CURSE OF THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT:
SOUTHERN OPPOSITION DURING
THE MEXICAN WAR
ERA, 1835-1850

By
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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

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Abstract

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This study examines southern opposition to the Mexican War. The story of such opposition is essential to a complete understanding of the Mexican War and the growing sectional conflict in the late antebellum period. It illustrates that much more opposition existed to the war in the South than is commonly thought. Nonetheless, southern war opponents failed to restrict the grand strategy of the Polk administration or shorten the length of the conflict. The main reason they failed in these goals stemmed from the inability of northern and southern opponents to work together to form and sustain a national antiwar movement. Southern war opponents firmly supported slavery and southern honor, and northern opponents did not, and this fissure doomed opposition in both sections. Almost all southerners committed themselves to defending slavery and southern honor – twin pillars which provided southerners with their very identities as free-American citizens – at all costs.
The dissertation is organized thematically. The first chapter analyzes the important political and military events leading up to the American declaration of war against Mexico. I argue that many southerners opposed Texas annexation until 1844 as they thought it would unite the North against the South, thus endangering slavery and honor even in the southern states. The second and third chapters analyze southern opposition within the military. These chapters demonstrate that significant opposition existed in the ranks and offer southern honor as central to that opposition. The fourth and fifth chapters focus on southern reactions to the Wilmot Proviso – an attempt by northerners to prevent the spread of slavery to any territory acquired from Mexico as a result of the war. I conclude that the decisions made from 1835 to 1850 proved to be disastrous to the South. The Mexican War was a failure for all southerners, as not only did opponents fail to achieve their goals, but supporters also lost access to the West. While the vast majority of southerners hoped to create a secure environment for slavery and honor, by the end of this period they perceived themselves to be living in an insecure world with dangers on all sides.
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Introduction

On February 9, 1847, South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun voiced his opposition against the Mexican War. For the first eight months of the war, Calhoun voted for money, supplies, and men to prosecute the conflict, but he now withdrew his support. During the course of his speech, Calhoun noted that “a mysterious connection between the fate of this country and that of Mexico.” The connection was so great, Calhoun believed, that “her independence and capability of sustaining herself are almost as essential to our prosperity, and the maintenance of our institutions as they are to hers.” He further warned the Senate that Mexico was “to us the forbidden fruit; the penalty of eating it would be to subject our institutions to political death.” Yet, much like Eve in the Garden of Eden, many Americans were tempted by what they ought not to touch. The Mexican War seemed likely to add new western territories, which could open up new economic opportunities for the country. The extension of slavery into the west was particularly alluring for southerners. These benefits, however, were illusory. This new territory, Calhoun cautioned, would almost assuredly bring northern attacks on the institution of black slavery – the very foundation of southern society. Calhoun believed that interference with Mexico promised only evil for the United States and his beloved South.¹

This study examines Americans like Calhoun – southern opponents to the Mexican War.² The story of such opposition is essential to a complete understanding of the Mexican War and the


² I consider the South to be all the slave states except Delaware, which had a very small slave population at the time of the Mexican War.
growing sectional conflict in the late antebellum period. Much more opposition existed to the war in the South than is commonly thought. Nonetheless, southern war opponents failed to restrict the grand strategy of the Polk administration or shorten the length of the conflict. The main reason they failed in these goals stemmed from the inability – or a complete unwillingness – of northern and southern opponents to work together in a national antiwar movement. Southern war opponents firmly supported slavery and southern honor, and northern opponents did not, and this fissure doomed opposition in both sections. It was southern opponents – those who supported the Union as it stood and opposed territorial expansion – who provided several of the plans which could have potentially prevented sectional conflict. But they failed. This devotion to slavery and southern honor, however, also meant that war opponents shared a common foundation with southern war supporters. The shared values of slavery and honor made it easier for southerners to work together in the years following the war in defense of southern rights. The vast majority of southerners committed themselves to defending slavery and


4 Most scholars believe that opposition was mostly confined to northeastern Whigs. For example, see K. Jack Bauer, *The Mexican War: 1846-1848* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 358-370; Thomas Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 1-9; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 658-791; David Mayers, *Dissenting Voices in America's Rise to Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 109-137; Frederick Merk, “Dissent in the Mexican War,” *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings* 81 (1969): 121-136; Dexter Perkins, “Dissent in Time of War,” *Virginia Quarterly Review* 47, no. 2 (Spring 1971): 161-74; and John H. Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), ix-164. At one point or another, a surprising number of southerners were opponents to the war. Prominent politicians like Calhoun, Thomas Hart Benton, Alexander Stephens, John Berrien, Thomas Clingman, Willie P. Mangum, Henry Hilliard, and Henry Clay all expressed considerable opposition to the war – and this is only a sample of political opposition. Such influential periodicals as *The Southern Quarterly Review, DeBow's Review,* and *The Southern Literary Messenger*; as well as newspapers like North Carolina's *Fayetteville Observer* and Virginia's *The Southern Planter* all ran antiwar articles throughout the war. Some of the soldiers fighting the war also became dissidents. While only a few deserted or mutinied during their time in Mexico, the overwhelming majority of volunteers became so disenchanted with the war that they refused to re-enlist when their terms expired. Opposition, thus, can be located in every southern state, in both the Whig and Democratic political parties, in popular culture, on the homefront, and in the ranks. Southern opposition to the Mexican War, therefore, was more extensive than is popularly thought.
southern honor – twin pillars which provided southerners with their very identities as free-American citizens – at all costs. The postwar years proved that southern war opponents were correct in their belief that the Mexican War and the acquisition of western territories would provide northern abolitionists with deadly weapons to use against slavery and southern honor.⁵

Antebellum southerners firmly believed they lived in an honorable society.⁶ For southerners, honor was not merely an intangible concept. Rather, it was seen when a person posted a demand for an apology in a newspaper, heard in political discourse or even at a local racetrack, and touched as surely as a hand gripped a dueling pistol or a bullet penetrated the body. What separated southern honor from previous honor bound societies was the way that southern honor was intimately tied to the institution of black chattel slavery. For the vast majority of southern whites – both slaveholders and non-slaveholders – black slaves represented everything which was dishonorable. Whites noticed that slaves seemed to docilely accept deprivation of rights and proved time and again that they were not only submissive, but also cowards and liars. In many ways, when a person insulted a white southerner by trying to deprive

⁵ I argue that slavery and honor made the antebellum North and South separate societies. I agree with other historians that northerners and southerners certainly held similarities, for instance in a connected economy and political structure. Yet both sections were willing to sever these connections in order to protect their views on honor and slavery, which shows the importance people placed on them. Northern honor rested on free-soil ideas and were mostly relegated to large-scale institutions, rather than the more intimate, face-to-face style found in the South based around the individual, family, and community. See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *A Warring Nation: Honor, Race, and Humiliation in America and Abroad* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 2; and Edward Pessen, “How Different from Each Other Were the Antebellum North and South?” *The American Historical Review* 85, no. 5 (Dec. 1980): 1119-1149.

⁶ Clement Eaton, “The Role of Honor in Southern Society,” *Southern Humanities Review* 10 (1976): 47-58. Eaton was one of the first historians to note the significance of honor to the antebellum South. He argued that honor actually only really emerged following the death of Thomas Jefferson in 1826, as southerners began to move away from the idea of gradual abolition and embraced the proslavery argument. Eaton also believed, unlike most scholars of southern honor, that southerners embraced honor mostly in reaction to abolitionism in the North. As a result of attacks by northern abolitionists, southerners felt the necessity to defend slavery on a moral basis, thus leading them to idealize the paternalism, high-mindedness, and honor of their society.
him of his rights or questioning his courage or honesty, the insulted gentleman believed that his identity as a free American citizen was under attack. In short, insults and other injuries could bring public disrepute upon his character, which explains why southerners vehemently defended their honor, sometimes violently.⁷

Southerners thought that honor gave value to every white person in the antebellum South and everyone had a role in society. As the historian Edward Ayers argues, honor is “a system of beliefs within which a person has exactly as much worth as others confer upon him.”⁸ Thus, the worth a person held was determined by communal values. Additionally, individual honor oftentimes determined the honor of a community, as the disgrace or triumph of one member of a family or even a regiment affected the other members of that group.⁹ The duel perhaps provides the best example for how the honorable society functioned. Only elite gentlemen participated, yet the entire community was involved in duels. Women either encouraged or discouraged men to fight duels. Newspaper editors frequently published the particulars of an affair of honor.

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Lower class whites sometimes acted as spectators at these duels. In short, the community, not just elite gentlemen, actively participated in the construction and maintenance of the honorable society, and it was ultimately they who determined whether one, both, or neither of the antagonists acted honorably. This shows that affairs of honor were public discussions. During the Mexican War, affairs of honor were not only among principals in private, but by wives at home, politicians during congressional debates, fellow soldiers in the army, in newspapers, and courthouses in local communities. Almost never were affairs only about the individuals involved, as the honor of the principals' family, regiment, community, or state were almost always at stake as well.

Southern honor, however, was not a tool or club southerners used to bludgeon opponents into submission. While southerners largely agreed that southern honor was important and needed to be protected, they could disagree on the correct course of action to secure southern interests in the future. Antebellum newspapers would not have been filled with calls for apologies or accounts of duels fought – or barely avoided – if everyone agreed that there was only one way to secure honor. This can be seen during the Mexican War, as southern opponents and war supporters alike shared a desire to secure slavery and southern honor into the future. Yet opponents fundamentally differed from supporters on how to achieve those goals. Opponents

10See Wyatt-Brown, A Warring Nation, 8, 62-79. In this study, Wyatt-Brown added to his previous work by noting that humiliation played an important role in honorable societies. He argued that the emotional state brought about by humiliation oftentimes generated the impulse to seek revenge for insult, whether against an individual, family, or nation. See also Steven M. Stowe, Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 1-49. Stowe showed that affairs of honor had many different aspects, and the duel was only the most visible and violent. Southern planters dueled only after the language of honor, which included seconds trying to find compromises, failed. He maintained that while duels were restricted to the planter class, it was actually the community which was the anticipated audience. Planters wanted to assure that their families and their slaves respected their rule in society. Stowe also stated that northerners turned away from dueling because of the embarrassment which the Aaron Burr-Alexander Hamilton duel caused in 1804. See also Williams, Dueling in the Old South, 3-12. Williams showed that dueling was common practice in the South, yet he maintains that only elites engaged in the southern culture of honor.
feared that the war with Mexico or territorial acquisition would invite attacks from radical northern abolitionists, and thus potentially endanger slavery and honor where they already existed. Even though southern war supporters constantly tried to brand dissidents as traitors to the South, southern war opponents considered themselves the ultimate protectors of slavery and southern honor. This shows that southerners did not disagree on matters of doctrine; rather, they disagreed on tactics and strategy during the Mexican War.

The interesting point is that while southern opponents had very violent debates with southern war supporters – and in a few cases dueled with them – it was northern war opponents who honorable southerners feared most. While not all northern dissidents were abolitionists, by the time of the Mexican War most southerners believed that most northerners – even those who had long supported southern rights – were hostile to slavery, and thus to the South as a whole.\footnote{Southerners used the term southern rights interchangeably with slavery and southern honor. When I use the term southern rights, I am referring to slavery and honor.} This explains why opposition to the war was doomed from the beginning, as pro-slavery southerners and northern abolitionists refused to work together in order to block United States’ entrance into or prosecution of the war, as well as the acquisition of territory from Mexico. While both southern and northern war opponents acted in ways designed to bring security for their own section's interests, rarely did the interests of honorable southerners and northern abolitionists overlap.

The story which follows differs from previous scholarship which holds both that southerners were unified in their support of the Mexican War and that the sectional divisions
which emerged as a result of territorial acquisition from the war inevitably led to the Civil War.\textsuperscript{12} It is not my intention to overemphasize the strength of opposition in the South. While an important minority opposed the war, most southerners thought that it represented a valuable opportunity to fulfill the country’s manifest destiny and extend the national territorial boundaries to the Pacific.\textsuperscript{13} As an added bonus, many southerners believed, territorial expansion promised to spread American “enlightened” republican government to the racially, culturally, politically, and religiously “savage” Mexicans.\textsuperscript{14}

It is my intention, however, to fully examine the ideas, desires, and actions of southern war opponents, since relatively few historians have taken up the challenge to explain both how much southern opposition to the Mexican War existed and why. Those few scholars who have addressed these questions argue that the war was a political clash, finding that much of the cause for southern opposition stemmed from Whig politicians who thought that President James Knox Polk acted imprudently and aggressively to bring about hostilities with the Mexicans. For these historians, the limited scale of opposition in the South derived from the fact that the Whigs were a minority party throughout much of the region and even many of them rallied to the pro-war


\textsuperscript{13} See Frederick Merk, Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 28-9; and Steven E. Woodworth, Manifest Destinies: America’s Westward Expansion and the Road to the Civil War (New York: Knopf Press, 2010), xii-xiv.

\textsuperscript{14} Yonatan Eyal, The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828-1861 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1-16. The Young American movement derived influence from the “Young Italy” movement. The Young Americans mostly came from the North and supported free-trade, western and southern expansion in the territories, and republican movements abroad. Membership included John L. O’Sullivan and Stephen Douglas, and they enjoyed the most success in the 1850s.
cause out of patriotism or a desire to support the dominant will of their constituency. Plus, Whig politicians who wavered in their support of the war – for instance in questioning the constitutionality of the conflict – risked falling victim to southern war supporter’s verbal attacks.¹⁵

At the same time, some historians have credited the Whigs for supplying the bulk of southern opposition to western expansion. According to these arguments, this opposition largely derived from racism, as some white southerners loathed the prospect of gaining land with over seven million free mixed-race inhabitants.¹⁶ This was closely linked to the concern that large-scale plantation agricultural, or cotton cultivation, would not be viable in the Mexican lands and black slavery could not be profitably implemented in the region. As a result of the limited economic potential in regards to either slavery or internal improvements, these southern Whigs perceived little reason to sacrifice American lives in a fruitless struggle.¹⁷

Yet studies which focus exclusively on the political sphere only partially illuminate the complex picture of southern opposition to the war. Joel Silbey first recognized this fact and recommended that historians concentrate more on American’s “ethno-cultural” concerns. By


¹⁷ Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 358-370; and Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 1-9. For Hietala, all Democrats supported the war and all Whigs opposed the war, with a few rare Democratic opponents like Calhoun described as “more racist” than other southerners.
focusing more on social and cultural aspects of opposition, historians have gained some valuable new insights about the war, specifically in regards to the motivations and concerns of non-combatants on the homefront and soldiers in the field. First and foremost, historians now realize that part of the reason the war gained such wide support throughout the country (and not just in the South) was because it reflected the cultural values of bravery, chivalry, and courage widely accepted by the masses on the home front. Importantly, historians have also discovered that American culture produced much of the disillusionment regarding the war. For instance, volunteer soldiers, who tended to come from a higher social status than regular enlisted soldiers, voiced complaints about the mode of discipline in the army, believing such treatment should only be used upon the lower classes and “inferior” racial groups. These volunteers sometimes showed their discontent through insubordination or desertion.

Even with these new insights, scholars continue to overlook southern opposition to the Mexican War. The only scholar to examine southern honor during the Mexican War has

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Many military histories discuss desertion or mutiny in some detail, but no full-length study of military dissent exists. One of the most important studies is Richard Bruce Winders, *Mr. Polk's War: The American Military Experience in the Mexican War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 60-2. Winders argued that most dissent in the ranks stemmed from political differences between the volunteers and their officers.

21 There has been one study which examines opposition in the state of South Carolina. See Ernest M. Lander, Jr., *Reluctant Imperialists: Calhoun, the South Carolinians, and the Mexican War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana
determined that supporters used southern honor to essentially blunt the emergence of effective opposition in the South. The most recent work on opposition during the Mexican War examined opposition in politics, in the ranks, and on the homefront, making the argument that a national antiwar movement emerged during the Mexican War. While this approach shows the great complexity of opposition in different segments of society, this work actually does not examine opposition in the South, only the political dissent of Henry Clay of Kentucky. While this author showed that opposition existed even in western states like Illinois—a point frequently missed by earlier scholars—she ultimately argued that the national antiwar movement's chief success was preventing war hawks from annexing the entire country of Mexico, a point already made in previous research. A comprehensive examination of southern opposition, therefore, is needed to gain a better understanding of both southern views of the war and the extent of dissent.

State University Press, 1980). Lander initially hoped to see whether Calhoun's opposition to the war hurt his standing among the public in the state, especially given the wide support which the Palmetto regiment received from the population. Lander determined that Calhoun was not hurt by his opposition, as other South Carolinians were actually more outspoken in opposition. South Carolinians mostly opposed the war because of the guerrilla tactics used by the Mexicans, cost, the cause was unjust, or because of fear that the climate was bad for American soldiers. Lander concluded, though, that most of these opponents believed that national honor demanded indemnity from Mexico.

Hospodor, “Honor Bound,” 22-64. Hospodor argued that honor impelled whites to support the war and squelched dissent in the South. There has also been one additional study on honor during the Mexican War, but it only examines the state of Kentucky. See Damon Eubank, “A Time For Heroes, A Time For Honor: Kentucky Soldiers in the Mexican War,” Filson Club Historical Quarterly 72, No. 2 (April 1998): 174-192. Eubank argued that Kentuckians did believe that honor was significant for local communities and the state, yet the honor he described was national honor. He maintained that Kentuckians preserved honor by emulating the deeds of their fathers.

Amy S. Greenberg, A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), xiii-xix. Greenberg argued that a speech Clay made in November 1847, called the Lexington Address, in which he denounced the war and territorial expansion, helped vocalize the ideas of a national antiwar movement. Schroeder already discussed the significance of this speech in his work in the 1970s, although he mentioned that this speech only received support in the North. While Greenberg argued otherwise, she also did not discuss southerners uniting behind Clay's ideas in a national antiwar movement through speeches or public rallies, mostly because these did not take place.
My work, thus, is a southern history which looks at the complexity of opposition in politics, in the ranks, and on the homefront. I examined political papers, newspapers, literary journals, letters, diaries, and poems in order to discover the multiple, complicated and diverse opinions southerners expressed during the Mexican War. These sources cannot quantify opposition in the South, yet they can demonstrate that opposition existed in politics, in local communities, and in the military. In short, these sources prove that opposition existed in every southern state. This is an important contribution, as some scholars have insisted that southern opposition only existed among politicians along the eastern seaboard. Certainly, not all southern opponents thought alike, and these sources demonstrate the diversity of opposition in the South. Politicians at the national or local level and those citizens who remained behind on the southern homefront did not share in the hardships that soldiers experienced in the camps or battles of Mexico. Nonetheless, what connected a politician speaking out against the war, a local newspaper castigating the war effort, or a soldier mutinying against his commander was that all these people believed they acted in the defense of southern honor.

It is easiest to see the distinctiveness of southern opposition by expanding the focus of the study, which is why my work begins by examining the debates over Texas annexation which commenced in 1835, and ends with discussion of the Compromise of 1850, which at least provided an initial solution to the problem of organizing the territories gained from the Mexican War. The purpose of this timeframe is to show that southern opposition did not occur in a vacuum. It was not uncommon for an opponent of the Mexican War to have supported the

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24 See Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War*, xxix; and Hospodor, “Honor Bound,” 67. Both these scholars argued that opposition only existed among eastern politicians.

annexation of Texas before the war and supported territorial acquisition following the war. This
is exactly what Calhoun did and it does not mean that southern opponents were inconsistent in
their thinking – they were not. When examining opponents' views, it becomes clear that they
were searching for the best path to preserve slavery and southern honor throughout the period.

The first chapter analyzes the important political and military events leading up to the
American declaration of war against Mexico. Since Texas was connected with slavery, it was
also connected with southern honor, and the ten years of debate over annexation showed that
while almost every southerner supported the preservation of honor, they disagreed whether
annexation could best secure its future. The Texan Revolution essentially sparked the subsequent
Mexican War by leading to a decade of debate over the potential annexation of Texas. As early
as 1836, Americans in both sections realized that the annexation of Texas – a large state which
was below the Missouri Compromise line – likely would result in sectional strife because of the
presence of slavery. The duel between Thomas Clingman and William L. Yancey in 1845 over
annexation showed that the future of Texas had become intimately connected with the future of
slavery and honor, and southerners were willing to die, if need be, to defend their position.
Thanks in large part to Polk's election in 1844, southerners' worries about international
abolitionism, and the increasing support for the idea of manifest destiny, Texas joined the Union
by the end of 1845. Once Texas joined the Union, President Polk believed that it was necessary
to defend the new state against Mexican aggression, as the Mexicans refused to make peace with
their former countrymen. Polk sent General Zachary Taylor to the eastern banks of the Rio
Grande – territory granted by Mexican President Antonio López de Santa Anna to Texas in 1836.
By April 1846 the Mexican Army had attacked and killed Americans in this region. While some
southerners opposed entry into the war, based upon their concern for southern honor, the desire for vengeance following the Mexican attack was fierce, and the Mexican War began in earnest.

The second and third chapters analyze southern opposition within the military. These chapters demonstrate that significant opposition existed in the ranks and offer southern honor as central to that opposition. These chapters examine opposition in Taylor’s campaigns in northern Mexico from May 1846 to August 1847. Both chapters demonstrate that volunteers carried their honor with them to Mexico and they were determined to return home with it. In some cases, preservation of honor meant that volunteers had to become opponents of the war. Chapter two discusses opposition during Taylor’s Monterey campaign, showing that southerners’ war enthusiasm quickly deteriorated once they arrived in Mexico. Southerners expected to go to Mexico, inflict a punishment which would ensure better behavior from the “inferior” republic in the future, and then return home to loved ones after only a short conflict. Instead, southerners mostly experienced superiors constantly barking orders, hours of drilling or marching, and many more hours of boredom in camp. Worse, many southerners died from disease; those who did not die witnessed burials almost on a daily basis. This was not the treatment they expected to receive or that they thought honorable southerners deserved, which meant that even the first volunteers who went to Mexico – those from Texas and Louisiana – searched for a way to return home as soon as possible. Some volunteers chose to desert, but the strategy most southerners took was to simply wait for their enlistments to expire and then to refuse to re-enlist. This was perhaps best shown by the behavior of the Tennessee and Mississippi volunteers, who both fought bravely during the Battle of Monterey – indeed, volunteers from both states came close to fighting duels over which state deserved to be credited with ensuring American victory-- nonetheless decided to not re-enlist when their terms expired in early 1847.
Chapter three closely examines southerners’ views of discipline and honor by focusing on the Arkansas and North Carolina volunteers in Taylor's army. Discipline was the issue which most rankled southern soldiers, as nothing so deprived a man of his honor than to be publicly disciplined. Many Arkansas volunteers criticized their Lieutenant-Colonel Archibald Yell for his poor leadership and camp management, yet he shielded his volunteers from the strict discipline of Brigadier General John Wool, second-in-command to Taylor, and gained the loyalty of the majority of the men in the regiment, who then went on to fight at the Battle of Buena Vista. After the battle, the people of Arkansas violently defended – to the point of dueling in one case – the honorable reputation of their regiment from aspersions of cowardice. On the other hand, Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Treat Paine of the North Carolina volunteers enthusiastically embraced Wool's style of discipline, and this caused the men under his command – along with Virginia and Mississippi volunteers brigaded in his camp – to mutiny. Discipline was the clear cause of the Paine mutiny, as the volunteers destroyed a wooden horse, an instrument used to publicly punish volunteers. The mutiny demonstrated that attempting to inflict dishonorable discipline on southerners could create wartime opponents.

The fourth and fifth chapters focus on southern reactions to the Wilmot Proviso – an attempt by northerners to prevent the spread of slavery to any territory acquired from Mexico as a result of the war. The volunteers’ refusal to re-enlist meant that politicians had to constantly raise and fund an army throughout the war. Therefore, military dissent helped fuel political dissent. Chapter four will undoubtedly be the most familiar to those who have read previous works on opposition during the Mexican War, as this chapter focuses on political debates from May 1846 to the ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in the spring of 1848, the timeframe for many previous studies. This chapter examines the challenges which southern
opponents experienced as they tried to restrict the war goals of the Polk administration and shorten the conflict, yet also deflect charges cast by southern war supporters that all war opponents supported the Wilmot proviso. The proviso never passed, but the principle of northerners trying to deprive southerners of their rights in the territories concerned southerners. Rather than abandon their opposition and join with southern war supporters, southern opponents instead insisted that they were the true defenders of slavery and southern honor. Thus, southern war opponents spoke against the war, voted against war measures, and even threatened duels in defense of their views. Throughout the war, some southerners thought that the best way to protect slavery and honor was to insist that no territory would be taken as a result of the war, thus keeping the sectional balance of the Union in the status-quo ante-bellum. Too few southerners, however, heeded southern opponents’ calls to avoid biting the forbidden fruit. Once the United States and Mexico ratified the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in mid-1848, however, Americans did acquire territory and the issue could no longer be avoided. Southern opponents had thus been unable to prevent the declaration, prosecution, or conclusion of the war in the way they desired, and had to decide the best way to ensure the perpetuation of slavery and honor in the future.

Chapter five focuses on southerners’ attempts to ensure equal access to the territories acquired as a result of victory in the war. The territories and the Wilmot Proviso remained the central issues facing the country following the war, and during the election of 1848 southerners began to at least consider abandoning the two national parties and uniting within a new southern party. Zachary Taylor won the election and within a year most southerners realized that he favored plans to bring California and New Mexico quickly into the Union as free states. By 1850, therefore, southern war opponents began to join hands with southern war supporters in
defense of slavery and honor. Opponents like Thomas Clingman and John C. Calhoun now spoke in unison with war supporters like Jefferson Davis and William L. Yancey. Every southern state held Southern Rights meetings in early 1850, and by the summer of 1850 most of the southern states sent delegates to the Nashville Convention to create a strategy for defending slavery and southern honor by demanding equal access to the territories. National politicians grew increasingly aware of the calls for southern unification – and in a few cases for disunion – and the Compromise of 1850 provided southerners with enough assurances that slavery and southern honor were safe within the Union for the time being. At this point, the plan for the territories finally had some organization and the Wilmot Proviso was dead at last, thus marking the true end of the Mexican War. The end of the story demonstrates that war opponents and supporters had always been united on the issues of slavery and southern honor, and the Mexican War helped people in both sections realize that important fact. By 1850, northerners and southerners lived in two distinct and increasingly antagonistic societies.

The conclusion briefly discusses the legacy of honor and opposition during the Mexican War era. I emphasize that various paths existed for southerners to secure slavery and honor, yet some paths led to destruction. The decisions made from 1835 to 1850 proved to be disastrous to the South. The Mexican War was a failure for all southerners, as not only did opponents fail to achieve their goals, but supporters also lost access to the West. Most ominously, abolitionists appeared poised to attack slavery where it already existed. While all southerners had hoped to create a secure environment for slavery and honor, in fact they now lived in an even more insecure world with danger on all sides.
Chapter 1:

“A Question of Life or Death”: Texas, Mexico, and Southern Honor

April 10th, 1846, seemed like the perfect day for a joyful horseback ride along the banks of the Rio Grande. At least, General Zachary Taylor’s quartermaster Trueman Cross thought so. Ten days later, American troops discovered Cross’ decomposing body. It showed clear signs that his skull had been crushed. Americans suspected that this was most likely the result of an attack by Mexican guerrillas. Two weeks later, Americans laid Cross to rest inside Fort Texas. Captain Seth Thornton set out with sixty-three American dragoons the next day to investigate a rumor of Mexican troops crossing to the eastern side of the Rio Grande. As it turns out, Mexican General Mariano Arista had indeed crossed over to the eastern bank of the Rio Grande. He met Thornton’s dragoons in a short skirmish at Matamoros. The encounter resulted in sixteen American fatalities. Texan John C. Robinson, who was in Taylor’s camp when news arrived, immediately wrote to his brother back home: “the Mexicans have looked upon us as invaders + considered that the two nations were in a state of war.” According to Robinson, this was the reason that Mexico attacked. “You see by this that the war has fairly commenced,” Robinson told his brother. “Mexico has strucken the blow that will cause her downfall.” Mexican troops had saturated the so-called disputed territory with the blood of American soldiers, marking the beginning of active fighting between the United States and Mexico.¹

This chapter examines how a war between the United States and Mexico came to be in 1846. The simple explanation for how the Mexican War began is that the United States annexed Texas’ war with Mexico when it brought the new state into the Union. The story, however, is much more complex. It was the Texas Revolution which laid the foundation for the Mexican

¹ John C. Robinson to his brother, April 26, 1846, John C. Robinson Papers, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries, Special Collections.
War, as the Texans defeated the Mexicans on the battlefield in 1836 and the Rio Grande became the newly-independent country's western border.后 gaining independence, many Texans called for annexation to the United States, and annexation, therefore, became an issue of debate for the next decade. I argue that these debates make it clear that southerners wanted to ensure the perpetuation of slavery into the future, since slavery formed the very foundation of southern society. Additionally, almost all southerners believed in the concept of honor, which was directly tied to slavery, and sought to protect their honor at all costs. Together, slavery and honor provided southerners with their identities as free-American citizens.

Thus, in the debates over annexation, southerners agreed that the end goal was to see slavery and honor secured for the future. It was the means, however, over which southerners bitterly disagreed. Many southerners argued that slavery and honor could best be protected by not annexing Texas, as bringing another slave state into the Union would only encourage abolitionists to assault slavery wherever and whenever they could. Anti-annexationist southerners were successful in keeping Texas out of the Union until 1845. By this point, however, even southerners who had opposed annexation began to argue that abolitionists – who were far more threatening enemies than the Mexicans – could best be defeated if Texas joined the Union as a slave state, instead of potentially falling prey to abolitionism as an independent

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3 Frederick Merk, Slavery and the Annexation of Texas (New York: Knopf Press, 1972), ix-xiii. Merk began his study in 1843 since this was the point when John Tyler broke from the previous administrations and openly supported the annexation of Texas. By this point, Merk was correct that southerners were largely unified in the belief that the annexation of Texas offered the best protection for slavery. However, since Merk did not examine the period from 1836-1842, he failed to note that most southerners had been against annexation prior to 1843. The South Merk presented was firmly unified on annexation, when in fact a great deal of diversity existed in the South on the question of annexation.
What the debates over annexation ultimately show, I conclude, was that anti-annexationist southerners believed that Texas joining the Union would unite the North against the South, thus endangering slavery and honor even in the southern states where it peacefully existed. In the end, though, they failed to keep Texas out of the Union. Yet their ideas were important, as they demonstrate that some southerners attempted to find a peaceful path in which the Union, slavery, and honor could thrive well into the future. Suffice to say, that path steered clear of Texas. Shortly after Texas annexation, President James Knox Polk sent American troops to defend the Texans against Mexican reprisals. The Mexicans attacked American troops in April 1846, and the war had begun.

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4 Richard Bruce Winders, *Crisis in the Southwest: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle over Texas* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Press, 2002), 71-152. Winders attempted to connect the events of the Texas Revolution to the Mexican War. He argued that Mexico's political instability was the primary reason for the loss of Texas and the subsequent Mexican War. See also Norman E. Totorow, *Texas Annexation and the Mexican War: A Political Study of the Old Northwest* (Palo Alto: Chadwick House, 1978), 1-122. Totorow found that political party views in the Old Northwest also broke down and the people of these states started to think of annexation in sectional terms by 1844.

5 Most Mexican War scholars do not examine the Texas Revolution or annexation in much detail. Instead, scholars tend to blame Polk for the outbreak of the war without examining the years leading up to the conflict. See John H. Schroeder, *Mr. Polk’s War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), ix-xvi; John. S. D. Eisenhower, *So Far From God: The U.S. War With Mexico, 1846-1848* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), xx; and Robert W. Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs: James K. Polk, the Mexican War and the Conquest of the American Continent* (New York: Simon and Schuster Press, 2009), 1-12. The most extreme argument for Polk’s responsibility for the war is found in Glenn W. Price, *Origins of the War with Mexico: The Polk-Stockton Intrigue* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), vii-x. Using the papers of Texas President Anson Jones, who opposed Texas annexation to the United States, Price argued that Polk sent Commodore Robert F. Stockton to Texas in May 1845 to turn the war between the Texans and Mexicans hot again. The timing was important, since this was before the Texans had ratified the annexation treaty sent by the United States Congress. Price suggested that Polk was not content with the fact that the Texans and Mexicans were still technically at war; he wanted bullets flying so that the United States could simply take over the war once annexation was complete. Thus, Polk craved a war to acquire territory.

Biographies about Polk discuss his life from the Texas Revolution through the Mexican War, and these studies also tend to blame him for the outbreak of the war. For example, see Thomas M. Leonard, *James K. Polk: A Clear and Unquestionable Destiny* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resource Books, 2001), 83.

The story of the Mexican War begins during the Texas Revolution which occurred a decade before. Mexicans considered Texas to be an essential part of their frontier, where men could settle, defend against Indian threats, and the land could be profitably exploited to support the government in Mexico City. Alas, Mexico lacked the population to settle the vast frontier in Texas, so they encouraged Americans to create settlements, in the process expecting the migrants to become rich, Catholic, and Mexican. These appeals worked, as 70,000 Americans migrated to Texas between 1821 and 1835. Things seemed to go well for the migrants, as Mexican officials were even willing to look the other way – in exchange for a small bribe – when southerners brought their slaves into Texas, in contradiction to the laws established in the 1824 Mexican Constitution.\footnote{For an example of an advertisement of smuggling slaves into Texas, see the \textit{New-Orleans Commercial Bulletin}, September 20, 1833.}

Such idyllic dreams faded when Antonio López de Santa Anna, with the help of influential priests and monarchists, seized control of the government in May 1834. Historians have argued that Santa Anna was a person who believed in honor – which for him meant loyalty to the state and social stability – above all else.\footnote{Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, \textit{The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500-2000} (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 247-273.} Santa Anna had a privileged upbringing in the eastern Mexican town of Vera Cruz, where he enjoyed a leisurely existence and received a quality military education. He believed that social and political stability enabled him to enjoy the finer things in life, and he looked to maintain the privileged position he held in society. Santa

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There is one scholar who also argues that honor played a central role in the decision to declare war. See Gregory Scott Hospodor, “Honor Bound: Southern Honor and the Mexican War,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 2000), 29. Hospodor argued that southern honor was crucial for southern politicians, non-combatants, and soldiers in deciding to declare war. He maintained southerners were united in the conflict through the lens of honor, compelling southern men to volunteer and women to support them. Honor also blunted the opposition among southern Whigs and the Calhounites. Hospodor, however, did not examine debates over Texas nor discuss the arguments made by opponents to the war.
Anna, thus, did not discard his loyalty to the Spanish crown during Mexico’s War for Independence until Spain showed a willingness to subvert the social order – promising greater liberties for the lower classes – in order to maintain control of the colony.\(^8\)

Once Mexico achieved its independence, Santa Anna believed that the inhabitants owed loyalty to the state and he did not appreciate Texans growing rich while not seeming to concern themselves with the overall welfare of the nation. In October 1835, Santa Anna abolished the state governments and consolidated his rule, appointing himself dictator. The state of Coahuila and Texas (which was actually one state known as Coahuila y Tejas) protested this move towards dictatorship. Santa Anna responded by arresting one of the state's leaders, Stephen F. Austin, and decreeing that the state could hold only one gun for every one hundred citizens. Santa Anna was convinced that the Texans wanted to break away from the nation and join the United States. Thus, he started making military preparations to forcibly keep Texas under Mexican control. He explained that “even were the soil of Texas a mere desert of sand, unproductive save of thorns to wound the foot of the traveler…[it] should be defended with energy and constancy, under the conviction that the possession of a right imposes upon a nation the necessity of never abandoning it, with shame and disgrace to her name.”\(^9\) Santa Anna sent some soldiers to Texas in December, 1835. Texas forces defeated and paroled Santa Anna’s men. When it appeared that Texans did not plan to submit, Santa Anna personally led his army to subdue the rebellious state in early 1836.\(^10\)

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\(^8\) For a description of Santa Anna’s early years, see Will Fowler, *Santa Anna of Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 1-132.


In the United States, Americans solidly supported Texas’ independence. Newspapers and letter writers throughout the nation, in towns both large and small, followed the developments in Texas. Americans were sickened to hear news of the slaughter of Texans at the Alamo and Goliad in early 1836. Congressman James Polk’s uncle, Thomas J. Hardeman, migrated from Tennessee to Texas in 1835 and participated in the Texas Revolution. Hardeman sent news to his nephew that “Santean[a] [sic] has declared a war of extermination of all the Americans in Texas which forced us to declare our independence & from his conduct so far it appears that he is determined to put it in execution.” Hardeman informed Polk that, at the fall of the Alamo, Santa Anna “shewed [sic] no quarters,” demonstrating that he was both “impudent as well as barbarous [sic].” A meeting of Nashville citizens declared that the massacre at the Alamo showed that the Mexican was “still a savage, and unfit to govern civilized men.” Further, these Nashville citizens believed that the “laws of God, of man, and of all civilized nations, had been outraged.” Such news reached everyday Americans as well, with the news disseminated in newspapers. Santa Anna and the Mexicans, many Americans assumed, partook in acts of savagery in warfare only equaled by the Indians.

Following the slaughter of Texans at the Alamo, General Sam Houston rallied support to avenge their blood. At the battle of San Jacinto in April 1836, Houston gained a decisive victory over Mexican troops. The Texans actually took Santa Anna captive. Many felt that Santa Anna should die for his actions against the Texans, and Santa Anna himself fully expected such a fate.

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13 Proceedings of a meeting of the citizens of Nashville, 24th Cong., 1st Sess., S. Doc. 418

Houston, however, knew that Santa Anna would be much more valuable alive; therefore, over the next several weeks, the Texas leader drafted a peace treaty. Meanwhile, Santa Anna’s second-in-command, Vicente Filisola, communicated with Mexican Naval Secretary José J. Corro about what the Mexican government desired from the treaty. Corro stated that Filisola should do whatever was necessary both to procure the release of the captured president and to save his troops and munitions of war. In exchange for these terms, the Texans believed Santa Anna would secure formal recognition of Texas independence when he returned to Mexico City.\(^\text{15}\) In the treaty, Santa Anna agreed to move his men out of Texas territory, east of the Rio Grande.

While the boundary for Texas since the 1803 Louisiana Purchase was the Nueces River, Texans insisted that the Rio Grande become the boundary.\(^\text{16}\) Santa Anna kept his head, but lost a 150-mile wide chunk of Texas which Mexico had never fully integrated politically, socially, or economically into the Mexican nation. Many Mexicans perceived the loss of Texas to be a disgrace to the nation. Despite reassurances from Mexico during the peace process, the acting Mexican government deposed Santa Anna of his political and military authority. Thus, they maintained that Santa Anna was not a true representative of the Mexican nation and the treaty he signed in duress was not legitimate.\(^\text{17}\)

News of the events in Texas spread like wildfire in the United States as memorials went out from all parts of the Union encouraging their congressmen to recognize Texas independence.


\(^\text{16}\) Many Americans believed that Texas was part of the Louisiana Purchase. They argued that John Quincy Adams parted with Texas in 1819, when as Secretary of State he negotiated the Adams-Oniz treaty with Spain. See Curtis R. Reynolds, “The Deterioration of Mexican-American Diplomatic Relations, 1833-1845,” *Journal of the West* 1, no. 2 (April, 1972): 213-224.

One supporter of Texas recognition was Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, who stated that from the beginning Americans were “inflamed into rage from the massacres of the Alamo and Goliad.” Once news of the Texan victory at San Jacinto arrived, Benton argued that American joy and public support for Texas “no longer knew any bounds.” At this time, however, Benton was not prepared to annex Texas. Yet as Benton quickly learned, others were poised for annexation.

When the Senate met on May 20, 1836, South Carolinian John C. Calhoun encouraged recognition and annexation of Texas by the United States. Calhoun was nearly sixty years old by this point, a Yale graduate who held the positions of United States Senator, Secretary of War, and Vice-President during more than three decades of service to the federal government. His vast experience meant that his ideas and words carried great weight in both his native state and the South as a whole. The national significance of Texas, for Calhoun, lay in the fact that Texas would be a slave state. As Calhoun explained, southerners “were deeply interested in preventing that country from having the power to annoy them; and the navigating and manufacturing interests of the North and the East were equally interested in in making it a part of the Union.” Calhoun emphasized, however, that Texas was most important in ensuring the future “balance of power and the perpetuation of our institutions.”

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20 John C. Calhoun speech to the Senate, May 16, 1836, quoted in Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, 667.

21 Calhoun speech to the Senate, May 20, 1836, quoted in Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, 669.
the most influential – southerners to argue that the future of the South, and the Union, relied upon slavery being allowed to spread westward into Texas.\textsuperscript{22}

Calhoun realized that slavery was the very foundation of southern society. Chattel slavery provided obvious economic benefits to southerners who owned slave property. Yet, according to Calhoun this was not the real importance of slavery. Calhoun articulated a sense of the vast importance of slavery in early 1836, when the United States Senate considered whether the country ought to take action against “incendiary publications” – or abolitionist literature – being distributed through the mail.\textsuperscript{23} Calhoun reminded the Senate that from the beginning the southern states were developed with blacks as slaves to whites; thus, he argued, slavery was essential not only to southern economics, but to southern society and politics as well. Abolitionist literature was dangerous because it threatened the stability of southern society. Calhoun insisted that for southerners slavery meant “property, country, liberty, and existence.”\textsuperscript{24}

In short, for Calhoun slavery organized southern society and was a fundamental ingredient in the construction of southern identity. Calhoun wrote and received letters from many southerners who expressed similar concerns. South Carolinian James Henry Hammond, for instance, wrote to Calhoun complaining that abolitionists encouraged slave revolts and black insubordination. Hammond relayed news of several plantation mansions burned by slaves in the South Carolina Low Country, stating: “This is fearful – horrible. A quick & potent remedy must be applied. \textit{Disunion if need be.}”\textsuperscript{25} It is an understatement to say that slavery was economically, politically,
socially, and culturally important to the South. Indeed, southerners considered slavery essential. This does not mean, however, that southerners all agreed that annexation offered the best path for preserving slavery. Many senators were unprepared for Calhoun to bring the slavery issue into the debate over Texas recognition, and Benton, for one, seemed somewhat bewildered by Calhoun's position. When Benton rose to address the Senate, he agreed with much of what Calhoun had said. According to Benton, there was no possible way that the Mexicans and Texans could ever live in peace again. As he stated: “Goliad has torn Texas from Mexico; Goliad has decreed independence; San Jacinto has sealed it! What the massacre decreed, the victory has sealed; and the day of the martyrdom of prisoners must forever be regarded as the day of disunion between Texas and Mexico.” But, unlike Calhoun, Benton did not see the extension of new slave territory as essential to the future safety of the South. Benton did recognize, however, that northern abolitionists represented a real threat. He told the Senate that the Americans who went to Texas were now engaged in a holy experimented, not dissimilar from the American revolutionaries in 1776. Northerners who wrote, argued, and preached about the Texas

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Revolution being a war fought for slavery were liars, according to Benton. He stated that “a calumny more heartless can never be imagined than that which would convert this just and holy defense of life, liberty, and property, into an aggression for the extension of slavery.”

Nonetheless, Benton would not even consider the annexation of Texas until the people of that country established a stable government. Benton's speech warned that Americans ought not to let passion rule their reason.

In the immediate aftermath of the Texas Revolution, more southerners agreed with Benton’s position than Calhoun’s. Throughout the South, communities large and small held meetings to discuss what policy their representatives should support in regards to Texas. In May citizens in Burke County, North Carolina held a meeting which drew up resolutions supporting United States’ recognition of Texas as an independent country. The citizens at this meeting argued that they held “the deepest interest [in] the struggle in which the infant republic of Texas” was now engaged, as this was “a contest on one side for liberty and a free representative government, against a cruel and unrelenting despot; one, who disregards all the principles of Christian and civilized warfare.” Americans believed that Texas represented liberty and republicanism, so their struggle needed to be supported by the United States. This meeting of North Carolinians concluded that Texas was “a government de facto, and that her independence ought to be recognized.” These North Carolinians, however, did not think that the United States should annex Texas.

Most southern politicians also thought the country should not embrace Calhoun’s position. Moderate northerners and southerners believed that if Texas indeed managed to create

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27 Benton speech to the Senate, May 20, 1836, *Thirty Years’ View*, 670-676.

a functioning government, then the United States should recognize it as an independent nation. Senator John Niles of Connecticut advised that the question of recognition and possible admission involved the “honor of the United States.” Niles argued that outside observers might charge that the country perpetrated a war simply to acquire territory, since many of the people who fought in the revolution were American emigrants. Massachusetts Senator Daniel Webster made a similar argument, stating that he would happily “be one of the first to acknowledge the independence of Texas, on reasonable proof that she had established government.” Senator William King of Alabama argued that Americans needed to employ “moderation and deliberation” and to consider the negligible effects which annexation might have on the United States. He exclaimed that he desired Texas independence, as “no man here felt a deeper detestation of the bloodthirsty wretches who had cruelly butchered their defenceless [sic] prisoners....but, whether true or false, did it become wise, discreet, prudent men, bound by the strongest considerations to preserve the honor and faith of the country, to be hurried along by the effervescence of feeling, and at once abandon the course.” Most moderates, then, believed that Texas independence should be applauded and recognized, but annexation would have to wait.

The primary concern for anti-annexationist southerners was slavery. For instance, George McDuffie – in most respects a loyal Calhounite – told the South Carolina legislature in 1836 that “the people of Texas by an almost unanimous vote, have expressed their desire to be admitted into our Confederacy, and application will probably be made to Congress for that purpose.” Yet, McDuffie insisted that “Congress ought not even to entertain such a proposition

29 John Niles speech to the Senate, May 20, 1836, quoted in Benton, Thirty Years’ View, 668-669.
30 Daniel Webster speech to the Senate, May 20, 1836, quoted in Benton, Thirty Years’ View, 666.
31 William King speech to the Senate, May 20, 1836, quoted in Benton, Thirty Years’ View, 666.
in the present state of the controversy.” McDuffie was referring to the international conspiracy of worldwide abolitionism, as he explained that annexing Texas posed the risk of Mexico declaring war against the United States, and “aided by some great European power, hoist the standard of servile insurrection in Louisiana and the neighboring States.” Like Calhoun and Hammond, McDuffie undoubtedly agreed that slavery was the foundation of white southern existence, but he believed that the security of slavery meant leaving Texas an independent country. Southerners held a common end in mind; they just disagreed on the means. Calhoun believed that annexation offered the best course of action to protect slavery, while McDuffie believed the addition of Texas would endanger slavery by bringing outside attacks on the institution.

While moderate northerners at least considered the prospect of eventually annexing Texas, it quickly became apparent that annexation had almost no champions among the ranks of the radical northern abolitionists. Most northerners were not radical abolitionists, of course, but from the very beginning of the debates about Texas the moderate and conservative northerners tended to be drowned out by the voluminous writings, speeches, and sermons by radical northern abolitionists. A book composed of anti-annexation writings and speeches from across the nation, entitled the *The Anti-Texass Legion*, published in 1845, argued against the annexation of Texas. *The Anti-Texass Legion* is important since its contents were created during the crucial ten year gap between the Texas Revolution and the start of the Mexican War. Most of the writings, unsurprisingly, came from radical northern abolitionists. A piece written by Edmund Quincy during the Texas Revolution explained that slavery was the key difference between the American Revolution and the events in Texas, as “Americans of our revolution then fought for their own

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33 Ibid.
liberty, and through their example of successful resistance, for the liberty of the world.” Quincy stressed, however, that the Texans fought “for slavery among themselves and if success crown their desperate efforts, they will have fought for the perpetuity of slavery throughout the world.”

Similarly, one of the excerpts written in the period immediately after the war argued that the Texas Revolution was “the clearest demonstration, that the immediate cause, and the leading object of this contest, originated in a settled design, among the slaveholders of this country, (with land speculators and slave-traders,) to wrest the large and valuable territory of Texas from the Mexican Republic, in order to re-establish the SYSTEM OF SLAVERY; to open a vast and profitable SLAVE MARKET therein; and ultimately to annex it to the United States.”

Extremists in the North viewed Texas as corrupted by slavery. Moreover, they viewed the South as being the primary cause of the war which occurred between the Texans and Mexicans. Abolitionists were certain that the Texas Revolution and annexation were all part of a “slave power” conspiracy against the freedom won during the American Revolution.

It was precisely the extremist and sectionalist language coming from radical abolitionists and Calhounites which convinced President Andrew Jackson that Texas, if annexed, could potentially rip the nation apart. Jackson was still the most popular man in America, as he continued to bask in the glory he achieved from winning the Battle of New Orleans and a multitude of Indian wars in Alabama and Florida. As president, though, Jackson had many enemies, most prominently Henry Clay and the Whig Party he founded in opposition to Jackson.

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With Texas he realized that it was best not to provide the most dangerous portion of the Whig Party, northern abolitionists, with weapons which they could use against the cherished Union. Therefore, in his annual address on December 6, 1836 Jackson cautioned that there were “considerations connected with the possible result of this contest between the two parties of so much delicacy and importance to the United States that our character requires that we should neither anticipate events, nor attempt to control them.” Jackson declared that while he hoped that the United States could fulfill the wishes of most Texans and allow them to join the Union, at present annexation was just too dangerous. Annexation, Jackson stated, “depends upon the reconcilement of various and conflicting interests, necessarily a work of time.” Jackson hoped that over time extremism over Texas would calm down, and the state could peacefully join the Union.  

