

**The Starless Night of Centralism: Examining The Language of War in and outside
of Revolutionary Texas**

by

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Abstract

Texian officials and American Democratic party newspapers pushed for a cause that they believed appealed to shared ideals concerning Jeffersonianism, centralism, race, liberty, slavery, nationalism, kinship, and identity. Altogether, their consistent rhetoric reveals what they thought it meant to be Americans. The *true* American was the decentralist minded ideologue whose predilection was against consolidation and abolitionism: the true American was the Texian. With their own interpretations of the Texian Revolution, party ideologues conveyed a specific vision of America itself. Texians used the language of centralism at home through the print media and they argued that Santa Anna had usurped protections given to the state under the 1824 Constitution. This was echoed and expounded upon by Democratic newspapermen in the United States who saw the Texian cause as *their* cause.

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Introduction

In early November of 1835, the *Nashville Tennessean* published a transcript of a meeting that was held in Texas one day before the first battle of the revolution at Gonzales occurred. The transcript of this meeting was designed to be sent out to the newspapermen of the United States and the language appealed directly to Democratic party sensibilities. Stephen F. Austin asked the committee, “Could not volunteers also be had from the United States? Our cause is one that merits the moral and physical aid of a free and magnanimous people.” He also instructed the committee to send his message, along with other enclosed papers, to “printers in the United States for publication in order that the public may be generally informed of the present state of affairs in Texas.”¹ The transcript goes “the justice of our cause will call to the recollection of the usurpers. The Caesar had his Brutus, Charles 1st his Cromwell, George 3d his Washington, Irtbide and Bustamentan (of more recent date) their Santa Anna, and Santa Anna will, I trust, find in some son of Washington a corrector of his errors.”² R. R. Royal, president of the interim council at San Felipe, surmised that when news of their victories spread to the newspapers of the United States, “it will be like smoke forced into a beehive.”³

The Texian army was just as hastily prepared as their Gonzales banner had been. Before the Battle of Gonzales even began it was understood by Texian committees and councils on war and public safety that the rebel army needed soldiers, arms, provisions, and a commander-in-chief. This “Army of The People,” as it was called, took four forms

¹ *Nashville Tennessean*, November 5, 1835.

² *Nashville Tennessean*, October 6, 1835.

³ Jenkins, John Holmes. *The Papers of the Texas Revolution: 1835-1836. Volume 2*. Austin: Presidial Press, 1973, 100.

over the course of the war and it became increasingly more American in composition instead of native Texan (by native I mean those who had lived in Texas prior to the war's outbreak).⁴ This coincided with an ardent campaign by Texian officials and American Democratic party newspapers to push for a cause that they believed appealed to shared ideals concerning Jeffersonianism, centralism, race, liberty, slavery, nationalism, kinship, and identity. Altogether, their rhetoric reveals what they thought it meant to be Americans. The *true* American was the decentralist minded ideologue whose predilection was against consolidation and abolitionism: the true American was the Texian. With their own interpretations of the Texian Revolution, party ideologues conveyed a specific vision of America itself. Texians used the language of centralism at home through the print media and they argued that Santa Anna had usurped protections given to the state under the 1824 Constitution. This was echoed and expounded upon by Democratic newspapermen in the United States who saw the Texian cause as *their* cause.

By examining the rhetoric of newspapermen and officials like Austin, one is able to get a glimpse of what they thought would motivate Americans to leave the United States and fight in the Texas Revolution. This recruitment language of this *American* revolution offers insight into the mental furniture of Democratic party operatives and what they believed to be ideologically compelling. It shows that party operatives viewed the events in Texas through a Jeffersonian lens that they, in turn, used to assess their own government. This reveals an interpretation of "Americanness" that is focused on political decentralization, slave-holding, and autonomy.

⁴ On that note, this essay will use the standard convention of referring to 1830s Texans of Anglo-Celtic descent as 'Texians' and to Texans of Hispanic descent as 'Tejanos.'

This all occurred in the backdrop of the dramatic transformation in American politics which resulted in the establishment of the Second Party System which lasted roughly from 1828-1854. In this era, the world's first "mass party organizations" were developed in the United States.⁵ For the first time, the momentum behind national elections began to supersede that of local and gubernatorial elections.⁶ Taking advantage of this rise in importance, state and local partisan organizations purchased newspapers *en masse* to spread the "Jackson Gospel."⁷ Technological advancement and changes in literacy rates increasingly contributed to a broadening of the public sphere which made the 1830s fertile ground for partisan newspaper wars. Much of the political history of the Second Party System, or Jacksonian America as this paper will refer to it, has been traditionally characterized by scheming, loyalty buying, contracts, patronages, gifts, political machinations, and sheer pragmatism which makes it all the more interesting and significant that ideology *trumps* pragmatism in this study.

Out of more than two hundred unique issues, I specifically searched for those that dealt directly with the Texas question and ideology. My primary method of research was finding full runs for party newspapers throughout 1835-1837. By using full runs in my research, or at least by using multiple samples from the same paper in different months or years, I was able to identify a pattern of ideological consistency rather than change in the rhetoric I examined. This project, in fact, was originally intended to be a comparison of

⁵ Ronald P. Formisano "The 'Party Period' Revisited" *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 1 (1999), 93.

⁶ Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, 8.

⁷ *Ibid*, 9; David Brown, "Jeffersonian Ideology and the Second Party System" *The Historian* 62, no. 1 (January 1999): 18.

rhetoric before, during, and after the conflict. Once I discovered that rhetoric did *not* change to any significant degree I opted to argue the case that ideology trumped pragmatism. This is primarily a southern study although it is not entirely limited to that region. The source base used in this study depended largely, but not exclusively, on the materials that were available. Many northern Democratic party papers share much of the same sentiment as the southern ones and they circulate pieces that previously had been printed in the southern papers of that party. Contrarily, drastically excoriating the happenings in Texas and the support that it received from the slave-holding states was commonplace in the Whig party newspapers of the northeast.

Expansion was key to the Jeffersonian model of republicanism. It allowed white men “a just share in their own rule.” It also allowed yeomen to purchase land for cheap and fulfil the Virginian’s idea of an “agrarian democracy.”⁸ Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* and his first inaugural address revealed his intentions to expand the border of the United States far past the Mississippi, Sabine, and even Rio Grande rivers. He described the land where Texas lie as “A chosen country, with room enough for our descendants to the hundredth and thousandth generation.”⁹ This theme, which governed policy in the first three decades of the nineteenth century would assert itself continuously as Americans poured across the Sabine during the war of 1835-1836.

The great Comanche empire to the north of New Spain’s metropole in Mexico City had long deterred Mexican settlers from establishing themselves in the region of Coahuila y Tejas. The land largely remained barren, save for the tough Tejano rancheros

⁸ Ibid, 11.

⁹ Ibid, 11.

and a few dilapidated missions built in the eighteenth century. This was the case until Spain introduced the empresario system which encouraged colonists from the United States to come and settle on the cheap, but fertile, lands north of the Rio Grande. Among these empresarios was Moses Austin who, after struggling from the economic Panic of 1819, migrated from Virginia to Missouri in order to capitalize on its burgeoning lead mining industry. After the Spanish government presented him with the colonization offer he set his aspirations on Texas until he died from pneumonia at the age of 59. The task of filling Texas with American colonizers fell to Moses' son Stephen F. Austin who, along with the "Old Three Hundred," formed the beginnings of what would be the Anglo-Celtic population in Texas.¹⁰

Years later, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, the hero of the late Mexican civil war, abolished the Mexican legislature, along with the self-governance that states like Coahuila y Tejas enjoyed under Mexico's federalist constitution of 1824. Texians continued to fight against the centralism and perceived treachery of the new caudillo. When Santa Anna ordered a small three pound cannon removed from the Texian garrison at Gonzales in early October 1835 defenders of the town met the invading army with a blast from the cannon and with a three word challenge painted onto a hastily prepared banner: "Come and Take It."¹¹

The rhetorical 'blasts' from American Democratic party newspapermen proved to be more important to the Texian cause than the physical cannon blast at Gonzales.

¹⁰ Randolph B. Campbell *Gone to Texas: a History of the Lone Star State* New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, .

¹¹ Crisp, James E. *Sleuthing the Alamo Davy Crockett's Last Stand and Other Mysteries of the Texas Revolution*. Oxford University Press, 2014, xiii.

Much like the “shot heard ‘round the world” at Lexington this shot at Gonzalez would take similar effect in the hearts and minds of Americans who felt that their brethren were being attacked. Austin’s initial call for his messages to be sent to the “printers in the United States” indicates that his diplomatic efforts entirely revolved around garnering American support.

The volunteers that followed these supportive messages would have joined an army that originally consisted mainly of native Texians. Recruits showed up either by land or by sea on steamers from New Orleans. They were sometimes already organized into their own units, like the New Orleans Greys, or into sporadic groups.¹² The largest numbers came from Tennessee, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Virginia, and Alabama. Most were either landowning farmers or the sons of landowning farmers and between the ages of 20 and 30. While many were rabble who had never seen battle before, many others had War of 1812 experience, having either fought under Jackson at New Orleans or against the Creeks at Horseshoe Bend. Their Kentucky long rifles and light infantry tactics, which had proven to be effective against a superior British force at New Orleans, would compensate for their overall lack in numbers.¹³

The *True American* that ran out of New Orleans published a Stephen F. Austin letter from early November 1835 claiming that he already had more than 750 men and he was expecting that number to reach 1,000 soon. He did not exaggerate. After year’s end, Austin’s Army had grown to 1,300 men with 52% of its 200 foreign volunteers coming

¹² Paul D. Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience: a Political and Social History, 1835-1836* (College Station: Texas A. & M University Press) 1992, 110.

¹³ Alwyn Barr, *Texans in Revolt: the Battle for San Antonio, 1835*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991, 9-11.

from the U.S. South. *This* number would increase as the war continued. The other 48% was split between volunteers from the northern states and from European countries. Likewise, *this* number would fall.¹⁴ So, by the time Sam Houston was given the last command of the army it would have mainly been comprised of soldiers who left the southeast after the war had begun. In the same letter, Austin appealed to Americans' cultural memory of revolution by declaring that "Gonzales had become the Lexington of Texas."¹⁵

The amount of volunteers streaming in from the United States during the Fall of 1835 unsurprisingly infuriated Santa Anna who saw American apathy to emigration as a violation of their official neutrality. The *Daily Selma Reporter* informed readers in November 1835 that the Mexican Charge d' Affaires sent President Jackson "an official note of remonstrance against the movements in New Orleans and elsewhere, in aid of the 'insurgents' of Texas. Upwards of almost one thousand individuals have gone out of the United States, into Texas, as volunteers."¹⁶ It seems as if these publishers brought this to the attention of readers as a form of challenge to defy the despot. Jackson's administration did little to stop the flow of emigrant volunteers to Texas. On the contrary, correspondence between Jackson and Houston suggests that the President was covertly supporting the influx.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Jackson sent the Virginian Edmund Gaines to the border of Louisiana and Texas to keep with international decorum. This ended up having

¹⁴ Ibid,9-11.

¹⁵ *New Orleans True American*, November 10, 1835.

¹⁶ *Daily Selma Reporter*, November 28, 1835

¹⁷ H.W. Brands, *Lone Star Nation*, (Anchor Books, 2004), 62.

the opposite effect as many of General Gaines' troops deserted and flocked to the armies of the Texas rebellion.¹⁸

The number of volunteers from the United States drastically increased after the Texans won the Siege of Bexar in December 1835. By that winter the overwhelming majority -- 79% in fact -- of the men who were in the army had emigrated from the United States after hostilities had begun in October and 63% of those volunteers were from the southern states.¹⁹²⁰Part of this is due to the fact that many of the Texans who had fought at Gonzales and Bexar had simply gone home. They volunteered to fight as they pleased and they left as they pleased. Those new emigrants did not have that opportunity because, quite frankly, they had nowhere else to go. Additionally, pamphlets and newspapers in the United States capitalized on Texian victories and continued to emphasize the same ideological language that they had in the fall of 1835.

