

Part Two: MANIFEST DESTINY

*Beneath the Tropic's blaze of lustrous day,
The Empire founders take their glorious way;
.....
Pass — Nation makers! onward go!
All earth shall yet your triumph know!*

Lady Emmeline Stuart Wortley.
On the Americans Crossing the Isthmus.

*Se necesitaría, Roosevelt, ser por Dios mismo,
el Riflero terrible y el fuerte Cazador,
para poder tenernos en vuestras férreas garras.
Y, pues contáis con todo, falta una cosa: Dios!*

Rubén Darío. A Roosevelt.

4. The Colossus of the North

The United States' political arena in 1845 was radically different from what Walker had seen in Europe. The thirteen English colonies that in 1776 had started the experiment of a republican government on the Atlantic side of the continent, when nearing seventy years of independent existence steadily continued the westward expansion that characterized them from the very beginning. To the territories received from Great Britain, they had added the vast expanse of French Louisiana, bought from Napoleon in 1803, and the Floridas, acquired from Spain shortly thereafter.

A population of two and a half million people in 1776 had grown to twenty million by 1845. Immigration from Europe in that year reached one hundred thousand people, and in another decade would surpass figures of half a million annually.

The inexhaustible virgin lands were sold by the government on credit for \$1.25 an acre to anybody willing to work them. Farm production and commercial activities burgeoned, while the industrial revolution was laying the bases for the future.

Thousands of miles of railroad tracks kept on extending, tying webs between cities. Ever larger numbers of steamboats moved on rivers and artificial channels. The merchant marine multiplied tonnage tenfold in less than 30 years. The magnetic telegraph began to transmit thoughts "with the speed of light."

Free public schools taught the three R's to millions of pupils. Libraries appeared all over. Newspapers mushroomed in numbers and shrank in price to a penny.

The steel plow, the McCormick harvesters, the use of anesthesia for surgery, the sewing machine, the power loom, the ice box, the iron stove, the mighty Colt revolver, and assorted tools to expedite labor were rapidly changing the country's landscape, simultaneously creating an individual-

istic, pioneer American character --the product of an interplay of inheritance and environment, both varied and complex. The whole of the continental milieu --the sense of spaciousness, the invitation to mobility, the atmosphere of independence, the encouragement to enterprise and to optimism produced an homogeneous American.

Henry Steele Commager portrays this generic American in *The American Mind*:¹

The American was incurably optimistic; progress was not, to him, a philosophical idea but a commonplace of experience. Nothing, in all history had ever succeeded like America, and every American knew it. Nowhere else in the globe had nature been at once so rich and generous, and her riches were available to all who had the enterprise to take them and the good fortune to be white.

The American lived in the future, caring little for what the day might bring but much for the dreams -- and profits -- of the morrow. With optimism went a sense of power and vast reserves of energy, while his imagination roamed a continent, receptive to large plans and heroic speculations.

The American preached the gospel of hard work, took comfort for granted, and viewed with condescension people who failed to come up to his standards. He had achieved a general well-being higher than that which obtained elsewhere in the world. He was accustomed to prosperity, resented anything that interfered with it, and looked at any prolonged lapse from it as an outrage against nature. Whatever promised to increase wealth was automatically regarded as good.

The American had an intense practicality which extended to most, though by no means to all, matters. He was endlessly ingenious and resourceful, always ready to improvise new tools or techniques to meet new conditions --happiest when he could find a mechanical solution to problems. He was among the first to concede to technology a place in higher education. Theories and speculations disturbed the American, and he avoided abstruse philosophies of government or conduct as healthy men avoid medicines.

¹Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 3.

The American was incurably utilitarian. He was religious rather than devout. Saintliness was not the most conspicuous quality in his religious leaders, and he stubbornly opposed an instinctive faith in salvation by works to the doctrine of salvation by grace. In politics, too, he profoundly mistrusted the abstract and the doctrinaire. His parties were organizations to which he could attach miscellaneous principles rather than principles around which he had to build organizations.

Completely committed to his life in the New World and enraptured with its riches and rewards, the American cherished an uncritical and unquestioning conviction that his was the best of all countries. To the American, his wilderness was indeed paradise enough. The moral superiority of his country was equally axiomatic to him. The assumption of superiority was accompanied by a sense of destiny and mission, and successive generations were equally eager to spread the American idea over the globe.

His attitude toward culture was at once suspicious and indulgent. For the most part, he required that culture serve some useful purpose. Education was his religion, and he paid it the tribute both of his money and his affection; he expected education to prepare for life — by which he meant, increasingly, jobs and professions.

This American described by Commager created The Colossus of the North, where progress exploded exuberantly in all directions. The establishment of the Naval Academy at Annapolis in 1845, the first code of rules for baseball, the Smithsonian Institution, Brook Farm and similar socialist experiments on the lines laid down by Fourier, the Mormons of Brigham Young, temperance societies by the thousands, women's rights organizations and conventions, over fifty antislavery associations, the *Liberator* newspaper of William Lloyd Garrison, with its motto "Our country is the world — our countrymen are mankind", the 36,000 churches counted in the Sixth National Census of 1850, the 70 million copies of literary magazines, 5 million copies of scientific journals, and 30 million copies of religious publications printed each year portray a kaleidoscopic pattern of progress that defies economic tabulations.

The plight of the two great minority groups in the coun-

try -- the American Indians and the Negroes defies tabulation also.