Calhoun, who had been the vice-president during Jackson’s first term in office, agreed that abolitionism offered the gravest threat to the Union. Yet he disagreed that keeping Texas out of the Union was the best defense. On March, 17, 1837, a public dinner honoring the services of Senator William C. Preston and Representative William J. Grayson was held at the Carolina Hotel in Charleston. As was common at such events, distinguished South Carolinians began giving toasts. Robert Y. Hayne rose to toast South Carolina’s most famous statesman, John C. Calhoun. Hayne exclaimed that the state was “proud of his high talents and excellent character, his heroic efforts to reform the Government – restore the Constitution – support our institutions – and thereby preserve public Liberty, and establish a perpetual Union among the States, entitle

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him to the admiration and gratitude of the whole country.”

Hayne emphasized his view that Calhoun was a defender of both the South and the Union.

As was proper, Calhoun rose and gave his own speech, defending the South and the Union from the dangers that seemed to threaten the country. Calhoun stated that he “considered [abolitionism] the mightiest evil that had ever threatened our Government.” Considering the British literally ran portions of the government out of the capital during the War of 1812, these were strong words. While Calhoun believed that most northerners were not abolitionists, he emphasized that “the Abolitionists were strong, active, uncompromising.” Therefore, southerners could only depend upon themselves to defend the institution of slavery. He concluded his toast by mentioning that South Carolinians supported the “heroes of San Jacinto,” adding that Texas was essential to the future safety of the South. Perhaps with memories of the Jefferson Day dinner seven years before, Calhoun demanded that “Texas must be annexed to the Union!”

In these debates about Texas and the future of slavery, southerners were also debating southern honor. Southerners themselves discussed honor and what it meant for them within their local communities. In 1836, the Raleigh Register defined “Honor” as “a term extremely elastic; it extends itself from virtue to infamy.” This paper added that men and women both had honor, but men’s honor was public and grew “in the sun,” while women’s honor was private and

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39 Calhoun speech to the people of Charleston, March 17, 1837, Papers of John C. Calhoun, Vol. 13, ed. Wilson, 497-8. For a discussion of the Jefferson birthday dinner of 1830, see Merrill D. Peterson, The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay, and Calhoun (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 185-6. During the dinner, Jackson toasted: “Our Federal Union: It must be preserved.” Calhoun followed by toasting: “The Union: Next to our Liberty the most dear.” This showed that Jackson placed the Union above all else, while Calhoun did not.
“flourishe[d] in the shade.” The *Virginia Free Press* declared: “There is no word of greater import and dignity than HONOR. It is virtue, adorned with every decoration that can make it amiable and useful in society.” This paper added that honor was “of universal extent and can be confined to no particular station of life because it is every man's interest.” Honor was the foundation of society in which every person had an important role to perform. For southerners, even during a duel the honor of the entire community was at risk, and this explains why duels were so widely discussed in southern newspapers. For example, the day after two men came to Natchez, Mississippi, to engage in a duel, the local paper announced that “a public meeting of the citizens will be held this day at 11 o'clock at the City Hall to express the public opinion relative to this affair and the subject of dueling in general.” Honor, thus, was widely discussed and read about in the antebellum South and people believed they occupied an important role in maintaining an honorable society.

Some southerners specifically cited southern honor as the reason for their opposition to the annexation of Texas. “The pretense which has been seized on by many in the south to give éclat and color to this project of annexation,” wrote one anonymous Arkansas anti-annexationist, was that “the extension of slavery, and southern influence, together with the additional securities and guarantees to that species of property.” This writer, however, thought that “according to our convictions and the opinions of a large portion of this State, deeply interested in that kind of property, this justification would not be well founded.” In fact, Texas joining the Union promised to bring abolitionist’s attacks on slavery throughout the South. Thus, annexation

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40 *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette*, July 12, 1836.

41 *Virginia Free Press*, May 4, 1837.

42 *The Mississippian*, April 27, 1838.
would endanger slavery rather than protect it. “The few obscure and contemptible abolitionists of the north,” exclaimed the Arkansan, “have spread but little alarm to our borders, and the great mass here confide in the integrity, honesty, and patriotism of the northern people themselves to degrade, dishonor, and expel these wretched fanatics.” But that the abolitionists “would soon accomplish this laudable purpose cannot be doubted, if left to themselves, and without the ill-timed interference of certain Hotspurs of the south, whose rashness continually places weapons in the hands of the very agitators, and it would really seem as if certain gentlemen in South Carolina were actually playing into their hands! - so ill-judged is their conduct.” The certain gentlemen in South Carolina, of course, were Calhoun and his loyal followers. “In every aspect, then, in which it is possible for us to view the great subject, we are irresistibly led to the conclusion that the admission of Texas into our Union would bring with it and scatter among us the elements of dishonor,” the writer concluded, “and finally, work out a dissolution of all the ties which make us kindred and constitute us as one people.”

The Union was in such peril because northerners had begun calling for dissolution of the Union if Texas was annexed to the United States. Even John Quincy Adams, a son of a Founding Father and a former president himself, believed that northern abolitionists would rather dissolve the Union than bring more slave territory under American control. Since abolitionists were vocal in their denunciations of slavery, many southerners believed that in the North, “whether they call themselves Whigs or Loco-focos – they all agree in condemning Slavery as a national sin which ought to be extirpated.” In order for southern honor and the Union to be

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43 *Arkansas State Gazette*, March 21, 1837.

44 *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette*, September 25, 1837.
preserved, slavery needed to be protected. In the 1830s most southerners believed that annexing Texas would fail to accomplish these goals.

Since Americans in both sections viewed the stakes in the matter of Texas annexation as high, the issue was not easily resolved. While Texas citizens sent letters to American printers and politicians stating that the citizens of the new republic desired annexation by the United States, Andrew Jackson’s chosen successor, Martin Van Buren, agreed that the sectional tensions seemed certain to increase with the annexation of a new slaveholding state. Further, Van Buren believed that annexing Texas meant that the United States would adopt Texas’ war with Mexico. As the debates over annexation showed, almost all southerners feared the ideas advocated by northern abolitionists since these ideas threatened the foundation of southern society. Jackson and Van Buren heard these arguments and determined that the evils of annexation far outweighed any benefits. Ironically, therefore, anti-annexationist northerners and southerners were successful in the short term, despite having entirely divergent views on the question of slavery and showing little willingness to work with each other.

Things, however, began to swing in the pro-annexationists’ favor in the early 1840s. President William Henry Harrison, who took office in March 1841, wished to avoid Texas as much as Jackson and Van Buren before him. Fate intervened, however: just one month into his term in office, Harrison died. Vice-president John Tyler, a longtime Virginia Democrat turned Whig, became president. As the first president not elected to the office, Tyler decided to run his administration in line with his Democratic roots and eschew the advice of the Whig party, most

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notably their nominal leader, Kentuckian Henry Clay. Unlike most Whigs, Tyler was an arch-expansionist who took the annexation of Texas as a goal for his administration.46

Tyler and his Secretary of State, South Carolinian Abel Upshur, worked diligently to garner support for annexation. Upshur was a longtime follower of Calhoun and communicated with him frequently on important political questions. Much like McDuffie, Upshur argued that it was British abolitionists who were the main threat to the United States. According to Upshur, the British wanted to acquire Texas and abolish slavery there, thus destroying competition in Texas against the British colonies in the West Indies. The British would thus become the main suppliers of goods to the western United States and Mexico, undercutting American manufacturing. In August 1843, the Secretary of State wrote a letter to Calhoun explaining that, “the slaves of Louisiana & Arkansas, will find an asylum in Texas, & it will be impossible to prevent them from seeking it. This government will not do any thing to aid the slave-holder, & of course, he will take the matter into his own hands. He will reclaim his slave by force, & this will lead to – war.” Upshur added that the “Northern States will not aid in a war, waged for such a cause, & this will lead to a separation of the Union. In this state of things, England will not be idle. The result cannot be calculated in degree, but it cannot be otherwise than disastrous.” To avoid this fate, Texas must be admitted, according to Upshur, since allowing Texas to “remain an independent & sovereign non-slaveholding State, will be fatal to the Union, & ruinous to the whole country.”47 For Upshur, the United States government had an obligation to protect slavery in Texas. He firmly believed that southerners would do anything to protect slavery, and any


Union which did not protect slavery would not last. Such was not exactly an inspiring view by the sitting secretary of state.

Upshur concluded his letter by calling for southern unification on annexation. He summarized the issue as he and other pro-annexationist southerners perceived it: “Would it not be well to break the subject to the people of the South, through the public prints? Both parties may unite in that, for it is a Southern question, & not one of whiggism & democracy. The southern people are far, far too lethargic upon this vital question. They ought to be roused, & made of one mind.” Upshur maintained that southerners should unite on the question of annexation to better confront the growing danger of abolitionism, as the entire “history of the world does not present an example of such insult, contempt & multiplied wrongs and outrages, from one nation to another, as we have received & are daily receiving, from our Northern brethren!! It is a reproach to us, that we bear it any longer. We are twelve States, & we have a right to be heard & regarded, in a matter which concerns, not only our rights, but our safety.”

Upshur could have easily transferred such language to describe the slave revolts which Hammond mentioned in a letter a few years earlier to Calhoun. For men like Upshur and Calhoun, those who were not with them were potential threats. Upshur clearly stated that threats could be found in the South as well, which explains why they used the language of southern honor to rally support for annexation. Honorable men must answer such insults, and in this instance the answer was annexation.

\[48\] Ibid.

\[49\] For a description of the language of honor, see Kenneth S. Greenberg, \textit{Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Death, Humanitarianism, Slave Rebellions, The Pro-Slavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South} (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996), xiii, 145. Greenberg argued that studying southern honor is reconstruction a language. This language was based around slavery, as southerners considered slaves to be without honor, therefore, every issue of honor also related to slavery. Greenberg claimed that men of honor distinguished themselves from their slave property by never letting anyone call them liars, giving gifts, and never fearing death. These actions, according to Greenberg, represented a language
The Tyler administration, therefore, was the first to support the annexation of Texas. The annexation debate began to gain momentum in January 1844, when the representatives and senators in Texas passed a resolution in favor of annexation to the United States, despite the opposition of Texas President Sam Houston. Tyler, of course, encouraged the United States Congress to accept the Texan’s resolution, indicating that he would gladly sign annexation into law. The president and other pro-annexationists believed that the long-lull in fighting between Mexico and Texas meant that the United States did not really have to worry about annexing an active war. Tyler also believed that the border dispute between the two countries would not lead to further warfare and did not need to be decided prior to the United States annexing Texas. As he explained on January 11, 1844, the border was “a question purposely left open for negotiation with Mexico, as affording the best opportunity for the most friendly and pacific arrangements.”

On February 28, 1844, however, plans changed rather abruptly. This marked the day that the crew of the U.S.S. Princeton organized an event to demonstrate the awesome power of their new cannon, the “Peacemaker.” After watching the cannon demonstration, Tyler had seen enough of the cannon and went below deck for some refreshments. Upshur initially followed

understood by all honorable southerners. Greenberg explained: “To pull noses was to comment on lies; to exchange gifts was to define community; to gamble on horses was to speak about death and about politics; and to duel was make statements about lies, gifts, gambling, politics, and death.”

Greenberg also mentioned that honorable gentlemen oftentimes called other men derogatory names or cast aspersions of other men’s character in order to “unmask” or prove the other person was a “liar.” They oftentimes stated that others had committed outrages, treason, arson, assassination, or murder. This language was meant to call the other person dishonorable. When the insulted person disputed this language, it then became a conversation to see which side was telling the truth and which party was lying.

See also Joanne B. Freeman, Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xxii. Freeman described this language as the grammar of political combat, which she argued was a shared understanding of the weapons at one’s disposal – their power, use, and impact. In this honorable political culture, all Americans understood that certain slurs could harm people’s reputations, so they were dangerous for those who received and gave these insults. She noted that the words rascal, scoundrel, liar, coward, and puppy were insults severe enough to lead to a duel, so whoever threw issued these labels literally risked his life.

50 The Mississippian, February 21, 1844.
51 Ibid.
Tyler’s lead, but then decided to go back on deck to watch another display of fire. Tyler did not follow. This time, the cannon exploded. The smoke eventually cleared, revealing a grisly scene. The cannon had eviscerated Upshur and four others. The United States needed a new secretary of state, and that man would be John C. Calhoun.

By 1844, Calhoun's main motivation for accepting the Secretary of State position was the protection of southern rights. Thus, Calhoun expressed deep concern to other southerners when he discovered a dispatch on his desk—received by Upshur shortly before his death—from the Earl of Aberdeen to the British minister to the United States, Richard Pakenham. In this dispatch, Calhoun discovered why Upshur believed that an international abolitionist conspiracy, led by the British, existed. He considered the dispatch evidence that the British desired to see slavery permanently abolished in Texas and would contemplate not recognizing Texas annexation to the United States, if that ever occurred, if slavery remained intact. Calhoun told Pakenham that the United States government could not “with indifference...[accept] a policy so hostile in its character and dangerous in its tendency to the domestic institutions of so many States of this Union, and to the safety and prosperity of the whole.” As a result of Calhoun's views on this topic, Congress rejected the Tyler administration's initial attempt to annex Texas. On May 17, 1844, Calhoun clarified why he sent his letter to Pakenham. In a letter written to Governor James Henry Hammond of South Carolina, Calhoun unequivocally stated that Texas

52 Pletcher, Diplomacy of Annexation, 130-134.

53 This contradicts the argument that Calhoun’s main motivation was personal ambition. See Schroeder, Mr. Polk’s War, 22; and Pletcher, Diplomacy of Annexation, 135.

annexation was “to us a question of life and death.”\textsuperscript{55} It has been argued that Calhoun’s letter was the product of southern racism.\textsuperscript{56} Yet, Calhoun’s letter was actually an attempt to protect the southern way of life from disparagement, and it was honor, not racism, which motivated him to reply to the British in the way he did.

Calhoun’s views on Texas soon became public knowledge, and most northerners disagreed with the direct connection Calhoun drew between slavery and annexation. One northerner contributed an article to a Delaware newspaper in which he argued that the “accursed project [annexation] has been a favorite of the South for years past. It was cherished by Jackson, and not frowned on by Van Buren; and is said to be a darling with Tyler and some of the Guard. We have territory enough – need no more, and to be saddled with Texas, and its \textit{diabolical} population, would probably cause a dissolution of the Union.”\textsuperscript{57} According to this writer – in marked contrast to Calhoun – acquiring more slave territory would mean the death of the Union.

Some northern abolitionists actually called for their states to secede if Texas joined the Union. Indeed, some northerners had already argued for the immediate emancipation of the southern slaves for over a decade. The most vocal and visible proponent of this view was William Lloyd Garrison of Massachusetts. By the spring of 1844, Garrison warned the readers of his abolitionist paper \textit{The Liberator} that the addition of the new slave state of Texas would mean that New England had no alternative but to secede from the Union, and he provided readers with sample petitions which they could send to their congressmen to urge disunion. By this time, Garrison and his followers had already rejected the Old Testament in the \textit{Bible}, arguing

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\item\textsuperscript{56} Pletcher, \textit{Diplomacy of Annexation}, 144.
\item\textsuperscript{57} Lundy, \textit{The Anti-Texass Legion}, 40, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries, Special Collections.
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that Christians need only act in accordance with Jesus’ message of love, as found in the Gospels. Garrison had been contemplating northern secession for years, as he believed that being in union with slaveholders hurt northerners morally just as much as the slaveholders. In fact, he once wrote to the Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society that the North should consider the “repeal of the Union between the North and the South – or, in other words, between liberty and slavery – in order that the people of the North might be induced to reflect upon their debasement, guilt, and danger, in continuing in partnership with heaven-daring oppressors, and thus be led to repentance.” From January 29-30, 1845, at Faneuil Hall in Boston, a convention of the “People of Massachusetts” eventually adopted a statement which rejected annexation as unconstitutional because it would spread slavery. That body, however, was not prepared to endorse Garrison's views of secession; some, in fact, believed that Garrison advocated anarchy. The editor of the Boston Daily News, Edward C. Purdy, referred to the document as “treasonable.” The next day, Garrison sent a letter to the editor which quoted Patrick Henry's famous statement: “If this be treason...make the most of it.” It is clear, though, that the editor's words cut deep, as Garrison stated that he did not wish to defend himself against the editor’s “absurd charge of treason, but to repel an insinuation which severely reflects on my honor and honesty as a man.” Abolitionists like Garrison believed that slavery fundamentally endangered the free-labor society of the North, and the values which they held dear as Americans. Garrison concluded by arguing “whatever may be my views of government, they do not disqualify me from joining an assembly of the people to protest against the annexation of

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58 Ziegler, The Advocates of Peace in Antebellum America, 106.

Texas as a most wicked and unlawful act.” While Garrison did not challenge Purdy to a duel, as might be done in the South, it is clear that Garrison believed the editorial impugned his character and he demanded an explanation. Garrison was far from the only northerner to link the idea of honor to the opposition of slavery, or, as he viewed it, defense of freedom. On the eve of the Mexican War, it was northern abolitionists who contemplated secession as a way to preserve their honor.

Despite the clear secessionist arguments of radical abolitionists, throughout 1844 southerners increasingly began to embrace the views of the new secretary of state. One of the most significant new proponents of annexation was Andrew Jackson. The former president was living out his final years at his Tennessee plantation – The Hermitage – but still kept abreast of the major political developments facing the country. In a letter to Tennessee Governor Aaron V. Brown, Jackson made it clear that he continued to think that the issue contained real dangers for the Union since it affected “our domestic relations.” Jackson emphasized, however, that he believed the time was right to annex Texas. Jackson wrote Brown that “in all its aspects, the annexation of Texas to the United States promises to enlarge the circle of free institutions, and is essential to the United States, particularly as lessening the probabilities of future collision with foreign powers, and giving them greater efficiency in spreading the blessings of peace.” While this letter was addressed to Brown, Jackson in fact intended it for publication, believing it might garner support in favor of annexation. Papers throughout the South and the nation published this letter in the following weeks.


61 *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette*, April 3, 1844.
With Jackson’s consent, many southerners increased their efforts to swing public support in favor of annexation. In the spring of 1844 the citizens of cities like New Orleans, Baltimore, Richmond, Savannah, and Mobile held pro-annexation meetings. Prominent members of both major political parties oftentimes supported these meetings. For instance, the pro-annexation meeting in Mecklenburg, North Carolina was composed of nearly equal numbers of Whigs and Democrats. On June 3, 1844 South Carolinians held pro-annexation meetings in towns like Laurens, Abbeville, Anderson, Pickens, and Spartanburg. The Greenville Mountaineer argued that these meetings showed South Carolinians had “thrown off all party shackles.”

The meetings also show that some southerners who had opposed annexation initially now called for Texas’ entrance into the Union. George McDuffie was one of the more prominent politicians to make this switch. On May 20, McDuffie and Robert Barnwell Rhett helped organize a large meeting held in Beaufort, South Carolina. The attendees of this meeting determined that the issue was between slavery and abolitionism, as the country seemed likely to accept “a policy hostile not only to our dearest interest, but even to our existence as a people....and we are called on by every consideration of interest, of honor and of self-preservation, to take instant and immediate measures for our security and defense.” The issue went much deeper than slavery, as it threatened the southern way of life. Speaking in the Senate shortly afterwards, McDuffie argued that these public meetings had “thrown nearly all other

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62 South Carolina Temperance Advocate and Register of Agriculture and General Literature, May 23, 1844.
63 The Liberator, May 31, 1844.
64 Greenville Mountaineer, June 7, 1844.
65 Fayetteville Observer, June 7, 1844.
topics in the shade, especially in the South, where there is scarcely a man opposed to immediate
annexation.”

As these meetings demonstrated, an increasing number of southerners had begun to think
of annexation as key to preserving slavery. After all, an abundance of evidence showed that
abolitionists wanted to destroy slavery regardless of whether Texas was in the Union or not.

“There is no danger of war with Mexico if Texas joined the Union.” Pro-annexationists pointed
to the fact that Mexico and Texas had not engaged in major military engagements since San Jacinto, so

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66 Greenville Mountaineer, May 31, 1844.

67 South Carolina Temperance Advocate and Register of Agriculture and General Literature, April 4, 1844.
the argument that the United States would be annexing a war with Mexico appeared to have no basis in reality. The *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette* argued that “under these circumstances the reasons which influence our government seven years ago have no bearing now upon the question.”68 Even if a war did result, pro-annexationists argued that Mexico posed little military threat to the United States. One southerner questioned: “Suppose Mexico should kick up, what should we do? Why, whip her to be sure.”69

Thus, by the summer of 1844 more southerners voiced support for annexation than at any point since the Texan Revolution concluded. The writers in the *Greenville Mountaineer*, a South Carolina paper, were optimistic despite the years of waiting for annexation that the time was “not far distant when an anti-annexation politician will be as odious as an anti-war man in olden times.”70 Andrew Stevenson of Virginia, former American Minister to Great Britain, remarked that it was only a matter of time until the United States spread liberty to Texas and northern Mexico. “By this union we take the surest means of fortifying not only the great defenses of liberty, and securing the perpetuations of our intuitions,” Stevenson said, “but we advance the cause of freedom, civilization, and christianity, throughout this western Hemisphere, for all future time.”71

Despite the gains made by pro-annexationists in early 1844, in June the Senate rejected the latest annexation treaty. John Berrien, a Georgia Whig in his first term, gave a speech which shows why southern opposition to annexation remained strong. While most Whigs opposed any sort of territorial acquisition through warfare, Berrien opposed annexation because he did not

69 *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette*, May 17, 1844.
70 *Greenville Mountaineer*, August 2, 1844.
believe the South would benefit from the annexation of Texas. His concerns, as he articulated them, were as “a Southern man.” He wanted “to know whether Southern interests will be peculiarly advanced by the ratification of this treaty.” Berrien believed that Texas would develop a fugitive slave problem, as slaves could potentially flee to Mexico where, at least in principle, slavery was outlawed. This problem would be even worse than the one that Upper South states faced with slaves fleeing to the North, since at least the United States had some laws to retrieve slave property in the free states. The best solution for the protection for slavery, therefore, was to keep Texas “an independent State.” Berrien warned his fellow southerners that if Texas joined the Union it “would afford an outlet of escape for the slave to a country where, from the nature of its institutions, from the variety and admixture of its population, from the amalgamation of the Spaniard and the Indian, and the negro, he would find a congenial home.” Berrien and other anti-annexationists simply believed that the annexation of Texas would hurt the South.

All the debates about annexation in Congress and in the nation's newspapers, as well as the Tyler administration's aggressive efforts to annex Texas, meant that the issue could not be ignored in the 1844 presidential election. That was, however, what Henry Clay, the front-runner for the Whig nomination, and New Yorker Martin Van Buren, the leading candidate for the Democrats, tried to do. Both Clay and Van Buren opposed the annexation of Texas by the United States and hoped to avoid making it an issue in the election. With Jackson’s public approval of annexation, however, support for annexation was growing too powerful for these politicians to

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72 Daily National Intelligencer, August 3, 1844.
sidestep the issue. Additionally, Jackson also gave his blessing for the Democratic National Convention in 1844 to select a candidate other than his chosen protégé Van Buren.\(^{73}\)

For southerners, international abolitionism was perhaps the biggest reason that annexation could no longer be ignored. While all the talk of international abolition coming from southerners might seem like mere hyperbole, many southerners expressed these views. Historians, thus, simply cannot ignore them. When he first read of the news of British meddling in Texas, Senator Benton wrote that it was like “a clap of thunder in a clear sky.”\(^{74}\) It is important to note, though, that not all southerners agreed. In early 1844, Henry Clay reported to North Carolina Senator Willie P. Mangum that “throughout the whole of that portion of the South, which I have traversed, I have found a degree of indifference of opposition to the measure of annexation which quiet surprized [sic] me.” It was at this point that Clay made the decision that rather than avoid the annexation debate, which he realized was not possible, he would instead publicly oppose the annexation of Texas. Clay expressed that he did not “entertain the slightest apprehension of any injury to our cause from the publication of my opinions. On the contrary I believe it would be benefited and strengthened.”\(^{75}\) Clay also wrote a letter to be published in newspapers across the nation, stating that he considered “the annexation of Texas, at this time, without the assent of Mexico, as a measure compromising the national character, involving us certainly in a war with Mexico, probably with other foreign powers, dangerous to the integrity of the Union, inexpedient in the present financial condition of the country, and not called for by any


Clay believed that southerners solidly opposed annexation and he could strengthen his support in the South by expressing similar views.

Clay misread southern public opinion on annexation. While opposition was still strong, the pro-annexation cause was increasing in numbers. Pro-annexationists, additionally, proved active in their campaigning to gain adherents to their cause. For instance, Mississippi Senator Henry Foote traveled to Louisiana to give a speech to local citizens about the importance of annexation. Shortly after Congress rejected annexation, Foote told Louisianans that southerners must continue their efforts, since “the question of annexation is the abolition question in another form.” In the following weeks, some of the citizens in the Parish of Tensas wrote to several Mississippi newspapers explaining how grateful Louisianans were to have a southern patriot visit them. “Gen. Foote's speech was a most triumphant vindication of the rights of the South,” stated one of these letters. Further, Foote clearly expressed the “right policy and necessity of IMMEDIATE ANNEXATION,” which “ought to convince every Southern man who heard it, whether whig or democrat, that it would be suicidal in the South to support Henry Clay for the Presidency.”

Clay found himself in a predicament when the Democratic National Convention heeded Jackson's advice and voted for an avowed expansionist – Tennessean James Knox Polk – to be the party's presidential hopeful. Polk promised that his administration would attempt to reduce the tariff of 1842, resolve the joint settlement with Britain in the Oregon territory by developing a plan in which the United States would take sole ownership, complete Texas annexation, and purchase Alta California from Mexico. Polk also promised to only serve one term in office, a

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76 *The Scioto Gazette*, May 2, 1844.

77 *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette*, June 25, 1844. Emphasis in the original.
concession he made to unite the various factions of the Democratic Party in the election. The one term pledge, additionally, would allow Polk to operate his administration without worrying about re-election. In response to Polk's nomination, Clay waffled, stating that he might be open to Texas annexation. While some southern Whigs undoubtedly appreciated Clay's change of heart, this decision ensured that Clay would not be able to count on the abolitionist vote. As a result, Polk carried the election in an extremely close vote, with the election essentially decided by enough people in New York State deciding to vote for the abolitionist ticket – headed by James Birney of the Liberty Party – instead of the Whig ticket.\(^7\) The votes Clay lost became, in essence, votes for Polk, who only won by about 5000 votes in the state. Samuel Medary of Columbus, Ohio, wrote to Polk that the election was a victory over the “cursed abolitionists.”\(^9\) The Democratic Party also interpreted the election as a mandate for annexation. It seemed, therefore, that it would only be a matter of time before the United States annexed Texas. In the months following Polk’s election, however, both supporters and opponents of annexation increased their efforts on this question.

Shortly after Polk’s election in November 1844, South Carolina Governor James Henry Hammond delivered a speech to the state senate and representatives in which he expressed great concern over abolitionism. While the election ended favorably for the South, it was clear that abolitionists’ numbers had grown enough to actually influence elections. In the future, the South might not be so fortunate. Hammond informed his listeners that many people outside the state believed that South Carolinians desired the dissolution of the Union, but he denied such charges.

\(^7\) Peterson, *The Great Triumvirate*, 415.

\(^9\) Samuel Medary to James Polk, November 10, 1844, *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, ed. Hall, 301.
Instead, Hammond maintained that South Carolina “has given, in its times of trial, a more ardent or effective support to the Union,” than any other state. What made the Union so valuable, according to Hammond, was that Americans enjoyed rights guaranteed by the Constitution. He claimed, however, that outsiders correctly believed that South Carolinians might take actions which included secession in order to preserve their Constitutional rights. Therefore, while South Carolinians were “not wanting in those sentiments which teach them to venerate the institutions founded, in part, by their own wise and heroic ancestors,” Hammond stressed that the Union must provide “liberty” and “security” to southerners. Once northerners succeeded in denying southerners their constitutional rights, Hammond bemoaned, the Union’s “living principles” would be gone.

To drive home this point, Hammond invoked the legacy of the most famous American, George Washington. Despite being dead for over forty-five years, in 1845 Americans still universally admired Washington, and as the popularity of the Parson Mason Locke Weems’ stories demonstrated, his life could still provide Americans with examples for living a virtuous life. Hammond informed the audience that “the Father of our Country, did indeed leave it to us, as his parting admonition, that we should cling to the Union as our ark of safety.” But, Hammond added, “Sacred as we hold his last words….we cannot throw them into the scale against the history of his life; and that teaches us to resist oppression, from whatever quarter it may come, and whatever hazard is incurred.” Hammond seemed to suggest that if Washington had been still alive in 1844, he would assuredly have resisted abolitionism at all costs.

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Following Polk’s election, most southerners finally agreed that Texas annexation was the best way to resist abolitionism.

Probably few southerners would have disagreed with Hammond’s assessment, but some opposition to annexation still existed in the South. In fact, it seemed that the debates over annexation would soon result in violence. A few weeks after Hammond’s address, Texas annexation once again came up for discussion in the House of Representatives. North Carolina Whig Thomas Lanier Clingman emerged as one of the most determined opponents of annexation. What separated Clingman from every other southern politician was that he never supported the gag rule against abolitionist petitions. Clingman was a firm supporter of slavery, but he believed that southerners’ resistance to unpopular abolitionist ideas only added fuel to the fire. This was the same reason he opposed Texas annexation, as annexation would only ensure more abolitionist attacks. In early January, 1845, Clingman argued that he did not appreciate fellow southerners trying to bully him and other opponents into voting for annexation. Moreover, he accused annexationists of acting as “false watchmen of the South – traitor sentinels.”

Pro-annexationist southerners continued to stress that Texas annexation was crucial to the future of southern institutions, and Clingman stated he simply did not believe this to be the case. In response, freshman Congressman William Lowndes Yancey of Alabama rose and declared Clingman the true traitor to the South and the nation, accusing him of supporting the enemy “in the face of his own friends” and giving “a stab to the institutions” of the South. Clingman then asked Yancey to clarify whether he was attacking his character as a gentleman or

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simply his political views. Yancey refused to clarify, and Clingman issued a challenge for a duel a few days later.

By 1845, dueling was primarily confined to the South and there were rules in place to structure these affairs of honor. In 1838, former South Carolina Governor John Lyde Wilson wrote *The Code of Honor*, a short tract which provided readers with the proper rules and ethics of dueling. His work was popular enough that it was published again in 1858. The reason Wilson’s tract found a receptive audience stemmed from the fact that white southerners found his ideas to be of practical importance in a region and age when dueling was still socially acceptable. “If an oppressed nation has a right to appeal to arms in defense of its liberty and the happiness of its people,” Wilson informed readers, then “there can be no argument used in support of such appeal, which will not apply with equal force to individuals.” An honorable gentleman should not quickly resort to a duel, however, as solutions like apologies – private or public – should be sought first. If a peaceful solution cannot be reached, however, then a duel might be necessary, as gentlemen must never display “passive forbearance to insult and indignity.” Dueling, thus, constituted a proper response if all other means to restore honor proved unsuccessful.

In the week which followed the Clingman-Yancey exchange in Congress, the two antagonists performed their proper part to avoid a duel. Clingman secured Washington attorney

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82 Ibid.
83 See Freeman, Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic, 159-98. Arguments made in Congress were supposed to be protected from reprisals. However, this did not apply if a politician issued an insult during a speech.
84 See Freeman, Affairs of Honor, xvi-xvii. Freeman noted that even in the early Republic, when dueling was still prevalent in the North, southerners were far quicker and more likely to resort to a duel than northerners.
86 Ibid.
Charles Lee Jones as his second in the affair, and Yancey obtained South Carolinian John
Middleton Huger to be his. Over the next week, the two seconds exchanged notes between the
two politicians, searching for a means by which to avoid the confrontation. Both Clingman and
Yancey, however, refused to issue an apology or admit blame for the disagreement. On January
13, 1845, the two principals met on a field of honor in Maryland, took shots, and missed.
Ultimately, Clingman admitted that he meant no personal assault by his speech in Congress, and
Yancey agreed to take back his personal assault on Clingman. 87 Both men believed that their
honor had been restored and let the matter drop. This event, though, did not change Clingman’s
opposition to annexation. The president of the Senate, North Carolinian Whig Willie P.
Mangum, in a statement that was seemingly both cultural and political, noted that Clingman, but
not Yancey, “bore himself with great calmness & resolution, & went through the whole affair in a
manner most honorable to him.” 88 As the Clingman-Yancey duel demonstrates, the question of
Texas annexation went well beyond traditional political animosities. 89 Each man decided that he
would rather die than lose his honor. Texas annexation was a matter of life and death.

A few days later, on January 21, 1845, the House of Representatives once again took up
discussion of Texas annexation. As was his usual course, Joshua Giddings of Ohio – perhaps the
foremost abolitionist in Congress – argued that he opposed annexation because of the probability
that it would become a slave state. Giddings – like Garrison – was a firm believer that

(1976): 52. Eaton argued that only a small percentage of challenges to a duel resulted in bloodshed, as many ended
exactly like the Clingman-Yancey duel, with neither antagonist hitting his opponent. Additionally, most affairs of
honor were settled through arbitration or in a local “Court of Honor” prior to the conflict escalating to a duel.

88 Willie P. Mangum to Charity A. Mangum, January 14, 1845, in Papers of Willie P. Mangum, ed. Shanks,
251.

89 For a discussion of the Clingman-Yancey duel and southern violence, see Dickson D. Bruce, Violence
northerners had honor. The key difference, according to Giddings, between northern honor and southern honor was that northern honor rested on freedom, while southern honor rested on slavery and oppression. After Giddings’ harangue against slavery and annexation, Andrew Johnson of Tennessee informed the House that he believed Giddings suffered from what “medical writers” called “monomania, under the influence of which the mind that was laboring was perfectly sound on all subjects save one.” More specifically, Johnson stated that it did “not [matter] what subject was introduced into this House, if the gentleman from Ohio got the floor, his cry was abolition! abolition!”

By this time, southerners like Johnson had grown accustomed to the diatribes of abolitionists like Giddings. Therefore, while Johnson still had the floor he decided to turn the debate towards the Clingman-Yancey duel. Like Yancey, Johnson was astonished by the dishonorable accusations which Clingman raised in his speeches in Congress. Johnson yelled that Clingman had committed “an unpardonable attack on the South, derogatory to the southern character, and unbecoming a southern representative.” It seems that Johnson was more accepting, or at least resigned, to the ideas of Giddings than of Clingman. It was in the northern abolitionist character to act dishonorably, but such behavior was ill-fitting on a North Carolina congressman. The events in Congress involving Clingman demonstrate that debates over Texas annexation cannot simply be reduced to political rivalries amongst Democrats and Whigs. Southerners believed that the stakes in this question were much higher, as their very honor was on the line.

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91 Ibid., 189-190.
Johnson’s speech helped once again spark debate over Texas annexation. One of the most fervent southern annexation supporters was South Carolinian Robert Barnwell Rhett, who followed Johnson with a speech of his own. “A few years since the South, from obvious motives of interest, was indifferent to the annexation of Texas to the Union; and, although I suppose they would at any time have gone for annexation as a great national measure, they had no deep enthusiasm in its favor,” Rhett summarized for his fellow representatives. It was abolitionists, however, who made so many southerners firm annexationists. Rhett told these abolitionists that “you have disturbed our ‘domestic tranquility,’” rendering “Texas, in the Southern mind, necessary to ensure it.” Rhett correctly argued that every American citizen was promised certain constitutional rights, one of which was domestic tranquility, and all Americans must take any action necessary to ensure these rights. “The South has been wantonly wronged, insulted, and betrayed,” Rhett concluded to the northerners listening to him speak.92 Speaking the language of southern honor, Rhett demanded annexation so slavery could expand to the West.

Georgia representative Alexander Stephens still opposed annexation, but his reasoning – the protection of slavery – was much the same as southern annexationists. “As much as I desire the addition to our Republic upon what I conceive to be correct and proper principles,” Stephens informed the House on January 25, “yet upon others, and upon some of those now before us, I should not hesitate to reject it as one of the greatest possible evils with which we could be cursed.” Stephens noted that every plan for annexation left the slavery question unresolved, so southerners needed to hope that northerners would respect the Missouri Compromise and allow slavery in the new state. Stephens clarified Rhett’s assertion that all southerners now supported

92 Daily National Intelligencer, February 8, 1845.
annexation, as the Georgia representative stated his state “has always been in favor of annexation, as soon as it could be honorably, peaceably, properly, and practically done, but no sooner.” The present plan for annexation, without a specific protection of slavery in Texas, meant that annexation could not be honorably, peaceably, properly, or practically accomplished at this time. “But this I will not hesitate to say,” Stephens lectured his fellow southerners, “that no Southern man could pursue, in my opinion, a more unwise course than to vote for any measure upon this subject without a settlement and establishment of the line dividing those interests. If slavery is to exist in any part of the territory, let it be so stated. Let it be ‘nominated in the bond.’”

Despite the best efforts of opponents like Stephens, by the end of January, a Joint Resolution for annexation had passed both houses of Congress. The Joint Resolutions, however, would have to be ratified by Texans to become official.

The majority of southerners began to embrace annexation because they thought that abolitionism posed a fundamental danger to slavery and southern honor. Abolitionists had increased their efforts to destroy slavery in the South; southerners thus believed that some measure should be taken as protection against their assaults. For instance, in the summer of 1845, a rather curious dispute ensued in a popular southern literary magazine. The discussion commenced when an anonymous northerner sent a letter to the Southern Literary Messenger. The northerner expressed concern that the southern magazine took too much of a southern view on the issue of slavery. The writer expressed astonishment upon reading the magazine’s support for slavery in past issues, stating how unfortunate it was that “a learned editor” speak of slavery as “assigned by God,” a view which carried “us back beyond the French Revolution, when a

93 Daily National Intelligencer, February 15, 1845. Emphasis in the original.
Noble could shoot a peasant for amusement.” The northerner went on to state that he wanted “Texas annexed, but not for the extension of slavery.” The northerner perceived the expansion of the country’s borders to the West as a national goal which the founders supported, but not the extension of slavery. This contributor reminded the magazine that southerners of the Revolutionary generation wanted future generations to oversee the gradual death of slavery. He stated that “wise men of the South, of the Jeffersonian age, wished and believed that slavery must come to an end, or we should do worse.” Alas, the dreams of emancipation held by the southern founders have been dashed by “their degenerate sons [who] are expecting to amass wealth by this plague spot on our Republic.” He assured southerners that he had “nothing to do with abolition or any other fanaticism,” but since southerners insisted upon linking the future glory of the nation to the corrosive influences of human bondage, southerners might as well “go your own way; hang your barbaric arguments; sleep over a volcano; prepare for a revolution that shall shake your sunny hills to their aristocratic centres.”

After receiving this curious letter, Benjamin Blake Minor, the editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, decided both to print the letter and to respond to the criticisms. Minor began by scoffing at the idea that the magazine should not be biased towards the South on the slavery issue. He decried that on all questions concerning “the rights and institutions of the South it [The Southern Literary Messenger] never will be ‘neutral.’” Minor proceeded to state that the magazine was “Southern and asks for Southern support,” but also assured the northerner that the magazine never held any desire to “array the South against the North.” Instead, Minor stressed that the magazine sought to “cordially adopt the motto of the American South, ‘In the South and for the South: In the Union and for the Union.’” Despite their attachment to the Union, however, Minor assured readers that “we will vindicate Southern interests from assault, Southern manners
from aspersion and Southern literature from disparagement.” Such evidence helped convince southerners that many northerners, not just abolitionists, posed a threat to slavery within the Union. Most southerners, therefore, embraced the idea that the extension of slavery offered the best remedy to combat abolitionism.

Pro-annexationists could finally claim victory when a Texas Convention met in Austin on the Fourth of July and assented to the Joint Resolutions. A few days later, Texans passed a resolution which asked “the President of the United States to send troops forthwith upon the frontier of Texas.” Texans knew that Mexico would not welcome this news. Even southerners who had long opposed annexation believed that Polk needed to protect the new state if the Mexicans decided to attack. Before news of Texas’ ratification of the Joint Resolutions, the *Raleigh Register*, an anti-annexation newspaper, explained that they opposed the approaching union since it would “not contribute to either the honor or the prosperity of the Nation.” This paper believed that war with Mexico seemed likely in the future, as once the new state entered the Union it would “be the duty of our government to protect Texas.”

Andrew Johnson, for one, saw annexation as both a major triumph over anti-annexationists’ and a victory for the South. On January 31, 1846, Johnson described opposition to the annexation of Texas as a monster, with a “head [which] was the United States bank; his arms, a latitudinous construction of the Constitution; his heart and stomach, the distribution of the proceeds of the public lands; his backbone and spine, a tariff for protection; his huge and ponderous legs, an assumption of $200,000,000 of the debts of the States; his long, dirty, greasy

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94 *Southern Literary Messenger*, June 1845, 62. Emphasis in the original. Editors sometimes provided fake communications in order to prove a certain point. Thus, it is possible that the letter from the northerner was not actually authentic.

95 *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette*, July 24, 1845.

96 *Weekly Raleigh Register*, July 11, 1845.
tail, the retrospective feature of the bankrupt law.” Most listeners easily grasped that this monster was the Whig party, controlled by interests harmful to the South. The annexation of Texas also marked the death of this monster. According to Johnson, with the monster no longer in the way, annexation could be accomplished. Johnson then informed the House what the scene of annexation looked like: “Uncle Sam, with his stars and stripes in his right hand, was seen approaching in the distance; and as he drew near the hymeneal altar, Texas, the interesting young virgin of the South, was seen leaning on his arm, the ring of ‘annexation’ on her finger, and her countenance indicating that she had confessed that she loved, and blushed that she had owned it.”

Despite the fact that there had been no major hostilities since 1836, at the time of annexation Mexico and Texas – in the absence of a recognized peace treaty by both belligerents – were still at war with each other. Texans believed that the Rio Grande was their state’s western boundary, and many American politicians, including Polk, agreed with this boundary. Now that Texas was an American state, Polk considered it his duty to protect the claims of the citizens of Texas. As requested, Polk sent American troops under Zachary Taylor's command to Texas to ensure safety to the Texans. In early 1846, Polk ordered Taylor's troops to the banks of the Rio Grande, into the disputed territory.

Somewhat coincidentally, on April 25, the same day that Mexican guerrillas ambushed Thornton's dragoons, President Polk met with his cabinet to discuss the “Mexican Question.”

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97 Johnson speech to the House of Representatives, January 31, 1846, Papers of Andrew Johnson, ed. Haskins, 292-293.

Polk told the cabinet: “we must take redress for the injuries done us into our own hands, that we had attempted to conciliate Mexico in vain, and had forborne until forbearance was no longer either a virtue or patriotic.” He emphasized his opinion that “we must treat all nations, whether great or small, strong or weak, alike, and that we should take a bold and firm course towards Mexico.”

At the conclusion of this meeting, all the members of the cabinet – except Secretary of State James Buchanan of Pennsylvania – disagreed with Polk’s view that a Declaration of War should be sent to Congress immediately. Instead, the rest of the cabinet believed that a Declaration should be written just in case relations with the Mexicans continued to deteriorate and a message needed to go to Congress quickly. On the evening of May 9, Polk received word that the Mexicans attacked General Taylor’s troops on April 25. Polk finished his message within two days and submitted it to Congress for consideration on May 11, 1846.

Polk did not really ask Congress for a Declaration of War; rather, he sought agreement in Congress that war already existed between the United States and Mexico. Polk maintained that American honor depended upon a quick response to Mexican aggression. In his message, Polk reminded Congress that he had dispatched Louisianan John Slidell as an envoy in October, 1845, with the intention of purchasing the northern Mexican territories of New Mexico and California. The president stated that this mission showed America’s “strong desire to establish

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100 Thomas M. Leonard, *James K. Polk: A Clear and Unquestionable Destiny* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001), 185. Leonard argued that war between the United States and Mexico was inevitable since Mexico was just as determined to defend its periphery as the United States was eager to add to its periphery.

101 See Schroeder, *Mr. Polk’s War*, 12; also Leonard, *James K. Polk*, 163. These scholars argued that Polk desired, coerced, and manipulated the Mexicans into attacking Americans in order to fight a war for territorial aggrandizement.

peace with Mexico on liberal and honorable terms.” Prior to Slidell’s departure, the Mexican
government promised Polk they would receive his envoy.\textsuperscript{103} When Slidell arrived in Mexico,
however, Polk described how “not only was the [territorial purchase] offer rejected, but the
indignity of its rejection was enhanced by the manifest breach of faith in refusing to admit the
envoy who came.” The Mexicans had lied to him and insulted the United States in the
process.\textsuperscript{104} For Polk, these reasons provided sufficient justification for acknowledging a war
which Mexico had already started.

While most southerners supported Polk’s views on Mexico, a significant number of
southerners lacked Polk’s desire for war. Even while the debates over Texas annexation still
raged, some southerners began to think about how annexation would affect relations with
Mexico. Perhaps one of the more noteworthy early war opponents was South Carolina Whig
Waddy Thompson, who served as Minister to Mexico from 1841 to 1844. Ironically, some
northerners like Daniel Webster linked Thompson to the radical Texans who demanded an
extreme western boundary in order to secure more slave territory. Thompson's private writings
and actions as minister during this period, however, prove that he was indeed a “friend of

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid. The Mexicans believed that the Americans were going to send a diplomat only to discuss the issue
of Texas. Instead, the United States sent Slidell as a minister plenipotentiary, able to discuss any diplomatic issue
with Mexico. If Mexico received Slidell, they would have to agree to resume normal diplomatic relations with the
United States. Such an admission would mean that Mexico would need to acknowledge that Texas was now an
American state.

\textsuperscript{104} James K. Polk, Message to Congress, May 11, 1846, quoted in John C. Pinhero, Manifest Ambition:
James K. Polk and Civil Military Relations during the Mexican War (Westport: Praeger Security International,
2007), 183-188.

For Mexican motivations on the Texas Question see Gene Brack, Mexico Views Manifest Destiny, 1821-
Brack showed that Mexican President Pedro Ampudia thought that the situation over Texas might be settled
peacefully if he could convince the Mexican people to simply deny their claims to Texas. However, most Mexican
politicians and the Mexican press believed Texas was a point of honor, and they therefore wanted war. Ampudia
held no other option but to resist American claims to Texas. See also Brack, “Mexican Opinion, American Racism,
Thompson believed another confrontation with Great Britain might erupt if the United States declared war, since tensions in the west still ran high between the two countries over disputes with Texas and Oregon. Yet Thompson also stressed that the United States needed to avoid declaring war because of the economic and military superiority that the United States held over the Mexicans. In a book written just prior to but published just after the outbreak of hostilities, Thompson employed gendered language to prove the point of Mexican weakness, stating that he did “not think that the Mexican men had much more physical strength than our [American] women,” analogizing that such a war would be like a “feeble woman and a strong man armed,” and even that would not “express the inequality of such a contest.” Against the superior Americans, Thompson wrote, Mexican’s “impotency and helplessness” were their only protection. Since this war would not be fought amongst equals, the United States needed to keep peace with their southern neighbor. Wars – like duels – ought only to be fought amongst equals.

James Dunwoody Brownson DeBow, a fast-rising New Orleans-based editor of agricultural periodicals, also opposed the war based on what he perceived to be Mexican inferiority. He feared the possibility of bringing such degraded people under the United States government, since a war with Mexico would potentially acquire seven million “immoral” Catholics and land unsuitable for plantation agriculture. In his Review, DeBow emphasized

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106 For an overview of Texas annexation and the Oregon question, see Pletcher, The Diplomacy of Annexation, 64-228.

107 Waddy Thompson, Recollections of Mexico (New York: 1847), 168-247; and Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny, 157-9. Importantly, many pro-war newspapers published glowing reviews of Thompson’s book, often selectively choosing lengthy excerpts which supported the war cause, causing some historians, including Horsman, to errantly label Thompson as a war supporter. Such cases demonstrate that in a society based largely around shared concepts of honor, majority and minority opinion oftentimes appeared very similar.
Mexico’s educational inferiority in his arguments against declaring war, maintaining that Mexicans learned to be weak and docile from clerical withholding of education. Such a condition arose because Mexico entrusted education “to ignorant monks and priests [who] served principally to inculcate the doctrine of passive obedience.…and rarely were to develop the intellectual and moral faculties of the Mexican youth.”

Southernners voiced similar arguments of docility and passive obedience about black slaves.

Therefore, some southerners worried about the dishonor which would follow fighting such an unequal contest. A major reason why southerners like Thompson and DeBow fostered such qualms about declaring war on Mexico was out of a sense of paternalism. Most historians use this term to explain southern planters’ relationship to their black slaves, where the institution of slavery produced reciprocal responsibilities in which white masters sometimes showed kindness and affection to their slaves to ensure hard work, but also occasional cruelty in order to alter the slave's behavior in the future. Yet implicitly, many southerners transferred paternalistic roles and responsibilities to the Mexicans during the war. Some southern opponents argued that the United States ought to instruct – rather than flog – the Mexicans on how to behave like proper “republicans.”

Some of the publications in DeBow’s periodicals show that some significant opposition to a conflict with Mexico existed in the Old Southwest, an area historians typically view as rabidly expansionist. For example, in an article entitled “Mexico, Its Social and Political

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108 *DeBow’s Review* 1, no. 1 (January 1846): 86.


110 Although Mexico was a republic in theory, in reality it was a dictatorship. Many southerners argued that Mexicans did not act “republican.” Such thoughts stemmed from the disorderly nature of politics, the immense power of the clergy, and the frequent governance by dictators. See Schroeder, *Mr. Polk’s War*, 52.

