of the men: “His brow became painfully thoughtful. His men, too, grew mutinous. It was plain to them that the Creoles in Cardenas, at least, felt no disposition to revolt; that their sympathies, or what was more probable their fears, were with the government, and the chances of their joining in the rising were visibly unpromising.”

López persisted in his conviction that Creoles in other parts of Cuba remained ready to support the expedition and its attempts at sparking a revolution. He had received letters claiming allegiance and felt that those beyond Cardenas would bolster the filibusters’ ranks. López continued in the campaign, pressing forward to Matanazas, a town further north along the coast. The author of *Life of General Narciso López* depicted the filibusters as being angry at the Creoles, claiming “the people charge us with endeavoring to create a revolution for the sake of pillage.” The filibustering men no longer believed that the Cubans desired freedom from Spain, and that if they did, the Creoles claimed, they would be the ones to free themselves. The filibuster claimed that López and his men told Creoles at Cardenas “we will not waste any more time, nor take
another step until we see something on the part of the Creoles besides promises. They must take the next, and then we will go to their assistance; otherwise, we shall not budge an inch.\(^{39}\) Toward the end of that first day, they heard the sound of advancing Spanish troops, and the thrill of the expedition soon ended. The Spanish advanced on the town and quickly routed the filibusters. Boggess recalled that Cubans had been glad when the filibusters arrived, but as they retreated “each one was an enemy.”\(^{40}\)

Many of the men quickly made it back to the ship, though their troubles were not over. The Spanish chased the filibusters back across the Florida Straits. López disbanded the expedition before it arrived in Key West, and the men returned to the main land. U.S. Naval Agents waited for them in Florida and arrested as many as possible despite the efforts of Key West citizens to hide several of them. López returned through Charleston, but eventually was arrested and put on trial along with several others for violation of U.S. Neutrality Acts.

In the aftermath of the expedition, *El Diario de la Marina* rejoiced with news of the news of Spanish victory. It celebrated the bravery of the Spanish army battalions that marched off to do battle with the invading *piratas* and *malvados* who landed on the Cuban shore. The *Diario* published personal accounts from Cardenas, detailing the events of the past few days, the behavior of the army, and the rosters of the valiant battalions, which had overrun López’s ragtag force in the city of Cardenas. Others on the island proclaimed “Gloria a la Nacion Espanol,” making it clear that Cuba remained


part of Spain and that the glory of victory went to the Spanish empire. They also announced that the tranquility of the island had returned quickly after the filibusters left, and consistently praised the patriotism of the Cubans in Cardenas. In New Orleans, the Picayune feared that Spanish colonial authorities would “hunt out victims for punishment,” working upon the fears of the “dispirited Creoles.” Another unfavorable effect of the failure of the expedition, argued the Picayune, would be to impair confidence in the efficacy of American help. The paper lamented that the skill and bravery of the men who fought against “mighty odds” during the U.S.-Mexican War imbued the filibusters with the “charm of the invincibility,” which the events at Cardenas “cannot fail to weaken, if not break entirely.” Thus, the newspaper questioned the ability of the United States to remain victorious in foreign countries.

The Cuban press vehemently denounced the expedition. Referring to the goals of the expedition, El Diario commented that such “lofty expeditions,” were always planned by “men without honor, by men who have betrayed his own country trampling their laws, shaming it and making it appear on the face of the Earth like an outlaw guard.” It referred to the expeditions as a new test for Cuban fidelity and valor, reminding its readers that the filibusters really despised the Cuban government. “the Spaniards of both hemispheres that have been born here or lived here,” the editorial proclaimed, “are not willing to wait to show that they have neither lost the energy of their fathers nor the noble blood of their ancestors.” Such statements demonstrated the manner in which the Spanish used their own form of racial ideology to combat Anglo-

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41 Diario de la Marina, May 18, 1850; ibid., May 22, 1850.

42 New Orleans Daily Picayune, May 29, 1850.
Saxon superiority. By emphasizing the historical roots of Spanish “noble blood,” it emphasized their long and prestigious history in the region.⁴³

Despite the obvious evidence demonstrating that starting a revolution in Cuba was no easy task and that Creole participation was by no means guaranteed, enthusiasm for the expeditions in the United States continued. Even as the filibusters went to trial, support for the expeditions did not wane, and newspapers often defended López’s actions. Southern desire for Cuba proved strong and resilient in 1850.

Quitman’s involvement in the U.S.-Mexican War, and his ire concerning the battles being waged in Congress over southern expansion and the fate of the Mexican cession, revealed his feelings toward the South and its place in the U.S. movement into Latin America. In 1850, the trial of the failed López expedition, Quitman’s owns possible culpability, and the Compromise of 1850, dominated correspondence amongst the Quitman family. John Quitman was in Jackson, Mississippi, serving as governor while his family was dispersed across both North and South. But his children and wife remained in Natchez on the family’s plantation, Monmouth. His sister Louisa wrote to her brother, eager to learn about his involvement and expressing her anxiety. Earlier, in March 1850, Louisa wrote concerning the possibility of his involvement with the Cuban expeditions. She refused to lend any credit to the statements made against her brother, but they continued to make her uneasy. She was fearful that his political opponents would use the accusations to speak out against him and other southerners. His wife Eliza wrote to him to celebrate July 4th and simply asked, “what will you do about that

⁴³ El Diario de la Marina, May 3, 1850.
Quitman allowed his expansionist fantasies to get the better of him momentarily, and as a result, his political career hung in the balance. His family’s worries over his involvement in the expeditions, as well as his fantasies concerning expansion, suggested yet another aspect of how the war’s consequences and its connection with the expeditions. For soldiers, the war shaped their expectations of the filibustering expeditions as much as the rhetoric in the newspapers shaped the public expectations of the expeditions.

By February 1851, Quitman had returned to New Orleans to stand trial for contributing money to, and meeting with the filibusters. His sister again wrote, concerned over the trial and Quitman’s reported connections with López and the expeditions. The story quickly shifted away from López and his efforts to help the Creoles of Cuba to the scandal of the Mississippi Governor’s arrest and trial. Louisa had only seen one paper in Vermont that had reported Quitman’s denials of any connection between himself and López. It was then, as she had suspected from the start of the indictment that it had been carried out by a group of subversives to “some political end known best to the projectors of it, while at the same time it afforded a vent for their spite & enmity.” Some New Orleanians celebrated Quitman and his expansionist ideas, and they hosted a public dinner for him. In response to the invitation Quitman wrote: “the condition of the country is so perilous, and my position so expendable that my mind is much and deeply agitated upon the subject...I am now fully satisfied that no southern statesman can . . . discharge his duties to his country, without subjecting his name, his

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44 Louisa R. Quitman to John Quitman, March 3, 1850, Quitman Family Papers #616, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Eliza Quitman, July 4, 1850, Quitman Family Papers.

45 Louisa to John Quitman, August 5, 1850, Quitman Family Papers.
character, and his reputation to . . . abuse.” He responded in the same manner to his daughter, also named Louisa, stating that the “southern question” had made him a target for the Federal Government and the North.  

Eventually the charges against Quitman were dropped due to lack of evidence, but he was forced to resign as Mississippi governor. The *Houston Democratic Telegraph and Texas Register* called the entire trial “one of the most ridiculous efforts to display the power of the Federal government that has been attempted since the days of the gag laws.”

During the excitement of the López’s trial, J.D.B. DeBow published an article in his *De Bow’s Review* in which he described a growing American “military spirit.” DeBow denounced the notion that only republics were obsessed with territorial aggrandizement, but noted that republics, and the United States in particular, seemed to possess a clear talent for violent expansion into new territory. With the U.S.-Mexican War, claimed DeBow, “the nation entered upon a new career, which was predicted of her, and to which her institutions and positions peculiarly inclined—one of war and conquest!”

According to DeBow, the nation possessed an insatiable appetite for new territory, for a universal empire. Yet DeBow felt it important to call attention to the fact that this expedition did not bode well for the Americans currently living on the island, fearing that the colonial authorities might place restrictions on them, and noting that daily the newspapers in Cuba denounced the “Buena Vista Yankees,” recalling the last major battle of the U.S.-Mexican War.

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46 John to Louisa Quitman, September 21, 1850, Quitman Family Papers.

47 John to Louisa, Quitman Family Papers, March 14, 1851.
The U.S.-Mexican War shaped both critiques of and justifications for the expeditions to Cuba. DeBow’s concerns also highlighted a conflict between the process of expansion and the discourse surrounding it. While the discourse relied on highly racialized visions of future conquest based on successful past expansionist projects, the reality of the process often disrupted the economy and society that Gulf South expansionists were attempting to secure.\(^ {48}\)

During the trial, the *Daily Delta* published a history of the expedition as a defense for López’s actions. Davis called the expedition the “most extraordinary piece of Knight-errantry on record—at least since the days of a certain Spanish gentleman dubbed ‘Don Quixote.’” J.C. Davis insisted that the Cubans had asked the filibusters as “individuals having a right to leave home and go to Cuba, California, Hungary, Italy, or anywhere else” to sail to their assistance. “They [the Cubans] did,” proclaimed Davis, “in the person of Gen. López.” Davis emphasized the centrality of López to American conceptions of Cuban desires, the Cuban independence movement, and the Cuban people as a whole.\(^ {49}\) In response to doubts about the filibustering expeditions, supporters such as John Henderson, López’s lawyer during the trial stated, “I still believe in the importance, the morality, and probability of the enterprise.” He further believed it was one that “the South should steadfastly cherish and promote,” emphasizing the region’s vested interest in expansion and the annexation of Cuba.\(^ {50}\)

They had received information from the island claiming that the Creoles were fully


\(^ {49}\) J.C. Davis, *The History of the Late Expedition to Cuba, by One of the Participants* (New Orleans: Job Office of the *Daily Delta*, 1850) 2-3.

