

A Star Shall Fall: Young America and the  
Politics of Manifest Destiny, 1844-1861

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April 2011

Senior Thesis, Columbia University

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Word Count: 19,994

**Abstract:** This paper explores the interplay between politics and ideology within the context of American expansion in the Late Jacksonian Era (1840s and 1850s). This paper seeks to understand the role of a younger generation of Democrats in changing the Democratic Party and the Second Party System as the United States expanded territorially and, unbeknownst to them, careened towards disunion and civil war. Of particular importance is the conception of a term which is synonymous with American expansion, Manifest Destiny. Rather than rehashing prior arguments about Manifest Destiny's ideological importance, this thesis goes an alternate route. It reframes Manifest Destiny as a paradoxical idea: simultaneously it served as a vague nationalism espoused by younger Democrats as a tool to achieve party unity on expansion and as the progenitor of the sectional conflict which culminated in secession and the Civil War.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks are first and foremost in order to Professors Mae Ngai, Herbert Sloan, Anders Stephanson, and Eric Foner. First, to my fantastic seminar leader Professor Ngai who was always supportive and enthusiastic about this project. Her indispensable guidance, along with her willingness to read multiple drafts, helped this paper evolve over the course of the year. Next, to my second reader Professor Sloan whose razor sharp criticisms of the United States and acerbic wit have always encouraged me to think critically about my subject. I owe him thanks for always allowing me into his office for extended discussions. Third, I need to thank Professor Stephanson for being a good sport about allowing me to critique his book and ideas about Manifest Destiny and Young America. Finally, I must thank Professor Foner for directing me towards writing a thesis on Young America and Manifest Destiny. Without him this thesis does not happen and I am very much indebted to him for his suggestion.

Thanks are next in order to my fellow seminar members, always critical and supportive of one another's projects. The great class time and peer review sessions made the processes of researching and writing all the more worthwhile throughout the past year. Your comments were integral to helping this paper evolve and reach its current form. Thanks for a great year!

Finally, I wish to thank the librarians and staff at Columbia University, Cornell University, and the New York Historical Society for their support and exposing me to an array of sources.

Dedication: To Mom, Dad, and Matt.

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Let us suppose that Manifest Destiny is debatable – what then? If such a question seems strange, it is because the historical debate on the hegemony of Manifest Destiny has been lacking. The prevailing historical view identifies Manifest Destiny as a unifying political framework that allowed the United States to understand its expansion and establishment as a transcontinental power. Anders Stephanson summed up this view by defining Manifest Destiny as “a particular (and particularly powerful) nationalism constituting itself not only as prophetic but also universal. . . . of single importance in the way the United States came to understand itself in the world.”<sup>1</sup> Such a view that Manifest Destiny was the hegemonic ideal for the nation and its self-perception does not explain the sectional crisis which grew out of division and debate on expansionist endeavors: annexing Texas, fixing the Oregon boundary, fighting the Mexican War, and seeking to acquire Cuba. The problem of claiming the United States derived self-understanding through Manifest Destiny is the assumption of unity within the nation or the parties. But contrary to these assumptions, the Whigs never embraced Manifest Destiny and eventually denounced it as a license to steal another’s land.<sup>2</sup> Democrats repeatedly struggled to unite on expansion and did so only after intense wrangling. Indeed, the sectional crisis seems to affirm Frederick Merk’s quip that Manifest Destiny was “a bomb wrapped in idealism.”<sup>3</sup> Yet Merk’s thesis that a minority foisted Manifest Destiny on the majority has shortcomings as well. Continental expansion did occur, and a young coterie within the Democratic Party worked as a vanguard to make expansion a national issue.

This paper attempts to explain Manifest Destiny’s rise and fall from 1844 to 1861 by focusing on the role of that coterie, a younger generation of Democrats who took the name

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<sup>1</sup> Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995) xiii-xiv.

<sup>2</sup> “Manifest Destiny,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 30 June 1853.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: a Reinterpretation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963) 216.

Young America. Geographically, these Democrats primarily came from the northwest although there were a few southerners. The most prominent of them were Illinois' Sydney Breese and James Shields, Indiana's Edward Hannegan and Jesse Bright, and Ohio's William Allen. Florida's David Yulee and Louisiana's Pierre Soulé were the notable southerners. Illinois' Stephen Douglas, the rising star and eventual party chieftain, served as the group's figurehead. These Democrats were born around the time of the disastrous War of 1812 and had no recollection of the sectionalist Missouri Compromise debates of 1820.<sup>4</sup> Their nationalist vision partly originated from their lack of anxieties (held by the older generation) about the nation's fragility, imperiled by external threats and internal tensions. Young Democrats constructed Manifest Destiny as an ideology by equating nationalism with freedom and democracy while linking both to regeneration through territorial expansion. This nationalist vision served as a critique of the Whig economic program of economic nationalism directed by the federal government that included a national bank, tariffs, and internal improvements (infrastructure development) which Jacksonians had fought for years. Yet, it is precisely that critique that led to an intergenerational clash within the Democracy. Jacksonians clung to Jefferson's vision of a yeoman farmer republic free from tyranny, whether from the federal government or bankers. Young Democrats embraced free development in a broad negative sense: free trade, free movement into space, and freedom of independent qualitative development which would overcome agrarianism. The maximization of private actors' interests, those of individuals, businesses, and political groups within the Union, would strengthen the nation by developing the egalitarian resource of land. The generational conflict over revising Democratic positions and adopting new ones found a tenuous and dangerous resolution in an emerging idea of nationalism.

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<sup>4</sup> Yonatan Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party 1828-1861* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 13.

Manifest Destiny was the ideological means to a political end. It used lofty, if vague ideals, to bridge the divide between Jacksonians and young Democrats in order to achieve specific aims of expansion. Neither generational wing of the Democracy desired the federal government to control access to land and dictate its usages because such a program would invariably evolve towards class hierarchy. By acquiring land for open development, the Democratic alliance of Southern planters and Northern plain republicans could regenerate itself and blunt Whig efforts to institute their own economic plan. The ideological component for securing party unity involved defining Manifest Destiny in hegemonic terms: expansion was inevitable and had national support. The Whigs' rejection of such an idea subsequently fostered Democratic unity. The Democracy became the party of the nation's destiny, expansion across the continent, while the Whigs became the party of class. If young Democrats seemed "long on bombast and short on specifics" as Stephanson claims, this was largely by design and the power of a strong opposition should not be underestimated.<sup>5</sup> Those who lived through the harrowing Missouri Compromise debates in 1820 knew the sectionalism surrounding the incident exploded at a time when the Federalist Party had all but vanished. With the Whigs committed against expansion and to their economic program, young Democrats and Jacksonians had to cooperate in order to effectively combat the Whigs.<sup>6</sup> Vagaries and bombast about the nation's destiny seemed a safe and useful means to unite the Democratic Party and pursue an anti-Whig agenda.

Yet, Young America encountered two problems by working in the vanguard. First, they remained a minority within the party: expansionist votes were close partly for this reason. Jacksonians did not desire to reenact the Missouri Compromise debates, and the sectionalism that

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<sup>5</sup> Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny*, 64.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Holt articulated the idea that a healthy political system depends upon divergence in *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*.

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expansionist debates unleashed revealed the danger of expansion. Indeed, Manifest Destiny proved a paradox because of its rhetoric of freedom and democracy while simultaneously expanding free and slave territory. Manifest Destiny could only veil, not eradicate, sectional divisions rooted in conflicts over slavery. Finessing the slavery issue meant separating territorial aggrandizement from expanding one section's interest at the other's expense: the manifest destiny to spread freedom and democracy across North America did not concern slavery. Moreover, such nationalist bombast masked sectionalism by displacing sectional tensions onto an external other; aristocratic Britons, mixed-race Mexicans, or Catholic Spaniards. The immediate goal of possessing the continent was realized, but not the ultimate goals of forging a nation through continental expansion and understanding such a project in nation building. Secession revealed how little Young America and Manifest Destiny had achieved besides adding land to the Union.<sup>7</sup>

## Prologue: The Blessings of Union

“And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of Heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Genesis 26:4

James Polk's inauguration on March 4, 1845 served as a coda to a contentious period of national and Congressional debate on the annexation of Texas. Whigs denounced annexation as a typical Democratic distraction from economic policy, such as internal improvements, while Democrats sneered at Whigs' attempts to deny common people access to land. The rhetoric incorporated a sectional dimension last witnessed in 1820 even though partisanship persisted. Northern Whigs decried annexation as a slave owner's land grab, while Southern Democrats

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<sup>7</sup> The racial aspects of Manifest Destiny are not within the scope of this paper. For further reading on this subject see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*.

retorted about the South's equal rights to land. Despite the persistence of party loyalties, the vitriol spewed in Congress alarmed Polk. In his inaugural address, Polk reprimanded those who questioned the "glorious Union" and its value:

No treason to mankind since the organization of society would be equal in atrocity to that of him who would lift his hand to destroy it...He would stop the progress of free government and involve his country in either anarchy or despotism. He would extinguish the fire of liberty which warms and animates the hearts of happy millions.<sup>8</sup>

Polk's nationalistic appeal seemed similar to Daniel Webster's famous dictum "Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable", Union as synonymous with freedom.<sup>9</sup> Freedom was the Union's foundation and guaranteed by American democratic institutions. Yet the parties viewed freedom and nationalism, however much interlinked, differently even as both ideas fit within the context of the Second Party System. From its birth in 1828 until 1844, the party system flourished as Democrats and Whigs established strong bisectonal constituencies by focusing on economics. The adage "liberty for all and special privileges for none" encapsulated Democrats' negative vision.<sup>10</sup> Democrats desired freedom from government intervention with the inherent premise that the Union, with its democratic superstructure, guaranteed such freedom. Furthermore this freedom did not require improvement, just recapitulation for which land provided the mechanism while encouraging private development that would improve the whole nation. In contrast, the Whigs saw freedom as subordinate to positive economic development. Only strong structures such as national banks and infrastructure directed by the federal government could forge one economy and one nation from the Union's geographic vastness. The Whig vision assumed the nation required perfecting through intensive

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<sup>8</sup> James K. Polk, "Inaugural Address," 4 March 1845. <http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3550> (26 September 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Webster, "Second Reply to Hayne," 27 January 1830. <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~dwebster/speeches/hayne-speech.html> (26 September 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, 17.



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development of the Union as it existed. For the Whigs, territorial expansion and recapitulation implied the nation would remain provincial in identity because of disparate interests, such as Southern slavery, and thus remain disunited. The politics of expansion re-structured late Jacksonian politics around two fundamental questions. What did adding land mean, and to whom? Upon and through the issue of expansion, sectionalism supplanted the Second Party System.

## Chapter 1: Ascension

“A star shall rise out of Jacob and a scepter shall spring up from Israel.” Numbers 24:17<sup>11</sup>

### **New Frontier: the Annexation of Texas as the First Conflict- Expansion Part I, 1844-1845**

Historians consider the annexation of Texas to be the start of the Second Party System's disintegration as sectional tensions, held at bay since the Missouri Compromise of 1820, re-appeared. The question of slavery's expansion became a focal point of the debate after John Calhoun, South Carolina's towering intellectual and pro-slavery ultra, forced the issue as President John Tyler's Secretary of State. The introduction of the slavery issue marked the annexation of Texas with intraparty struggle to forge and maintain unity in spite of the sectional logic inherent in any defense of or attack upon slavery. To that end, political power more than anything was at stake in the annexation struggle. The Whigs opposed adding territory because it diluted the power of existing states by expanding representation in Congress, and their unity in opposition held until the final vote.<sup>12</sup> The Democrats initially split along sectional lines but managed to unify after months of argumentation, particularly within the press, spurred on by the

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<sup>11</sup> Douay-Rheims Bible. All other Biblical quotations are taken from the King James Version.