111 For studies which focus on opposition among northeastern Whigs, see K. Jack Bauer, *The Mexican
Condition,” New Orleans based lawyer Gustavus Schmidt provided one of these oppositional articles. He started by explaining the historical differences between the United States and Mexico, stating that “it would be vain to attempt to disguise, that if the United States on the one hand, exhibit[ed] in bold and beautiful relief, the blessings of liberty, Mexico, on the other, show[ed] that freedom may be perverted and degenerate into anarchy, which, in its effects is not less deplorable than the most oppressive despotism.” Schmidt found that Mexico’s brief history as an independent nation constituted “a state of anarchy and confusion, which is incompatible with the protection of the lives and property of citizens, the chief ends of all governments.” Mexico had failed as an independent nation, Schmidt argued, because of a lack of education among the population, control of the nation by the clergy, an absence of professional classes, and low morals. Schmidt detailed that republicanism “which is liberty in action, can therefore never be established and maintained, except among a virtuous and intelligent people: for it requires the sacrifices of private interest to the public good, the suppression and control of individual passions, when their expression might be detrimental to the community, and above all, that high moral and mental culture which enables each citizen to sustain his part in the administration of the affairs of the nation of which he is a member.” As a result of its weakness, Schmidt concluded that Mexico would have to be “treated with indulgent forbearance, especially by the United States.”

He stated that if the United States acted with forbearance, then in the future Mexico would be “capable to repay us ten-fold the friendship we extended to her in her

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112 DeBow's Review 2, no. 1 (July 1846): 132.
infancy.” Americans needed to domesticate the hostile and unruly Mexicans – much like black slaves – in the hope that eventually they would docilely accept American style republican government. DeBow and a few other southerners who provided articles to his periodical perceived a tangible benefit to this strategy as well, for they thought that peaceful relations with Mexico might encourage the spread of republicanism further into Latin America and produce favorable trading opportunities in the future. Until then, however, Mexicans needed to be treated as children and nurtured in republicanism in order to fulfill their role in the world.

Southern opponents also feared that a war with Mexico would look bad in the eyes of the world. Even though the Monroe Doctrine had been in place for almost two decades, Americans realized that Europeans still watched developments in the western hemisphere and, in the case of Great Britain, seemed likely to continue to push for territory in Oregon, Texas, or California. Therefore, in his book, Waddy Thompson informed Americans of the necessity of appearing as a benevolent, non-aggressive republican nation in an age when Americans sought respect and recognition of their power from European leaders. He urged his countrymen to avoid war because the Mexicans were “so impoverished that they have nothing but the wealth of their churches, and surely no civilized enemy would take that.” A southern contributor to another DeBow edited periodical concurred, stating that “our deep regret is that it might be found necessary to declare war against Mexico.” This southerner regretted “this the more because such

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113 Ibid., 116-132.

114 Eyal, The Young America Movement, 7. The Young Americans voiced similar reasons in support of the war.


116 Thompson, Recollections on Mexico, 158; and Isaac McDaniel, “The Impact of the Mexican War on Anti-Catholicism in the United States,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1991). McDaniel demonstrated that although anti-Catholicism served as a prime motivator for many to fight the war against the Mexicans, anti-Catholicism actually decreased in the United States during the war. The primary reason for this was the brave contribution which many Catholic immigrants made to the war effort.
an occurrence is calculated to strengthen the prejudices elsewhere [specifically Great Britain] existing against our form of government.”

These southerners worried that declaring war against a weak republican nation would mar the reputation of the United States as a compassionate nation in world opinion. For these men, America’s influence in the world depended on much more than just how much land the country controlled, but also that other countries respected them as a civilized world power. For southerners, in order to truly have honor one must be seen as honorable to others.

Given that such influential men like Thompson and De Bow expressed criticism about a war in the years leading up to Texas annexation, Polk worried that Congress might reject the Declaration of War. He believed that people like Thomas Hart Benton, who only supported defensive war, would work with Whigs—who Polk thought opposed all the measures of his administration—to defeat the declaration. Indeed, Benton noted shortly after news of the Mexican attack that it was “impossible to conceive of an administration less warlike, or more intriguing, than that of Mr. Polk.”

It seemed that Polk's worries about the Declaration of War were not unfounded.

Despite Polk's uncertainties, the Declaration of War faced little resistance in Congress. The war message passed overwhelmingly in the House of Representatives, as opponents were literally silenced as a result of having not been recognized when they asked for time to speak. The Senate was more closely contested and a few opponents had the opportunity to speak, but events happened so quickly that opponents had no opportunity to discuss strategy for defeating

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117 *The Commercial Review of the South and West; a Monthly Journal of Trade, Commerce, Commercial Polity, Agriculture, Manufactures, Internal Improvements and General Literature* 2, no. 2 (July 1846): 27; and Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 64-88. Pletcher showed that during the age of territorial advancement, Americans always thought about how their actions would be viewed and potentially alter their relationship to Britain, France, and Spain.

118 Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, 680.
the declaration. A few southerners, like Thomas Hart Benton, stated that he believed Polk sent Taylor's forces to the Rio Grande to provoke hostilities. Benton thought that the spilt blood was the sole reason why any support existed for war, as he stated that event produced “a state of hostilities in fact, fired the American blood, both in and out of Congress, and inflamed the country for immediate war.”

Many southerners also emphasized that the Mexicans had committed an unjustifiable act and urged the country to avenge the “murder” of their fellow countrymen. While a majority of southerners believed a war represented a convenient means for territorial aggrandizement, they also expressed that the conflict should be a punitive mission to correct the behavior of the religiously, culturally, and politically “backward” Mexicans. Mississippian Jefferson Davis agreed with Polk that the Mexican refusal to receive Slidell was a slap in the face, and “the insult would have justified an immediate declaration of war.” According to Davis, Polk acted with forbearance and simply moved troops to the eastern banks of the Rio Grande only “to take possession of the entire territory claimed as our own, when there was no longer a prospect of adjustment by negotiation.” Sam Houston, now a United States Senator from Texas, argued that the country still held the responsibility of punishing the Mexicans for the massacres at the Alamo and Goliad during the Texas Revolution. Houston exclaimed in the Senate that since America “received wrongs at her [Mexico’s] hands, it was our duty to redress those wrongs.” Further, Houston maintained that Mexico should not be allowed to insult the honor of a superior nation and urged the Senate to prosecute a full scale war, insisting that Mexico’s “insolence


120 Jefferson Davis to the People of Mississippi, July 13, 1846, in *The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 3*, eds. McIntosh et al., 8.
ought not to be tolerated.” 121 Few southerners could miss Houston’s effective use of the language of honor.

These arguments reminded other southern congressmen of their responsibility to uphold southern cultural values. Floridian James Westcott tended to oppose most of the Polk administration’s policies, and Westcott initially wanted to vote in opposition to the war. After all, Mexico was a republic – in theory – if not in practice. Even the dictator Antonio López de Santa Anna had declared himself a republican, although, he later admitted that he did not know the definition of the word republican. 122 Nonetheless, many Americans like Westcott believed that Mexico represented the best hope for the future of republicanism in North America – after the United States – and wanted to restrain from attacking a fellow republic. But Westcott admitted that Americans like him had “allowed our feelings for a neighboring sister republic to restrain us from demanding and enforcing our long ago reparation for her insults and outrages.” 123

Although not explicitly stating so, southerners seemed to perceive the surprise Mexican attack in similar terms as they thought of black slave disobedience, where a slave’s defiance needed quick correction by whipping – or other just punishment – in order to secure the proper behavior in the future. 124

Much like Westcott, the vast majority of southerners who voiced criticism for the war ended up voting for it. Senator Calhoun perhaps best showed the difficulty that southern

121 Congressional Globe, 29:1, App., 800-1. Much of the language used by southern men was gendered and influenced by the “cult of true womanhood.” For further information see Amy S. Greenberg, Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1-17.

122 Anderson and Cayton, Dominion of War, 247-273.

123 Congressional Globe, 29:1, App., 801.

124 Greenberg, Masters and Statesmen, 3-44. Greenberg showed that southern politicians oftentimes thought of their duties and obligations as slave masters when making political decisions.
opponents found themselves in during these debates. At first blush, it might seem odd that Calhoun opposed the Declaration of War, especially given his vehement support for Texas annexation over the previous decade. Yet Calhoun had several reasons to oppose the war. Primarily, as one of the foremost architects of Texas annexation, he saw firsthand that the era of compromise on the issue of slavery was abruptly coming to an end. Additionally, he loathed President Polk. While he felt duty bound to vote for supplies to repel this small Mexican force, he declared that voting for a war would be like plunging “a dagger into my own heart.” He thought Polk’s claim that war existed by act of Mexico ran contrary “with that sacred regard for truth,” which he wished to always abide by. In the end, though, opponents in Congress like Calhoun believed that the United States had a paternal obligation to punish the Mexican aggression with some show of force. Thus, while a few southern Senators abstained from the voting — Calhoun and Berrien — no southern senators or congressmen voted in opposition to declare war. In total, only fourteen Representatives and two Senators, all from the North, voted in opposition to the war. That does not mean, however, southern opposition was non-existent and that they did not harbor concerns about the future. Even though early southern war opponents stressed a variety of reasons for their personal opposition to the war, they all shared a common concern that fighting a formal war against Mexicans could cause irreparable harm to slavery and cherished cultural values like honor. Anti-war southerners failed to prevent a declaration of war largely

125 Lander, Reluctant Imperialists, 65.


127 The Senators who voted in opposition were Thomas Clayton of Delaware and John Davis of Massachusetts. The Representatives who voted in opposition were: John Quincy Adams, George Ashmun, Henry Y. Cranston, Erastus D. Culver, Columbus Delano, Joshua R. Giddings, Hoseph Grinnell, Charles Hudson, Daniel P. King, Joseph M. Root, Luther Severance, John Strohm, Daniel R. Tilden, and Joseph Vance.
because of the patriotic fervor which swept the country, as well as the support which territorial expansion, anti-Catholicism, and racism garnered from the southern population, even in Whig dominated areas hostile to the Polk administration. After Congress approved a declaration of war, Louisianan J. H. Harmanson argued that the United States was about to engage in a punitive war. He stated that the Mexican attack was “insulting” and “defiant,” proving that “nothing but war would do her. Let her have it, then.”

A punitive war, although not desired, proved to be acceptable to southern opponents. After the declaration passed, Kentucky Representative Gerrett Davis continued to insist that this was a war that the Polk administration, not the Mexicans, had created. That was no longer the question, though, as the focus shifted to how to successfully prosecute the war. Davis explained that since “this war is upon us, strike vigorously. Let it be quick, sharp, and hot, that peace may sooner come.” He further insisted that he held “no fears as to the results,” and “no apprehensions for the gallant Taylor and his little army, besieged as they are said to be.” Davis believed wholeheartedly that Taylor would “thrash them gloriously.”

In towns and cities across the South, many opponents also became reconciled to a war. Just a few days after the declaration, the South Carolina Temperance Advocate and Register of Agriculture and General Literature stated: “We have been precipitated into a war with Mexico, and of course must abide the consequences, but the opposition manifested to the mode of conducting that war as well as to the declaration of it in the first instance, by the Representatives of South Carolina, must be regarded as well grounded and worthy of all praise.”

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128 J. H. Harmanson speech in the Senate, February 12, 1847, Congressional Globe 29:2, App., 142; Hobspodor, “Honor Bound,” 32; and Greenberg, Manifest Manhood, 1-53. Greenberg showed that Americans used language which privileged American manliness and emphasized female inferiority to support American expansion throughout the nineteenth century.

129 Daily National Intelligencer, May 18, 1846.
newspaper acknowledged that southerners should rally around the flag, yet they hoped that southerners could appreciate the arguments made by opponents. “The Mexicans are no doubt a most despicable people – but it is a fatal mistake to under value the spirit, resources, or energy of any foe – they are despicable in character, in honor, and in all things that ennoble human nature,” the newspaper added. However, unlike Gerrett Davis, the editors of this newspaper did not believe the Mexicans should be taken lightly because of their despicable nature. Instead, the editors reasoned that “these characteristics only serve to render them a more formidable enemy for their usual concomitants are treachery, want of fidelity to the most sacred obligations, and an utter disregard for the highest sanctions of both individual and national honor.”

While opponents held some backing in the South, most often they received criticism from war supporters. *The Mississippian* argued that “Mexico” was “walking around upon our soil, with the sword in one hand and the torch in the other.” The editors argued that all southerners should stand up and ready themselves to meet this threat. Not all southerners, however, supported their nation. Instead, the editors exclaimed that “Mr. Calhoun refused to vote either money or men for the defense of his country. He refused to vote.” Echoing the paternalistic and punitive rhetoric of southern pro-war politicians, the paper concluded that Americans “in the last seventy-five years have taught men and nations highly important lessons, and they have more lessons yet to teach.”

Such opinions were by no means confined to Democratic newspapers. The Whig edited *Weekly Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette*, which will be a leading organ of

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130 *South Carolina Temperance Advocate and Register of Agriculture and General Literature*, May 21, 1846.

131 *South Carolina Temperance Advocate and Register of Agriculture and General Literature*, May 14, 1846.

132 *The Mississippian*, May 27, 1846.
opposition throughout the war, argued that “hundreds of brave volunteers from Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, are on their way to Gen. Taylor's Camp, to relieve him and aid the work of a just retribution.” Much like the Democrats, this Whig paper urged a punitive war. The editors commented that they were “glad to see that, every where the American spirit is fully up, and that every citizen, without reference to the blunders of the administration, seems determined to do his duty, his whole duty to his country.” The editors concluded that “Mexican cruelty and rapacity will be signally punished.””\textsuperscript{133} Despite the efforts of many southerners, a war had come. Thus, the nation was compelled to thrash the Mexicans into submission.

The Texas debates which engulfed the United States from 1836 to 1846 were extremely complex. In order to fully understand the actions of southerners during the war, it is best to state clearly the conclusions which can be drawn from the pre-war period. First, opposition cannot be confined to the Whig party or to northerners. These debates showed that southern Democrats like Calhoun, Benton, and De Bow also voiced opposition. Second, it may seem odd that someone like Calhoun, who so passionately urged Texas annexation, decided to oppose – or at least abstain from voting for – a declaration of war. When one examines his views within the framework of honor and slavery, however, his views are remarkably consistent. Indeed, all southerners believed that the questions of annexation and war were very important to the South – life or death, as Calhoun said – and remained consistent in their desire to protect honor and slavery, they merely disagreed on the proper means to meet these ends. In a sense, southerners were united on the questions of honor and slavery, but not on the questions of annexation and war. Third, honor did not blunt opposition to annexation or the war declaration. Opponents used

\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Weekly Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette}, May, 15, 1846.
the language of honor just like pro-annexation and pro-war southerners. Honor was not a blunt object wielded by supporters to beat opponents into submission. Rather, honor was something that southerners thought much about and occasionally some people changed their mind on questions as new developments emerged. A southerner could bemoan the injustice of Polk sending troops to the Rio Grande, yet still believe that honor demanded that the troops there be funded and the Mexicans punished for their transgressions. In short, honor was not an irrational code of ethics in which southerners ran off to duel whenever they felt insulted. Honor was, instead, a key component to southern society and identity that all southerners attempted to abide by. Southerners agreed with honor in theory, but they differed in practice from time to time. As the next chapter will show, this continued during the actual fighting of the war as well.
Chapter 2:

“The Mean and Ungentlemanly Treatment Which the Southerners Have Received”: Honor and Dissent during the Monterey Campaign

The city of Vicksburg was abuzz as the Colonel of the 2nd Mississippi Rifle Company – Jefferson Davis – arrived to make a scheduled speech on November 10, 1846. Davis had only recently returned to Mississippi on a six week furlough to attend to the needs of his ailing wife, Varina. After a few introductory remarks from several local citizens, a large crowd gathered around to hear the heroic deeds of their state's volunteers at the recent battle of Monterey, as told by one of the state's foremost citizens. Davis excited the crowd, at least those who could hear him, when he stated that the Mississippians had added “another chaplet to the honor of the chivalry of our State.” Davis stressed, though, that the victory had “not been done without sacrifices, labors, privations, and dangers. A few months ago you saw a band of patriots leave your shores – exulting in hope and youth and looking forward to laurels and victory.” Despite this optimism, Davis informed the crowd that almost none “in that band of enthusiastic volunteers knew what were the stern realities of military life; and at the very threshold [sic] of the service upon which they entered, detention, disappointment, and hardships attended them.”

The Mississippians experienced great pains and difficulties the first few months of the war, and many men who left would not return alive. They never lost confidence, however, even when “fretted by delays – wasted by sickness” that “when the time of trial came, theirs should be the foremost post of honor.” Davis concluded his impassioned speech by informing the people of Mississippi that it was the volunteers from their native state who had acted most bravely in

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battle, broken the Mexicans fortifications which surrounded Monterey, and won the battle for their country.

This chapter analyzes southern volunteer's ideas of honor and the realities of the war which led to opposition in General Zachary Taylor's Monterey campaign from mid-1846 to early 1847. In May 1846, war fever gripped the South and those who voiced any opposition about the war were easily drowned out by war enthusiasts. Southerners expected a quick excursion into Mexico and then to return home reflecting honor upon themselves and their states.\(^2\) I argue, however, that southerners quickly realized that this was an illusion. Many volunteers died; almost all witnessed their fellow volunteers being buried in the sands of Mexico. These volunteers also came under army discipline which they had no experience with prior to the war, as commanders insisted that the volunteers follow regulations and provided punishment to whoever broke the rules. To many southerners, this discipline smacked of tyranny and reminded many of them of the treatment which slaves received back home. As a result, some decided it would be better to desert than to stay in the service. The vast majority of those who did remain determined that they would not re-enlist once their term expired, no matter how dire the manpower needs of the army. I show that this sort of behavior arose among the volunteers because they brought their ideas of honor with them to Mexico.\(^3\) I contend that while many

\(^2\) The fourteen slave states provided 47,639 of the 73,532 volunteers during the war, therefore, 68% of volunteers came from the slaveholding states. Only about 27,000 regulars served during the war. Thus, southern volunteers were a heavily represented group in Mexico. Statistics cited from Gregory S. Hospodor, “Bound By All Ties of Honor”: Southern Honor, The Mississippians, and the Mexican War,” The Journal of Mississippi History 61, no. 1 (March 1999): 3.

\(^3\) Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), xxxiv. Southerners believed that they lived by the highest ethical standards, and they thought the society they developed perfectly showed God's natural order. Honor supported hierarchy, entitlement, defense of family blood, and protection of communal needs. In the antebellum South, honor coexisted with violence and the subjugation of racial inferiors in a way which produced communal stability. Southerners rejected the lowly, the alien, and the shamed, claiming that these people were outside the honorable society. Wyatt-Brown argued that “honor is essentially the cluster of ethical rules, most readily found in societies of small communities, by which judgments of behavior are ratified by community consensus.”
southerners left for Mexico as ardent patriots determined to fight a punitive war against the enemy, some of these volunteers actually became opponents of the war as a result of the dishonorable treatment they believed they received while in the service of their country. The stories they told of disease, discipline, dishonor, and death, helped fuel antiwar sentiments in the South more than the rhetoric and actions of politicians.

The battle of Monterey demonstrated the extent to which southerners believed their individual and communal honor was at stake in the war. Indeed, their communities back home expected them to act bravely in battle and they themselves sought military glory. The battle really turned in the Americans’ favor when the Mississippi and Tennessee volunteers under the command of Brigadier General John Quitman captured the Tenería, a fort just outside the eastern walls of the city. After the battle, members of 1st Tennessee Regiment of Volunteers and the 2nd Mississippi Rifle Company both claimed the honor of being the first to breach the walls of the fort, and the exchanges between these two sides became so intense that some worried that duels might be fought to settle their differences. While duels were avoided, this affair of honor

Notably absent from Wyatt-Brown’s discussion of honor is slavery, as he argued that honor has existed in societies where slavery did not exist and honor just happened to exist most powerfully in the southern United States. Most historians – most prominently Kenneth Greenberg and Drew Gilpin Faust – do now believe that southern honor was intimately connected with slavery in the United States. In later works, Wyatt-Brown even accepted that honor and slavery were connected. This is important, as honor took on a racial composition. Blacks, even those who had some white blood, were outside the honorable society. Any actions which typified the white race, such as whipping a black slave, came to be seen as honorable. Meanwhile, actions like lying, cheating, stealing, and arson came to be seen not just as slave characteristics, but also characteristics of the dishonorable.


The honor of the entire state was bound with the volunteers. See Hospodor, “Bound By All Ties of Honor,” 4. Hospodor argues “for southerners the ties of group loyalty directly affected personal honor. In short, an honorable man had a stake in the communal honor of the associations to which he belonged.”
ultimately showed that individual, communal, and state honor were always on southern volunteers’ minds throughout the war, and this explains why Davis emphasized the honor of Mississippians in his Vicksburg speech. These men realized, however, that opportunities for military bravery were few and far between in Mexico, and volunteers continued to grumble over all matters of camp life even after achieving victory in battle. Thus, many volunteers decided to disband as soon as their enlistments ended, including the 1st Tennessee Regiment of Volunteers and the 2nd Mississippi Rifle Company. These volunteers’ idea of honor helped bring them into the service, but it also ultimately helped drive them out of the service as well. I conclude that the Monterey campaign demonstrated that southerners carried their honor with them to Mexico, and they were determined to return home with it.

War fever engulfed the country in May 1846, and no region was more struck by its effects than the South. When President Polk issued a call for 50,000 volunteers in the aftermath of the skirmish at Matamoros, southerners showed a willingness to protect their country and punish the enemy by joining up in massive numbers. Despite having a much smaller population than the North, the South accounted for roughly 35,000 of these initial volunteers. Conversely, all the New England states combined only sent a little over 1,000 volunteers. Pennsylvania, New York, Illinois, and Indiana accounted for most of the remaining volunteers. Although much of this

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6 Hospodor, “Bound By All The Ties of Honor,” 1-28. Hospodor argued that honor was a major reason for Mississippians, and southerners in general, to enlist for the war. He believed, however, that honor also prevented dissent from forming in the South, as war supporters could appeal to honor and bring war opponents to the pro-war viewpoint. While my interpretation agrees that honor was a major factor in southerners deciding to support the war, I disagree that honor blunted dissent. Hospodor's work is mostly devoted to politics and the homefront, so I believe an examination of military aspects will show how honor actually caused opposition in various forms in the ranks.

7 Clayton Sumner Ellsworth “The American Churches and the Mexican War,” The American Historical Review 45, no. 2 (Jan, 1940): 319. The exact number of southern volunteers was 34,426, while New England accounted for 1,057 volunteers.
disparity occurred because of the South’s closer proximity to the place of conflict, many southerners expressed a desire to show bravery and chastise “insolent” Mexicans as their primary motivation for volunteering.

Much like southern politicians, many southern citizens shared the view that the Mexicans had committed gross outrages against American citizens which needed to be redressed.\(^8\) Tennessean Chatham Roberdeau Wheat was one such angry citizen, as he wrote to his friend that he thought he could see his “noble eye flash with honest indignation at the insults we have received.”\(^9\) This anger and indignation at Mexicans transcended political lines in the South, as heavily Whig counties in northern Mississippi, northern Alabama, western Tennessee, eastern North Carolina, and eastern Virginia all contributed volunteers to the war movement.\(^10\) In all parts of the South, citizens from various backgrounds expressed pride in their local communities for volunteering in massive numbers and very quickly. In his conversations and letters, Alabama planter Thomas Hubbard Hobbs expressed pride “in Alabama for her promptness in sending volunteers to Texas.”\(^11\)

The same ideas of chastising the insolent Mexicans, so clearly expressed in the political debates in Congress over whether to declare war, were freely stated in newspapers and private

\(^8\) Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 406. In southern society, whites expected obedience and some semblance of affection from their black slaves. Southerners considered any impudence as a prelude to general disobedience and a threat to the social order. Thus, southerners believed that slaves must be dealt with sternly and forcibly at a very early stage, to prevent a much larger problem from occurring. Southerners obviously did not prosecute the war as a master race trying to put down a slave rebellion, but they did seem to be motivated to strike an enemy they considered to be racially inferior in the hopes of correcting their behavior in the future.

\(^9\) C.R. Wheat to George Maney, May 15, 1846, John Kimberly Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

\(^10\) For a description of the popularity of volunteering, see McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny*, 21.

\(^11\) Thomas Hubbard Hobbs diary, May 14 and 18, 1846, The Papers of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs, Hoole Rare Book Library, University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa.
letters throughout the South. In May, a Mississippi newspaper tried fervently to galvanize local citizens to volunteer by running an editorial which read in part: “Fellow-Citizens!! – Here is another incitement to arm and proceed to chastise the perfidious Mexicans, who ravage our Territory, and thus take the lives of our brave men who have rallied on the frontier in their country's service. TO ARMS, then without delay!!” Such eagerness to correct the wrongs which the Mexicans perpetrated on the country bestowed glory on the entire state. Jefferson Davis, who was soon to be commissioned as a colonel in the 2nd Mississippi Rifle Company, wrote a public letter in which he boasted of “the masses who have voluntarily come forward in numbers far exceeding the necessities of the occasion.” Davis loved the show of martial support, yet his note illuminates that he believed less troops necessary to beat the inferior Mexicans.

If anything, the volunteers worried that the fighting might be over before they had a chance to reach Mexico. The initial volunteer movement took place in May and June of 1846; news quickly reached the homefront that American arms had already achieved two more victories on May 9 and 10 – in the battles fought at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma – respectively. After these conflicts, Americans in Mexico sent word that it seemed the fighting with Mexico would soon be at an end. Virginian Edmund Kirby-Smith, writing in May, stated in letters home to his family that they should “banish all concern for our safety.” He also assured

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12 For a discussion of Americans volunteering to punish Mexicans for insulting the United States, see Dean B. Mahin, Olive Branch and Sword: The United States and Mexico, 1845-1848 (Jefferson: McFarland Press, 1997), 1-22.

13 Mississippi Free-Trader and Natchez Gazette, May 12, 1846. Emphasis in the original.

14 Davis to the People of Mississippi, July 13, 1846, The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 3, eds. McIntosh et al., 8.

them that the war was “pretty much over, two thousand men were it.” Kirby-Smith opined that after these battles the Mexican forces were cut up and their resources expended. Many other private letters like this reached the southern homefront; their optimism quickly spread to the newspapers. This certainly was good news for the country as a whole, but many southerners hoped that they could go to Mexico and play an active part in disciplining the Mexicans.

Thus, instead of sapping the volunteer movement, this news spurred men to enlist in states which still had not met their volunteer quotas. Southern states experienced no shortage of volunteers; indeed, some volunteers had to be turned away. Thus, even before volunteers started to leave for Mexico some discontent started to show amongst the volunteers. In Mississippi, for example, so many men came to their country’s call in May, some volunteers expressed disappointment when they were still in Mississippi by the end of the month. The Mississippi Free-Trader and Natchez Gazette stated that the state’s volunteers were “anxious for the field.” The paper added “that there were a day or two ago very distinct mutterings of dissatisfaction at the Governor [Albert Brown]….because they had not received marching orders.”

Similar frustration arose in Tennessee, where Governor Aaron V. Brown called for 2,400 volunteers and 10,000 men showed up to offer their services. Thus, the vast majority went home disappointed.

Many of those disappointed actually remained at the ready in case the country issued additional calls for volunteers. Marylander John Reese Kenly noted that it was important for him to volunteer because of the multiple insults which Mexico gave to the United States in the decade prior to the war. As Kenly noted, the Mexicans attempting to renege on the 1836 peace treaty

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16 Edmund Kirby-Smith to his mother, May 20, 1846, Edmund Kirby-Smith Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.


18 The Weekly Nashville Union, June 3, 1846.
was the “casus belli”  

Texas, however, was not the only reason for war. Rather, “a long continuance of outrages upon the persons and property of American citizens by Mexican officials, and redress either positively refused or vexatiously [sic] and willfully postponed; another, the watchful jealously with which the officials of Mexico had been regarding the expansive growth of the United States, – jealously from which sprang first distrust, then hatred.” It was a decade of insults which provided ample justification for war. Despite being disappointed in forming a company in May, this drive to chastise the Mexicans explains why Kenly sprang into action in forming a volunteer company in June, when the government issued a second call for Marylanders. Kenly filled his company within thirty-six hours.

Without a doubt, the volunteer rush from May to June 1846 demonstrated that the war received popular support throughout the South. Some opposition, however, did exist to the volunteer movement in the South. Letters and editorials in northern presses offer some evidence of southern opposition. For example, at least some moderate northerners believed that many in the South held the same qualms about the war as themselves. For instance, the Cleveland Herald noted that with “the beating of drums in New Orleans the North had reason to suppose the whole South would have taken the field ere them. But not so.” The newspaper continued: “Talking and fighting are different things.”

Northern newspapers oftentimes quoted southern newspapers, such as the New Orleans Picayune, which described the difficulty which southern states faced in

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19 John Reese Kenly, Memoirs of a Maryland volunteer: War with Mexico, in the years 1846-7-8 (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1873), 16. Emphasis in the original.


21 The Cleveland Herald, May 20, 1846.
not just gaining volunteers, but also keeping them happy long enough prior to their departure to Mexico.

The extreme abolitionists, however, were much less sanguine about southern opposition to the war. William Lloyd Garrison, editor of the *Liberator*, and Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the *National Era*, offered scathing denunciations against the drive to gather volunteers and southerners. In the *Liberator*, Garrison published a poem entitled “A Yankee’s Notion About Enlisting in the Mexican War,” which stated:

“Call me coward, call me traitor,
Jest as suits your mean idees,
Here I stand a tyrant hater,
And the friend of God and Peace!”

Poems like these demonstrate the deepening cultural differences between North and South. Although the *Cleveland Herald* might have been right in noting that volunteerism was not as popular in the South as it was made out to be in the southern presses, poems like Garrison’s were radical even in the North, and they were non-existent in the South. Even southern Whigs who loathed the “tyrant” Polk – such as Clingman before the war – never welcomed being called a “coward” or a “traitor.” Such insults brought into question a southerner’s manhood and sometimes produced a challenge to a duel. These cultural differences acted as a wedge which

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22 *The Liberator*, July 3, 1846, 108. This does not mean that all antislavery advocates opposed the war. One of the most famous soldiers of the war, John Charles Fremont of South Carolina, was a lifelong abolitionist. He was a firm supporter of manifest destiny and eventually fought for the Union in the Civil War. See Tom Chaffin, *Pathfinder: John Charles Fremont and the Course of American Empire* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002).

For analysis of antiwar literature and poetry on the home front, see Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 370. Bauer argued that antislavery arguments during the war “appeared as childish tantrums which repelled rather than attracted support.” Also see Julie Ann Ruiz, “The Boundaries of Conflict: The Mexican War in Nineteenth Century American Literature,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2001). Ruiz examined four American and Mexican writers, determining that a common American identity comes through across national boundaries. Obviously, Garrison would not fit into this argument well.

23 McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny*, 25. McCaffrey noted the shame which southern volunteers experienced when told by examining physicians they were physically unfit for soldiering. One Alabama doctor stated that these rejected volunteers “could not be made to understand that a visitation of providence was not an
made intersectional antiwar cooperation nearly impossible from the very beginning of the war. 24

While not as extreme, there is additional evidence of southern opposition in the southern presses. 25 Many poor southerners barely made ends meet, largely because the region still suffered from the effects of the national depression the previous decade. Therefore, war offered some men the opportunity to abandon their work and join in the volunteer movement to avoid creditors. 26 In this cash- and credit-poor economy most everyone accumulated debt, but the desire for planters to strengthen class ties amongst themselves created an expectation that the loans of poor whites needed to be paid quicker than those of other planters. 27 Therefore, the masses of poor whites volunteering to go to Mexico led to some bitterness on the southern homefront among planters, not just toward the volunteers but about the war in general. The Southern Planter, published in Virginia, posted a highly critical “Employment Wanted” advertisement a month after the call for volunteers, bemoaning that there were “thousands of young men in the Southern country, the finest materiel in the world who are dragging out a

insult offered by myself to their manliness.”

See also Kenneth S. Greenberg, Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, Gambling in the Old South (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 56-57. Southerners rarely directly called another person a coward, although they would use the language of honor, oftentimes called “giving the lie” to opponents. The purpose was to uncover the true appearance of a person. Thus, southerners used insults such as “poltroon” or “puppy,” in order to demean their opponent. Southerners would give the lie to let opponents know that they were not considered an honorable person.


25 Gregory S. Hospodor, “The American Home Front in the Mexican War,” Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Early America: From the Colonial Era to the Civil War, eds., David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), 113-150. Hospodor made the interesting argument that women played a substantial role in the war movement, as it was oftentimes women who pushed their male relatives to fight in the war. He maintained that had women withheld their support for the war, then opposition throughout the nation would have been much stronger.

26 McCaffrey, Army of Manifest Destiny, 15-32; and Richard Bruce Winders, Mr. Polk’s Army: The American Military Experience in the Mexican War (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 60.

27 Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 345.
slothful, inactive, inglorious existence,” since they were “not willing to engage in any pursuits but those that are already overcrowded.” The “overcrowded” occupations to which the editor alluded were professional trades like the law and plantation agriculture. This editor believed that many poor southern men went into debt as a consequence of avoiding yeoman agricultural work, which some associated as being similar to slave labor. He then asked his readers was it not “melancholy to see the flower of the Virginia youth begging to be sent to Mexico, even as common soldiers?”28 Despite such editorials, opponents on the southern homefront faced a similar problem as politicians like Calhoun and Berrien, as the desire for war was just too powerful and the need to reinforce Taylor’s army too great for anyone to actually reverse the volunteer rush. In the spring of 1846, southern criticisms of the war were drowned out by the clamor for war.

It seems safe to say that most volunteers heard very few protests to the war as they joined the army, and any criticisms they heard made no impact on their decision. Most volunteers thought the war would be a short trip to punish the Mexicans. Like most of the politicians, southern volunteers strongly believed they faced a racially inferior foe which lacked the military prowess which white Americans possessed. A letter written in the New Orleans Picayune noted gleefully that the volunteers had a good “chance now for a pleasure excursion to Mexico, and probably a ‘revel in the halls of Montezumas.’”29 A Tennessee volunteer, who submitted a letter to a local newspaper under the name E. Eastman, explained that he hoped all the Tennessee volunteers to return home “reflecting honor on the volunteer state’ and received praise ’ of a

28 Southern Planter, June 6, 1846. Emphasis in original.

29 Niles National Register, August 19, 1846.
Almost all southerners shared such sentiments. Southerners fought for their own personal honor, as well as the honor of their states and country.

Thus, throughout the South citizens gathered in large crowds to watch volunteers depart for Mexico. Richard M. Edwards described one such scene in Knoxville, Tennessee, where the town’s “streets above the river were crowded with the beauty and chivalry of the grand old town to see the young manhood of East Tennessee embark for a 3,000 miles trip to a foreign land to teach a foreign foe to pay proper respect to our flag and people.” Edwards then stressed that while there were those who decried “it as 'Polk's war,” in reality “we were a portion of the manhood of a great nation going forth to avenge the great wrongs of the past and to secure indemnity for the wrongs done us and security for the future.” At many of these gatherings, women oftentimes presented regimental flags and gave speeches to spur the men towards war. In June, Fanny Mayrant gave a speech in honor of the Mississippi State Fencibles, a volunteer company, stating that an “insult” had “been offered to the American Union.” Therefore, she continued, “Mexico, and through Mexico, all the world must be taught that the American Flag is not to be assailed with impunity – they must be made to know that….an invading foe will meet with a chastisement commensurate with the dignity of a nation that acknowledges no superior.”

30 The Weekly Nashville Union, October 21, 1846.


Many southerners thought that Mexicans must pay for the outrages and insults they hurled at the United States.

On May 21, 1846, General Zachary Taylor received word from Secretary of War William Marcy that despite not yet having received necessary volunteers or supplies, Taylor should proceed to Monterey to dislodge the Mexican troops entrenched in the city. Over the next several months, some of the twelve-month volunteers began to arrive in Taylor's ranks. Before the call for the twelve-month men, in April Taylor had issued an emergency call for three- and six-month volunteers from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama to fill out his ranks. It is important to remember that southerners brought their prejudices – as well as their honor – to Mexico. Most of these southerners believed that the war would not last long, as even President Polk and General Taylor believed that hostilities could be concluded in four months. Southerners did not believe that a racially-inferior enemy – who more closely resembled American slaves than free-American republicans – stood any chance in battle against an army of honorable southerners. Many southerners expressed views similar to Richard Edwards and believed that Mexicans needed to be taught to pay proper respect to their superiors. As long as everything went as planned and the war ended quickly with an American victory – along with the Mexicans promising to show proper deference to their superiors in the future – then very little possibility existed of southerners becoming disillusioned with the war.

From the very beginning, however, the war did not proceed as planned. By the time most of the emergency volunteers joined Taylor’s Army the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma had already been fought, and Taylor did not plan to continue military operations until he

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33 Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, 390.
was reinforced by some of the 50,000 twelve-month volunteers being raised by the call from the Polk administration. Since the three- and six-month men arrived during a time when Taylor was not actively pursuing or fighting the Mexicans, these volunteers spent much of their time drilling, taking target practice, drinking, training donkeys, and attending church, monte parlors, or the theatre. With the arrival of the twelve-month volunteers and insufficient logistical companies to support so many troops, the three- and six-month volunteers became more a hindrance to Taylor's campaign. As a result, many of these volunteers were never able to fight the Mexicans or win the military glory they craved. At the behest of Secretary of War Marcy, Taylor offered these men the opportunity to become twelve-month volunteers, but they all refused. Thus, Taylor disbanded these companies and sent them back home. John Kenly actually saw some of these volunteers as they returned home and explained that they “were very indignant to continue in the service and re-volunteer for twelve months.” The first volunteers to arrive in Mexico refused to serve any longer. The Old Southwest is commonly referred to by historians as a region fervently supportive of the Mexican War. Yet, in the first few months of the war many of the volunteers from these states were dejected and left the war for others to fight.

The treatment of these first volunteers then became a topic of debate on the southern homefront. Some of the twelve-month volunteers just arriving in Mexico expressed criticism of the disbanded volunteers. A Tennessean wrote to his local newspaper, the Nashville Union, that this news was “doubtless very agreeable to most of those who make the most noise about

34 Bauer, The Mexican War, 83.
35 Ibid.
36 Kenly, Memoirs of a Maryland volunteer, 45.
37 John Douglas Pitts Fuller, The Movement For the Acquisition of All Mexico: 1846-1848 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1936), 160.
injustice, for all of them could have staid [sic] provided they had prolonged their enlistment to 12 months. Many of the disbanded volunteers no doubt wanted to go to Mexico, fight a battle, and then return home at the end of their term. They had no interest in staying in Mexico an additional year, the Tennessean argued, so they maintained that they were mistreated in their short enlistment period.

Despite the poor conditions volunteers experienced, many believed that the three- and six-month volunteers had failed to act honorably in their refusal to re-enlist. An officer of the Mississippi State Fencibles, a volunteer company, writing home to the newspaper *The Mississippian*, noted fondly that his regiment had “the reputation of being the best volunteer Regiment in the army.” Even with such an elite regiment, this officer noted that his men were “grumbling 'mightily' about their food duties, the restrictions.” Unlike the emergency volunteers, though, his regiment would not be leaving for home. This officer tried to assuage the fears of the people back in Mississippi about the three- and six-month volunteers leaving: “Do not feel alarmed at the reports of the discharged men. They will tell horrible tales of sickness, misery, famine, & c., but set them down as sheer humbugs. Many of them come from the homesick boys of the Regiment who urge remarkably strong reasons for returning home.”

This officer gave the lie to the discharged men and hoped that their false stories would not sap support for the war or prevent future recruitments.

These volunteers’ experiences also became fodder for war opposition throughout the South. The North Carolina newspaper the *Fayetteville Observer* chastised the war department,

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40 Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*, xiii.
arguing that the “disbandment and return of the Louisiana and Alabama Volunteers,” formed yet “another chapter in the mismanagement of the Mexican War.” Although this paper was under the editorship of Whigs, what is interesting is that the paper criticized the treatment of volunteers, not the politics of the war. The paper continued that the government sent these volunteers home “dissatisfied with their treatment, disgusted with military life, and many of them unfitted by newly acquired habits of dissipation, for the active business pursuits which they abandoned at the call of their country.” The editors concluded that war was “a terrible evil, and to no country under the sun more so than to ours.”

From the very beginning of the war, stories of the volunteer’s poor treatment at the hands of the army reached southern newspapers. Soldiers’ venting their frustrations in the newspapers became common practice throughout the war.

It did not take long for the twelve-month volunteers to also start bemoaning the poor treatment they experienced while in Mexico. While many of the volunteers might not have agreed that the war was a terrible evil, some southerners in Mexico found certain aspects of the war evil. In the months following the discharge of the emergency volunteers, for instance, many soldiers complained about the long marches through what seemed like endless desert with temperatures which ranged from extreme heat to freezing cold. An Arkansas volunteer who wrote a letter to his local newspaper back home, the Arkansas State Democrat, told folks that he was “sick of ranging over an uninteresting country, looking for an enemy we cannot find,” and he planned to make “a good plea for returning” home. Since he experienced long marches with no fighting, this volunteer had determined that he would request a discharge from the service. In a post script to the same letter, however, he explained that “I have just changed my mind about

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being discharged, as they say we will push on to join Gen. Taylor, and will either have a fight or be discharged, at Saltillo – about 250 miles. How could I leave, under such circumstances?"\(^{42}\)

This volunteer showed that many southerners complained quite loudly about the poor conditions and treatment they received in Mexico, but the prospect of fighting the Mexicans was what kept most men from leaving the service, at least in the first few months.

Not all these men survived, however, as death surrounded the volunteers from the very beginning of the war and dwindled the American ranks. During the war, a total of 12,876 Americans died, including 6,967 volunteers. Of this total, 11,155 Americans – including 6,256 volunteers – succumbed to disease.\(^{43}\) This means that it was a common experience for a volunteer to see a fellow volunteer die from disease, and it was oftentimes the first observation they made upon arriving in Mexico. For example, Mississippi volunteer Robert Joseylin witnessed the burial of a soldier his first day in Mexico. Joseylin wrote a poem about the soldier’s death and sent it back to the *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette* for publication. In the poem, Joseylin referred to death by disease as the “unhonored death.”\(^{44}\)

Southerners considered dying of sickness dishonorable since even in the final moments of life honorable men were expected to show mastery and control rather than dependence and submission. Disease largely deprived men of mastery or control over their fate.\(^{45}\)

This demonstrates that southerners believed in honorable and dishonorable death. While all the volunteers knew that they might die in Mexico, almost all believed that it would be a

\(^{42}\) *Arkansas State Democrat*, November 27, 1846. Emphasis in the original.

\(^{43}\) Bauer, The Mexican War, 397

\(^{44}\) *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette*, September 10, 1846.

\(^{45}\) Greenberg, *Slavery and Honor*, 93. Honorable gentlemen were expected to retain complete mastery, even in their dying moments of life.
glorious death on the battlefield. Throughout the South, soldiers made a Spartan pledge to their local communities that they would come back from Mexico victorious or die trying. This was the kind of death honorable southerners craved, but it was not the death most experienced.

While most did not consider death by disease prior to departure, volunteers quickly learned they were much more likely to die from heat stroke, excessive diarrhea, cholera, or yellow fever than from combat. What was worse, many of the men also died from the poor treatment they received following their commanders’ orders or while under the care of army doctors. This explains why John Kenly heard “curses” and “imprecations” while out on long marches, as well as “a vindicativeness was manifested,” that he rarely “expected ever shown by American troops.”

Americans knew that their commanders sending them on long marches with insufficient water was not just physically grueling, it could potentially be a death sentence.

One of the first things southerners learned about the war with Mexico, therefore, was that they might very well die in the matter of a few days, weeks, or months. Kenly noted that every burial “was a solemn and impressive scene, producing a marked effect upon the rough men gathered around the grave of a comrade, thus cut off away from home and kindred, and thus buried where to-morrow no one might find his final resting place.”

Logistics necessitated that many soldiers be buried where the camp happened to be that day, and the remains stayed behind when the camp moved on. Thus, many volunteers knew that if they died their body would lie forever in Mexico. Upon seeing the burial of a Mississippian, Texan William G. Droddy sadly lamented that he knew the “Poor feler [sic]” left home completely ignorant of the fact that “his

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remains would be left in Mexico when he left his home and Parents.” The families of a few of the richest and most influential American officers and soldiers arranged for their fallen relative to be shipped back to the United States and buried in a cemetery. Most Americans who died, however, remained in Mexico, never to have their families visit and mourn.

As Taylor’s army made the slow march from Matamoros to Monterey during the hot summer months, it was not uncommon for companies of a hundred to lose dozens of men and regiments of a thousand to lose hundreds of men within a few months of arriving in Mexico. The army stopped at places like Camargo along the way, which had a reputation for being one of the unhealthiest places in all Mexico, as disease ran rampant and temperatures reached 112 degrees. Almost all volunteers placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of their commanders. Kenly noted that within a few months the 1st Tennessee Regiment of Volunteers had a large number die, and “the general opinion was that we were in a very unhealthy camp.” While encamped at Camargo, Kenly informed readers that “in speaking of Camargo the men would invariably call it the graveyard.”

The death which surrounded them caused some southerners to fear that they would never return home. Rather than worrying about punishing the Mexicans, many southerners quickly started to fear for their own personal safety. It is agonizing to read Alabamian William G.

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48 William A. Droddy diary, August 20, 1846, William A. Droddy Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.
51 Kenly, *Memoirs of a Maryland volunteer*, 70. Emphasis in the original.
Coleman’s letters to his wife Mary Jane. In one letter, Coleman began by telling his wife that as he wrote his eyes were “so full of tears.” Coleman then poured out his heart: “Should I live it will doubtless appear as long or longer in proportion to the four which have passed, I hope, and my constant prayer to God is that he will guide and direct me into his kingdom, and that he will protect me against my enemies and restore me safely, and soundly back to the bosom of my Dear family, relatives, and friends.” Coleman’s letters did not just display homesickness, but rather a deep sense of his own mortality in war. He realized that many men might be victorious against the Mexicans in battle, but fall victim to death in other forms.

Coleman’s uncle, James Bailey, was also in the war as an Alabama volunteer. Bailey, however, voiced very different concerns than his nephew. In one letter home to his niece, Bailey informed her that even if she was following the progress of the war in the newspapers, she still was “not aware of the utter insignificance of a private soldier in the army of the United States. Almost all the hardships of the campaign are upon him, while….pay is not more than half what a negro would hire for in Ala.” In Mexico, thus, Bailey determined that the army valued the services of white southerners’ less than what white Alabamians valued the services of free blacks in Alabama. Bailey continued by explaining that a captain’s pay was “not less than a thousand dollars a year,” while a private’s pay was “less than one hundred; and the distinctions made between them are greater than the difference in pay.” This demonstrates that southerners like Bailey compared their circumstances while in Mexico to their lives back home. For men like

52 William G. Coleman to Mary Jane Coleman, October, 17, 1846, William G. Coleman Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin. Emphasis in the original.

53 James Bailey to Mary Jane Coleman, March 2, 1847, Coleman Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.
Bailey, it appeared that the war had turned the world upside down, and now white southerners were made to feel like inferiors, even worse than slaves. The value which they held back in the honorable South seemed to disappear in the camps of Mexico.

This sense of inferiority came largely from the treatment the volunteers received at the hands of their commanding officers. Many officers believed that discipline was necessary to ensure that the large numbers of volunteers could be counted on to contribute positively in battle. Some commanding officers resorted to punishments like the stocks-and-irons or the wooden horse. Since there were no major engagements until September 1846, the volunteers had a lot of downtime in camp, and the officers wanted to ensure that the volunteers did not resort to fighting, leaving camp in search of Mexican women, or partaking in any other activities which could cost the army a volunteers’ service if he ended up getting sick or in trouble legally. One officer, Tennessean Thomas Claiborne, explained that he “was not popular, as no one can be with those he governs under the Articles of War and strict regulations.” Claiborne then provided an example of the difficult situation commanding officers found themselves in, as “for instance, the surgeon warned me not to let my men sit on the ground without something underneath them, as the earth is a strong conductor and the lower bowel very sensitive, and heat is drawn off so rapidly as to congestit [sic]; hence arise diarrhea and dysentery.” In hopes of keeping his men healthy, Claiborne rigorously enforced this rule. As a result, the volunteers under his command, “who looked on that as tyranny,” hated him.54 Commanding officers, thus, faced an unenviable task of trying to instill discipline into men who wished, like Bailey, to never receive any treatment which they would not accept at home. This shows that many of the twelve-month volunteers started to realize why the emergency volunteers talked of poor treatment.

54 Thomas Claiborne, Reminiscences of the Mexican War, Thomas Claiborne Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
Therefore, while many volunteers criticized the three- and six-month men who returned home rather than re-enlist, during the Monterey campaign from May to September many of the twelve-month volunteers also expressed a desire to return home. Some men took the extreme step of actually deserting the service and returning home. Desertion was actually much more a problem among the army regulars, as 5,331 regulars deserted as compared to 3,876 volunteers. The price for desertion, if caught, was very high. Most likely, officers confined a deserter to irons, put him on bread and water, and eventually drummed him dishonorably out of the service. Capital punishment was a possibility in some cases. Nonetheless, the dishonorable treatment which some southerners experienced led them to think there was more honor in leaving the service of their country. For example, two Alabama sergeants of Captain Joseph Desha's company of volunteers – James Chandler and Elijah Kerr – deserted and went back to Mobile. According to the two men, they deserted because of “the tyrannical conduct of Capt. Desha and his first lieutenant.”