The American Indians remained isolated from Anglo-Saxon civilization in 1845. The English settlers in the seventeenth century had established their communities detached from the 250,000 natives residing east of the Mississippi, whose density of population barely reached one inhabitant per ten square kilometers of land, and whose primitive ancestral customs burdened them with severe handicaps in dealings with the white man.

As the European enclaves expanded, they displaced the aborigines, oftentimes through the formal instruments of treaties but just as often through the force of arms. Within ten years, the Indian Removal Act of May 28, 1830 had emptied the remaining Seminole and Cherokee tribes -- approximately 100,000 human beings -- from Georgia, Florida, and neighboring states -- transplanting them to the Oklahoma wilderness in the Louisiana Territory west of the Mississippi. Some braves tried to resist and were murdered; others perished along the road, victims of epidemics; and the survivors suffered untold hardships, frequently aggravated by the injustice of Federal agents.

But the redskin's plight in 1845 pales before the sad fate of three million blacks in the United States, 90% of whom were born in slavery, enjoying no civil rights, no education, and no right of family ties.

When the thirteen English colonies declared their independence in 1776, African slavery was a legal institution not only in both American hemispheres, but throughout the globe, and the slave trade that Africans themselves started and sixteenth century Europeans introduced in the New World, was a lucrative and thriving business.

The first North American blacks had, of course, arrived in Virginia in 1619, and their numbers reached 700,000 when the thirteen original states prohibited the slave trade soon after winning independence, thus bringing an end to the importation of Africans. Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and other Northern states, where slavery was not profitable and where there were few Negroes, immediately abolished forced servitude. In the Southern states, however, it was allowed to continue, for the number of Africans (658,000) was too

high and freeing them at once would have entailed a catastrophic upheaval of the existing social and economic order.

Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1793 -- a wooden cylinder encircled by rows of slender spikes that would separate the short staple upland cotton from the seed -- accelerated the ginning process from six pounds daily to a thousand. It also created a demand for the short staple variety, which in turn opened extensive upland areas to its cultivation and thereby consolidated slavery as an integral, indispensable element of the Southern socio-economic establishment.

Cotton production rose one hundredfold within a decade. Exports jumped from 189,000 lbs. in 1791 to 21,000,000 in 1801 and doubled again within three years. King Cotton reigned supreme in the South, irreparably shackling the slaves more securely. While initially most Southern gentlemen deplored their *peculiar institution* as a necessary evil, with the passage of time and mushrooming of cotton it became so essential that to many of them it no longer seemed bad.

The nation's growth became unbalanced. In 1790, the Free States had two million inhabitants. (1.9 million white); the Slave States also had two million. (1.3 million white). By 1820 the North rose to 5.2 million (5 million white) and the South to 4.5 million (2.8 million white). Thirty years later the North soared to 13.4 million (13.2 million white) while the South only reached 9.6 million (6.2 million white). The difference was in large part due to the fact that European immigrants overwhelmingly preferred to settle in Free states.

Agricultural production, which early was greater in the South, was reversed by 1840: 285 versus 279 million dollars in favor of the North, and ten years later the gap had widened to \$859 million in the Free States versus \$631 million under slavery. This, despite the larger area of Southern farms: 180 million acres to only 108 million in the North. While Northern farms employed 2.5 million workers, Southerners required 3.7 million, including 2.5 million slaves --yielding \$7.94 per acre vs. \$3.49, and \$342 per worker vs. \$171, both sets of figures in favor of the North.

Industrial expansion reflected an even wider gap. In 1820, the products manufactured in the Free States were

worth \$32 million; in the Slave States, \$20 million. In 1840, the figures were \$375 and \$106 million respectively. In 1850 the North manufactured \$843 million worth of goods while the South produced only \$165 million.

The 1850 census abounds in figures that reveal similar unequal development in practically every field. Internal commerce statistics show \$1.4 for the North and \$0.4 million for the South. "Enrolled and licensed tonnage" for coasting trade and navigation of rivers, lakes and canals, 1.5 and 0.5 million tons; merchant marine, 1.33 and 0.25 million tons; railroad tracks, 13,105 and 4,212 miles, all in favor of the North.

61 Northern colleges enrolled 47,752 students in 1850; 59 Southern colleges enrolled 19,648 students. 62,433 Northern public schools enrolled 2,769,201 students; 18,507 Southern public schools enrolled 581,861 students. 15,000 libraries held four million volumes in the Free States; 700 libraries held 650,000 volumes in the Slave States. 1,790 newspapers and periodicals printed 334 million Northern copies in 1850; 704 printed 81 million in the South.

About the only statistic that favors the South is the value of exports for the year ending June 30, 1850 (\$81.1 to \$70.7 million), naturally due to cotton, whose expansion totally altered dress fashions in the Western World, displacing wool and other fibers, and which eventually accounted for two thirds of all American exports.

Cotton production continued setting new records at the pace begun in the 1790's, soaring to 1.6 billion lbs. in 1820, and then to 3.2, 7, 10 and 23 billion lbs. per year in each succeeding decade. In 1850, when tractors were yet to be invented, nearly 60% of the Southern slaves labored in the cotton fields. The planting of cotton, which had started in Georgia and South Carolina had moved on to Alabama and Mississippi, then had entered into the former Louisiana Territory and had advanced westward over the Texas flatland, leaving behind thousands upon thousands of acres of impoverished soil due to the wasteful agricultural practices prevailing at the time. With apparently inexhaustible virgin lands available next door, there was no need to apply scientific methods of soil conservation, and as the Georgia and Carolina plantations dropped out of production one after

another, the immense uninhabited prairies of Texas attracted Southern farmers with their slaves.