<sup>12</sup> Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, "Congress and the Territorial Expansion of the United States," in *Party, Process, and Political Change in Congress: New Perspectives on the History of Congress*, David W. Brady and Mathew D. McCubbins, (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2002) 394.

presidential election of 1844. Democratic consensus for annexation rested upon a questionable argument, so important in later debates, that expansion increased land available to free Americans to cultivate independently for theirs and the nation's benefit. This argument, beginning with the Texas struggle, would define later expansionist debates. Moreover, it introduced a new ideology based upon expansion.

By changing the justification for annexation, Calhoun nearly prevented it. His predecessor as Secretary of State, Abel Upshur, justified annexation on the broad ground of arresting British influence in North America. Specifically, Upshur saw annexation as a question of safety for the South and interest for the North.<sup>13</sup> Congressional Whigs disagreed after spending most of Tyler's term grappling with "His Accidency's" apostasy. Specifically, Tyler had vetoed Whig economic legislation such as internal improvements and re-chartering a national bank. When the treaty of annexation came before the Senate in April 1844 the majority Whigs moved to defeat it, but not before reading a disastrous document Calhoun had sent with the treaty. In a letter to the British minister Robert Pakenham, Calhoun defended annexation as pro-slavery policy. Failure to annex Texas would permit Britain "the most efficient means of effecting in the neighboring States of this Union what she avows to be her desire to do in all countries where slavery exists."<sup>14</sup> Calhoun instantly sectionalized the issue, hardened Whig opposition, and split Northern Democrats. On June 8th, the treaty failed 35-16: Whigs voted no

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<sup>13</sup> Sam Haynes, "Anglophobia and the Annexation of Texas: the Quest for National Security," in *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism*, Sam W. Haynes and Christopher Morris, (Arlington, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1997) 127. Tyler appointed Calhoun as Secretary of State because Upshur died in February 1844.

<sup>14</sup> John C. Calhoun, "The Collected Works of John C. Calhoun," vol. 5 Richard K. Crallé (New York: D. Appleton, 1863-1864) 336. Also quoted in William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion Volume I: Secessionists at Bay 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 431.

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27-1, Southern Democrats voted yes 10-1, and Northern Democrats split 7-5 against with one abstention.<sup>15</sup> By framing annexation in pro-slavery terms, Calhoun seemed to harm his cause.

However, if Calhoun intended to rouse Southerners to defend their property rights in human flesh, then his letter was successful. Even his old enemy concurred with him on annexing Texas, to secure both the nation and the South from British malevolence. Printed in the *Washington Globe*, and reprinted elsewhere, former President Andrew Jackson's May 1844 letter identified Texas as "the key to our safety" and stated annexation would "lock the door against future danger."<sup>16</sup> Much to Calhoun's dismay and Jackson's fury, Southern Whigs chose party unity instead of slavery's security. Writing more explicitly in July, Jackson claimed that failing to annex Texas would invite "British influence and under the pretense of abolishing slavery will be interfering with our rights, and it will never cease."<sup>17</sup> One South Carolina paper distilled Jackson's rage further: annexation was "a question concerning our security- our very existence itself."<sup>18</sup> Yet, grandstanding about slavery's security pushed a losing issue as already demonstrated in Congress. The bisectonal party system remained strong enough to render a sectionalist appeal useless and Southern Whigs had little to gain from adding more slave states. Only a historical accident had obstructed the Whig economic program, Tyler's ascension after William Harrison's unexpected death. Furthermore, Southern Democrats were a minority within their party, and Northern Democrats had voted against pro-slavery annexation. Expansion required a national character and justification to attain a Congressional majority.

Northerners had little to gain by annexing Texas. Northerners would not move into a territory where they had to compete with slave labor and planters monopolized the best land.

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<sup>15</sup> Freehling, *The Road to Disunion Volume I*, 431.

<sup>16</sup> "Gen. Jackson's Letter," *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette* 25 May 1844.

<sup>17</sup> "Letter from Gen. Jackson," *Mississippi Free Trader* 10 July 1844.

<sup>18</sup> "Annexation Meeting," *Greenville Mountaineer* 24 May 1844.

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The South's prospective gain in political power from admitting another slave state made the Pakenham Letter even more infuriating. Northerners excoriated Calhoun's letter as "collateral, irrelevant to the issue, and calculated to affect the question injuriously."<sup>19</sup> Yet the pending election put Northern Democrats in a dilemma. Repudiating annexation so popular among Southern Democrats would divide the party and probably assure victory for Henry Clay and the Whigs, but embracing annexation on pro-slavery grounds hurt their own re-election prospects. These constraints led pro-annexation Northerners to make contorted national security arguments. Lewis Cass, Michigan Democrat and a presidential hopeful, wrote a letter in *The Globe*, reprinted elsewhere, which exemplified Northern Democrats' dilemma. Cass favored "immediate annexation" because Texas was ideal ground for "the occupation of English black troops, and for letting them loose on our Southern States."<sup>20</sup> Cass, by arguing for expansion from national security grounds without explicitly endorsing slavery, stoked slave owner's deepest fear, slave insurrection. Cass correctly invoked British designs on Texas as a national security threat but he could not circumvent the slavery issue, and he further inflamed Southern Democrats' pro-slavery expansionist views by trying to skirt it. The Texas issue loomed so large that the Democracy nearly fractured at its late May 1844 convention. Leading candidate Martin Van Buren supported annexation only by negotiation: he did not desire a conflict with Mexico.<sup>21</sup> Southerners disagreed. The convention's two-thirds majority rule allowed the South to block Van Buren's nomination, and he fell short of the threshold for eight ballots before withdrawing. Cass benefited from Van Buren's fall but not enough to secure the supermajority either as Van Buren's men united against him. In the search for a nominee acceptable to all, Tennessee's

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<sup>19</sup> *Pennsylvanian*, December 13, 1844 quoted in Joel Silbey, *Storm Over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 45.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis Cass, letter to the editor, *Greenville Mountaineer* 31 May 1844.

<sup>21</sup> Silbey, *Storm Over Texas*, 63-64.

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James Polk was put forth as a compromise choice and nominated on the ninth ballot. With a dark horse nominee, Democratic sentiment for annexation started crystallizing.<sup>22</sup>

The political posturing caught *The United States Democratic Review and Magazine's* attention. As a national and pro-expansionist journal, the *Democratic Review* would be the principal national voice for Young America. Its approach was the hallmark strategy of young Democrats: it took up the annexation issue in the context of finding a lowest common denominator to build party consensus for annexation. In response to sectional angst, the *Democratic Review* went on the offensive in April 1844 by attacking southern sectionalism for its irrelevance and abolitionists for their hysteria about additional slave states. The journal condemned the politicization of a "local issue", slavery, to create discord as unproductive and possibly dangerous. Additionally, abolitionists failed to comprehend that free state control of the federal government might "dissolve the Union", but it "would not dissolve the bonds of slavery within the Slave States."<sup>23</sup> To keep this immaterial issue from inhibiting party unity, and build consensus, the *Democratic Review* reinvented Jefferson's "empire of liberty" claim as an argument: land as synonymous with freedom is egalitarian. Who could oppose land acquisition which extended the Union's blessings? Of strategic importance, the *Democratic Review* failed to specify what blessings it meant. Instead, it broadly pronounced "Our system of government...will bear indefinite extension; nor do we doubt that in the fullness of time it is destined to embrace... every habitable square inch of this continent."<sup>24</sup> Whigs' obstruction delayed the inevitable and anti-annexation Northern Democrats would be replaced. Texas was just the beginning.

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<sup>22</sup> Freehling, *The Road to Disunion Volume I*, 429-431.

<sup>23</sup> "The Texas Question," *Democratic Review* vol. 14, no. 70 (April 1844) 429.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

Pro-annexationists quickly seized on the *Democratic Review*'s providential and continental language. *The New York Herald* favored annexation "at all risks and hazards" as did "the bulk of this community" which also favored annexing the whole continent "not yet embraced within the arms of the Union." The idea of acquiring "the mines of Mexico" exemplified the blend of national interest and inevitability continental language created.<sup>25</sup> Territorial aggrandizement offered benefits for all; land for commoners, silver for the economy, and political representation for each section. In the South, pro-annexationists melded anti-British rhetoric and pro-Democratic sentiment. One Mississippi paper disparaged British interest in Texas as "perfectly immaterial" because Americans, intent on having Texas, would act through the "ruling party of the Union", the Democracy.<sup>26</sup> Southern faith in the Democracy rested on the Democratic Party Platform's call for the "re-annexation of Texas" at the "earliest practicable period."<sup>27</sup> The campaign helped smooth the angst of the spring as both sections worked hard to elect Polk. Southern Democrats, such as Mississippi's Robert Walker, implored their fellow Southerners to vote against the anti-annexationist Clay.<sup>28</sup> Northern Democrats did their duty by delivering Van Buren's New York, and its victory clinching thirty-six electoral votes. Yet, Polk's slim plurality in the popular vote, 49.5 percent to Clay's 48.1 percent, indicated a public divided over annexation.<sup>29</sup>

In December, when the 28<sup>th</sup> Congress reconvened for its lame-duck session, Tyler intended to force the annexation issue. In his final annual message to Congress he claimed that

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<sup>25</sup> "The Great Meeting in Favor of the Annexation of Texas," *New York Herald*, 3 May 1844.

<sup>26</sup> "The Treaty of Annexation Rejected," *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette* 19 June 1844.

<sup>27</sup> Democratic Party Platform of 1844. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29573> (27 September 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Silbey, *Storm Over Texas*, 73.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs: James K. Polk, the Mexican War, and the Conquest of the American Continent*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009) 110-111. Polk defeated Clay in the popular vote by 39,490 votes. Yet, the abolitionist Liberty Party, running in the North, amassed 62,103 votes and likely tipped New York to Polk.

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“a controlling majority of the people and a large majority of the States have declared in favor of immediate annexation.”<sup>30</sup> Cognizant that he could not muster the two-thirds majority in the Senate, Tyler decided on annexation by a joint-resolution, requiring simple majorities, despite Northern Whigs’ objections of unconstitutionality. Southern Whigs then made matters worse. Eyeing heavy Whig losses in the Deep South from the recent election, Tennessee’s Milton Brown introduced an amendment permitting Texas to divide itself into five states. Whiggery could now claim credit for annexing Texas and deny political rewards to the Democrats. Northern Whigs refused to cooperate. Indiana’s Caleb Smith repeated an old Whig adage: “Our territory is already sufficiently extensive to promote the welfare of all.”<sup>31</sup> Aside from principle, Tyler had vetoed Whig legislation so Whigs should respond by blocking annexation.

With the slavery issue looming, the *Democratic Review* issued another epistle. It attacked Calhoun by calling the pro-slavery grounds for annexation “a great wrong” done to the North. Selfish sectional reasons corrupted normal partisan framework, yet a higher good existed. The *Democratic Review* stated as “much as the North is entitled to complain of the false position into which it has been thrown- great as is the sacrifice of feeling and pride to be made to the patriotism and larger view of national policy, in yielding to the South on this point.”<sup>32</sup> Tyler was handing Democrats the fulfillment of a campaign promise before Polk even took office, and the Democrats acted accordingly. By a party-line vote, Democrats added Brown’s amendment to the

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<sup>30</sup> *Congressional Globe* 28<sup>th</sup> Congress 2<sup>nd</sup> Session (3 December 1844) 5. Also quoted in Silbey, *Storm Over Texas*, 81.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>32</sup> “Mr. Calhoun and the Democratic Review,” *Democratic Review* vol. 16 no. 80 (February 1845) 107.