The Richmond Whig agreed that the two men’s experiences in Mexico most likely were the reason they abandoned the cause, but the editors argued that in reality the men “found that volunteering for the war was not what it was cracked up to be: that there is more

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55 See Clement Eaton, “The Role of Honor in Southern Society,” Southern Humanities Review 10 (1976): 47-58. Eaton argued that southerners considered desertion to be dishonorable during the Civil War, but he did not explain why desertion was dishonorable, nor whether desertion could be considered honorable in some cases. The best known case of desertion during the Mexican War was in the San Patricio battalion, which was composed mostly of regulars from New York. A thorough work on the San Patricio battalion is Robert Ryal Miller, Shamrock and Sword: The Saint Patrick's Battalion in the U.S.-Mexican War (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989).

56 Bauer, The Mexican War, 397.

57 Daily National Intelligencer, August 19, 1846.

58 Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, 99. Desertion could be considered honorable because submission to inequality was a common characteristic of slaves. Greenberg argued that masters expected a “mask” of obedience from slaves, meaning masters wanted slaves to behave obediently. While southerners certainly realized that rules and laws needed to be obeyed, they rejected the idea that they should partake in any activity which required them to be submissive, or act in any way as an inferior.
hardship and privation in it than fun and frolic.”\textsuperscript{59} The \textit{Richmond Whig} was undoubtedly right, but the editors failed to note that the cause of this “hardship and privation,” in many cases, were the commanding officers.\textsuperscript{60}

Based upon the writings found in volunteers’ journals and letters, it seems that many of them contemplated desertion. Around camp, however, stories traveled around about the horrors which deserters could be expected to meet upon arriving home. Tennessee volunteer George Furber mentioned that there were some in his Tennessee regiment “who most earnestly wished to return home, and cursed themselves for ever leaving their firesides.”\textsuperscript{61} For a few, this desire proved so strong that they became disillusioned with the cause. Furber recounted a story of a Memphis man and woman who became engaged shortly before the onset of the war. When war broke out, the man volunteered to fight. Upon arriving in Mexico, surrounded by death instead of the loving arms of his fiancé, he grew heartsick. The man decided upon a logical plan based upon the situation in the ranks; feigning sick in order to be discharged from his service early. After successfully fooling the medical staff of his “illness,” the man returned home. His fiancée, however, was not pleased. She had “hoped for his soon and honorable return- She was astonished to see him back so soon, and upon hearing his motive, indignantly refused to have

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Daily National Intelligencer}, July 28, 1846.

\textsuperscript{60} Wyatt-Brown, \textit{Southern Honor}, 458. Wyatt-Brown showed that punishments played an important role in community safety and control. In the South, discipline was meant to be public so that it could serve as an example to everyone. It was meant to protect the community from dangers, both from within and from without. In order to encourage those who might want to visit their town, editors were important in not only writing about public punishments, but also letting everyone know that the entire community approved of these punishments. Wrong-doers were meant to not just know they did wrong by the community, but to also be publicly shamed. When southerners experienced punishment, they knew that they were thought of as outside the community, and outside the culture of honor. Thus, punishments were meant to confirm the honor of the community at the expense of those who were being punished. This explains why southerners being punished or disciplined could actually feel they were having their honor taken away from them.

\textsuperscript{61} George C. Furber, \textit{The Twelve months volunteer or, Journal of a private, in the Tennessee regiment of cavalry, in the campaign, in Mexico, 1846-7} (Cincinnati: J.A. and U.P. James, 1848), 72.
anything further to do with him,” according to Furber.\textsuperscript{62} While it is not clear whether this story was fact or fiction, the moral of the tale was clear; if southern men deserted the cause they risked being received as a dishonorable coward.

Rather than desert the service, therefore, most southerners chose to simply not re-enlist when their terms came to an end.\textsuperscript{63} Texan William A. Droddy, for example, was a six-month volunteer who made this decision. Droddy explained that his colonel “call’d [sic] up the companies and pout [sic] it to vote whither [sic] they would go on or return Home, more than half the Regement [sic] voted to go home.” Droddy was one of the men who voted to go home. In his diary, Droddy noted several reasons for his decision. Like almost all volunteers, Droddy hated the food and long marches. More importantly, though, he noted that the commanding officers “tried to bring us under the same desiplin [sic] nearly as the Regulars in some things they were harder on us…I concluded I would go home while I had the chance for if they got us to go on and had us completely in there [sic] power insted [sic] of treating us as Vol.”\textsuperscript{64} Droddy feared that the army might bring him under even stricter codes and regulations, as well as inflict the harsher punishments which the regulars received. Southerners like Droddy believed that such treatment brought humiliation, shame, and physical pain.\textsuperscript{65} These southerners went to Mexico to punish the Mexicans, not face punishment themselves.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{62}Furber, \textit{The Twelve Month Volunteer}, 425.

\textsuperscript{63}Winders, \textit{Mr. Polk’s Army}, 115. Winders found evidence that suggests some southern soldiers actually contemplated suicide in order to escape the discipline of the army, but also to avoid desertion. See also Greenberg, \textit{Honor and Slavery}, 100. Suicide was considered an honorable – if not a Christian – death since the gentleman had complete control over his fate and did not have to submit to a life of subjugation. This explains why several prominent southerners committed suicide at the close of the Civil War.

\textsuperscript{64}Droddy diary, August 13, 1846, William A. Droddy Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

\textsuperscript{65}See See Wyatt-Brown, \textit{A Warring Nation}, 8, 62-79. In this study, Wyatt-Brown argued that the emotional state brought about by humiliation oftentimes generated the impulse to seek revenge for insult, whether against an
General Taylor did not actually expect the Mexicans to fight at Monterey. He correctly believed that Santa Anna, who had taken command of the Mexican army following the Mexican defeats at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, would instead want General Pedro de Ampudía, the commander at Monterey, to take the mountain city of Saltillo, which was a better natural defensive position. Ampudía disagreed, believing that Monterey would be easier to recapture if it fell into American hands. He also thought that allowing the troops to entrench and maintain their position would be better for morale than if they decided to retreat to Saltillo. Thus, while the Americans marched from Matamoros to Monterey, the Mexicans busily strengthened the defenses of the city.67

According to one of the first and most famous historians of the Mexican War, John Frost, the Mexican defenses at Monterey were truly tremendous. Not only did the Mexican defenders outnumber the Americans, they also had redoubts with masonry for the infantry, gorges which the Americans needed to cross to get to the walls, guns at every entrance of the city, a bridgehead in front of a bridge Americans needed to cross, and large stone houses which Mexican forces could hide behind if Americans breeched the city. On the outskirts of the city lay a fort called the Tenería, armed with two 8-pounders, a 4-pounder, a mountain howitzer, and 350 defenders. The

66 See John C. Pinheiro, *Manifest Ambition: James K. Polk and Civil-Military Relations during the Mexican War* (Westport: Praeger, 2007), 90-1. Pinheiro argued that in Jacksonian America unmeasurable factors like liberty, virtue, and honor played an important role in why volunteers deserted at such a lower percentage than regulars. Pinheiro’s main concern, though, were differences between volunteers and regulars, not sectional differences. See also McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny*, 174. McCaffrey argued that Americans, no matter of sectional origin, believed that they faithfully upheld their enlistments and the decision to leave at the end of a year was honorable.

city also contained a citadel – an incomplete cathedral – which had thirty guns and was manned by 400 soldiers. Frost explained that the defenses of “Monterey were on a scale which justified the Mexicans in their belief that the city was impregnable.”

Despite these defenses, Taylor decided that he would indeed attempt to take the city. His plan was twofold: his initial goal was to take the road which ran between Monterey and Saltillo, thus depriving Ampudia of possible reinforcements and supplies, and the American commander would then try a double envelopment in which he would have General William Worth attack from the west and Taylor himself would take the main command and attack from the east. Taylor planned to accomplish this with only 6,000 men, while Ampudia had over 7,000 regulars and 3,000 local conscripts to defend.

As was the case with every major battle during the war, Americans had to plan their strategy to take the city while volunteers continued to die from disease. Brigadier General John Quitman, a Mississippian who commanded the Mississippi and Tennessee volunteers during the battle, declared that a pall seemed to settle over the American ranks leading up to the battle. At Monterey on September 14, 1846, he wrote to his wife that his “volunteers have suffered much by sickness. We have heard the last volleys fired over some poor fellow's grave every day.”

In the days leading up to the American storming of Monterey, many volunteers realized that even if they somehow survived the impressive Mexican defenses, they still needed to escape death from disease if they hoped to leave Mexico alive.


69 Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 93.

70 John Quitman to Eliza Quitman, August 14, 1846, John Quitman Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
Taylor's set his twofold plan in motion on September 20 – and by September 24 the Americans had taken the town. On September 21, the Americans took the road to Saltillo, and on September 22, they breached the first fortification on the outskirts of the city. Quitman's brigade played a crucial role in first breaking the Fort De La Tenería. The 1st Tennessee Volunteer Regiment, under the direct command of Colonel William B. Campbell, took a quarter of all American casualties during the battle. The Tennesseans believed their casualties were so high because they were the first brigade to break the Mexican defenses, thus they started to refer to themselves as the “Bloody First.”

Campbell actually halted when he came upon the fort, awaiting further orders from General Quitman. Lieutenant Andrew McClung, leading a company of Mississippians, continued forward without orders and the evidence suggests that in his zeal he was the first person to climb over the fort’s walls. After Tenería fell, Ampudía decided to abandon all the forts which surrounded the city except the citadel. Abandoning the forts allowed Taylor to concentrate his forces against the city, and they scaled the walls the next day, after which nasty street fighting caused Ampudía to ask for terms by September 24. Instead of taking the Mexicans as prisoners of war, Taylor agreed to an eight week armistice.

In the immediate aftermath of the battle, the survivors thoughts drifted towards the men left writhing in pain or those who did not make it out alive. The volunteers realized that people they had seen marching, eating, sleeping, and laughing – full of life just days before – were now

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71 Bauer, The Mexican War, 96.


73 For a discussion about the armistice, see Pinheiro, Manifest Ambition, 62-64.

gone. The captain of the Baltimore volunteers, John Kenly, relayed a particularly powerful experience in his memoirs. On the morning of September 20, Colonel William Watson asked Kenly which company should be left in reserve to guard camp while the rest stormed Monterey. Kenly really did not care which company remained behind, so long as his company was among those storming the city. His company was responsible for sustaining the honor of the community back home, and honor went to soldiers charging the enemy, not those guarding supplies at camp. Watson then changed the conversation, asking for Kenly’s opinion on the unimportant question of which footwear he should wear in battle. Kenly jested “that the lighter pair would be more suitable, as I thought there would be some running done to-day.” Watson laughed heartily, “saying that he had the advantage of me, as he was mounted,” so he chose the heavy boots. “It was by these boots as much as by anything else,” Kenly noted in his memoirs, “that I identified his remains when they were disinterred to send to Baltimore for burial.”

Here today, gone tomorrow. Such was the story of so many Mexican War soldiers.

Monterey was the first battle of the war in which the volunteers played an essential role in the battlefield strategy and tactics, and many volunteers proudly took the credit for the victory at Monterey. Newspapers throughout the South printed favorable stories which emphasized the bravery of their local volunteers. Letters sent from volunteers who participated in the battle allowed the Nashville Union to boast that “the chief loss of the enemy was occasioned by the sharp shooting of Tennessee rifles and sharp cutting of Mississippi bowie knives.” In a letter to

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75 See Damon Ralph Eubank, “A Time of Enthusiasm: The Response of Kentucky to the Call for Troops in the Mexican War,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 90, no. 4 (Autumn 1992): 323-344. Kentucky volunteers demonstrated a similar desire to display martial bravery to preserve the honor which their fathers passed down to them.


his wife, William P. Rogers stated that the bravery of the volunteers stood in stark contrast to the actions of the regulars who were “skulking behind,” adding that they were “cowardly dogs” who refused to fight.\footnote{William P. Rogers letter to his wife, October 8, 1846, John Thomas Bolton Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.} It was the volunteers, those who represented the proud American tradition of the local militia, who won the battle, not the standing army.\footnote{For a discussion of the rivalry between volunteers and regulars, see McCaffrey, \textit{Army of Manifest Destiny}, 66-79.} The volunteers waited several months to finally fight the enemy, and they expressed pride in the role they played in American victory.

After the battle, Brigadier General Quitman expressed that the pall which existed over the ranks prior to the battle had lifted. The volunteers – at least those who were not agonizing in wounds received during the assault – basked in the glory of what they had just accomplished. On September 25, 1846, Quitman boasted to his wife that Monterey, a city “occupied with 7000 Mexican troops with 40 pieces of cannon and bristling in every direction with forts” had at last “capitulated to our arms.”\footnote{John Quitman to Eliza Quitman, September 25, 1846, John Quitman Papers, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.} Quite naturally, Quitman singled out the troops under his command as the heroes of the battle. As he told the story, it was the Mississippian and Tennesseans who “came up gallantly to the charge and about 4 o'clock we took the fort [Tenería] by storm jumping the ditch and scaling the walls, driving the Mexicans with great loss.”\footnote{Greenberg, \textit{Southern Honor}, 88. \textit{Willingness to die in battle was a central component of the southern culture of honor, as Greenberg explained: “free and honorable gentlemen, unlike the slaves they governed, were not afraid to die. For honorable men of the Old South, mastery over the fear of death seemed a pre condition for life as free men.”}} Several weeks later, Quitman still marveled at what Americans accomplished at Monterey, claiming that it was “one
of the greatest victories ever achieved by American soldiers. The Mississippian and Tennessean fought like veterans.”

Just like the American victories at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, the victory at Monterey once again elevated the spirits of southerners that American victory was close at hand. South Carolinian Barnard E. Bee stated that he was “satisfied [sic] the game” was up. “The Mexicans will sue for Peace – full well knowing – that this country is utterly lost to them – if the War lasts Six Months.”

Edmund Kirby-Smith, almost echoing his letters home in May, believed once again that the war might very well be over. A few days after the battle, as the Americans sat victorious in the walls of the city, Kirby-Smith wrote a letter to his mother in which he expressed optimism that “after a bloody struggle we have I believe fought our last fight with the Mexicans.”

Jefferson Davis wrote to his brother back in Mississippi that the Mexicans were “whipped….We hope soon to return” since the war was probably over. Following the victory, many southerners felt they had done their duty and their thoughts drifted to returning home.

News of the battle reached the homefront before any casualty numbers, and loved ones back home agonized as they waited to hear of the fate of their friends or family who fought at Monterey. Many on the homefront started to write letters to inquire whether their friends or relatives in Mexico were safe. Many letters were filled with emotion during this time, as family

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82 John Quitman to Eliza Quitman, October 7, 1846, John Quitman Papers, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

83 Barnard Bee to Ashbel Smith, June 8, 1846, Bernard Bee Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center For American History, University of Texas at Austin.

84 Edmund Kirby-Smith letter to his mother, September 24, 1847, Edmund Kirby-Smith Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

members and friends wondered whether they should celebrate or mourn. Barnard Bee heard news about the battle in early October, but he did not hear from his son, Hamilton, who was involved in the battle. Barnard wrote to his friend, Ashbel Smith, who was also at Monterey, in hopes he might be able to tell him of the fate of his son. Bee informed Smith that he knew of the “dreadful slaughter of his Regt – 3rd Infantry,” which Hamilton belonged to. “For my Son Ham,” Bee added he was still “all in anxiety.” Finally, on October 30 the anxious father received a letter from Ham stating that he survived the battle, washing away his concerns for his son’s safety. For many other families, however, the news was much worse. Therefore, news of the battle brought much joy but also significant sorrow to the homefront.

After hearing news of the battle and the heroic role that his brother performed, Joseph Davis expressed great satisfaction at the news. Like most Americans, he was thrilled that the Americans overcame such extensive defenses and took the city. Joseph wrote to Jefferson that he knew from previous letters that many of the volunteers had uttered complaints “against you for severity of training.” Joseph added, though, that he supposed the great victory would “silence all murmurings, and the grumblers will hide their heads.” Men like Joseph Davis believed that the victory at Monterey was the fruit harvested because of all the work that men like his brother and other commanding officers did in making the volunteers into an effective fighting force.

Despite Joseph Davis’ optimism, after the battle many volunteers openly expressed their

86 Barnard E. Bee to Ashbel Smith, October 25, 1846, Barnard Bee Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

87 For a description of the homefront following Monterey, see William J. Cooper, Jr., Jefferson Davis, American (New York: Knopf, 2000), 141-2.

desire to return home in letters to loved ones. One member of Jefferson Davis’ regiment, William P. Rogers, freely gave his opinion about the war after the American victory. He observed that despite the victory, many volunteers ended up wounded, sick, or dead in the aftermath of the battle. Americans were “crippled” by the bloody fighting, despite taking the city. He said that the volunteers blamed General Taylor, in whom “nobody has any confidence.”

Taylor did add greatly to American casualties by sending regiments in piecemeal, instead of in coordinated assaults, as the Americans tried to scale the city walls on September 23. Taylor's generalship, however, was not the main cause of complaint from volunteers after the battle. Instead, Rogers and others were disgusted with the filth, sickness, and discipline of camp life. “You can form no idea of how anxious we all are to get home,” Rogers informed his wife. The volunteers “have suffered so much and we have been in our battle, and we tired and sick of the camp.” He lamented that the camp was “an awful place to a man of refined feelings.”

After winning their battle and successfully inflicting the punishment upon the Mexicans, most southern volunteers wanted to leave the dirt, discipline, and their subordinate role in Mexico and resume their honorable lives back home. The South was a more appropriate place for men of refined feelings.

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89 William P. Rogers letter to his wife, October 8, 1846, Thomas Bolton Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

90 This opinion of Taylor’s generalship is most forcefully argued in K. Jack Bauer, *Zachary Taylor: Soldier, Planter, Statesman of the Old Southwest* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 166-214.

91 William P. Rogers letter to his wife, October 8, 1846, Thomas Bolton Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

92 See Robert A. Brent, “Mississippi and the Mexican War,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 31, no. 3 (August 1969): 202-14. Brent argued that except for the Civil War, Mississippi was never as unified behind a conflict as it was during the Mexican War. He was correct to note the great popularity of the war, but he did not discuss how this war enthusiasm deteriorated rather quickly, despite the great success of American arms.
Hamilton Bee expressed a similar desire to return now that he had successfully chastised the Mexicans. Ham eagerly volunteered for the war and, after the battle, expressed “a sense of gratification – for which I wouldn’t exchange anything that I participated in it – and did my duty – and you will add escaped – very well.” Now that he had experienced hostile fire, though, Ham told his father that “it often occur’d to me that I was in a position where I had no incentive to do more than my duty – and never again will be found a private Soldier, unless my fireside is invaded – indeed I am pretty well satisfied with war and have no fancy to hear the can- roar.”

Many southerners hoped that the Mexicans would agree to peace now that the superiority of American arms had been clearly settled through war. Many southerners wanted the fighting to be at an end, and they hoped the Mexicans felt the same way.

As the weeks passed with no formal peace treaty in place, many volunteers continued their complaints that the treatment they received at the hands of their superiors was unbefitting to southerners. Howard Morris, a Mississippi volunteer, expressed gratification when two of the captains in his regiment went back to Vicksburg on furlough. Morris wrote a letter to his siblings in which he said he supposed the captains were “now enjoying themselves in Vicksburg, and boasting loudly of their chivalrous deeds at the battle of Monterey, ‘and many other places’ – God grant that they may both stay home.” Morris refused to give specifics about why he wanted the captains to stay home, saying instead that he would “not say anything of the mean and ungentlemanly….treatment which the Southerners have received from Capt. Willis.” Although Morris failed to mention the other captain, it can be assumed that Morris did not hold a higher

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93 Barnard E. Bee to Ashbel Smith, January 2, 1847, Barnard Bee Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

94 Howard Morris to his brother and sister, November 11, 1846, Crutcher-Shannon Family Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.
opinion of him than Willis. While he does not mention what the captains subjected the volunteers to, it most likely did not differ substantially from the complaints raised by soldiers before the battle. It is clear, however, that the treatment was “mean” and “ungentlemanly,” contrary to how southern gentlemen should be treated.

Over the next few months, even Brigadier General Quitman started to think longingly of home. Throughout the war, once soldiers had fought a major battle, even those who distinguished themselves, the desire was not to follow up victory against the retreating enemy, but rather to leave the service. In October, Quitman expressed to his wife that the general opinion was “that it will bring about peace. I trust it will if it can be done honourably to our country.” He then reassured her that he believed he had successfully fulfilled his obligations and wished to return home, stating that he was “still persuaded that my duty and character required me to join this service, [but] I shall hail as the happiest moment of my life that, when I can again embrace you.” A few months later, Quitman realized that Monterey had not brought about the peace he hoped for, but he still explained that he was “anxious for its conclusion, when with honor,” he could “return to the bosom” of his family.95 Despite his desires, Quitman remained in Mexico for the duration of the war, and his family had to wait for him to return and raise their “drooping spirits.”96

Quitman also became involved in an affair of honor following the battle. It is important to note that an affair of honor did not necessarily mean that a duel took place. Rather, affairs of

95 John Quitman to Eliza Quitman, January 27, 1847, John Quitman Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

96 John Quitman to Eliza Quitman, September 19, 1847, John Quitman Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
honor could also be discussions and letters passed between belligerents in hopes of finding an honorable solution for all involved.⁹⁷ In addition to the increasing desires of many volunteers to return home, in the months following Monterey there also arose considerable arguing between the Mississippi and Tennessee volunteers. Even though General Quitman mentioned that both the Tennesseans and the Mississippian distinguished themselves during the battle, the volunteers in these regiments were not satisfied. As a matter of state pride, patriotism, and ultimately honor, they wanted to receive credit for being the first to break the fortification at the Tenería. Jefferson Davis was adamant that it was the Mississippian who first entered the fort. In his official report from the battle, Davis said he witnessed the first person to breach the fortification, and it was a Mississippian. He wrote to Brigadier General Quitman that he could not “omit to mention the gallant bearing of Lieut. Col. [Alexander] McClung. At the storming of the Fort, he first mounted the parapet, and turning to the Regiment waved his Sword over his head in token of the triumph of our Arms.”⁹⁸

In addition to his own report, Davis asked all his subordinate officers their versions of the battle. These field reports differed from most reports since Davis specifically asked the commanders to address the question of who first broke the Tenería. In essence, Davis wanted to stockpile evidence to use in case the Tennesseans tried to give the lie and take credit for themselves.⁹⁹ Near the end of September, R.N. Downing wrote that the Tennesseans were

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⁹⁷ See Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, xii. Greenberg argued whenever southerners exchanged words in a certain way, they showed same set of values as men who dueled. Even those who opposed dueling demonstrated their belief in honor, as they advocated punishments designed to deprive duelists of honor.

⁹⁸ Jefferson Davis to John Quitman, September 26, 1846, The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 3, eds. McIntosh et al., 27.

⁹⁹ Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 107. It seems likely that in the dispute between the Mississippian and Tennesseans over Tenería, neither side was trying to lie. In order for men to achieve fame, they needed to act honorably. It is very likely that the Mississippian genuinely believed that a fellow Mississippian was the first in the fort, while the Tennesseans believed a fellow Tennessean was the first in the fort. Each side believed the other was
instrumental in Americans taking the fort. Downing added, however, that before “the Tennesseans [sic] got into the Battery, the Mississippians were in possession of the Fort, where Col. McClung was shot.” Not only did Davis see that the Mississippians first entered the fort, he also had the word of other gentlemen which supported his view.

In the weeks which followed the victory, Davis read many appalling stories in newspapers that the Tennesseans first breached the fort and deserved most of the credit. One historian has argued that this controversy showed Davis’ “petty side.” The Mississippians and Tennesseans believed their individual, regimental, and state honor was at stake, so this was far from a petty dispute. In one case, Balie Peyton, a Tennessean and General Worth's aide-de-camp, wrote a letter to the influential New Orleans Picayune, which gave the bulk of the credit to the Tennesseans. In reply to Peyton, Davis wrote on November 1, 1846, that in the Picayune letter there was “a statement of an occurrence in the East end of the town, to wit, the capture of a fort on the 21st Sept. which...[was] so inaccurate and does so much injustice to the Miss: Regt: as to require me to ask of you in such manner as you may elect to remove the impression created by this statement, bearing as it now does the sanction of your name.” This letter contained many of the characteristics of an initial letter exchanged after an honorable gentleman felt himself insulted or injured by another. While Peyton most likely did not mean to insult Davis, as the Tennessean seemed to only be trying to provide an accurate picture of the events, Davis believed trying to steal their fame, and thus, their honor.

100 Reuben N. Downing field report to Davis, September 26, 1846, The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 3, ed. McIntosh et al., 45.

101 Chance, Jefferson Davis's Mexican War Regiment, 62. Even though Chance thought this was a trifling affair, he did mention that this controversy continued to rage between Davis and Campbell into the 1850s.

102 Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 351; and Dickson Bruce, Dueling in the Old South, 73. Letters were a way to prevent men from bursting into fits of passion, and instead try to find an honorable solution to differences prior to fighting.
it was wrong and needed to be changed. Davis’ honor was intimately connected with his regiment, and to take the credit which belonged to the Mississippians smacked as a personal insult to Davis. He thus formally asked Peyton to correct his mistake.\textsuperscript{103}

A little more than a month after the battle, Davis returned to Mississippi on a six week furlough, to care for his sick wife Varina, as well as continue his defense of the Mississippi volunteers. Prior to his return, the city of Vicksburg planned a celebration in honor of several returning volunteers, including Davis. The newspaper the \textit{Mississippian} ran an advertisement which encouraged local citizens to come see “\textit{Col. Jefferson Davis – The patriot soldier who could relinquish a station of emolument, honor, ease, and safety, for the privations and perils of the camp; high and brilliantly has he inscribed his name among the heroes of Monterey.”}\textsuperscript{104} The return of Davis and some of his men created much excitement, and the celebration in Vicksburg ensured that many people would be able to hear Davis’ account of the battle.

Many Mississippians were eager to hear the tale of the great battle of Monterey directly from one of the local heroes. Similarly, Davis was eager to tell the crowd that the honor of victory at Monterey belonged to the Mississippians. But, Davis warned his listeners, “Others, who have been more successful in writing their valor on paper with a pen, than on the bodies of our enemies with lead and steel, may have beaten the Mississippians in blazoning their deeds to the country.” Davis did not even have to mention that it was the Tennesseans that were trying to steal honor from Mississippi, as the newspapers had been covering this controversy for the last couple weeks. “But,” Davis assured the devoted crowd that none of the Tennesseans “beat the Mississippians in storming the enemy's ramparts; and we shall be content that deliberate, and

\textsuperscript{103} Davis to Peyton, November 3, 1846, \textit{The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 3}, eds. McIntosh et al., 77.

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{The Mississippian}, November 17, 1846. Emphasis in original.
Sometimes slowmoving truth, shall travel behind these impetuous rumors, and finally set all things right.” The listeners undoubtedly knew that Davis planned to continue to fight for the honor which rightfully belonged to Mississippi. Davis concluded by reminding all in attendance that Mississippi volunteers were gentlemen, and “the best soldiers are gentlemen. They it is who have a high spirit of honor – a noble emulation for approval to sustain them; and with that spirit the immortal mind asserts its power, bides the toil and suffers without fatigue, mocks the danger and death, and relinquishes exertion and advance, only with life itself.”

Davis knew that Mississippians took the Tenería, and he refused to allow others to steal that honor from him, his men, or the people of Mississippi.

In the aftermath of Davis’ Vicksburg speech, it was not only the Tennesseans who had an issue with Davis. His superior in the army, Brigadier General Quitman, also expressed displeasure at the way Davis conducted himself after the battle. Prior to the war, Davis and Quitman were good friends and actually lived within walking distance of each other in Mississippi. Quitman was not angry with Davis for not giving the Tennesseans any credit for their part in the taking of Monterey. Instead, Quitman was displeased because he did not receive any credit from Davis either. Quitman’s wife encouraged her husband to try to reconcile his differences with Colonel Davis. Quitman told his wife that her “wishes indicate the honest purpose and goodness of your heart, and….I would on your account most cheerfully extend my hand with my heart to Col. Davis, but our difference is not a quarrel.” Indeed, Quitman felt Davis’ actions struck him much deeper, telling his wife that Davis had “shown himself a selfish

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105 Davis speech to the people of Vicksburg, November 10, 1846, The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 3, eds. McIntosh et al., 81-83. Emphasis in the original.

106 Cooper, Jefferson Davis, 123-157. Cooper showed that Davis and Quitman were good friends before the war. Cooper also argued that he believed the majority of evidence supports the Mississippians, and even Quitman privately mentioned that it was the Mississippians who first entered the fort.
and genuinely an ambitious man, without one particle of generosity or magnanimity [sic] in his character.” Quitman did not believe he could “esteem” Davis until he changed his character.  

News of Davis’ speech followed far and wide in the ranks, and most of the Tennessee volunteers believed that Davis wanted to steal the honor gained at Tenería from the Bloody First. The next month, Tennessean Robert Foster wrote his father a letter which attempted to correct the distorted view of the battle perpetuated by Davis and other Mississippians. Much like Davis, Foster agreed that the victory came at a tremendous loss of blood, explaining that Monterey represented a “thrilling, but sad tale, [because] of the immense loss of the wounded and fallen brave, of the gallant First Regiment of Tennessee Volunteers, has been unfolded to all, and well can I imagine the tears and sorrows, of relatives and friends.” Foster, like the people back in Tennessee, mourned the tremendous amount of blood that Tennesseans spilled at Monterey. He told his father to reassure the people grieving back home, as Foster shared “their grief for the chivalrous dead, as a brother in arms.”

In stark contrast to Davis, Foster claimed that the real heroes at Monterey were the Tennesseans. “It has been ingloriously attempted by some, and with but little regard to truth,” Foster told his father, “to steal from our gallant Regiment, the laurels that they have so dearly purchased, at the cost of so much blood.” Foster decried that “Mississippi; brave and gallant Mississippi; comes in and aims at us a bloody, mark indeed, but with the most deadly import, and

107 Greenberg, Southern Honor, 9. In essence, Quitman was “giving the lie” to Davis. Quitman explained to his wife that Davis’ appearance differed from his true nature.

108 John Quitman to Eliza, February 20, 1847, John Quitman Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

109 George Foster to his father, December 10, 1846, Robert Foster Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
would have it believed that she passed through our lines, and was the first to mount the fortress of the enemy.” He believed that the Mississippian were not just attempting to steal honor which did not belong to them, but men like Davis tried to minimize the bravery which Tennesseans displayed in battle. So, Foster chastised Mississippian for claiming “that to Mississippi belongs the honor of having charged upon, and taken a fort, whose ramparts were first scaled by others.” Instead, Foster believed Mississippian ought to “say that it was the small and heroic bunch of gallant Tennessee[ans], that led you to the charge and called upon you to follow, that you might enjoy with her, and wear in common that wreath of honor, she has so gloriously won.” It was the Tennesseans who led, the Mississippian who followed, according to Foster. Foster’s account confirmed that which was already widely believed in Tennessee; volunteers from both states acted bravely, but the honor of first breaking the fortifications at Tenería belonged to the Tennesseans. As the *Nashville Union* declared, the Tennessee volunteers deserved the bulk of the credit, and they were “aided by a Regiment of Mississippi volunteers commanded by Col. Davis.”

People in both Mississippi and Tennessee genuinely believed that whoever scaled the fort first demonstrated great bravery and bestowed honor upon the whole community. Communities gathered together when their local regiments departed and gave speeches encouraging the men forward because the regiment represented more than just the men fighting, it represented the entire community. The honor of local communities and the state were tightly wrapped with the personal honor of every volunteer. The people in both Mississippi and Tennessee wanted the Mexicans chastised and they wanted the volunteers from their state to be the ones who acted

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110 Ibid.

111 *The Weekly Nashville Union*, December 2, 1846.
first. People on the homefront in both states even agreed to build monuments for their volunteers’ actions at Monterey. Not surprisingly, the Tennessee monument planned to state that Tennesseans first took the Tenería, while the Mississippi monument planned to credit their volunteers for taking the fort. For several weeks, citizens, volunteers, and newspaper editors from Mississippi and Tennessee continued to direct harsh words at each other. At one point, Jefferson Davis' wife Varina pleaded with her husband to find some sort of an honorable solution to the problem, as she believed that her husband might eventually fight a duel with a number of partisans of the 1st Tennessee Regiment of Volunteers. This affair demonstrated how closely southerners guarded their honor while in Mexico.

The Monterey campaign showed that glory and military victory for American arms were not enough to keep volunteers in the ranks. Volunteers had the opportunity to re-enlist after Monterey, but 90% of these volunteers chose to return home after the twelve-month enlistments ended in May 1847. Some did not even wait for their enlistments to expire, as Kentuckian Jefferson Peak noted in the aftermath of Monterey that “half of the officers resigned in the key regiments [sic] & all others & gon [sic] home, perhaps not quite half but a great many.”

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112 Hospodor, “Bound by All the Ties of Honor,” 1-28.

113 Davis, Papers of Jefferson Davis, eds. McIntosh et al., 96. A duel was avoided largely because most of the volunteers were involved in an even larger battle and more brilliant American victory just a few short months later—a battle in which Davis and the 2nd Mississippi Rifle Company undeniably did play the most important role in bringing about American victory.

See Kenneth Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, 8. Varina Davis most likely feared that a duel might come about because accusations of lying were difficult to ameliorate through an exchange of letters and almost always led to a duel.


115 Jefferson Peak to his wife, November 4, 1846, in From Kentucky to Mexico: The Diary of Lieutenant Jefferson Peak, Gallatin Rangers, Company No. 2, 1st Regiment, Ky. Volunteer Cavalry, translated by R.L. Paschal,
Part of the reason that a large number of southerners refused to re-enlist stemmed from Jacksonian individualism. These men volunteered for a certain length of time, and they believed that once that time expired the country could expect no more from them. This belief explains the warm reception which accompanied almost every discharged regiment once they reached their home town. Both the Mississippi and Tennessee volunteers, the key participants in the affair of honor following Monterey, received hero's welcomes when they returned. In Mississippi, prominent Whigs and Democrats worked together to plan a parade for the returning volunteers, as the Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette stated that it was as little “as the citizens of the State which shares their glorious deeds can do, to welcome them on their return from the fields of their fame in no sparing manner.” A Nashville paper described a similar scene for the returning 1st Regiment of Tennessee Volunteers: “An immense concourse of citizens assembled at the landing to welcome them, and the returning soldiers were received with the most distinguished honors. Richly have they earned these honors,” the paper gloated.

It is apparent, however, that Jacksonian individualism cannot by itself explain these volunteers' decisions to not re-enlist. When these volunteers returned, it was blatantly apparent to every person who saw them that the war had taken a drastic toll on all involved. For example, the crowd of people who awaited the return of the Mississippi volunteers would have easily discerned that of the 900 men who left one year earlier, only 300 returned, and most of them

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116 See John C. Pinheiro, *Manifest Ambition: James K. Polk and Civil-Military Relations during the Mexican War* (Westport: Praeger, 2007), 50-51. Pinheiro argued that once volunteers terms of enlistment ended, then they believed they had fulfilled their roles as citizen soldiers and had every right to return home. Pinheiro found that while discipline was part of the reason soldiers left, most were liberty lovers and hated the drudgery of camp life.

117 Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette, May 15, 1847.

118 The National Union, June 6, 1847.
were sick or injured – including Colonel Davis. Tennessean Richard Edwards in his memoirs painted a good picture of the mindset of the men who were returning: “It was quite a different affair from our landing six months before. Then we were all stout and gay. Now most all were more or less enfeebled by fevers and that worse scourge the diarrhoea [sic].” Prior to leaving for home, Edwards explained that he heard the Marine band play “Home, Sweet Home,” and he and the men around him cried. When the song played, Edwards explained that he and everyone else questioned: “Shall I live to get there?”

In the days, weeks, and months which followed their return, these volunteers told their stories to friends and families, wrote them in diaries, and some even submitted their experiences to editors of local newspapers. Anyone who thought they might want to volunteer to take one of these men's places, therefore, had plenty of vivid stories which showed the reality of warfare in Mexico.

Thus, many of the states which experienced a rush of volunteers in May 1846 struggled to meet their volunteer requirements later in the war. Upon returning to Baltimore to form a new regiment, John Kenly noted that “Recruiting had been going on very slowly, and there was some difficulty between the several officers as to the command of the companies that were being organized.”

By the summer of 1847, even Mississippi struggled to fill its regiments, as the Mississippian noted that the Governor was forced to make another appeal to the patriotism and chivalry of the young men of Mississippi,” as considerable delay had “been experienced in raising a battalion of five companies under the last requisition from the Secretary of War.

Thomas Hobbes, the Alabama planter who expressed such pleasure at Alabamians quick

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120 Kenly, Memoirs of a Maryland Volunteer, 277-8.

121 The Mississippian, August 27, 1847.
response to volunteer for the war, learned of rising dissatisfaction towards the war on the southern homefront when he attempted to form a volunteer regiment in mid-1847. He went from plantation to plantation telling people that the country needed additional forces to gain complete victory. Hobbes noted in his diary that he “met with tolerable success getting some names, and being refused by some.” After spending a week trying to fill a volunteer unit with little success, he then tried to form a volunteer horse, or dragoon, company with other planters in his community. This effort failed as well.\textsuperscript{122} South Carolinian Waddy Thompson, the former ambassador to Mexico, remarked that the southern “enthusiasm for volunteering has had its last paroxysm.”\textsuperscript{123} Some volunteers deserted and some of the men who refused to re-enlist became vocal opponents of the war on the homefront. It seems safe to say, however, that many of the volunteers who returned home were not necessarily opponents of the war. The stories they told of disease, discipline, dishonor, and death, however, helped fuel antiwar sentiments in the South more than anything antiwar politicians said or did.

As an extreme case, the state of Alabama failed to fill its final required regiments. In Montgomery, the \textit{Tri-Weekly Flag and Advertiser} bemoaned that after three months since the call for volunteers Alabama still had not fulfilled its requisition called for by the Governor. The newspaper sternly rebuked Alabamians: “Yes, with shame be it said, that \textit{every State in the Union} but ours has responded to the calls that have been made upon them for troops to serve in this war.” The editor knew the reason why Alabama failed to fill its regiments, as he admitted that he was “aware that much dissatisfaction has prevailed owing to the treatment of the Alabama volunteers that have already served in Mexico, both those that went for six months, and those

\textsuperscript{122} Hobbes diary, May 12 and 19, 1847, Thomas Hobbes Papers, Hoole Rare Book library, University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa.

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Morning News}, January 30, 1848.
that went for twelve.” Surely, the stories of James Bailey and others who grunted that the army treated southern white volunteers worse than black slaves had made it around the state. To counteract such stories, the editor could only appeal to honor: “Are we Alabamians, and care nothing for the honor and fame of our State?” The difficulty which southern states had in filling their regiments after the initial volunteering rush demonstrates that as the war went on, some southerners believed that it was more honorable to stay away from Mexico.

The Monterey campaign was significant because it established a pattern which repeated throughout the war. Whether men answered the first call for volunteers in May 1846, the second in December 1846, or the third in May 1847, these volunteers expressed enthusiasm for the war and a desire to chastise the Mexicans. Almost immediately upon leaving for Mexico, these volunteers came face to face with sickness, discipline, and the death of fellow volunteers, and letters started pouring home about how these volunteers could not wait until they were discharged. Prior to being discharged, however, southerners hoped to be involved in a major battle, as their individual, regimental, communal, and state honor were all involved. Southerners proved willing to verbally assault anyone who attempted to impinge the honor of their regiment, and all southerners were aware that these assaults could lead to duels. The Monterey campaign demonstrated that southerners carried their honor with them to Mexico, and they were determined to return home with it. In some cases, maintaining honor meant becoming opponents.

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124 *Tri-Weekly Flag and Advertiser*, September 28, 1847.

125 Hospodor, “Bound By All The Ties of Honor,” 1-28. Hospodor did not discuss the difficulty which southern states experienced following the initial volunteer rush. Later volunteer movements showed that honor could not be used as a club to beat others into supporting the war. Southerners still firmly believed in honor, but more began to see honor in staying away from Mexico.
of the war. In most cases, the volunteer’s stories of the treatment they received impeded recruitment later in the war.

What this meant was that manpower was a constant problem, not only for Zachary Taylor but also the next year as the United States opened a second front and General Winfield Scott faced the same problems. Much like Taylor experienced at the start of the Monterey campaign, General Scott asked the twelve-month volunteers to re-enlist for his Mexico City campaign, but instead the vast majority of the men left for home. Scott had to halt his march to Mexico City for months and wait for reinforcements. This meant that politicians repeatedly had to deal with the war, as Congress needed to fulfill its constitutional duty of raising and funding an army whenever the old volunteers decided to leave the service. While Taylor’s men performed admirably in their assault on Monterey, the American high command realized that it would be best to not always have to fight the Mexicans with a great disadvantage of manpower. Since it became clear after Monterey that most volunteers would leave as soon as their enlistments ended, it was crucial for the army to keep as many men in Mexico as they could and instill discipline so the volunteers could be counted on in upcoming engagements. During the Monterey campaign, harsh discipline led some men to desert the service, so it was already clear that discipline could backfire on American commanders. In the months which followed Monterey, some volunteers considered an even more drastic step – mutiny.
Chapter 3:

“To Sustain Untarnished the Honor of Our State”: Mutineers of Buena Vista

Colonel Robert Treat Paine of the 1st Regiment of North Carolina Volunteers was not happy to be in Mexico. His gloom only increased when his own men—along with many volunteers from the nearby Virginia and Mississippi camps—mutinied against him. Around 8 o’clock on the evening of August 15, 1847, Paine ran to his tent and grabbed his dragoon pistols. Upon exiting the tent, the mutineers approached him, and Paine screamed at the hostile mob to “HALT.” The men continued moving towards the embattled colonel. When the men approached to about fifteen paces, Paine discharged one of his pistols. The ball passed through the torso of one man, North Carolina volunteer A.H. Bradly, and exited through his back. The bullet’s journey was not through, however, as it went on to wound the hand of a Virginia volunteer. The consequences were lethal; Bradly later died from his wounds. A North Carolinian, who volunteered to fight the Mexicans, win glory on the battlefield, and sustain the honor or his state, instead lost his life from a bullet fired by his own colonel.¹

This chapter analyses how and why some southern volunteers decided upon mutiny as the proper recourse to protect their honor in General Zachary Taylor’s army in northern Mexico. After the battle of Monterey, Taylor once again stopped active campaigning against the Mexicans, mostly because he believed that the war could not be won in northern Mexico and that a second front needed to be opened further south. From October 1846 to January 1847, Taylor’s men only fought occasional skirmishes with Mexican guerrillas. Volunteers spent much of the rest of their time in a similar fashion as volunteers spent time at the start of the Monterey campaign: soldiers drilled, drank, joked, played cards, chased Mexican women, and occasionally

¹ Robert Treat Paine to Eliza Paine, August 16, 1847, Robert Treat Paine Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
attended church, the theatre, or fandangos. Taylor’s second-in-command, Brigadier General John Wool, used this time of inactivity to continue to instill discipline into the volunteers, which was the root cause of opposition and mutiny among the southern volunteers.²

The story which follows, thus, is the story of two mutinies – or rather, the story of one mutiny and one mutiny avoided. It is also a story of two commanders, Arkansas Colonel Archibald Yell and North Carolina Colonel Robert Treat Paine.³ From October 1846 until his death at the Battle of Buena Vista, Yell defended the volunteers in his regiment against the harsh discipline put in place by Wool, and the Arkansas volunteers learned to respect their colonel as a staunch defender of their rights and honor. On the other hand, after the Battle of Buena Vista, Paine embraced Wool’s discipline, and Paine’s men – as well as fellow brigaded volunteers from Virginia and Mississippi – mutinied. Yell showed that defending southern honor helped create

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useful soldiers in the ranks, and Paine showed that rejecting southern honor turned southern patriots into mutineers against their own regiment and country.\(^4\)

Both these cases are essential for fully comprehending the larger story of opposition during the Mexican War era.\(^5\) While historians most often place politics at the center of Mexican War opposition, these volunteers demonstrated that significant opposition existed within the ranks of the southern volunteers and that honor was the primary reason for whether they decided to continue to support the war, or instead become outright opponents.\(^6\) As long as the volunteers believed that they could preserve their personal, regimental, communal, and state honor by serving in the war, they remained in the ranks. Ultimately, this was the reason that Arkansas volunteers remained loyal to the cause. If soldiers believed that it was dishonorable to be subjected to harsh discipline, then they became opponents through disobedience, desertion, or in

\(^4\)See Gregory S. Hospodor, “Bound By All Ties of Honor’: Southern Honor, The Mississippians, and the Mexican War,” *The Journal of Mississippi History* 61, no. 1 (March 1999): 1-28. Hospodor showed that southerners were united by the southerner culture of honor. Hospodor also argued, though, that southerner honor blunted dissent in the South. However, Hospodor did not examine the military aspects of the war in much detail – or the mutiny at Buena Vista at all. I argue that while southerners were certainly united around the ideas encompassed in the southern culture of honor, that honor also caused much of the dissent which occurred throughout the war.


Severals of the most important studies about military dissent argue that opposition within the ranks actually fell along political lines. For example, see Brown, “The Mexican War Experiences of Albert Pike and the ‘Mounted Devils’ of Arkansas,” 301-15; and Winders, “Will the Regiment Stand It? The 1st North Carolina Mutinies at Buena Vista,” in *Dueling Eagles*, eds. Francaviglia and Richmond, 67-82. The best study which links military dissent to political opposition is Ernest M. Lander, Jr., *Reluctant Imperialists: Calhoun, the South Carolinians, and the Mexican War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980).
the case of the North Carolina, Virginia, and Mississippi volunteers, mutiny. Southern opponents had warned that Texas annexation and the war would bring shame, humiliation, and dishonor upon the South. This dreadful fear started to become a reality during the war.

In order to better understand the experiences of the Arkansas and North Carolina regiments during the war, it is first necessary to recognize that southerners feared that service in the Mexican War could corrode their honorable identities. In his journal that he kept during the war, Kentuckian William McClintock explained that southerners could be easily identified by their manners, habits, feelings, and appearances. Southerners acted like gentlemen on all occasions. In battle, McClintock continued, southerners possessed “bold chivalrous daring” which distinguished them from the rest of the men in Mexico. Southerners intended to keep these positive characteristics throughout the war, which could be difficult while surrounded by Mexicans, or as McClintock called them, a “lazy, lousy, blanket generation of thieves & cut throats.”

Like black slaves back home, southerners considered Mexicans to be degraded,

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7 There are no studies which focus substantially on honor among soldiers during the Mexican War. There are some studies which examine honor during the Civil War, however. See Clement Eaton, “The Role of Honor in Southern Society,” Southern Humanities Review 10 (1976): 47-58; and James M. McPherson, For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

This chapter mostly draws upon the ideas in Bertram Wyatt-Brown, A Warring Nation: Honor, Race, and Humiliation in America and Abroad (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 8, 62-79. He argued that the emotional state brought about by humiliation oftentimes generated the impulse to seek revenge for insult, whether against an individual, family, or nation. Although Wyatt-Brown did not analyze how humiliation helped guide the actions of dissent during the Mexican War, I believe that the discipline imposed by commanders oftentimes caused southern volunteers to feel humiliated. In response, southerners chose to oppose their commanders as a way to avoid humiliation and preserve honor.

8 William A. McClintock, Journal of a soldier of the second Kentucky regiment: Trip through Texas and Northern Mexico in 1846-1847, 48, William A. McClintock Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

9 McClintock, Journal of a Soldier, 44, William A. McClintock Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

10 McClintock, Journal of a Soldier, 51, William A. McClintock Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.
cowardly, and dishonest. Thus, honorable southerners strived to maintain their refined characteristics while surrounded by dishonorable Mexicans.

The easiest way for a southerner to lose his honor in Mexico was to submit to treatment and discipline which would not be acceptable in the South. Throughout the war, southerners experienced a wide range of punishments and discipline which challenged their perceptions of themselves as honorable men. For instance, Texan Thomas J. Driks commented that southerners oftentimes received punishment “for the most trifling offense,” which was “something that the volunteers ha[d] never been used to before this.” Driks found officers forcing some men sit upon the wooden horse or putting some in the stocks for up to eight hours a day for several months as particularly appalling.¹¹ Southerners considered this treatment suited for slaves or Mexicans, but not themselves. The most popular commanders were those who avoided excessive discipline. This was precisely the reason why John Quitman was so popular among the Mississippians and Tennesseans he commanded. One southerner mentioned that Quitman spoke “to a soldier not like he was a slave, but like he was a freeman, and equal to himself.”¹² Army discipline, according to many volunteers, threatened to deprive southerners of their identities as free-American citizens, which was why discipline was an important and contested part of the war.

Others viewed the volunteers’ behavior in Mexico as dishonorable and argued that strict discipline was necessary to correct this problem.¹³ North Carolinian Daniel Harvey Hill mentioned that the volunteers frequently drank, robbed, raped, or even murdered Mexicans, thus

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¹¹ Thomas J. Driks, January 31, 1848, Thomas J. Driks Papers, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries, Special Collections.

¹² T.C. Alexander diary, April 21, 1847, T.C. Alexander Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

¹³ Otis A. Singletary, *The Mexican War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 128. Many of the complaints against the volunteers came from army regulars. Otis termed the in-fighting between volunteers and regulars as one part of the “hidden war.”
casting dishonor upon the entire army. Hill believed that volunteers usually only received light punishment for such offenses, especially considering the fact that regulars received up to thirty lashes with rawhide on bareback for minor crimes. Additionally, the volunteers rarely showed any respect to their commanders and usually instigated arguments with their superior officers. Hill experienced these “outrages” himself on several occasions, as the volunteers “generally shouted at us and said something impertinent” when he and other commanding officers rode by.