\(^ {50}\) John Henderson to John A. Quitman, Nov. 6, 1850, Quitman Family Papers; New Orleans *Daily Picayune* April 15, 1851; *Mobile Daily Register* April 18, 1851.
behind the expeditions, he insisted. “The junta, and all engaged in the enterprise, were
in high spirits; the utmost confidence was reposed by the heads of the expedition in the
valor of the Americans; nothing was wanted but a field in which to display their prowess,
and then ‘wo to the Spaniard.’”

On July 3rd, Joaquin de Agnero y Sanchez, and a small band of Creole men who
had joined him, rode into the town of Principe, shouting “Liberty—Death to the
Spaniard!” The filibusters and revolutionaries believed that hundreds of Principe’s
citizens were only waiting for the word to rise up in revolution, but again, this was not
the case. Either because of fear or miscommunication, only fifteen citizens heeded
Agnero y Sanchez’s call. El Filibustero reported that this lack of enthusiasm disturbed
Agnero y Sanchez, but he continued his attempts, with little success, to rouse the
people of Principe. The next day revolutionary forces made yet another attempt at
creating an uprising, this time outside of town in the hills of Najassa, just beyond the city
of Principe. Here they drew a larger group of supporters, but remained small in
comparison to the 400 they had been expecting. Despite these setbacks they unfurled
their flag of independence and read aloud their declaration. This lack of support on the
part of the Cuban Creoles plagued the campaign and finally came to affect the views
that many Americans held concerning the Creoles of Cuba and the process of
expansion. Cuban reluctance as well as López’s lack of progress disheartened the
filibusters.

The federal court acquitted López. He immediately began planning a third and
final expedition, which set sail in August 1851. The court’s decision did not sanction the
expeditions, but acquittal did suggest to those interested in joining the filibusters that no
real harm would come to them if they took part. As the ships arrived at Bahia Honda in Cuba, Gulf newspapers excitedly announced López’s arrival and quickly began relating rumors of revolution in Cuba. Many of the revolutionaries who López had been in contact with on the island sent word to other possible hotbeds of revolutionary activity. The message came back that Creoles at Puerto Principe would support the filibusters and they had made a demonstration there on the 4th of July, when a declaration of independence was read aloud to the people. This, the filibusters hoped, would inspire others across Cuba to rise up against the Spanish.

However, news from Cuba was shoddy and incomplete, making it difficult for those within the Gulf of Mexico to know exactly what was happening to the filibusters. At one point the Pensacola Gazette all but proclaimed López and his men victorious, claiming that a Spanish commander had offered López concessions and that Spanish soldiers daily joined López’s ranks.51 Yet in reality López’s hopes of arriving in the middle of a revolution disintegrated when the planned uprisings failed to materialize. During one of the final battles between Spanish troops and the filibusters, the Spanish army took 51 members of the filibustering expedition prisoner, including López, and planned to execute them. As the rest of the filibusters retreated, Boggess claimed that some men who were left behind, were forced to live in hiding on an abandoned sugar plantation for years before they could escape to the mainland. The Cubans living around the plantation thought the men were ghosts haunting the old place.52

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51 Pensacola Gazette, August 20, 1851; Daily Picayune, August 19, 1851; Daily Alabama Journal, August 25, 1851.

52 Boggess, A Veteran of Four Wars, 30; Johnson, River of Dark Dreams, 330-331.
López’s impending execution disheartened many along the Gulf Coast as letters from prisoners arrived in New Orleans and were published in the newspapers. One filibuster simply asked his friends to think of him often and asked his wife to never remarry. He would die “worthy of a Creole,” and “worthy of Louisiana.” On August 16, 1851, Spanish troops removed 51 of López’s men from the prison in which they were held and executed them by firing squad. By the time many of the letters were published in the newspapers, the young men of the expedition were already dead. On September 1, 1851, López was also executed.53

In New Orleans and Mobile, public outrage developed into violence and targeted destruction. Citizens sympathetic to López and his men attacked symbols of Spanish culture and society. Residents targeted cafes, cigar shops, and wrecked the Spanish newspaper La Union as well as property belonging to the Spanish consulate.54

In the United States, López and the other filibusters who had been executed became martyrs for the expansionist cause and Cuban freedom. When the Cuban exiles and López supporters learned about the execution, the Junta and its supporters in the United States, mourned “with tears,” streaming from their eyes. These groups regarded López as “a pure, high-minded, noble-hearted patriot, and the tears they gave to his memory came up from their hearts.”55 Lucy Halcombe, a young woman in Texas, penned a novel that blended fact and fiction, effectively spinning both into the fabric of legend. She wrote of López’s heroic army as they sailed away to fight for another


54 The Daily Picayune, August 22, 1851; Alabama Daily Journal, August 25, 1851.

nation’s freedom. Death at the hands of Spanish captors was not supposed to happen to American citizen-soldiers.\textsuperscript{56}

The outcome of the expeditions was startling and horrifying for many who had hoped that Cuban annexation was finally within reach. It altered the discourse of expansion by separating the narrative of the U.S.-Mexican War from the annexation of Cuba. The connections between past wars and the present struggle for Cuba were no longer as seemlessly connected. The loss of the expeditions and the executions also went against the very idea of American superiority over Latin American and Spanish peoples. This was not what had happened in the U.S.-Mexican War, and the connections between the filibusters and the war slowly fell away from remembrances of the expeditions. López was memorialized, but expansionists no longer compared the Cuban fiasco with the U.S.-Mexican War. Remembering the end of the expedition, Boggess lamented López’s passing, but displayed a sense of ambivalence and even bitterness towards the Cubans, exclaiming that “there was not a particle of difference between the Spaniards and Cubans; the big majority have their price.” While negative views of Creoles did emerge out of the expeditions, interest in Cuba did not diminish and the vision of them as a weakened people requiring Anglo American rescue persisted.

Reaction to the lack of Cuban support in both expeditions reflected a sense of confusion stemming from the belief that all Creoles on the island supported annexation. As a result, views on Cuban Creoles became much more ambivalent.\textsuperscript{57} The San

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\textsuperscript{56} Lucy Halcombe Pickens, \textit{The Free Flag of Cuba, or, The Martyrdom of Lopez A Tale of the Liberating Expedition of 1851} (New York: DeWitt & Davenport, 1855).
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\textsuperscript{57} Boggess. \textit{A Veteran of Four Wars}, 31.
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Antonio Ledger described their situation in Cuba, noting that “it is terrible to tell the tale of wo and agony that the mother land visits up on the poor provincials.” A San Antonio newspaper called the Spanish “lazy and leprous nobility, stinking with baseless pride, like hideous vampires, suck away for their own support vampires, suck away for their own support the treasures of the land.” They imagined a scene in which a young Creole woman described as “A sweet girl . . . this creature is a Creole daughter, bright as her own native isle,” was raped by Spanish officers and her father murdered. Despite the fact that the many within the Gulf South were embittered by the outcome of the expeditions, the Ledger maintained “The Creole is a dog under the heel of a drunken and wrathful owner--a galley slave under constant goad . . . the sons and daughters of Cuba, in the midnight hour, when the brutal oppression is asleep, go to the beach. They ask, too, the many exiles whom tyranny has driven away to this dear soil to bestir themselves in their behalf. Alas for Cuba!”

For several years afterward in New Orleans and other parts of the Gulf South, Cuban Creoles and white southerners commemorated López’s death and sought to keep the memory of the expeditions alive. Citizens of New Orleans held memorials for López despite the fact that his body was never returned to Louisiana. In New Orleans, the cathedral bells rang on Wednesday, September 1, 1852, much the way they had when the city first learned the news of the death of López and the prisoners. Friends were asked to go and pay tribute to General López, the “Washington of Cuba.” The Picayune again related the commemoration of López’s funeral in the city in 1853.

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58 San Antonio Ledger, August 19, 1852.
During the 1854 commemoration many of the speeches were recorded in small pamphlets that could be purchased throughout the city. John S. Thrasher, one of John Quitman’s associates spoke about López and the relations between the U.S. and Cuba, which he viewed as being intrinsically linked as a result of López’s attempts to begin a revolution. When Thrasher addressed the crowd, he talked about López’s tragic glory and the heroism of his men who had all been executed several years ago. However, throughout most of his speech he focused on the new relationship between the “Iberian” races that lived in Latin America and the Anglo Saxon race in the United States. Thrasher stated, “here in this common tomb, and in these common glories, we have the perfect demonstration that the Iberian and the Saxon can unite.” He went on to tell the crowd “Northern and Southern America would stand united before the world upon the noblest sentiment that can animate the heart of man; liberty and the elevation of the masses.” Yet embedded in his call for North American and South American unity along the lines of liberty and the “elevation of the masses” was a critique of South American nations and their road toward independence. Thrasher declared that to Cuba, “the last remnant of the Spanish power in the New World, was reserved the glorious task of avoiding the errors of her elder sisters, and of initiating the true theory of their regeneration and welfare.” Gaspar Betencourt, a Cuban exile who also spoke at the memorial, and announced “and in 1854 there are more men, more hearts, more sympathies, more resources and means ready to be sacrificed for the cause of Cuban independence than Narciso López had in 1851; and never more clearly than to-day has the [Spanish] Government revealed its fears and its impotency to maintain its unjust dominion.”

59 John S. Thrasher, *Addresses Delivered at the Celebration of the Third Anniversary in Honor of the
The speeches given at the 1854 commemoration revealed several new narratives that began to emerge concerning Anglo visions of Latin American nations and the part Cuba was expected to play in that vision. They also shed light on the manner in which Cuban exiles appropriated López for their own ends and included him in their pantheon of revolutionaries despite the fact that he had worked to complete Anglo American expansionist projects. For them he fought for Cuban independence. While for the Americans he fought for Cuban annexation. Within the Gulf of Mexico, Latin American peoples participated in the shaping of discourse regarding American expansion as much as Anglos did, and like the Gulf South, Cubans were willing to use expansionism to their own ends.