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joint-resolution 118-101 with Northern Democrats voting 50-30 yes.<sup>33</sup> The House approved the joint-resolution as amended 120-98 and sent it to the Senate.<sup>34</sup>

Pro-annexationists faced formidable obstacles in the Senate. The Whigs held a 28-24 majority and Missouri Democrat Thomas Hart Benton, a nationalist from one of the South's least enslaved states, had voted against the treaty. All twenty-four Democrats and three Whig turncoats would be needed to pass the joint-resolution. An agreement which allowed the president to either continue negotiations with Texas over its boundary or permit its self-division mollified Benton. Each section, confident Polk would annex Texas on their terms, put aside their differences. Across the aisle, the Whigs engaged in an arduous debate on everything from circumventing the Constitution to how annexation would weaken upper and border South slavery. When the debate ended the requisite three Whigs, Merrick of Maryland, Johnson of Louisiana, and Henderson of Mississippi joined a unanimous Democracy. Annexation passed 27-25.<sup>35</sup> The House quickly passed the Senate version and Tyler signed the bill.

### **Nationalism and its Prophets: Manifest Destiny and its Young American Architects**

John L. O'Sullivan, editor of the *Democratic Review* and its chief political polemicist, watched the Texas drama unfold with great interest. His expansionist views were known, but his preferred mechanism for expansion remained unclear. His July 1845 article titled "Annexation" clarified his position. It was the "manifest destiny" of the United States to "overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions."<sup>36</sup> This inevitability demanded a cessation of the opposition to expansion, first with Texas and next

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<sup>33</sup> Freehling, *The Road to Disunion Volume I*, 443.

<sup>34</sup> *Congressional Globe* 28<sup>th</sup> Congress 2<sup>nd</sup> Session (25 January 1845) 193-194.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 February 1845, 362.

<sup>36</sup> "Annexation." *Democratic Review* vol. 17 no. 85 (July-August 1845) 5.



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with lands further west. To deny this destiny meant slandering Providence's intent for the United States. He then prophesized:

there is a great deal of annexation yet to take place, within the life of the present generation...Texas has been absorbed into the Union in the inevitable fulfillment of the general law which is rolling our population westward; the connection of which with that ratio of growth in population...is too evident to leave us in doubt of the manifest design of Providence in regard to the occupation of this continent.<sup>37</sup>

In brief, demography is destiny. The expanding white population successfully recapitulated the democratic system thus enlarging the American Union. While O'Sullivan borrowed from Jefferson's vision of a large decentralized republic, he disregarded Jefferson's belief that the republic should end at the Rocky Mountains. Based on the distance between the Pacific Coast and the United States, Jefferson reasoned that any settlements along the Pacific should become an independent republic even though American settlers would probably populate the region.<sup>38</sup> However, the rapid pace of American expansion towards the Pacific, migration of persons and addition of states to the Union, rendered Jefferson's vision defunct by outpacing his projections. Within a few decades, as O'Sullivan noted, Americans had marched towards the Pacific and remade much of the frontier in the democratic image central to American identity. O'Sullivan promoted this process because he reasoned that expansion meant increased freedom to which no deterrent logically existed. Arguing against Manifest Destiny meant attacking the cultivation of freedom which Americans had lauded for decades; even centuries, if dated to Massachusetts Bay Colony Governor John Winthrop's 1630 "city upon a hill" sermon. O'Sullivan couched an existing idea of freedom in providential, continental, and nationalistic language in effect forging an ideology.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>38</sup> Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission*, 8-9.

By the time “Annexation” appeared, expansionism had gripped politicians. Specifically, young Democrats desired more than Texas. Many of these Democrats moved west at a young age and drew their political beliefs from the political combat and explosive economic growth during Andrew Jackson’s presidency (1829-1837).<sup>39</sup> Young Democrats also had support from Michigan’s Lewis Cass and Missouri’s Thomas Hart Benton on territorial aggrandizement. O’Sullivan, and later George Sanders, served as the editor of young Democrats’ media organ, the *Democratic Review*.<sup>40</sup> This bisectonal Democratic coterie took the name Young America to mark their common age and a new vision for the Democracy and the nation. Domestically, young Democrats embraced free trade and a looser construction of the Constitution.<sup>41</sup> Domestic freedom necessarily implied freedom from government intervention and allegiance to antiquated ideas, such as strict-constructionist Jeffersonian agrarianism. In foreign affairs, they articulated a foreign policy of democracy promotion.<sup>42</sup> As a burgeoning democracy, the United States represented the antithesis of decadent monarchical Europe and democracy’s continental expansion served as validation. Young Democrats were Manifest Destiny’s architects who exhorted the people to embrace their vision of a transcontinental nation and democratic power. By working as a vanguard, young Democrats clashed with Whigs over expansion’s benefits for the nation even as they pulled reluctant Jacksonians towards their vision of the nation’s future.

### **“Fifty-Four Forty or Fight!” Manifest Destiny Diplomacy- Expansion Part II, 1845-1846**

With Texas annexed, Young America eyed the jointly occupied, American and British, Oregon territory. Vaster than Texas, the Oregon territory stretched from the border of Russian America (present day Alaska) at 54°40’ down to the northern border of California. The territory

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<sup>39</sup> Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 9- 11.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

encompassed all of present day British Columbia, Oregon, Washington State, and Idaho, as well as a part of western Montana and Wyoming. Oregon represented an ideal test case for Manifest Destiny's paradoxical nature. Oregon's geography muted the expansion of slavery issue that had plagued the annexation of Texas, and the presence of a port for building trade with Asia could foster bipartisanship. Most importantly, opposition to Britain's presence could enhance Manifest Destiny's democratic dimensions and unify Americans against their aristocratic nemesis. Yet, the Democratic Party Platform's claim that the American title to the "whole territory of Oregon is clear and unquestionable" and "no portion of the same ought to be ceded to England" created a problem.<sup>43</sup> How far would nationalists go to attain all of Oregon? Did the situation warrant an aggressive stance? If O'Sullivan was right, the influx of American settlers made annexation inevitable. Young Democrats, particularly those from the northwest, did not agree with O'Sullivan's pacific vision. They wanted all of Oregon, and now, much to the consternation of Jacksonians, Southern Democrats, and Whigs.

Northern Democrats had good reason to expect Southern support in their bid for all of Oregon: Northerners had swallowed the rejection of Van Buren and helped annex Texas. Additionally, Polk set the party-line when he echoed the platform's assertion of a "clear and unquestionable" title in his inaugural speech.<sup>44</sup> But most importantly, all-Oregon Democrats could leverage Anglophobia for party unity. After learning of Polk's claim, London's *Times* proclaimed "the same *democratic folly* which makes [Americans] arrogant in the Cabinet makes them habitually feeble in all that constitutes a nation's strength in the field" [italics added].<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Democratic Party Platform of 1844. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29573> (27 September 2010).

<sup>44</sup> James K. Polk, "Inaugural Address," 4 March 1845. <http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3550> (26 September 2010). Democratic Party Platform of 1844. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29573> (27 September 2010).

<sup>45</sup> *The Times* 4 April 1845 quoted in Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs*, 171.

The Democratic press, in all sections, erupted into frenzy. *The Mississippian* declared “we must not part with a foot of soil in Oregon; and if war must come, LET IT COME” [emphasis in the original].<sup>46</sup> *The Mississippian* later attacked Calhoun’s organ, *The Charleston Mercury*, for supporting compromise with Britain. “The northern democracy magnanimously fought with us for Texas, and they may be assured that the south will not fail them in maintaining our right to the country of Oregon.”<sup>47</sup> Calhoun and his disciples would appear hypocritical to abandon Oregon after Northerners added Texas for slavery. Such a display of loyalty and defiance of Calhoun by Southern Democrats undoubtedly heartened Northerners seeking all of Oregon.

Northerners eyed the Oregon territory because it would easily equal and probably surpass Texas in size, and be all free territory. Anglophobia merely provided a convenient reason to adopt a hard-line stance. *The New York Herald* stated “every inch of Oregon is ours and must be preserved.” Instead of war, the United States could use peaceful coercion by self-embargoing cotton exports. The absence of American cotton would cripple English textile manufacturing, thus bringing about “a civil revolution” and a peaceful settlement with a chastened Britain.<sup>48</sup> *The Weekly Ohio Statesman* melodramatically declared the Oregon dispute as a contest “between democracy and aristocracy.”<sup>49</sup> To that point, “Throughout the great west, and we believe throughout the Union, the cry of to arms to defend the integrity of our soil” would overwhelm those seeking compromise.<sup>50</sup> But the rhetoric did not obscure the complications which came with the territory. Namely, did the port mean more than the land north of it? *The Democratic Review* had an answer, albeit a convoluted one. It maintained the American right to Oregon as perfect but viewed a compromise at the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel as acceptable: “we most want, the noble

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<sup>46</sup> “Great Britain and Oregon,” *The Mississippian* 7 May 1845.

<sup>47</sup> “The Charleston Mercury and the Oregon Question,” *The Mississippian* 28 May 1845.

<sup>48</sup> “The Oregon Question in a New Shape,” *New York Herald* 10 July 1845.

<sup>49</sup> “The Oregon Question-The Real Principles Involved in It,” *Weekly Ohio Statesman* 30 July 1845.

<sup>50</sup> “The Integrity of Our Soil,” *Weekly Ohio Statesman* 23 July 1845.

harbors about the Strait of Fuca [the water which lies between Vancouver Island and the Olympic Peninsula and provides the outlet to the Pacific].” Yet, the *Democratic Review* also claimed a war would produce “the extinction of British power on this continent” before backtracking to state that war should not be desired.<sup>51</sup> Despite the bombast about perfect titles, national interest and angst remained potent forces. Specifically, Congress would be under tremendous pressure in its diplomacy with Britain at whom the expansionist press bellowed.

Upon convening in December 1845, the 29<sup>th</sup> Congress immersed itself in the Oregon question as Polk’s first annual message to Congress called for the abrogation of the treaty of joint-occupation with Britain.<sup>52</sup> Polk’s demand generated controversy because it changed the issue from diplomatic bargaining for territory into a dispute about rights to the territory. Northern Democrats, specifically Northwestern young Democrats, demanded all of Oregon even at the risk of war, which the Whigs decried. However, Whigs’ insistence on a peaceful settlement only served to embolden the war hawks. After proposing resolutions calling for an inquiry into United States’ military readiness, Cass pontificated on America’s claim to Oregon. “We must maintain it or abandon it. A vigorous and enterprising people are fast increasing there, who will possess the country by the best title of all- that of occupation and improvement.” The United States could either provide them with a government or the settlers would establish their own. William Allen added that Britain’s history of gun boat diplomacy necessitated an evaluation of the military. Evaluating readiness did not, as the Whigs repeatedly claimed, indicate an inevitable conflict.<sup>53</sup> The United States, Allen insisted, could not afford to negotiate

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<sup>51</sup> “The Oregon Question,” *Democratic Review* vol. 16 no. 84 (June 1845) 531-532.

<sup>52</sup> *Congressional Globe* 29<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session (2 December 1845) 7.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 December 1845, 46-49.