To be clear, I am aware of the social context in which this study lies. The reader should come away from this paper with an understanding that this is *not* an argument about what happened. Instead, this should be construed as an argument about an argument -- an argument and perspective of 1830s white Americans and white Texans. While this paper is a study of recruitment, is not a study of recruits, it is a study of *recruiters*. Race lies at the heart of their rhetoric, language, and ideology. The reality of race is something with which every historian contends. In this regard, I have done my

¹⁸Alwyn Barr, *Texans in Revolt: the Battle for San Antonio, 1835*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991,

¹⁹ Paul D. Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience: a Political and Social History, 1835-1836* (College Station: Texas A. & M University Press) 1992, 115.

²⁰ With the other 37% being split between Northerners and Europeans

best to be true to both my sources and my readers by providing a full picture of the subject I am studying.

The Language of War

The rebels let their patriotism run rampant in the form of raucous drunkenness and in accusing their Mexican neighbors of being “Tories.”²¹ The pre-war language of the 26 year old William Barret Travis not only harked back to the American Revolution but to the Republican toasts given on the eve of the War of 1812. While raising an earthenware cup of corn liquor, the only provision the Texian Army never seemed to run out of, Travis declared in a toast, “Hurrah for liberty and the rights of man!” “They (the Tories) would rather inaugurate tyranny than preserve property!”²² It is this theme that the rhetoricians of the revolution, on both sides of the Sabine, attempted to export to the audiences of the United States.

It was highly improbable that Andrew Jackson’s administration was going to create an incident and directly come to the aid of the Texians. So Texian agents sought instead to garner the support of individual Americans who sided with their cause. Before hostilities began the Texians had already started unofficially appealing to potential volunteers from the United States through editorial media. Empresario Sterling C. Robertson left Texas to presumably recruit volunteers from his home state of Tennessee as early as mid-September 1835. In a letter that was eventually published in the

²¹ Stephen L. Hardin and Gary S. Zaboly *Texian Iliad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015, 134.

²² *Ibid*, 134-137.

Tennessean after the first battle of the war took place Robertson wrote how even though he had been out of Texas for almost a month's time news of hostilities and rumors of war in Texas were running rampant throughout the United States. He wrote, "Since I have left Texas I have seen various publications in the newspapers which would seem to indicate that a rupture was about to take place between the authorities of Texas and the general government of Mexico."²³ He continued by choreographing this information into a plea that said, "Texas is divided into small municipalities unconnected by any bond of union except their common danger. The arms of Santa Anna are victorious over the Federal Constitution in every part of the empire except Texas. She stands alone."²⁴

After providing as many details as a man 800 miles away from the events could have, Robertson encouraged anyone "excited by the rumors of danger" or any "interested partizans [sic]" to "answer their own views." In Robertson's mind the "common danger" was the impending doom that Anglos in Texas faced if Santa Anna succeeded in quelling their revolt. By calling on readers to "answer their own views" he leaves it up to them to make the mental leap from simply being ideologically aligned with them to actually going to Texas and fighting.²⁵

Colonel William H. Wharton spearheaded the early attempts at getting news of the revolution to American readers and potential US volunteers. In one recruitment broadside that ran in October of 1835 he urged men to join the fight for "the great principle of human liberty." He praised the Texian force as one that would be made up of

²³ *Nashville Tennessean*, October 6, 1835.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

American patriots, not of “the menial slaves of a Despotic Tyrant.”²⁶ He declared that the people had “adopted the motto of their ancestors -- Liberty or Death” and he felt “with every confidence” that there would be “within a few days, upwards of 600 American volunteers in Gonzales.”²⁷ On the other side of the Sabine, Democratic newspapermen capitalized on the Texian cause’s appeal in order to rally Americans to fight their own political battles at home.

Stephen F. Austin’s language was echoed by the editors of the *Frankfurt Argus* of Kentucky. In a martial call to their readers, the editors related to them the “highly important” information that “the war had already begun. Gonzales had become the Lexington of Texas. The distinguished Lorenzo de Zavala (the great Mexican patriot who had the boldness to denounce the apostasies of Santa Anna) and Stephen F. Austin, Esq. are in the field battling against the legions of Centralism and despotism.”²⁸

In a later issue of the same publication, upon hearing the news of the Kentuckyian Benjamin Milam’s death at the Battle of San Antonio de Bexar, the *Argus*’ editors chose to defend their state’s son with an appeal to ideology. “The joy and triumph” of victory at Bexar was “sadly diminished by the circumstance that the brave Milam, the dauntless leader of the storm, was numbered among the slain.” After leading the Texian charge against the small wooden jacales that surrounded the village at Bexar a Mexican sharpshooter, perched in a tree of some nearby woods, shot Milam in the head and killed him instantly. After giving away his position with the loud crack of his rifle and the

²⁶ Paul D. Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience: a Political and Social History, 1835-1836* (College Station: Texas A. & M University Press) 1992, 111.

²⁷ *Nashville Tennessean*, November 12, 1835.

²⁸ *Frankfurt Argus*, November 25, 1835.

subsequent plume of smoke the sharpshooter struggled to get to safety as a band of Texians rushed him and lynched him in the same tree where he had fired the fatal shot. “Long will Texas and the friends of liberty remember and lament his (Milam’s) fate” they declared. The editors quoted the revolutionary Thomas Paine and emphasized that Texas was now “in the hour that tried men’s souls” just as the United States had been in 1776. The “dictator Santa Anna,” they informed their audience, had “destroyed the constitution and invaded Texas with a mercenary army *for the purpose of bringing the inhabitants under the yoke of centralism*” (emphasis mine).²⁹

They rallied their readers to join the cause. Americans in Texas “languished under the harrassing uncertainty and unconstitutional oppression consequent upon the incessant revolutions of Mexico.” They felt now that “the cup of bitterness was full to overflow, that the rod of persecution had smitten sufficiently severe, and that [the Texians] were determined to teach their oppressors that they had heads to conceive, hearts to feel, and arms to execute and avenge.” The young “beardless” boys and old “hoary-headed” men of Texas desperately needed American support. “At the call of their country they rallied around its standard with an ardor never surpassed.”³⁰ Now it was their readers’ turn to do the same by going to Texas and answering the call of battle.

The allusion to the collective American memory of Lexington and Concord, as well as Thomas Paine, was intended to be provocative and soul-stirring. This, paired with a Jeffersonian command against “centralism and despotism,” establishes a common theme that pervades the language of war inside the United States. The *Tennessean* for

²⁹ *Frankfurt Argus*, January 27, 1836.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

example, typical reading for the scores of Democratic-leaning volunteers headed west, had already been long established as a paper whose politics were explicitly of the Jeffersonian mold. Immediately prior to the news of what was brewing in Texas, *The Tennessean's* editors worked to garner support for the Democratic Hugh Lawson White. White, or simply "Judge White" as he was known, could be described as Tennessee's equivalent to a John C. Calhoun. As an ardent supporter of decentralism, White made a name for himself in the Democratic circles of Tennessee and Washington.³¹ White was a fervent nullifier, and the support he garnered from most of the major newspapers in the South pervades the issues that call for fellow ideologues to go to Texas. *The Tennessean's* editors urged their readers to have faith in the "friends of Judge White" in "their struggle for the rights of the States, the rights of the people, and the preservation of the Constitution against the encroachments of federal power" as well as "the plots and schemes of well-trained office holders."³² This language is indicative of the anti-centralist sentiment that ran rampant in the printed media in those states that sent the greatest amount of future Texian soldiers to the front lines. It is this exact type of language that editors would also apply to the events in Texas.

The *Nashville Union* ran a piece in October of 1835 that had originally been printed by the *Richmond Enquirer*.³³ As an organized company of Virginia volunteers prepared to embark on a long journey to Texas speeches, and then toasts, were given in

³¹ Andrew Jackson, ironically, had once 'accused' him of being a Federalist who opposed states' rights. This was of course a few years before Jackson himself opposed the very same doctrine for a brief period in 1832.

³² *Nashville Tennessean*, August 20, 1835.

³³ *Nashville Tennessean*, October 27, 1835. The publishing of articles that were attributed to different newspapers was typical and it conveys the high level of circulation that existed among like minded publishers.

their honor at a dinner in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. William P. Mangum, a guest of the dinner whom the editors chose to describe as a “supporter of Andrew Jackson before and after the nullification affair, but not during,” gave the first speech. After raising a glass, he called himself a “fearless defender of State Rights as expounded in the Virginia Resolutions of ‘98 and ‘99.”³⁴ “The State of Virginia,” he continued, “unconquered and unconquerable; her proud banner of Liberty may be trailed in the dust; for a moment, by the minion of power; but her gallant sons will be to the rescue and plant it where it shall defy Despotic power.”³⁵ His language implies that the state of Virginia *itself* was marching off to Texas, with all its gallant sons, to fight a tyrant that was more than a thousand miles away. To these rhetoricians Virginia signified a certain mindset, the same mindset that Jefferson expounded upon in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Yes, it was a place, but the people who lived there could, and should, move westward and carry their ideals with them to form new ‘Virginias’ in the west at the expense of the Indians and the African slaves they brought with them. After this speech’s publication the editors of the *Union* interjected by calling the volunteers present at the event modern Patrick Henries.³⁶

Another orator appealed to and admonished his “sister states” who were, in his mind and in effect, also at war with Mexico. To quote Jefferson, in part, he exclaimed that the westward-bound volunteers who stood before him were “illustrating the lesson dictated by history and uttered by wisdom -- Eternal vigilance is the price of Liberty.”³⁷

³⁴ *Nashville Union*, October 7, 1835.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Nashville Union*, October 7, 1835.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

That very same vigilance was meant to be directed at *any* tyrant who threatened the rights of Anglos no matter if they were within the official borders of the United States or if they were not.

A journalist who was present at the occasion added to the piece that it seemed almost impossible to quantify the volunteers. He added that they were “more than sufficient” to show the “mongrel” what for.³⁸ His interpretations of liberty and republicanism were deeply associated with race. He, like the other Texian supporters, reinforces the early American republican idea of ‘being fit for self-government.’ This ‘fitness’ was limited. Liberty, in his mind, was inherited and it was bestowed upon Anglos through centuries of liberalizing tradition. It was not something the “mongrels” could appreciate, but it *was* something they could destroy. That was the common threat Americans in Texas faced. This language does offer more insight to the modern reader about things other than the ideology of federalism and liberty. It shows that, at least in the United States, the war in Texas was indeed a racial one. Historian James E. Crisp has argued that the Texian War for Independence did not become racialized until the late nineteenth century when romantic painters depicted the Anglo-Texians as white heroes fending off against hordes of brown people.³⁹ The language of these individuals shows, on the other hand, that there was indeed a racial aspect to the war in the United States. This is not surprising, though, when one considers the fact that not many Americans were even aware of the existence of Tejanos at all. Also, a uniquely Anglo-centric story and definition of liberty abided in the minds of these people. In other words, of course the war

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ James E. Crisp *Sleuthing the Alamo Davy Crockett's Last Stand and Other Mysteries of the Texas Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

was racialized from the beginning. Given the norms of 1830s America, it is very unlikely that it could not have been.

Slavery had been more or less tolerated by the Mexican government under the old constitution but Santa Anna's consolidation efforts certainly gave good reason for Texians to assume that things would change under a new autocratic system. Their collective memory fueled their suspicion of Santa Anna's intentions. They remembered the bloodbath of San Domingue. Austin wrote his cousin in 1830:

I sometimes shudder at the consequences and think that a large part of America will be Santo Domingonized in 100, or 200 years. The idea of seeing such a country as this overrun by a slave population almost makes me weep. It is in vain to tell a North American that the white population will be destroyed some fifty or eighty years hence by the negroes, and that his daughters will be violated and Butchered by them. 'It is too far off to think of' -- 'they can do as I have, take care of themselves'-- 'something will turn up to keep off the evil' etc, etc. Such are the silly answers of the slave holder."⁴⁰

Austin feared that "Mexicans intend[ed] to wipe out Anglos in Texas and turn it over to blacks and indians."⁴¹ Kentuckian Benjamin Milam held similar suspicions that

⁴⁰Gregg Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin, Empresario of Texas*. Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2016, 189.