**Conclusion**

New Orleanians may have begun to question the strategy of unsanctioned armed expeditions to annex Cuba, but gaining the gem of the Antilles remained a major goal for Gulf South expansionists and Cuban annexationists throughout the country. Amidst all of the memorializing and commemorating of López’s expeditions, concern for purchasing Cuba from Spain gained traction within Gulf Coast society, just as it did in the U.S. government. This concern did not stop John Quitman from attempting to organize his own filibustering expedition in 1853, for which he was brought up on charges yet again. In 1854, he and two of his associates was fined several thousand dollars. Annexationists’ dreams of Cuban revolution and statehood continued and seemed impossible to stifle.60

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60 Decree, Circuit Court Document, July 7, 1854, Quitman Family Papers.

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Through his involvement in both local city affairs and his senatorial duties, Soulé became interested in Cuban annexation, yet the prospect of armed expeditions and filibustering did not appeal to him. His involvement in U.S. efforts to purchase Cuba demonstrated his belief that annexing Cuba was paramount. His efforts eventually lead him to journey to Spain to try to arrange a treaty over Cuba. Many felt he possessed “too much sentimental spirit to succeed in the diplomatic world.” The Spanish people and the courts thought of him as a filibuster. The filibustering expeditions affected the possibilities of Cuban annexation and gave Spain a ready accusation to level against American overtures.

In 1854 Soulé, James Buchanan, and William L. Marcy helped to create the Ostend Manifesto, which they hoped would be the final push the U.S. would need to annex Cuba. While the manifesto was supported in the Gulf as in many other parts of the South, the North and Europe reviled it. In the U.S. it quickly became swept up in other events. While the Gulf South had been captivated by the drama of filibustering, sectionalism increased in the United States. As López sailed for Cuba for the first time, the Compromise of 1850 was passed. As Soulé, Buchanan, and Marcy crafted their manifesto, the Kansas-Nebraska Act wound its way through Congress, and soon led to the outbreak of violence between antislavery and proslavery supporters. Beyond the borders of the South the manifesto caused a severe backlash as many antislavery proponents used it as yet another example of the South’s intent to take complete control of the government and perpetuate slavery throughout the nation. Fights between North and South had begun to overshadow interests in Latin America. Yet, in the Gulf South

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the developing debate concerning sectionalism still remained couched in the discourse that expansionists created over the past twenty years.

New Orleans and the Gulf region continued to view their choices through a multifaceted prism of defense, economic security, revolution, annexation, territorial aggrandizement, and independence all of which contributed to the borderland nature of the Gulf. In the case of its relationship to Cuba this meant that Americans living in the Gulf’s ports had to consider the voices of Cuban exiles, the U.S. state’s authority, pro-annexationists and anti-annexationists, and Spanish diplomats. Anglos in the Gulf South were forced to navigate these complex communities perhaps more carefully than those living in other parts of the South. The clear debate about Cuban annexation blurred significantly within Gulf Coast communities. So, too, did the debate over secession, as will be seen in Chapter 7.

Cuba continued to play a central role in expansionists’ goals during the latter half of the decade. England’s continued efforts to stop the slave trade also meant that they were again a threatening presence on the Gulf’s border that might collude with the North. Anglo-American conflict on the U.S.-Mexico border made the Gulf South appear even more vulnerable. Whether they were pro-secessionist or anti-secessionist, Gulf southerners used these same issues to voice their opinions on their region’s best course of action. What would secure their continued expansion into Latin America? Would the region continue to be at the vanguard of the United States’ pursuit of territory? Or would it become the threatened coastline of a new nation? In 1854, many of these questions had not yet been fully formed, but as they took shape the Gulf South remembered the struggles of its past and wondered about its future.
CHAPTER 7
“ALL AROUND US AND APPROACHING NEARER”: THE LANGUAGE OF EXPANSION AND SECESSION IN THE ANTEBELLUM GULF COAST

Introduction

“I hope the South will yet be able to obtain what she asks, tho’ she seems fated to much battling still to gain it,” wrote Louisa Lovell Claiborne in a letter she penned to her brother John Quitman in 1850. Ten years later, on August 4, 1860, the Civilian and Galveston Gazette published a letter supposedly written by Republican conspirators in one of the state’s western border counties. If real, the newspaper reasoned, the conspiracy provided “a clue to the late outrages in Texas.” The paper believed that these conspirators intended to destroy southern merchants and millers, and use preachers and teachers to instruct Texans on the evils of slavery. The supposed conspirators believed they had at least “one more struggle to make—that is, free Texas.” After they accomplished their goal, the imagined conspirators planned to connect the Great Lakes with the Gulf of Mexico. Slavery would then be “surrounded by land and by water, and soon sting itself to death.” The Republican conspirators proposed to have meetings at night with African Americans, and “impress upon their clouded intellects the blessings of freedom, induce all to leave.” In 1850, Louisa’s words were a warning. In the aftermath of the U.S.-Mexican War, unfettered expansion into Latin America still seemed wholly possible. By 1854, with the deaths of Narciso Lopez and the filibusters in Cuba, and the virulent backlash against the Ostend Manifesto, further expansion appeared threatened. In the tension-filled years leading up to secession, newspapers and citizens in the Gulf ports used the language of expansion to provide a context for the sectional debates mounting within the nation. While the borders of the South were always imperiled in some way, the world beyond them always seemed to hold the
promise of continued expansion, but as the decade came to a close, that world held more threats than it did hopes.¹

Throughout the 1840s and 1850s the fissures that eventually caused the southern states to secede evolved along with the process of expansion, and the push for additional territory caused many of those deep divisions within the Union that caused many southerners to support secession. In the years leading up to the Civil War, southerners in the Gulf South constructed narratives tied to the experience of expansion. Whether secessionist or unionist, they asked the same questions, but came up with very different answers. Chapter 7 explores the manner in which southern expansionists in the Gulf, unionist and secessionist alike, used this discourse to debate the virtues of secessionism and unionism in the years leading up to the secession. The years before 1861 demonstrate the manner in which rhetoric in the Gulf South began to shift away from expansionism to secession. Southerners used events taking place in the Caribbean and on the U.S.-Mexico border to imagine how secession might affect their region. In the Gulf South, the experiences of expansion, both positive and negative, collided with the growth of southern sectionalism, and in many ways shaped it.² Fears concerning the security of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and the fate of slavery in Cuba combined to create a potent mixture of borderland conflict that shaped the nature of debate concerning the idea of secession. In light of Anglo Southerners’ inability to completely control the former and purchase the latter, the world beyond the borders of

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¹ Louisa Lovell Charbourne to John A. Quitman, August 5, 1850, Quitman Family Papers #616, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Civilian and Galveston Gazette, August 14, 1860.

the South seemed to reject expansionist overtures in much the same way that northerners rejected their entire society. As was discussed in Chapter 6, Latin Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans within Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands fought back against the narratives that Anglo southerners sought to impose on them. In so doing, they forced Anglo Southerners to question the viability of those narratives at the same time that they questioned their place within the nation.

Thus, in 1861 Southerners were forced to ask how best to continue their interests in Latin America, and whether it was even possible to do so. The increase in sectionalist sentiment in the late 1850s revealed the extent to which these narratives were called into question, but also how they were used to frame the South’s most critical decision.³

Although the Gulf South port communities became bastions of expansionism, the region was heavily divided when it came to secession. In Texas, Sam Houston, previously an avid supporter of territorial expansion, threatened his political career and his reputation as a founding father of Texas in an attempt to stave off the secessionist movement. In Galveston, secessionists eventually ruled the day, but there was also a strong undercurrent of unionism on the part of German immigrants, and white Galvestonians who found supporting secession problematic. New Orleans was also heavily divided along political and class lines. Pensacolians found enemies in the form of the soldiers and sailors who inhabited the forts and naval yard, which had once been their salvation. Merchants in the region had cultivated trade connections with both planters and other merchants and factories within the North, England, and Latin

America. During the heyday of antebellum territorial expansionism these connections worked for these groups and helped to justify interests in Latin America, however secession taxed these connections.4

Chapter 7 addresses several main themes discussed throughout this study, examining how they shaped the context of secession. It focuses primarily on the years just before the 1860 election, and considers fears of European intervention, anxiety concerning the complex racial order of the U.S.-Mexico border in Texas, and the importance of Cuba and its continued significance in the Gulf South. Other issues such as the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the collapse of the two-party system, John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry, and the election of Abraham Lincoln remain central to the narrative of secession, but by examining the context in which secession emerged in the Gulf of Mexico other aspects of that narrative come to light.

**Cuba, Europe, and Past and Present Fears**

Throughout the antebellum period, Anglo-southern expansionists viewed European intervention as one of the most significant threats to their commerce and territorial expansion into Latin America. The annexation of Texas and attempted conquest of Cuba had been partly justified by the possibility of Great Britain influencing the development of slavery in both. In each instance, expansionists justified annexation based on the notion that their inclusion would shore up the South against British political influence. During the late 1850s, Gulf expansionists became concerned with England

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and their attempts to stop the African slave trade in the French West Indies and Cuba. In order to emphasize the threat of growing northern opposition to southern expansion, they focused on the fear of English search and seizure of American ships as well as their efforts to stop French and Spanish importation of Africans. In Cuba, Martinique, and the West Indies these southerners recognized a story parallel to their own.  

For some southerners, northern opposition to the South’s expansion into Latin America came as a shock. Albert Sidney Johnston wrote to his son, remarking on the opposition to the South while he was stationed in San Francisco. In a frustrated and bewildered tone he wrote, “I notice with sorrow the progress of fanaticism in the North. What do they want?” “We want to share in its glorious, benevolent, civilizing mission, and its high and magnificent destiny,” continued Johnston. Johnston asserted that the South whole-heartedly supported American expansion. Many often emphasized this destiny in order to side step the issue of sectionalism or denigrate the side supporting it. The master narrative of Manifest Destiny had held the pieces together, but the South’s fight to remain a part of the narrative ultimately removed them from it.