Despite the horrible way the volunteers treated their commanding officers, Hill complained that the volunteers entered “a mutinous state” when they received even slight rebuke for their actions. Therefore, both volunteers and their commanders considered their honor to be at stake in the ranks. While commanders considered discipline as a way to protect honor, volunteers viewed it as a way to deprive them of honor. As Hill recorded, southerners considered mutiny an option to ensure the survival of honor.

Southerners’ opinions of discipline are important for understanding the case of the Arkansas regiment. Much like another state of the Old Southwest – Texas – Arkansas was only recently added to the Union at the outbreak of the war. Living in the far west, Arkansans had gained a reputation as fierce Indian fighters. Arkansans also shared Texans’, and most southerners’ desire to chastise the Mexicans. The people of Arkansas mostly emigrated from other Deep South states, and the institution of black slavery was already firmly rooted by the outbreak of the war. The state leaned towards the Democratic Party and zealously supported the

14 D.H. Hill diary, November 21, 1846, D.H. Hill Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

15 Some argue that the volunteers from Arkansas, coming from a frontier state with clearly drawn racial lines, made the Arkansans, much like the Texans, prone to violence and atrocities against the Mexicans. For example, see Foos, A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair, 144.
Polk administration. When Polk issued the call for volunteers, Arkansas experienced a similar volunteer rush as states like Mississippi and Tennessee.16

At the outbreak of war, the state’s first U.S. Senator and second governor, Democrat Archibald Yell, served as a member of the House of Representatives from Fayetteville in Washington County. Like most of his constituents, he was an enthusiast for the war. Yell and Polk were also close personal friends; so if the congressman decided to vacate his seat to serve in the Mexican War, Polk would gladly support the move.17 With this in mind, Yell vacated his seat in the House of Representatives after Governor Thomas S. Drew issued a call for volunteers on May 27. Yell traveled back to Arkansas to scour the state for volunteers and eventually decided to enlist as a private in Solon Borland’s company, one of ten being formed in the state. The ten companies eventually formed into one regiment. Like most politicians, Yell boasted relatively few skills which translated to the battlefield, a fact his critics gladly informed the public. Critics most often referred to him as a poor communicator. This might, in part, explain why he had proven unable to overcome personal disputes with other gentlemen and had been involved in several duels in the past. The Arkansas State Democrat staff explained that they “could name more than fifty gentlemen whom we consider quite as well qualified for the task as Gov. Yell, and many of them much better.”18 Nonetheless, on July 7, in this heavily Democratic part of the state, the volunteers elected Yell as colonel over the regiment’s other prominent citizen, Little Rock Whig Albert Pike. Politics was not the main reason for Yell’s election, however, as the

16 For a discussion of the volunteer rush in Arkansas and other southern states, see McCaffrey, Army of Manifest Destiny, 15-32.

17 For an example of the pre-war friendship of Polk and Yell, see Thomas M. Leonard, James K. Polk: A Clear and Unquestionable Destiny (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001), 77.

18 Arkansas State Democrat, May 29, 1846.
volunteers primarily voted for Yell since Pike had a reputation as a “strict disciplinarian.”¹⁹ The volunteers elected John Selden Roane as lieutenant-colonel and Borland as major, both of whom were Democrats who had a reputation for being soft on discipline.

The federal government mustered the Arkansas volunteers into service in July 1846, and by August they left Arkansas to join General John Wool’s men on the Rio Grande. A native of New York, Wool was a professional soldier who had fought in the War of 1812 and against Indians prior to the Mexican War. He had gained a reputation as a great organizer, but also a strict disciplinarian.²⁰ Early in the war, Wool commanded an independent division in Taylor’s army which operated near the western Mexican state of Chihuahua. At the end of August, the Arkansas regiment joined Wool’s division in the western theatre.²¹ At this time, there was no active fighting between the Mexicans and Wool’s division, so he proceeded to train the rough volunteers, including the Arkansans. Wool realized the challenge he faced with the Arkansas regiment, as they frequently yelled at him when he gave orders or tried to instill discipline.²² As a result, Wool mentioned that they were “wholly without instruction,” and that Yell had a “total ignorance of his duties as Colonel.”²³ It is important to note that Wool was a Democrat, so his low opinion of Yell and the Arkansas men was not politically motivated.

¹⁹ For a discussion of Albert Pike during the Mexican War, see Brown, “The Mexican War Experiences of Albert Pike and the ‘Mounted Devils’ of Arkansas,” 301-15.

²⁰ Francis Baylies, A Narrative of Major General Wool’s Campaign in Mexico: In the Years 1846, 1847, & 1848 (Albany: Little Press, 1851), 1-78.

²¹ For soldiers’ experiences in the western war, see George Croghan, Army Life on the Western Frontier, ed. Francis Paul Prucha (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 1-187.


²³ Bauer, The Mexican War, 146.
Despite Yell’s shortcomings, he made the wise decision to invite Josiah Gregg, a well-known naturalist who had extensive knowledge of Mexico and the Spanish language, along as a guide. Like almost every American who had extensive contact and interaction with the Mexicans, Gregg was a firm proponent of the war. He expressed at various points leading up to the conflict, and even during the war, that the United States “had abundant reason for war with Mexico, even apart from its immediate causes.” This reasoning was reminiscent of the language Polk used in his message to Congress, as the abundant reasons Gregg referred to were the loans which the Mexican government took from the American government and citizens with no intention of ever repaying. Thus, Gregg argued that “every American will say who has sojourned in the interior of Mexico, and suffered, as I have, (and all have suffered more or less), a multiplicity of outrages.” According to Gregg, this war was necessary to procure redress and avoid the United States from becoming “a scoffing by-word instead of a terror to the Mexicans.”24 Even though Gregg was not shouldering arms, he expressed a willingness to chastise the Mexicans in any way that he could, which made his knowledge of the terrain and language useful to Yell.

Gregg, though, shared Wool’s opinion about Yell’s martial abilities. In a letter to the *Arkansas Intelligencer*, Gregg complained that it was “certainly painful – very mortifying to witness the almost universal dissatisfaction,” which seemed to prevail “among regulars as [well as] volunteers, with regard to [Yell].” Gregg confirmed that it was not only Wool who expressed dissatisfaction with Yell, but the men under his command as well. “The truth,” Gregg continued, was that all the Arkansas volunteers seemed convinced that Yell was “not only of a very unpleasant, whimsical temperament – decidedly old-womanish,” but he also lacked “the requisite

capacity for such a command.”25 In a matter of a few brief months, Yell’s leadership came under question by his own men and his commanding officer. Yell needed to gain the respect of his men. Without it, he, risked losing control over them.

In November, Wool presented Yell with an opportunity to show his men that they could count on him as their colonel. It was at this time that Wool decided to get back at his subordinate by not only instilling some discipline into the volunteers, but also into Yell himself. Wool decided that instead of camping on the army’s left flank, which had always been the 1st Arkansas regiment’s location since their arrival, they would now camp on the right flank. Gregg wrote in his diary that volunteers in other regiments started to say that if you were looking for the Arkansas Regiment, “go to [the] lower end of line.”26 Gregg emphasized the word lower not just because of the physical location of the camp, but also because this regiment was held in lower regard than the other regiments, which Wool made clear by moving the Arkansas men to the inferior camping ground.

While a camping spot might not appear to be cause for alarm, it was a great concern for honorable southerners. Wool made sure that the spot where Yell’s men camped had relatively little grass for the horses to graze, which was certain to further exacerbate the condition of the horses, which many Arkansas volunteers had already been complaining about. Secondly, the new camp was downstream from the other camps, meaning that, as Gregg explained, “the ‘Arkansawyers’ always had filthy water to drink.”27 Wool told Yell that this was where the


27 Ibid.
Arkansas regiment needed to camp from now on. Wool hoped this new position would force Yell to increase the training and discipline among his volunteers and subsequently stop their grumbling about the conditions of camp. Yell, and consequently the men in his regiment, were being punished.

Yell knew that this new development with the camp might literally cause the Arkansas volunteers to be up-in-arms. The men already chafed at the extensive period of inactivity, as well as the training, discipline, and conditions of camp. This new development might be viewed as an attempt to humiliate the Arkansans, so Yell needed to act quickly.\textsuperscript{28} Instead of focusing on discipline, Yell decided he would move the camp to a new location which offered more grass for the horses and more fresh water for his men to drink. Gregg expressed astonishment at Yell’s action, as moving to a new camp “was an absolute disobedience of orders – almost a mutiny – rebellion, – according to army regulations.”\textsuperscript{29} Gregg’s diary suggests that he gained a new-found respect not only for Colonel Yell, but also Lieutenant-Colonel John Roane and Major Solon Borland, the commanders of the 1\textsuperscript{st} Arkansas Regiment who initiated the move. Gregg explained that he “could not but admire the spirit with which they sustained their hastily-formed resolution.”\textsuperscript{30} The 1\textsuperscript{st} Arkansas regiment moved their camp in opposition to the poor treatment they received at Wool’s hands.

Wool noticed right away, that contrary to his orders, the Arkansas volunteers had moved to a new camp. On the night of December 1, he came to the Arkansas men’s new campground and ordered Colonel Yell to move them back to their proper place down the river. Yell refused

\textsuperscript{28} Wyatt-Brown, \textit{A Warring Nation}, 8.

\textsuperscript{29} Gregg, \textit{Diary and Letter: 1840-1847}, ed. Fulton, 311.

and Wool placed the colonel under arrest. Command now passed to Lieutenant-Colonel Roane, and Wool now commanded him to move the camp. Roane refused and was placed under arrest with Yell. The command now fell to Major Borland, who, like Yell and Roane, also refused to move the camp when commanded by Wool. Thus, the Arkansas volunteers saw three of their commanding officers arrested and taken away, all three for trying to protect their rights and provide the regiment with a camp more suitable for Arkansans. Major Borland explained that all three men’s “disobedience consisted of refusing to encamp on the ground selected for us – but taking a better position.” He stated that the volunteers “considered that our regiment had been imposed upon, in this way, very often, and resolved to stand it no longer.” Wool kept the three men arrested under guard until December 6, when he released them back to command. Wool, noticing the delicacy of the situation among the Arkansans, also decided to forego a court martial in the case.

It seemed that standing up for the rights of the regiment endeared Yell to the majority of the volunteers. While men still grumbled, a greater calm enveloped the camp. Yell’s actions even changed Gregg’s opinion of him. Indeed, seeing the example Yell set, Gregg expressed regret that the fourth in command, senior Captain Andrew Porter, took the command. Gregg explained that he had hoped all the commanding officers would “have 'spunk' enough to show the gen. that none of them would exercise the command, after their field-officers had been arrested for defending their rights.” Nonetheless, when Yell, Roane, and Borland returned to

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31 Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette, February 4, 1847.

32 Most scholars argue that the Arkansas soldiers were extremely violent and prone to committing atrocities, so the discipline put in place by Wool even fell short of what was needed. See Bauer, The Mexican War, 211; and Foos, A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair, 124.

33 Gregg, Diary and Letters: 1840-1847, 292-4
the regiment, it seemed that the Arkansas volunteers held greater affinity for their field officers than ever before.

This event helped the Arkansas volunteers to gain a greater sense that an attack upon one was an attack upon all. This was not always a good thing. At the end of 1846, Wool had left the war in the west and joined forces with Taylor in northern Mexico. On February 9, Mexican guerrillas lynched an Arkansas volunteer. Shortly thereafter, a group of Arkansas men went looking for the guerrillas. They happened upon a neighboring rancho and immediately saw some items belonging to an Illinois volunteer, who they assumed had also been killed by the Mexicans. While they did not find any possessions from the Arkansas volunteer, this was cause to make this rancho pay. The following day, Arkansas, Illinois, and Kentucky volunteers fired upon the inhabitants of the rancho. The volunteers chased some of the inhabitants to a nearby cave and proceeded to shoot into the cave. Historians are not certain how many people died in this attack, as the official report counted four killed yet eyewitness reports vary from twenty to thirty killed. In a letter to his brother, Gregg noted though there was “little doubt that there were numerous villains in the rancho, who had been robbing and murdering the volunteers, yet, of course, the shooting them down indiscriminately was a most savage atrocity.” When word reached Zachary Taylor later in the month, he agreed with Gregg and threatened to send the two Arkansas companies involved – although not the Illinois or Kentucky volunteers – to the city of Camargo under guard. As many of the volunteers noted during the Monterey campaign,

34 For an overview of the cave massacre, see Foos, *A Short, Offhand killing Affair*, 124.
Camargo had the reputation among the volunteers as a very unhealthy environment, virtually a graveyard. Sending the Arkansans there would constitute a severe punishment indeed.\textsuperscript{37}

Prior to Taylor making a decision, however, it became clear that the Mexican army under Santa Anna had begun making preparations for battle at the nearby Hacienda San Juan de Buena Vista – known to history as Buena Vista. Santa Anna knew that the American war strategy had recently changed, and a new campaign under the leadership of Winfield Scott was underway against the eastern coastal city of Vera Cruz. The Americans intended to take Vera Cruz, Santa Anna’s hometown, in the first step of a plan intended to lead to the defeat of the Mexican army or the capture of Mexico City. After Monterey, however, the Mexican public began to express concern over the war effort. Therefore, Santa Anna decided that he needed a victory to raise the morale of his troops and the Mexican people. Thus, he decided to go for Taylor’s army which had just recently sent the majority of its men to assist Scott with the capture of Vera Cruz. To Santa Anna’s mind, Taylor represented an easy target. In response to Santa Anna marching his way, Taylor moved his command from Saltillo to Buena Vista, a place with a main road that passed between cliffs at the edge of a plateau on the east, and broken ground on a river to the west. Santa Anna arrived at Buena Vista on February 20, and even after a long, grueling march during which a substantial number of his men died or deserted, he still commanded 15,142 combat-ready troops.\textsuperscript{38} Taylor needed every man for this battle, so the Arkansas volunteers

\textsuperscript{37} Pinheiro, \textit{Manifest Ambition}, 101. Pinheiro showed that southerners committed the vast majority of atrocities during the war. The reason, he argued, was that southerner’s deep held ideas of honor and the massacres perpetrated by the Mexicans during the Texas Revolution caused southerners to seek revenge against Mexicans any chance they could get. He did not discuss honor in any detail, especially how it led southerners to commit atrocities.

\textsuperscript{38} Bauer, \textit{The Mexican War}, 209.
Taylor decided that Wool’s forces, which included the Arkansas volunteers, would lead the main attack upon the Mexican positions. When the Mexican infantry moved directly in front of Wool’s command, the band struck up “Hail Columbia,” and he immediately sent a notice to Taylor informing him that his help would be needed soon. Since the Mexicans heavily outnumbered the Americans, Santa Anna placed his artillery on high ground and enfiladed almost the entire American position with his lines. At 11am on February 21, Santa Anna sent a note demanding the surrender of Taylor’s forces within one hour. According to Gregg, Taylor replied that “he would give an answer after the battle.”

The battle commenced shortly thereafter. The Mexicans began the attack by feinting against the American right, and Santa Anna then ordered his main assault to come against the American left, the position which the Arkansas volunteers occupied. The fighting continued for much of the first day with neither side suffering greatly. During the night, Taylor rode back to Saltillo to ensure that the defenses for the rear of his command were sufficient, in case he deemed a retreat necessary the next day. Santa Anna continued the attack against the American left at sunup. Taylor raced back to Buena Vista at 9am, accompanied by the 2nd Mississippi Rifle Company, commanded by his former son-in-law Jefferson Davis. Partly because of the overwhelming number of Mexicans attacking, as well as the fact that some of the Americans believed that a command had been given to retreat, the American left was on the brink of collapse.

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39 It is interesting to note that Yell actually threatened to withdraw his entire regiment if Taylor sent the two companies to Camargo. Thus, Yell once again protected his men from discipline. See Foos, *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair*, 124.


It was at this point that Wool sent the Arkansas volunteers and the recently arrived Mississippians, to reinforce the American left. If the American left collapsed, the Mexicans would be able to encircle all the American forces at Buena Vista. Santa Anna recognized this possibility and sent his lancers and infantry towards the American lines. The classic defense against charging infantry and cavalry was to form a hollow square and affix bayonets, thus ensuring that the charge could be defended from all sides and distances. Davis did not have the time or the resources, since he lacked bayonets, to make this defense work. Instead, he quickly formed the men into a “V” formation and massed his artillery in the middle. The Mexicans charged directly into the center of the V, and the Americans thoroughly repulsed this Mexican charge. Davis and his Mississippians then charged the enemy, supported by American artillery, and sent most of the Mexicans retreating into the mountains. Santa Anna reformed his units and began a second assault. Most of the Americans fled when the Mexicans made this second charge, yet Yell and many of his men remained. The Americans eventually stopped the Mexican advance and the left never fell, but during this second Mexican charge Yell lost his life. At 5pm, Braxton Bragg arrived with his heavy artillery and proceeded to double-canister the Mexican lines. The Americans had stopped the Mexican advance for the day, and Taylor started to entrench for the next assault, which he believed would come the following day. Santa Anna, however, decided to retreat during the night. The next day the Americans realized they had


44 Brown, “The Mexican War Experiences,” 310. Albert Pike maintained that Yell actually gave an order to retreat at Buena Vista and most of the men followed his lead, and Brown accepted this story. It does not seem to make much sense, however, that Yell would give an order to retreat yet charge the Mexicans himself.
achieved another victory. During the battle, most of the Arkansas volunteers fought bravely, following the example of their now-respected leader, Colonel Yell.

The Arkansas volunteers saw no further action against the Mexicans in northern Mexico. For both Americans and Mexicans, the war shifted further south. The American strategy to defeat the Mexican army or take Mexico City began to take shape, while the Mexicans tried to keep their army and capital out of American hands. After the heavy losses they sustained at Buena Vista, the Arkansas volunteers were “anxiously awaiting the arrival of the term for their discharge.” When the volunteers arrived in June, the Arkansas State Democrat announced that “the booming of the guns was heard at the landing, and….it was gratifying indeed, to see the street thronged by a dense crowd of our people, eagerly hastening to the levee to catch a glimpse of the soldiers, and hail their safe return from the scenes through which they had passed, unconquered by fatigue, unscathed by disease, and unterrified by danger.” The paper was too optimistic, however. Many of the volunteers arrived home sick and still nursing wounds. Additionally, some Arkansans did not live to see the scene, as Colonel Yell’s remains arrived on the steamer the Hatchee Planter, and some volunteers’ bodies remained in Mexico.

Many people in Arkansas lamented Yell’s death. Upon hearing of the death of his friend, Polk confided to his diary that he deeply deplored the loss of “a brave and good man, and among the best friends I had on earth.” About 4,000 people attended Yell’s funeral in the still sparsely settled state. The Methodist Episcopal Reverend John Harrell pronounced that “how sleep the

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46 Arkansas State Democrat, June 11, 1847. Emphasis in the original.

47 Ibid.

brave, who sink to rest. By all their country’s wishes blest.”

One newspaper reported that Yell “fell at Buena Vista while gallantly leading his regiment in a desperate charge upon an overwhelming force of the enemy. He thus sealed his devotion to his country with his life blood and gloriously closed a life of usefulness and honorable fame.” For southerners back home, Yell protected his honor by spilling his blood on Mexican soil.

Despite the celebrations that accompanied the return of the volunteers and the widespread sorrow displayed at Yell’s funeral, not all was harmonious on the Arkansas homefront. Newspapers in several states mentioned that some members of the Arkansas volunteer cavalry fled in the face of the enemy. Some of the Arkansas volunteers confirmed the retreat of the cavalry. One volunteer, W. Quesenbay, wrote a letter to the editor of the Arkansas State Democrat that some would “remember Buena Vista with regret for their own cowardly conduct.” These few men, he wrote, “imagined that the battle was lost, and ran off and took shelter in Saltillo, telling those there who were to defend the city, most appalling tales of Santa Anna’s victory.” Yet, Quesenbay wrote, “when they heard the tide had turned, they came back (the most of them) and were loud in their accounts of their own valor.” Quesenbay remembered several men fleeing from most of the regiments, and criticized the men who left while the others fought. Lieutenant John W. Patrick agreed with Quesenbay that a few men fled from the battle, but he reassured people back home that there was no truth to the rumors “that the Arkansas regiment disgraced itself by ingloriously retreating.”

The Arkansas State Democrat, the newspaper which criticized Yell prior to the regiment

49 New-Hampshire Patriot, April 29, 1847.

50 New-Hampshire Patriot, September 2, 1847. Emphasis in the original.

51 Arkansas State Democrat, April 16, 1847.
even leaving for Mexico, perhaps best displayed why this was such an important matter following the battle. In an editorial entitled “THE SLANDER UPON OUR VOLUNTEERS,” the editors noted that if the rumors of the volunteers retreating were true, then it “would prove a lasting disgrace to a portion of our troops, and cast an indelible stigma upon the character of our State.” The people of Arkansas felt the insult just as much as the volunteers, as the paper stated that these rumors “aroused a feeling of indignation among our whole people.” Similar to what happened in Mississippi and Tennessee following the battle of Monterey, the people of Arkansas defended their volunteers, who represented the honor of their local communities and the state. The newspaper argued that Arkansans viewed “the Arkansas Regiment as a special delegation, sent out to do the good battle against the foe, and to sustain untarnished the honor of our State.” If the volunteers acted cowardly, then the entire state would share that cowardly reputation. The paper concluded that their volunteers acted bravely and “in the most effectual manner.”

Unlike the case of the Mississippians and Tennesseans, a duel did occur between members of the Arkansas volunteers. This affair demonstrates that the Arkansas volunteers believed that their honor was intimately tied to the honor of their local communities and the state. The two principal participants in this affair of honor were John Roane, Yell’s second-in-command who also refused Wool’s order to move the Arkansas camp, and Albert Pike, the Whig leader who lost the election for the colonelcy to Yell and firmly believed that Yell should have embraced Wool’s discipline. In many ways, this duel was a reflection of the dispute over

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52 Arkansas State Democrat, April 16, 1847. This is an example of individuals being responsible for supporting the honor of the whole community, which was Wyatt-Brown's main thesis. See also Gregory S. Hospodor, “Bound By All Ties of Honor,” Southern Honor, The Mississippians, and the Mexican War, The Journal of Mississippi History 61, no. 1 (April 1999): 1-28. Hospodor argued that in Mississippi an attack upon one member of a regiment was an attack upon all, and an attack upon the state. He also showed that Mississippi women frequently defended the honor of the men of their state against slanders and insults.
discipline which vexed relations between Yell and Wool.

The roots of this duel can be traced back to Pike’s criticism of Yell, Roane, and Borland for their failure to instill discipline into the regiment. Similar to Wool and Gregg, Pike freely denounced the lack of effectual leadership and discipline in the Arkansas regiment. In one letter to the *Arkansas State Democrat*, Pike stated that “Yell…[was]the laughing stock of the men.” Further, Pike explained that Yell had “never undertaken to give any order without making a blunder.” Moreover, Pike complained that the horses were “worn down, the men…undisciplined.” Indeed, according to Pike, “everybody, officers and men,” were “tired out, worn down and disgusted.”

While Pike surely believed that he would have performed a better job had he been elected colonel, these remarks were not mere petty babbling from a disillusioned Whig. Rather, they reflected the reality of the Arkansas regiment. These criticisms, however, were not personal insults or enough to challenge the honor of any of the commanders.

The real troubles between Roane and Pike were twofold and both stemmed from events during the war. The first difference of opinion revolved around the killing of the Mexicans in the cave. Roane and his supporters believed that these killings were justifiable and, in fact, only four Mexicans lost their lives, all of whom were highway bandits. On the other hand, Pike and his partisans maintained that even Zachary Taylor believed the Arkansans committed “cowardly murder,” and the number of killed was actually much higher, maybe as many as twenty-seven Mexicans. Another problem existed between the two men, though. The men seemed to agree that some of the Arkansas volunteers skirted their duties and cowered back in Saltillo, allowing the rest of the volunteers to do the actual fighting at Buena Vista. Unsurprisingly, each principal

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53 *Arkansas State Democrat*, February 12, 1847.
accused the other of being in command of the cowards.\textsuperscript{54} Pike sent a letter to the homefront in April giving his side of the controversy, and newspapers throughout Arkansas published it. He then asked for a Court of Inquiry to clear his name of Roane’s charges of cowardice. The court decided that neither of the participants deserved any blame in these difficulties and that these charges were mere misunderstandings. This was, at least Pike hoped, the end of the disagreements.\textsuperscript{55}

The argument spilled onto the homefront, however. At first, the difficulties were not confined to just Roane and Pike; instead, each man had supporters which confirmed one person’s story and gave the lie to the other man.\textsuperscript{56} One of Roane’s champions was Captain Edward Hunter, the man who actually led the Arkansas volunteers to the cave in February. The language became so heated between Hunter and Pike that it seemed for a while that these two men might engage in a duel. Despite the findings of the court, Hunter argued that he needed “to engage in a defense, alike of myself, [as] the character of the company which I command[ed], and the reputation of the State” were all involved. Hunter still brooded over the charges Pike made in the letter he sent to the newspapers in April, as, the captain argued, Pike made “base falsehoods, loathsome self-commendation, and aspersions of the whole Regiment.” These accusations, Hunter argued, casted “a stigma upon the regiment” and the people of Arkansas. The honor of the state, he said, stood “as dear to me as life.” Therefore, Hunter confirmed Roane’s story and set the record straight, stating that only four Mexicans died in the cave, all highway bandits and murders, and Pike acted cowardly at Buena Vista.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{54} Arkansas State Democrat, July 30, 1847.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{56} For discussion of giving the lie, see Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, xiii.

\textsuperscript{57} Arkansas State Democrat, July 30, 1847.
Such accusations required a reply from Pike, and he responded in three ways. First, Pike wrote a letter which appeared in newspapers across the state, indicating that Hunter had admitted in private that seventeen, not four, Mexicans died at the cave, and reiterated that Taylor believed this was an atrocity. Pike stated that Hunter, not himself, behaved cowardly at Buena Vista. Pike scathingly noted that any “officer who when his men retreat without being pursued, loses his company and is separated from his colors should reflect twice before he assails another.”

Second, Pike appealed to Colonel Roane directly and asked him to clarify the issue for the public. Roane, still insulted by the damaging charge of cowardice that Pike threw his way in April, told him that he agreed with Hunter’s version of events. Pike realized that Roane had no intention of retracting his statements, and, having no inclination to withdraw his own account, Pike finally challenged Roane to a duel.

Unable to settle their differences, Roane and Pike agreed to a duel with pistols and met in a field outside Little Rock shortly after dawn on August 2, 1847. Each man took his first shot, and each missed the target. The two took another shot at each other, and both, again, missed. Pike demanded a third shot, and Roane readily agreed. At this point, however, the doctors for both men asked for a few minutes to confer with the seconds, which the belligerents allowed. The seconds then conferred with the duelists, and both Roane and Pike expressed satisfaction.

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58 This is an example of giving the lie direct, where a person provides evidence to demonstrate that something another person said was untrue. See Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, xiii.

59 Arkansas State Democrat, July 30, 1847. Emphasis in the original.

60 Brown, “The Mexican War Experiences of Albert Pike and the ‘Mounted Devils’ of Arkansas,” 301-15. Brown demonstrated that this was not a political duel, instead the insults were so severe that each participant had little option except to fight a duel. Brown argued that while each participant issued severe charges, Pike’s version of event could be proven by the historical record.

61 Eaton, “The Role of Honor in Southern Society,” 52. Many duels resulted in no blood being spilt, as shots frequently missed their marks.
with the solution. The duel, thus, terminated and each man claimed his honor intact. The men agreed to send their terms of settlement to newspapers around the state as evidence for the community that each man had behaved honorably. The “settlement” actually provided no specifics about the affair or solution, only mentioning that “the past should be buried.”

While Yell was not even alive when this duel occurred, it demonstrates why his actions were so significant to avoiding mutiny in his regiment. This was a war in which volunteers in other regiments came to a near state of mutiny over uniforms and who owned the rights to a fish caught in a Mexican stream. Many of the Arkansas volunteers were Indian fighters who had grown accustomed to life on the violent frontier. Further, as the duel between Roane and Pike demonstrated, Arkansans showed a willingness to violently defend their personal, regimental, communal, or state honor to the point of death. Yell realized that if he inflicted harsh discipline on his men, as Wool tried to impose, he not only risked tarnishing the volunteers’ honor, but also the honor of people back home in Arkansas. Yell had extensive limitations as a military commander, yet he managed to gain greater respect from his men by defying General Wool’s orders. While Yell certainly did not have complete control over his men while in camp, as the cave massacre showed, he had enough respect that most of them did follow him into battle, as was shown at Buena Vista.

62 Arkansas State Democrat, August 5, 1847.

63 Arkansas State Democrat, August 13, 1847.

The Arkansas Regiment of Volunteers was not the most effective regiment in the battle, but most of them participated in the battle and played an important part in reversing Mexican advances on February 23. The most important point is that this regiment, when they first arrived in Mexico, seemed destined to provide the United States with little useful service; in the end, though, they were useful to the American war effort, as Taylor needed every man to defeat the Mexicans. By defending the Arkansans’ honor against Wool, Yell kept the situation in the regiment from spiraling out of control. After the battle, the people on the homefront defended the honor which they believed their volunteers displayed on the bloody fields of Buena Vista.

While Archibald Yell avoided mutiny in his regiment and even died a hero’s death, a few months later another southern volunteer colonel failed to avoid the wrath of his own men. In August 1847, a mutiny occurred in the ranks of the First North Carolina regiment of volunteers. The mutiny took place when Virginians and Mississipians entered the camp of Colonel Robert Treat Paine, joining with the North Carolinians in opposition to their commander. Paine was a Whig in charge of a regiment which included many Democrats. For this reason, the mutiny has been interpreted as a traditional Whig-Democrat political fray which took place in Mexico instead of the United States. While political differences might have played some role, the mutiny ultimately came about because of the dishonorable discipline which Paine inflicted upon the men under his command. The mutineers, thus, acted in defense of their honor.

Part of the reason the mutiny occurred stemmed from the fact that so many volunteers

65 The foremost scholar to argue that the mutiny was the result of politics is Winders, *Mr. Polk’s Army*, 110-111. Some scholars, even those interested with crime and punishment during the Mexican War, seem to devote little time analyzing this mutiny. See John C. Pinheiro, *Manifest Ambition*, 97; and Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 211-213. Pinheiro borrowed Bauer’s argument that the Paine mutiny was caused by “cantankerous boredom.”

For an example of the mutiny as a result of class-based and racial grievances, see Foos, *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair*, 91-92.
refused to re-enlist following the Battle of Monterey. Understanding the mistake he made allowing volunteers to decide whether to continue to serve when their enlistments expired, Polk declared his call from May “null and void.” Thus, on November 16, 1846, he sent another call for volunteers from nine states, including North Carolina, for the duration of the war. Recruitment for this second round of volunteers proceeded slowly in North Carolina, as many people on the homefront realized the pain, discipline, and death which the first volunteers experienced while in Mexico. William D. Valentine noted in his diary that only eight men volunteered one day in Hertford County, despite the fifes playing and patriotic speeches to encourage men to join. “How many poor creatures have been and are still to be sacrificed upon the altar of pride and ambition,” one North Carolina woman wrote in her diary. As in the first volunteer movement, local citizens and editors encouraged the men of the state to answer their country’s call to arms. One enthusiast in Davidson county encouraged the local citizens to not “cowardly slink from your duty” as the state’s “honor” and everything that was “prized by honorable minds” was involved.

Eventually, by February 1847 the North Carolinians had answered the new call and filled the ranks of a new regiment. At this point Governor William Graham did something which was sure to cause bitterness; he took away the right of the volunteers to elect their own colonel, lieutenant-colonel, and major, like the Arkansas regiment and most other regiments did. Instead, he selected the officers himself. Unsurprisingly, he chose fellow Whigs Paine, who was a

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member of the North Carolina House of Commons, and John A. Fagg, a former member of the General Assembly, as colonel and lieutenant-colonel, respectively.\textsuperscript{69} There was controversy with this selection process. The selection of volunteer military leaders all the way through the Civil War created political bickering, as those who won military glory oftentimes gained political spoils at the conclusion of the war. North Carolina was a heavily Whig state, but, of course, many Democrats lived in the state as well. Since Graham took the officer vote away from the regiment, one company that was set to leave with the regiment actually refused to go.\textsuperscript{70} The Whig presses, thus, went on the attack, stating: “Craven must have been the heart in those ranks, whose bosom did not swell with pride at the judicious selection of Gov. Graham in the appointment of their Colonel and who did not feel his bosom swell a nearly response to the beautiful and soul-stirring reply of Col. Paine,” one paper boasted.\textsuperscript{71} Political differences existed in almost all regiments which formed during the war, and the First Regiment of North Carolina Volunteers was no different.

Despite this controversy, the new regiment received a similar patriotic sendoff as the volunteers who left the previous May and June. For instance, some North Carolinians gave the Buncombe volunteer Rangers copies of the New Testament, and provided passionate speeches in which they declared they had “no fears that Buncombe chivalry, honor, or patriotism, will ever be eclipsed by any in the world.”\textsuperscript{72} A similar scene occurred just prior to the departure of Paine’s regiment in March. At a small celebration in Smithville on March 13, Adjutant General Robert

\textsuperscript{69} Winders, “Will the Regiment Stand It?,” in \textit{Dueling Eagles}, 79. Graham did select Democrat Monfort Stokes as major.

\textsuperscript{70} Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette, March 16, 1847.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

\textsuperscript{72} Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette, March 26, 1847.
W. Haywood presented the regiment with a flag purchased by the state. Upon receiving the flag, Colonel Paine replied that “he, his Staff and men, would defend that flag and return it un tarnished by dishonor, or leave their bones to bleach on the battle fields in Mexico.” The people of North Carolina expected the regiment to doggedly maintain the state’s honor, and Paine gave a Spartan pledge to do so.

The North Carolina volunteer regiment showed some clear political divisions. Politics, however, were not central to the difficulties which existed between the North Carolina volunteers and their colonel while in Mexico. Like much of the opposition to the war in the ranks, the poor treatment which these southern volunteers received at the hands of their colonel was the real root of animosity. Paine was one of the few American soldiers who seemed to have plenty of time to write letters, as he wrote his wife Eliza up to three or four times a week. In these letters, it is clear that Paine experienced a great deal of uncertainty on how to best command his regiment. He recognized that the government sent him to Mexico to fulfill his duties as a colonel and he took that job seriously, but he stated that he was “afraid of the effect which the life of a warrior may have upon my disposition.” Thus, Paine wrote that it would be a “happy relief….to retire from the command of this place.” It seems that Paine did not necessarily want to instill discipline into his regiment, for fear of what it might do to his character, yet he also viewed it as necessary to adequately prepare his men for fighting. He risked losing the loyalty of his men no matter what option he chose, so he wished to simply return home.

73 Ibid.

74 Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 56. For southern whites, a verbal oath was considered equivalent to a signed contract, and the community expected people to keep their word. Paine’s promise was something that the community expected him to fulfill.

75 Robert Treat Paine to Eliza Paine, May 22, 1847, Robert Treat Paine Papers, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
Forced to make a decision, Paine chose to submit his regiment to strict discipline shortly after arriving in Mexico. In May 1847, Paine held a conversation with General Zachary Taylor in which Paine requested that he and his men be sent to Saltillo to join John Wool’s forces, as Wool was well known as “a most severe + Rigid disciplinarian.” The 1st Arkansas Volunteer Regiment already found this out. The North Carolinian wanted Wool to provide instruction on proper discipline. Paine did not care whether he was popular or if his men liked him, he wanted discipline. He worried that “a neglect of those duties….would bring discord on our state.” Paine wanted to instill discipline as soon as possible since, as he informed his wife, life in an undisciplined camp was “most dreadful.”76 It seems that Paine also considered the behavior of the regiment to be dreadful, and better discipline was the best solution.

The men of the regiment perceived the conditions of the camp much differently. Many of the volunteers believed Paine was a poor leader in part because he refused to kill Mexicans. He was a pious man and took the Ten Commandments to heart. Thus, he desperately wanted to avoid killing another man. While the Bible is, of course, filled with examples in the Old Testament of God leading or abandoning his people in warfare, and even in the New Testament Jesus stated that he had brought the sword, not peace, to the world, Paine believed that even in warfare men should avoid taking another human life. As he expressed to his wife, “oh may God grant that I pass this life without shedding mans [sic] blood, at least by my own hand.”77 To the volunteers, such an attitude was inexcusable. If Paine did not believe that men should kill other men, and he wished never to kill another, he should not have agreed to lead a volunteer regiment in the war. Even if his men did not know Paine’s religious beliefs and objections towards killing,

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.
they certainly gained a sense of his views on August 13. On that day, Paine and a few men personally surrounded a couple hostile Mexican guerrillas, and his men expected Paine to shoot them. Instead, Paine decided to take the Mexicans as prisoners. Upon witnessing this, several men in Paine’s regiment laughed at him. Later that night, Paine communicated to his wife that he was “much better satisfied than if I had slain them.” His men’s laughter indicated that they did not feel the same way.

The volunteers realized that Paine really was not willing to share in the struggles of the men he commanded. A perfect example, the volunteers believed, was Paine’s construction of a wooden horse in his camp. The wooden horse was pretty much exactly what it sounds like: a crude looking wood structure that vaguely resembled a horse, which commanders forced volunteers to sit upon for hours at a time. The punishment was very physically painful for men, but it also perched men up high above a camp which made them an object of ridicule for onlookers. The purpose of the wooden horse was to inflict pain and demean men so they agreed to follow rules and regulations in the future. Paine placed this object of punishment near his tent in the North Carolinians’ camp, but it was clearly visible to the Virginians and Mississippians as well. The wooden horse ominously suggested that they could be subjected to similar punishment. Paine would shortly learn the consequences for inflicting shameful and humiliating punishment on honorable southerners.

Paine had experienced taunts and insults from his own men and volunteers from other

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78 Robert Treat Paine to Eliza Paine, August 13, 1847, Robert Treat Paine Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

79 See McCaffrey, Army of Manifest Destiny, 115-117. McCaffrey also argued that the wooden horse was the cause of the mutiny, but he maintained that the southerners were “unruly spirits.” See also Wallace, Jr., “The First Regiment of Virginia Volunteers,” 65-68. Wallace was the first to note that the wooden horse was the reason for the mutiny.
regiments for weeks. Any time Paine passed these volunteers, the Virginia and Mississippi volunteers threatened him, and their “hostile feeling was further manifested by saluting him with insulting noises as he passed their quarters.” As he informed his wife, he had “experienced....endless insults” from Virginia and Mississippi volunteers,” but he “purposely avoided taking notice of them save one or two occasions when my duty required it to be noticed.” As long as Paine considered the men’s comments as empty threats, he did not take any action other than to report them to their commanding officer and Brigadier General Wool.

Unbeknownst to Paine, these insults proved to be just the beginning, and the personal attacks escalated in the following weeks. According to Paine, events changed rather abruptly and he was surprised when his men mutinied against him starting on August 14. On this day, Paine discovered that about a hundred volunteers from the neighboring Virginia camp had entered his camp. The men started parading through the camp’s streets with saddles, bridles, and bundles of forage which they brought to mock the wooden horse. Paine believed that a small “riot,” precipitated by Virginians entering his camp, occurred because he had deliberately ignored the volunteer’s insults for weeks. It was on this night, however, that Paine believed that his own personal safety and the integrity of his command were in danger. While Paine avoided any physical harm, the same could not be said that the wooden horse. The mutineers threw down and partially destroyed the horse, thus attacking the object of their frustration, but leaving the person who constructed the dishonorable device unscathed.

The next day was a different story. On August 15, Paine wrote his wife that “a mutiny of


81 Foos, A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair, 92. Foos maintained that the wooden horse offended the men more as members of a democratic society which feared the potential violent authority which leaders could wield.

82 Court of Inquiry, April 11, 1848, Robert Treat Paine Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
parallel to which....cannot be found in history,” occurred in his camp. Much like the previous evening, the Virginians entered his camp, but this evening the Mississippi volunteers joined them. Paine knew right away that these men intended nothing but “evil.” It was around 7 o’clock, as Paine sat down to eat supper, that he noticed a band of about twenty men who passed by his tent and shouted “insults.” After the events of the previous evening, Paine realized that he could not simply ignore these insults like he had done in the past. Instead, he burst out of the tent, grabbed two Virginia volunteers by the collar and dragged them to their colonel, John F. Hamtrmck, who managed to restore some semblance of order. While discussing matters with Hamtrmck, Paine noticed that more of the Virginia volunteers began to gather and walk in the direction of the North Carolina camp. He ordered these men to stay away from his camp, and then returned with the hope that the hostilities were over for the night. For the next thirty minutes, the camp became eerily quiet.

During this lull, Paine took preventive measures by calling for reinforcements against the Virginians and Mississippians. This was when Paine realized the extent of the threat he faced. When he asked an aide to order K Company to keep guard outside his tent, the aide reported back that the men refused. Paine then personally went over to K Company, but “found the men in a state of open mutiny against me.” What further exasperated the situation was that the other officers in the regiment, some of whom were sick but others who were perfectly healthy, stayed in their tents and refused to offer their colonel any assistance.

Around 8pm, the Virginians and Mississippians returned, so hostile men from three different regiments and three different states filled Paine’s camp. The men increased their violence by throwing rocks at the colonel’s tent, which according to Paine were sufficient in size to kill him if they struck him just right. When the mutineers realized that the rock throwing
caused no reaction from Paine, more men grabbed rocks and chucked them at the tent. Paine sat inside, hearing the thump, thump, thump of the rocks, thinking about what he could do to gain control of the situation. It was at this point that he realized drastic action was necessary. He left out of his tent and ordered the men to stop immediately, or suffer the consequences. These words seemed to have no effect on the men, as they continued to yell insults and clutch rocks in their hands. They seemed to be waiting for Paine to confront them. As Paine described his thinking, he “saw now that the time for prompt and decided action had arrived + that summary steps must be taken to put a stop to this thing + to preserve my life.” Paine legitimately believed that his life was in danger and that the men were personally insulting him with their actions. This seemed to be what convinced Paine to move beyond his qualms of shedding other men’s blood. He decided that he would have to kill if need be.83

Paine then returned to his tent and grabbed his dragoon pistols. He rushed out of the tent searching for “the perpetrators of the outrage.”84 Paine seemed ready to take extreme action to bring peace and safety to himself and his camp. Upon seeing the pistols in Paine’s hands, the mutineers split into two groups and began to flee in the direction of the other camps. Paine demanded that they halt, which prompted one soldier to reply, “Go to hell, God damn you,” and another, “Shoot and be damned.”85 He discharged one of his pistols. Despite the presence of large numbers of Virginians and Mississippians, Paine fired into a group of men from his own regiment, into a company from which the mutiny first showed itself. This was the shot which killed Bradly and wounded a Virginian. Paine claimed that he tried to aim low and that he did

83 Robert Treat Paine to Eliza Paine, August, 16, 1847, Robert Treat Paine Papers, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

84 The word “outrage” was frequently used to call opponents dishonorable. See Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, xiii.

85 McCaffrey, Army of Manifest Destiny, 116.
not want to kill anyone. Instead, he wanted to fire a warning shot to show his preparation to use lethal force if necessary. The stress must have caused Paine to aim higher than he intended. This shot caused the men to disperse and the mutiny fizzled out. Paine believed that he had saved his own life and the life of many more men in his regiment.

The next day was much quieter in the camp of the First North Carolina Regiment. In some respects, Paine expressed astonishment at how effectively his shot had changed the behavior of most in his camp. He thought that the men were “ashamed of their conduct” towards him the previous night, and thus they “raised their hats whenever they passed” by him. He did find out more about why the mutineers seemed to be waiting for him to approach. Apparently the guardsmen which Paine placed around his tent were cooperating with the mutineers, and the guardsmen agreed not to fire on the volunteers. Instead, the guardsmen were actually awaiting Paine to approach the mutineers, in which case his own guard promised to shot him in the back. Paine never approached, though, and the guardsmen never fired. Paine expressed disbelief that some “treacherous cowards” were willing to leave him to a most cruel fate. He believed that “those officers who have so deeply wronged me, I suppose, hate me most cordially.” He added that he had “but discharged my duty faithfully to my country + my reward from those over whom I have been placed has been such as to disgust me with the service.” Of course, Paine was already dissatisfied with the service even prior to the mutiny, but he was certainly very upset by this point.

One of the leaders of the mutiny, Lieutenant Josiah S. Pender, penned his side of the story in a letter to Brigadier General Caleb Cushing on the day following the mutiny. Pender claimed

86 Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, xiii.

87 Robert Treat Paine to Eliza Paine, August, 16, 1847, Robert Treat Paine Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
he was “grossly and unjustly charged with divers acts of fearfull [sic] import calculated to brand
an innocent man with dishonour.” He denied that his actions were “reprehensible,” but in fact
“praiseworthy.” He argued that the men did not act out of any personal malice towards Paine,
but instead to secure the reputation of the regiment and “the reputation of our State.” Pender
then informed Cushing that poor treatment was the root cause for the mutiny, explaining that
since the regiment arrived in Mexico Paine used abusive language towards the volunteers and
reacted violently – including striking men with heavy pieces of wood – over the most trifling
offenses. In short, Paine did not treat the volunteers “with the respect they were entitled to.”
Pender maintained that the volunteers acted “from a sincere desire for the honor of the
Regiment.”88 This was, according to Pender, the motivation for the mutiny.

While the camp was mostly quiet, that did not mean that all the men were satisfied with
what had transpired in recent days. Twenty-five men, including Pender, wrote and signed a letter
asking Paine to resign his commission as colonel. The letter claimed that Paine must resign for
the “quiet and harmony of the Regiment.”89 Perhaps anticipating that their actions would be
construed as politically motivated, the men who signed this petition stated that they “were not
induced to do this from any personal ill feelings, but from a sincere desire for the welfare of the
Regiment from our native State to which we are attached.” These men believed that in order for
the regiment to continue to effectively function for the duration of the war, Paine needed to be
removed from his duties. Almost immediately afterwards, some of the men asked for their
names to be stricken from the petition. On August 18, one of the men, Nixon White, spoke with

88 Josiah S. Pender to Caleb Cushing, August 18, 1847, in Chronicles of the Gringos, ed. Smith and Judah,
431.

89 Petition of 1st Regiment of North Carolina Volunteers to Robert Treat Paine, August 16, 1847, Robert
Treat Paine Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of
North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
Paine and said he “now pledge[d] my honor as a Gentleman” to fulfill his duties to his colonel faithfully for the rest of the war.\textsuperscript{90} White showed that it was not always easy to make honorable decisions.

Despite the change of heart some of the men experienced, Paine agreed with the petitioners that he needed to resign. He realized that Wool fully supported the discipline in the North Carolina regiment, as after the mutiny Wool dishonorably discharged four volunteers, including Pender.\textsuperscript{91} Nonetheless, Paine had no real love for the military life and he desired to return to his family in North Carolina. In early September, Paine poured out his heart to Eliza, bemoaning that he had “tasted of man's duplicity + treachery. I have passed through a struggle which has now left me, calm but not contented with my situation. I am coming home my love, yes if God is willing.”\textsuperscript{92} In the coming weeks, Paine decided he had had enough of Mexico. He began taking steps to allow him to return home.

On September 12, Paine formally asked General Wool for a discharge. Paine explained that he had thought it over, and he believed that it was best for him and the regiment if he left. Knowing that many officers tried to resign in order to pursue political office, Paine assured Wool that he based the decision entirely on the recent hostile interactions with the men under his command. Wool listened patiently to Paine, before informing the colonel that he refused the resignation. Wool, obviously a partisan of strict discipline, stated that he had already communicated with Secretary of War Marcy and North Carolina Governor Graham earlier in the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{90} Nixon White to Robert Treat Paine, August 18, 1847, Robert Treat Paine Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

\item \textsuperscript{91} Wallace, “The First Regiment of Virginia Volunteers,” 67. The War department later voided these discharges, stating that the men needed to have a court martial prior to being dishonorably discharged.

\item \textsuperscript{92} Robert Treat Paine to Eliza Paine, September 5, 1847, Robert Treat Paine Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
\end{itemize}
war, and they both expressed satisfaction with the job Paine had done since arriving in Mexico. Wool added, as Paine recalled, that the Brigadier General “had never known an officer in the army with whom he had been more satisfied.” Wool almost assuredly wished to sweep the mutiny under the rug, as he knew that American forces under General Winfield Scott were on the outskirts of Mexico City, and the war would be over shortly after they took the city. Paine asked Wool if he would reconsider, but he once again refused. The only way that Paine would be able to return would be to desert his command. Therefore, Paine stayed in Mexico.

For the rest of the war, the First North Carolina Regiment mostly guarded supply trains and kept an eye on Mexican guerrillas following the capitulation of Mexico City. In order to separate the North Carolinians from the Virginians and Mississippians, Wool sent Paine’s regiment to Saltillo and Arispas Mills. Ironically, this regiment which fought amongst itself never participated in any fighting against the Mexicans. The regiment did not peacefully coexist after the mutiny. At one point, about twenty men deserted following the news that Paine intended to retain his command. Much more common than desertion was for volunteers to write back letters to North Carolina, both personal letters to family or friends and public letters intended for publication in the local papers, giving their interpretation of the mutiny. A few men even went back to North Carolina, ostensibly to recruit more volunteers in case the Mexicans refused to make peace, but instead these volunteers spent their time criticizing Paine. When Paine heard news of these activities, he bemoaned to his wife that he would “think of it no more, but to pray that I may loose [sic] the feeling of contempt for those who have digged a pit for me

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94 Robert Treat Paine to Eliza Paine, September 12, 1847, Robert Treat Paine Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
+ fallen in it themselves.”