That expansionist momentum of Southern cotton interests, and, of course, the growing demographic and economic preponderance of the Free States, necessarily disrupted the equilibrium of political forces, causing successive readjustments in an effort to maintain a delicate balance of power between the North and the South. The first important political readjustment took place in 1819-20 when Missouri, which was part of the Louisiana Territory, asked for admission to the Union as a State. Its proposed constitution allowed slavery, sponsored by Southern plantation owners within its borders.

At that moment the Union consisted of 22 members equally divided between Free and Slave states, giving each faction 22 senators in Washington, two for each state. The eleven so-called Northern or Free States, situated between 37° and 47° north latitude, were Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The eleven Southern or Slave States, lying between 29° and 40°, were Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

The location of Missouri, between 36° 30' and 40°, was intermediate, and Northern interests opposed its admission as a member of the slavery bloc. As a result of the tensions created by vested interests on both sides, Congress approved the "Missouri Compromise" in 1820, whereby the entrance of the slave state was balanced by admitting Maine, separated from Massachusetts, as a free state. In addition, the Congress prohibited slavery in all territories north of parallel 36° 30' still under Federal jurisdiction. The Compromise allowed an interlude of relative peaceful coexistence during which two additional Southern states, Arkansas (1836) and Florida (1845), were balanced with the admission of two Northern states: Michigan (1837) and Iowa (1846).

In 1845, the sole remaining territory below parallel 36° 30' available for a potential slave state was the Oklahoma Indian country, while above this parallel vast regions that would later form Wisconsin, Minnesota, Kansas, Colo-

rado, Nebraska, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana. In addition to the undefined Oregon Territory then in dispute between the United States and Great Britain, all loomed as potential free states that would eventually give the North an overwhelming majority in both houses of the Congress.

Under these circumstances, the Republic of Texas, recently separated from Mexico, asked for admission in the Union as a slave state, further exacerbating tensions between the North and the South. Before looking at the Texas question, however, it behooves to cast a glance at the neighbors south of the border, of whom Texas had been a part.

5. South of the Border

In 1845, a quarter of a century after gaining independence from Spain, political affairs in South America offered a striking contrast with the United States.

La Gran Colombia, consisting of Nueva Granada, Venezuela and Ecuador, was splintered with internecine strife: Factional quarrels, either active or latent, continued raging in Nueva Granada after the 1840-42 civil war. Ecuador saw the end of Venezuelan General Juan José Flores' reign (1831-35 and 1839-45). Flores had stayed in power changing the country's constitution at will, until deposed and exiled. In Venezuela the current *caudillo* General José Antonio Páez took power in 1831 and ruled, directly or by proxy, until 1846 when his puppet José Tadeo Monagas turned against him and had him exiled.

Peru fell under the sway of General Ramón Castilla (1845-51 and 1855-62), after a series of revolutions shook the country. Bolivia was under the temporary control of General José Ballivian, installed by force of arms, and another revolt broke out as soon as he left in 1848. In Chile, General Manuel Bulnes (1841-51) enjoyed dictatorial powers.

In Argentina, dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas (1829-52) ruled by force and terror. It is said that his state secret police, the *Mazorca* (Ear of Corn), murdered over 15,000 opponents, earning for Rosas the sobriquet of "Creole Louis XI" ("El Terrible"). In Paraguay the people were subjected to another dictator, Carlos Antonio López (1840-62), and in 1845 the country fought a short war with Argentina. A previous dictator, Doctor Gaspar Rodríguez Francia, *El Supremo*, had ruled for life from 1814 to 1840. In 1845 Uruguay fought a civil war that lasted nine years (1843-51), in which the *Colorado* party of ex-president Fructuoso Rivera and the *Blanco* followers of ex-president Manuel Oribe battled for power.

Brazil had an emperor, Dom Pedro II. Alaska belonged to

the Russian Czar. Panama was an appendage of New Granada. Cuba and Puerto Rico were Spanish possessions. Canada and Jamaica, English colonies. The island of Hispaniola, sole independent piece of land in the West Indies, had witnessed recurrent blood baths beginning with the insurrection of the slaves in 1791.

Central America in 1845 was also a theater of ruthless, factional quarrels. An endless civil war raged in Nicaragua, and the country was invaded by the combined armies of Honduras and El Salvador. Guatemala was governed by Rafael Carrera, an illiterate general who continued as "President for Life" until death removed him twenty years later.

In 1845 Mexico was also torn by turbulent forces in intestinal strife. During its initial 55 years of independent existence (1821-1876), Mexico had no fewer than 74 governments. In the decade ending in 1845, it actually had fifteen presidents of the republic and twelve revolutions.

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, Mexico was larger than the United States both in size and population. When Mexico became independent from Spain in 1821, her territory surpassed four million square kilometers, about equal in area to the United States after the Louisiana and the Florida purchases. But while the United States population burgeoned from 5 to 23 million during the first half of the century, Mexico's remained around 6 to 7 million.