⁴¹ William C. Davis, *Lone Star Rising: the Revolutionary Birth of the Texas Republic*, College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2012, .

Santa Anna would “encourage slaves to rise and create a second front.”⁴² Their suspicion was not unfounded. Santa Anna, who noticed the irony that the slaveholders in Texas were more liberty-minded and democratic than the non-slaveholders in Mexico, certainly suggested encouraging mass revolts among the slave population early on in the war.⁴³ He did the same with the native Comanches who terrorized Texas’ border to the northwest. Other editors informed their readers that “The Mexicans are endeavoring to secure the aid of these savages against the people of Texas. Santa Anna has dispatched agents to urge them to join in his nefarious attempt to exterminate American Citizens, who have emigrated to Texas.”⁴⁴ The common ideology that their rhetoric appeals to implies that Americans in the United States were experiencing the very same threat the Texians were.

Another anonymous orator presented toasts to both Judge White and John C. Calhoun before taking his seat and yielding to the other events of the evening. His appeal to Calhoun not only bolstered his Anglo-centered language of liberty and republicanism but it demonstrates how his version of liberty was inherently tied in with decentralism. The editors of these papers sought to make it clear that a friend to White and Calhoun was a friend to Texas. But why would he choose to talk about *these* things specifically in front of a bunch of people headed to Texas? Because, in his mind, they were fighting for exactly what he was ranting about. Texians were Americans. What’s more, they were

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ *Charleston Daily Courier*, April 28, 1836.

true Americans, and their fight carried on the Jeffersonian banner of ‘98 and ‘99 against another John Adams.⁴⁵

One toaster added to his congenial support of the Texian volunteers by making sure to include that they understood that the election of Judge White, or “some other Southern Patriot other than Van Buren” was “indispensable to the preservation of the Union.”⁴⁶ This speaker’s language, probably correctly, assumes that the Texian volunteers were all fellow “Southern Patriots” and it conveys how politicians used took advantage of the Texas conflict to make political statements about issues at home. Other Democrats graced the volunteers with praises of a more general republican and democratic sentiment. To the Texian volunteers Thomas Speed cheered “The right of the people to instruct their representatives.” And then added that “a recurrence to first principles will demonstrate that it shouldn’t be thoughtlessly exercised by one, or wantonly disregarded by the other.”⁴⁷ It is difficult to tell whether this was actually directed at Santa Anna or the corruption that he thought he saw in Washington.

After a toast was dedicated to the Senate of the United States, or “the Thermopylae by which Liberty triumphed over despotism,” the crowd of volunteers erupted into a singing of *La Marseillaise* or, as the editor noted, “the Hymn of Liberty.”⁴⁸ The American spirit itself, or at least their version of it, was under attack in Texas and

⁴⁵ Adams’ administration passed the Alien and Sedition acts which led to calls for “state interposition” by Jefferson and Madison in their Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions of 1798 and 1799. These were the blueprint documents for the nineteenth-century doctrine of “nullification.”

⁴⁶ *Nashville Union*, October 7, 1835.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

that was enough cause to adopt the anthem of the French Revolution and defy any tyrant who stood in their way.

Finally, a toast was given to the *Richmond Enquirer* itself as well as its founder, Thomas Ritchie, the father of the current editors.⁴⁹ The editors once again interjected here and thanked those who were present at the event and to assure their readers that “They (the editors and their families) were all Republicans.”⁵⁰ The editors laid out a patriotic pedigree of their family, “one of our brothers fell at the head of his artillery company in 1814 on the plains of Bridgewater,” they said, “our other brother was frequently in the legislature, always a Republican in his principles, and well known for his active command of a regiment of militia during the last war.”⁵¹ Then they added that two of their brothers-in-law were “the eloquent Robert Brooke (Governor of Virginia) and William Ruffin (relative of Edmund Ruffin and a member of the Randolph dynasty of Virginia) whose speech is to be found in the debates on the Resolutions of ‘98. They were both inflexible States’ Rights Republicans.”⁵² These editors, who had by happenstance and marriage been ushered into the Virginia aristocracy, concluded by stating, “to the writings of Mr. Jefferson and to Mr. Madison’s report of ‘99, do we principally owe the seeds of Republican principles.”⁵³ The language of these editors

⁴⁹ The paper had its fair share of clout. Thomas Jefferson once quipped in an 1823 letter to William Short, “I read but a single newspaper, Ritchie’s *Enquirer*, the best that is published or ever has been published in America.” Ritchie was a staunch supporter of the ‘principles of ‘98.’ In an 1846 duel, Ritchie killed the *Richmond Whig’s* founder and editor John Hamden Pleasants.

⁵⁰ In this period, ‘Republican’ usually refers to the shorter name for what is now called the ‘Democratic-Republican’ party by scholars. In this instance, and in many others in this paper, ‘Republican’ is just another name for the Democratic party.

⁵¹ The Battle of Bridgewater, also known as the Battle of Niagara Falls, or the Battle of Lundy’s Lane occurred in the summer of 1814 during the War of 1812.

⁵² *Nashville Union*, October 7, 1835.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

reveals the partisan character of newspapers at this time and it shows just how dedicated the southern Democratic party ideologues were in supporting the Texians who were about to be caught up in a war that had not even started yet.

In a different piece that ran on the same page in this particularly war-hawkish edition of the *Enquirer* the editors gave a brief ideological background of themselves, “Before we were of age, we drew our pen against the Alien and Sedition Laws,” they continued, “from the first moment indeed when we could form an opinion on politics we have been Republicans -- strict constructionists -- dyed in the wool of the State Rights school.” So, in their view, and by extension, it would be only logical that they support the cause of Texas. “We have supported General Jackson’s administration when it was right,” they said, “but we have fearlessly condemned what we considered to be its errors.”⁵⁴ They were the platonic ideals of the southern partisan newspapermen; the vehicles by which the literate and illiterate masses engaged with the ideas of their party. Likewise, newspapermen were the agents who, along with the general citizenry, helped develop the rhetoric that characterized the pro-Texas publications during this period.

The editors of the *Enquirer* reinforced their “dyed in the wool” position on Texas in a later issue where they exclaimed how Americans in Texas would be “Sold as slaves or transferable property” if defeated. They braced themselves for conflict because they were certain that supporting their fellow Americans across the Sabine river “would furnish Santa Anna the means. . . to subject this country to war.” The editors, and even some federalist holdouts in Mexico proper were opposed to this abomination of Santa

⁵⁴ Many loyal Jacksonians criticized his handling of the Nullification Crisis as is demonstrated by the rhetoric of Democratic party papers throughout this project.

Anna just as “Texas [was] to centralism.” Their reaffirmation of decentralist ideology was coupled with adoration of the Anglo spirit. They had “little reason to doubt” that the victorious Anglo-American tide of war would result in “the triumph of federalism in Mexico, and of liberty and honor in Texas.” Before concluding, in a tone of supplication, the rhetors commanded that “heaven prosper the efforts in favor of liberty; and may the American eagle extend its fostering wings over all her descendents and imitators in the cause of freedom and sovereignty.”⁵⁵ By tying themselves in with the Texians, they made it clear to their audience how a defense of Texas was a defense of America itself.

The sheer amount of publications that flowed out of Tennessee would lead one to believe that the state was a hotbed of Texian support. The editors of the *Nashville Union* provided ideological commentary on the Nacogdoches Resolutions which had originally been published in the *Red River Herald*. “It must be evident to every unbiased mind that a feeling of loyalty. . . had for a long time past swayed the people of Texas.” In other words, like the American Revolutionaries who had originally only wanted to ‘defend their rights as Englishmen,’ the Texians were only actuated by a desire to preserve their Mexican rights under the 1824 Constitution. The Texians “emanated from a land of liberty, bearing in their breast the glorious principles of Republicanism.” But, “the eye of grasping avarice was upon them -- their quiet acquiescence was construed into servile submission, and the ascension of Santa Anna to the Dictatorship, was the signal for oppression.” The editors continued, “the mandates of a despot proclaims the law for their future government. This it is which has aroused them to resistance, and coerced them, in

⁵⁵ *Richmond Enquirer*, December 19, 1835.

protection of their dearest rights, to proclaim that spirit of determination which they have inherited from their fathers.” Finally, the *Nashville Union*’s editors ended their introduction with a hopeful blessing, “May the spirit of Washington pervade their (the Texians’) councils and rule their actions, and let them be assured that their brethren of the Union look not with an eye of apathy upon their welfare.”⁵⁶ Their introduction was followed by a full presentation of the Nacogdoches Resolutions and a few messages from Sam Houston. The editors revealed what they thought to be significant about the happenings in Texas and they demonstrated what they wanted their readers to come away with upon reading the paper.

Different publications often circulated copies of pieces that were originally printed elsewhere. The *New Orleans True American* ran a piece that was also published by the *Nashville Whig* in late September. “Texas,” the *True American*’s editors wrote, was about to embark on an “extraordinary experiment.”⁵⁷ They continued, “a threatened invasion by Santa Anna, the imposition of burthensome and unequal taxes on the commerce of the country, the arrest of the Governor,” and finally, “the alarming progress of centralism in the Mexican Republic aroused them (the Texians) to the defence of their rights, and to resist oppression.” The editors no doubt believed that the anti-centralist language would appeal to contemporary Democratic party members in the United States. As far north as Maryland one could find similar sentiments regarding the “alarming progress of centralism” in Mexico. The editors of the *Maryland Gazette*, out of Annapolis, likewise informed their readers of the “usurpations of Centralism.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *Nashville Union*, September 25, 1835.

⁵⁷ *Nashville Whig*, October 2, 1835.

⁵⁸ *Maryland Gazette*, October 1, 1835.

The Jeffersonian, decentralist, theme is reintroduced in the following paragraph of the piece, “meetings have been met in all the towns and villages (of Texas). . . they have adopted resolutions expressive of indignation at the proceedings of the General Government and of determination to resist it.”⁵⁹ An important point to note here is the writer’s use of the word “general” rather than “national” to modify the word “government.” While seemingly semantic, this careful word choice was central to the debates on the state-federal issue between John C. Calhoun and Daniel Webster as it was with Abel Upshur and Joseph Story who, like the former two, were invested in a fervent debate on the nature of the Union. Using the term “General Government” signifies that the author, and presumably his reader (he hopes), is also a Democrat who is “dyed in the wool of the State Rights school.” He is an ideologue, and likewise, the Texian cause is ideologically Democratic in nature that any decentralist should get behind.

The *Whig’s* editors continue that an invasion by Santa Anna would “doubtless call upon every Texonian [sic] to resist, by every honorable means, remonstrances first, and arms later, the usurpations of centralism.”⁶⁰ Framed in this way, *any* “dyed in the wool” Jeffersonian was also a Texian. The Texian’s cause was the American’s cause. At least, it was to certain Americans. For example, consider the language of the same editors when they added, “it is said that all the states of Mexico, except Texas, have given their consent to centralism. This system is no doubt the proper one for the Mexican people, but it will not do for the Americans.”⁶¹ In their minds, the ‘incessant revolutions’ and uprisings in Latin America gave credence to this idea. This sentiment does not pay any attention to

⁵⁹ *Nashville Whig*, October 2, 1835.

⁶⁰ *Nashville Whig*, October 2, 1835.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

the Tejanos, of course. Nor does it reconcile the fact that those who were not “dyed in the wool” Democrats -- many northerners, most New Englanders by this time, and even some southerners -- had entirely different views on the ‘evils’ of centralism.

Nevertheless, the *true* American, the Texian, was the one who understood that the states had created the federal government and any seemingly minute step towards consolidation or centralization was *felo de se* or ‘the evil-doer himself.’