Still, Paine had many supporters who defended him back in North Carolina. Much of the support he received came from the Whig presses. For instance, the editors of the *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette* filled its column with the language of honor in order to justify Paine’s actions. The paper stated that a hundred men from the Virginia Regiment “committed a gross outrage” and made “insulting and provoking remarks.” The editors added that “if he had submitted to insult and violence so repeatedly offered to him, without quelling the mutiny, he would have been unworthy of the command” he held. Much like the mutineers believed they had acted honorably in rising up against the colonel, Paine’s partisans claimed he had acted honorably by firing a shot at men in his own regiment.

On April 11, 1848, the Court of Inquiry regarding the mutiny released its findings, and it confirmed that discipline, not politics, was the root cause of the mutiny. The court found that well prior to August 15 the regiment experienced “dissatisfaction” and discontent, “chiefly in consequence of the strict discipline which he [Paine] required of his command.” On August 7, some of the men in the regiment – without Paine’s knowledge – even sent a letter to General Taylor asking him to intervene to stop the strict discipline. The men did not ask for Paine’s removal or cite any political complaints. Rather than discussing the root cause of the mutiny, the court was actually more concerned with determining whether or not a mutiny took place. They found that Paine’s regiment made “frequent threats of Personal violence….against Col. Paine by soldiers of the volunteer Regiments encamped at Buena Vista, in consequence of him requiring

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95 Ibid.

96 *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette*, September 29, 1847.
from them, a strict and faithful performance of their duty."  Thus, the men did mutiny and Paine faithfully performed his duty as colonel by shooting two of the mutineers.

Thus, the 1st Arkansas Regiment of Volunteers and the 1st North Carolina Regiment of Volunteers experienced very different fates. The men of both regiments believed that the army subjected them to discipline which was unbecoming of honorable southerners. With the Arkansas men, Colonel Yell came to their aid against the strict punishment implemented by Brigadier General Wool. Yell defended their honor and thus won their affections. As a result, most of the men fought bravely by his side at Buena Vista, and the people on the homefront vehemently defended the honor of the regiment. In the case of the North Carolina volunteers, Colonel Paine worked with General Wool to instill discipline which added to his men’s misery. The men of the 1st North Carolina regiment believed that Paine attacked their honor, and thus they attacked him. The dishonorable treatment at the hands of their colonel created mutineers among the North Carolina regiment, while Yell’s ability to defend the honor of his men created volunteers ready to fight and die for their country and their colonel. As these cases demonstrate, honor was something that southerners thought a great deal about. Southern volunteers who were eager to fight in the war could become deserters, mutineers, or vocal opponents of the war if they believed the war in any way threatened the cultural values they held dear. Southern politicians and citizens on the homefront reacted much the same way when David Wilmot offered a proviso which also threatened to bring dishonor on the South.

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97 Court of Inquiry, April 11, 1848, Robert Treat Paine Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Emphasis in original.
Chapter 4:

“The Signs of the Times Are Portentous of Evil”: The Wilmot Proviso

A heated debate commenced in the United States House of Representatives over the course the country ought to take in prosecuting the war with Mexico in June 1846. Luther Severance, a Maine Whig, blamed the current war on the Polk administration, arguing that the country should abandon all thoughts of territorial aggrandizement and instead search for the shortest path possible to end the war. In reply, Tennessee Democrat Barclay Martin quickly disparaged Severance for his “anti-American feelings,” asking bluntly whether he was “this day in the Hall as a representative of an American State or a representative of the Republic of Mexico?” Instead of viewing their difference of opinion as political, however, Martin believed the reason was sectional. He concluded his harangue by stating that in the South there were “no parties on this question,” as both “Whigs and Democrats rally in one common cause, and go as one man for their own country, whether bounded by the Sabine, the Nueces, or the Rio Grande.”¹ Martin’s speech was significant since it showed that from the very beginning of the conflict with Mexico, southern war supporters hoped to unite the South behind the war, regardless of party. The South, however, would never be united on questions concerning the origins or prosecution of the war.

This chapter focuses on how southern honor fueled political opposition to the Mexican War from May 1846 to the spring of 1848. During this period southern war opponents developed several plans to protect slavery and honor from becoming casualties of the war. On a practical level, southern war opponents wanted to prevent as much bloodshed as possible in Mexico, bring the war quickly to a conclusion, and avoid taking any territory from Mexico. From the outset,

¹ The Weekly Nashville Union, June 17, 1846.
however, if southern war opponents held any chance of being successful, they would have to work with northern abolitionists who they perceived as threatening the very foundation of southern society with their support of the Wilmot Proviso. Most southern opponents proved unwilling to do this. As a result, no national antiwar movement ever emerged, and the Polk administration was free to prosecute the war how it pleased.2

Despite their failure, I argue that the story of southern opposition during the war is essential to understanding the growing sectional divide. Southern war opponents did not believe that slavery should be barred from the territories – if acquired – yet they also did not believe that the expansion of slavery into the West was necessary for the future of slavery and honor. With their actions and words throughout the war, southern opponents offered southern supporters various ways to avoid conflict with the North. Opponents wanted to kill the Wilmot Proviso by depriving it of power – newly acquired territory. Without territory, the Wilmot Proviso would be a dead letter, which was what southern opponents tried to get southern supporters to realize. I conclude, however, that southern war supporters failed to heed the warnings of opponents. Instead, war supporters branded southern opponents as traitors not only to the nation, but also to the South and its institutions. It must be stressed, however, that despite these attacks using the language of honor, southern war supporters never successfully used southern honor as a club to

2 This point directly counters the most recent book on opposition during the Mexican War. See Amy S. Greenberg, A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), xiii–xix. Greenberg argued that a speech Henry Clay made in November 1847, called the Lexington Address, in which he denounced the war and territorial expansion, helped unify a national antiwar movement. See also, John H. Schroder, Mr. Polk’s War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), 139. Schroeder already discussed the significance of this speech in his work in the 1970s, although he mentioned that this speech only received support in the North. While Greenberg argued otherwise, she also did not discuss southerners uniting behind Clay’s ideas in a national antiwar movement through speeches or public rallies, mostly because these did not take place. See also, Frederick Merk, “Dissent in the Mexican War,” Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings 81 (1969): 121-136. Merk argued that the All Mexico movement was prevented because of opponents of the Mexican War.
beat war opponents into submission. Instead of blindly following war supporters, opponents believed they were the true guardians of slavery and southern honor.

In June 1846, Pennsylvanian David Wilmot introduced his proviso to the House of Representatives and forever altered the political debates about the war. The Wilmot Proviso came about because of northerners’ concerns that the war with Mexico was ultimately a war of conquest by the Polk administration. Indeed, Polk explicitly stated that Mexico would be responsible for paying some sort of “indemnity” in the war message he sent to Congress in May. Since the Mexican government already did not have enough money to pay the $3 million that it owed to the American government and citizens, Polk and most Americans believed that this indemnity would have to come in the form of territorial relinquishment by Mexico. Before the introduction in June of the Two Million Bill (an appropriations bill to fund the war) however, northern opponents of the war could not be entirely sure what Polk’s war goals were, as he remained vague. With the Two Million bill, it became clear that Polk wanted a well-supplied force in Mexico in order to conquer territory with the ultimate goal being annexation to the United States. By the time Congress received the Two Million bill, many northerners already feared that slavery would be introduced into any territory taken from Mexico, since the majority of the Mexican lands laid below the Missouri Compromise line. Wilmot’s proviso was actually a bipartisan plan on the part of northerners to restrict slavery, as New York Whig Representative

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3 This point counters the argument made in the only other study of southern honor during the Mexican War. See Gregory Scott Hospodor, “Honor Bound: Southern Honor and the Mexican War,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 2000), 29. Hospodor argued that southern honor was crucial for southern politicians, non-combatants, and soldiers during the Mexican War. He maintained southerners were united in conflict through the lens of honor, compelling southern men to volunteer and women to support them. Honor also blunted the opposition among southern Whigs and the Calhounites.

Hugh White urged all northerners to oppose the introduction of slavery in any territories, and Wilmot – perhaps wanting to make a name for himself as a freshmen representative – opted to support White’s call for united northern action.\(^5\) In the proviso, Wilmot declared “as an express and fundamental condition to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico by the United States….neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of said territory.”\(^6\) The Wilmot Proviso doomed opposition to the war almost instantly, as southern opponents would work minimally with northern war opponents for the rest of the war. Southerners perceived that northern opposition was not influenced by patriotic desire to end the war quickly or prevent the acquisition of territory, but rather the sectional desire to use the war to attack slavery.

These early debates demonstrated that the Wilmot Proviso was not only connected to slavery, but also to southern honor. The introduction of the Wilmot Proviso made it clear to all southerners that the results of the war could be disastrous to the South. Despite this knowledge, southerners could not agree on any one strategy for meeting this threat. For example, William Lowndes Yancey once again took great offense to a speech in which Alexander Stephens analogized that the war was similar to the capitol being on fire, with Americans obligated to pursue “the speediest extinguishment.” Stephens also attacked war supporters for pursuing a war

\(^5\) It is important to note that Wilmot was a member of the Martin Van Buren wing of the Democratic Party. Although he was a Democrat, in fact he was hostile to the Polk administration. See Holman Hamilton, *Prologue to Conflict: The Crisis and Compromise of 1850* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1964), 7-8.

\(^6\) Wilmot Proviso, quoted in Schroeder, *Mr. Polk’s War*, 46; see also Jonathan H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 78-144; and Chaplain W. Morrison, *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism: The Wilmot Proviso Controversy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), viii-173. Morrison showed that the Wilmot Proviso was more symbolically than politically significant. The Proviso proved to southerners that slavery could potentially be abolished, and it helped unite southerners in opposition to it.
which potentially endangered southern institutions. It should be kept in mind that Stephens was very much a firm supporter of slavery, as he mentioned that protection of slavery was his primary motive for opposing Texas annexation. The fact remained, though, that Stephens’s opposition to the war, in the eyes of southern war supporters, made him an ally of northern abolitionists and other northerners who supported the Wilmot Proviso, sixteen of whom had actually voted against the war declaration in May.

Much like with Clingman during the Texas annexation debates, Yancey prepared to issue a severe verbal assault to Stephens. Yancey told his fellow congressmen that he “respect[ed] the character of the gentleman from Georgia to a sufficient degree to cause me to feel unfeigned regret that he has not left the task assumed….to those upon whom it sits more naturally than upon a Georgian.” This shows Yancey held strict beliefs about the proper behavior and rhetoric to which southerners ought to adhere, regardless of political party. By opposing the war, Stephens appeared to be acting like a northerner. Concluding his retort to Stephens, Yancey asserted that Stephens shared the same “hasty plate of soup” as General Winfield Scott. Yancey warned that it might “prove to be hot enough to scald the mouth even of a member of Congress.” In essence, Yancey accused Stephens of cowardice and intended his verbal attack to appeal to Stephens’ cultural values, forcing him to support the war for honor’s sake. In the weeks

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7 Congressional Globe 29:1, App., 947-52. By comparing Stephens to General Winfield Scott, Yancey implied that Stephens was a liar. In the beginning of the war, Scott and President Polk went through a public disagreement on the prosecution of the war. Polk wrote that Scott was “foolish and vindictive,” for making “base and false insinuations in reference to the administration.” See also Eric Walther, William Lowndes Yancey and the Coming of the Civil War (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 89-90. In the weeks that followed this debate, Stephens and Yancey prepared for a possible duel, both having been involved in previous duels.

See also Hospodor, “Honor Bound,” 94. This debate shows that Hospodor is certainly correct to notice that the language of honor was prevalent during the war. However, the fact that people like Stephens, among many others, continued their opposition throughout the war despite such attacks demonstrates that honor’s ability to mute antiwar rhetoric was limited.

By insulting Stephens the way he did, Yancey realized that he was once again risking another duel. For a description of the language of honor, see Kenneth S. Greenberg, Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Death, Humanitarianism, Slave Rebellions, The Pro-Slavery Argument,
following this speech, Stephens and Yancey exchanged notes and it appeared that a duel might take place. Yancey did not believe that the frail Georgian cared much for a duel, stating in a letter to his cousin that he thought Stephens would “never again make me a theme upon which to vent his spleen.” Yancey actually misread the Georgian, however, and Stephens did indeed challenge Yancey to a duel. Unlike in the case of the Clingman-Yancey duel during the debates over annexation, though, each man’s seconds were able to bring about a resolution before this dispute escalated to that level. This dispute should not be interpreted as merely political, as Yancey was primarily upset at Stephens’ rhetoric because he was a southerner, and Yancey expected southerners to unite in this battle against Mexicans and abolitionists. Southern war supporters like Yancey tried to make the South appear “as one man,” although they were not successful in this instance or at any point during the war. Most importantly, though, this exchange demonstrates that much like during the debates over Texas annexation, southerners believed their honor was at stake in the war with Mexico.\footnote{Wyatt-Brown, \textit{Southern Honor}, xvii; and Steven M. Stowe, \textit{Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters} (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 1-49. Stowe showed that affairs of honor had many different aspects, and the duel was only the most visible and violent. Southern planters dueled only after the language of honor, which included seconds trying to find compromises, failed.}

Despite this near duel, the initial introduction of the Wilmot Proviso ended rather innocently. On August 10, the bill reached the Senate floor, the last day of the twenty-ninth Congress’ first session. Alabamian Dixon Lewis hoped to approve the bill but strike the proviso, then send it back to the House of Representatives before the session ended, thus forcing the lower house to approve the bill as it was or deprive the troops of needed supplies. Lewis, however, never gained the floor, as Massachusetts Senator John Davis successfully filibustered

until the lower House adjourned. Thus, the Two Million Bill and the attached proviso, went down to defeat.\textsuperscript{10} Congress passed a subsequent bill to fund the war – without the proviso attached. Even though the Wilmot proviso went down in defeat, and indeed never passed the Senate which was evenly divided between members from free and slave states, it demonstrated a willingness among northerners to work together to restrict slavery in the West. Northerners opposed slavery and thus also opposed southerners migrating westward.\textsuperscript{11}

The most loyal supporters of the Wilmot Proviso were actually northern abolitionists who nominally supported the Whig Party. They remained the most faithful supporters of the proviso throughout the war.\textsuperscript{12} For example, Whig Senator Joshua Giddings of Ohio had a reputation as a passionate abolitionist and he remained a firm supporter of the proviso throughout the war. If the United States acquired slave territory, Giddings warned that northerners “shall be regarded as useful to the Union only as instruments to support slavery,” adding that “Northern rights and northern honor will be looked upon as among the things that were.”\textsuperscript{13} Much like southerners, Giddings and other abolitionists believed that the perpetuation of their form of honor rested a great deal upon excluding slavery from any potentially ceded western territories. These

\textsuperscript{10} Schroeder, \textit{Mr. Polk’s War}, 48-9.


\textsuperscript{12} Schroeder, \textit{Mr. Polk’s War}, 51.

\textsuperscript{13} Joshua Giddings, quoted Michael A. Morrison, “New Territory versus No Territory: The Whig Party and the Politics of Western Expansion, 1846-1848,” \textit{The Western Historical Quarterly} 23, no. 1 (Feb. 1992): 38; and Wyatt-Brown, \textit{Southern Honor}, 294-5. Wyatt-Brown showed that the emphasis on “southern” honor did not mean northerners lacked honor. However, northerners and southerners saw their honor stemming from two different outlets (slavery and free-labor) and led to different cultural practices. Northern honor rested upon moral purity, where not partaking in slavery, avoiding sexual relations before marriage, and not killing people in senseless duels represented honorable behavior.
antislawery “Conscious” Whigs contributed to the gradual disintegration of ties with the southern wing of the party by placing blame for the war directly on southerners, declaring, as one abolitionist paper argued, that “the South, which drew us into the war, will suffer the most from it.”\(^{14}\) Southerners, regardless of party, did not appreciate these attacks on slavery. For instance, North Carolina Whig and war opponent David Outlaw explained “day after day the evils of slavery – its sin – its evils, moral, social, and political are paraded for our entertainment by men who know nothing of our actual condition or of the practical bearings of the question which they attempt to discuss.”\(^{15}\)

For his part, President Polk simply could not understand how the slavery issue ever became connected with the war. Even though Polk was a southern slaveholder, he assumed that the climate of the territory which might be annexed would not sustain slavery. Thus, he could not understand why politicians even bothered to discuss the issue. It is certainly surprising that Polk failed to understand the potential risks of territorial acquisition, as the slavery issue had been repeatedly brought up during the prior twenty-five years whenever new states sought admission to the Union. Moreover, as recently as the annexation of Texas several compromises and political deals had become necessary in the interest of maintaining sectional harmony. However, since Polk mentioned several times in his diary that he could not understand how the issues were connected, it seems likely that he legitimately did not believe at the start of the war that acquisition of Mexican lands would lead to sectional arguments over slavery. As Polk wrote in his diary, slavery had “no legitimate connection with the War with Mexico,” and this agitation


\(^{15}\) David Outlaw, quoted in Morrison, “New Territory versus No Territory,” 43.
was “not only unwise, but wicked.”\textsuperscript{16} He stressed his belief that slavery was “practically an abstract question,” as there was “no probability that any territory will ever be acquired from Mexico in which slavery would ever exist.”\textsuperscript{17}

While he might not have understood why Congress broached the slavery question, Polk knew by the summer of 1846 that territorial acquisition was sure to cause sectional strife within the Union. This knowledge, however, did not prevent him from prosecuting the war aggressively with the goal of territorial acquisition in mind. After hearing news of the victory at Monterey – and the Mexican refusal to talk peace after such a humiliating defeat – Polk took General Taylor’s advice and started to prepare for a second campaign aimed at taking the war into the heart of Mexico. Thus, in his annual message in December 1846, Polk called on Congress to fully support the war by voting adequate money and supplies to the soldiers. Even though he lost the Two Million Bill in August, Polk now decided to try to get a Three Million bill, another appropriations bill, passed at the start of the new year.\textsuperscript{18} At a cabinet meeting in early 1847 Polk explained that “the season for active operations of an army in Mexico was rapidly passing away; that the term of service of the volunteers now in the field would expire in June next, & that it was very important that provision should be made to have troops to take their places before the end of the healthy season.”\textsuperscript{19} Polk needed money to finance a two-front war in 1847, which seemed certain to be even more expensive than 1846.


\textsuperscript{17} Polk, \textit{Polk Diary}, ed. Quaife, 2: 328.

\textsuperscript{18} See Schroeder, \textit{Mr. Polk’s War}, 65. In the annual message, Polk also asked for the reestablishment of the lieutenant-general rank, which previously had only been held by George Washington in 1798, during the Quasi War with France. Polk hoped to give this rank to Thomas Hart Benton – a Democrat – in order to supersede the authority of Taylor and Scott in Mexico.

\textsuperscript{19} Polk, \textit{Diary}, ed. Quaife, 2: 302.
Along with money, Polk needed ten new regiments because most of the six-month volunteers refused to re-enlist. This meant that the disillusionment which the soldiers experienced in the war—and thus causing them to return home—constantly drew the war into political debates in the United States. Despite the clear sectional dangers which existed since the introduction of the Wilmot Proviso, Polk had determined to prosecute the war vigorously into the heart of Mexico. One of the champions of the administration in Congress, Andrew Johnson, clearly expressed the country’s war aims in December, arguing that the “war ought to be prosecuted with sufficient energy, and for a suitable length of time, to make the Mexicans feel their own weakness and inability to cope with the American republic in arms, and their consequent dependence, so that they may hereafter be disposed to preserve religiously and scrupulously any treaties which they may make.”

Thus, the Polk administration and southern war supporters argued for an aggressive punitive war which seemed likely to bring new territory into the Union.

In early 1847, therefore, southern opposition to the Polk administration and the war became more widespread and vocal. The most significant blow for Polk came when Calhoun openly broke with the president over the war. During the early months of the war, Calhoun led a group which included some southern Democrats devoted to him, some former Van Buren followers, and many Whigs outside the West. Polk had tried to keep Calhoun’s support for the

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21 Bergeron, The Presidency of James K. Polk, 87. Bergeron noted that northern opposition to the war bothered Polk little. However, Calhoun’s opposition troubled Polk greatly because it represented a clash between the two most influential southern politicians over whose views best represented the majority of people from their section.
22 Merrill D. Peterson, The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay, and Calhoun (New York: Oxford University
war, as the Democrats held only a four man advantage in the Senate, which meant that if Calhoun and his supporters ever decided to not support the war measures, they could essentially block the prosecution of the war. In the first months of the war, Calhoun voted supplies and money to the prosecution of the war.

On February 8, however, Polk’s fears came true, as Calhoun voted with the majority of Whigs to defeat the Ten Regiment Bill. In reality, Calhoun inched closer to opposing the war in December when he disagreed with Polk’s idea of placing Thomas Hart Benton, a Democrat, in the position of Lieutenant-General, thus allowing Polk to supersede the authority of Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott, who the president assumed were Whigs. In January, however, Calhoun voted against the Ten Regiment Bill for sectional reasons. “We are not only in the midst of a very difficult and a very expensive war,” he told the Senate that the country was also “involved in a domestic question of the most irritating and dangerous character.” Unlike Polk, Calhoun believed that the questions of territory and the future of slavery could not be separated. Calhoun had held many meetings with Polk in the first months of the war, and they agreed that nature would prevent slavery from being profitably introduced in almost any territory taken from Mexico. For Calhoun, though, the real question was not acquisition of territory, but rather principle and honor. He understood that by this point Polk would not be satisfied without acquiring some territory, and Calhoun was prepared to support the acquisition of territory in northern Mexico. Yet Calhoun grew concerned that the new campaign promised to bring even

Press, 1987), 419.

23 Schroeder, Mr. Polk’s War, 69. Schroder argues that Calhoun broke with Polk because of personal ambition, concern for the war, and concern for slavery.

24 Calhoun met with Polk periodically throughout the first six months of the war, and he voiced his first opposition in December when Polk broached the subject of Benton as lieutenant-general. See Polk, Diary, 2: 325.

more territory into American control. Rather than push the war until the Mexicans decided to yield to American terms, Calhoun believed that the country ought to create a defensive line of forts, occupying some territory but not conquering the whole Mexican nation. Calhoun’s plan involved holding forts along the Rio Grande, stretching all the way to the Pacific Ocean along the thirty-second parallel. This was a better strategy, Calhoun believed, since it would require less men and money than pushing the war into the Mexican interior, while also accomplishing the goal of territorial indemnity for American citizens. Calhoun, thus, tried to devise a plan which could bring the war to a speedy conclusion and limit territorial acquisition.

In order to gain support for his defensive line strategy, Calhoun appealed to his fellow Senators’ religious beliefs. Calhoun’s religious arguments differed substantially from northern abolitionists’ who argued that a war for slavery was immoral. Yet he also differed from pacifists who believed all warfare ran counter to Jesus’ message of love in the Gospels. Calhoun believed that slavery was agreeable to God and that all men were not created equal, as God only created two people – Adam and Eve – and all others came about through human reproduction and therefore inequalities emerged along with sin. Calhoun did believe, however, that real evil existed in the world, and Christians had the responsibility for eliminating evil wherever and whenever they could. If the Senate provided Polk with ten new regiments, Calhoun assumed that 50,000 more Americans would have to take the field, and if the large death totals from disease during Taylor’s campaign in northern Mexico were any indication, then at least 16,000 of these men would die. Calhoun appealed to the conscience of every Senator who heard him, asking “can you as a Christian, justify giving a vote that would lead to such results?”

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Calhoun then proceeded to analyze the future of this territory in the Union. At this point, Calhoun spoke directly to the northern members, asking them if they could “come to the conclusion, to exclude the South from all benefit in the acquired territory, with no other interest but that, I turn to their representatives on this floor and ask them, what they suppose must [be] the feeling of the slave-holding States, to whom this question is one of safety and not of mere policy, to be deprived of their rights, and their perfect equality secured by the Constitution, and to be assailed in their most vulnerable point?” This question was an important one, and Calhoun made sure that the northerners understood that their actions could lead to some very deadly results. “Be assured,” Calhoun warned, “if there be stern determination on one side to exclude us, there will be determination still sterner on ours, not to be excluded.” Calhoun concluded by telling all Senators – North and South – that they “could make no disposition of Mexico, as a subject or conquered nation, that would not prove disastrous to us; nor could we conquer and subdue her without great sacrifice and injurious effects to our institutions.”

President Polk believed that Calhoun only opposed the war because of bitterness over not being retained as secretary of state. In reality, Calhoun’s opposition was much more complicated. He opposed Polk’s prosecution of the war, but he also insisted that if the United States proceeded to take territory as a result of the war, then the South should have equal access. That night, Polk wrote in his diary that he had come to regard Calhoun as “in opposition” to the administration. Indeed, he viewed him as “the most mischievous man in the Senate.”

On February 19, Calhoun rose once again in the Senate to discuss resolutions which he believed would ensure southern equality in the Union and stave off civil conflict following the

27 Ibid.

28 Polk, Diary, ed. Quaife, 2: 371.
war with Mexico. He reminded the Senate of the fact that the South already had a great
disadvantage in terms of population and representatives in Congress, and they only remained
equal in the Senate. Since a compromise existed which prevented slavery north of the Mason-
Dixon Line, the free states might soon crush this equality, as newly admitted Wisconsin stood
ready to bring two more northern Senators during the next session. Additionally, some
northerners had attempted to attach the Wilmot Proviso to appropriations bills, which would
directly restrict slavery in any territory taken from Mexico. Calhoun, thus, presented four
resolutions which he thought would ensure southern access to the territories and preserve the
Union. The third resolution was the most detailed and clearly articulated a reply to the Wilmot
Proviso. In it, Calhoun argued that any law which deprived southerners from emigrating to the
territories with their property “would tend directly to subvert the Union itself.”29 While still an
opponent of the war, Calhoun was already clearly demonstrating that he planned to vigorously
defend southern rights and equal access to any territories taken as a result of the war. While the
Senate did not bring Calhoun’s resolutions to a vote, that really was not Calhoun’s purpose. As
the historian Merrill Peterson argues, Calhoun desired, instead, to lay the foundation for a new
“Platform of the South,” which would call for southern unity and the protection of slavery as
more important than the preservation of the Union.30 Much like Barclay Martin, Calhoun desired
southern unification in defense of slavery and honor. Unlike Martin, Calhoun wanted the South
united against the war as well.

Calhoun was far from the only southerner who vocally demanded equal access to the
territories, as many war supporters made similar arguments. Although southerners had different

29 Calhoun speech in the Senate, February 19, 1847, Papers of John C. Calhoun, Vol. 24, ed. Wilson, 169-
176.

30 Peterson, The Great Triumvirate, 427.
plans for avoiding subjugation, by early 1847 almost all southerners stood firmly opposed to any attempt to bar equal migration to the West with their property – if the country indeed gained territory from the war. In a letter to fellow South Carolinian Barnard Bee, former Governor James Hamilton made clear why southerners could never relinquish equal access to the territories, stating that if southerners submitted then they would be “far worse slaves than our vassals.” Hamilton further explained that if southerners failed to “raise the standard of resistance,” they would be “the basest poltroons that ever lived to be frightened into slavery and debasement.” Hamilton, however, desired that the question of the territories wait until the conclusion of the war. Yet he insisted that the issue should “be made the moment the war…end[ed] if our domestic enemies desire. Its discussion would now weaken the country in the Prosecuting of hostilities. Its discussion when Peace takes place will nerve animate and fit us for the struggle which must come.”

If the North managed to exclude the South from the territories, then southerners would be subjected and unequal members of the Union. White southerners believed the final result could be the loss of everything they held dear – including their honor as free-American citizens – and they would be the most despised and miserable members of the Union.

Opposition to the Wilmot Proviso – and thus support for equal access to the territories – crossed political lines in the South. In February, 1847, the solidly Whig *Fayetteville Observer*, a North Carolina newspaper, ran an editorial which they coined a “WARNING TO THE SOUTH.” The paper claimed that northerners “celebrated [the] Wilmot Proviso, forbidding the toleration of slavery in any territory hereafter acquired or annexed, was attached to the Three Million Bill in the House.” Anytime northerners attached the Wilmot Proviso to potential legislation, the paper

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31 James Hamilton to Barnard Bee, February 7, 1847, Barnard Bee Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.
added, almost every member of Congress appeared to vote. “The vote was almost entirely a sectional one,” the paper claimed, and “every Southern man of both parties, with a few Northern and Western men, voting against it.” Thus, southerners stood united against the Wilmot Proviso, but as Calhoun’s speeches demonstrated, they remained divided on the war.

Politicians, of course, were far from the only Americans concerned about the Wilmot Proviso. Northerners and southerners on the homefront also expressed their opinions about this important issue. Much like in the debates over whether the United States should go to war with Mexico, periodicals became useful instruments for southerners to express their opinions about the Wilmot Proviso and western expansion. In DeBow’s Review, B.F. Porter of Alabama discussed the Wilmot Proviso in an article entitled “The Mission of America.” Similar to Calhoun, DeBow initially opposed the war but then became an early proponent of equal access for southerners to the territories. The articles in his periodicals demonstrated this shift. Porter thought that in order to find answers for their present difficulties, southerners should consult the wisdom of their revolutionary fathers. He stated that Americans should “contemplate the point which our ancestors had reached when this fair country passed into our hands.” Porter argued that southerners would “not permit our confidence in the patriotism and intelligence of the people of the United States to be at all impaired by the excitements of this controversy.” Instead, they believed it grew “out of the derangement of a few religious minds, and the corruption of designing office-seekers; and that the mass of the northern people, with all their moral principle, their love of the institutions of the country, their sacred regard for the blessed constitutional freedom of the states, never will sacrifice the Union for a mere abstract idea of individual

32 Fayetteville Observer, February 23, 1847.
liberty.” Porter believed that the common revolutionary past instilled sacred values which all Americans dared not discard.

Many other southerners shared Porter’s view that northerners would not willingly destroy the liberty and Union which the revolutionaries left for their children. At the same time, most southerners believed that abolitionist extremists posed a very real danger to the blessings bestowed by the Revolution. The Southern Literary Messenger, a Virginia-based periodical devoted to southern literature and arts, published an article in early 1847 entitled “The Present Aspect of Abolitionism.” In this short article, a man from Madison County, Mississippi, writing under the pseudonym PUBLICOLA stated that northern abolitionists appeared “to be anxious to earn an infamous immortality by applying a torch to the fairest edifice of constitutional freedom which the world has yet seen.” For PUBLICOLA, the Wilmot Proviso demonstrated that “the South must rely for safety upon her own firmness and decision.” In an interesting tactic, PUBLICOLA emphasized that slavery became big business in the United States thanks in large part to the involvement of northerners in the slave trade. PUBLICOLA argued that if they were “really so horrified as they pretend at the existence of this gigantic iniquity, they could not better prove their sincerity than by giving a portion of that wealth to purchase the freedom of those whose fathers were sold into bondage by their fathers to obtain it.” PUBLICOLA ultimately expressed confidence that most northerners supported the benefits bestowed by the Union over any possible benefits in abolitionism. The article concluded that since “the Union was strong enough to survive the perilous period of infamy when the interests of its remote sections were hardly unified at all, and the people of some States scarcely had any intercourse with those of

33 DeBow’s Review 2, no. 1 (March 1847): 109-118.
others, we may surely entertain good hopes of it now when it has been cemented by time and is besides strengthened by so many additional bonds of which our Fathers never thought.”

In addition to attacking northern abolitionists, some southerners used periodicals to attack southern opponents of the war. A contributor to the *Southern Quarterly Review*, another DeBow-edited periodical, noted that slavery was only part of what the South stood to lose, as the South’s “equality amongst the States in the Union- their peace and safety- it may be their existence as a people,” were “all involved in the results of this controversy.” This contributor believed that this generation owed it to their revolutionary ancestors to preserve southern rights and honor left by them. The article emphasized that “the right- the right- [was] worth existence. No people who cannot, like our fathers, stand on the abstract right, and maintain it at every hazard, can long be free.” Another contributor warned southerners to not be ignorant of the traitors in their midst. In response to a southern congressman who stated that no support for the Wilmot proviso existed in the South, a contributor to the *Southern Quarterly Review* mentioned that all causes, even “the holiest, has found its traitors.” The contributor continued that southerners “must be prepared to meet not only her enemies of the North, but her worst enemies within her bosom; and with a stern relentless arm, to repel or crush both. Her liberties, her honour and safety, demand this policy.” For most southerners, preservation of their rights, honor, and future equality within the Union required fiercely confronting all challenges to southern rights and honor, whether from external or internal forces.

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35 *The Southern Quarterly Review*, April 1847, 401.

36 *The Southern Quarterly Review*, April 1847, 406.
Such rhetoric failed to mute southern dissent. While it was certainly true that the Wilmot Proviso united southerners – both in politics and on the homefront – behind the idea of equal access to any territories acquired, that does not mean that southern opposition to the war disappeared or that all southerners desired the acquisition of territory. It was southern Whigs, most prominently Georgia Senator John Berrien and Representative Alexander Stephens, who proposed the No Territory position. These southern Whigs allied with conservative northern Whigs, although not abolitionists, behind this idea in order to not only save the Union from arguing over the future of slavery in the West, but also save the Whig Party from sectional infighting as well. They also believed this strategy was a realistic way to end the war, as it would remove American’s prime motivation – which they believed was territorial acquisition – for fighting the war. The No Territory proponents also believed this strategy would remove the Mexican fear that Americans might take their whole country. Whigs also believed that this might be a way for the party to oppose the war but also avoid charges of treason by Democrats. North Carolinian Alfred Dockery said that Democrats incessantly argued that “Whigs preferred the interest of Mexico to their own country.” The No Territory plan, therefore, served as a way for the Whigs to support the prosecution of the war but not territorial acquisition, thus depriving, they hoped, Democrats of some of their venom.

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37 Schroeder, *Mr. Polk’s War*, 86. At the same time, this No Territory position helped to push the abolitionists out of the party, as most Whig abolitionists actually supported the Wilmot Proviso throughout the war since they saw it as a firm antislavery pledge against the spread of slavery, regardless of whether the country acquired territory or not. They did not support the No Territory position, believing that such a strategy ignored the problem of expansion, rather than find an actual solution to the problem.

38 Alfred Dockery to Edmund Deberry, February 4, 1847, Edmund Deberry Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

39 Schroeder, *Mr. Polk’s War*, 79.
Southern Whigs, however, supported the No Territory idea primarily as a defense of slavery. John Berrien took the lead of the No Territory position by placing an amendment on a $3 million appropriation bill in February 1847 which stated that the United States could not attempt the dismemberment of the Mexican republic with the war.\(^{40}\) An editorial in a Montgomery, Alabama, newspaper supported the No Territory proposal, objecting to “calling a thing [territorial acquisition] ‘indemnity,’” when it was “manifestly no indemnity, but an actual expense to the Nation, add[ing] no strength to the South, but will bring aid to its abolitionist enemies.”\(^{41}\) Thus, the No Territory position represented the ultimate support for slavery, as Berrien and other southern Whigs sought a calculated strategy to force slavery out of national political debate.\(^{42}\)

The introduction of the No Territory proviso demonstrates that while many Whigs and Democrats disagreed about whether to acquire territory from the war, all southerners sought ways to protect slavery in the future. For example, Henry Washington Hilliard, an Alabama Whig who had gained a reputation as a moderate southerner while serving his first term in Congress, berated northerners for introducing the Wilmot Proviso into the debates about the war. Hilliard exclaimed in an early 1847 speech that if the Wilmot Proviso ever passed then the government would “become unequal, and its days will be numbered.” Hilliard went on to state

\(^{40}\) Schroeder, *Mr. Polk’s War*, 87. The most direct way for antiwar advocates to change administration policy in regards to the war was in appropriation bills, in which money might be withheld or provisos added which stipulated the objects which the money needed to pursue.

\(^{41}\) *Tri-Weekly Flag and Advisor*, November 23, 1847. Emphasis in the original.

\(^{42}\) Michael A. Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 70-78. Morrison argued that many Whigs supported western expansion, yet they all agreed that “it must be peaceful, must proceed gradually with the consent of the governed, and, of course, must be accomplished without violation of Whig constitutional principles.” Although this statement was true in the analysis of politicians, this ignored the massive number of Whigs in the military (Taylor and Scott included) who supported this war and in one way or another supported violent territorial expansion.
that most southerners loved the Union – a Union gained by the efforts of southerners like George Washington – but if northerners continued on their dangerous path then southerners would need “to give up an alliance” which was characterized “only by wrongs and oppressions, and gather about their homes and their property.” 43 After this fiery address filled with the language of honor, a Democratic paper in Alabama commended “in strong terms the course of Mr. Hilliard, in Congress, especially his speech on the Mexican war, and against Wilmot’s Proviso.” The paper added that Hilliard’s speech spread “the mantle of charity over all his Whig heterodoxy, and calls upon the Democrats in his district to rally to his support, without reference to party.” 44

In essence, by early 1847 many southerners believed that they faced attacks on two fronts – from Mexicans and northerners – both posing potential danger for slavery and southern culture.

By the spring of 1847, southern war opponents became increasingly pessimistic about being able to stop the acquisition of territory. The main reason for their pessimism was the tremendous success enjoyed by the American military in Mexico. While southern opponents were proud of the volunteers, they realized that war supporters would likely increase their demands for Mexican territory the more success the military achieved and the longer the Mexicans resisted. In March 1847, General Winfield Scott gained a smashing victory at Santa Anna’s hometown of Vera Cruz, as Scott successful guided American soldiers in an amphibious assault and then siege of the city. Afterward, Scott started to march from Vera Cruz on the


44 National Era, February 11, 1847. Words like “wrongs” and “oppressions” were frequently cited to cast the character of an opponent as dishonorable. For a discussion of the language of honor, see Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, xiii.
national road towards Mexico City, marching quickly in order to prevent losing too many men to the debilitating effects of “el vomito,” as Yellow Fever was known to Mexican War soldiers. In the months that followed, reminiscent of Taylor’s campaigns in northern Mexico, Scott met the Mexicans entrenched in strong defensive positions on several occasions, and much like Taylor won victories against the enemy. In May, though, manpower shortages forced Scott to bring his campaign to a grinding halt, as the enlistments of the twelve-months volunteers were set to expire, and about 90% chose not to re-enlist. Scott explained in his memoirs that “the halt, at Puebla, was protracted and irksome.” Scott had seen new regiments trickle in during the last few months, but he needed to wait for the states to provide more soldiers before he could begin moving forward. By August, Scott had enough men to continue his march towards Mexico City.

In the summer of 1847, therefore, Calhoun expressed increasing concern about the destruction which the conclusion of the war would likely do to the Union. In a letter written to Thomas Clemson, Calhoun stated that he had done his “duty fully in reference to the Mexican war, as it relates both to its origin & the mode it ought to have been conducted, I stand free of all responsibility, & independent of both parties, & their entanglement.” Calhoun added that it was difficult to determine who was most responsible for the war, “the administration & its party, as its authors, or the whigs for the folly & weakness of having voted for a war, which they had in discussion proved to be unconstitutional & unprovoked.” Now that the United States had been fully engaged in the war for a full year, Calhoun lamented that whether the United States


emerged “victorious, or defeated” the situation was bad. “If the former,” Calhoun argued that “it would seem impossible almost to stop short of the Conquest of the country; and then comes the question, what shall we do with it?” Calhoun attacked all supporters of the war, regardless of party. He reasoned that to annex Mexico “would be to overthrow our Government, and, to hold it as a Province, to corrupt and destroy it. The farther we advance, the more appearant [sic] the folly and wantonness of the war.”

Southerners expressed similar concerns on the homefront as well. In the August issue of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, Reverend J.N. Danford of Alexandria, Virginia, submitted an article which detailed his experience celebrating the most recent Fourth of July. He mentioned that the revolutionaries were safe from any criticism for their conduct during a war. He continued that “God raised those men up, and qualified them for the great work to which they were called, as manifestly as Moses was called upon to be deliverer of Israel from Egyptian bondage, or Joshua to lead them into the promised land.” He warned, however, that “the dead cannot save the living.” At this point, Danford transfused his vision of the War for Independence with the current war with Mexico, stating that “if those were ‘times that tried men’s souls’ in one form,” the current war “tried” Americans “by our very successes.” Danford expressed remorse that Americans had been “diverted from the work of subduing the soil to that of subduing armed men.” He continued by attacking the cultural values of southerners, stressing that the destruction of the war resulted from “that glittering thing called honor, a sort of beau ideal, to men who, as in the days of chivalry, not relishing the calm virtues of domestic life, but smitten with the love of wondering, seek their chief pleasure in scenes of turbulence and bloodshed.” Danford’s article is important since it shows that some southerners questioned the role honor played in society.

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Yet, significantly, Danford still recognized honor’s power among the majority of southerners. That Danford felt the need to defend his position against southern notions of honor suggests that many southerners justified their support for the war based upon honor. Even those who criticized southern culture had to confront the idea of honor in order for their arguments to be perceived as credible and persuasive.\textsuperscript{48} Danford concluded his message by noting that he did not oppose American expansion, but he believed that plenty of land existed directly west of the United States, not southwest, which Americans really needed to control. Danford stated that Americans were foolish “to plunge into foreign wars, when we have so much home territory to subdue. May we undertake this enterprise of conquest with ploughshares made out of American swords, and pruning hooks made out of Mexican spears.”\textsuperscript{49}

It should be emphasized that almost all southerners – with a few individuals like Danford proving the exception – held the common goal of preserving slavery and honor. There remained, however, considerable disagreement about the best means to achieve that goal in regards to the western territories.\textsuperscript{50} The most controversial proposal for territorial indemnity was that of All Mexico.\textsuperscript{51} The All Mexico movement gained momentum after the fall of Mexico City, which Scott achieved in September 1847. The All Mexico movement was in part motivated by ideas of manifest destiny, but supporters of this plan also thought it was a pragmatic solution to the

\textsuperscript{48} Wyatt-Brown, \textit{Southern Honor}, 4.

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{The Southern Literary Messenger}, August 1847, 502-4.

\textsuperscript{50} Douglas Arthur Ley, “Expansionists All? Southern Senators and American Foreign Policy, 1841-1860,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1990). Ley argued that “southern Senators agreed on abstract principles, but never agreed on precise application of these principles to specific foreign policy initiatives.”

problem of Mexicans refusing to treat with the Americans despite the fact that American troops thoroughly defeated the Mexican army and captured their capital. One person who supported the All Mexico movement was Blackston McDannel, an east Tennessee volunteer. Writing to Andrew Johnson, McDannel explained that the United States “ought never entertain the idea for a single moment of giving back so fine a country as this to these Lousy, Lazy Mexicans & Indians.” Referring to the country’s policy towards the Cherokees, McDannel suggested that the Mexicans should be forcibly removed. “With the right kind of Population there could be no finer country than this,” McDannel concluded.\(^{52}\) All Mexico, however, had very few supporters in the South. Most southerners feared that All Mexico was a ploy by northerners – Lewis Cass of Michigan and James Buchanan of Pennsylvania were two major northern politicians who supported All Mexico – to acquire territory, bar slavery, and thus surround the slave states with free states on all sides.\(^{53}\)

All Mexico failed to garner much southern support because few believed forced removal was plausible. Therefore, the United States would be stuck with lands populated by “undesirable” races. The editors of the *Pensacola Gazette* countered All Mexico proponents by explaining that Mexicans were “not ripe for the blessings which we would confer upon them—the blessings of wise laws and a stable government.” The paper asked readers: “What shall we do? Carry on the war until we force them to be happy?”\(^{54}\) The nightmare of acquiring a large, mixed-


\(^{53}\) John Douglas Pitts Fuller, *The Movement For the Acquisition of All Mexico: 1846-1848* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1936), 10. Fuller argued that slaveholders wanted to prevent the acquisition of All Mexico and that there was an “anti-slavery” conspiracy to acquire All Mexico. Northerners increasingly supported territorial acquisition as the war progressed since they came to the opinion that nature would not allow slavery to exist in the territories most likely to be acquired. Many northerners, therefore, believed that the western territories would eventually become free states even without the Wilmot Proviso.

\(^{54}\) *Pensacola Gazette*, January 30, 1847.
race population would be a frightening reality if supporters of All Mexico had their way. Not only were the Mexicans not enslaved, they had already shown with their guerrilla tactics that they would not docilely submit to American rule. A North Carolina newspaper editorial opined that such an acquisition would “cost our Government a great deal of trouble and money, and, after all, what do we gain? A bankrupt country, with three millions of whites and five millions of stark-naked Indians to be supported.” When Secretary of State James Buchanan advised President Polk that the United States ought to secure the territory as far south as Tamaulipas, even Polk “expressed a doubt as to the policy or practicability of obtaining a country containing so large a number of the Mexican population.” Throughout the war the wholehearted belief by most southerners in the intellectual and moral inferiority of the Mexicans continued, and the thought of extending the liberties of the Constitution to them aroused concern in the South. Representative Edward Cabell of Florida doubted the “black, white, red, mongrel, miserable populations of Mexico- the Mexicans, Indians, Mulattoes, Mestizos, Chinos, Zambos, Quinteros” could ever become “free and enlightened American citizens.” Underlying these racist attacks of the All Mexico movement, of course, were fears for the southern social order.

The dread of granting American liberty to such a degraded population was another approach which southern Whigs used to not only attack the All Mexico movement, but to also gain support for the No Territory position. At an anti-Wilmot Proviso meeting in Greenville, South Carolina, former Minister to Mexico Waddy Thompson stressed that the climate in Mexico predestined the failure of cotton cultivation. As a result, Thompson predicted that the blacks and

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55 The Weekly Raleigh Register, December 25, 1846.

56 Polk, Polk’s Diary, ed. Nevins, 291.

57 Congressional Globe, 29:2, 429.
Mexicans in the conquered territory would never lose their “natural” behavior. Thompson recalled the scary scenes he witnessed as minister of Mexico in which blacks and Mexicans lived side by side with equal freedom under Mexican law. Thompson concluded that the blacks in Mexico were “the same lazy, filthy, and vicious creatures that they inevitably become where they are not held in bondage.” According to Thompson, the Mexicans showed the same tendencies of being “lazy, ignorant, and, of course, vicious and dishonest.” Therefore, white Americans living in freedom with free blacks and Mexicans risked becoming lazy, ignorant, and dishonest—a turn of events they perceived as nothing short of a cultural disaster.

By the fall of 1847, therefore, it was clear that southerners did not speak with one voice and they were certainly not united behind the war effort or territorial acquisition. It was at this time, therefore, that some southerners began to question whether allegiance to the two national political parties was beneficial to the South. Calls for southern unification actually started in the spring, when the Virginia House of Delegates passed a series of resolutions which other states adopted shortly thereafter. These resolutions stated that if the Wilmot Proviso passed, then it was “the duty of every slaveholding State; and all the citizens thereof, as they value their dearest privileges, their sovereignty, their independence, their rights of property, to take firm, united and concerted action in this emergency.” Around the same time, an Alabama newspaper remarked in an editorial that the Wilmot Proviso and abolitionism were “ominous of gathering evils to the South; and they will soon be here, unless our citizens, with a spirit of firm determination, meet

58 Thompson, Recollections of Mexico, 239; and Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny, 212. Horsman argued that Thompson accepted territorial acquisition as early as his term as Minister of Mexico, but wanted to use peaceful methods to gain the territory.

59 Greenville Mountaineer, March 5, 1847.
them in a manner the crisis demand.” The paper added that the time for compromises was over as “these things portend the vassalage of the South,” and some policy which promised southern equality was the only condition upon which the South would “hold political fellowship with the non-slaveholding States.”

Several months later, calls for southern unification became more prevalent. In a private letter sent to a friend, Democratic Senator Jefferson Davis warned that northern Democrats firm support for the Wilmot Proviso meant “it might become necessary to unite as southern men, and to dissolve the ties which have connected us to the northern Democracy: the position recently assumed in a majority of the non-slave holding states has led me to fear.” Davis added that with “the questions of Southern institutions and southern rights…that extensive defections have occurred among Northern democrats.” Despite this reality, Davis believed that northerners still demonstrated “enough of [the] good feeling…to sustain the hope, that as a party they will show themselves worthy of their ancient appellation, the natural allies of the South, and will meet us upon just constitutional ground.” Davis sincerely hoped that although the signs of the times were “portentous of evil, and the cloud which now hangs on our northern horizon threatens a storm, it may yet blow over with only the tear drops of contrition and regret.” Slavery, and with it the very Union which southerners pledged their sacred honor to uphold, was in grave danger, but Davis hoped that the Democratic Party could find some solution to the crisis. At this point, however, Davis did not know how the Union could survive with the North showing such hostility to the South.

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60 Tri-Weekly Flag and Advertiser, March 16, 1847. Emphasis in the original.

Henry Clay agreed that the Union was in grave danger, yet he believed that national party politics – and his beloved Whig Party in particular – were essential to saving the country. While Clay voted men and supplies throughout the war, he in fact had verbally denounced the struggle from the very outbreak of hostilities. During the war, Clay felt the pain of the war intimately, when his eldest son and namesake, Henry Clay, Jr., died at the Battle of Buena Vista. Mexican lancers knocked his son from the saddle and proceeded to stab him. General Taylor consoled Senator Clay by reporting that his son had died in a “manly” fashion. With his death, he had upheld “the honor of the State and of the country,” Taylor lamented. An officer in Clay’s Kentucky regiment wrote that “no man ever fell more nobly, or more deeply regretted by his brother soldiers.” Prior to returning the body home, the regiment managed to procure a coffin in which Clay’s remains might rest in Mexico. Shortly thereafter, an artist named Joseph Ward produced a lithograph honoring the gallant sacrifice of the young Clay – an enduring image of the war which helped Americans picture the sacrifice which the war entailed.