In the mid-1850s, the Gulf South continued to reaffirm its interests in issues surrounding Cuba, but also in the U.S. involvement in stopping the slave trade. By the time that James Buchanan was elected president in 1856, he had been involved in both

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the U.S.-Mexican War and the Ostend Manifesto, which further shaped his ideas about U.S. foreign policy concerning the Caribbean and Mexico. Buchanan was not only an advocate of expansion, but through his positions as foreign minister, secretary of state, and president he was able to turn much of the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny into actual policy much the way Polk had before him. Under the Buchanan administration, the African and Gulf squadrons became more aggressive in stopping slavers leaving Africa. As a result of U.S. participation in the restriction of the trade, many ships carrying slaves also began flying U.S. flags. There had been a number of American vessels and slave importers that did continue to participate illicitly in the trade. In response to an incident in which a British vessel captured an American vessel and searched it, Lewis Cass, Secretary of State, wrote a report on the subject, which was published in the *New Orleans Dialy Picayune*, worrying that the navy would be forced to search every American vessel sailing in the Caribbean.\(^7\) The *Picayune* later quipped "It was wisely said to Mr. Buchanan, a few days ago, by a gentleman whose opinion be asked as to the best remedy for the Kansas trouble: 'Change the programme; substitute Cuba for Kansas and ostend manifesto for the Lecompton Convention.' The president smiled and brightened up at the idea which went home to one of his warmest feelings and aspirations."\(^8\) Aside from being a crude joke referring to the bloody attacks taking place in Kansas, it was also a reminder of the importance of Cuba to expansionists such as Buchanan.


In his annual message in 1858, Buchanan summed up the current state of American interests in Latin America, and while he maintained the nation’s interests in expanding into Cuba, Mexico, and Central America. His speech also revealed an intense frustration over the lack of U.S. control and authority in South America. Buchanan accused the Spanish of the same charges Polk once leveled against the Mexican Government, claiming that Spanish officials insulted the national flag, seized American property, and injured American citizens. He also blamed them for Cuba’s importation of African slaves. Buchanan claimed, “the truth is, that Cuba, in its existing colonial condition, is a constant source of injury and annoyance to the American people.” Viewed from the vantage point of Washington D.C., this assertion was easy to make. From the position of the Gulf Coast, intervention on the part of U.S. citizens was both discourse and reality. They continued to assert their Anglo-Saxon superiority and authority within these regions.

However, the British navy that patrolled the Gulf in search of slave traders again signaled a weakening of Anglo American commerce and a hindrance to territorial expansion, which the region still valued. In a speech given to the Baconian Society during the graduation ceremonies of the Texas Monument and Military Institute’s first graduating class in 1858, Ashbel Smith spoke about the threats of sectionalism and Great Britain, which challenged the continued expansion of the nation. The *Houston Weekly Telegraph* advertised the speech as one of the closing acts of the evening, and they greatly looked forward to seeing what Smith had to say. Smith, a member of the founding generation of Texas, was a physician from North Carolina who had lived in

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9 “Annual Examination and Commencement in Texas Monument & Military Institute,” *Houston Weekly Telegraph*, June 2, 1858.
Galveston since the city’s founding, had given several speeches concerning expansion throughout the 1850s. Smith began by discussing the seizure of American ships in the Gulf of Mexico and off the coast of Cuba. Though Smith was still largely against secession in 1858, he referred to both British seizure of American ships and a “large party in the Northern States,” which he accused of having insulted the South. His speech was essentially a critique of the North and the British in their efforts to limit southern expansion in the Gulf of Mexico. Smith cautioned those who would put faith in the “delusive lie which England has been indiscriminately whispering through unknown channels into the ear of the South for five and twenty years.” The lie that Smith referred to was the claim that if the South separated from the North then they would find an ally in Great Britain. “Friend! Protection!! Yes such protection as the wolf gave the lamb,” Smith declared. He then accused newspapers such as the New York Tribune of being paid off to tell northerners the opposite, citing as evidence a London Times announcement in 1856 that sympathized with the North over Buchanan’s defeat of John Charles Frémont. Smith invoked the past to give the present context, by recalling the War of 1812, as he closed his speech. Over the past decades the South had become enamored with the growth of the cotton trade, and territorial expansion of the South was accomplished, in part, to provide more room for more cotton. For Smith though, the expansion of the nation into the Gulf South meant more than the growth of a commodity. In his closing statement he remarked, “I think well however of cotton--cotton served a most excellent purpose on the 8th of Jany 1815. It was in bags arranged in front of our gallant soldiers at New Orleans.”

10 “Speech to the Baconian Literary Society,” 1858, Ashbel Smith Papers, 1823-1926, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box 2G237.
attendants wrote a letter to the editor of the *Houston Telegraph* to tell them “His subject was the great value of national power in connexion with our present domestic difficulties.”¹¹

Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, expansionists in the region frequently recalled the War of 1812 as a way to frame the nation and the region’s relationship with Great Britain. During the years before the secession, national events such as the Revolution and the War of 1812 also became reminders of unity and fealty to the nation. For those living within the Gulf South, the victory in the battle of New Orleans signified a strong anti-British sentiment. By connecting cotton with the British in this way, Smith signaled that he in no way supported British involvement in domestic political issues such as slavery, despite the fact that England consumed a large share of the South’s top staple. *The Civilian and Gazette* also relied on the nation’s past for justification of its current interests, and reminded its readers that Thomas Jefferson had also been in support of the purchase of Cuba by reprinting a lengthy letter written by Jefferson on the subject. “It is well for us occasionally to look back upon our former history,” noted the *Gazette*. They felt Jefferson expressed some “sound thoughts upon Cuba annexation . . . and equally sound sentiment upon European aggression.” Jefferson’s thoughts on Cuban annexation along with the idea of seizing Northern Mexico, encompassed the still persistent vision of an “empire for liberty.”¹²

Despite the fact that Buchanan vilified the slave trade, in April 1859 the *Civilian and Gazette* remarked on the positive aspects of it and used Cuba as their example. In

¹¹ *Houston Weekly Telegraph*, July 14, 1858.

¹² *Civilian and Galveston Gazette*, August 3, 1858.
Cuba, they stated “we have ourselves seen many negroes who were brought in slavers from Africa, but have never yet seen one who desired to return.” For the *Gazette*, the British Colonies furnished an example of the effects of the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean. They believed no citizen of Texas was “insensible of the advantages which the State receives from the institution of domestic slavery, or doubts that the negroes are better off in this condition than they are in a state of freedom, whether in the West Indies, Africa, or the Northern States of the Union.” The creators of the constitution of the Republic of Texas “thought proper to denounce the trade as piracy,” and went on to state “we incline to the belief that, were it an open question, a majority of our citizens would treat it with more leniency at the present day.” But the matter had passed from their control when the United States annexed Texas, which hinted at the idea that it could be their decision again if they separated from the Union in some way.\(^\text{13}\) Although the *Civilian and Gazette* viewed the idea of separation from the Union with fewer objections than Smith had in his speech, they both used the nation’s tense relations with Great Britain, past efforts at expansion, and past wars to frame their ideas about the current trend toward sectionalism in the South.

Others in the Gulf used aspects of French and Spanish slavery within the West Indies, as a way to discuss sectionalism and the centrality of slavery to the South. In so doing, they emphasized the connection between slavery, expansion, and the perpetuation of Southern society. Gulf South expansionists joined other Southerners in the hopes that Cuba would help assure their place within the United States at such a critical time. During the Charleston Convention the Democratic Party resolved to

\(^{13}\) “Mr. Jefferson and Cuba,” *Civilian and Gazette*, August 3, 1859, April 8, 1859.
support the acquisition of Cuba from Spain, stating “on such terms as shall be
honorable to ourselves and just to Spain, at the earliest practical moment.”14 The West
Indies provided a view of the future of the South if it did not expand and instead let the
North have its way over the state of slavery in the nation. Picayune produced an article
revealing these complex connections. The paper urged its readers to stay abreast of the
outcome of the French importation of Africans to the West Indies, and wrote: “great
interest to this country, and needs to be well studied and heeded well, by considerate
and patriotic men, now that heated enthusiasts and calculating demagogues are
 clamoring for the putting into force of the theories of which Europe is deploring the
disastrous consequence.” The Picayune felt that the attempts of the French to “rescue”
Africans from what they viewed as a barbarous existence by enslaving them provided
an excellent example of the benefits of slavery.15 While the central questions of slavery
remained that of whether or not it would be allowed in new states, the experiences of
the Gulf South and the struggles between slaveholding European nations and Britain
provided an additional context for this most fundamental issue. Thus revealing the way
that national and international issues intersected with the experiences of those living in
the Gulf South during the prior two decades.

Newspapers charted the comings and goings of slavers in the Caribbean,
reporting how they attempted to avoid run-ins with British vessels. In 1858 the Picayune
reported that Cuban slavers were refitting out of Campeache in the Yucatan because
there were no English cruisers present and the authorities there seldom inquired over

14 “Platform of the National Democracy,” The Crisis!, August 1, 1860.
the ship’s cargo, so long as the captain paid the port fees.\textsuperscript{16} At the end of the decade, Cuba became both a place to watch and a place that might become a part of the United States. Interest in annexing Cuba remained of central importance to expansionists in the Gulf of Mexico, but it also became an example of what might happen to them if the slave trade were to be reopened or remained closed. The Caribbean became a kind of test case for those who guarded against disunion and for those who in some way advocated it. In the relationship between England, France, Spain, and Cuba that played out over the questions of slavery and the slave trade, the same questions so bitterly fought over in the U.S. between the North and South, the South saw every possible outcome of these questions.\textsuperscript{17}

Despite approving the continued importation of slaves into the West Indies in April 1859, the New Orleans Picayune published a brief article speaking out against those who recommended the reopening of the slave trade in the U.S. It believed that most southerners supported the slave trade simply because northerners found it offensive, rather than out of an actual belief that reopening the trade would bring the South any real prosperity. And these same men, wrote the Picayune “who seem to have become possessed with this idea as the remedy for an thousand fancied ills, are ready to declare, if the laws declaring the slave trade piracy be not repeated, the South must set up for herself.”\textsuperscript{18} In this light, the slave trade would hinder the more important issues that confronted the South. The paper wrote the “South is likely to neglect, and perhaps to endanger the success of a policy in which she is vitally interested.” It believed that

\textsuperscript{16} New Orleans Picayune, January 13, 1858.