The October of 1835 brought about tremendous energy for the Texian cause in the United States. A Mississippi committee organized by William Bogart, J. H. Caldwell, and William Bryan met in favor of the Texian rebels in the middle of that month. Their resolutions were published in the *Mississippi Free Trader*. The committee praised the rebels for being “engaged in the same cause in defence of which *their* and *our* forefathers bled and died for the great cause of constitutional liberty.” In the past, the committee noted, Republicans gave their support to “the disenthralment of Greece and the restoration of Poland, and the liberation of Mexico and we cannot now refuse our sympathy and aid to those who are advocating the same principles, and who are endeared to us by every tie that can bind one people to another.”⁶² The committee not only appealed to ties of ideology with the Texians, but to ties of kinship as well. “We feel proud that the citizens of Texas have shown an abiding attachment to the principles in which they have been educated. That, although few in number, they have shown themselves to be genuine Americans” and most importantly “repudiated dangerous attempts at centralism and consolidation.”⁶³ The Mississippi committee, which received a

⁶² *Mississippi Free Trader*, October 20, 1835.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

crowd of such a mass of people that it overflowed to the outside of the arcade where it was held, made sure to include how some of the “best citizens of the Union” had already begun to fight in Texas. The resolutions in this editorial allude to the fact that there were many more committees voicing support for Texas “throughout the United States in favor of the same sacred cause” that were taking up donations, arms, and men to be sent west of the Sabine.⁶⁴ Like Mississippi’s, Alabama’s state assembly formed a “Texas Committee” and its resolutions were republished from the *Huntsville Democrat* with the first resolutions asserting that the legislature “consider[ed] the present contest between Texas and Santa Anna as a contest between freedom and despotism” and that they “invite and call upon the brave and generous young men of the country to volunteer their services in the Texas cause.”⁶⁵

In November, the editors of the *Tennessean* appealed to the young men of the southern states specifically. “From the letters which we published in our last, from S. F. Austin” they declared, “They (the Texians) are actuated by that love of liberty and hatred of oppression which burn so warmly in the heart of every American. . . We perceive that many of the chivalrous sons of the South are taking measures to assist their brethren in Texas.”⁶⁶ Firstly, this reveals that newspapermen had already been on a publishing crusade intended to encourage volunteers for a while. Secondly, it implies that many Democrats saw, and were constructing, the war in Texas as a southern, Democratic party war.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ *Nashville Tennessean*, November 12, 1835.

Another letter from the editors of the *Mississippi Free Trader* supports this idea. After publishing recruitment broadsides from Sam Houston that explicitly requested volunteers from the United States. The editors wrote, “There never was a time when the feelings of a whole people were more fully enlisted upon any subject than are those of the citizens of the United States in relation to the present eventful period in the history of Texas.”⁶⁷ The editors wrote that their audience was “apt to feel for a people who have burst the chains of freedom.” In reference to the Texian soldiers they added, “They are principally emigrants from our states. . . it is not to be wondered at that so much feeling is evinced for the success of those brethren who have gone to a foreign land. . . the tide of emigration is still flowing on.”⁶⁸

This was not universally endorsed though. The efforts of Democratic newspapermen were so effective that one one South Carolinian took it upon himself to write a letter to the editor of the *Charleston Mercury* chastising their “attempts upon the excitability and generous ardor of the Carolina youth. The ‘Young Volunteer to the cause of Texas’ tells us that he ‘knows many of our young men who are desirous of distinguishing themselves and having their names recorded in the annals of history.’” The letter cautioned the editors for the “popular fever” they generated and the “delirious actions” they may cause. As if they were not aware, the letter continued, “a meeting of the ‘young men of Carolina’ to ‘convince our brethren of Texas that we intend to act with them shortly,’ has been called by *your* correspondent.” “Expatriation,” they noted, “must always be a subject of the most serious reflection to every considerate man, and high

⁶⁷ *Mississippi Free Trader* December 25, 1835.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

souled patriot.” This did not affect the writer’s insistence that “there is indeed a laudable sympathy, and a just indignation against treacherous tyranny agitating the public heart of Carolina.” They shared that “the glory of aiding in a struggle for the liberty and independence of our fellow countrymen in Texas. . . is a motive which should not be repressed, and I trust it does animate the bosoms of those who are imbued with the noble pride of being citizens of the chivalrous Carolina.” “But the young men,” the writer asserted, “the flower of our State, should pause and deeply reflect on conduct whose consequences would be grave to themselves and trying to their friends. The young men should be wary of the calls of the newspapermen for they were of “mercenary design.”⁶⁹ The rhetoric of newspapermen was effective enough for people to be concerned about its effect on the young men of their state.

The editors of the *Weekly Mississippian* ran a piece in January of 1836 where they derided the acting governor of Mississippi, John Anthony Quitman, as a “centralist,” in the Daniel Webster and Joseph Story mold. They printed a boastful message written by the acting governor that they believed was meant to attack “modern states’ rights men.” They wrote that in Quitman’s opinion, the States’ Rights doctrine was a heresy devised by Jefferson in the late eighteenth century and it should have stayed there. They blurted that Quitman bragged that he “avowed himself against the Union severing heresy of nullification.” It was shown, to his “satisfaction” that the American political system’s “inclination [was] to centralism.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ *Charleston Mercury* May 13, 1836.

⁷⁰ *Weekly Mississippian* January, 22 1836.

Quitman may or may not have actually been a “centralist” at this point in his life. It is important to note that by the 1850s Quitman was a staunch proponent of nullification and a protege of sorts to John C. Calhoun. Either the editors misunderstood Quitman’s message, took it out of context, held a political grudge against him, or indeed Quitman had once been a nationalist in the Webster mold. Nevertheless, their interpretation of Quitman as a centralist, and rhetoric they employed against centralism, conveys how the editors felt about this ideology and it is useful to examine.

The editors, like most of the other editors of the major Democratic newspapers of the South, were “dyed in the wool” and they sarcastically commented on the governor’s message by calling it a “masterly production.” They turned to a more serious tone when they asserted that Quitman’s message to the Democrats of Mississippi, and others like it, would “knock out the brains of this Union and prostrate on the earth those great principles of liberty.” “Centralism!” the editors cried, meant nothing more than “monarchy or despotism; for centralism *we* understand to be a concentration of power” into one entity. “It is against centralism” they asserted, “that our brethren of Texas are struggling now, and it was to stay the advances of centralism or despotism that those who fought the battles of Independence poured their blood.” They asked, “can it be, that the only government on the broad earth, under whose wings republicanism and liberty have found a resting place, be approaching to centralism?” “If he (Judge Quitman) be the friend of centralism,” he cannot be a “lover of liberty.” Likewise, a *true* American could

not “give his support to a system of government whose inclinations are to despotism.”⁷¹ It was this very system that they believed was taking hold in Mexico.

The editors asked again, “Can it be true that our free institutions, planted by Washington, watered by the hands of Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Jackson are to be swallowed up and lost forever in the starless night of centralism?”⁷² Or, in other words, governmental consolidation. “For ourselves,” they said, “we are among the number who believe that this system of self-government (the Jeffersonian or decentralist one) will stand as strong as the hills of this country, that the virtue and intelligence of the people will bear it up against the combined efforts of all its enemies.” It really does not matter whether the “enemies” in question were Mexicans, Centralists, abolitionists, or Yankees because, in the editors’ view, they were all the same. In regards to centralism, the editors noted, “Such was not the language of the framers of our Constitution and such should not be the language of our statesmen now; not the sickening story that its (the government’s) tendency is to ‘centralism.’”⁷³ As early as the 1830s, the authority and mythology of the Founders had already been called upon to bolster the arguments of men who fought to succeed their legacy.⁷⁴ Additionally, they were using this authority to make an appeal for Texas.

That February, alongside advertisements and appeals for volunteers to join others and go to Texas, *The Tennessean* published a speech of a man named Churchill who gave

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Apparently these editors forgave Jackson for his ‘centralist’ action in opposing South Carolina at the turn of the decade. It seems, like other southern editors, that the editors of the *Weekly Mississippian* were friends of Jackson *only* when he was in the right (by their standards).

⁷³ *Weekly Mississippian* January, 22 1836.

⁷⁴ David Brown, “Jeffersonian Ideology and the Second Party System” *The Historian* 62, no. 1 (January 1999): 18.

his opinion on an internal improvement bill. After trashing the “greedy capitalists” of the North, Churchill asserted that “as a states’ right man I urge the argument that the states have the only and exclusive right to carry on internal improvements; and that the General Government not only has not the power by the Federal Constitution, but that it is anti-republican and dangerous to the liberties of the people. This, sir, I conceive to be the Democratic doctrine of Tennessee; the Switzerland of the West.”⁷⁵ He referred to Switzerland’s status as a stalwart and defiant little state. Its historical predilection towards sovereignty and steadfastness against encroachment made the Alpine confederation a natural object of praise for Jeffersonian Democrats. This suggests that the editors’ rhetoric was constant in denouncing the actions of Santa Anna as being ‘centralist’ in nature. They were pushing for volunteers to go west but more importantly they were indirectly making a statement about American politics by directly talking about Mexico.

A March 1836 recruitment broadside published in New Orleans titled “Texas Forever” appealed to the South as a whole. It was published alongside orders from General Houston that called upon “the citizens of the East to march to combat. . . Independence is declared, it must be maintained.”⁷⁶ The broadside began, “The usurper of the South has failed in his efforts to enslave the freemen of Texas. . . the wives and daughters of Texas will be saved from the brutality of Mexican soldiers. Now is the time to emigrate to the Garden of America.”⁷⁷ Calling Santa Anna “the usurper of the South”

⁷⁵ *Nashville Tennessean* February 20, 1836.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ “Texas Forever!!” Broadside - Large Image. Accessed November 1, 2019. <https://www.cah.utexas.edu/exhibits/Pena/english/large/9a.html>.

presents the Texian cause as one that would benefit southerners in general. The author believed that the same centralizing spirit of Santa Anna somehow threatened the South or somehow could threaten the region by taking some other form in the future. This seems to have been a common feeling.

This sentiment was emphasized by the *Charleston Mercury*'s editors in December of that year. In a piece titled "The South and Texas," the editors included their own commentary on the Texas question as well as a speech that was recently given in the legislature by Joel Roberts Poinsett. Poinsett, aside from being credited with introducing the famous Poinsettia Christmas flower in the 1820s, was the American government's very first minister to an independent Mexico. The editors considered him "a high authority on this matter (of Texas), and we rejoice" they added "to find him putting down the calumnies of the fanatics and the Philo-Abolitionists. . . the eyes of the Southern people have been sufficiently opened" by the western events and by "recent movements [on the Texas question] in the North."⁷⁸ The editors quoted Poinsett's firm stance that a "reproach against the Texian people. . . was a direct charge against our own government [of South Carolina]." But, "what were the claims of Texas upon our sympathy" they asked? A "central despotism," was Poinsett's answer, "erected in the place of" a government of "stipulations." Poinsett, who had been a unionist at the time of the American nullification crisis just years before, had changed his tune and even went so far as to say that an "exclusion [of an independent Texas would apparently authorize our own compulsory expulsion from the Union, upon the same principles." They were held

⁷⁸ *Charleston Mercury* Dec 30, 1836.

together by “common interests” the editors noted. They quoted Poinsett who maintained that “We had everything to fear if Mexico remained our neighbor. . . our Planters never would submit to have their own (runaway) property wrested from them by the Mexican authorities.” Mexico, he asserted, was a threat to the “essentially republican” states just east of its borders. The Texian people, Poinsett concluded, “must ultimately be free.”⁷⁹

A later publication from the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* informed its readers that the “miscreant [Santa Anna] is treated with the greatest respect in the North” if he were to make a tour of the northern United States the writers believed “he would find plenty of admirers and friends and would be honored with public dinners, balls, &c.”⁸⁰ Not much else is said by the writers in regards to Santa Anna being respected in the North. The writers believed, and were invested in shaping, the Texas cause as a southern cause. It should be no surprise that there was significant New England opposition to Americans volunteering to fight in the war in Texas especially if there was a possibility that an independent Texas would be annexed by the United States. Even before the slavery issue took hold in the late 1840s and 1850s the states of the northeast opposed southern expansion because the addition of each new state would enhance the federal power of the Democratic-Republican party.⁸¹ The balance of political power shifted away from the northeast during the first few decades of the nineteenth century after the admission of six new states to the Union. Five of which were either western or southern.⁸²

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ *Times-Picayune* January 29, 1837.