With a densely rugged terrain creased by steep ridges and deep ravines, Mexico's vast hinterlands were crossed solely by Indian footpaths, afterwards trodden by the hoofs of the Conquistadores' horses and the toilsome mule trains of colonial commerce. It was only at the end of the colonial period that the Spanish authorities got to inaugurate a road from the capital to the port of Veracruz and another to Toluca. Though urgently needed, communications do not advance at all in the succeeding years of constant revolutions; on the contrary, military operations frequently require their obstruction, and whatever an army destroyed in a few hours, it would take a very long time indeed to repair.

The revenue from postal services in 1832 were lower than in 1808. Although the first contract for the construction of a railroad from Veracruz to Mexico City was signed in 1837, when 1850 arrived the dormant energies of the nation were

yet to be awakened by the shrill whistle of a locomotive, and the country's silence is yet to be split by a magnetic telegraph signal.

Numberless tariffs imposed heavy fetters on trade. To heavy import duties and ancient excise taxes imposed on transit to merchandise, onerous municipal imports were added under the guise of various names -- *de mejoras*, *de contrarresguardo*, *de internación*, *de amortización*, and who knows how many more, besides another cluster levied at port for *toneladas*, *muelle*, *aguaje*, *practicaje*, *capitanía*, *sanidad*, and others that each new government established or abolished at whim. This prompted an American observer to remark: "Free trade seems to be so odious to Mexicans, that it does not exist even between the different States of the republic."¹

Calicoes that in New York sold for ten cents a yard, cost seventy cents in the Mexican capital. Smuggling naturally flourished. Mexican historian Emilio Rabasa discusses this and other aspects of the problem in *La Evolución Histórica de México* [The Historical Evolution of Mexico], explaining the economic ruin of the nation:

In the eleven years that the [Mexican] War of Independence lasted, with the disorders and increased expenditures also came a decline of internal revenues and corruption in their collection. Mines and fields left idle and abandoned when the men joined the rebels or were pressed into service by the government; the paralysis of trade consequent to the increased hazards of travel; the insecurity in the cities, constantly threatened by the combatants and agitated by insurrectional sentiments; all these things contributed to decrease production, thereby lowering tax revenues to extremely low levels.

To compensate for the deficit, the government resorted to the usual measure of raising tax rates:

¹Albert C. Ramsey, Col. U.S. Army. "Field Notes -- Statistics, Observations, and Thoughts on the Civil Condition of Mexico," *New York Herald* February 14, 1848, p.1, c.4.

the higher duties inspired ideas of smuggling in the importation of goods, in the export of precious metals, and in illegal trades; and the contraband brought venality of fiscal agents, who in the confusion reigning at the time were exempt from official surveillance and imbued with the spirits of rebellion, cupidity and licentiousness that all popular uprisings seem to loosen and propagate in the public sector.

In eleven years everything was contaminated and the evil became permanent: excessive taxation was a device familiar to those in power; fiscal fraud, customarily practiced by the taxpayer; collusion and venality ceased to be morally repugnant for employees; and all these things together attained and established the impoverishment of the country and the ruinous depression of productive activities.

But that was not all. To complete the array of vices transformed into habits bequeathed as heritage on the coming generation that would guide the liberated country, the Spanish authorities set the example of resorting to forced loans in the name of the law, and the rebels resorted to confiscations of property in the name of liberty; the former showed how to sell public revenues at a large discount, justifying it as being necessary to save the kingdom, while the latter issued worthless currency under the pretext of needing to do it to secure independence.

. . . .
The accumulation of incorrect ideas on economic matters, the erroneous notions on what freedom could accomplish in a land dreamt to be immensely wealthy, and the lack of administrative traditions to prescribe at least a way of prudent exploration, produced a set of conditions that determined an unmistakable proclivity for blundering. . . .

The taxpayer, abused by all, hated and despised the government, the speculators and employees alike. The partisan press of each triumphant revolution attacked the fiscal policies of the previous govern-

ment, denouncing them as unfair or dishonest; and the process, repeated time and again after each political shift would eventually assault all taxes without exception, making them odious and, in a nutshell, teaching the citizen that all taxes were iniquitous, that he possessed a natural right to resist, and that every fraud he practiced upon the national treasury was a moral act of self defense.²

Poverty characterized the national treasury from the very start. In 1821 Mexico began its career as an independent nation with a domestic debt of thirty five million pesos. It instantly required an injection of twenty seven million pesos lent by London bankers, but the situation gradually worsened as recurrent revolutions, interests, and loans kept accumulating. Government revenues were always insufficient to meet administrative expenses, leaving no room for even planning any works of progress.

Public education didn't exist, either before or after independence. The individual Mexican states, reduced to even tighter straits than the Federal government, completely neglected education within their respective jurisdictions. Private schools gathered some pupils, and Joseph Lancaster's "mutual" system of mass instruction was tried in Mexico City in 1822, but lack of funds in the public coffers created such penury that it never achieved any practical results.

Grade school instruction was generally conducted by the religious orders, in classrooms usually attached to a convent. The few in existence -- it is estimated that at the end of the eighteenth century there were only eleven in the whole country -- offered a limited curriculum of reading, writing, religion, and manual labors. Higher education in Jesuit schools -- before their expulsion by Charles III in 1767 -- added Latin and metaphysical discussion. The Mexico City and Guadalajara universities, founded in the sixteenth century, taught Theology, Medicine and Law, and the seminar-

²Emilio Rabasa, *La Evolución Histórica de México*, (Mexico: Editorial Porrúa, S.A. 1972), pp. 67-73.

ies established towards the end of the eighteenth century. Law and Theology.