\textsuperscript{17} New Orleans Picayune, July 30, 1858.

\textsuperscript{18} “False Position,” New Orleans Picayune, April 17, 1859.
slaves should be “dethroned” from the “dictatorship in politics.” The paper hoped that southerners returned to the “importance of making the Gulf of Mexico an American sea-of acquiring if possible by honorable means, the Island of Cuba--of exercising a predominating influence in Central America--and reconstructing the distracted Government of Mexico. These are true Southern as well as national questions.” It felt that the South desperately needed territorial development to open new fields of consumption and enterprise, and not as a reason to open up the slave trade. In laying out alternate views of the slave trade as a threat to Southern territorial expansion, it envisioned a future in which the South held ultimate authority over the “future highway of the world's commerce,” as well as the starting point for the Pacific railroad which was under debate in Congress.\textsuperscript{19} Paying attention to the issues between France and England became one way that southerners shaped their views of the importance of their own system of slavery and the opposition against it during the years leading up to the 1860 presidential election.

**Rejecting the Filibusters**

Towards the end of the decade, ideas about filibustering changed as much as ideas about the slave trade. Due to the outcomes of the filibustering expeditions in Cuba and the defeat of William Walker, who took over Nicaragua in 1856, many southern expansionists in the region began to pull away from supporting armed attempts to start revolutions in Latin America. Instead they focused more of their attention on purchasing these countries. William Preston Johnston related a story concerning his father and a younger officer in the second cavalry. Albert gave the young man advice when he

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
learned that the soldier was about to enlist in a filibustering campaign. As the gentlemen later retold the story to William, Johnston told the man “The days of Quixotism are past, and with them the chance for name and fame in all such enterprises as this.” Johnston wondered if there was any real difference between filibusters and buccaneers. “Tell me not of philanthropy as a plea,” he stated, “if you are pining for adventure . . . fanaticism will soon bring on a sectional collision between the States of the Union, in which every man will have to choose his side.” Johnston’s apparent dislike of filibustering stemmed, in part, from the fact that the two most spectacular filibusters to Cuba and Nicaragua did not end with the annexation of either country. Narciso Lopez was executed in 1851 along with several American accomplices. William Walker, the “grey eyed man of destiny,” had succeeded for a time in Nicaragua, but was eventually deposed and forced back to the United States in 1857. The end of the decade found Walker still trying to reclaim his lost prize, Nicaragua. Johnston’s belief that filibustering was mere piracy also stemmed from his career in the military, which was considered the legitimate force in the process of territorial expansion.20

As the campaigning for the national and state elections got underway in 1860, John Reagan, a U.S. Senator from Texas, issued a circular discussing the central issues facing Texas and the South. Among them was a rejection of the filibustering strategy that so many southerners had once enthusiastically supported. In the circular Reagan wrote, “I am opposed to any unlawful private expeditions being fitted out in our country to rob and murder the people of neighboring nations, with whom we are at peace, either for territory or other booty, and whether in the name of liberty, or of the

South, or any other name.” He rejected his opponent’s claims that because he denounced filibustering it meant he was against further acquisition of “southern territory.” Reagan maintained that he was strongly in favor of the acquisition of Cuba “by fair and honorable means,” which meant through purchase. The alternative was the government seizing Cuba forcibly. Reagan reminded his readers that if any other nation controlled Cuba it would endanger the South’s institutions, commerce, and possibly interfere with their rights. Reagan asserted that he supported further acquisition of slave territory even beyond Cuba by similar means, which like many southern expansionists, he believed would “strengthen the power of the slave States, and tend to the preservation of the Union by increasing their power to resist the sectional fanaticism which exists in the free States.” Reagan’s platform on the subject of Cuba demonstrated that it was a critical issue for Texans just as it had been for New Orleanians, and also presented voters with the view that Cuba could only be purchased by the Union and would also help maintain unity against the onslaught of sectionalism.²¹

Sam Houston, an avowed unionist, used the Cuban slave trade as yet another way to explore what would happen if the country were to adopt such measures. He claimed, “Re-open the African slave trade and the South will be deluged with barbarians.” The price of domestic slaves would plummet, and slaves would become less intelligent according to Houston’s reasoning. Like secessionists, who argued that emancipation would inevitably result in destruction of the northern free labor force by making labor so cheap that workers would be unable to feed themselves and their families, and Houston claimed that further importation of slaves would result in a cotton

glut on the market thereby lowering the overall price of the crop. Even freight prices would go up due to the large number of Africans the South imported. For Houston, the idea of importing slaves from Africa as Cuba had done would mean nothing but ruin for the South and the nation.

In 1860 Richard Henderson, editor of the Galveston Civilian and Gazette, began publishing a circular called The Crisis! in which he recorded secessionists’ remarks from fire-eaters across the South. James Chestnut described the affects of abolitionism in the territories and what it would do to the South. Chestnut spoke about the South as a whole, but in places like Galveston or the other small port towns along the Texas coast, Texans read evidence of these movements along the U.S.-Mexico border. If abolition occurred in the United States, then Chestnut saw in the South’s future much of the same dire prospects that Houston saw if they began they import slaves as had colonies in the West Indies. Chestnut also felt that the South would lose its pride of place among the slaveholding societies in the western hemisphere, as the best among them. Those states that depended on slavery would “bound forward with such power and prosperity as would be without parallel . . . Cuba and Brazil would be beneficiaries of the first result.” Jefferson Davis’ address included similar themes. He explored these narratives in his speech, claiming, “British interference finds no footing, receives no welcome among us of the South; we turn with loathing and disgust from their mock philanthropy.” While this may have been mere abstraction for men of the upper South, it was a dire vision of the future for the Gulf South that was grounded in the real

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22 “Speech of Hon. Sam Houston at Nacogdoches, Saturday July 9, 1859," Civilian and Gazette, July 26, 1859.

international tensions that existed within the region. The contest of territory between North American nation-states and between the United States and its old colonial rivals such as England, France and Spain played out in the communities of the Gulf South.

Cuban exiles hid in New Orleans, Pensacolians saw ships that monitored the British in the Caribbean, Galvestonians once armed men bound for Mexico, and one of its own sons waged war against Native Americans on Texas’ western border. The fiery speeches of South Carolinians drew on national events made intimate by the Gulf’s location at the center of expansion.24

Despite the fact that Chesnut and Houston were on opposite sides of the secession question they nonetheless used the same language to speak about their views. While Cuba still remained the elusive prize, it also became a symbol for many southern fears during the mounting uncertainty of the time. Cuba and the West Indies were used as models of what might happen, but were also used as “boogey men” for southerners thinking they could risk the possibility of staying in a Union under a president who did not bow to the will of the slave power. Cubans would rise up and become the real power in the region. Brazil would take the South’s place if abolitionists had their way. A fearful tone emerged, one that had been quieted and drowned out by the strong expansionist narratives of the past. But the reality of the setbacks as seen through the losses taken by the filibustering expeditions could no longer be held back by the visions of territorial acquisition. They had conquered Mexican territory, but the possibility that it would be lost to the South became very real in the late 1850s, and Cuba was not any closer to being annexed or freed from Spain. Native American and

Mexican incursions along the South’s borders persisted to the point that Texans saw the enemies of slavery drawing down on them from all sides.

Continued conflict between Mexicans and Anglos created an additional level of complexity to the choice of secession. Southerners had to decide which course of action might allow them to continue their pursuit of Cuba. With the disaster of filibustering fresh in the minds of Gulf South expansionists, the purchase of Cuba seemed like a more favorable route. Only the United States could orchestrate such a feat. However, northern opposition weakened this possibility and further complicated the Gulf South’s options. In terms of the U.S.-Mexico border, the question remained the same. Which would secure it best? Leaving the nation or staying in it? In the late 1850s it seemed that only the federal government, primarily through the use of army patrols, would ensure that expansion of Anglo Americans in Texas could continue unencumbered. However in 1859, the eruption of the Cortina War challenged that belief at the same moment that it seemed the government might be taken over by antislavery powers intent on isolating the South and destroying its society.

The State of the Border

In addition to the issue of coastal defenses, which primarily focused on Cuba and the West Indies, the defense of slavery and settlement in the Texas borderlands also played a central role in the construction of the secession debate. In 1859, a series of border skirmishes occurred between Mexicans and Anglos, which horrified many southerners within the Gulf of Mexico. By the election of 1860 these matters became part of the debate over secession. Secessionists cast their decision to support separation as a process that followed in the footsteps of the Founding generation.
Secessionist Texans also looked back through their history by reawakening loyalty to the Republic of Texas.  

During Buchanan’s 1858 annual address, he illustrated prevailing notions concerning Mexico since the war’s end. He discussed the current relationship between the United States and Mexico in two different lights, which elucidated the changing nature of expansionist narratives concerning Latin America. First, he emphasized Mexico’s tumultuous political atmosphere. Buchanan cited the number of coups, dictators, and governments that came to power after independence, and the struggles for liberal reform in the 1850s, which he believed contributed to the lack of protection for both Mexican and U.S. citizens “against lawless violence.” As a result, the treaty between the U.S. and Mexico amounted to little more than a dead letter. Secondly, he focused on the state of the U.S.-Mexico border. “There is another view of our relations with Mexico,” Buchanan stated, which arose from the “unhappy condition of affairs along our southwestern frontier, which demands immediate action.” He cited “large bands of hostile and predatory Indians . . . lawless Mexicans from passing the border and committing depredation on our remote settlers,” which roamed the Mexican States along the border, and accused the local governments of northern Mexican states of being helpless to stop them.  