⁸¹ Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, 836.

⁸² Frank L. Owsley and Gene A. Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800-1821*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2014, 11-12.

Independence was not the original goal of the Texians of 1835 who wanted to restore the federal constitution of 1824. It was the American volunteer who brought with him the idea of separating completely from Mexico.⁸³ This worked in Austin's favor as the southern banks that gave him loans did so only under the stipulation that Texas declared independence, form a republic, and thereby become a likely candidate for annexation. At this time, the Texians adopted the "Bonnie Blue Flag," which one historian has called a generic and universal symbol of resistance, as their banner.⁸⁴ The Jeffersonian connotations of using this flag would have been obvious to the Texans. The successful filibuster that resulted in the establishment of the short-lived Republic of West Florida had originally used the flag. The single white star on a navy blue background symbolized independence and state sovereignty. By 1836, the revolution had shifted from a continuation of the Mexican civil war to a war for Texian independence. The commonalities that existed between Texas and the short-lived West Florida Republic were more than just ideological. The maneuvers to establish West Florida was covertly supported by the Madison administration from the beginning. The goal, as it was with an independant Texas, was annexation.

Contrary to the papers presented above, when one examines certain northern Whig party publications ones comes away with a very different sentiment -- one that directly criticizes Texian supporters and, by extension, their definition of Americanism. Lebanon, New Hampshire's *Watchman, Impartialist, and Christian Repository* ran a piece that criticized a "letter writer from Texas." The letter writer opined, "If Texas

⁸³ H.W. Brands, *Lone Star Nation*, (Anchor Books, 2004), 41.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

belonged to the United States it would soon become the garden of America.” “To this remark,” the editors included a rather sarcastic response from the editors of the *Philadelphia Herald* that read “The truth is, there are so many places within the United States that claim to be called the ‘garden of America,’ that we are in want of hands to cultivate these lovely spots. We would then advise Americans to stay at home, and not place themselves under a foreign government,” they continued, “They ought to reflect, when they settle the lands of Texas, that they lose all claim on our government as citizens.”⁸⁵ Likewise, another run of the same paper months later praised Santa Anna for offering a “reward” to the “Indians for their services in case they should expel the colonists. This measure would be politic in his [Santa Anna’s] part.”⁸⁶

In the same vein, Philadelphia's *United States Gazette* lambasted the “province of Texas” in 1836 for the “establishment of slavery” there and the threat it posed to free white labor.⁸⁷ “The war going in on in Texas,” the editors opined, “is not a war for independence or for liberty -- it is a war for slavery, and the Texians have been most unjustly assisted by the southern states of the American Union-- Texas had carried on slavery in a most open manner.”⁸⁸

The editors of the city’s *National Gazette* informed their readers of the heresy of the “Texas Insurrection” in an April 1836 issue. The “large slave-holders, land-speculators, &.,” they remarked, “having lost the confidence of the people in their own country, here sought a new theatre where they might press their claims to public

⁸⁵ *Watchman, Impartialist, and Christian Repository* December 12 1835.

⁸⁶ *Watchman, Impartialist, and Christian Repository* March 26, 1836.

⁸⁷ *United States Gazette* September 14, 1836.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

favor and political distinction.”⁸⁹ When the Mexican government “determine[d] to enforce obedience to their laws” it was “their schemes of slaveholding” that motivated them to make war upon that government. The editors added, “The idea was entertained that ‘an independent state,’ under the confederated system, might stand upon its ‘sovereignty’ and nullify the decrees of the general government to suit its purposes.” “This doctrine,” they explained, “was promulgated throughout the Texas country, and embraced by a considerable (perhaps a majority) of the colonists, who were mostly from our slaveholding states.” The Mexican government, they asserted, acted within its rights to act the way it had in 1835, “but the spirit of ‘nullification’ had found its way into the Mexican Confederacy. It pervaded several of the ‘sovereign’ states and attempts at insurrection were the consequence.” A later issue of the same publication assured its readers that “Nullification has no advocates in the western or eastern states.” This, of course, was false but the rhetoric of these northern Whig newspapermen conveys that they believed nullification to be a “southern insurrectionist” idea. The very same idea had come to fruition in the Mexican state of Texas which had effectively become a southern colony due to Anglo settlement.⁹⁰ To them, the events in Texas were nothing more than an extension of the southern decentralist slave power in another country. That, and the useless turning of events had gotten the already nationally famous “Colonel Crocket” killed after he died “firing his piece until the Mexicans had obtained possession of the fort at San Antonio, clubbed his musket,” and went down with it “in his hands after

⁸⁹ *National Gazette* April 26, 1836.

⁹⁰ *United States Gazette* June 27, 1838

killing twenty five of the enemy.”⁹¹ This information from Boston where the editors of another paper had already called the war in Texas “tiresome.”⁹²

Another piece that ran out of York, Pennsylvania published a letter entitled “The Red Bug” written by a Pennsylvanian that made sure that readers knew that “The weather [in Texas] is oppressively warm, the thermometer has stood from 80 to 90 degrees in the shade; and this is but the beginning of summer.” “The musquetoos [sic] abound,” he added, as well as “millions of reptiles, of beautiful and hideous variety, snakes and lizards of various orders, tarantulas, centipedes, and scorpions of all sizes, bugs, bees, wasps, tics, and an almost imperceptible little bug called the red bug.” It is uncertain whether or not this unflattering account of the “Garden of America” was specifically intended to stifle any potential emigrants from making the trip to Texas, but it is probably certain that it made some readers think twice if they were.

This is not to say that every northern newspaper held this sentiment. On the contrary, the editors of South Carolina’s *Charleston Mercury* published a piece from a Democratic newspaper in New York that was highly in favor of the Texian cause. The *Mercury*’s editors emphasized that the Democratic New York paper “justly” defended the “Texasians [sic] against the charge of being rebels.” It denied “that Texas is a province in rebellion, and shows that she is a sovereign State of the Mexican confederacy, and now engaged in gloriously maintaining her sovereign rights.” Texas is “entitled to our best best sympathies,” the editors added. “We concur with the concluding sentiment of the following extract (from that Democratic New York publication).” Before they shared the

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² *Boston Post*, January 11, 1836.

New York article they introduced it with the declaration: “Let no impediment or discouragement be offered to Americans who will repair, either individually or in bodies, the standard of State Rights in Texas.”⁹³ They then continued with the New York publication which began by explaining to the readership just how “the confederated states of Mexico came into being under a Constitution of which our own was the *model*.” As in the American union’s case, they remarked, “the United States of Mexico formed a General Government and guaranteed to the State Governments their independence under restrictions similar to those which exist among us.” They lectured their audience that after Santa Anna’s egregious actions, “under the advisement of the Priesthood” the state of Texas commenced the exercise of her sovereign authority as an independent state of the confederacy” against the Mexican government’s attempts at “centralism and consolidation.” Santa Anna “asserted the right of the General Government to take away her [Texas’] State sovereignty and reduce her to the condition of a Territory.” Would not the citizens of the United States do the same, they asked, “if Congress and *our* Santa Anna were to attempt the exercise of similar authority?” The Texians, and by extension any *true* “dyed in the wool” Americans were waging a war “against Tyranny, Oppression, and Priestcraft, on behalf of our Liberal Principles, chartered rights, and an independent republican government.”⁹⁴

The *Republican Farmer and Democratic Journal* out of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania praised the Texians in their actions against “the general government of Mexico.” The editors assured their audience that “the acts of the Mexican government,”

⁹³ *Charleston Mercury*, November 12, 1835.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*.

abolishing the legislature, usurping state powers, and entertaining the threat of abolition, justified Texian “self-preservation” in every way.⁹⁵ They praised the legislature in Kentucky for also adopting a “Texas Committee.” Boston Massachusetts’ *Liberator*, the editors of which were *not* for the Texian cause, published a speech by the Democratic Governor of New York William L. Marcy that was previously printed by another paper. The editor accused the governor of supporting the “Refuge of Oppression” by supporting Texas. The governor, who would later be accused by detractors of being a ‘doughface’ and southern sympathizer, made the point that he was acting along with the governor of South Carolina in denouncing the “intermeddling” of abolitionists and the proposition that the federal government should prosecute those abolitionists who had broken the law. The states, the two governors argued in common, were capable of enforcing penalties themselves. Marcy equated the abolitionists who broke state laws, and any proposed actions by the *federal* government to prosecute them, with “the belligerent authorities of Mexico.”⁹⁶ He asserted that his “state [was] a member of a community of republics” and this “relation gives us rights essential to our well-being, and imposes on us duties equally essential to the well-being of our sister states.” In this case, he was referring to enforcing penalties on “false philanthropists” who were promoting violence and “servile war” south of the Mason-Dixon line. “A few individuals in the middle and eastern states, acting on mistaken motives of moral and religious duty, or some less justifiable principle, and disregarding the obligation which they owe their respective governments, have embarked on an enterprise for abolishing domestic slavery in the southern and southwestern states.”

⁹⁵ *Republican Farmer and Democratic Journal* May 4, 1836.

⁹⁶ *Charleston Mercury*, November 12, 1835.

Along with the resolutions sent to him in the letter from South Carolina's governor, Marcy declared that "a regard for the preservation of peace among our citizens, as well as a due respect for the obligations created by our political institutions and relations, calls upon us [the states] to do what must be done, consistently with the great principles of civil liberty, to put an end to the evils which the abolitionists are bringing upon us and the whole country." These evils motivated the "belligerent" Mexicans and they threatened Americans in the United States *and* outside of it. "With whatever disfavor we may view the institution of domestic slavery, we ought not to overlook the very difficulties in abolishing it, or give countenance to any scheme for accomplishing this object, in violation of the solemn guarantees we under not to interfere with the institution as it exists in other states." He noted that "any intermeddling with it in the respective states, except by the citizens and civil authorities thereof" was, and ought to be, considered antithetical to his, the Democratic party's, and the Texians' definition of "civil liberty." He wanted to appeal to New Yorkers who may or may not have shared his sentiment. "We (New Yorkers) were left to come to this result (abolition) in our own time and manner. I am very sure that any intermeddling with us in this matter. . . would have been rejected as useless, and regarded as an invasion of our rights." If the "abolitionists design[ed] to enlist our passions. . . to influence the actions of Congress, then they are aiming at a usurpation of power." In the same way, Santa Anna was then acting as the "usurper of the South" and not just Texas. "The powers of Congress cannot be enlarged. . . without the consent of the slaveholding states" he remarked.

On the southern states he opined, “We tolerate within our borders these disturbers of their peace and the violators of their laws.” He made an appeal to his fellow Democrats, and presumably others as well, and suggested that “When we consider the matter and manner of these appeals (of the abolitionists), and the character of the people to whom they are made, we ought not to be surprised that they have been indignantly rejected.” To the allegation that Texians were southern troublemakers he tried to remind his audience:

In all that regards the civilities of life, in high intellectual cultivation and endowments, in moral conduct and character, in comprehension of the principles of civil and political liberty, in ability to give these principles practical application, in love of country and devotion to its best interests, the people of the South have furnished as many eminent examples as any of the section of the Union.

Marcy proclaimed he would not “undertake to describe the calamities which, in all probability, would result from their (the abolitionists’) further progress, not only to the rights of the several states, but to the whole human race, so far as the cause of civil liberty is concerned.” That was a careful modification of his initial exclamation. “Our fellow citizens,” of New York or South Carolina, “very generally feel it to be their solemn duty, whatever they may think of slavery in the abstract, or in its actual condition in any

section of the Union, to leave its treatment entirely forever to the people of those states in which it exists.” It could be surmised from Governor Marcy’s speech that he believed his constituency’s “affection for their brethren of the South” would motivate them against the current events transpiring in Mexico and it would be “inconsistent” for them to do otherwise. His language echoes the rhetoric used by Stephen F. Austin as he made his way through the states recruiting for the Texian cause.