Although liberal reforms in 1833 were responsible for the laicization of education, the relaxation of monastic vows, the discontinuance by the state of the collection of tithes, and the right of the state to appoint church officials, in 1845 the Catholic Church still enjoyed enormous political power in Mexico. It would continue exerting it undiminished until Benito Juárez in 1859 issued decrees suppressing the religious orders, nationalizing ecclesiastical real estate (estimated as worth more than \$125,000,000 without including churches, monasteries, schools, hospitals, libraries and art treasures), establishing civil marriage and registration, transferring the cemeteries to civil control—in short, disestablishing and disendowing the church.

Rabasa explains the political supremacy of the Catholic hierarchy during the period, as follows:

As soon as Independence is won, the two tendencies for advancement and regression spontaneously appear: The progressive current that invoking liberty leads on to anarchy, and the conservative trend that under the pretext of the reign of law strives to restore the fallen regime. The latter is traditionally strong and will oppose obstinate resistance.

Spanish tradition had synthesized as the foundation of Spanish nationality and independence, a secular unity of "the altar and the throne," tight and indissoluble. Whatever New Spain [Mexico] ever got to know about monarchical government was by intervention of the church, which imposed more authority than the king with her presence permeating all of society and every home.

Neither the people could foresee a government without the church, nor the clergy could conceive of its own religious function without temporal authority. The church defended her "share" with the firm conviction of a rightful owner; the government, strictly civil in nature, was a booty of privileges guaranteed by human and divine laws.

In order to transform the established order, it was essential to first vanquish the champions of tradition and to eject the clergy from the heart of the state, thereby splitting the duality that to the common conscience appeared as indisputable unity. In short, and considering that political strength resided in the masses, the organization of Mexico required a metamorphosis of the popular spirit in its most intimate and rebellious element: Its religious sentiment.³

In 1845 the Mexican clergy was fragmented with regard to political matters, and numerous priests were staunch republicans, though all of them united in defense of ecclesiastical privileges and of the temporal power of the church when under attack by anticlerical forces. An American observer in 1848 tells it this way:

From these considerations, it is apparent that this religious establishment has power and influence unsurpassed in any civilized country; and yet, that power and influence are seldom brought into energetic exercise, in consequence of the impediments which counteracting circumstances are constantly opposing. There is not one question that can be presented of government or policy, not directly affecting the interests of the church, on which the opinions of the church will be found united; and it is this want of concert which has always prevented them from usurping the political departments of the republic, or giving direction to public affairs.⁴

In its ownership of real estate in the republic, the Catholic Church was the wealthy landlord, and in monetary affairs it was the great banker of Mexico. Yet, "possessing

³Ibid., p. 264.

⁴Ramsey, *Op. Cit.*, p. 2, c. 1.

riches, proclaiming poverty," by stressing the parable of the camel and the needle's eye in the field of morals. Roman Catholic supremacy created in the Mexican people a hostile attitude towards the rich. Conversely, in the United States the Calvinist sentiment prevailed: material wealth was considered a token of God's grace.

Just as the American pioneer viewed with condescension his Southern neighbors who failed to come up to his standards, and cherished an uncritical and unquestioning conviction that his was the best of all countries, so the Mexican people believed that their own Roman Catholic religion was the only true faith, and disdained all protestants — that is to say, their Northern neighbors — as heathen and renegades irretrievably condemned to eternal Hell.

On the other hand, the wide-spread feeling in the Western world about the alleged inferiority of colored races and the supposedly pernicious characteristics of racial mixtures, necessarily kindled animosity between both countries, as 40% of the Mexicans had mixed blood and another 40% were of pure Indian stock.

Don Emilio Rabasa crystalizes the relevant characteristics of the Mexican temperament, which contrasted with the nineteenth century American portrayed by Henry Steele Commager in our previous chapter, partially explain the diverging development of both nations. Rabasa says:

For the Mexican, his native patch, almost human, displays its own features, is endowed with diction and embosoms a soul. He clings to it, identifies himself with it, and loves it as a totem of his family, of his ancestors, from the gods that protect them.

Such fetishistic attachment supports his love for his region which then embraces his state with parochial affection and broadens to the concept of country (when he gets to know it), covering it not in vanity, disavowed by his backwardness and history, but with love learned from his native patch, enlarged by his knowledge of kindred people and kindled in the misfortunes of the common fatherland. Mexican patriotism has thus been formed, passionate

and explosive, as yet immature from lack of education, at the mercy of avarice and malice, oftentimes unable to sacrifice ambition but never yet unwilling to offer the sacrifice of his own blood.

The native patch ties down each Mexican and takes in his family roots, keeping migration to a minimum. The family tightens with bonds conferring on towns the appearance of hearth gatherings which lately has been noticed by several foreign writers. Kinships are kept alive, and acknowledged even though many-times-removed, as in patriarchal societies, models of union.