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from weakness with Britain for practical reasons. Unfortunately for young Democrats, Southern Democrats had other ideas about practicality.

Southern Democrats faced a dilemma. They owed Northern colleagues for bringing Texas into the Union, and Polk's tough stance only increased the pressure. Yet, Southerners stood to lose much in a war with Britain with the likelihood of a naval blockade destroying the cotton trade and an invasion targeting and possibly destroying slavery. Accordingly, many cotton state Democrats proved tenuous allies and, at times, sided with the Whigs in requesting a peaceful settlement. Southern Democrats supported Manifest Destiny so long as it did not imperil the cotton trade with their best customer. They preferred Calhoun's 1843 advice, pursuing a course of "wise and masterly inactivity" which mirrored O'Sullivan's vision. After outlining why the United States could not militarily evict Britain from North America, Calhoun had stated the American population was "rolling towards the shores of the Pacific."<sup>54</sup> Yet, Calhoun diverged from O'Sullivan by claiming that American settlers had not ventured north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. Where O'Sullivan would claim that Americans would eventually populate all of Oregon, Calhoun and Southern Democrats saw settlement patterns as indicative of a natural boundary. However, young Democrats showed no signs of softening their stance.

In 1844, O'Sullivan established *The New York Morning News*, and in a December 27, 1845 editorial he declared the American claim to all of Oregon "The True Title." He dismissed Whigs' favorite arguments, historical exploration and international law, as irrelevant. The future, not the past, determined a claim's validity:

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<sup>54</sup> *Congressional Globe* 27<sup>th</sup> Congress 3<sup>rd</sup> Session (24 January 1843). Appendix to the *Congressional Globe* 138-139.

We are free to say that were the respective cases and arguments of the two parties, as to all these points of history and law reversed-had England all ours, and we nothing but hers- our claim to Oregon would still be best and stronger. And that claim is by the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us.<sup>55</sup>

As a democracy, the future favored the United States, which O'Sullivan supported by citing the American population boom. American, not British, settlers had flooded into Oregon in recent years, and they would eventually annex Oregon. This same process brought Texas into the Union, and now it had spread across North America: Manifest Destiny in its pure peaceful form. Yet O'Sullivan was not finished. Nine days later he gave continental conquest a partisan spin by hailing the Democracy as the "true national party, the true American party, the true party of sympathy with the genius of our country, the true instrument for achieving the future glories and grandeurs of its destiny."<sup>56</sup> Aligning the partisan and the providential created a strong unifying rhetorical framework. By opposing the annexation of all of Oregon, the Whigs had futilely sided against destiny while bemoaning a war with Britain that would never happen. Democrats, young and old, just needed to remain unified, and the Whig opposition would inevitably collapse. But however strong the theory, it did not override political behavior within the Democracy or convince the Whigs of their futility.

Massachusetts Representative Robert Winthrop gave the Whigs' response to young Democrats' and O'Sullivan's belligerence. Winthrop spent most of his speech opining about the horrors of war, which war hawks seemed to either ignore or not seriously consider. Near the end, he turned to O'Sullivan and the Democrats' new ideology: "I suppose the right of a manifest destiny to spread, will not be admitted to exist in any nation except the universal Yankee

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<sup>55</sup> "The True Title," *New York Morning News* 27 December 1845.

<sup>56</sup> John L. O'Sullivan, "response to a letter to the editor from Chas. O'Connor," *New York Morning News*, 5 January 1846.

nation!”<sup>57</sup> Whigs refused to recognize nationalism structured around abstractions of a nation endlessly recapitulating itself. Instead, Whigs fell back on their economic program of intensive development and insisted the nation should acquire the port and cede the land north of it to Britain. Dividing the territory at the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, as suggested by Winthrop and pursued by previous administrations, would accomplish that reasonable goal.<sup>58</sup> Winthrop deplored the behavior of young Democrats after Polk terminated negotiations, notably Indiana’s Edward Hannegan whose cries of “no compromise at forty-nine” seemed delusional.<sup>59</sup> The right of manifest destiny would neither protect the nation from the British military nor satisfactorily resolve the Oregon dispute. Winthrop’s speech outlined an often used Whig refrain in the coming months: if the Democrats opted for war then they would suffer the consequences. Yet Whigs and Southern Democrats seemed oblivious to how young Democrats’ rhetoric had reframed the issue. The debate did not concern the act of expansion, deemed inevitable, but how adding land meshed with American self-understanding. Specifically, young Democrats saw land as the backbone of democracy because land gave one control over one’s destiny (subsistence farming or staple crop production). However concrete the subject of the debate, land, the argument focused on the abstract purpose of any new lands.

Throughout the winter and into the spring the debate followed a persistent pattern: young Democrats from the Northwest demanded all of Oregon, Northeastern Democrats provided some support, Southern Democrats split regionally between the cotton and upper South, and the Whigs united in resistance.<sup>60</sup> A House resolution, abrogation notice for the treaty of joint-occupation,

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<sup>57</sup> *Congressional Globe* 29<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session (3 January 1846) 134.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 December 1845, 112.

<sup>60</sup> Frederick Merk, “Presidential Fever,” in *The Oregon Question: Essays in Anglo-American Diplomacy & Politics* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1967) 371-373.



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passed 163 to 54 on February 9th before moving across the Capitol.<sup>61</sup> The next day's events demonstrated the chaotic nature of the Senate debate, particularly within the Democracy. Hannegan proposed a resolution calling Oregon "part and parcel" of the United States and stating the government could not transfer the allegiance of American settlers to Britain. Calhoun quickly motioned to replace Hannegan's resolution with one affirming the president's right to negotiate the boundary with the Senate's advice and consent. Calhoun's duplicity represented a problem for young Democrats seeking all of Oregon, the unreliability of Southern Democrats. Under Calhoun's direction, Southern Democrats had leveraged Anglophobia against Northerners in pursuit of Texas but now they deserted the expansionist project they had precipitated. Allen responded to Calhoun by ranting about European desires to cripple the United States thereby extinguishing the fire of liberty in favor of the monarchical tyranny. Next, he denounced Britain for seeking to block American prosperity since 1783 by interfering with American commerce and for its "interposition of fictitious, frivolous, and vexatious claims" to North American territory.<sup>62</sup> This bombastic performance, that opened the Senate debate, seemed indicative of the struggle which lay ahead. Polk's demand for Congress to pass an abrogation notice had catalyzed uproar not unity. This proved especially true within the Democracy which fought itself more than the Whigs, with young Democrats playing a central role.

A party split seemed imminent after an incendiary March 5th exchange between the pro-compromise Senator Haywood (North Carolina Democrat) and the war hawks. Haywood claimed Polk's actions relating to Oregon were "pacific" and the president would avoid going to war. Hannegan inquired if Haywood spoke for Polk, and when Haywood tried to evade the

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<sup>61</sup> *Congressional Globe* 29<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session (9 February 1846) 349.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 February 1846, 350-351.

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question Allen interjected that he would construe Haywood's answer "into a negative." The debate quickly degenerated.

Haywood: I deny the right of any Senators to put questions to me in this way. I have not assumed to speak by authority of the President.

Allen: Then the Senator takes back his speech.

Haywood: Not all; but I am glad to see that my speech takes.

Allen: With the British.

Allen did the unthinkable: accuse a fellow Democrat of pro-British sympathies! Such a charge, usually reserved for the Whigs, amounted to an accusation of treason. Before the shock of Allen's rhetorical bomb could subside, Hannegan gained the floor for a vitriolic speech.

Whether or not Haywood answered his question about speaking for Polk was "entirely immaterial" because the relevant question centered on the boundary. Hannegan demanded all of Oregon, and he believed Polk supported this position: a claim he supported by quoting an April 1844 speech Polk gave in which he affirmed an all Oregon stance. Hannegan then raged at Polk, whom history would condemn as a sellout if he compromised.

So long as one human eye remains to linger on the page of history, the story of his abasement will be read, sending him and his name together to an infamy so profound, a damnation so deep, that the hand of resurrection will never be able to drag him forth. He who is a traitor to his country, can never have forgiveness of God, and cannot ask mercy of man.

Despite Senator Mangum (North Carolina Whig) calling Hannegan to order, the diatribe reached a stirring climax. If Polk intended to compromise then "James K Polk has spoken words of falsehood, and with the tongue of a serpent."<sup>63</sup> Before Allen could continue, the Senate adjourned with the Democratic breach exposed. Southerners had refused to support Westerners'

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<sup>63</sup> *Congressional Globe* 29<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session (5 March 1846) 458-460. Also quoted in Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs*, 227-229 and Merk, "Presidential Fever" in *The Oregon Question*, 381-382.

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belligerence, and Young America hawks responded by trying to browbeat party moderates and Polk into line with their vision. Rather than galvanize the party, Oregon was tearing it apart.

The angry debate continued into the spring, with an occasional sectional outburst. Notably, Illinois' Sydney Breese clashed with South Carolina's George McDuffie in early April. McDuffie wished to avoid war with Britain, and he asserted the land north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel had little agricultural use, which Breese rebuffed but to no avail.<sup>64</sup> The temporary alliance of Southern Democrats and a united Whig Party made young Democrats' intransigence irrelevant. Northerners could cry betrayal and reference Southern Democrats willingness to fight Britain for Texas, but it did not change any minds. Southern Democrats would not fight a war with their primary cotton customer. On April 16<sup>th</sup>, the Senate passed a conciliatory abrogation notice, written by Kentucky Whig John Crittenden, leaving the door open for negotiations with Britain. The Senate further rebuked Young America by denying Allen, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, a place on the conference committee to reconcile the House and Senate versions.<sup>65</sup> The resolution passed on April 23rd with overwhelming majorities, 42-10 in the Senate and 142-46 in the House. Allen and Hanneagan's behavior had been repudiated and the paradox of Manifest Destiny affirmed. In the Senate, all twenty-four Whigs and eighteen Democrats voted against ten dissenting Democrats primarily from the Northwest.<sup>66</sup> Manifest Destiny proved incapable of galvanizing popular support or presenting a united front of Democratic, let alone Congressional, support for Polk in his diplomacy with Britain. It allowed and encouraged the opposite to occur.

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<sup>64</sup> *Congressional Globe* 29<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session (4 April 1846) 604-608. Also quoted in Thomas Hietla, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in the Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985) 235.

<sup>65</sup> Merk, "Presidential Fever," in *The Oregon Question*, 387-388.

<sup>66</sup> *Congressional Globe* 29<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session (23 April 1846) 717, 720, 721.

## Chapter 2: Climax.

“For the stars of Heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.” Isaiah 13:10

From Oregon, destiny’s arrow turned south towards Mexico, which held the last conquerable vestige of North America in foreign hands still. Completed by force, Manifest Destiny during the Mexican War inverted party paradigms. Negative government Democrats defended positive force and Polk’s strong leadership despite virulent Whig condemnations. Their hunger for western land, particularly California, made them strong defenders of the war. Young Democrats’ support for the war also proved essential to halting the proposed ban on slavery in any new territories, the Wilmot Proviso, which had its roots in Northern grievances about how the annexation of Texas and Oregon had transpired. However, the paradox of Manifest Destiny prompted such sectional animosities that it necessitated monumental efforts on the part of young Democrats to quell, at least for the moment, the sectional outbreak.