Stephen F. Austin was not cut out for military life. Equally as obvious was the fact that he *was* suited for diplomacy. So, he spent the remainder of the war acting on behalf of Texians in the United States just as Benjamin Franklin had done on behalf of the Americans in France.⁹⁷ His rhetoric was first put on display in New Orleans in early January in what was described as “one of the largest and most respectable meetings ever held in the city.”⁹⁸ The meeting, which had featured a variety of speakers who championed the Texian cause, ended with a “ passage of resolutions praising the Texian struggle for truth, light and liberty, against tyranny, priestcraft and military domination.”⁹⁹ The success of this meeting made it obvious to Austin that American support for Texas in general would rely on him specifically garnering support for *independence* from the southerners. He was wary though, “I have felt it my duty to be very cautious in involving the pioneers and actual settlers of that country, by any act of mine, until I was fully and clearly convinced of its necessity, and of our resources to sustain it.”¹⁰⁰ The support he received in New Orleans made it clear to him that independence was indeed the route to

⁹⁷ Gregg Cantrell *Stephen F. Austin, Empresario of Texas* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2016), 333.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 334.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 335.

take. The enthusiasm was “a thousand fold more than [he] had any idea of.” The “War for Liberty,” as he championed it, “must, and will, end in Independence.” Shifting the rhetoric from securing Mexican rights to promoting independence was perhaps the most skillful rhetorical move by any diplomat in the conflict. This was language that most Jacksonians and Jeffersonians could “understand and appreciate.”¹⁰¹

After fighting off the flu Austin made his way to Kentucky where he delivered his “Plea For Texas” (a speech given at the Second Presbyterian Church of Louisville). The speech was circulated throughout the newspapers of the southeast and was reprinted by the *Huntsville Democrat* in May of 1836. After introducing himself to the Kentuckyians Austin remarked, “all the public has been informed, through the medium of newspapers, that war exists between the people of the Texas and the Government of Mexico.”¹⁰²

Austin, whose chief responsibility was to foment American support, had already understood that the best way to do that was to take advantage of the “medium of newspapers.” Additionally, Austin’s language reveals key Jeffersonian ideological tenets that would have resonated with “dyed in the wool” Americans. He explained, “when a people consider themselves compelled by circumstances or by oppression, to appeal to arms and resort to their natural rights, they necessarily submit their cause to the great tribunal of public opinion.”¹⁰³ Which, in this case, was not only the Kentucky audience but the thousands of readers that would have come across this “Plea” in papers like the *Huntsville Democrat*. “Our cause is just,” he asserted, “it is the cause of light and liberty:

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 339.

¹⁰² *Huntsville Democrat* May 10, 1836.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

the same holy cause for which our forefathers fought and bled.” An appeal to kin and to a shared revolutionary past was part and parcel of his message.

Although the phrase Manifest Destiny would not be used until after the Mexican-American War, Austin’s idea that it was the Americans’ duty to colonize the West already resonated with Americans. “A few years back,” he added, “Texas was but a wilderness, the home of the uncivilized and wandering. . . Foreign emigrants were invited in order to restrain these settlements and bring them into subjection.” Most importantly, he noted, “American enterprise accepted the invitation and promptly responded to the call.” He explained to the Kentuckians that Texians did not “expatriate [themselves] from this land of liberty” without first having “guarantees of protection for our persons and property and political rights” in Mexico. He explained, “No American, no Englishman, no one of any nation who has a knowledge of the people of the United States or of the prominent characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon race to which we belong -- a race that in all ages and in all countries wherever it has appeared, has been marked for a jealous and tenacious watchfulness of its liberties.” “No one who has a knowledge of this race,” he added, “can believe that we removed (ourselves) to Texas without such guarantees, as freeborn men naturally expect and require.” Here Austin establishes a familiar picture of liberty for his audience so that he can adequately explain to them how the ‘Spaniard’ Santa Anna trampled their fellow Anglos’ rights.¹⁰⁴

He expounded on this and explained how “a despotic, or strong government, is best adapted to the education and habits of a portion of the Mexican people. This does

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

not, and cannot give to them the right to dictate. . . to the other portion who have equal rights in differing opinion.” The “object” of the Texians, he noted, was “freedom from that government and that people who have shown that they are incapable of self-government. . . this object we expect to obtain by total separation from Mexico as an independent community -- a new republic -- or by becoming a State of the U.S.”¹⁰⁵

This was a drastic change from months before when Austin was a staunch supporter of remaining in the Mexican confederation once the Texians’ rights were secured. He continued to blend this with sentiment that is strikingly similar to Calhoun’s anti-democratic theory of the concurrent majority. He told audiences, “had every member of the confederacy been fairly represented it would have placed the matter on different ground but, even then, it would be monstrous to admit to the principle that a majority have a right to destroy the minority. For the right of self-preservation is superior to all political obligations.” He made sure the audience understood that “self-preservation” was the “first law which God stamped upon the heart of man” and that that was “violate[d]” by the “destruction of the compact.” After referring to the Mexico City prison where he was held before the war as a “dark dungeon of the former Inquisition” he returned to appealing to shared ideology. “Self-preservation,” he asserted, “required a local government in Texas suited to the situation and necessities of the country and the character of its inhabitants. Our forefathers in ‘76 flew to arms for much less. They raised a *principle, the theory of oppression* but in our case it was the *reality*.”

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

At this point, Austin's careful language gets explicitly Jeffersonian, secessionist, and decentralist. He flattered his audience by saying that everyone already accepted that, "the object of government is the well being, security, and happiness of the governed, and that allegiance ceases whenever it is clear, evident, and palpable, that this is in no respect effected." Besides these general and vague "guarantees," Austin noted the specific guarantees under the 1824 Mexican constitution. "When the federal system and constitution were adopted in 1824, and the former provinces became States, Texas exercised the right of retaining within her own control, the rights and powers which appertained to her as one of the *unities* or distinct societies which were confederated together to form the federal republic." The overt states' rights rhetoric accelerates when Austin referred to the 1824 constitution as a "federal compact" and insisted that there were specific reserved rights "vested" in the state of Texas like "the well defined right of self-government."¹⁰⁶ Additionally, calling the Mexican federal government a "general government" can be considered to be a dig at nationalists like Webster and Story.¹⁰⁷ He berated the general government of Mexico for the "total prostration of the constitution, the destruction of the federal system, and the dissolution of the federal compact." Santa Anna, along with the clergy and the aristocracy, had always sought to "overturn the federal system and constitution and establish a monarchy or consolidated government of some kind." The "military and priests," he argued, drove their federated republic towards "centralism" and the "States were converted into departments." He made the point that the Mexican federal constitution was intended to be a copy of the United States'. Thus, in

¹⁰⁶ Referring to Union as "compact" is loaded/buzzword. Note:

¹⁰⁷ *Huntsville Democrat* May 10, 1836.

talking about the violations of the Mexican one, Austin also conveyed what he thought about the nature of the American one. So, those who also thought like this should join the cause because it was only logical. Austin declared that “the Federal compact of Mexico is dissolved” and, according to the published account, was met with thunderous applause.

His object was not simply to rabble rouse for Texas. He delivered a commentary on federalism in general as if he had not already got his point across. He told the Kentuckians that “the powers of the States [of Mexico] were the same in substance as the States of the United States and in some instances greater. . . by keeping these facts in view,” he said, “and then supposing that the President and Congress of these U. States were to do what the President and Congress of Mexico have done, and that one of the States was to resist and to insist on sustaining the federal constitution and state rights, a parallel case would be presented of the present contest between Texas and the revolutionary government of Mexico.” The fact that Austin so diligently articulated this point suggests that he was either depending on this type of ideological rhetoric specifically to garner support or it could mean that he was simply trying to present Texas’ case in a way like-minded Americans would understand. There is good reason to believe that his audience would have been familiar with the appeal to a Jeffersonian compact theory of the constitution. Daniel Webster and Robert Hayne had had their famous debate over the same compact question in 1830, and justices Abel Upshur and Joseph Story had completed voluminous written arguments by 1833. The robust party print culture, along with both Jackson and Calhoun’s celebrity, would have made Americans like the ones in Austin’s audience fully cognizant of what he was trying to convey.

Perhaps the most revealing part of Austin's speech was his concluding advertisement and plea for American emigrants. He noted, "The Greeks and the Poles have received the sympathies or aid of the people of the U. States. . . But the Greeks and Poles are not parallel cases with ours -- they are not the sons and daughters of Anglo-Americans. We are." "The credit of Texas is good," he assured those who might choose to support Texas monetarily, "as is proven by the extensive loans already negotiated" by southern banks. After informing his audience of the current numerical state of the army he listed the benefits of emigration and he reasoned that "Americanizing Texas" was of "great importance. . . [in order to] extend the principles of self-government to a neighboring country." Most importantly, "this means Texas will become a great outwork on the west to protect this outlet of the Western world and the mouths of the Mississippi, as Alabama and Florida are on the east: and to keep far away on the frontier. . . all the enemies who might make Texas a door for invasion, or use it as a theatre from which mistaken philanthropists, and wild fanatics, might attempt a system of intervention in the domestic concerns of the South, which might lead to a servile war, or at least jeopardize the tranquility of Louisiana and the neighboring States."

The editors bookended Austin's speech with a number of accounts that assured readers that "the prospects brighten for Texas" and they listed a number of different schooners that were then preparing to set sail for Texas. They entertained the popular rumour that General Gaines himself might cross the Sabine with 600 men to join the fight against Santa Anna and they strategically placed different letters to the editors that expressed sentiments like, "Rouse up the friends of Texas with all possible haste, and

urge the Florida volunteers on their return to take vessels and steamers, and embark for the Trinity and reach Robbin's Crossing (near San Antonio) as soon as possible."¹⁰⁸

In an adjoining piece titled "Cheering For Texas" the editors noted that they were "indebted to the *New Orleans Bulletin*" and other "Southern papers" for many of the slips published in the *Democrat* including an "official account of the Storming of the Alamo." They even ended this piece with their reasoning for including the entire text of Austin's speech. "As many of our readers are not apprised of all the facts connected with the revolution in Texas," they said, "we have inserted the Address of S.F. Austin. After a perusal of the details [of the cause]. . . to deny its justice would be to condemn that spirit which animated the patriots of the Revolution who resisted the oppressions of Great Britain." They specifically appealed to the "patriotism of the States of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama" in hopes that "their gallant sons will yield a ready obedience and march without delay to that defenceless portion of the country which is now threatened with a merciless and sanguinary War."

His attempts at garnering support north of the Mason-Dixon Line were less successful. This culminated in an unsuccessful appeal to Nicholas Biddle, the president of the Bank of the United States, for a hefty loan of around a half-million dollars.¹⁰⁹ His appeals were "delivered in a distinctly Southern voice" which endeared him to enthusiastic Jacksonian Democrats and disconnected him from disenchanted northern Whigs.¹¹⁰ After news of the Alamo's fall, he penned a letter to American publishers that was heavily circulated in late Spring. He exclaimed that, "A war of extermination is

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 343.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 344.

raging in Texas, a war of barbarism and despotic principles, waged by the mongrel Spanish-Indian and Negro race, against civilization and the Anglo-American race.” If no support was to be had from the United States in the form of man or material, “the Anglo-American foundation, this nucleus of republicanism, is to be broken up and its place supplied by a population of Indians, Mexicans, and renegadoes, all mixed together, and all the natural enemies of white men and civilization.” “Let an army of the United States march into Texas,” he said, “and say to the pirate Santa Anna, ‘Stop:’ a great and philanthropic and free people will not stand tamely by and see justice, constitutional right, and humanity, wantonly violated at her door.” He concluded, “nor can a paternal government tolerate a state of things on its most vulnerable and important frontier, that will, and *must* bring the bloody tide of savage war and the horrors of negro insurrection within its limits.” Austin enjoyed a close relationship with Tejano leaders, and he harbored a genuine respect for the military leadership of Mexico, but the *rhetoric* is what was important here. Results were what Austin sought and this was how he thought best to obtain them.