Feelings thereby prevail over the urge for action. Happiness takes precedence over wealth. Moving away, even within the country, is an outrageously costly sacrifice. The productive faculty languishes and is applied only in circumstances in which such hardships can be avoided.⁵

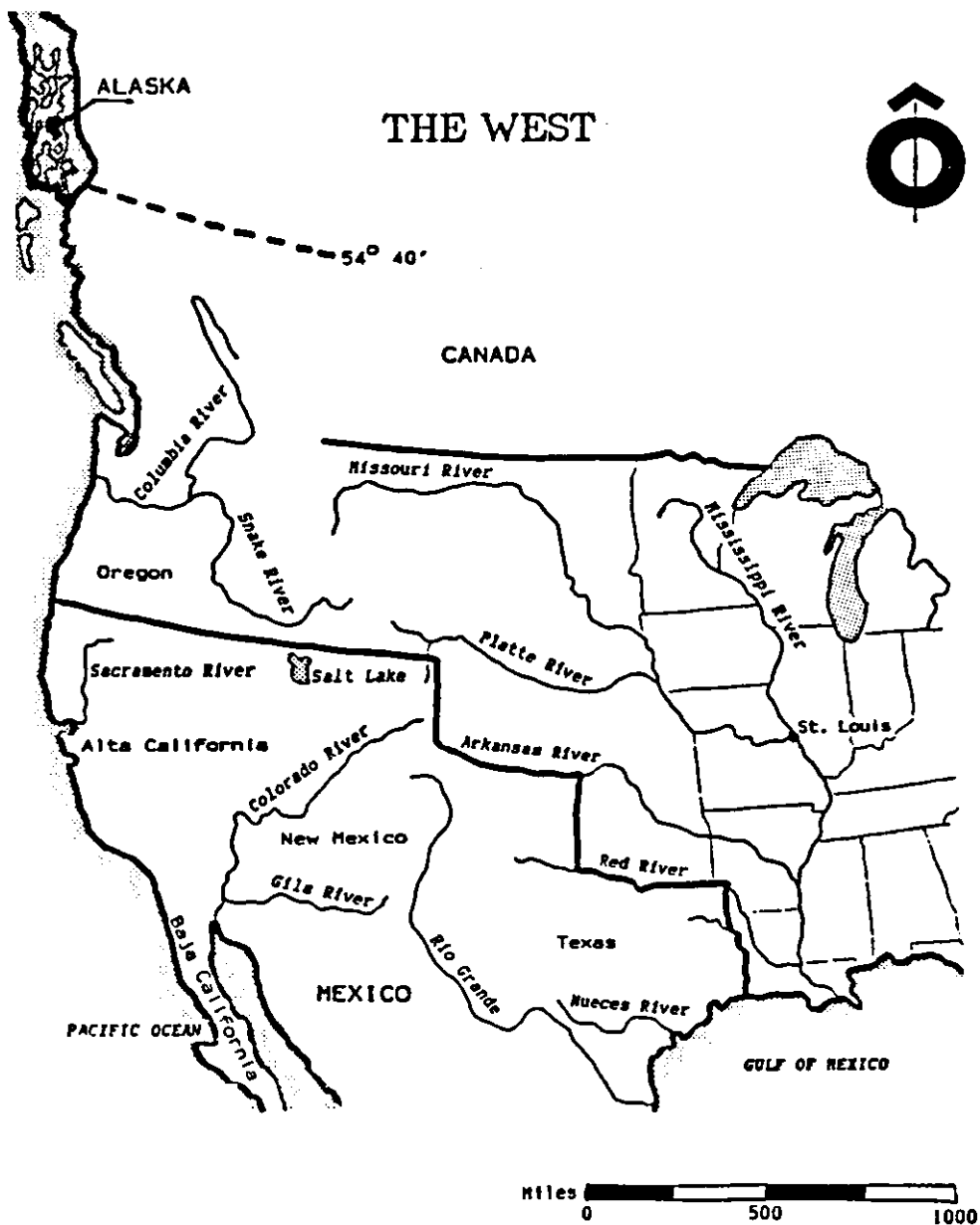
During the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Mexican's "native patch" was a corner somewhere along the central or southern parts of the country. Few courageous souls dared to seek shelter in the vast solitude of the northern territories of Texas, New Mexico, and California with a combined expanse of two million square kilometers which today comprise the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona (north of the Gila), Utah, Nevada, California, and portions of Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, and Wyoming.

After three centuries of Spanish rule in the New World, the province of Texas — larger than France — had only three modest civilized communities named San Antonio, Goliad, and Nacogdoches. Counting all "domesticated" Indians, Santa Fe, Taos, Albuquerque, and other villages in New Mexico — the total population was only thirty thousand people. Alta California (which included Nevada) had only seven thousand persons of Spanish origin and thirty thousand baptized Indians.

⁵Rabasa. *Op. Cit.*, p. 11.

The best natural harbor in the Pacific coast of the American continent, San Francisco, was a tiny hamlet of two hundred people. By adding all the civilized communities in the two million square kilometers comprising the three provinces, one could reach a figure of eighty thousand people: a population density less than half a person for every ten kilometers. "Wild" Indians, defying Mexican authority, numbered close to three hundred thousand — one brave and his squaw for each fourteen square kilometers of land -- these Indians included Apaches, Comanches, and allied nomadic warring tribes that periodically ravaged the isolated bastions of "civilization."

Anxious to stimulate progress and protect the frontier, the Mexican government enacted a General Law of Colonization in 1824, authorizing untitled common lands to anyone willing to work them, including foreigners. But while seven million Mexicans, absorbed and distracted in everlasting civil strife devoutly clung to the cherished native patch in the southern parts of the country, their energetic Northern neighbors eagerly took advantage of the opening to establish settlements in Texas and California. This inevitably led to the Alamo in 1836 and the American-Mexican war in 1846: a war that permeated Walker's consciousness.