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62 Stephen Aron, *How The West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky From Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 192-200. Aron showed that despite the many technological, economic, political, and social changes which Clay witnessed in Kentucky and the nation, he always maintained that the Whig Party held answers to new problems facing the country.

63 Zachary Taylor to Henry Clay, March 1, 1847, *The Papers of Henry Clay: Volume 10, Candidate, Compromiser, Elder Statesman, January 1, 1844-June 29, 1852*, ed. Melba Hay (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1991), 312. Dying in a manly fashion was part of antebellum notions of the “good death.” For discussion of the good death, see Mark S. Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America’s Culture of Death* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 18-9; and Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), xi-31. Ideally, a person wanted to die at a full age, at home, and surrounded by family and friends. A person should also be resigned and accepting of death. Warfare in a foreign land challenged this idea. Therefore, Americans were flexible enough to allow Mexican war soldiers, cut down in their primes far from home, to be referred to as people who died the good death as long as they displayed gallantry on the battlefield.


Most southern war opponents believed that the lives of southern warriors who died in Mexico deserved a respectful salute for their sacrifice. Even Calhoun’s followers voiced their appreciation for the Palmetto regiment which experienced high casualty rates during the Mexico City campaign. For example, Calhounite Francis Lieber wrote Calhoun that the remains of Pierce Butler, who died at the Battle of Churubusco, “were interred with great pomp,” but Lieber thought that “too much time had been allowed to elapse between their arrival and interment, so that every day of delay took away something from the original spontaneous and natural manifestation of feeling.”

If anything, Lieber wished that the remains of the fallen had arrived sooner for an even better demonstration of state pride. Paul Hamilton Hayne, a South Carolina poet, linked the death of Butler to the preservation of southern honor. In “LINES, On the Death of Col. Pierce M. Butler, of the Palmetto Regiment, who fell in the Battle of Churubusco, August 20th, 1847,” Hayne poeticized:

> “His gallant sword is firmly grasped: hold! Let it linger there-
> The spotless blade that BUTLER bore, another must not bear-
> He kept his honor like the steel- the bright steel by his side-
> And only clasped the treasure close- still closer when he died.”

Thus, many southerners linked the deaths of their fallen countrymen to the preservation of southern honor.

However, as a mourning father who opposed a war in which his son died fighting, Clay’s pain was much deeper than Calhoun’s or Hayne’s. In the weeks which followed, the Kentuckian fell into a depression which he believed only his own death might relieve. Clay thought

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incessantly about “the bloody Battle field of Buena Vista.” With knowledge of the fact that his son died in combat, Clay remarked in many letters to family and friends that he felt some comfort knowing that “in all the forms of death, he [Henry Clay, Jr.] would himself have preferred that which has fallen to his lot.” However, Clay wrote to Senator John M. Clayton that his “consolation would be greater,” if he did not believe that the “Mexican War was unnecessary and of an aggressive character.”

For most of 1847, Clay isolated himself at his Kentucky plantation – Ashland – and refused to speak publicly. However, on a rainy Saturday, November 13, Clay delivered his first speech since his son’s death. The main purpose of this nearly three-hour speech was to clearly explain the crisis the country faced and provide resolutions to combat this evil. The day was “dark and gloomy,” Clay began, “unsettled and uncertain, like the condition of our country, in regard to the unnatural war with Mexico.” Clay agreed with Davis that the Democratic Party deserved most of the blame for this state of affairs, but Clay believed it was the expansionists who started the war with Mexico – Polk and his followers – not the Wilmot Provisoists. Clay reminded the crowd that the Wilmot Proviso was a northern response to the war with Mexico, so the Proviso “was predicted as the consequence of the annexation of Texas to the United States.” Clay emphasized that in this war the Americans were the aggressors, as it was Mexico “defending her fire-sides, her castles and her altars, not we.”

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Clay realized, however, that the origins of the war were not the main issue at this time. Instead, he believed that, if successful, the All Mexico movement threatened to inflict far more damage on the country. While Clay did not believe that the president desired the acquisition of All Mexico he did believe that Polk was still partially at fault for the charged political climate. Polk failed to inform the country what territorial demands the United States planned to ask from Mexico during the peace process, thus leading to bitter arguments over the best course of action. Clay suggested, therefore, that Polk could greatly alleviate some of the sectional difficulties if he just stated, “simply, that the war shall, or shall not, be a war of conquest.” Clay whimsically hoped that Polk would adopt the No Territory position, as the acquisition of Mexican territory would result in “discontent, insurrections, rebellion....until the incompatible parts would be broken asunder, and possibly, in the frightful struggle, our present glorious Union itself would be dissevered or dissolved.” He encouraged the expansionists to contemplate whether Mexican lands were even valuable enough to bring into the Union. “We do not want the mines, the mountains, the morasses, and the sterile lands of Mexico,” Clay thundered, adding that to Mexico “the loss of them would be humiliating, and be a perpetual source of regret and mortification.” For the United States, however, these territories would “prove a fatal acquisition, producing distraction, dissension, division, possibly disunion.” It seemed that Clay, too, considered Mexico to be the forbidden fruit. 72

Polk and the expansionists were not the only ones threatening the Union, however. Clay stressed that the abolitionists were just as destructive to sectional harmony. He had long been a supporter of gradual abolition and the colonization of freed slaves back to Africa, and he, thus,

had little respect for those calling for immediate abolition.\textsuperscript{73} “Whether they have intended it or not,” Clay stated that it was his “calm and deliberate belief, that they have done incalculable mischief even to the very cause which they have espoused, to say nothing of the discord which has been produced between different parts of the Union.” Thus, with these words Clay attacked northern radicals who had long supported the Whig Party.

Clay, however, was not finished. He took the opportunity to present resolutions which he believed might bring about an honorable peace with Mexico and provide long-term stability to the Union. In the seventh resolution Clay stated: “That we do, positively and emphatically, disclaim and disavow any wish or desire, on our part, to acquire any foreign territory whatever, for the purpose of propagating slavery, or of introducing slaves from the United States, into such foreign territory.”\textsuperscript{74} Despite his avowed support of the No Territory position, by specifically mentioning slavery, Clay presented a plan which was more closely associated with the Wilmot Proviso than the No Territory position staked out by the Whig Party. Thus, Clay managed in one speech to earn the enmity of both southern and northern radicals of the Whig Party, both groups which, ironically, agreed with Clay's opposition to the Mexican War. Conservative northern Whigs, the only group to which this speech really appealed, held meetings in support of Clay's plan in the following months. This “Lexington Address” has been interpreted as the beginning of a national anti-war movement, when in fact it was more successful in uniting anti-war northerners and southerners in opposition to Clay.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{73} Peterson, \textit{The Great Triumvirate}, 434.

\textsuperscript{74} Clay speech to the people of Lexington, November 13, 1847, \textit{The Papers of Henry Clay}, ed. Hay, 361-376.

\textsuperscript{75} Schroeder, \textit{Mr. Polk’s War}, 140-1; and Amy S. Greenberg, \textit{A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), xiii-xix. Greenberg argued that this speech sparked a national antiwar movement.
Clay’s speech occurred at a point when American forces occupied Mexico City, Santa Anna had been deposed from power, and the only resistance Mexicans could muster came in the form of guerrilla attacks. One of the prime motivating factors for southerners – punishing the Mexicans for their recalcitrance – had been met. “We have taught Mexico salutary lessons,” Jefferson Davis told the Senate a few months after the fall of Mexico City, adding that the United States had “convinced them [the Mexicans] that they are not what they supposed they were; and I hope it will not excite a laugh when I mention that supposition to have been, that they were the greatest military power on the continent; for it was not until after the battle of Buena Vista that they began to doubt it.” Still, Mexicans dragged their feet in the peace process. Some Mexican political leaders gave victor’s demands to the Americans, stating that the United States needed to remove its army east of the Rio Grande and that the naval blockade of Vera Cruz needed to be lifted in order to treat with the Americans. Such unrealistic detachment from the actual military situation in the country meant that the peace process was not quick.

This absence of closure meant that territorial acquisition continued to fill political debates back in the United States. By the end of 1847, there were some people who desired the acquisition of All Mexico, some who desired acquiring some Mexican territory (divided between those who wanted slavery excluded and those who wanted slavery allowed in the territory), and

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78 It was during this period – December 22, 1847 – that Representative Abraham Lincoln of Illinois introduced his “spot” resolutions. These resolutions were not original, since other politicians like Calhoun had made similar arguments, and they were also poorly timed, considering formal hostilities were essentially over when he presented these for debate. These resolutions were insignificant at the time, but nonetheless have garnered significant historical analysis because of Lincoln’s later role in the Civil War. For a copy of the resolutions, see Don E. Fehrenbacher, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and Writings, 1832-1858* (New York: Library of America, 1989), 158-159.
some who desired acquiring no territory. Southerners were included in all these groups. The stakes in these political debates were high, of course, and disagreements became increasingly heated. For instance, on February 2, 1848, prominent Whig John Bell of Tennessee gave a speech in the Senate in which he questioned the goals of the administration in prosecuting the war, the need for the additional regiments, and the possibility of negotiation with the present Mexican government. The next day, Jefferson Davis responded that he held that “in a just war we conquered a larger portion of Mexico, and that to it we have a title which has been regarded as valid ever since man existed in a social condition – the title of conquest.”

During the period between the end of formal fighting and the drafting of a peace treaty, many southerners like Davis tried to convince the No Territory men to now throw their support to territorial acquisition. Acquisition supporters denounced Francis Blair – Andrew Jackson’s old friend, political advisor, and supporter of the No Territory position – “as a traitor to the South, in whose bosom he resides and whose institutions he would now stab with the dagger of [Benedict] Arnold.” As a result of such harsh attacks, many No Territory proponents began to lose faith that they could achieve their main goal. Alabamian George F. Lindsey wrote in early 1848 that the territorial question filled his “mind with doubt and difficulty,” and almost made him “curse the hour when the recklessness of the President brought about such fearful difficulties.” He concluded that the only remedy was in “‘no territory,’ but that…[was]impossible in the present state of the public mind.”

79 Davis speech to the Senate, February 3, 1848, The Papers of Jefferson Davis, vol. 3, eds. McIntosh et al., 263.

80 The Mississippian, August 18, 1848.

The “public mind” remained firmly behind President Polk and maintained that the war could only be completely punitive by acquiring Mexican territory. In arguing for southern access to the territories, Alabama planter John A. Campbell wrote that “the strength of our position” was that slavery was “the central point about which Southern Society is formed.” Since the territory was “the fruit of common expenditure & toil,” southerners “must have an organization of the territory that admits us as equals.” However, Campbell projected a pessimistic attitude towards a fair policy being enacted in the territories, dejectedly writing that southerners were “on the eve of collisions and conflicts worse than those with Mexico,” and he believed the South would “come out of these conflicts with the loss of everything- I fear honor- as well as influence, stability, strength.”\(^{82}\) At least for Campbell, the loss of honor represented the primary casualty if northerners managed to exclude slavery from the western territories. Alabama representative Arthur Bagby concurred with these views, maintaining that since common blood and treasury had been used in conquering Mexican territory, then all Americans needed equal access with a guarantee of their Constitutional rights. He declared that if he agreed to bar slavery from the western territories, then he would “disgrace the blood” which ran in his veins and “be recreant to all the obligations of duty.” On this point, Bagby argued that southerners were “united as one\(^{83}\) man.”

Rather suddenly, though, news of a peace treaty arrived. On February 23, 1848, exactly one year since the American victory at Buena Vista, President Polk sent American envoy Nicholas Trist’s peace treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to the Senate for ratification. The treaty, 


ironically, had been illegally negotiated, as Polk had recalled Trist and removed from him the power to negotiate a treaty as a result of poor communication and Trist's refusals to follow Polk's instructions while in Mexico. Further, while Polk never believed that the United States should acquire All Mexico, he had started to believe that the failure of the Mexicans to treat should lead to greater territorial concessions. Despite the illegal negotiation, Polk decided to send the treaty to Congress since it secured the original war aims of the administration. With the treaty, Mexico accepted the Rio Grande as the western boundary of Texas and ceded New Mexico and California to the United States. In exchange, the United States agreed to pay Mexico $15 million along with the assumption of the claims of American citizens amounting to over $3 million. By March 10, Congress had ratified the treaty, and the United States now had to await news of whether the Mexicans would also ratify the treaty. The two countries were not officially at peace, but they had made substantial progress.

When President Polk delivered his address to Congress following ratification of the treaty, he stressed that from beginning to end his administration pursued an honorable course. Polk began his address by emphasizing the glorious example that Americans set for future generations. Americans fought a “war in which our country was reluctantly involved, in the necessary vindication of the national rights and honor has been thus terminated; and I congratulate Congress, and our common constituents, upon the restoration of an honorable peace.” Although the acquisition of western lands fulfilled the ideals of manifest destiny, these territories also served as a severe punitive measure for Mexico rising up against the United

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86 Schroeder, *Mr. Polk’s War*, 156.
States. Polk concluded that the “extensive and valuable territories ceded by Mexico to the United States constitute indemnity for the past, and the brilliant achievements and signal successes of our arms will be a guarantee of security for the future, by convincing all nations that our rights must be respected.” In the eyes of the world, Polk believed, the United States stood as an honorable country.

While one war seemed to be coming to a close, another appeared on the horizon. February 23, 1848, was significant not only because the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo arrived in Congress, but also because John Quincy Adams died earlier that same day, just two days following a massive stroke suffered while working at his desk in the capital building. The next day President Polk declared the capitol officially in mourning. The political battles of the Mexican War had left some deep wounds which could be seen in the way that even Adams’ death became intertwined with sectional politics. Upon hearing of Adams’ death, the citizens of Richmond, Virginia, asked a former member of the state legislature, A. Judson Crane, to speak about the legacy of the sixth president. Crane fondly remembered the close relationship of Massachusetts and Virginia during the Revolution, pleading that “the bonds of that holy marriage solemnized by contract in 1776 in the face of the world, the prolific fruits of which are seen in seventeen new states of American freemen, let it, oh let it never be sundered!” Crane then went on to address the idea that Adams had become increasingly critical of slavery in his later years, mentioning that “Mr. Adams has been by some supposed to be hostile to the interests of the South. I need not tell you, among whom I was born, that I consider this, if true, a grievous blemish upon the otherwise symmetrical character of a distinguished statesman.”

87 Niles National Register, July 19, 1848.
concluded that hostility to the interests of any portion of the country was “inconsistent with enlightened statesmanship or genuine patriotism.”

Congress paid for every state to send one person to follow Adams’ body back to Massachusetts, and Henry Hilliard was the Whig representative selected for Alabama. At a dinner in memory of Adams, in his home town of Quincy, Hilliard took time to attack the Wilmot Proviso and abolitionism, stating that Alabamians demanded “ample protection for all their property and all their rights.” Adams was not an abolitionist, but he did creep closer to the anti-slavery cause towards the end of his life. Despite Adams’ many great achievements, some southerners could only think of his support for the Wilmot proviso; for them, such support forever tarnished his legacy. The fact that southerners defended slavery in speeches honoring Adams’ life, perhaps more than anything, shows the deep wounds which Wilmot’s Proviso had inflicted upon the nation.

By 1848, Hilliard and other southern opponents of the war had failed to achieve their goals. This was not from lack of trying, as Calhoun and his followers developed the defensive line strategy, the Whigs devised the No Territory position, and Clay devised his own plan in the Lexington Address. These opponents had hoped to shorten the war, alter the Polk administration’s prosecution of the war, or avoid western territorial acquisition. Southerners failure in all these areas stemmed from their unwillingness to work with northern abolitionists who opposed the war but also supported the Wilmot Proviso. Therefore, southerners based their opposition mostly on a defense of slavery and honor, not by animosity to Polk and the

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88 The Southern Literary Messenger, April 1848, 299.
Democratic Party which is oftentimes argued by historians. This meant that even during the war southerners started to at least consider abandoning the major political parties and unifying the South instead behind a defense of slavery and honor, even if it threatened the Union itself. Thus, while the South was never “united as one man” during the war, it was a little closer to being unified in 1848 than it was in 1846. These cries for unification increased in the two years following the war, as the country still struggled to find a solution to the territory acquired from the war.

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91 This is the main argument in Schroeder, *Mr. Polk’s War*, xxi. See also Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, xiii-xix.
Chapter 5:

“Kill off the Southern Convention, hang a few Northern Abolitionists, and put a few Southern mad-caps in a straight-jacket”:
Compromise, Conventions, and Southern Honor

In the fall of 1850, the Pauldine Clarion, a Mississippi newspaper ran an editorial which asked: “Southern Rights and Southern Honor – Shall They Be Maintained?” – a question which was on the lips of almost every southerner since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo two years earlier. When the editorial appeared, Congress had just passed a series of laws – commonly referred to as the Compromise of 1850 – designed to bring closure to the territorial questions raised by the acquisition of new lands following the Mexican War. In response, the writer of this article stated that these laws promised nothing but oppression and dishonor for the South. “It is impossible that she [the South] should submit to it, without falsifying her most solemn declarations, and sinking her honor beneath the Crown of dominant power,” the newspaper stated. Southerners, the editorial claimed, must rely upon themselves if they wanted their rights and honor maintained, as northerners consistently proved that they would attack slavery whenever they had the opportunity. The newspaper called “upon all Southern Patriots to unite in vindication of these Rights, and in resistance to the measures by which we...[were] deprived of them.” Southern unity was absolutely essential if southern rights, honor, and slavery were to survive and thrive into the future. The editors beseeched readers to “let no dissenting voice be heard from the craven spirit of submission, but let all be Union! Glorious union for our rights!”

1 Fayetteville Observer, May 14, 1850.

2 The Mississippian, October 4, 1850.
This chapter analyzes southern attempts to find a solution to the problem of the western territories which would preserve honor and slavery in the postwar period. Historians generally view this period as the beginning of the road to the Civil War, as the idea of secession became more pervasive in the South during these years. I suggest, however, that southern views on slavery and honor are more easily understood if this period is examined within the context of the Mexican War. It was, after all, American victory in the Mexican War which led to new territories being added to the Union. Additionally, southerners’ inability to kill the Wilmot Proviso meant that this insulting legislation continued to loom ominously over all the debates about the organization of the territories. Finally, it was a southern Mexican War hero, Zachary Taylor, who as president seemed to pose the greatest danger to southern honor and slavery, helping divide southerners into hostile factions known at the time as “submissionists” and “disunionists,” but better known to historians as “unionists” and “sectionalists.” These years proved that southern war opponents were right; the annexation Texas, the Mexican War, and the acquisition of western...


See also William J. Cooper, *The South and the Politics of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978). Cooper was ahead of his time in his views on honor, as he argued that southerners stated that honor was a key reason for their actions from 1848 to 1850. He mentioned in passing that honor was a key reason why southerners embraced the compromise. However, he only briefly mentioned honor and he did not fully develop how honor connected to the politics of slavery.

See also James L. Huston, “Southerners Against Secession: The Arguments of the Constitutional Unionists in 1850-1851, *Civil War History* 46, no. 4 (2000): 281-298. Huston argued that most historians credit success of the Compromise of 1850 to the fact that “party ties continued to be strong, Southern nationalism was insufficiently developed to sustain secession, a soothing prosperity in the form of high cotton prices covered the land, and, finally, the Compromise settlement did not seem to injure Southern honor or interests. For most historians, the key issue, and therefore the focus of their attentions, was the debate over secession, not the arguments for union, and the general conclusion has been that in 1850-51 the cotton South rejected secession as a cure for alleged Northern infringements on Southern constitutional rights.” Huston found, however, that the unionists ideas were in fact more important to avoiding secession in 1850 than the secessionists arguments. I find Huston’s method to be useful in understanding these debates, although my study is interested in finding continuity and change from the Mexican War, rather than with the Civil War, as Huston’s study examined.
territories increased northern abolitionists’ attacks upon southern slavery and honor. It was because of the Mexican War that all southerners had to contemplate whether their rights and honor would survive.⁴

It cannot simply be said that southerners who opposed the Mexican War became unionists and those that supported the war became sectionalists in the postwar period, as every southerner had to reconsider the best way to ensure honor and slavery in the future. Indeed, prominent opponents of the Mexican War like John C. Calhoun, John Berrien, and Thomas Clingman joined forces as sectionalists with soldiers like John Quitman and Jefferson Davis. Sectionalists eventually held two conventions in Nashville which proposed that southerners unite in defense of their territorial rights and their honor, taking any steps necessary, even to the point of secession, to ensure these goals. Most southerners, however, eventually embraced the Compromise of 1850 as a permanent settlement to the territorial difficulties caused by the Mexican War. What is significant, however, was that southern support for the Union was conditional, as northerners needed to faithfully adhere to the compromise in order to preserve southern allegiance. Even southern unionists believed that any action by the North which southerners deemed as a threat to


slavery and honor would require decisive southern action, possibly even secession. These debates demonstrate, I argue, that even though southerners were divided over the best means for ensuring southern equality in the territories wrested from Mexico, they remained firmly committed to preserving slavery and honor at all costs.5

In order to fully understand the postwar sectional differences, it is important to discuss Zachary Taylor’s ideas on slavery and the Wilmot Proviso in some detail. Taylor was at the very center of the Mexican War for its entire duration, as well as the disputes which followed the war. General Taylor had openly criticized American hostilities with Mexico from the beginning, believing the country's first mistake was with the annexation of Texas. “I was opposed to the annexation of Texas,” Taylor informed Senator Jefferson Davis, “believing as I did the manner it was done” was contrary to the Constitution. While Taylor first voiced concern over sending troops into disputed territory, once the war began he largely bemoaned the heavy cost of blood which Americans expended fighting the war. Fighting the battles of Monterey and Buena Vista – as well as watching many soldiers die from disease – Taylor believed that the war needed to be speedily concluded “if for no other reason than the effect it would have of saving the lives of so

5 The most thorough examination of the Nashville Conventions is Thelma Jennings, *The Nashville Convention: Southern Movement for Unity, 1848-1851* (Memphis: University of Memphis Press, 1980). Jennings argued that the Nashville Convention was important because it helped push the country towards the Compromise of 1850. She also shows that southerners failed in their primary goal of political unity.

For a bibliographical discussion of the 1850 crisis, see Jennings, *The Nashville Convention*, 293-300. See also Avery Craven, *The Coming of the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942); Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1947); and Holman Hamilton, *Prologue to Conflict: The Crisis and Compromise of 1850* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1964). Craven argued that the Nashville Convention was destined to fail since most southerners attached little significance to the Convention. Nevins argued that the Nashville Convention was extremist, as only the old and new followers of Calhoun, all of whom were nullifiers, supported the Nashville Convention. Hamilton argued that Zachary Taylor’s death made the Nashville Convention less threatening since southerners no longer had to fear the Wilmot Proviso being enacted as a policy for the territories.
many of our young gallant respectable” volunteers, who daily fell victim to disease. Taylor certainly did not believe that Mexicans were innocent victims, as he thought that the Mexican government had dishonestly taken loans from American citizens for decades with no intention of paying them back. With the expenditure of so much American blood, Taylor believed that some Mexican territory should be taken as indemnity, but only so much as to cover the costs which the Mexicans had taken from American citizens.

It is also clear that Taylor had actively begun following the political debates back in the United States. This was a substantial change since Taylor had never been very interested in politics; he had never voted in a presidential election, nor was he much in the habit of reading political debates for leisure. Yet Taylor was informed enough to tell Davis that the Wilmot Proviso was “a mere bugbare,” which amounted to nothing since nature essentially prevented slavery from existing in Mexican lands. This did not mean, though, that Taylor thought southerners should not defend slavery. “So far as Slavery is concerned,” Taylor explained to Davis, “we of the south must throw ourselves on the constitution & defend our rights.” He further explained that “when arguments will not longer suffice, we will appeal to the sword, if necessary to do so, I will be the last to yield one inch.” Taylor expressed willingness to use violence to defend slavery, but he could not bring himself to call for destruction of the Union, as he stated that he would not “give up the constitution or abandon it because [of] a rent.” Instead, he pledged to “repair it, & nurse it, as long as it will hang together [sic].”

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7 Bauer, The Mexican War, 359-361.


9 Ibid.
Yet only three weeks later Taylor expressed his support for disunionism if northern
extremists continued to threaten slavery. In a letter to Davis, Taylor wrote that he “would on the
question of Slavery respect the opinions & feeling of the non Slave holding States on that subject
& be careful not to don any act which would interfere with legal rights as regards the same.” He
also stated, however, that no encroachment should be “made on the rights of the citizens of the
slave holding.” Southerners, he claimed, must be ready to combat the northern threat and “the
moment they go beyond that point where resistance becomes right & proper, let the South act
promptly, boldly & decisively with arms in their hands if necessary, as the union in that case will
be blown to atoms.”

By the end of 1847 Taylor believed that abolitionists posed a great threat
to both slavery and the Union, yet he also believed that the Wilmot Proviso was not as dangerous
as many southerners thought. On September 18, Taylor wrote that he thought the Wilmot
Proviso was a “trifling affair”; nonetheless, he thought the country was “perhaps about to have a
terrible [sic] storm,” as a result “of the abolition question, the most important one in my humble
opinion which has ever agitated the country.”

Taylor, like every southerner during the war, constantly thought about how slavery and honor could best be preserved in the future. His
wavering indicated that the war and the Wilmot Proviso posed difficult challenges for
southerners trying to secure slavery and honor.

Except for the fortunate few like Davis, most Americans only knew that Taylor was a
great military hero. Military success was the reason that many people started to view Taylor as a
potential presidential candidate in 1848. Since Taylor was a large slaveholder from Louisiana,
southern political leaders from both parties were naturally curious whether he would be willing

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10 Taylor to Davis, August 16, 1847, The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 3, eds. McIntosh et al., 210-11.

11 Taylor to Davis, September 18, 1847, The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 3, eds. McIntosh et al., 222.
to make a run for the White House. While nobody actually knew where Taylor's loyalties lay, even Davis, most suspected that he leaned towards the Whigs. As early as May 1847, Jefferson Davis received a letter from his brother Joseph in which he stated that he had “been anxious to know something of Genl. Taylor,” specifically whether he was “free from ultraFederal priniples [sic]” and whether he would agree to be “president of the nation not of a party.”\(^\text{12}\) This might seem like whimsical thinking considering even George Washington could not stand above party politics during his administration, but Davis' letter demonstrates that southerners, and really people throughout the nation, had high hopes for a possible Taylor administration.\(^\text{13}\)

At the start of 1848, however, Americans’ primary concern was not the election, but rather concluding the Mexican war which was still not officially at an end. Even after the United States ratified the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Mexican War remained a topic of debate. Americans expressed concern that the Mexicans might reject the treaty and resume hostilities. In March, Polk asked for the formation of ten additional regiments to be sent to Mexico in case this happened.\(^\text{14}\) Calhoun accepted the territorial indemnity which the treaty secured, but by this point he was not in favor of sending additional men to fight in Mexico. He continued to argue that the war commenced because Polk ordered the Army into an area in which the United States


\(^\text{13}\) Gregory S. Hospodor, “Honor Bound: Southern Honor and the Mexican War,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 2000), 243. Hospodor maintained that southern honor helped Taylor achieve a status similar to that of George Washington in the hearts and minds of many southerners. Hospodor argued that like Washington, Taylor tried to stand above party. However, Taylor ended up being brought into factional disputes, much like Washington.

\(^\text{14}\) For a discussion of American military occupation after the fall of Mexico City, see James M. McCaffrey, \textit{Army of Manifest Destiny: The American Soldier in the Mexican War, 1846-1848} (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 197. McCaffrey demonstrated that American soldiers discovered rather quickly that the Mexicans would not continue formal hostilities, but the politicians in Washington were not as well informed on the military situation in Mexico.
held no constitutional authority. On March 17, Calhoun stated that Polk had “no right to order it [the army] into disputed territory.” Early in the war, patriotism required Calhoun to support the troops in the field, and the future of honor and slavery in the West required him to defend southern access to the western territories, but by 1848 he demonstrated that he could no longer support a war which emerged from such dubious circumstances.\textsuperscript{15}

Jefferson Davis was indignant when he heard this reasoning. “What!” he replied. “Shall a foreign Power dispute our territorial limits – refuse to settle the boundary by negotiation – seize, by force, territory rightfully ours, and our Executive stand powerless by and see the enemy gain the advantage of occupying all the commanding positions of the country.” Davis clearly did not consider the territory between the Nueces and Rio Grande as disputed and added that Polk “did what every man of patriotic impulses will say he should have done – afford to Texas that protection which a State had the right to demand; and in ordering the army to the Rio Grande, he did no more than might have been done in the case of the northeastern boundary, when that was an open question.”\textsuperscript{16}

Davis then tried to convince Calhoun that it was important to continue to support the prosecution of the war. Davis believed that “if [the Mexicans] have their hopes revived again with the prospect of a refusal here to supply men and money to prosecute the war, they will again reject negotiations in the expectation that a new administration may come into power in the United States more favorable to them.” Practically, the refusal of distinguished men like Calhoun would increase Mexican confidence that the Americans were tired of the war and might


\textsuperscript{16} Jefferson Davis speech to the Senate, March 17, 1848, \textit{The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 3}, eds. McIntosh et al., 280-1.
settle for a peace which included no territory. Davis then stressed that the Mexicans were an inferior nation who had continually taken advantage of American kindness towards them. Mexicans had committed depredations for years, and the refusal of the American people to chastise them had led them to think they could insult the United States without suffering any consequences. “In our intercourse with Mexico,” Davis stressed, the Polk administration did nothing wrong by using military force. Instead, “if we have erred, it has been in undue consideration and misplaced leniency. For a long term of years we have borne national insult, and left unredressed the personal outrages and pecuniary injuries done to our citizens by Mexico.” This language was very similar to that used by southern senators and representatives in May 1846. Much like then, Davis tried to appeal to Calhoun’s honor to gain his support for southern rights going forward.

All these southerners—despite their differences over the continuation of the war—still held the defense of slavery and honor as their ultimate goal. Around the same time that Calhoun and Davis verbally sparred with each other over the war, they expressed very similar views on a number of issues involving slavery and abolitionism. For example, on April 15, 1848, the abolitionist sloop Pearl left Washington D.C. with fugitive slaves on board, attempting to hide and transport the slaves to a northern port and freedom. The navy seized the ship two days later in Maryland and the fugitive slaves were jailed, awaiting their return back to their masters.


18 Hospodor, “Honor Bound,” 22-64. Contrary to Hospodor’s argument, Davis’ appeal to honor did not force Calhoun to agree with Davis.

Much like in the previous chapters, the language of honor is crucial to understanding the debates following the war. For a description of the language of honor, see Kenneth S. Greenberg, Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Death, Humanitarianism, Slave Rebellions, The Pro-Slavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996), xiii, 145.
the days following this incident, those who viewed abolitionists as agitators determined to wreck the tranquility of the Union threatened several abolitionist presses with destruction.\textsuperscript{19} John P. Hale of New Hampshire brought this issue to the attention of the Senate, proposing a bill to indemnify property owners for damages caused by “any riotous or tumultuous assemblage.” Southerners expressed outrage at such an idea. Davis responded by asking the Senate, “Why is it…that we find the subject of this contest so insulting to the South – so irritating always when it is agitated – introduced on such an occasion? Is this debatable ground? No! It is ground upon which the people of this Union may shed blood, and that is the final result.” In case Hale and the other northerners missed the point, Davis stressed that if abolitionists “pressed any further,” then sectional violence might erupt. He stressed that southerners were not “here to be insulted on account of institutions” which they inherited, and if this was the event destined to bring about civil discord, then Davis yelled “let the conflict begin.”\textsuperscript{20} Davis’ outbursts following the \textit{Pearl} incident made his exchange with the Tennesseans following Monterey appear mild.

After Davis, John C. Calhoun briefly took the floor, but he was surprisingly subdued on this occasion. While Calhoun reportedly felt fatigued from fighting the battles of the South for so long, he was more likely feeling the effects of tuberculosis on this day.\textsuperscript{21} Therefore, he suggested to the other Mississippi Senator, Henry S. Foote, that perhaps and younger southerner could carry the burden on this occasion. Foote was more than willing to oblige, informing Hale specifically “that were he to visit any thickly-settled vicinage in Mississippi, and there use such language as that which he just uttered,” he risked “being strung up on one of the loftiest trees of


\textsuperscript{20} Davis speech to the Senate, April 18, 1848, in \textit{The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 3}, eds. McIntosh et al., 314-315.

the forest.” To add urgency to the threat, Foote concluded that “should there be any want of willing executioner,” he would himself “turn hangman.”22 Foote believed that Hale and other abolitionists were trying to incite insurrection amongst the slaves. People like Foote stood ready to defend the tranquility of the South against outside agitators.

At this point, Davis again took the floor to clarify his opinion upon the question. While he did not mention disapproval of the kind of violence Foote promised, Davis did clear up the nature of slavery in the South. Davis barked that he did “not wish to be considered as participating in the feeling to which the Senator alludes.” Instead, Davis maintained that he had “no fear of insurrection; no more dread of our slaves than…of our cattle.” He concluded that southern slaves were “happy and contented,” and slavery was "a paternal institution.”23 Foote readily agreed, saying he must have misspoken when he expressed fear of the enslaved population of Mississippi.24

It was in this highly charged context – as southerners argued amongst themselves and threatened to kill northern politicians – that two prominent southerners declared their candidacy for the presidency. On April 10, Henry Clay released a letter to the public in which he stated that, although he had no desire to run, he felt it his duty to do so for the sake of the Whig ticket in the free states. By defining the contest in this way, Clay essentially forfeited the vote of the


23 Davis speech to the Senate, April 18, 1848, in The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 3, eds. McIntosh et al., 314-315.

24 See Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, 107-8. The turning point in southern thought on slavery came in the aftermath of the Nat Turner rebellion in Virginia in 1831. Within a year following this event, Thomas Roderick Dew published an essay entitled Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831-1832. In this essay, Dew rejected that slavery was a necessary evil and slaves should be colonized back in Africa, instead arguing that slavery was a positive good for both masters and slaves.
South. The Taylor camp immediately realized – along with his Lexington Platform the previous November – that Clay had provided a golden opportunity to ensure southern Whig support for the general. Thus, while Taylor attended to business at his Baton Rouge plantation, his managers convinced him to sign a letter to his brother-in-law, Captain John S. Allison, in which Taylor declared himself “a Whig but not an ultra Whig.” The letter also promised that Taylor would have a deferential attitude toward Congress and not abuse the veto power, which pleased Whigs everywhere but especially in the South.

While it certainly seemed that Taylor had reason to be optimistic in the spring of 1848, over the course of the year he grew more pessimistic about the election. He communicated to Jefferson Davis in April 1848 that the Wilmot Proviso was “a matter of more importance than you at one time imagined,” and he “was not far wrong in believing it would be best for our whole country in settling the terms of a treaty with Mexico…[to have not] taken any territory South of the Missouri compromise line.” It seems that Taylor was mistaken on this occasion, as it was he who at one point considered the Wilmot Proviso to be of little significance, but it is not clear when or if Davis ever considered the Proviso trifling. Nonetheless, Taylor now believed the Proviso was more important than he once assumed, as he told Davis that “the Wilmot proviso or the extension of Slavery will in all probability be the test question at both conventions Whigs &Democrats, as well as throughout the country at the coming election, in which case as I have before stated, someone from the free States Whig or Democrat [must] be elected.” If northerners gained control of the White House, Taylor predicted it would become “disreputable even to


26 Ibid.

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reside in a slave holding state.” 27 A great southern warrior believed that the election promised ruin for the South, so long as a northerner or a southerner with northern sympathies, like Clay, claimed the White House.

In contrast to what Taylor believed, the national conventions actually attempted to avoid the Wilmot Proviso and the question of slavery in the territories as much as possible. The Democratic Convention met on May 22, 1848, in Baltimore. On the fourth ballot, the delegates selected Michigan Senator Lewis Cass as the presidential candidate and Mexican War General William O. Butler of Kentucky as the vice-presidential candidate. More important than the candidates, however, was the construction of the party platform. In February, William L. Yancey had helped develop the Alabama Platform – which called for full protection of slavery in the territories – to guide the delegates of his state while in Baltimore. Calhoun also came and presented a southern resolution embodying his doctrine on the equal rights of slaveholders in the territories. These men's ideas, however, had no bearing on the final platform, and most southerners were disappointed in it. 28 As expected, the platform plainly stated that the Mexican War was a just war. It read, in part: “That the war with Mexico, provoked on her part by years of insult and injury, was commenced by her army crossing the Rio Grande, attacking the American troops, and invading our sister State of Texas.” Cass was a known proponent of the idea of “popular sovereignty” to fix the problem of slavery in the West. The party platform, however, did not mention the idea of popular sovereignty, meaning that a Cass administration would not be


tied to any one approach for solving western difficulties. The platform firmly denounced the abolitionists, however, stating “that all efforts of the Abolitionists or others made to induce Congress to interfere with questions of slavery, or to take incipient steps in relation thereto, are calculated to lead to the most alarming and dangerous consequences; and that all such efforts have an inevitable tendency to diminish the happiness of the people, and endanger the stability and permanence of the Union, and ought not to be countenanced by any friend to our political institutions.” Thus, the Democratic Convention selected a northerner to headline the ticket and a platform which offered no assurances of slavery in the territories.

The Whig Convention met on June 7 in Philadelphia and everyone knew that the ticket would have a southerner – either Clay or Taylor – as the presidential candidate. On the first ballot, 279 delegates from thirty states cast 111 votes for Taylor, 97 for Clay, 43 for Winfield Scott, 22 for Daniel Webster, and 6 for two others. By the fourth ballot all of Clay’s New England delegates pledged themselves to General Taylor, and he won the nomination. The Whigs were perhaps even more divided than the Democrats since extreme abolitionists and great planters both pledged their allegiance to the party. As a result, the convention adopted no platform, thus entirely ignoring the sectional division of slavery in the territories. New Yorker Horace Greeley thought that the result of the convention showed that the nomination had been made by “gunpowder popularity.” The party which Clay established to battle a man who

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29 For an overview of Cass' views on the territorial question, see Frank B. Woodford, Lewis Cass: The Last Jeffersonian (New Brunswick:,1950), 251-71. Popular sovereignty was the idea that the local inhabitants of a territory should hold the right to decide whether slavery should be allowed or not.


31 Peterson, The Great Triumvirate , 440.

32 Ibid., 441.
gained popularity by killing Indians – Andrew Jackson – had now nominated a man who gained popularity by killing Mexicans. Much like with his battles with Jackson, Clay lost in his battle with Taylor. As in 1840, Whigs hoped a military leader could bring their party political power and would have to trust that Taylor would abide by Whig principles.

Taylor was right about the election focusing extensively on the Wilmot Proviso and the expansion of slavery into the territories. What Calhoun and most every southerner desperately wanted was for one of the two candidates to unequivocally denounce the Wilmot Proviso. Members of both political parties expressed a willingness to abandon their party allegiance if the candidate of the other party opposed the Proviso. For example, after reading a speech in which fellow Alabamian and U.S. Representative Henry Hilliard pledged to stand by Taylor at all costs, planter and former Alabama Whig congressman James Dellet stated that he could not pledge himself “to vote for Gen. Taylor 'right or wrong.' If I should, and he should be elected, it would be no consolation to me to know that it was in part by my influence, if it should turn out that he had deliberately endorsed the Wilmot Proviso in the signal letter, or should refuse to veto a bill extending the Ordinance of 1787 over any new territory which we may acquire beyond the Rio Grande.”

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35 Joseph G. Rayback, Free Soil: The Election of 1848 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1970), 1-326. Rayback noted that both major parties focused extensively on trying to find a moderate plan for the issue of slavery in the western territories. This meant that both parties focused extensively upon slavery, even as they wished to avoid the issue.

36 Tri-Weekly Flag and Advertiser, July 30, 1847.
It was perhaps Jefferson Davis, however, who showed the greatest anguish over the upcoming election. Since Taylor was his former father-in-law, it might seem natural for Davis to support the Whig ticket in the upcoming election. However, Davis was one of the most partisan men in the country and the Democratic Party had long claimed his allegiance. Starting in September, therefore, Davis began to deliver a series of speeches in Mississippi in support of the Democratic ticket. In these speeches, Davis' pain over the present political situation was evident. In the town of Raymond on September 22, 1848 one observer noted that Davis admitted in a speech that “the Northern Democrats were no longer worthy of being called 'allies of the South' and that he should never again speak of them as such.” This observer recalled that although Davis endorsed the Democratic ticket, he believed that “the South must rely upon herself in the great struggle which must soon come upon the slavery question, and that the Presidential canvas should be conducted with such forbearance as to prepare the way for the amalgamation of parties which the coming crisis would render necessary.” Davis inched closer to thinking in terms of section instead or party.

The next day, Davis delivered another speech in Jackson in which he argued that slavery in the territories, southern honor, and the Union were all directly connected. He argued that the failure to protect all meant that all would perish. “All who loved the Union more than sectional advantage must see,” Davis told the people in Jackson, “that to preserve the confederacy, the slaveholding States must be multiplied, increasing pari passu with the other States, unless they indulge the vain expectation that the South will surrender her claim to equality and sovereignty, and permit her institutions to be dictated by her pride-swollen neighbors.” Davis anticipated that

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many of the listeners would question why he supported a northerner for the presidency. No matter how much he respected General Taylor, Davis maintained that he could never support a Whig for the White House. Meanwhile, while the friends of the South were rapidly disappearing in the North, Cass was a legitimate supporter of southern rights, and thus needed to be supported. The stakes were high, Davis admitted, but he believed that the next person to occupy the White House would not be the solution to the problem. Rather, southerners themselves needed to clearly show northerners that they would not allow their rights to be trampled upon. While the decision was difficult, the question actually was not, as “the question at issue was whether the territory of the United States should be open to the settlement of all citizens with their property, or whether we of the South should be excluded from taking our slaves into such territory.” Davis stated that this question allowed no “compromise,” and if southerners failed then they would be “marked as unfit for the equality in the Union which they inherited from their sires of the revolution.” While Davis did not advocate specific action, he clearly mentioned that southerners needed to firmly support their rights in word and deed. The sooner that the South’s “enemies” understood this fact, “the greater the hope of peaceful and honorable adjustment of this question, dangerous to the Union, and vital to the honor, to the prosperity, to the existence of the slaveholding States,” Davis concluded.39

Despite the best efforts of southern democratic stalwarts like Davis, on November 7, 1848, the American people elected Taylor president. Taylor carried the important states of New York and Pennsylvania, along with Florida, Louisiana, Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Kentucky to easily win with 163 electoral votes. Importantly, though, Cass took six southern

states: Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, South Carolina, and Virginia.\textsuperscript{40} New York, much like in 1844, was the key state in the election. In this election, Martin Van Buren’s Free Soil ticket split the democratic vote in the state, thus allowing Taylor to win the state. If New York had voted for Cass, then he would have won the election. What the election showed was that despite southerners realizing that the future of slavery in the territories could very well be in jeopardy – and all southerners voiced a desire to preserve southern honor and rights at all costs – southerners still, much like during the Mexican War, could not agree on the best path forward. Southern Whigs expressed elation, of course, and at least southern Democrats could take solace in the fact that a fellow southerner once again was in the White House.\textsuperscript{41}

Taylor’s election, however, did not solve the problem of the territories, and his silence on the Wilmot Proviso continued to alarm many southerners. As a result, the month following Taylor’s election, Calhoun stopped in Columbia to urge the South Carolina legislature to make an attempt to unify the South. The legislature agreed with Calhoun, deciding that the state needed to act in conjunction with other southern states to ensure the future of slavery and honor. In the following weeks, the legislatures in Alabama, Virginia, Florida, and Missouri agreed that some sort of unified action was required on the part of southerners.\textsuperscript{42}

These calls from the various legislatures for unified southern action led to a bipartisan meeting of southern congressmen in Washington D.C. on December 23, 1848. The delegates who attended this meeting determined that more time was needed to fully contemplate the

\textsuperscript{40} See Hospodor, “Honor Bound,” 240-260. Hospodor argued that Taylor was the most honored man in the South and his popularity even rivaled George Washington’s. Hospodor claimed that Taylor received low southern support in the election because party politics were so strong.

\textsuperscript{41} Hamilton, \textit{Prologue to Conflict}, 10.

\textsuperscript{42} Peterson, \textit{The Great Triumvirate}, 447.
troubles facing the South, and they agreed to a proposition by Georgia Whig Alexander Stephens to meet again on January 15 to discuss their common grievances as southerners in more detail.\textsuperscript{43} In the meantime, though, the representatives decided that a statement of southern rights needed to be prepared for discussion at the next meeting. Many southerners did not want their politicians taking any drastic actions before anyone had a chance to see what Taylor’s policies on the territories would be. The \textit{Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette} hoped that moderates and “prudent counsels…. [would] prevail at the South.” While a moderate response was desired, the editors expressed satisfaction that southerners “firmly” united “in resisting to the utmost extent the encroachments of the federal government upon the constitutional rights of the slaveholding states, and in asserting the justice of their claim to an equal participation in the benefits resulting from the territory acquired.” In support of southern rights, the newspaper stated there was “no difference of opinion between Southern Whigs and Southern Democrats.”\textsuperscript{44} This meeting demonstrated a willingness among southerners to cross party lines in order to secure their rights to the territories.\textsuperscript{45}

The task of drafting this statement of southern rights went to Calhoun. The meeting on January 15 was smaller than the one in December, as most Whigs eventually decided against taking any action which might injure the Taylor administration in the future. Thus, of the forty-eight southern representatives that signed the address, only one was a Whig. The southerners who attended this meeting decided to publish and distribute the \textit{Address of the Southern Delegates in Congress to their Constituents} in all the southern states. The \textit{Address} argued that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{44}\textit{Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette}, January 6, 1849.
\item \textsuperscript{45}Peterson, \textit{The Great Triumvirate}, 447.
\end{itemize}
southerners did not call for the extension of slavery, but insisted that southerners should not “be prohibited from immigrating, with our property, into the Territories of the United States.” From the perspective of southerners, if Congress prohibited slavery in the territories, “nothing would be left but to finish the work of abolition at pleasure in the States themselves.” Southern opponents had made the same argument during the Mexican War and these congressmen dusted it off to protect southern rights after the war. The Address stipulated that in order to avoid this fate, then southerners needed “to be united, and for that purpose adopt all necessary measures.”

In order to stimulate unity and ensure quick communication and action at the first sight of danger in the South, the delegates called for every southern state to establish committees of safety and vigilance. The South needed to unite so northerners could see the consequences of their conduct and hopefully alter their views upon slavery in the territories.

The Address appeared in newspapers throughout the South before Taylor even took the oath of office, which meant that southerners like Calhoun believed that their section might need to react quickly to the new administration’s policies. Many southerners had hoped that Taylor would embrace Polk’s call, made in his final message to Congress, for the extension of the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific. Taylor, however, had no such plan. Instead, he believed that California and New Mexico should be admitted to the Union as soon as both territories established a republican style of government and drafted a state constitution. With the discovery of gold in California, Taylor dispatched Georgian Thomas B. King to expedite the

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process of admitting California as a state. Taylor expected California and New Mexico to draft constitutions barring slavery, and seemed willing to accept both as free states. Anticipating southern outrage over such a policy, Taylor stated in his message to Congress in December 1849 that Congress “should abstain from the introduction of those exciting topics of a sectional character which have hitherto produced painful apprehensions in the public mind.” Southerners began to refer to this as the Executive Proviso, since Taylor’s plan proposed the admission of new free states without any guarantees or compensations to the South. While not specifically denying southerners the right to immigrate to the territories, Taylor’s plan was actually the Wilmot Proviso by another name.

The most significant reaction to the Executive Proviso occurred in Mississippi. On October 1, 1849, Mississippians held a convention in Jackson to discuss the importance of southern rights for the people of the state. This was the first clear case of southerners attempting to secure their rights in the territories and unify the South. In total, sixty-nine people from thirty counties attended the Mississippi – or October – Convention, as it came to be called. Local communities chose the delegates to the convention to act in the interests of their friends and families back home. The delegates selected prominent Whig and Chief Justice of the Mississippi Supreme Court William L. Sharkey as President of the convention. It is important to note that Calhoun had been acting behind the scenes to try to get Mississippi to take some action on southern rights, as he knew that South Carolina’s history with nullification meant that another

48 Hamilton, Prologue to Conflict, 15-16.


50 For background of the Mississippi Convention, see Jennings, The Nashville Convention, 35-7.
state needed to lead the effort to bring about wider popular support and avoid the charge of extremism.  

Sharkey’s opening address clearly showed that the delegates planned to firmly support southern rights in the territories. Despite the fact that Sharkey was a Whig who had a reputation for moderation, he insisted that the South needed to resist all future encroachment upon their rights by any means – including violence – if necessary. Even Democrats supported Sharkey’s firm stance at the convention. The editors of the *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette* observed that his address “met with a response from every true Southern heart.” The paper added that Sharkey’s speech demonstrated that the Whigs in the South supported the interests of the South above the interests of their party. “In our sincere admiration of the bold and manly tone which characterizes the address of Judge Sharkey,” the editors glowed that Democrats ought to “forget much that has been done against our peculiar institutions by some of the leading spirits of the Whig party.” Judge Sharkey was first-and-foremost a Mississippian, not a Whig, and the citizens of the state needed to rally around his words.