After the fall of the Alamo in March 1836 Richard Ellis, president of the convention that voted for Texas Independence, sent out copies of a letter addressed to “The People of the United States.” The *Voice of Sumter* out of Alabama published Ellis’ letter in full. After retelling the events of the thirteen-day siege and final battle Ellis wrote that those who died in the siege were motivated by “the same right which impelled your fathers and our fathers, to throw the gauntlet of defiance against the power of Britain. . . Their enemy was comparatively Christian and magnanimous. Ours is semi-civilized

infuriate and merciless.” After conveying the barbarity of Santa Anna he called upon more shared memories in writing that the patriots of the American Revolution “appealed to the sympathics [sic] of Monarchs and of strangers, and they appealed not in vain. Aid, prompt, powerful, and efficient was rendered them.” He passionately continued, “Friends and brothers! We the citizens of Texas . . . turn our thoughts and our hearts with an unwavering confidence to the land of our common nativity, and we ask you for assistance.” He then asked the American people in the aggregate, “Will you brothers and friends refuse to do for us what was nobly done for you?”¹¹¹

The percentage of American volunteers remained consistent but the overall number of soldiers in the army, under the new command of Sam Houston, increased to 1,282 prior to the Battle of San Jacinto in April. After peace was achieved volunteers from the United States continued to pour into the country. This was due to fears of Mexican counterattack that persisted years after the revolution had been won. Interim president of Texas David G. Burnet had tried to discourage further emigration of volunteers early in the summer of 1836. He rescinded these orders under the certainty that a renewal of hostilities with Mexico was on the horizon.¹¹²

The Conflict in Near Memory

¹¹¹ *Voice of Sumter* April 5, 1836.

¹¹² Paul D. Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience: a Political and Social History, 1835-1836* (College Station: Texas A. & M University Press) 1992, 135.

With expectations of glory, volunteers continued to pour into Texas as late as 1837 and 1838 after the war was over. The cause had already been mythologized. One farewell poem published in the *Times-Picayune* by a woman simply called “Miss Russell” championed volunteers from Louisiana who were marching west. The most provocative line read, “The gallant Grays would prove a hardy band -- ‘Till their last breath dispute the foeman’s pass, And die, like Spartans, with Leonidas.”¹¹³ This mythos evokes images of the few in number, highly trained, band of Europeans holding off civilization and liberty from hoards of authoritarian outsiders. Like Thermopylae, the Texian conflict had already been remembered in a similar manner. Another poem titled “Texas the Promised Land” published in a September 1838 edition of the same paper exhorted young men to fight where “Davy Crockett fell” and to join “the brave who are pressing to the West, the promised land.”¹¹⁴ This language reveals how Crockett had already assumed a similar position to the American founders by this time.

Despite the fact that large numbers of volunteers journeyed to Texas in late 1836 and 1837 most of them returned to the United States.¹¹⁵ This suggests that ideology had a greater impact on volunteer mobilization than the land grant offers used by Texian officials to lure Americans into their country. One recruitment broadside that was sent to the *Natchitoches Herald* contained a message from general Houston promising “if volunteers from the United States will join their brethren in this section, they will receive liberal bounties of land. We have millions of acres of our best lands unchosen and

¹¹³ *Times-Picayune* May 30, 1837.

¹¹⁴ *Times-Picayune* September 19, 1837.

¹¹⁵ Stephen L. Hardin and Gary S. Zaboly *Texian Iliad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015.

unappropriated.”¹¹⁶ The only men who stayed, however, in Texas at this time were those who were young, single and had nothing waiting for them back home. Regardless, it is difficult to separate these pecuniary issues from patriotic and ideological ones. Instead, it would be more accurate to assume that they influence each other. Even still, those who *were* attracted by the prospect of land were still products of the rhetorical efforts of the party newspapermen.

The post-war language used by rhetoricians of the Texian cause did not really differ from what was used during the war years. The cause and the heroes of that cause solidified what it meant to be an American in the collective imagination of the patriotic “dyed in the wool” Democrats. Tennesseans gave a dinner in honor of the Texian republic in 1839. The editors of the *Republican Banner*, a paper out of Nashville, were sure to include a full transcript of the events of the evening in their 27 of June issue. Throughout the evening toasters revealed what they thought to be the most important take-aways from the late war in Texas. Dr. John Shelby’s first toast was given to both “Texians and Tennesseans -- United by kindred and blood” and it was followed by a dedication to Sam Houston who had left the state of Tennessee with a “bright fame and brighter prospects.” This issue made sure to include that “this defender of the rights of man” was no adventurer who was resolved to “break down the supremacy of Mexico.” Instead, he was “fighting for the Constitution under which they [Texians] had sought a new home as Colonists, against the fearful and oppressive inroads of Centralism.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ *Mississippi Free Trader* October 27, 1835.

¹¹⁷ *Republican Banner* June 27, 1839.

The editors informed their readers that Houston “had been misrepresented on this point,” and that it was not until “every other remonstrance had failed; not until the very arms of defence were demanded of the Texans, did he look to revolution as the proper means of redress.” The question of just who exactly was doing the misrepresenting is unclear here. It would be unlikely for Houston’s political enemies, like Mirabeau Lamar, to have embarked on a campaign of tarnishing him on the grounds mentioned. Like Houston, Lamar had been involved with the revolution from the beginning. Any allegations of brash conduct that could have been laid on Houston could have very well been laid on Lamar. Notwithstanding the possibility that Houston was simply trying to correct honest rumours it could be assumed that he was trying to defend himself against those were ideologically aligned against him, his Texian rebels, and “dyed in the wool” Democrats in general.

This would not be out of the question. Even after the war’s end publications like the Boston’s *Liberator* and the *Pittsburg Gazette* continued to lampoon Houston and the rebels for pushing for “insurrection in Texas.” Carlisle, Pennsylvania’s *Weekly Herald* featured a piece that suggested that, from the very beginning, the civil war in Mexico was part of a larger southern conspiracy to “incorporate” Texas into the United States and then “clothe the slaveholders with the control of the Union.”¹¹⁸ There is no evidence that was going to cease either. As late as 1842 one piece in Philadelphia’s *Public ledger* criticized Americans for “aiding rebels in Texas in arms against the lawful authority of Mexico.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ *Weekly Herald* January 30, 1838.

¹¹⁹ *Public ledger* July 18, 1842.

Nevertheless, Houston maintained that his cause was just and he continued to deliver toasts to republicanism, the United States, and its “glorious institutions she [Texas] was anxious to participate in.” He praised the “people of Tennessee” as well as members of “the Anglo-Saxon Race” who were “colonizing every land, and regenerating it as they go. When their dominion is universal, Liberty and Civilization will be erected on immovable foundations.” He even extolled Great Britain, the “common mother” of the attendees, and remarked, “though once rudely forced from her bosom, we can never forget our former relations, and that she is now firmly engaged with us in the advancement of Liberty.” He praised the “one star of Texas” and declared that it would “shed its brilliant rays over a land of freedom” and “prove to be a ‘pillar of fire’ to direct the march of other nations from bondage to liberty.” The other attendees shaped the cause as one that promoted the “rights of man” and “civil liberty.” Houston was the “Washington of Texas.”¹²⁰

At a summer dinner in Huntsville, Alabama in 1844 mayor C.C. Clay Jr. welcomed Democrats and veterans of the “Texian War” who were from Alabama and Tennessee to celebrate the “re-annexation” movement that was then being fostered in the southern states. In the fiery pre-dinner speech Clay asked his audience “If it [annexation] was right then, why is it wrong now?”¹²¹ He referred to the spirit of the late 1820s and 1830s that had argued for the president to annex Texas. The difference in 1844 was that slavery was much more of an issue than it had been in previous decades. Clay exclaimed that a spirit of “rabid abolitionism” fuelled many of the most radical Northerners who

¹²⁰ *Republican Banner* June 27, 1839

¹²¹ *Huntsville Democrat* July 24, 1844.

were adamant that the victorious Texians, and the land of Texas itself, still belonged to the government of Mexico.¹²² The Yankee sentiment would have no doubt been received as vile and insulting to the veterans who were in Clay's audience that night.

Clay matched this with strong appeals to a common ideology. He extolled the veterans of the Texian War for contributing themselves to "the good old cause" that motivated the founders of Alabama and Tennessee. Like the "warriors of Sparta," he said, the old volunteers had "struck terror into the hearts of our enemies and secured to us the blessings of freedom and peace."¹²³ He thanked them for the blood that was spilled on "patriot alters" and for "carrying on the tradition of the high-souled, chivalrous and self-devoted patriotism of the citizen soldier." Echoing Jefferson, he finished by adding that he "wish[ed] to add fresh fuel to the watchfire of liberty and to excite a vestal vigilance for its preservation."¹²⁴ Southerners remembered the Texian War as a southern, Democrat war. It was an ideological conflict, and in talking about Santa Anna the usurper, they indirectly criticized the Yankee meddler. Clay gloried in how the planter and yeoman was superior to the New England merchant. He echoed John Randolph by arguing that the landowner was the "great bulwark" of liberty that had originally come to the English people via the "Magna Charta."¹²⁵ He likened them to a hero they had in common: "the master of the second War of Independence, the illustrious Andrew Jackson."¹²⁶ The cause of Texas in 1836, he said, was "dear to every *true* American heart" (emphasis is mine). He characterized the conflict as something that involved "the

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ *Huntsville Democrat* July 24, 1844.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

political and domestic peace of the South, and the civil and religious liberty of our fellows.” He assured the veterans that “the entire Democratic party was enlisted” in that fight against the “Carthaginian spirit of Mexico.”¹²⁷ If the Mexicans were Carthaginians, then the Americans (Texians included) were Romans who gloriously defended their republic from invasion by a tyrannical nineteenth-century version of a Hannibal Barca. Like Carthage, Mexico was the placeholder that prevented expansion and threatened American (or Roman) liberty and republicanism. Painting Santa Anna as Hannibal and Sam Houston as Scipio reinforced the connections that Americans already drew between themselves and the Romans of antiquity. Like Scipio, who took on the name ‘Africanus,’ Houston took on the name ‘Sam Jacinto’ as part of a play on words that referred to his victory over the invader at *San Jacinto*.

Clay’s appeal to common heroes, common principles, and common identity reveals an aspect of consistency in the ideological themes that characterized the rhetoric of the war years. Second, it displays how the conflict in Texas was all about national politics for the Americans. If the entire Democratic party was enlisted, the other party, along with Mexico, was part of the anti-American, “Carthaginian spirit,” of consolidation, centralism, and abolitionism. By contrast, the stereotypical Texian was everything that their definition of an American was.

One writer featured in an 1838 issue of the *Richmond Enquirer* took this classic Rome-Carthage comparison step further. In a piece titled “OUR DESTINY,” the writer warned “we have our Alps, not the Alleghenies, but the Rocky Mountains, that lift their

¹²⁷ Ibid.

heads up to the heavens.” He continued, “as the Alps of Europe have been crossed by a Hannibal -- a Charlemagne -- a Napoleon; so our Alps must be passed. Who shall pass over our Alps? Hannibal passed over from Africa to Spain -- or rather the Carthaginians did -- and were led by Hannibal over the Pyrenees, through Gaul, over the Alps, and into the heart of Italy.” In this case, the heart of Italy was a stand-in for the American homeland. The writer asked, “Will our Alps be passed from the West (by the Mexicans) or the East (by Americans)?” He pushed for Americans to come to the aid of independent Texas. The autonomy of Americans in that republic was threatened so long as it remained outside of the protection of the United States. “Let us acquire it by treaty,” he added, “let it be admitted into the confederacy and then, the northern statesmen will consent to the admission of Texas. Then the republic will be balanced -- the icebergs of the North will tend to cool the burning sands of the South. . . Let this be our policy, take Texas.” So as not to provoke “Carthage,” the writer suggested that further western territory be taken with “justice to Mexico” as well.¹²⁸ To this writer, and presumably to his audience, the Carthaginian threat to American liberty in the United States and in Texas was very real and immediate.

Two Visions of America

But just what exactly does this all mean? It is evident that two American factions had two very different views on the Texas question. Additionally, one can tell that these

¹²⁸ *Richmond Enquirer*, January 13, 1838.

views were inherently tied to a difference in ideology. What does this reveal? Austin, like the newspaper men devoted to the Texian cause, applied his own definition of ‘union and liberty’ to the struggle in Mexico. Those who were opposed to that vision appealed to the authority of Santa Anna, and the government of Mexico, to promote their own definition of ‘union and liberty’ as well as a type of nationalism that did not authorize any type of local check on the general will. As serious as this *specific* question was, it cannot, and should not, be separated from the political context of the 1830s.