6. Winds of War

After the American Revolution, the Continental Navy had been disbanded and, consequently, the United States didn't have a single man of war in 1792. Nevertheless, it managed to take possession of the Columbia river mouth in the Pacific Northwest, thereby setting a claim to the virgin lands of the "Oregon country" lying between Spanish California and Russian Alaska, thousands of miles away from its own borders. In May of that year, Captain Robert Gray of the *Columbia*, a Boston trader searching for furs to sell in China, discovered and entered the river to which he gave the name of his ship. He formally took possession of the land and gave his country its first foothold on the Pacific coast.

The Lewis and Clark expedition in 1804-06, ascending the Missouri river from St. Louis, opened the Big Medicine Trail for the fur traders in the Northwest. The Trail was in fact an almost unbroken transcontinental waterway linking the Northwest Pacific Ocean with the Gulf of Mexico: Up the Columbia river from Astoria to the Continental Divide and down the Missouri and the Mississippi rivers to New Orleans.

William Ashley, Tom Fitzpatrick, Kit Carson, Jim Bridger, William and Milton Sublette, and fellow fur traders and trappers rapidly pushed the American frontier to the West. The "Father of the Santa Fe Trail," William Becknell, opened the caravan trade between Missouri and New Mexico in 1821, exchanging Yankee merchandise for Mexican silver and pelts.

Celebrated pioneers opened the way to California: Jedediah Smith, William Wolfskill, and George Yount by the Old Spanish Trail; James Ohio Pattie, Sylvester Pattie, Ewing Young, and Kit Carson by the Gila Trail to the south; Kit Carson, John Bidwell, and John C. Frémont by the California Trail to the north; and slow sailing vessels, winding down Cape Horn, added their quota of Anglo Saxon immigrants to the Pacific ports. By 1845, foreign settlers in California

already outnumbered the seven thousand residents of Spanish origin.

Connecticut Yankee Stephen F. Austin, carrying on a project started by his father, Moses, secured a Mexican grant in 1823 to introduce 300 families in Texas. Other Americans, specially Southerners, soon turned other grants to good account, sending down a stream of colonists that by 1834 surpasses the 25,000 mark, overwhelming the older Texas residents of Spanish extraction in a proportion of four to one.

In 1835, under President Antonio López de Santa Anna, the Mexican Congress framed a centralist Constitution known as the *Siete Leyes* (Seven Laws) that abolished the Mexican states and turned them into *Departamentos* (Departments) ruled by governors appointed by the central government. Popular representation was reduced considerably. The new settlers rebelled, and in 1836 proclaimed the independence of Texas from Mexico.

Santa Anna attacked and triumphed at El Alamo (San Antonio) on March 6, but the insurgents, led by Sam Houston, former governor of Tennessee, and reinforced by volunteers from Louisiana and nearby states, defeated the Mexican general in a twenty-minute battle at the San Jacinto river on April 21. Consequently, in 1836 Texas was independent of Mexican control.

Texas promptly legalized slavery and applied for admission to the Union. This was vigorously opposed by antislavery forces, alarmed at visions of a brand-new slave state the size of France. The annexation proposal was defeated in the U.S. Congress, but the infant Lone Star Republic instantly secured recognition as an independent nation from the governments in Washington, London, and Paris. Mexico's vehement protests were ignored.

The panic of 1837 forced most banks to suspend specie payments and led to failures unprecedented in the United States. Another commercial crisis in 1839 contributed to maintain the status quo for several years. This crisis pressed Texas financially, and rumors began to circulate about forthcoming British economic assistance in exchange for the Lone Star Republic's request for British protection. The diplomatic maneuvering resulted in various intrigues by officials in Austin, Washington, London, Paris, and Mexico

City. Finally, the 1844 electoral campaign brought the issue to a head in the United States when Democratic candidate James K. Polk adroitly precipitated the admission of Texas into the Union.

James Knox Polk (1795-1849), born in Mecklenburg county, N.C., had excelled as "the pre-eminent scholar in both classics and mathematics" at the University of North Carolina. In 1820 he began his career as a politically ambitious lawyer in Nashville, Tennessee. Close friend and protegee of Andrew Jackson and undeviating supporter of Jacksonian principles, Polk served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1825 to 1839 and then left Washington to become governor of Tennessee.

When nominated for the presidency at the Democratic Convention in 1844, he surprised the nation by taking an affirmative stand on two burning issues of the day. While other candidates hedged on Texas, he demanded annexation; while others evaded the Oregon problem, he openly advocated a drastic change in policy in the boundary dispute with Great Britain. Polk cleverly circumvented antislavery objections to Texas by directing the whole country's attention to Oregon, turning national passions against England.

The Whigs -- the conservative party organized in 1834 in opposition to Jackson's Democrats -- nominated Henry Clay. Clay stood against the admission of Texas unless it could be done "without dishonor, without war, with the common consent of the Union, and upon just and fair terms."¹ His attempt to skirt this issue by straddling a middle course caused him to lose supporters from both camps.

Recalcitrant anti-slavery New Yorkers squandered their votes in November on James Gillespie Birney, abolitionist candidate on the Liberty Party ticket. This allowed Polk to win that key state by a scant plurality, and the presidency of the country with less than 50% of the popular vote.