### **To the Halls of Montezuma: the Travails of War- Expansion Part III, 1846-1848**

Shortly after passing the abrogation notice, tensions between the United States and Mexico exploded. Relations had been poor recently: Mexico refused to recognize the United States’ annexation of Texas, broke diplomatic relations, and rebuffed Polk’s offers to buy California. In January 1846, Polk moved soldiers under General Zachary Taylor into Mexican territory between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande. In early May, reports of shooting between Mexican and American forces in the territory arrived in Washington and led Polk to send Congress a war message claiming Mexico had “shed American blood upon the American

soil.”<sup>67</sup> Young Democrats happily complied with Polk’s demand for a declaration of war by using heavy-handed parliamentary tactics. On May 11th, House Democrats gagged debate and spent most of the allotted two hours reading the war message and accompanying documents. More importantly, Ohio Democrat Jacob Brinkerhoff added a preamble to a supply bill stating “by the act of the Republic of Mexico, a state of war exists between the United States and that Republic.”<sup>68</sup> Whigs now faced the dilemma of voting for Polk’s claims about the conflict’s origins or voting against supporting the troops. Using a point of personal privilege to gain the floor, Kentucky Whig Garrett Davis lambasted the preamble as “so bold a falsehood” given the “war was begun by the President.” Stephen Douglas rebuffed Davis by calling him to order for criticizing the preamble instead of explaining why he should be excused from voting. Davis’ diatribe promptly ended and the House voted overwhelmingly for war, 174-14 with 35 abstentions. Many Whigs, including Davis, voted for war rather than appear unpatriotic.<sup>69</sup>

With no time limit on debate, Calhoun led the Senate opposition against the House resolution the next day. Calhoun wanted the preamble excised because no evidence confirming a state of war between the two republics existed. Only the Mexican government had legitimate war making power and it could easily disavow the border incident as the irresponsibility of individuals. Unmoved by Calhoun’s emphasis on technicalities, Allen retorted that the opposition “could not close their eyes” to the fact that a state of war existed after hearing Polk’s message.<sup>70</sup> Cass concurred by noting that whether or not the Mexican government had declared war was irrelevant. The deaths of Americans consecrated the continued Mexican threats of retaliation ever since the United States had annexed Texas. Contrary to Calhoun’s legalism,

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 11 May 1846, 782.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 791.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 794-95. Also quoted in Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission*, 90-1.

<sup>70</sup> *Congressional Globe* 29<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session (12 May 1846) 796-7.

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Cass claimed Congress best recognize the state of war which already existed.<sup>71</sup> After multiple parliamentary maneuvers to strike the preamble failed, the Senate voted 40-2 with three abstentions to declare war; all Democrats voted yes, two Whigs voted no and two Whigs along with Calhoun abstained.<sup>72</sup> By force, Manifest Destiny would complete continental conquest with the Democratic Party seemingly united.

The reactions in the press by the apostles of Manifest Destiny seemed to indicate the expansionist character of this war. The *Indiana Sentinel* manifested its feelings with the headline “War at Last.” Even the pacifist O’Sullivan who initially opposed war with Mexico changed his mind. He had long asserted the burgeoning American settlements in California would eventually overwhelm the sparse Mexican populations and bring California into the Union. The war offered the chance to expedite the acquisition process, and O’Sullivan declared, “We therefore insist upon the immediate acquisition of California.”<sup>73</sup> Expansionists justified obtaining Mexican territory as compensation for an indemnity Mexico owed to the United States. Specifically, American citizens claimed anywhere from two to ten million dollars in damages from Mexican injuries, particularly with regard to shipping disruptions and attacks on American citizens.<sup>74</sup> The routine government changes and general chaos in Mexico had left it bankrupt, which suited Polk’s purposes. Mexico could not afford to prosecute the war for long, and land would prove suitable compensation after the war ended.

In early August 1846 Polk confirmed the war’s expansionist character when he asked Congress to appropriate two million dollars to pay Mexico “for any cession of territory.” With the Congressional session nearing its end, Polk surmised the lack of time would force a vote with

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<sup>71</sup> “A Mexican army is upon our soil.” Ibid., 799-800.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 804.

<sup>73</sup> *New York Morning News* 18 May 1846 quoted in Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission*, 109.

<sup>74</sup> Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs*, 184-186.

little or no debate and give him a quick victory. Instead, Pennsylvania's David Wilmot rose to vent Northern Democrats' frustrations with Polk. Northern Democrats had loyally supported a president who seemed determined to add slave territory, a frustrating predicament for Northern Democrats who Northern Whigs often accused of subservience to slaveholders. If this war did not concern the extension of slave territory, then Polk could prove it by supporting an amended appropriations bill soon dubbed the Wilmot Proviso: "that, as an express and fundamental condition to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico...neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of said territory." On a sectional vote, the appropriations bill as amended passed the House 85 to 79 with all Southerners opposed. Doomed by the Senate's sectional equilibrium, the session expired before a vote could be taken.<sup>75</sup> The proviso and the sectional vote in the House revealed the more problematic side of the war and Manifest Destiny. The lack of a definitive judgment on slavery's role in continental expansion had left the door open for a calamity. What was slavery's role in a supposedly expanding free democratic society? Did it have a role at all? In the short term, such questions seemed immaterial because the proviso assumed there would be territorial acquisition. However, slavery became useful as political leverage between politicians laying claim to the spoils of a victory not yet achieved. This leverage would have been unnecessary if Manifest Destiny could marginalize, if not overcome, sectional differences instead of veiling them (or intraparty squabbles for that matter).

The proviso originated with Van Buren Democrats, Northeasterners mostly from New York, who were fed up with Polk and Southern Democrats. These Northeastern Democrats represented the party's older wing which viewed economics as the major division between the

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<sup>75</sup> *Congressional Globe* 29<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session, (8 August 1846) 1213-1217. Also quoted in David Potter, *The Impending Crisis 1848-1861* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc, 1976) 19-21.

parties although they supported expansion under the right conditions. However, the recent expansionist projects had seemingly maximized Southern gain and left Northerners with broken promises. Southern Democrats made the annexation of Texas an issue of party loyalty, and Northern Democrats eventually gave their support. Southern Democrats then demanded the Brown Amendment with its permission for Texas' self-division into five states, a prospective boost in Southern political power immediately jumped from two senators to possibly ten.<sup>76</sup> Van Burenites swallowed their frustrations and supported annexation, hoping Polk would renegotiate Texas' territory without the Brown Amendment per the deal negotiated with Benton. They forgot Tyler was still president and he, possibly at Calhoun's urging, dispatched a courier with orders permitting Texas' admission with the Brown Amendment intact. Van Burenites howled with protest, yet Polk refused to countermand Tyler's orders. Then Polk agreed to partition Oregon after initially taking a hard-line position, and his treaty passed because Southern Democrats sided with the Whigs. Now, Polk's war threatened to increase Southern political power by adding more slave states. Van Buren had warned Northern Democrats that supporting an aggressive war for adding slave territory would be "political suicide." Northern Democrats needed time, and the proviso could at least delay a final decision on territorial acquisition or help gain free territory out of what seemed a slave owner's war.<sup>77</sup> However, the rebels received inconsistent support from their Northwestern brethren.

Northwestern Democrats were not Van Burenites: they embraced expansion and championed Manifest Destiny. Polk's compromise on Oregon, dividing it at the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, surely infuriated them just as Polk's Texas betrayal enraged Van Burenites. Northwestern House

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<sup>76</sup> Eric Foner, "The Wilmot Proviso Revisited," *The Journal of American History* vol. 56 no. 2 (September 1969) 269-271.

<sup>77</sup> "Van Buren-Bancroft Correspondence, 1830-1845" quoted in Foner, "The Wilmot Proviso Revisited," 275.



Democrats' initial support for the Wilmot Proviso says as much about their desire for political retribution.<sup>78</sup> Northwestern Senators shared their House colleagues' anger over Oregon but their ire came to naught. When Polk submitted the treaty for ratification, all twenty-four Whigs and seventeen Democrats (fifteen of them Southerners) voted yes. Of the fourteen dissenting votes, twelve came from the North and two from the South with Young Americans Allen, Breese, Bright, Cass, and Hannegan registering five dissenting votes.<sup>79</sup> Yet, the anger proved short-lived as young Democrats supported the war and voted down the proviso. Specifically, the war pushed the key Young American goal of completing continental conquest. Allen moved from demanding all of Oregon to lusting after California, identifying it as "only nominally a part of Mexico."<sup>80</sup> Young American Senators, unlike their House colleagues, seemed to comprehend Manifest Destiny's broader implications: California could compensate for the Oregon setback. Manifest Destiny entailed expanding into space with only the Pacific Ocean as a definitive boundary, and slavery need not contaminate discussions of expansion. However, previous instances and the chaos in the House indicated that Southern allies could not so easily be brought to heel. A resurgent opposition only added to young Democrats' plethora of problems.

By harnessing antiwar sentiment, the Whigs won control of the House for the 30<sup>th</sup> Congress set to convene in December 1847. Frustrated by Democrats' recent electoral misfortune and tiring of the Whigs' hypocritical opposition, attacking the war yet voting for supply bills, Polk lashed out at his Whig critics with the treason charge. In his annual message to Congress, Polk claimed Whig denunciations of the war encouraged the Mexicans to keep

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<sup>78</sup> Michael Holt, *The Fate of Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004) 23-24.

<sup>79</sup> *Congressional Globe* 29<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session (10 August 1846) 1224 and Hietla, *Manifest Design*, 236.

<sup>80</sup> Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, 126.

fighting, thus Whigs had “given them ‘aid and comfort.’”<sup>81</sup> The Whigs responded by viciously turning Polk’s rhetoric back on him. On December 9th, Davis mocked Polk for usurping the Constitution in his war of aggression by establishing temporary governments in the conquered provinces. Leaping to Polk’s defense, Douglas clashed with Davis over the president’s power as Commander-in-Chief to establish governments in conquered Mexican lands given the war’s questionable legality.<sup>82</sup> A week later, the abolitionist Whig Joshua Giddings of Ohio lent his talent for incendiary commentary. He condemned the “executive war” begun for expanding slavery and then ridiculed Polk’s defensive message. According to Giddings, an uninformed reader might think the president faced impeachment based on the lengths he [Polk] went to defend himself, the war’s origins, and the war’s conduct.<sup>83</sup> Hearing enough from the Whigs, Democrats responded with their own inflammatory rhetoric. Indiana Democrat Andrew Kennedy responded to Giddings the next day, December 16<sup>th</sup>, with a common Democratic refrain: the Whigs should stop assailing a war they voted for and continued to support with supplies. Possibly venting party frustrations, Kennedy added a personal barb: “you peace-loving, war-hating, religious men have a great regard for Mexican blood.”<sup>84</sup> Not only were the Whigs hypocrites and bordering on treasonous, they were bad Christians. The charges of treason and bad faith helped the parties avoid a sectional outbreak by not discussing the problem of who benefited from territorial extension. Indeed, it proved an odd paradox: the Democrats prosecuted a war for territorial extension but refused to address the issue. They constantly referred to Mexican aggressions and injuries which allowed the Whigs to counter that Polk instigated the conflict to dismember Mexico. The arguments appeared partisan as one party defended Polk and

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<sup>81</sup> *Congressional Globe* 29<sup>th</sup> Congress 2<sup>nd</sup> Session (8 December 1846) 4.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 December 1846, 13-14.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 December 1846, 34-35.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 December 1846, 48. Also quoted in Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, 129.

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the war, while the other denounced both. Yet the war remained partisan neutral insofar as both parties voted the funds that helped Polk prosecute it despite both parties hurling inflammatory accusations at each other. Neither party desired to face the sectionalist consequences of discussing territorial aggrandizement.