This notion, that two distinct visions of Americanness were detectable and at odds during the time of the Texas Revolution, was heavily explored by Richard M. Weaver in the mid-twentieth century. The language that is examined in this study strongly reflects his conclusions about the two interpretations of “union” and the two types of American individualism that existed in the 1830s. This work goes a step further than Weaver’s, though, in that it posits that the Webster Hayne debate and the nullification crisis were not the only arenas where contending ideas about Americanness clashed during the 1830s. This is not to say that Weaver insisted that there were *only* two of these aforesaid arenas, this work is simply adding the Texas Revolution-centered rhetoric of the United States party officials to his list.

It is one thing to say that the Webster Hayne debates personified Massachusetts and South Carolina, it is another thing to say that they personified the regions of North and South entirely. It is yet *another* thing to say, in some ways, they personified the two major political parties of the United States in general. Regardless of whatever they personified, the very same can be said of the debates that were centered on the revolution

in Texas. They accomplished the same things. They both presented distinct definitions of union, Americanness, and liberty to the public. And the public, in the minds of the rhetoricians, would have been forced to either take a position on a side or stay out of the conflict entirely.

Weaver refers to Webster's speech as a sort of "opening gun of American nationalism."¹²⁹ He identifies 'nationalism' as being a conception of the American people in the aggregate. Nationalism in this specific ideological case is opposed to the idea that the people of the states specifically formed the union. Despite the fact that the language of Texians and southerners could be referred to as "nationalist" by today's standards, it should be differentiated from the traditional Websterian form of the word. As Weaver puts it, the French Revolution expounded upon the idea of nationality by extending its application to "people" in the aggregate. This resulted in a "breaking point of all intermediate structures" or "feudal heritages." The French people were "collectivized" into one single entity. *They* were sovereign, and the "historical system of checks and balances. . . were swept out of existence. Local prerogatives and loyalties were impeached" by the accumulating force of Rousseau's concept of the "general will."¹³⁰

This is what was taking place in the United States during the earlier part of the nineteenth century according to Weaver. Yes, the Texian revolutionaries sang *La Marseillaise*, but they sang it under the auspices of their own conception of liberty. In other words, it is not likely that Texian supporters would have condemned the French Revolution for creating the idea of nationalism in the aggregate. Many would have seen it

¹²⁹ George M. Curtis, and James J. Thompson, *The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1987), 105.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 106.

as an anti-monarchical fight to rally behind, and they certainly did. What Weaver means is that the French Revolutionary conception of nationalism itself expressly influenced Webster's, and by connection the anti-Texian's, idea of Americanness. Those who agreed that the American people formed the union in the aggregate would have winced at the idea that other Americans supported Texian secession based on a conception that federal unions were formed through the consent of the people *of the states individually*. In the latter case, liberty was a negative kind of condition which involved self-restraint and respect for others rights. It did not depend on an insistence of arbitrary expansion (which in Webster's conception of the term it did).

With these ideas in mind, those who argued about the legitimacy of the Texian rebellion were effectively talking past each other. Two rival philosophies on the nature of the union and on liberty exploded over the "seemingly innocent" issue of public land distribution in 1830.¹³¹ The very same philosophies reared their heads as Texian legitimacy was questioned by the same political factions just a few years later. Like those who criticized Santa Anna and his New England supporters, Hayne's major fear was that Webster's faction was overtly participating in the devilish act of "consolidating the government."¹³²

Webster, on the other hand, explicitly foreshadowed the thinking of those who were cautious about supporting the Texian rebels. Support would give legitimacy to "southern insurrectionists" and it would ideologically "weaken the bonds of connection" in the union.¹³³ In this political climate, supporting the Texians in 1835 would have been

¹³¹ Ibid,107.

¹³² Ibid, 109.

¹³³ Ibid.

exactly the same as advocating Hayne's idea that *Webster's* conception of the American union was one that was held together by a "chain of iron." Likewise, if one was ideologically aligned with Webster in 1830, it would have been inconsistent to support the Texians because that meant that one advocated Webster's idea that *Hayne's* conception of the American union was one that was held together by a "rope of sand."¹³⁴ In Hayne's mind, "The South repudiate[d] the idea that a pecuniary dependence on the federal government [was] one of legitimate means of holding the states together." To Webster, this jeopardized the "general will" of the American nation itself. Disagreement on the legitimacy of a "subversion of the sovereignty and independence of the states" were, according to Hayne, "the grounds which have, from the beginning, divided the great parties of this country." Webster definitely would not have called this "subversion" and neither would those who publicly criticized the Texian rebels five years later. They both touched upon sectional, political, and ideological differences that revealed an internal discrepancy of national character that was made even more evident after news of hostilities in Texas began to make its way into the United States.

This was fundamentally a question of definitions of what one's conception of the word 'freedom' was. In Hayne's, and by extension the Texian supporter's mind, "the implication was clear that liberty required the independence and dignity *of the parts*, with local attention to and disposition of local affairs." It came from the familiar Anglo-centric idea that freedom was not something bestowed from the top down as it was in France in 1789. "Freedom" was something that "gathers around the hearth, inheres in local

¹³⁴ Ibid, 129.

associations, and endears to a man his place of habitation. It was a protection to enable him to enjoy things, not a force or power to enable him to do things.”¹³⁵ Contrast this sentiment with Webster’s insistence that it was “the people’s Constitution, the people’s government, made for the people, made by the people, and answerable to the people.”¹³⁶ A positive conception of both power and freedom were derived from the very notion of “the people” in the aggregate. So, why would any Websterian in their right mind support a “southern insurrection” based on “local prerogative,” “stipulations,” or autonomy? It would be anathema to not only their idea of what freedom was, but more importantly, to their very conception of American identity itself. What was the American nation then? Was it simply a means to some higher end? Or was it the end itself? This is what was ultimately being argued both on the floor of the senate in 1830 and in the paper debates in the Texas question years later. The supporters of Texas, like Hayne, had already decided the answer to these questions by resurrecting the Jeffersonian principles of ‘98 in their rhetoric.

William J. Cooper succinctly defines this version of freedom in his 1983 work *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860*. Like Weaver, he emphasizes the theme that this interpretation of liberty was of a bottom up “states-rights milieu” that had been percolating since the colonial days. He uses the emerging southern political figure John Tyler to describe it in relation to the Texas question. Years before the Mexican War began Cooper attests to the fact that Tyler and others “savored Texas as their political elixir.” Tyler was as “dyed in the wool” as a Democrat could get and he understood that

¹³⁵ Ibid, 122.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 123-124.

“no other issue so aroused southerners as an outside threat to slavery, which, of course, jeopardized their liberty.”¹³⁷ The centralizing, abolitionist force of Santa Anna in Texas “touched the raw nerve of southern politics” and presented a common threat to “their interest in slavery, but also their liberty.”¹³⁸ He notes “When somebody other than themselves talked about tampering with slavery on their own ground. . . southerners heard only one sound, the clanking of the shackles that would end their freedom to control their own affairs -- thus ending their liberty.” The common bond of a specific interpretation of American liberty must be kept in mind simply due to the fact that ‘liberty’ itself is so crucial to the mythos of American identity. Democratic party rhetoricians in 1835-1836 consistently conveyed this, and they maintained that Santa Anna fit the bill for the type of threat that Americans in the United States and in Texas had in common.¹³⁹

Conclusion

In September of 1836, after the war in Texas had wound down, the Democratic editors of the *Mississippi Free Trader* expressed their dissatisfaction with President-Elect

¹³⁷ William J. Cooper *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 208.

¹³⁸ Calhoun agreed that “the attention of the people of the South ought to be turned to the subject” of Texas which is definitely ideologically consistent, but it is ironic considering the fact that years later Calhoun withdrew his support from the Mexican War on the grounds that James K. Polk had abused his executive powers.

¹³⁹ Cooper plays with the idea that Texas was “practically” their (southerners) territory in one sentence but he does not take this any further besides mentioning it in passing. This is understandable because the aspect I am exploring is only tangential, at best, to Cooper’s study.

Martin Van Buren. Despite being a leader in their own party, to these editors, Van Buren was not “dyed in the wool of the State’s Rights school.” This Democrat was a wolf in sheep’s clothing. In a headline that read “Van Buren Opposed to Texas” the editors specifically explained how the president-elect’s opposition to the Texian cause of state sovereignty inevitably meant that his administration would never allow *any* semblance of state sovereignty in the United States. Again, decentralism was essential to their view of true American liberty in and outside of revolutionary Texas. Liberty arose from communities and went up from there. It did not come from the top down.

Although he was a Democrat, opposing Texas meant that he opposed the Jeffersonian principles of ‘98. To those who were “dyed in the wool,” the Americans in Texas were far more ‘American’ than the president-elect was. The Americans in Texas were all on board with annexation, the editors explained. It was Van Buren who corrupted Jackson and betrayed the Americans in Texas by rejecting annexation. “There is an almost united feeling in favor of Texian liberty,” the editors remarked, “another song is to be sung; the prejudice of the people are to be appealed to for political effect; Mr. Van Buren is the opponent of the Texian cause, and his influence is the sole reason why the President has not taken more effective means [to help them].” He dared to “couple the name of Andrew Jackson with this pretended opposition.” Every “friend” of Van Buren had “made soul-stirring speeches in favor of the Texian cause,” but Van Buren himself showed “the lukewarmness of Mr. Clay.” They maintained that “Van

Buren and Southern interests can never coalesce. The South will feel this, perhaps when it is too late.”¹⁴⁰

In spite of being disappointed about annexation, these “dyed in the wool” rhetors, along with most of the others examined in this paper, noticed the irony that an independent little Anglo-American Texas republic was more evocative of Jefferson outside of the Union than inside it. One orator quipped, in an allusion to Jefferson, that he did not mind if there was a string of little independent republics spanning the breadth of the entire North American continent for all he cared. This was the *true* American ideal which was symbolized in the very character of what ‘Texas’ was. Tennessee, the former home of Houston, Crocket, and countless others, had been once called the Switzerland of the West. Now, it was Texas.

One can see from their common language what the “dyed in the wool” party operatives thought about the Texians. Likewise, it reveals what they intended for their audiences to take away from their rhetoric. A sure defense of Texas, state sovereignty, liberty, and honor in Mexico was exactly the same to these people a defense of the very same ideas in America (or at least in their version of it). To use Austin’s alarmist words, “America will be Santo Domingonized” if the forces of centralism, invasion, and “Philo-Abolitionism” were not quelled in Texas. In other words, ‘as Texas goes, so goes the nation.’

It is important to emphasize the importance of liberty, race, decentralism, and slavery to their point of view on the Texas question. What lies at the heart of all these

¹⁴⁰ *Mississippi Free Trader* September 1, 1836.

things is a unique perspective on American identity itself. It was not limited to the official borders of the United States. It was, however, dependent on ideology. So, in this sense, the Jeffersonian Texians were Americans. What people like Van Buren, Clay, or northeastern Whigs had to say about the situation effectively did not matter. The threats Texians faced were the very same threats that other *true* Americans faced within the actual borders of the United States. The debate over the Texas question effectively drafted the Texians into a collectively imagined narrative of American liberty that was under attack by “alarming progress of centralism” in Mexico.¹⁴¹

This paper has shown that from the beginning of the conflict “dyed in the wool” Americans saw the Texian cause as *their* cause and this was promulgated by the rhetoric of Democratic Party operatives in the southern United States. Their common bonds of kinship, common ties of decentralist ideology, and common threat of centralism and abolitionism solidified the idea that American identity was typified in the stereotypical Texian. The ideological rhetoric of Texian officials and American Democratic party newspapermen reveals what they thought it meant to be Americans. The *true* American was the Jeffersonian decentralist. In effect, the true American was the Texian.

¹⁴¹ *Nashville Whig*, October 2, 1835.

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