Throughout the 1850s the growth of settlement, slavery, and cotton within Texas heightened anxiety over the security of the U.S.-Mexico border and the West Texas borderlands, but the added tension of sectionalism, John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry,  


26 “President's Message,” Civilian and Galveston Gazette, December 15, 1858.
and a host of local conflicts between Anglos and Mexicans posed additional questions concerning the Union for Gulf South citizens. *The Civilian and Gazette* recorded an exchange between several senators concerning the Indian appropriations in which Illinois Representative Owen Lovejoy moved to strike down an appropriation for maintaining Indian reservations in Texas, and the Oregon and Washington territories. Texas representative, Guy Bryan, opposed the amendment on the grounds that he feared what would happen if Native Americans in Texas were allowed to leave the reservation. “Say you will not give us that protection, and we will protect ourselves. We have done it, and can do it again,” said Bryan. It was believed that Mexican citizens also wanted continued assistance from U.S. armed forces. The *Civilian and Galveston Gazette* wrote: “It seems that life and property are not safe anywhere, and that the great mass of the responsible portion of the community look to the United States as their only hope.” The mention of both of these issues at the close of 1859 stemmed from the past years’ conflicts. While both Mexican Texans and Anglo Texans worried over Native American incursions on their borders, violence between their own communities dominated the debate over Texan border defenses throughout the closing months of 1859.

In the summer of 1859, an altercation between an elite ranchero, Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, and the Brownsville marshall ended in the marshall’s death, and sparked a series of violent clashes that resulted in the First Cortina War. In the years since the U.S.-Mexican War, Cortina had run aground of a group of Anglo judges and attorneys in Brownsville who he accused of appropriating lands from Tejanos in the

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27 “Texas and the Union,” *Civilian and Galveston Gazette*, January 25, 1859.
county. During September and November, Juan Cortina and an armed group of supporters numbering forty to eighty men occupied the town of Brownsville, a bordertown on the Rio Grande. They rode through the streets shouting “Viva Mexico!” and “Death to the Americans!” In a moment of cooperation, Brownsville citizens actually pleaded with Mexican officials in Matamoros for help. They crossed the river and negotiated with Cortina, who agreed to evacuate the town. However, tensions remained high throughout the fall and several armed bands of men from Brownsville targeted Cortina’s followers.  

A letter written by a Brownsville citizen to the Picayune in October related the events through an Anglo’s perspective. The writer worried that all Mexicans, even the elite and officials from Matamoros, would join Cotina. In November the paper argued that American troops should string Cortina up no matter where they found him, whether on the American side of the Mexican side of the Rio Grande. The Picayune urged Congress to take measures to authorize the President to send in troops to occupy both sides of the river due to Mexico’s “distracted condition.” The paper wrote “the distracted condition of Mexico leaves us no alternative now but to take care of ourselves, our country and our countrymen, without expecting anything from any of the governments there.” Eventually, the Texas Rangers were called in and chased Cortina and his company which had grown to 400 men from the region. The Rangers defeated Cortina on December 27, 1859, and he fled across the river, hiding in Mexico.  

Although the federal government regarded this as a victory, many Texas newspapers castigated

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28 Houston Weekly Telegraph, October 12, 1859.

29 New Orleans Picayune, October 19, 1859, November 18, 1859.
federal troops for their inability or unwillingness to cross into Mexico to capture Cortina and his men.30 Events such as the Cortina War of 1859, coupled with Harpers Ferry, led many Anglo Texans to view the U.S.-Mexico border as a hostile place filled with enemies that could use the border’s permeability and the perceived Mexican opposition to slavery as a way to infiltrate the cotton belt and inspire slave insurrection. All of these events contributed to the complex nature of the choices of secession and Union in the Gulf South. As Buchanan had stated, the border region was inherently unstable. The extent to which the government worked to maintain the racial order of the region remained a central issue to the Gulf states.31

Governor Hardin Runnels’ annual message expressed these sentiments. He wrote, “witness the recent invasion and attempted insurrection at Harper’s Ferry, and which, though differing in the commission of the overt act, events have had counterparts in our state . . . not less ominous.” Runnels ended his message by proclaiming that “equality in the union or independence outside of it should be the motto of every Southern state.”32

To many Texans, promises of border security went unmet from 1857 to 1859. In the 1859 election year, Sam Houston ran as part of the Opposition Party and hoped to win favor with the Mexican and German communities by appointing Angel Navarro, a Mexican-Texas from a well-respected Tejano family, as his lieutenant governor. As a

30 Montejano, Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas 32-33; DeLeon, They Called them Greasers, 53-55
32 “Governor’s Message,” Texas State Gazette, November, 12, 1859; Marten, Texas Divided, 15.
result of his shrewd maneuvering, and Runnels’ disastrous dealings with Texas’ borders, Houston won the gubernatorial election of 1859.  

A female correspondent, Volumnia, wrote to the *Austin State Gazette* in December 1860, espousing loyalty to the state of Texas and asking the state’s men to look at the spectacle of their “bleeding frontier.” “Do you think that the depredations there committed are only the offspring of the fiendish Indians that swarm upon our borders,” she asked.  

When Volumnia urged the unionist men of Texas to stop and ponder, she revealed the fears associated with threats to the borders in the state by both Mexicans and Native Americans. Both unionists and secessionists emphasized the state’s border troubles, though for different reasons. Where secessionists saw no help from the federal government, and therefore saw no reason to remain in the Union, unionists saw the U.S. military as the only way to ward off these threats and establish an order that benefited Anglo and southern social and cultural structures.

Throughout this period, the U.S.-Mexico border became an example of what was happening, how the federal government did not appear to be interested in protecting southerners living within the borderlands or their economic interests. The actual process of secession took shape in a variety of different ways throughout the region. Each was as dramatic as the unionist and secessionist forces that met to decide Texas’ fate. Citizens in all three Gulf Coast communities studied here held meetings and each one met secession along with the rest of their states. Though the region’s fate was experienced by all, each city experienced secession in ways that were similar to those

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34 Volumnia, “From a Texas Lady,” *Austin State Gazette* (December 29, 1860).
of other southern communities, which perhaps made them more like other southerners than had their prior experience with expansion. Yet the diversity of the populations including immigrants, as well as the presence of the military also shaped the outcome of secession.

The Gulf South Chooses

Territorial expansion into Latin America was largely disrupted as Gulf citizens joined their southern neighbors in debating secession. Many of the communities along the Gulf Coast that had been centers of expansionist thought now became centers of secessionist debate. While they became caught up in the frenzy of the moment, the changes that had taken place in the cities through the antebellum period from the different groups of people that had immigrated to the cities, and their position on a vulnerable coastline, shaped the process of secession in each city much the same way that it had once shaped expansion and the discourse that evolved to maintain it. John Breckenridge won the lower South states, and all of the Gulf South states seceded early, following South Carolina in January and February.

In Galveston, as in the rest of Texas, the choices that citizens faced possessed an additional level of complexity, because Texans considered the possibility of returning to an independent Republic, in addition to choosing whether or not to stay in the Union or go with its southern sisters and form a southern confederacy. Galveston, like many other cities along the Gulf, was quite heavily divided over the issue of secession.

William Pitt Ballinger, a real estate lawyer in Galveston, had a law office in the city which quickly became a center of debate in 1859, as his acquaintances argued over the possible outcomes of election. According to Ballinger, several of his friends argued for hours over the topic of secession, and many unionist friends determined to "go
north,” if Texas was going to secede. The next two evenings the Democrats of the city held meetings at the market, which Ballinger attended though found disheartening as the voices of the secessionists grew louder. At both meetings Ballinger made a point to remain quiet, perhaps feeling the tensions rising within the city between the two factions.

Anglo southerners were not the only ones considering the choices that secession posted. For immigrants in the port cities secession meant they would be in a wholly new country. Many German immigrants came to the Gulf Coast intent on escaping European wars and revolutions. Now the country they had entered as a refuge looked to be collapsing as well. While these issues were not directly tied to the discourse of expansion, German immigrants’ presence had been part of Texas’ expansion and settlement. Germans within Galveston were largely Unionist as were most Germans within the state. Germans had a difficult choice in the gubernatorial election, the unionist choice was Sam Houston whom Germans had come to dislike because of his past nativist connections with the Know Nothings. In a moment of desperation, the Know Nothings attempted to woo Germans away from the Democratic Party, charging that the pro-slave-trade Democrats wanted to “run out the German labor and bring in slaves.” Growing German support of Houston caused him to reject his nativist past, which he did in a letter to Ferdinand Flake, editor of the German newspaper Die Union. Hardin Runnels, Houston’s opponent and the incumbent governor, accused Houston of pulling the “wool over the eyes of Galveston German voters.” A German citizen of Galveston published a letter in the Houston Telegraph responding to the attacks, stating, “we have long sought for the country which guarantees us that full share of political and religious
liberty denied us at home. We found that blessed country in this great Union, and this imposing confederacy of several states, and we will cling to it forever.” George Schneider wrote that Germans in Galveston did not believe in a northern and southern confederacy, but in the Union as the “great bulwark of liberty” which was in danger of being destroyed.35 In April, Democrats met at a convention in Galveston and created a platform that leaned toward secession, arguing that Texas had the right to annul its compact with the Union, and support its southern sisters in their course of action.

In the aftermath of Lincoln’s election on November 6, 1860, Texans organized meetings to consider union or disunion. The coastal town of Indianola reported the largest meeting in the town’s history, which began with a procession led by citizens to the courthouse where the meeting was held. The Lone Star flag led the way, and citizens held banners emblazoned with sentiments such as “states rights,” “we are with South Carolina,” “Texas is Sovereign,” and “none but slaves submit.” Banners such as these conflated the memory of Texas independence and Texas sovereignty with the argument for southern independence in the wake of Lincoln’s election.36

Many Texans believed that neither the Union nor the Confederacy were good choices, and that Texas should go back to being a Republic. They argued, “We all know the Republic of Texas can be sustained in independence, and unless we can better our condition materially, we for one, should be in favor of standing aloof. Self-protection is the first law of nature, and the great law of States. In none of these alternatives can we be made to occupy the humiliating position to which a submission to an abolition


36 The Bellville Countryman, November 21, 1860; Indianola Courier, November 24, 1860.
triumph would now reduce us." The **Telegraph** participated in a debate taking shape in the wake of Abraham Lincoln’s election and the rise to power of the Republican Party. Anglo Texans again invoked a sense of nationalism associated with the original construction of Texas as a nation-state. It reminded readers about their successful experience with secession when Texas broke off from Mexico.