House Van Burenites refused to concede on the Wilmot Proviso. On January 4, 1847 New York Democrat Preston King, a top Van Burenite, reintroduced the proviso to a three million dollar appropriations bill.<sup>85</sup> The Whigs' midterm success made the revolt's possible consequences devastating: Polk needed money appropriated before the Congress expired on March 3rd. The South Carolina contingent attacked this affront to the South with Constitutional legalism. Another pro-slavery ultra, Robert Barnwell Rhett, asserted the sovereign states jointly owned the territories and had not granted Congress any power over slavery in the territories. Barring slavery from the territories would amount to amending the Constitution because of the implications for representation: excluding slaves who counted as three-fifths of a person for Congressional apportionment of seats in the House. Rhett curiously failed to mention that positive legislation would be needed to re-enslave Mexican territory, which had been free since September 1829.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, this legalism was at odds with pragmatism. Two amendments to strike the proviso and permit slavery south of 36-30, including one proposed by Douglas, failed on February 15th. Southerners would not concede the exclusion of slavery from territories they jointly owned. After more parliamentary maneuvers to excise the proviso failed, the House passed the amended bill 115-105 with all Southerners, except one, and sixteen Northern Democrats opposed.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Congressional Globe* 29th Congress 2<sup>nd</sup> Session (4 January 1847) 105.

<sup>86</sup> Freehling, *The Road to Disunion Volume I*, 365.

<sup>87</sup> *Congressional Globe* 29<sup>th</sup> Congress 2<sup>nd</sup> Session (15 February 1847) 424-425.

In mid-February, Calhoun moved from quietly directing Southerners anti-proviso efforts in the House to open opposition. Long opposed to the war, he joined the Whigs in flaying Polk. The “immediate cause of the war” had been Polk’s decision to deliberately order American forces into Mexican territory.<sup>88</sup> Benton, Young America’s nationalist ally, saw that Calhoun had exposed himself and he gleefully seized the opportunity a few days later. No one should doubt Calhoun’s knowledge of the war’s causes because he [Calhoun] was, according to Benton, “the author of those causes, and therefore the author of the war.” In a review of Calhoun’s long political career, Benton highlighted two episodes. As James Monroe’s Secretary of War, Calhoun supported swapping Florida for the area which later became Texas in the 1819 Adams-Onís Treaty. When Southerners later excoriated Adams for giving away Texas, Calhoun never summoned the courage to admit his support for the treaty. Instead, he used his position as Secretary of State in 1845 to pursue a reckless course to recover Texas despite Mexico’s warnings that annexation would mean war. Worse still, Calhoun urged newspapers on the State Department payroll to attack those who desired peaceful annexation and simultaneous settlement of the boundary with Mexico as treasonous, according to a State Department document from April 11, 1844 which Benton cited. When Calhoun protested that he did not write such a document, Benton mocked Calhoun for assigning Polk the blame for a war which his [Calhoun’s] actions “contracted.”<sup>89</sup> However, young Democrats’ rhetorical victory seemed hollow because embarrassing Calhoun did not unite the party. Instead, Benton’s polemic could spur animosity from Southern Democrats already angry about the Wilmot Proviso.

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<sup>88</sup> Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs*, 346.

<sup>89</sup> *Congressional Globe* 29<sup>th</sup> Congress 2<sup>nd</sup> Session (24 February 1847) 494-498. Also quoted in Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs*, 346-348.

The incendiary speeches left little time to finish legislative business. The Senate voted on the three million dollar bill and rejected the House version with the proviso on March 1st 21-31: Northerners broke 20-5 for the House bill and Southerners voted 26-1 against. Young America cast crucial negative votes; Benton, Bright, Breese, Cass, and Hannegan.<sup>90</sup> Shorn of the proviso and facing the session's end, the House approved the un-amended appropriations bill 115-81.<sup>91</sup> Manifest Destiny won its victory over the Whigs' seeking "no territory by conquest" and insisting the port of San Francisco would suffice for absolving the Mexican indemnity.<sup>92</sup> However, it seemed a pyrrhic victory. Sectional angst had reached the highest levels since 1820 over territory only present in abstract form since no annexation had yet occurred. The parties cohered not by following Manifest Destiny's script, with a destined winner and loser of the argument. Instead, they played on the logic of war: the opposition denounced Polk and the Democrats accused the Whigs of treason. Expansion itself remained too contentious an issue.

The Mexican War inverted a Second Party System paradigm concerning government power. Traditionally, the Whigs and Democrats differed over the means of improving the Union. Whigs desired qualitative improvement directed by the federal government in an orderly if lengthy process. The Democrats sought rapid movement into unsettled western spaces to recapitulate the Union as it existed.<sup>93</sup> Now, negative government Democrats supported a war which added territory and Pacific ports to foster free trade with Asia. It had all the markings of Whig economics, gaining a port for economic development, but with the Democratic twist of free trade. Whigs, proponents of a strong centralized federal government, denounced the war as a flagrant abuse of government power because it quantitatively added to the Union without

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<sup>90</sup> *Congressional Globe* 29<sup>th</sup> Congress 2<sup>nd</sup> Session (1 March 1847) 555.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 March 1847, 573.

<sup>92</sup> Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission*, 153.

<sup>93</sup> Major Wilson, *Space, Time, and Freedom: the Quest for Nationality and the Irrepressible Conflict 1815-1861*. (Greenwood Press: Westport, Connecticut, 1974) 12-13.

qualitatively improving it. Pro-free trade young Democrats consequently ridiculed the Whigs for decrying the war which acquired the port of San Francisco that they publicly desired.<sup>94</sup>

Moreover, Whigs wanted to increase industry but had the wrong approach given that growing industries need new markets which Whig tariffs would undercut by having industries sell in tampered economic conditions. Democrats repeatedly taunted the Whigs that they could not have it all ways, abhorring the war and wanting the port for their flawed economic program.

The inversion of the government power paradigm unleashed new tensions related to slavery. In response to the Wilmot Proviso, Southerners denied not just federal power over slavery where it existed, in the states, but where it might go, the territories. Mexico's abolition of slavery gave the inversion added complexity: re-enslaving free territory required either formally overturning the prohibition or allowing slave owners into the Mexican Cession in order to carve out slave states. Either way, a confrontation focused on Congress' power over slavery seemed unavoidable. Would the nation's most anti-democratic institution be allowed into free lands won for the regeneration of democracy? If Congress could enslave free land, could it not free enslaved land? Such questions had no easy answers. As an ideology, Manifest Destiny constituted a world view, not a legal summation of Constitutional power or lack thereof. The war forced each section to reevaluate old principles with the onset of new realities.

### **“There Never was an Election of Greater Importance”<sup>95</sup> 1848**

By the onset of the electoral season, the Democracy was tearing itself apart. The Congressional clash over the Wilmot Proviso did not end, but trickled into state politics. In New

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<sup>94</sup> “The Whigs and the War,” D.D. Barnard, *American Whig Review* vol. 6 no. 4 (October 1847) 334 and 342.

<sup>95</sup> “The General Issue,” *Democratic Review* vol. 23 no. 125 (November 1848) 381. Also quoted in Joel Silbey, *Party Over Section: the Rough and Ready Presidential Election of 1848* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas 2009) 103.

York (with its 36 electoral votes), the state Democratic Party split between those who supported including the proviso in the state party platform (Van Burenites also known as Barnburners) and those who supported the Polk Administration (Hunkers). Southerners added to the headaches with Calhoun, among others, insisting Congress could not exclude slavery from the territories jointly owned by the sovereign states. Yet, that stance did not satisfy a more radical Southern sect. The Alabama state legislature instructed its delegates only to vote for a prospective nominee who supported federal protection for slavery in the territories.<sup>96</sup> However, organizing the territories would not be simple: Congress had constitutionally-acknowledged jurisdiction which in part provoked the proviso and the subsequent sectionalism.<sup>97</sup> If left unresolved, the raging sectionalism might cost the Democratic Party the election and inflict lasting damage.

The problems began as soon as the national convention opened in Baltimore on May 22nd. The Barnburners agreed to drop their demand for the Wilmot Proviso if the convention seated them and not the Hunkers as the delegates of New York. The convention did not concur and it split both groups in half in order to form a whole delegation, a solution which satisfied neither faction. Then the pro-expansionist Cass, with solid support from the Northwest and the South, won a majority on the first ballot and the nomination on the fourth.irate at the nomination of the man who gained at Van Buren's expense in 1844, the Barnburners left. The platform passed smoothly and it contained the customary assertion about the limited powers of the federal government. However, the usual dogma did not suffice for the author of the Alabama Platform, William Yancey. He insisted the federal government had a duty to protect slavery in the new territories, a fundamentally positive idea, and he moved to amend the platform

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<sup>96</sup> Silbey, *Party Over Section*, 38-41.

<sup>97</sup> U.S. Constitution Article IV Section III Clause 2: "The Congress shall have Power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or other Property belonging to the United States; and nothing in this Constitution shall be so construed as to Prejudice any Claims of the United States, or of any particular State."

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accordingly. When his amendment overwhelmingly failed 216 to 36, Yancey and his followers exited.<sup>98</sup> With the nomination of their ally and the passage of a favorable platform, Young America emerged the convention's winner. Additionally, the platform commended Polk for reducing the tariff, congratulated France for seeking democratic government, and justified the Mexican War.<sup>99</sup> This was now young Democrats' election, and possibly their party.

The Whigs had their own divisions as their convention convened in early June in Philadelphia. The repeated failure of their economic program, internal improvements and tariffs, to sway the electorate seemingly disqualified leading Whigs such as Webster and Clay (a three-time loser). However, this proved a point of contention given that Clay still had support and those Whigs championing the selection of a war hero had picked one who held an almost antiparty stance. Zachary Taylor, hero of the Mexican War which the Whigs deplored, refused to endorse any traditional Whig positions which the party founder, Clay, embodied. The first ballot indicated sharp division, Taylor at 111 and Clay at 97. However, the rapid erosion of Clay's support gave Taylor the nomination on the fourth ballot. In accordance with Taylor's anti-party stance, the Whigs did not issue an official platform nor did their "statement of principles" address old issues. Instead, the document dwelled on Taylor's leadership ability and character.<sup>100</sup> Possibly out of exasperation, one of Taylor's opponents derisively labeled him "anything but a Whig."<sup>101</sup> The parties were showing the strain of the shift from old economic issues with demarcated differences to the hazy aftermath of territorial expansion.

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<sup>98</sup> Silbey, *Party Over Section*, 65-66

<sup>99</sup> Democratic Party Platform of 1848 quoted Ibid., Appendix A 159-161.

<sup>100</sup> Whig Party Statement of Principles Passed at a Mass Meeting After the National Convention of 1848 quoted in Ibid., Appendix B 162-163.

<sup>101</sup> Silbey, *Party Over Section*, 68-69.