During the course of the convention, the delegates selected a committee of twenty members to write a report, an “Address to the Southern States,” which demanded that the Taylor administration protect southern constitutional rights. The address insisted that Congress had no

51 Jennings, *The Nashville Convention*, 37. Jennings argued that all these debates essential were an attempt to bring about southern unity. She concluded that the Nashville Conventions were essential in pushing the nation towards an acceptance of Clay’s Compromise. She quoted much of the language of southern honor, yet she does not actually analyze the importance of honor for southerners.

52 *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette*, December 1, 1849.

53 Hospodor, “Honor Bound,” 29. Hospodor’s main argument was that honor helped rally southern manhood around the war effort. Throughout the Mexican War era, southerners appealed to other men’s manhood in an attempt to gain support for important political issues. These arguments did not unite southerners, but they were prevalent nonetheless.
authority to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, prohibit the internal slave trade, or to prevent slavery’s expansion into the territories.\textsuperscript{54} If any of these events happened, including the acceptance of the Wilmot Proviso in the new territories, the committee argued, the southern states had the right to take action to resist. The most significant result of the October Convention was that the delegates decided to make a call for all southerners to attend a new convention to meet in Nashville the following June. The purpose was to bring delegates of all the slaveholding states together to determine a course for united action. One northern paper warned readers that the words of these Mississippians needed to be taken seriously, as the members of the Convention clearly declared that they would “not submit to such ‘political degradation,’” and they “regard[ed] the non-slaveholding states as enemies.”\textsuperscript{55} Much like war hawks in 1846, proponents of the Nashville Convention wanted the South to formulate a specific plan to combat their enemies.

The Governor of Mississippi, John Quitman, firmly supported the convention. Quitman, of course, had served as a brigadier general throughout the war, gained glory leading the Tennessee and Mississippi volunteers at Monterey, and had served as the American military governor of Mexico City at the end of General Winfield Scott’s Mexico City campaign. Like Davis, Quitman rode his military glory to political office following the war.\textsuperscript{56} Quitman believed that the ideas expressed in the October Convention were unquestionably popular throughout the South, and he predicted that all the southern states would eventually support the violent defense of their rights. Indeed, in a speech in early January, Quitman told Mississippians that “southern

\textsuperscript{54} Jennings, \textit{The Nashville Convention}, 36.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{North American and United States Gazette}, October 16, 1849.

\textsuperscript{56} For background on Quitman’s postwar career, see Robert E. May, \textit{John A. Quitman: Old South Crusader} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 122-190; and Cooper, \textit{Jefferson Davis}, 154-220.
rights must be protected – if argument and remonstrance cannot, arms must do it.” For Quitman, the disputes between political parties no longer mattered, just like it did not matter whether a person had been in support of the Mexican War or not. Instead, the salient point had to do with northern efforts to prevent southerners from entering the newly-acquired territories with their property. “The crisis has come,” Quitman exclaimed, “and security or war must be the result!”\(^57\)

In light of Taylor’s territorial policies and the southern reaction, many Americans came to believe that the Union was in grave danger. Henry Clay viewed this as maybe his last opportunity to save his country from sectional strife, and by January he had begun to develop his own plan which he hoped would be mutually agreeable to the sections. On a rainy January evening in 1850, Clay visited Daniel Webster at his house, hoping that the two could work together to defeat Taylor’s terrible policies. Webster agreed to help in this holy endeavor. Both statesmen hoped to create a permanent sectional compromise to preserve the Union.\(^58\)

Clay first presented the Senate with a set of resolutions on January 29. In a short speech, Clay listed his eight resolutions. The first called for the admission of California as a free state. Second, he recommended that New Mexico and Utah be organized as territories without restriction to slavery. Third, the boundary between Texas and New Mexico needed to be adjusted, with Texas giving some of its claims to New Mexico. Fourth, the federal government would assume the pre-annexation Texas debt, to compensate Texans for abandoning their claims in New Mexico. Fifth, the federal government would not interfere with slavery in the District of Columbia. The sixth, however, called for the prohibition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia.

\(^{57}\) *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette* January 19, 1850. See also May, *John A. Quitman*, xv-485. May argued that Quitman’s main concern was slavery’s long-term future within the Union.

\(^{58}\) Peterson, *The Great Triumvirate*, 455.
Columbia. The seventh resolution called for a more effective and closely regulated fugitive slave law. The final resolution stated that Congress lacked the authority to interfere with the slave trade between the slaveholding states. Democrats Jefferson Davis and Whig John Berrien both declared that this plan provided no benefit or protection for the South.\(^5^9\) If California entered as a free state, then the plan essentially barred southerners from migrating to the Pacific coast with their property. Protection for slavery where it existed could not compensate for southerners losing their right to the territories.

A week later, on February 5 and 6, Clay again gained the floor to fully explain his resolutions. People filled the senate galleries in anticipation of the speech. Clay castigated both northern abolitionists, for insistence upon the Wilmot Proviso, and southern extremists, for their calls for disunion if their demands went unfulfilled. Clay agreed that southern rights ought to be preserved and he expressed his willingness to fight “with the sword” in defense of these rights. He told southerners, however, that their fight needed to be made “within the bounds and under the safeguards of the Union.”\(^6^0\) The Union must be preserved and both sections needed to make compromises. Clay demonstrated that this was no time to mince words; the people endangering the Union in both sections needed to be rebuked and their ideas cast to the wind.

After the Mississippi October Convention and Clay’s call for compromise in February, southerners found themselves tasked with the necessity of deciding which path they should take. Many southerners came out in support of the October Convention with “Southern Rights” meetings which took place in every southern state in the spring of 1850. Many of these meetings occurred in North Carolina. Even though North Carolina remained a Whig state, by 1850 even

\(^{59}\) Peterson, *The Great Triumvirate*, 456.

some of them had lost faith that Taylor would support southern rights in the territories. A meeting held in Wilmington on January 29—without distinction to party—passed a series of resolutions which promised that southerners stood ready to violently support their claims to the expansion of slavery in the territories. This meeting also made it clear that preservation of slavery was essential to preservation of southern honor. Attendees resolved that life was nothing without honor, stating that as “dear and essential” as was “life to the individual, no brave and virtuous man” would ever “consent to hold it at the sacrifice of honor and principle.” The attendees further declared that they would not “yield up principle and honor, even if the maintenance of them should involve the sacrifice of our political and individual existence, in the dissolution of the Union and the bloody consequences likely to flow there from.” The members of this meeting not only supported sending delegates from their districts to the Nashville Convention, but they also said they wanted “some peaceful and honorable result for the preservation of the Union; and if that may not be, in any event, to a perfect unanimity of action in the Southern States.” These North Carolinians, thus, proclaimed their willingness to sacrifice the Union if need be to preserve honor and slavery.

The Southern Rights meeting in Wilmington was far from unique. A meeting in Warren, North Carolina, resolved that southerners could not submit to the “dishonor” and “degradation” by acquiescing in any policy barring slavery from the territories. These citizens declared that abolitionists for decades had “perpetuate[d] wrongs,” and if they managed to bar slavery from the territories it would “dishonor and degrade the southern States, by depriving them of equal rights, and destroying that equality which is the basis of Union.” Attendees at a meeting in

61 Raleigh Register, February 6, 1850.
62 Raleigh Register, March 13, 1850.
Fayetteville, North Carolina, a few weeks later came to very similar conclusions. Like the people of Wilmington, the people of Fayetteville resolved that “honor and principle” stood above “any thing earthly; and even the ties of kindred and political association must be sacrificed if necessary for their preservation.” Unlike the meeting in Wilmington, however, the Fayetteville attendees stressed their belief that the Union increasingly supported abolitionism instead of the rights of southerners. For them, this explained why even a southerner like Taylor, when given national political power, had begun to oppress the South. “That the madness of fanaticism and the ambition of designing politicians,” the people of Fayetteville stated, were “combining to force upon us the question of whether the union shall be preserved by the southern States in dishonor and shame, or be given up to avoid them.”

Southern whites feared nothing more than dishonor and shame, the characteristics of slaves. The people of Fayetteville, thus, believed that if the abolitionists succeeded in depriving southern whites of access to the western territories, eventually they would be slaves within the Union. By 1850, southerners began to see the Union itself as threatening, instead of protecting, honor and slavery.

In the weeks that followed, even southerners who openly professed unflinching allegiance to the Union began to question whether honor and slavery could ever be secure in the United States, much less the territories. For example, an editorial in the Wilmington Commercial expressed pleasure that despite radical meetings like those held in Wilmington and Fayetteville, it seemed that most North Carolinians believed it was “honorable to the patriotism, and creditable to the intelligence, and worthy of the humanity of our people, that they look upon the severance of our bond of Union, with all its probable disastrous and bloody consequences with no composure of feeling.” In addition to their denunciation of the North Carolina “disunionists,”

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63 *The Weekly Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette*, February 20, 1850.
the editors proceeded to denounce abolitionism and Wilmot Provisoists just as vehemently as the radicals. “The South has remonstrated, urged, intreated [sic], and demanded, in vain,” the editorial stated. Despite southerners’ good-faith efforts to compromise, they “have been met with reckless causeless, insulting innovations and trespasses upon their rights, and will submit to them no longer.” The paper concluded that southerners desired “to live under the Federal Constitution, in its true and correct version, or else they will recede and form one for themselves, under which they can enjoy their rights and privileges.”

While they argued that the Union should be preserved, they held that southerners should not lose honor and slavery as the price for remaining in the Union. This editorial demonstrates that in 1850, southerners continued to hope that they could preserve the Union that their fathers passed down to them. Southerners, however, also wanted preservation of honor and slavery, which were the very foundation of southern life.

These Southern Rights meetings helped buoy John C. Calhoun’s spirits. Suffering from tuberculosis, it was clear to everyone who saw him that he was in his final days of life. He had stayed at home for the first six weeks of 1850, hoping to regain some strength. On February 18, Calhoun returned to the Senate and mustered the last of his strength to write a speech in defense of southern equality and rights in the territories and within the Union. On the fourth of March, a little after noon, Calhoun entered the Senate on the arm of fellow South Carolinian James Hamilton. Too weak to stand or talk, Calhoun directed Virginian James M. Mason to read the

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64 *Greenville Mountaineer*, March 8, 1850.

65 Hospodor, “Honor Bound,” 254, 262. Hospodor demonstrated that southerners cared deeply for preserving the honor and legacy of the Founding Fathers. He argued that southerners fought and acted with their ideological fathers looking over their shoulders.
prepared speech. In it, Calhoun argued that northern aggression had destroyed many of the religious, social, and economic ties which had historically bound the sections together, and even the equality in the Senate was in danger.\textsuperscript{66} Calhoun rejected both Taylor’s and Clay’s plans, instead calling vaguely for a constitutional amendment which would “restore to the South in substance the power she possessed of protecting herself, before the equilibrium between the sections was destroyed.”\textsuperscript{67} While Calhoun rejected both plans, he failed to provide the Senate with his own plan for consideration, and he never did. It is possible that Calhoun planned to endorse the extension of the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific Ocean, but he did not mention a specific plan at this time.\textsuperscript{68}

Three days later, on March 7, Daniel Webster – perhaps the greatest orator in American history, and certainly the greatest of the age – signaled his support for compromise. As he aged, Webster’s voice had lost some of the power it once possessed. The speech he made on March 7 was thus slow and laborious. He began by stating that he wished “to speak today, not as a Massachusetts man, nor as a northerner, but as an American.” Webster’s ideas were very much akin to Clay’s on this occasion, and he proceeded to attack “disunionism.” As a northerner, Webster was careful not to insult his colleagues from the other section. Thus, Webster criticized northerners, specifically abolitionists, much more viciously than southerners. On the topic of slavery, Webster argued that the institution was a historical reality, existing since antiquity, and not, as many northern abolitionists insisted, a moral question. During the present time, Webster claimed, abolitionists were also misguided because of their firm devotion to the

\textsuperscript{66} Peterson, \textit{The Great Triumvirate}, 460.

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Congressional Globe}, 31\textsuperscript{st} Congress, 1\textsuperscript{st} Session, 451-455.

\textsuperscript{68} See Peterson, \textit{The Great Triumvirate}, 462. Peterson argued that he did not disclose the form of this amendment, although he probably meant a dual executive along the lines of the proposal sketched out in the \textit{Discourse on Government}, which had not yet been published.
Wilmot Proviso. Webster stated that if any abolitionist attempted to place “a provision for a prohibition of slavery” in any of the territories, he would not vote for it. On the other hand, Webster believed that little danger existed if southerners decided to meet at Nashville, as he predicted the gentlemen would gather “to advise the South to forbearance and moderation; and to inculcate principles of brotherly love, and affection, and attachment to the Constitution of the country.” The only strong criticism Webster made against the South was to those who argued for secession. He stated that “peaceable secession” was an utter impossibility.69 Webster’s speech met many receptive ears in the South and helped motivate southern Unionists to take the offensive again the Nashville Convention.

The speech met a much different reception in the North, however. In the weeks which followed meetings and speeches took place throughout the North, most prominently in Webster’s native state of Massachusetts, condemning him. For such a respected politician as Webster to endure such treatment, most southerners agreed, meant that the abolitionists’ strength and aggressiveness continued to increase. Nonetheless, Webster’s speech helped some southerners realize that a few friends still existed in the North. These southerners now knew that a realistic alternative existed to Taylor’s plan and the Nashville Convention.70

In the weeks following Webster’s speech, southerners began organizing “Union” meetings to counter the “Southern Rights” meetings which started in February. A meeting in Granville, North Carolina, did not support sending delegates from the district to the Nashville Convention.71 A similar Union meeting in Randolph, North Carolina, specifically argued that


70 For a discussion of the positive reception of Webster’s speech in the South, see Robert V. Ramini, Daniel Webster: The Man and His Time (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 673.
these meetings were just as committed to southern rights as the Southern Rights meetings. The people in Randolph denied that Congress held the power to “deprive any part of the people of their rightful occupation and enjoyment of such territory,” and any attempt for Congress to do so would be “a wrong [to] which freeman cannot and will not submit.” The members of this meeting, however, believed that southerners must not act rashly and organize a convention to discuss disunion. Therefore, the attendees considered the proposed Nashville Convention as “unnecessary and imprudent, uncalled for, and calculated to mislead the unwary.” Southerners needed to follow Clay’s and Webster’s lead towards compromise.

Much like the Southern Rights meetings, these Union meetings shortly appeared in every southern state. It is important to note that these meetings rarely supported the Union at all hazards. Instead, these meetings made it clear that southerners demanded protection of their rights within the Union. For example, a public meeting held in Cassville, Georgia, supported the constitutional protection of slavery, the admission of California with no restriction on slavery, and yet opposed the Nashville Convention. Similarly, in Washington County, North Carolina, citizens of both parties met and stated they were “united to a man in favor of maintaining rights of the South,” and they declared themselves “nearly as unanimously united to stand by and abide with the Union.” The men at this meeting mentioned their unity on the question of southern rights, yet stated that they were “nearly as unanimously united” on the question of the Union. Some supporters of the Nashville Convention, or maybe even disunion, must have attended this meeting.

71 *Fayetteville Observer*, March 19, 1850.

72 *Fayetteville Observer*, April 16, 1850.

73 *Raleigh Register*, March 23, 1850.

74 *Fayetteville Observer*, March 26, 1850.
In addition to the appearance of the Union meetings, the supporters of the Nashville Convention received more terrible news when they learned that John C. Calhoun had died at his home in South Carolina on March 31, 1850. Much like what happened after Adams’ death, southerners took the opportunity of Calhoun’s death to attack abolitionism. In Charleston, James Henry Hammond delivered the funeral oration for Calhoun, arguing that southerners needed to continue Calhoun’s fight against abolitionism. Hammond told the mourners that abolitionism proved that the United States contained “at least two separate, distinct, and in some essential points, antagonistic social systems, whose differences can never be reconciled and subjected to one equal and just Government.” The only way southerners could continue to persist in such a Union, according to Hammond, was if “Abolitionism [were] crushed and entirely eradicated.” Southerners like Hammond believed that they needed to act as the protectors of southern rights against northern aggression, much as Calhoun did throughout his life. Another speaker compared Calhoun's death to that of a Spartan chief, causing no faltering in the ranks, and serving “only to rally to the defense of the South every true Southern heart.” Even those who refused to speak in honor of Calhoun realized that his ideas would not die as easily as his body. Thomas Hart Benton declined to speak about Calhoun, stating that he was “not dead,” that while there was “no vitality in his body” there was “in his doctrines.”

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75 See Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*, 87-114. Greenberg argued that Calhoun died an honorable death because he maintained complete control over himself and all his dependents until the very end. He also was reserved and accepting of death. This was the kind of honorable death which every southern desired to obtain.


78 Ibid., 467.
In the wake of the Union meetings and Calhoun’s death, it seemed that the Nashville Convention might be in danger. The highly-anticipated April 2 election in Georgia for delegates revealed a very low voter turnout, and many letters appeared in southern newspapers arguing that the majority of the people of Nashville wanted the convention to meet elsewhere. Ironically, though, while Calhoun’s death deprived the supporters of the Nashville Convention of their undisputed leader, the news also helped to galvanize the flagging support for the Nashville Convention in the South. It appeared, therefore, that in Calhoun’s death southerners remembered his life’s work of battling abolitionism and, despite the poor results of the Georgia election, the Nashville Convention remained on schedule to meet in June. Perhaps the most surprising southerner to speak out forcibly for southern rights was Thomas Clingman. Only a few years after being the only southerner to oppose the gag rule and fighting a duel to support his opposition to Texas annexation, Clingman became one of the most vocal “fire-eaters” in the South. Many Whigs in North Carolina criticized this perceived inconsistency. Clingman, of course, did not believe he was inconsistent, as even during his support of the gag rule he claimed that he acted as a defender of slavery and honor against northern attack. Thus, he argued that his responsibility as a congressman remained “to protect, if possible, from threatened wrong, those whom I have the honor in part to represent.” His support for southern rights, he claimed, was an attempt to protect his constituents, adding that he should “be found with the people of the South” in whatever movements they found “necessary to guard their safety and honor.” The editor of a Democratic paper which had previously criticized Clingman noted that he had begun to speak “as a Southern patriot.”

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79 Greenville Mountaineer, April 5, 1850.
In the months leading up to the Nashville Convention, therefore, it seemed that southerners were divided into two groups: “submissionists” and “disunionists.” Those who supported the convention referred to unionists as submissionists who would willingly abandon southern rights in order to preserve the Union. On the other hand, unionists called supporters of the convention disunionists who would invite northern aggression and willingly destroy the rights southerners enjoyed within the Union. Partisans threw these insults to vilify their opponents as traitors to the South. As the convention drew nearer, southerners became more forceful both in defense of their positions and in their attacks on their opponents.  

By late spring, the governors of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Maryland, Virginia, Florida, and Louisiana had sanctioned the Nashville Convention. The Tennessee Legislature, however, condemned the Convention, encouraging the Tennesseans to offer no support for this “disunionist” meeting. Upon hearing this news, the editors of one South Carolina newspaper opined that when “the time arrive[ed] in the history of the Union, when the glorious banner of Southern rights and Southern honor must be unfurled, we feel well assured that none will cluster under its folds with more alacrity than the gallant sons of Tennessee.”

Similarly, Georgia Representative Robert Toombs denounced the Tennessee “submissionists,” arguing that any southerner who considered “the danger of defending his own honor” was “already degraded,” and “the people who count[ed] the cost of maintaining their political rights…[were] ready for slavery.” The purpose of the Nashville Convention was to preserve

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80 Jennings, The Nashville Convention, 81-103.

81 Greenville Mountaineer, March 8, 1850.
honor and prevent oppression, Toombs maintained. Southerners like Cobb believed the convention would be a conservative gathering, not radical.

Against these arguments, unionists insisted that the Nashville Convention itself was an aggressive act likely to bring further northern attacks upon the South. The *Richmond Times* argued that southerners ought “to stand in perfect unitedness upon our principal ground of resistance to the first act of aggression.” A Union meeting in Richmond, Virginia, essentially came to the same conclusion. This meeting resolved that Virginians would “never submit to pretensions of superiority in other States, founded on the exercise of her undeniable right to regulate her own domestic institutions.” Nonetheless, the members of this meeting also believed that since there was “an earnest attempt being now in progress in the Senate of the United States to adjust, on a satisfactory basis, our present difficulties,” they deemed “it unnecessary at this time, in anticipation of measures of a contrary, character, to take any further action in relation to the Convention contemplated to be held at Nashville.” The Nashville Convention seemed more likely to unite northern opinion against the South than to determine any satisfactory plan for ensuring southern rights which might be acceptable to both sections. For the unionists, therefore, the dangers of the Nashville Convention outweighed any possible positive rewards.

The delegates who eventually decided to attend the Nashville Convention, as well as their followers, simply did not believe that either Taylor’s plan or Clay’s compromise resolutions offered sufficient protection to the South. Mississippian F.L. Claiborne already believed that at some point slavery would only be protected in the original states. In the more distant future,

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82 *Greenville Mountaineer*, April 5, 1850.

83 *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 30, 1850.

84 *Raleigh Register*, May 5, 1850.
abolitionists might attempt to destroy the institution there as well. Thus, he insisted, southerners needed to make a stand in the territories. As he asked his fellow southerners: “[was] it not wiser to defend the out-posts, before the enemy approaches the citadel?” The *Montgomery Alabama Atlas* argued that the unionists were “ready to submit themselves as willing and obedient *slaves* to northern masters just so soon as it may be the good will and pleasure of these northern masters to rivet the merited fetters upon their cringing and recreant limbs!” The supporters of the convention believed that the proceedings in Nashville might very well determine whether southerners continued to live with their freedom and honor intact, or instead live in slavery and dishonor.

The supporters of the Nashville Convention feared that they might lose their honor, and this fear was so prevalent that it ensured the Nashville Convention proceeded as planned. The delegates started arriving in Nashville towards the end of May, and it began on Monday, June 3, 1850. Former Tennessee Governor Aaron Brown called the convention to order, J.B. Ferguson offered the opening prayer, and the delegates chose the same man who presided over the October Convention, William L. Sharkey, as president. In total, nine southern states sent delegates to the convention: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Six slaveholding states – Delaware, Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, and Louisiana – declined to send delegates. Nobody was surprised that Delaware and Maryland sent no delegates, since the numbers of slaves in those states had been steadily

85 *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette*, April 17, 1850.

86 *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette*, May 11, 1850. Emphasis in the original.

declining for years and the institution was no longer as important as it once had been, especially in Delaware. Few expressed any surprise that no delegates attended from Kentucky and Missouri, the stomping grounds of Henry Clay and Thomas Hart Benton, respectively. It was apparent, though, that the unionists in Louisiana and North Carolina had been successful in keeping delegates from attending the convention, as many Southern Rights meetings took place in these two states and it appeared that enough support existed to at least send some delegates.\textsuperscript{88}

Supporters of the convention bemoaned that only a little more than half the slaveholding states sent representatives. This fact was “deeply to be regretted by every true friend of the South, and of the Union,” lamented one Georgia newspaper, “as it must have the effect greatly to diminish the influence of the Convention, if it does not entirely defeat the ends sought to be attained by the friends of the movement.” There was a sense among the convention’s supporters that any action the convention took would not be accepted in the South. Many of these supporters believed that this did not represent a victory for the Union, but rather a victory for the abolitionists. This newspaper concluded that “the day…[was] not far distant when those who have been prominent in opposing the Southern Convention will regret their course.”\textsuperscript{89} The low turnout cast a pall over the convention from the very beginning.

Nonetheless, from June 3-12, many of the delegates took time to debate southern rights and the value of the Union. Most of the debates, as Cobb and most other convention supporters promised over the last couple months, were conservative in tone and focused on securing southern rights within the Union.\textsuperscript{90} There were a few radicals, however, who called for disunion,

\textsuperscript{88} Natchez Courier, June 18, 1850.

\textsuperscript{89} Daily Morning News, June 7, 1850.

\textsuperscript{90} Jennings, The Nashville Convention, 165.
and these were the men who gained the most notoriety following the convention. Some of these men, like Robert Barnwell Rhett of South Carolina, were well known fire-eaters before the convention met. At the convention, Rhett stated that Clay’s compromise was the “surrender and dishonor of the South,” and the only logical solution was “the severance of our connection with the North.”

One of the most extreme fire-eaters was Walter T. Colquitt of Georgia, who believed every southerner should be “moulding bullets, casting cannon, and filling their arsenals, if need be, in order to defend their rights.” The extremists were diverse, though, and even such leading intellectuals like William and Mary University Professor Beverly Tucker encouraged secession and war if Congress barred slavery in the territories or states entering the Union.

Most significantly, the convention passed resolutions which clarified the goals that the convention hoped to accomplish after the work in Nashville concluded. The first resolution stated that all states had equal rights to the territories, and the second stipulated that Congress could not exclude slavery from the territories. The eleventh resolution called for an extension of the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific Ocean as the only acceptable solution to the present difficulties. The twelfth resolution, however, was perhaps most significant of all since it showed the deeper importance of the problem with the Mexican Cessation, it read: “That the spectacle of a confederacy of States; involved in quarrel over the fruits of a war in which the American arms were crowned with glory, is humiliating. That the incorporation of the Wilmot proviso in the offer of settlements, a proposition which fourteen States regard as disparaging and dishonorable,  

91 *Fayetteville Observer*, July 2, 1850. Emphasis in the original.

92 *Raleigh Register*, June 19, 1850. Emphasis in the original.

is degrading to the country."\textsuperscript{94} The Wilmot Proviso not only degraded the South, but the Union as a whole. Thus, the Wilmot Proviso or the Union needed to be eliminated to ensure honor. This was about southern honor, and this was why these delegates believed their work was so important.

The convention continued to be a topic of national importance for the next few months because the delegates agreed to hold a second convention six weeks later. In the meantime, almost all southerners issued a sigh of relief when Zachary Taylor breathed his last on July 9. Taylor spent the Fourth of July in the hot sun, eating plenty of pickled eggs, cherries, and chilled milk. That evening, he complained of stomach pains. He lingered five days before succumbing to this gastrointestinal malady.\textsuperscript{95} Milliard Fillmore became president, and while a northerner, he was also a friend of Clay's and of compromise.\textsuperscript{96} Taylor’s plan, like the old soldier himself, was dead. This meant that over these next few months, most of the Nashville delegates worked to gain support for the convention, while the unionists continued their efforts to gain support for Clay’s compromise.

During this time, meetings occurred in most of the southern states to confirm or deny the work of the Nashville Convention. Somewhat ironically, several of these meetings began with statements which clearly borrowed the eloquence of Webster’s language, if not his message, stating that they came “into this meeting, not as whigs, nor as democrats, but as Southern men.”\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{94} The Natchez Courier, June 21, 1850. The delegates did not actually even consider Delaware a slaveholding state.

\textsuperscript{95} For a discussion of Taylor’s death, see Remini, Daniel Webster, 683.

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{97} The Mississippian, September 13, 1850.
One of the largest and most influential of these meetings occurred in Macon, Georgia, on August 22. Rhett, Yancey, and Colquitt actually decided to attend this meeting, which ended up, unsurprisingly, supporting the resolutions of the Nashville Convention. The members of this meeting also concluded that in Clay’s compromise they found “so much to condemn, that we consider it an insult to call such propositions an offer of compromise.” The attendees at a meeting in Talladega, Alabama, used even more forceful language in their support of the Nashville Convention, arguing that any who believed in “submission” to inequality or “Esau-like” bartered his birthright for porridge was “recreant to the memory of the past, to his duty to the present, and a traitor to posterity.” The defenders of the Nashville Convention hoped that these new insults might knock sense into the submissionists who continued to pursue compromises destined to bring dishonor upon the South.

Many unionists, of course, denounced the Nashville Convention. They believed that the fact that only nine states attended the convention and the rather conservative resolutions meant that the convention really did not pose much of a danger and compromise was inevitable. Others, however, noted that a real evil came from the Nashville Convention, as the convention agreed upon the Missouri Compromise line as the only way to ensure southern equality within the Union, which stood no chance of being supported in Congress. Some immediately began to think that the convention deliberately called for a plan they knew would not garner support in order to take more forceful action in the future. Many unionists pointed to the speeches of the fire-eaters as evidence that the true intention and ultimate goal of the convention was disunion.

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98 *The Mississippian*, August 26, 1850.

99 *The Mississippian*, September 9, 1850. In the Old Testament book of Genesis, Esau was the twin-brother of Jacob. Esau, however, was born first and held all the privileges enjoyed by first-born sons. Esau exchanged his birthright with Jacob in exchange for a bowl of pottage after a long day of work.

100 *Fayetteville Observer*, July 30, 1850.
The *Petersburg Intelligencer* argued that men like Beverly Tucker could potentially control the next meeting and make disunion the plan of action. This newspaper “utterly repudiate[ed] the sentiments which he [Tucker] avowed and condemn[ed] the temper he displayed in his speech in that body. *Disunion per se does not occupy an inch of Virginia soil.*” While radical secessionists only represented a minority of the delegates to the convention, unionists criticized that their presence and words proved that at least some of the delegates sought disunion.

Other unionists believed that the Nashville Convention simply did not provide the best plan for ensuring southern rights and honor in the future. At a meeting in Savannah, Georgia, Judge William B. Fleming perceived “no just ground of objection on the part of the South to the admission of California.” Rather than clamoring for an expansive and powerful central government regulating slavery, most southerners, according to Fleming, desired less government involvement. “The true Southern ground was non-interference by Congress with the Slave question,” concluded Fleming, “and that was the doctrine of the Compromise bill.”

Despite the firm support of many southerners for Clay’s compromise, on July 31, 1850, all of the resolutions came to the Senate in the form of one “omnibus” bill, which went down to defeat. Many politicians felt uncomfortable voting for so many different policies in one bill, especially southerners, as northerners once again tried to place the Wilmot Proviso on the omnibus, which would essentially deprive the South of any benefits from the compromise.

Defenders of the Nashville Convention expressed great satisfaction upon hearing this news, as it

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102 *Daily Morning News*, July 30, 1850.

103 See Benton, *Thirty Years’ View*, 749.
seemed they were one step closer to establishing the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific. *The Mississippian* opined that the omnibus’ defeat represented “a triumph of right over wrong, a victory of the friend of the UNION, based upon constitutional principles, over arrogant free-soilism and submissiveness.”¹⁰⁴ Clay, however, vowed to continue the fight. Given his declining health, however, Clay allowed Illinois Democrat Stephen Douglas to take the lead in pushing the resolutions through Congress piecemeal.

Many southern unionists agreed to continue the fight for compromise as well. North Carolina Whig George Badger stated in the Senate that he felt there was an “unauthorized disposition to tamper, with or without improper designs, with our domestic institutions of slavery,” as evidenced by the Wilmot Proviso. Even though northerners tried to place the Wilmot Proviso on the omnibus bill, Badger cautioned that Clay’s compromise measures were not the Wilmot Proviso disguised as compromise, as Taylor’s plan had been. Thus, the South needed to rally around Clay’s compromise, as it was Badger’s “deliberate opinion that no measures now accomplished, or now threatened, can furnish justifiable, reasonable, or excusable grounds for taking any measures of resistance calculated to lead to a dissolution of the Union.”¹⁰⁵ Clay’s compromise measures promised to finally end the controversy over the territories, while the resolutions of the Nashville Convention offered no such assurances and seemed destined for failure.

Other unionist politicians specifically stated that they believed Clay’s compromise was the best defense of southern honor. During his campaign for re-election to the House of Representatives, Florida Whig Edward Cabell frequently defended his opposition to the

¹⁰⁴ *The Mississippian*, September 9, 1850.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.
Nashville Convention. Cabell recognized, however, that while at heart all southerners desired the protection of slavery and honor, they did not always agree on the means to achieve these ends. “I will admit they are as true to the South as I am,” Cabell said of the defenders of the Nashville Convention in a letter which appeared in a Florida newspaper. Cabell maintained, however, that “when men like them falsely charge me and other native-born Southern men and slave-holders with want of fidelity to our section, they must expect to be rebuked.” He continued that only “traitors” would “inspire want of confidence and distrust among Southern people at a time when we should be banded together as brothers.” This was not a political ploy by Cabell to gain support for his candidacy, but rather a plea for southerners to stop fighting amongst themselves and instead focus on their real enemies. This was a defense of slavery, of course, but it was also so much more. “Our safety, our very existence,” was involved in this question, and according the Cabell, the situation demanded “the most fraternal feeling.”

Cabell’s letter is significant since he was one of the few southerners in all the debates surrounding the Nashville Convention who actually tried to appeal directly to the honor of his opponents, rather than just insult them.

Cabell and the other unionists eventually won a decisive victory when the Compromise of 1850 finally passed Congress. With the assistance of new Secretary of State Daniel Webster, Stephen Douglas carefully massaged Clay’s resolutions through Congress in September, and President Fillmore happily signed each into law. Unionists in both sections realized that failure to compromise would only provide greater strength to the extremists in both sections, thus allowing the successful passage of each resolution. Yet for supporters of the Nashville

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106 Pensacola Gazette, September 21, 1850.
107 For a discussion of final passage of the compromise measures, see Remini, Daniel Webster, 688-693.
Convention, the triumph of the compromise represented the permanent inequality of southerners in the western territories. The *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette*, one of the newspapers which championed the Nashville Convention, editorialized that the compromise measures depreciated “Southern courage,” and disparaged “Southern honor.” California would enter the Union as a free state, thus destroying any possibility of adopting the Nashville Convention’s call for the extension of the Missouri Compromise to the Pacific. The paper charged compromisers with using “fraud” and “chicanery” to force the South from every foot of the public territories, thus dooming southerners “to inequality and inferiority forever.” The editors did not mention specifically what action southerners should take, but they did argue that those “who would glory in Southern dishonor,” would eventually “tremble before the dreadful response of a wronged and courageous people.” Southerners expected such betrayal from northerners who had constantly attacked slavery since the start of the Texas annexation debates. Once again, though, it was the fact that so many southerners supported the compromise which stung the most. The editors believed that “a recreant son of the South [would] regret that he ever joined in alliance with those who would degrade and oppress the slaveholder.” With the compromise measures, the newspaper continued, the South lost everything, as the exclusion of southerners from the territories was “fatal to the equality, the independence, the rights, the interests, the honor, and the safety of the South.”

While the editors did not know how southerners would respond, they knew that even war would not be surprising. The paper added that southerners deemed “those who would force those wrongs upon them enemies,” who hoped to place southerners in “dishonorable bondage and fasten manacles on their children.” In this context, breaking the Union seemed to be the only honorable path forward. The newspaper then called upon Mississippians to follow
Quitman and Davis, two men who never flinched when facing the Mexicans on the battlefield
and would not flinch in the face of the abolitionist enemies either. After the compromise,
many Mississippians, at least according to this editorial, would once again look to the warriors
who gained so much fame in Mexico to lead them into the future.

For those opposed to the compromise, their final hope was for the second Nashville
Convention to find an honorable solution which allowed southern access to the territories.
Around this time, a North Carolinian named Seth Barton had his ideas, contained in a short tract
called the “Randolph Epistles,” published in newspapers throughout the South. Barton explained
that the North “appropriated to herself and free soil – and destituted [sic] and excluded the South
forever, from every foot of California, Utah and New Mexico.” The North also succeeded in
monopolizing the spread of “their culture and their treasure” to the West. Southern culture,
based upon honor, and treasure, based upon slavery, was effectively barred from the West as
well. Thus, some southerners remained committed to holding the second convention, even
though a national compromise had already been struck.

Most of the supporters of the first convention, however, decided that a second convention
could achieve no positive purpose. Judge Sharkey, the president of the first convention, actually
refused to issue the call for the second convention since he was personally satisfied with the
compromise, and he correctly interpreted that most southerners were as well. The Koscuisko
Chronicle, a Democratic Mississippi newspaper which initially supported southern rights and the
Nashville Convention, now opposed a second convention. This newspaper believed that the first
convention met to agree upon an acceptable plan to ensure southern rights within the Union, but

108 Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette, September 28, 1850.
109 The Mississippian, October 4, 1850.
the compromise already took a positive step in this direction, even if it was flawed. Thus, the newspaper questioned whether southerners would “ever give ear to the sentiment of disunion as advocated by R.B. Rhett, of South Carolina, and Beverly Tucker of Virginia?” This newspaper believed that it was imprudent to put the South’s safety at risk “in so doubtful an enterprise.” Therefore, southerners ought to accept the position of the unionists and only react “by acts of real aggression on the part of their northern brethren.” The unionist newspapers echoed these sentiments, as the Raleigh Register argued that the second Nashville Convention could have no purpose but disunion and it would “have the effect of exposing to the world the paucity of number and the traitorous designs” of the convention supporters.

Nonetheless, after considerable delay, the second Nashville Convention did eventually come to order on November 11. Much like the Raleigh Register predicted not many southerners attended the second convention. Only forty-nine delegates attended from Virginia, Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Georgia, Tennessee, and South Carolina. Of this number, only one delegate attended from Virginia, while sixteen came from South Carolina. Additionally, fourteen delegates came from Tennessee; almost all of whom actually supported the compromise measures and only attended simply to disrupt the proceedings. Besides the Tennesseans, however, most members disagreed with the compromise and believed that unified secession must be considered.

Shouts of secession and disunion filled much of the air over the week the convention met. Langdon Cheves of South Carolina argued that “the Union was already dissolved,” since it was

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110 The Natchez Courier, September 20, 1850. Emphasis in the original.

111 The Raleigh Register, September 25, 1850.

112 Daily National Intelligencer, November 27, 1850.
supposed to be “a bond of fraternity,” yet with the compromise it had “now become one of hostilities.” Cheves maintained that southerners “could not expect to live with a people who on every occasion, and in the halls of legislation, denounce slavery.” It would simply be dishonorable to remain in the Union any longer, according to Cheves. He concluded by stating that every honorable southerner should feel “shame at such insults” and take decisive action to protect their honor.\textsuperscript{113} The convention eventually concluded that secession was the only remedy left for maintaining southern rights, so long as the South agreed to act in unison. The preamble of the final resolutions, presented by Alabamian C.C. Clay, advocated secession in order to preserve the original Constitution, as the compromise threatened to abolish slavery everywhere, not just in the territories. The document argued that the North had “insulted” and “outraged” the South for decades now, and that southerners faced a “degraded destiny” unless they took forceful steps. “Our rights, our independence – the peace, and existence of our families depend upon the issue,” the delegates of the convention concluded.\textsuperscript{114}

The unionists, however, eventually defeated the calls for disunion. On Saturday November 23, 1850, Tennessee unionists held their own meeting to draft a set of resolutions in response to the two Nashville Conventions. The delegates agreed that the South might have to secede and prosecute a war to preserve their rights in the future, as all people when “palpably, intolerably, and unconstitutionally oppressed,” held the right “to throw off the chains that oppress them.” In the fall of 1850, though, the South did not face oppression. The delegates of this

\textsuperscript{113} Daily National Intelligencer, November 16, 1850; and Weekly Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette, November 20, 1850.

\textsuperscript{114} Daily Morning News, November 23, 1850.
Union meeting resolved that the compromise measures met their “approbation, as the best that, under the circumstances, could be adopted,” and they pledged “to give them our hearty support.”

Southern support for the Union became even more secure several weeks later when a convention of the people of Georgia drafted what became known as the Georgia Platform. The major contributors to the convention were Alexander Stephens and Robert Toombs. It is worth noting, though, that John Berrien, who now threw his support to secession, opposed this convention and played no role in the drafting of the five resolutions in the Georgia Platform. The first resolution would have certainly met the approval of Calhoun, were he alive, as it stated that they held “the American Union, secondary in importance only to the rights and principles it was designed to perpetuate.” The third resolution provided lukewarm support for the compromise, stating that “whilst she [Georgia] does not wholly approve, will abide by it as a permanent adjustment of this sectional controversy.” The fourth resolution, however, insisted that northerners had an obligation to abide by the compromise measures. If they did not, and they passed through Congress any legislation “incompatible with the safety, domestic tranquility, the rights and honor of the slave-holding States, or any refusal to admit as a State any territory hereafter, applying, because of the existence of slavery therein,” extreme action would become necessary. If the North violated the compromise, then the state of Georgia ought to destroy “every tie” which bound it to the Union.

In the following weeks, the people of Mississippi

115 The Daily Register, November 30, 1850.

116 Hamilton, Prologue to Conflict, 184.

and Alabama gave their support for the Georgia Platform. Thus, calls for secession were essentially quieted throughout the South, except in South Carolina.\textsuperscript{118}

During the Mexican War, southern opponents’ greatest fear was that the war and territorial acquisition would unite northerners in opposition to slavery in the West and bring unwelcomed attacks from abolitionists. This was exactly what happened following the war. Another great fear was that the Mexican War threatened to expose the drastic differences between the sections, leading to the destruction of slavery not only in the West but also in the established states. At least some southern opponents took solace in the fact that slavery still remained intact where it already existed. The sentiments of other southern opponents, such as Clingman, Berrien, and Calhoun, suggests that they believed this was only a temporary victory, and at some point a greater defense of slavery and honor would be necessary, or all would be lost. For southern opponents, this proved why waging war against the Mexicans was folly. During the war, southern opponents had offered various paths to avoid the difficulties which emerged from 1848-1850, but they failed. Instead, the country ate the forbidden fruit and the Union established by the founders had suffered the consequences for this sin. Acceptance of Clay’s compromise and the Georgia Platform were not ringing endorsements for the Union. Rather, they represented southerners’ attempts to preserve honor and slavery where they already existed. Much like with the Mexican War, unionists believed that instead of offering safety, secession would only further endanger slavery and honor. This time, most southerners agreed.

Conclusion

This story has shown that during the period from 1835 to 1850, southerners were called upon to reconsider how best to safeguard slavery and honor in an increasingly insecure world. Southerners agreed that slavery and honor must be protected, yet they often disagreed over the proper means to secure these twin pillars of their lives. Mississippian Alexander K. McClung perhaps best demonstrated the challenges that southerners faced in trying to preserve their honor. Although born in Kentucky, McClung grew up in Mississippi and lived there at the outbreak of the war. A veteran of many duels, other southerners oftentimes referred to him as “heroic,” “gallant,” or even as “the great duelist.”¹ During the war, Jefferson Davis credited Colonel McClung with being the first man to breach the Tenería at Monterey in September 1846. Following the war, McClung became depressed over his flagging political career. In the early hours of a March morning in 1855, McClung put a pistol behind his right ear and pulled the trigger, splattering his blood on the walls of the Eagle Hotel in Jackson, Mississippi. McClung did not leave a note, so the exact motivation for his suicide remains unclear. The important point is that many Mississippians recognized that his suicide was an honorable act. Loved ones transported his body to Vicksburg and he was buried with full military honors. Many local citizens came to mourn at his funeral, and newspapers glowed in their praise of the Mexican War veteran. McClung died as he lived: an honorable man.²

¹ For example, see Samuel C. Reid, Jr., The Scouting Expeditions of McCulloch’s Texas Rangers; or, the Summer and Fall Campaign of the Army of the United States in Mexico – 1846; Including Skirmishes with the Mexicans, and an accurate Detail of the Storming of Monterey; also, the Daring Scouts at Buena Vista Together with Anecdotes, Incidents, Descriptions of Country, and Sketches of the Lives of the Celebrated Partisan Chiefs, Hays, McCulloch, and Walker (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1847), 177.


For a discussion of honor and suicide, see Kenneth S. Greenberg, Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery
The common perception is that southerners during the Mexican War, much like McClung, proceeded down a path which resulted in their own destruction during the Civil War. Indeed, some historians consider the Civil War all but inevitable by 1850. This view is not unique to historians, as even some who participated in the Civil War advanced similar arguments.

Virginian John S. Mosby, a Confederate colonel who gained renown for his daring cavalry raids in the Civil War, wrote in his memoirs that John C. Calhoun was “the great apostle of secession and slavery.” Mosby considered Calhoun and William L. Yancey as the two men primarily responsible for the divisions in the Democratic Party which increased sectional tensions and ultimately led to southern secession. It makes sense to blame Yancey in part for secession, since he participated in the secession winter of 1860–61; it is odd, however, that Mosby blamed Calhoun, who died in 1850, for the Civil War as well. As my study has shown, Calhoun was part of a small number of southerners who opposed the Mexican War in hopes of preserving the Union. Yet, Mosby blamed Calhoun for destroying the Union. While such a conclusion might have made Mosby feel less personal responsibility for his actions during the Civil War, it was also a distorted view of history.

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Argument, Baseball, Hunting, Gambling in the Old South (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 88. Suicide demonstrated a complete mastery over death and a refusal for honorable gentlemen to live dishonored, subjugated, or unequal. Several prominent southerners committed suicide following the collapse of the Confederacy in 1865, including Virginia agriculturalist Edmund Ruffin and Florida Governor John Milton.


5 Ulysses S. Grant is the most well-known example, referring to the conflict with Mexico as “a wicked war” which brought about the Civil War for the United States. See Amy S. Greenberg, A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), xiii.

Thus, instead of turning towards the Civil War, I suggest that scholars can gain a better understanding of Mexican War era southerners by examining what they thought of history, as they had a keen sense of their place on the historical stage. When I altered my focus this way, I discovered that the vast majority of southerners treasured the Union which provided constitutional safety for slavery and honor. It was the unadulterated Union passed down from the Founding Fathers which Mexican War southerners wanted to protect. The desire to protect slavery and honor also helped spur the study of history in the South, as periodicals like *The Southern Literary Messenger* encouraged historical research throughout the years of the Mexican War. In every issue the editors requested that readers send in documents and articles relating to colonial history and the American Revolution. South Carolinian William Gilmore Simms seconded this search, stating that people in the future “will groan and wonder at our wretched indifference, in the South, to all that concerns the glory of our ancestors.” In 1847, the magazine included an article which attempted to provide readers with a proper definition of the field of history. The article explained that history was “a spirit of Reverence for the Past, paying homage to its Great and Good, which it strive[d] to emulate or surpass.” Similarly, at the first annual meeting of the Virginia Historical Society, President William C. Rives stated that a primary mission of the society was to recall “what Virginia was, [so] we can best form to ourselves a correct idea of what Virginia ought still to be, and the true measure of our own duties as present actors on the stage.” By the Mexican War, Americans realized that history held lessons for their present problems and, therefore, spent more time studying the events of the

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8 *The Southern Literary Messenger*, March 1847, 57.

past.\textsuperscript{10} In particular, Americans came to revere the American Revolution and constantly looked for lessons from their revolutionary fathers.

When viewed in this light, the Mexican War was a failure for the South not because it helped lead towards Civil War, but because by 1850 southerners had already failed to protect what they perceived to be the constitutional rights which their fathers had left them.\textsuperscript{11} Prior to the war, southern anti-annexationists could not prevent Texas from entering the Union, largely because many southerners believed that Texas might become a hotbed of abolitionism if it remained outside the Union. During the war, opponents advocated several different plans which they hoped might alter the Polk administration’s prosecution of the war or prevent the acquisition of western territory. These opponents hoped to deprive the fire of abolition with the necessary fuel to devour southern slavery and honor in flames. Opponents failed to achieve these goals as well.

I suggest, however, that southern war supporters also failed since the South lost all access to the West as slave territory. This meant that the southerners who fought in the war, such as Jefferson Davis, John Quitman, and Alexander McClung, realized that all the expenditure of southern blood came to naught. Many southern supporters of the war believed that in order for slavery and honor to flourish into the future southerners needed to extend the institution into the West, but this path closed forever with the Compromise of 1850. Many of the most extreme politicians during the war, such as Yancey, now realized several years after opponents of the war

\textsuperscript{10} This was the case throughout the era of the early Republic. See James E. Lewis, Jr., The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United Sates and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

\textsuperscript{11} Michael A. Morrison, Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 66-125. Morrison argued that western expansion caused a division between northerners and southerners on the ideas of the legacy of the revolution. He believed that slavery and western expansion gradually broke the revolutionary ties which held the sections together, thus leading to the Civil War.
that abolitionists even threatened slavery and honor in the states, not just the territories. While many of these southerners embraced the annexation of Texas to prevent the spread of British abolitionism, they unwittingly helped encourage the abolitionist movement of the North.

Therefore, southerners entered the decade following the Mexican War in an increasingly hostile and insecure world. Even southerners who did not view abolitionists as a great threat concluded that they were still evil. Alabamian Raphael Semmes wrote in his book *Service Afloat and Ashore During the Mexican War* that abolitionism was akin to “fanaticism.” He cautioned his fellow southerners that fanaticism only spread “by the sword.” Abolitionism would never spread, according the Semmes, because it was error. Semmes told readers that “like the plague,” abolitionism would “never inundate a vast country.” He advised southerners to not even worry that abolitionist meetings “to denounce a law to the Union, or for any other disloyal and treasonable purpose,” were still being held in Faneuil Hall in the city of Boston following the Compromise of 1850.¹²

Semmes failed to realize, however, that these meetings demonstrated that abolitionists had no intention of abiding by the Compromise of 1850. Abolitionists remained hostile to the South, even if they did not clutch swords. Southern opponents correctly predicted that Texas annexation and the Mexican War would increase northern abolitionists’ efforts to eradicate slavery. What is ironic is that almost all Mexican War era southerners attempted to preserve slavery and honor, yet their inability to unite on the means to achieve this goal meant that slavery and honor were in even more danger in 1850 than in 1835. As McClung’s suicide demonstrated, there was more than one path to preserve honor. As McClung and the Mexican War proved,

¹² Raphael Semmes, *Service Afloat and Ashore During the Mexican War* (Cincinnati: Wm. H. Moore Press, 1851), 473.
however, some of those paths led to destruction.
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