Public meetings continued all throughout the summer months, and politics consumed Galvestonians lives much the way that talk of trade and expanding transportation up river. Ballinger recorded the phenomenon by simply saying “wasted all morning in political discussion which amounted to nothing” He went on, noting “same all over town.” In August, Ballinger spoke at a large meeting, giving what he called a “constitutional speech,” which was received well, but later he worried over how such a public demonstration of his views might affect his growing law practice. The **Daily Delta** advertised meetings in which representatives from Texas would be present, and asked “Will the people of New Orleans support and justify them?”

Whereas in the small community of Galveston the German support of unionism was a visible presence, in New Orleans the immigrant population was much more divided. The **New Orleans Picayune** posted a letter to the editor taken from the **New Orleans Creole** in which they claimed that principal German newspapers were unionist, an editor, E.L. Bolitz sent a letter to the **Creole**. He wrote: “Does not this prove to the South that a change of our naturalization laws is essential to our safety? We are nourishing in the South lately made citizens who join the abolition conspirator against

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us. Greely was right when he said ‘Emigration is the cradle of freedom’—meaning abolitionism.”

As senator, Pierre Soulé was a much more public supporter of Union than the German newspaper editors of Galveston and New Orleans. He had long professed loyalty to his state as well as loyalty to the nation. During his time as a senator, after he gave a speech on the African slave trade, Henry Clay denounced him by leveling charges of disunionism, and claimed “this damned Frenchmen does more harm to our cause than good.” Soulé answered, “When the controversy breaks its walls and degenerates into collision or rupture, a profound sentiment that I owe to my adopted country orders me to abstain and to leave its destinies to its native children and Providence.” Soulé opposed secession, but had always been loyal to Louisiana. During Soule’s address at the Democratic Convention in Charleston, Soule spoke about the issues that had arisen since the U.S.-Mexican War and how the South had handled each one by opposing them, but never leaving the Union. When California entered the Union, many southerns had opposed its entrance as a free state. Soule claimed that Louisiana could not support secession, because she could not “be so far oblivious of the past and recent services as to disown that fearless and indomitable champion of popular rights and state equality.” Though Soulé supported the Union, he eventually sided with Louisiana when it seceded from the Union on January 26, 1861.

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39 The Washington American, August 3, 1856; New Orleans Picayune, August 1, 1856.

40 F. Gaillardet, “Pierre Soule who died in New Orleans, was the most remarkable Frenchman of the New World. He was the only one of our compatriots who came to be so popular in the United States that he became a Senator at Washington, having declaimed with the most eminent orators, and having been given the honor of representing his adopted country as Special Envoy and Plenipotentiary minister in a strange court.” Louisiana Liberte, Nos. 19, pg 33-35; Waldo W. Braden and Pierre Soule, “Secession Means Disunion,” Louisiana History: The Journal of Louisiana Historical Association 6, no.1, 82.
When secession came, it quickly consumed New Orleans in the way that the U.S.-Mexican War had done. Maria Craig wrote a letter to her sister Franny Levrich, who’s husband owned a merchant company that did business in the city, and told her of the arrival of the military. She was concerned that mail between North and South might end. Craig wrote: “Our streets are filled with large Military Companies; and composed of the very Flower and Chivalry of Louisiana--thousands have left for Fort Pickens, and other Military Stations . . . enthusiasm is very great.”

The men Craig observed were intent on taking control of the military fortifications there. The Gulf South had once lobbied hard for federal government appropriations to improve the forts and naval yard in Pensacola, but after secession southerners were intent on removing one of the region’s most vital defense posts from the Union.

For Pensacolians, the experience of secession brought about glimmerings of the war to come. Pensacola’s proposed prosperity under the navy and army stalled during the 1850s. The region was hit with several yellow fever epidemics similar to those that affected Galveston, New Orleans, and Mobile. The epidemic of 1853 proved to be especially bad, and no one could ever be sure if it was the town or the naval yard which had caused it. Interaction between the town and the naval yard diminished after the outbreaks of yellow fever. As the town recovered, life began returning to its normal pace, however by then sectionalism began to overtake the expansionist rhetoric of the past. However, secessionists were outspoken in Pensacola. Immediately after Abraham Lincoln’s election, large meetings were held in the city to determine how the citizens

41 Maria Craig to Franny Leverich, April 28, 1861, Franny Leverich Eshleman Craig collection, Manuscripts Collection 225, Howard-Tilton Memorial library, Tulane University, New Orleans.
would address disunion. One naval officer remarked that it appeared as though all “men, women, and children had gone mad.”

During the early days of January, Lieutenant Adam J. Slemmer then in charge of the U.S. army at Fort Barrancas, quickly recognized that Fort Pickens was much more easily defensible, and a prime target for secessionists. William Chase, who had overseen construction at the forts and helped to bolster the Pensacola economy, resigned from the U.S. Navy and commanded the Confederacy’s forces at Pensacola. He quickly moved to capture forts McRee and Barrancas as well as the naval yard. On January 8, 1861, a group of local men from Pensacola under his command attacked Fort Barrancas. Fighting in the late night darkness, the Federal soldiers within the fort repelled their attempt to take over the fort, which hastened Slemmer’s decision to pull his forces back to Fort Pickens. On that same day Slemmer destroyed 20,000 pounds of gunpowder at Fort McRee, spiked the guns at Barrancas, and evacuated 51 soldiers and sailors to Fort Pickens.

Despite the size and enthusiasm of the secessionist meetings, West Florida provided the largest number of delegates to the secession convention who urged postponing the final decision until other southern states seceded. Urging patience was common in the days after South Carolina seceded in December. Going against convention delegates that urged patience, the more ardent secessionists at the convention dominated the proceedings, and Florida seceded on January 10, 1861.

On two separate occasions, January 15, 1861 and January 18, 1861, Slemmer refused locals’ demands that they surrender the fort to the Confederacy. Slemmer

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42 Quoted in Tracy J. Revels, Grander in her Daughters: Florida’s Women During the Civil War (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 10.
managed to hold onto the fort until April when it was reinforced by other U.S. forces. As a result, Fort Pickens became one of the few fortifications in the Gulf South that remained in Union hands through the duration of the war.\textsuperscript{43}

In July, after the battle of Bull Run, some of the first bodies came back to New Orleans; Pierre Soulé received a letter that requested his presence at the funeral of a dear friend. James Trudeau wrote him, asking that he be there as a representative of, “all those who are united in purpose to see triumphant the ideas and principles of our Confederate States, in one word all the true patriots of the South, to render a last tribute of respect to him who shed his blood in defense of the Sacred Rights of our Country.”\textsuperscript{44}

After secession, the Gulf South’s borders were redrawn, as they had been when Texas entered the United States in 1845. The port cities of the Gulf became the Confederacy’s southern coast, and one of its most vulnerable positions. The anxieties that permeated their present and the ideas about their future had shaped the debate over secession in the years before 1860, and many of the changes that took place in the region throughout the antebellum period contributed to the many ways that Gulf southerners experienced secession. Their place along the borders of the South would come to shape their experience of the Civil War just as it had shaped their experience of the U.S.-Mexican War.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Secession caused many to reassess their views of the Caribbean and Latin America. It also called into question the way they viewed their communities and their


\textsuperscript{44} James Trudeau to Pierre Soule, July 8, 1861, Pierre Soule Papers, Mss. 401,1044,2028, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.
place within the South. It caused people to dust off old ideas or question those they thought fundamental and incontrovertible. As the country went to war, William Preston Johnston looked over an old essay he wrote in his boyhood days, entitled “Will Democracy Ultimately Prevail.” It was a young man’s attempt to reason through his lessons on Greek and Roman political philosophy. On July 7, 1861, Johnston wrote on the cover “I wrote this about 1851. I would to God I could say in 1861 it is all-true, But there is a good deal of nonsense in it. July 7th 1861. W.P.J.” He went on to write “In these times of convulsion and change, of turmoil and disaster, of despotism and anarchy, of wild speculation and wilder experiment, it becomes us as reasoning beings to consider whither we are tending . . . We must solve this problem.”\textsuperscript{45} Both he and his father, Albert Sidney would serve in the Confederacy. Despite Johnston’s fealty to the union and the army he had served for the majority of his adult life, he chose to follow the state that he had made his home, rather than the nation he fought to expand. Albert Sidney Johnston died at the battle of Shiloh on April 6, 1862.

Several years prior to the outbreak of Civil War, James Buchanan discussed the paths that U.S.-Latin American relations should take. While he was not the sole creator of foreign policy toward Latin America, his speech pointed the way towards what became the nation’s agenda concerning the region after the Civil War. He worried over how the border would protect settlers moving into the Southwest where there was, according to him, “rampant lawlessness,” and proposed sending troops there. In reference to Central America, he believed that the routes across the isthmus were of incalculable importance. Buchanan stated that “all commercial nations, therefore, have

a deep and direct interest, that these communications shall be rendered secure from interruption . . . it could not be pretended that these States would have the right to arrest or retard its navigation, to the injury of other nations.” Anglo southerners’ understanding of geopolitical borders and expansion into Latin America shaped the discourse of secession in 1861. They used their unique geographic location and interests in the Caribbean and Mexico to attempt to understand what future lay beyond the decision to secede.