When the Barnburners left Baltimore, Democrats predicted a short lived rebellion. Instead, the Barnburners started their own party along with anti-slavery Whigs, mainly from Massachusetts, dissatisfied with the nomination of the slaveholder Taylor. The early August convention convened in Buffalo, New York, roughly half-way between the anti-slavery hotbeds of Northeastern Ohio and Massachusetts. On the first ballot, and with some Whig reservations, the convention nominated Van Buren for president.<sup>102</sup> As its signature issue, and to attract a broad base of support, the convention adopted the Wilmot Proviso as its platform. Specifically, the platform called for an “act of Congress” to bar slavery from territories organized out of the Mexican Cession, and affirmed that Congress could not end slavery in the states where it already existed. Despite affirming an established political reality, these renegades broke with over twenty years of precedent. Rather than avoid discussing slavery, as the Democrats and Whigs had done in the past and would do again, the Barnburners sought to attract those disenchanted with both parties by forcing a debate. Ironically, the man most responsible for creating a political system devoted to keeping slavery out of politics [Van Buren] now headed the ticket of a party committed to discussing slavery. With their rousing slogan of “Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor, and Free Men” the nascent Free Soil Party hit the campaign trail.<sup>103</sup>

In his December 1847 “Nicholson Letter” Cass articulated Democrats’ negative government solution to the festering sectionalism surrounding the territories issue: allow territorial legislatures to decide slavery’s fate. Passing the issue to territorial legislatures prevented the debates on Congressional power over slavery which spurred so much sectionalist

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<sup>102</sup> Steven Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies: America’s Westward Expansion and the Road to the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010) 307.

<sup>103</sup> Free Soil National Platform of 1848 quoted in Silbey, *Party Over Section*, Appendix C 165.

angst.<sup>104</sup> Young Democrats liked the idea and actively campaigned across the country, with Douglas taking a prominent role and even campaigning in the South.<sup>105</sup> But popular sovereignty, like Manifest Destiny, meant different things in each section. In the South, popular sovereignty promised Congress would not impose the hated Wilmot Proviso. In the North, popular sovereignty seemed to guarantee slavery's exclusion from the territories based on climate inhospitable to cotton cultivation and a growing Northern population seeking Western lands. In a national sense, Manifest Destiny spawned popular sovereignty by reframing slavery's expansion as a political problem and not a moral question. Much effort had been spent extending the democratic dominion across North America, so local democratic institutions should be allowed to settle the slavery issue. Manifest Destiny encompassed all Americans who prided themselves on living under democratic government. Allow territorial residents to render the decision and consider it final upon application for statehood.

Attacking the other side has a prominent role in any campaign, but it had a different twist in 1848. The Democrats mocked the Whigs' nonpartisan stance as a cowardly retreat from their principles. By refusing to tell the electorate what they stood for, the Whigs debased themselves to petty office seekers who could only win the election with a personality centered campaign as in 1840.<sup>106</sup> While the Democrats never failed to taunt the Whigs about their nonpartisanship, they directed their harshest attacks at the Free Soilers. The *Democratic Review* scoffed at Van Buren's newfound anti-slavery beliefs in light of his past. He stood beneath a banner of free speech yet his tie-breaking vote as vice president, in 1835, had allowed South Carolina postmasters to remove abolitionist literature from the mail. Being a cynical politician, Van

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<sup>104</sup> Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission*, 178.

<sup>105</sup> Silbey, *Party Over Section*, 95.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

Buren voted for censorship to solicit Southern support for his 1836 presidential bid.<sup>107</sup> Now, after losing out on the 1844 nomination, Van Buren ran solely for revenge upon Southern Democrats.<sup>108</sup> The *Democratic Review* blasted these apostates who would only siphon votes from Cass. “With what consistency can these men pretend...the advocacy of ‘free soil,’ when they pursue a course calculated to throw the government...into the hands, for four years, of federalists under a slave holding leader?”<sup>109</sup> The Free Soilers could not win as a third-party, but even more dangerous were their principles: “if carried out” they would “inevitably lead to the disunion of the states.”<sup>110</sup> Yet, the sharp prose clearly exemplified Democrats’ frustration. They had a solution to the issue of slavery’s expansion consistent with the principle justification for expansion, expanding freedom and democracy, yet the Free Soilers could render it all irrelevant. The unified framework of Manifest Destiny seemed unable to strengthen Democrats’ electoral appeal. Instead, it became a sharp weapon wielded against them.

The Whigs deployed primarily a two-pronged approach. They responded to Democratic mockery of their principles with old charges, Democratic support for executive tyranny and corruption. The “usurping dynasty”, the Polk Administration, had thwarted the stimulation and protection of industry and internal improvements with “twenty vetoes.” In place of substantive issues the Democrats had substituted buzz-phrases such as “the extension of our empire” and “the freedom of trade” to justify the Mexican War which turned the land of freedom into a “community of land pirates.”<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, recent events validated charges of Democratic debauchery. Democratic chieftains marginalized those unsupportive of the party’s new direction

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<sup>107</sup> “Principles Not Men,” *Democratic Review* vol. 23 no. 121 (July 1848) 5.

<sup>108</sup> “An Appeal to the Free Soil Party,” *Democratic Review* vol. 23 no. 125. (November 1848) 400.

<sup>109</sup> “Principles Not Men,” 12.

<sup>110</sup> “An Appeal to the Free Soil Party,” 401.

<sup>111</sup> “Causes of the Success of the Whigs,” *American Whig Review*, vol. 8 no. 6 (Dec. 1848) 547-552.

[the Van Burenites] and rewarded the party hack Cass with a presidential nomination. In his demands for all of Oregon and loyal support for Polk's war, Cass represented the Democratic creed, "war, conquest, and forced aggrandizement."<sup>112</sup> Cass's election would surely continue such horrid policies. By contrast, Whigs cheered that "Taylor is no partisan."<sup>113</sup> This upstanding soldier stood for good government, meaning Congressional supremacy and sparing use of the veto. There would be no wars of aggression or acting above the law with Taylor as president because, "The Whigs desire to preserve peace with all the world, to stimulate the industry, and to develop the resources of the country."<sup>114</sup> The Whigs said little of interest because they were depending on Taylor's popularity and the Democratic split.

While Democrats and Whigs sought ambiguity or silence on the expansion of slavery issue, the Free Soilers adopted a clear position: "You are either for slavery or you are against it."<sup>115</sup> The Free Soilers made two interlinked arguments to Northern voters: the corrupt parties survived by obstructing debate on slavery. The South "hitherto ruled the republic with a rod of iron" with seven slave owners, counting Polk, occupying the presidency [Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Jackson, Tyler]. The Democracy's complicity in forwarding Southern interests seemed so obvious that recounting its subservience appeared unnecessary. Popular sovereignty merely represented Northern Democrats' latest sleight of hand to avoid discussing slavery and paying the electoral price. The deceitful Whigs were an equally bad option. Arguments about Taylor's nonpartisanship were disingenuous at best and outright denial at worst. Taylor was a slave owner and everyone knew it. As a party, the Whigs had no program to stop slavery's expansion because Taylor would never allow it. The pithy description of the

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<sup>112</sup> "The Whigs and their Candidate," *American Whig Review*, vol. 8 no. 3 (Sept. 1848) 225.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>114</sup> *National Intelligencer* 20 July 1848 quoted in Silbey, *Party Over Section*, 113.

<sup>115</sup> *The New York Globe* 26 September 1848 quoted in *Ibid.*, 124.

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candidates, “one is a Northern man with Southern principles, and the other is a Southern man with Southern principles” encapsulates the Free Soilers appeal to Northerners.<sup>116</sup> The Free Soilers permitted what had heretofore been an almost impossible electoral decision for Northerners, disapproving of slavery and its expansion and expressing such sentiments.

The Free Soilers had a solution which the Democrats denied and the Whigs lacked the votes to pass, Congressional action. Congress exercised power over slavery’s expansion into the territories by barring slavery from the old Northwest with the Northwest Ordinances of 1787 and 1789 and the 1820 Missouri Compromise confined slavery south of the 36-30 line in the Louisiana Purchase territory. Moreover, those who denied such Congressional power also denied the intent of the Founders. The Free Soil platform declared “the entire history of that period [post American Revolution], clearly show that it was the settled policy of the nation, *not to extend, nationalize, or encourage*, but to limit, localize, and discourage Slavery” [emphasis in the original].<sup>117</sup> Congress had the power and it should exercise it in the Mexican Cession. The Free Soilers correctly claimed that the parties survived by abdicating any responsibility to legislate on slavery and then claiming impotence on the question to placate Southerners. The vast territorial expansion no longer made such a course plausible, or even responsible. Congress could, and should, block slavery’s expansion into the Mexican Cession.

Cass lost, and not because of the Free Soilers. The Free Soilers undoubtedly cost Cass New York but they also cost Taylor Indiana and Ohio which held thirty-five electoral votes (one less than New York). Instead, Pennsylvania, where the Free Soilers had a negligible impact, made the difference. Polk and young Democrats managed to substantially reduce the high tariff

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<sup>116</sup> Silbey, *Party Over Section*, 123-124.

<sup>117</sup> Free Soil National Platform of 1848 quoted in Silbey, *Party Over Section*, Appendix C 165.

of 1842 which Pennsylvania, with its coal and pig iron districts, supported. A bad economy coupled with this turn towards free trade pushed Pennsylvania's twenty-six electoral votes into the Whig column and cost Cass the election.<sup>118</sup> His loss also reveals Manifest Destiny's paradox. Ideologically, Manifest Destiny kept Democrats together by not elevating one section's interest above another's. Polk trampled on this idea by provoking a war with Mexico presumably to accrue land for slave states while compromising on free territory (Oregon). Southern belligerence to an assertion of Northern interest, the Wilmot Proviso, proved too much for Van Burenites, who formed the Free Soil Party. Manifest Destiny progressively appeared to be a slaveholder's boon and the free majority's burden, a very un-Democratic idea.

### **Truce at Midcentury, 1850.**

Organizing the territories with or without slavery consumed the first session of the 31<sup>st</sup> Congress from December 1849 to September 1850. Bitter divisions from the election lingered and quickly surfaced, first in the House. For three weeks no candidate for Speaker could attain a majority and orators gained the floor, in the midst of the disorder, to rant about the fate of the territories. Angry rhetoric reached a new level as Georgia Whig Robert Toombs swore before the House, the country, and "in the presence of the living God that if by your legislation you seek to drive us from the territories of California and New Mexico...I am for disunion."<sup>119</sup> The Senate at least proved more eloquent as young Democrats yielded to the still dominant Great Triumvirate of Clay, Calhoun, and Webster. On January 29th, Clay proposed resolutions which formed the compromise: admit California as a free state, organize the New Mexico territory without restrictions on slavery, shrink Texas' land in exchange for debt relief, and abolish the

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<sup>118</sup> Silbey, *Party Over Section*, 144-145.

<sup>119</sup> *Congressional Globe* 31<sup>st</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session (13 December 1849) 28.

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slave trade in Washington D.C.<sup>120</sup> On March 4th, Calhoun gave his final speech on the subject of equilibrium. The North's rapid growth had destroyed sectional equilibrium, threatening to render the South a permanent minority, unable to protect slavery. Accordingly, Calhoun called on the North to grant concessions if it desired continued union.<sup>121</sup> Invariably, Calhoun meant ceding some of the new territories to the South in order to maintain sectional equilibrium in the Senate. On March 7th, Webster countered the festering sectionalism with a nationalist appeal. After denying the possibility of "peaceable secession", he criticized secession's supporters for not contemplating its ramifications:

Why, what would be the result?...What is to remain American? What am I to be? An American no longer? Am I to become a sectional man, a local man, a separatist, with no country in common with the gentlemen who sit around me here, or who fill the other house of Congress? Heaven forbid!...Why, Sir, our ancestors, our fathers and our grandfathers... would rebuke and reproach us; and our children and our grandchildren would cry out, Shame upon us! If we of this generation should dishonor...the harmony of that Union which is every day felt among us with so much joy and gratitude.<sup>122</sup>

Webster reiterated an old message, American identity and the Union were inseparable. Yet, the events in Congress only seemed to confirm the paradox of Manifest Destiny particularly in the way both parties split over the fruits of expansion. Northern Whigs and Southern Democrats opposed any compromise for opposite reasons, commitment to slavery's exclusion and extension respectively. Northern Democrats and Southern Whigs supported a compromise but Southern Whigs were slow to accept Northern Democrats' solution of popular sovereignty. Clay's legislative tactics, packaging the bills into an omnibus, also proved problematic. The omnibus guaranteed a simultaneous vote on concessions and gains for each section yet no pro-

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<sup>120</sup> Holman Hamilton, *Prologue to Conflict: The Crisis and Compromise of 1850*, (Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1964) 54.