Interpreting Polk's election as a popular mandate for the admission of Texas, the Congress authorized it at the end of February, 1845, by a narrow 27 to 25 margin in the Senate

¹Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Growth of the American Republic*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 545.

and an ample 132 to 76 margin in the House. In reaction, Mexico instantly severed relations with the United States but belatedly recognized the independence of Texas. The Texans, however, preferred Washington's offer, and they eagerly ratified annexation at the Austin Convention of July 4.

Polk was inaugurated the 11th president of the United States on March 4, 1845. During his time in the White House, he worked close to eighteen hours daily, except for six weeks of vacation during the entire four years. His dream was to acquire California, especially the splendid harbors at San Francisco, Monterey, and San Diego before England or France could snatch them from Mexico.

In 1845, American naval strength totaled 77 vessels containing 2,345 guns; 12 of the vessels were still unfinished in the shipyards. This was substantially inferior to the 316 ships and 8,782 guns of the French fleet, and not even subject to comparison with the 671 ships and 17,772 guns of the British Navy.

Both European powers were then expanding their Pacific empires. The British hoisted the Union Jack in New Zealand, annexing it to Australia in 1840. The French took possession of the Marquesas archipelago in 1843. When the Bustamante government failed to satisfy questionable damage claims by French nationals in Mexico in 1838, a French fleet blockaded the coast, bombarded the fortress of San Juan de Ulúa, and temporarily occupied Veracruz.

The British consul in Monterey repeatedly urged London to acquire California, and the English Minister to Mexico proposed the cession of Californian real estate to England in payment for the constantly growing Mexican debt.

On October 15, 1845, Mexican president José Joaquín Herrera suggested that he was ready to resume diplomatic relations with the United States, accepting an overture from President Polk to settle all the questions in dispute between the two nations, by negotiation. Polk promptly sent John Slidell as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary from the United States to Mexico.

Slidell arrived in Veracruz aboard the sloop-of-war, *St. Mary's*, on November 29. His detailed instructions included an authorization to offer a maximum of twenty-five million dollars for the cession of California to the Union. The

document, signed by Secretary of State James Buchanan, fleshed out the administration's fears and wishes in regards to California:

From information possessed by this department, it is to be seriously apprehended that both Great Britain and France have designs upon California. The views of the government of the United States on this subject, you will find presented in my despatch to Thomas O. Larkin, Esq., our consul at Monterey, dated October 17, 1845, a copy of which is herewith transmitted. From it you will perceive that, while this government does not intend to interfere between Mexico and California, it would vigorously interpose to prevent the latter from becoming either a British or a French colony. . . .

The possession of the bay and harbor of San Francisco is all important to the United States. The advantages to us of its acquisition are so striking, that it would be a waste of time to enumerate them here. If all these should be turned against our country by the cession of California to Great Britain, our principal commercial² rival, the consequences would be most disastrous.

At the same time that Polk sent Slidell to Mexico, he intensified the offensive against Great Britain on the Oregon question. In previous talks the United States had proposed to divide the disputed territory at parallel 49°, leaving England the northern portion, up to the Alaskan panhandle at 54°40' latitude. The British desired to secure a slightly larger share, down to the Columbia river.

In his Message to the Congress on December 2, 1845, the president announced that there was no longer any hope of adjusting the question by negotiation; indeed, all negotiation on the subject was closed. The proposition to compromise had been withdrawn, and the United States claimed the

²The Instructions of the Hon. James Buchanan, the Secretary of State, to the Hon. John Slidell, "New York Herald, 3/21/1848, p. 3, c. 4.

entire Oregon Territory up to the 54°40' parallel at the Alaskan border.

News dispatches telling of English and French naval squadrons intervening at the siege of Montevideo in South America exacerbated the general animosity against Great Britain, as did rumors filtered from Havana that the Spanish *Infanta*, Doña Luisa Fernanda, was to be given in marriage to the Duke of Montpensier, son of Louis Philippe, and placed "on the throne of Mexico" backed by the Spanish, British, and French fleets.

Large numbers of Americans -- Democrats and Whigs in the North and South -- supported the president in his posture against Britain, and the popular *fifty four forty or fight* slogan swept the country. "The country," said the president in his Message to the Congress, "will have reached a period when the national rights in Oregon must be either abandoned or firmly established. That they cannot be abandoned without a sacrifice both of national honor and interest, is too clear to admit of doubt."³

The Americans' urge of Western expansion to fill a continent, passionately directed against the ancient monarchical enemy, was soon to be forcefully accomplished at the expense of Mexico. Americans found moral justification in their conviction of the superiority of the republican system and their sense of mission and destiny that precisely in 1845 journalist John L. O'Sullivan characterized as MANIFEST DESTINY in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*:

Our manifest destiny [is] to overspread and possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us⁴

In fact, the doctrine of Manifest Destiny inspired the

³"The President's Message," *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), 12/13/1845, p.2, c.2.

⁴Michael Kraus, *The United States to 1865*. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1959), p. 430.

forthcoming Mexican War drive (1846-48) that completed American Western Expansion, rounding out the continental boundary at the Pacific shore. It also inspired the filibustering expeditions against Cuba, Mexico, and Central America in the succeeding decade. William Walker, the "king of the filibusters," conspicuously stands out as the living embodiment of Manifest Destiny sentiment. In 1855, in Nicaragua, Walker would receive world attention and be dubbed *The Gray-Eyed Man of Destiny*.



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