The growing debate over secession added a layer of paranoia and anxiety over a society already traumatized and frustrated with the failures of expansion into countries such as Cuba and the territories of the Mexican Cession. Southerners on the margins of the South helped to shape the borders of the region, which in turn defined the South as a distinct part of the American landscape. The South’s experience with secession and civil war was a complete unmooring of southern culture. It reverberated throughout society far beyond the realm of political discourse where it began. Unlike many other national, state, and local processes, mounting sectionalist sentiment caused many within the South, both unionists and secessionist, to reevaluate their world. Secessionists and Unionists often asked the same questions, but arrived at completely different answers. While the political process provided the forum through which to debate their issues, the prospect of leaving the Union weighed heavily on southerners from all walks of life. The Gulf’s past, it’s involvement in the great westward and southward migration of people not only shaped the issues they cared about, but also how they spoke about them. The viability of slavery within their society and within the nation was among the South’s broader concerns. Within the Gulf, these larger debates
were interpreted through the nexus of past fears and conflicts concerning the expansion of the South's slave society into the Texas borderlands, Mexico, and Cuba. As the South birthed a nation from its regional boundaries, southerners within the Gulf of Mexico again reimagined their community. They gave new meaning to their borders and the world that lay beyond them, as they became a part of the rebellious Confederate States of America.
CHAPTER 8
THE VIEW FROM THE GULF OF MEXICO

In 1861 the South’s future seemed entirely uncertain. It seemed even more uncertain than it had when the United States annexed Texas in 1845. While it was impossible for the residents of the Gulf South to know what would happen as a result of annexation and expansion, they felt confident that expansion represented the path to prosperity and security, so long as the nation continued to pursue its interests in Latin America. The annexation of Texas and the U.S.-Mexican War had secured immense tracks of land, feeding the hopes of Gulf southerners. After the war it seemed as though Cuba would become the next slave state in the Union; even Central America seemed within reach. However, the failure of filibustering in Cuba and Central America called this imagined future into question. Secession eventually overshadowed the South’s interests in Latin America as the nation faced the great uncertainty that accompanied the first battles of the Civil War. The Gulf South’s many connections with the outside world defined the experiences of all these events.

The antebellum Gulf South lay at the center of a multitude of connections, and exploring those ties is at the heart of this study. The connections that existed between the South, Latin America, the southwest borderlands, and the Atlantic World can all be viewed from the Gulf of Mexico. Gulf ports were deeply affected by these ties. Those multiple linkages facilitated expansionism during the 1840s and 1850s. They also brought a bi-racial society into contact with multi-racial and multi-ethnic societies, and
these connections in part shaped the discourse used to understand and define expansion within the region.¹

The Gulf of Mexico provides a valuable window into the transnational connections of the United States in the nineteenth century. It has been my aim to contribute to scholarship that explores the complexity and importance of the Gulf of Mexico, and to show the need for continued and extensive study of a region that has always played a key role in the history of the Americas. While the Lower Mississippi Valley was a vital route for trade, political discourse, and cultural transmission, it was the Gulf ports through which goods, people, and ideas entered and exited the American South. The connections that developed between the Gulf South and Latin American evolved from early efforts at colonial and American expansion. Of all the populations that lived in the Gulf of Mexico, Anglo Americans were among the newest. Spanish and French colonial powers sought control of the region, which had helped solidify their power in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The ports they founded aided the development of trade and protection. Americans later exploited these early ties between North and South America. Through their efforts to dominate the region, we see these transplants from the middle and upper South question aspects of their own society and culture. By 1845, American-born New Orleanians, both free and slave were confronted with the presence of immigrants, free people of color, and Creoles. Yet its diverse

populations and the immense value of its markets made it integral to the process of expansion in the Gulf of Mexico. The smaller port towns also had diverse populations and ties to the world beyond the South’s borders. Pensacola’s military fortifications and its proximity to the Caribbean meant that the presence of European naval powers in the region played a significant role in how Pensacolians saw themselves and the world around them.

Galveston became the central port of arrival for European immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s. City boosters’ interest in becoming Texas’ main cotton and sugar exporter in part drove their interest in maintaining connections between themselves and the Texas hinterlands as well as asserting Anglo social order along the borders of the young state. Through these connections the Gulf ports provide a glimpse into local perspectives on the national narrative of expansion, but they also reveal their integral part in this story. Without the expansion of colonial powers, the Gulf ports would not have existed, and their presence on the Gulf of Mexico made American expansion into the region and beyond possible.

The discourse of expansion gave voice to all these dreams, imagined futures, hopes, and fears. Texas’ annexation and settlement made further bids for territory seem wholly possible. Expansion and conquest in Latin America was not only a dream or an imagined future, but it was also viewed as the answer to many of the problems that plagued the South during the antebellum period. Beyond the standard argument that more land meant more room for excess slave populations and yeoman farmers was the belief that gaining more territory meant securing the South’s borders. The Gulf South used the rhetoric surrounding expansion to benefit them. The region’s history of
territorial expansion quickly became a fundamental part of that discourse, thus shaping the national movement for more territory. Texas’ history with Mexico, a Gulf South narrative, became a part of the United States’ rhetoric of war. The U.S.-Mexican War then provided the impetus for the filibustering of the 1850s. However, in Texas it became apparent that the war meant to settle differences between the U.S. and Mexico only served to further destabilize the region with the added population of Anglo settlers along the borders.

Throughout the antebellum period, Anglo southerners living in these communities were consistently forced to question and evaluate what it meant to be American, southern, and white. The southerners who migrated to the Gulf of Mexico brought with them constructions of race that emphasized a strict difference between black and white. The Spanish and French colonial past of the Gulf of Mexico provided a different understanding of race that included mixed race people as well as free African Americans. Anglo Americans worked to define multiracial people in ways that they could understand and that fit within their familiar biracial social structures. Creoles in New Orleans were depicted as white, despite the fact that Creoles of color made up a portion of the Creole community. Those living in the Gulf South created racial constructions of Mexicans and Cuban Creoles to further the project of expansion. Mexicans were often depicted as mixed race and Cubans were depicted in a similar fashion as Creoles in New Orleans. Racial rhetoric surrounding the Lopez expeditions emphasized their European ancestry. Depictions such as these allowed for varied responses to expansion into these different countries. Mexico was conquered through war, and Cuba would have been liberated through revolution if the Lopez expeditions had succeeded.
When those efforts failed, the United States attempted to purchase Cuba, but those efforts were also unsuccessful. That this effort failed was in part due to growing antislavery opposition to the idea of Cuban annexation and continued southern expansion. In the years before secession, many expansionists in the Gulf South who had once supported filibustering to Latin America now denounced the practice as piracy, much the way the Spanish had during the Lopez expeditions.

Cuba, Texas, and Mexico continued to play integral roles in the discourse of expansion towards the end of the 1850s. While secession is not the central focus of this study, the growth of sectionalist sentiment in the South and the breakup of the Union did have an impact on the process of expansion in the Gulf of Mexico. In the Gulf South, fears concerning growing Northern opposition to southern expansion and slavery were connected to anxiety over English efforts to stop the slave trade and continued interests in Cuban annexation. Both Unionists and secessionists in the Gulf region used these concerns to frame their arguments over which better served the South. Unionists often used Cuba and the reopened slave trade as examples of what might happen to the South if southerners supported sectionalism. Secessionists saw the opposite, but both interpreted the possible outcomes of secession through the lens of Cuba and its relations with England.

Anglo Americans living in Texas worried that slaves would escape to Mexico, exacerbating the instability of the border. Texans also worried that abolitionists were attempting to infiltrate the state and turn locals against slavery. Many of the individual expansionists studied here were reluctant secessionists. Sam Houston, Albert Sidney Johnston, and Pierre Soulé espoused unionist views early on, and Houston, who served
as governor in 1860, tried to stop his state from seceding. Eventually, the Gulf South states seceded, and, like many other southerners, these men supported their state over the Union. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s the individuals’ experiences with expansion revealed additional levels of complexity to the connection between expansion and rhetoric. During the years leading up to secession their words and actions demonstrated that support of southern expansion did not automatically mean support for southern secession.

Throughout the antebellum era the Gulf South faced many questions similar to those faced by other southerners during and after the Civil War. As southerners shared in the difficulties and anxieties brought about by war, they were forced to evaluate fundamental aspects of their society much the way that the Gulf South had wrestled with similar issues during their mad grab for Latin American territory. Questions concerning the security of slave populations and the stability of the institution came to the forefront in the South during the Civil War as African Americans escaped to Union lines and won their freedom. Through secession and Civil War southerners interrogated what it meant to be southern, much as the Gulf South’s white southerners had done as they looked out at the world beyond them. The Civil War was fought throughout much of the South, and while the U.S.-Mexican War had not been fought in the Gulf South’s port communities, the evidence of the war through the presence of soldiers, sailors, and arms had brought the war with Mexico to their doorstep.2

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On April 19, 1861, the U.S. navy imposed a blockade on the Confederacy’s Gulf and the Atlantic ports. The connections created through the Gulf of Mexico played a role in the blockade. The U.S. Navy had once patrolled the Gulf and Caribbean in support of southern commerce and conducted blockades against foreign enemies. With the South as the enemy, the navy worked to keep southern ships from leaving the ports. Southern blockade runners dashed across the Gulf of Mexico, hoping to evade Union ships as they headed for neutral ports in the Caribbean where British suppliers were based. England provided supplies while southern blockade-runners traded high dollar commodities such as cotton, sugar, and tobacco. Mexico also served as a route through which southerners attempted to export cotton and import supplies. In the aftermath of the war, some southerners chose exile rather than surrender and escaped to Latin America. They wound up in Mexico, Cuba, and Brazil where many tried to resurrect their decimated society with little success.³

After the Civil War, United States troops again marched through Latin America in an attempt to gain political influence and territory. During the Spanish-American War the United States used notions of Cubans that had once been used during the Lopez expeditions and Cuban annexationist movement. Many of the early racial constructions of Latin Americans during the antebellum period persisted; these were formulated through the experience of expansion in the Gulf of Mexico. During the latter half of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century, Anglos in Texas and the Southwest continued to view Mexicans and Mexican Americans as racially mixed mongrels who

were often times barely considered human. They became subject to the same Jim Crow laws that circumvented African American freedom in the South. These later uses of race to support Anglo American dominance at home and abroad were founded in the earlier territorial expansion of the antebellum period. Within the Gulf of Mexico they were also founded in the South’s attempts to secure their society’s place in the ever-changing world that lay just beyond the horizon.\textsuperscript{4}

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Maria Angela Diaz was born in Austin, Texas. She attained her bachelor of arts in history at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro in May 2007. She graduated from the University of Florida with her Master of Arts in history in 2009, and went ABD in 2010. She received her Ph.D from the University of Florida in the summer of 2013.