<sup>121</sup> *Congressional Globe* 31<sup>st</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session (4 March 1850) 455.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 March 1850, 482.

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compromise majority had materialized. On July 31st, the omnibus' opponents unraveled it by striking parts of the bill.<sup>123</sup> The man who helped weather so many crises, Clay, was beaten.

Douglas realized the compromise failed because of a tactical error and not because of a defect in the legislation. Instead, Douglas employed the strategy Clay used in 1820, de-link the bills. If allowed to vote on the bills separately, a sectional phalanx with additional support plus abstentions from the opposition could secure compromise in piece-meal form. The results validated Douglas's reasoning. All voting Southerners in both houses of Congress approved the fugitive slave law and all voting Northerners supported California's admission.<sup>124</sup> Regarding abstentions, fifteen of the twenty-one abstaining senators on the fugitive slave law were Northerners and six of the eight abstaining senators on California's admission were Southerners.<sup>125</sup> On partisan lines, Northern Democrats and particularly young Democrats were the compromise's strongest supporters. Five young Democrats, counting Cass, voted yes on five bills while abstaining, or in Augustus Dodge's case voting yes on the fugitive slave law: Douglas, Bright, Shields, Cass, and Dodge of Iowa. Other Democrats assisted them; Texas' Sam Houston, Pennsylvania's Daniel Sturgeon, Michigan's Alpheus Felch, and New Hampshire's Moses Norris voted yes on all six measures.<sup>126</sup> Southern young Democrats, Florida's David Yulee and Louisiana's Pierre Soulé, acquiesced to popular sovereignty in the Utah and New Mexico territories by either voting yes or abstaining.<sup>127</sup> Ironically, it took sectionalism to power an anti-sectional settlement which resolved a sectional clash over a partisan war's spoils.

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<sup>123</sup> Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 108.

<sup>124</sup> Hamilton, *Prologue to Conflict*, 191-200.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 192



## Chapter 3: Downfall

“And the stars of Heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in Heaven shall be shaken.” Mark 13:25

With the Compromise of 1850, territorial expansion could resume. Young America next eyed Cuba, an annexation target of early American administrations, whose location, ninety miles from Florida, allowed annexation to appear part of continental conquest. Living beneath the yoke of monarchical Catholic Spain satisfied all the requisite anti-democratic criteria necessary for American intervention beneath the banner of Manifest Destiny. Also, bisectional support from empire-minded Northerners and land-hungry Southerners could potentially mute sectional squabbling about additional slave states. Yet, the paradox of Manifest Destiny again appeared as Northerners and Southerners fundamentally disagreed about the reason for annexation. A recent wave of emancipation in the West Indies had considerably aroused Southern anxieties about slavery's security. However, emancipation also stemmed from the liberal revolutions in Europe that deposed monarchs, much to Northerners' ebullience about a new democratic age in Europe. Would annexing Cuba manifest the democratic United States' newly cultivated power or be a reactionary move to save Cuban slavery? Young Democrats' crucial mistakes, ranging from Soulé's behavior to Douglas' fateful Kansas-Nebraska Act, indicated the latter and thus prevented annexation. The expansionist press kept the idea of annexation alive throughout the 1850s, but annexation never regained traction particularly as the sectional crisis deepened. With the colossal repudiation of failed annexation, the era of expansion and ascendancy of Young America within the Democratic Party ended.

### **Paradise Lost: the Quest for Cuba- Expansion Part- IV, 1853-1859**

American designs on Cuba predated Manifest Destiny and Young America. With a magnificent port facing the American coastline and a perfect climate for crops such as sugar, Cuba represented an idyllic territory for annexation particularly, for Southern planters. Indeed, Democratic-Republicans had obsessed over Cuba. Thomas Jefferson had believed it held the key to the Louisiana territory's security and President Madison had attempted to purchase Cuba in 1810.<sup>128</sup> President Monroe opted for aggressive diplomacy spearheaded by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams. Adams threatened American recognition of the rebellious provinces of New Spain unless Spain agreed to sell East Florida. Spain capitulated in the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819 and swapped Florida for American boundary claims in the western edges of the Louisiana Purchase (Texas).<sup>129</sup> Yet, Adams did not view Florida as the end of American expansion.

Adams foreshadowed the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny by labeling Puerto Rico and Cuba as “natural appendages of the North American continent.” Once free from Spain, given the ongoing insurrections in New Spain, Adams reasoned that Cuba would be unable to support itself and could “gravitate only towards the North American Union.”<sup>130</sup> The primary issue remained European, primarily British, interference despite the Monroe Doctrine (written by Adams) declaring the new republics off-limits to re-colonization. However, British abolitionism continued to hang over the Cuba question because the Royal Navy actively suppressed the African slave trade in which Spain continued to participate. Britain had already conquered Cuba once, during the Seven Years War, and recent slave uprisings were demonstrating the Spanish

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<sup>128</sup> Frederick Merk, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansion 1843-1849*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966) 234-235.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

were struggling to control the island. What would stop Britain from ending the African slave trade into Cuba with a blockade which could inadvertently catalyze a potentially successful slave uprising?<sup>131</sup> The Caribbean already had one black republic born from slave revolt (Haiti): it did not need another, particularly one ninety miles from the South. Yet, a crusade for Cuba beneath the Monroe Doctrine seemed infeasible. The nation was still recouping from a disastrous war, had defused a major sectional crisis, and remained caught in a depression which began in 1819. For the moment, Southerners and the nation exercised restraint.

American designs on Cuba subsided for two decades as major domestic issues consumed the late 1820s and 1830s: South Carolina's nullification of a federal tariff, Indian removal, the destruction of the Second Bank of the United States, and the depression of 1837. Polk reawakened visions of an active foreign policy by reviving the Monroe Doctrine in a different context. In his first annual message to Congress, Polk expressed hostility towards European powers in nationalist terms. Twenty-two years since the Monroe Doctrine had been issued, "the expansion of free principles and our rising greatness as a nation are attracting the attention of the powers of Europe." That attention brought about the threat of a "balance of power" system imposed "on this continent to check our advancement."<sup>132</sup> Under such duress, expansion into the open spaces of North America represented a logical response. Contrary to O'Sullivan's passive "let destiny unfold" model, Polk pursued a course of action affirming that the nation needed aggressive expansion to guarantee its security. European meddling in South America and particularly British designs on Texas, real or imagined, proved useful propaganda for demagogue politicians and fodder for expansionist newspapers seeking to inflame public opinion.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 234-235

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>133</sup> Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, 118.

Manifest Destiny offered convenient rhetoric to cover a calculated policy decision. However, some young Democrats wanted to take a radical step, exporting republicanism to Europe.

By the mid-1840s, young Democrats believed the nation had a role to play in foreign affairs. The republican character of the United States gave it a unique position on the world stage vis-à-vis Europe, where republicanism roiled beneath the surface of monarchical stability.<sup>134</sup> The onset of revolution in the spring of 1848, beginning as usual in France, seemed an ominous sign of a new age in Europe. *The New York Herald* ecstatically declared, “throughout the continent, the materials of democracy will be in a most inflammatory condition now that France, *the great ruling nation of the continent, has thrown down her race of kings, and stands before the world as a republic, on the plan of the United States*” [italics added].<sup>135</sup> In Congress, young Democrats put on quite a show of support for France and other European republicans, with Douglas acting as leader. When Calhoun argued against Allen’s resolution congratulating France for becoming a republic, because he believed the new government might not endure, Douglas responded promptly and forcefully. Denunciations from autocratic Austria, Prussia, and Russia would not deter France, Douglas thundered. But the French were “deeply interested” in American opinion “because the United States of America is the only republic upon Earth.” Douglas then laid bare young Democrats’ feelings about the upheaval in Europe: “All republicans throughout the world have their eyes fixed upon us...Our success is the foundation of all their hopes.”<sup>136</sup> Refusing to show solidarity would betray American republican ideals in the name of maintaining the archaic doctrine of non-interference, and Allen’s resolution

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-98.

<sup>135</sup> “The News from Europe –Revolution in France- Establishment of a Republic,” *New York Herald* 19 March 1848.

<sup>136</sup> *Congressional Globe* 30<sup>th</sup> Congress (30 March 1848) 549, 568-569, 592. Also quoted in Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, 102-103.

eventually passed.<sup>137</sup> Young America's prophecy of a new republican age gained credence when *The New York Herald* reported that Austria and Prussia had fallen, "Germany may be a grand federal republic before the middle of summer."<sup>138</sup> Surely Spain would fall next. From there, the expansionist impulse could be galvanized.

Cuba lurked behind young Democrats' support for the revolutions engulfing Europe. With France now a republic, the *New York Herald* prophesized: "We anticipate a revolution... in Spain."<sup>139</sup> Without France to protect it, as in 1823 when French soldiers restored King Ferdinand, a major impediment to annexing Cuba disappeared. Seeing an opportunity, Douglas and O'Sullivan met with Polk in early May to discuss annexing Cuba. With the Mexican War concluded, O'Sullivan argued that "further delay now would be criminal." While O'Sullivan did not condone violent seizure, he believed Spain would sell and Britain would not interfere given the chaos in Europe.<sup>140</sup> Southern expansionists joined in with the national security argument of commanding "the basin of the Mississippi River", the Gulf of Mexico.<sup>141</sup> Under British control, Havana would become a nest of British warships with Cuba serving as a crucial base of force projection in a third Anglo-American war. Calhoun, involved in efforts to acquire Cuba as Monroe's Secretary of War, stressed the national security argument by labeling Cuba "indispensible to the safety of the United States." Yet Calhoun's comfort with continued

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., (7 April 1848) 549 and 592. Also quoted in Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, 103.

<sup>138</sup> "Arrival of the Washington-Important Intelligence- All Europe in a State of Revolution," *New York Herald* 8 April 1848.

<sup>139</sup> "The News from Europe -Revolution in France- Establishment of a Republic," *New York Herald* 19 March 1848.

<sup>140</sup> John L. O'Sullivan to James Buchanan, 19 March 1848, Buchanan Papers; quoted in Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, 135-136.

<sup>141</sup> "British Designs upon Cuba," *The Mississippian* 24 March 1848.

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possession of Cuba by the slaveholding Spanish betrayed his and other Southerners' sectional feelings.<sup>142</sup> They would never allow a non-slaveholding power to occupy Cuba.

The liberal revolutions not only overthrew monarchies but retrograde institutions such as slavery: the French and Danish abolition of bondage in their West Indian possessions made all but the Dutch and Spanish colonies in the Caribbean free.<sup>143</sup> Would a republican Spain free its slaves or, worse, would the British seize Cuba and abolish slavery with Spain so weak? West Indian economics made British intervention probable because Jamaican sugar planters could not compete with Cuban sugar planters using slave labor. South Carolina's *Greenville Mountaineer* noted that the "utter failure of emancipation in Jamaica" led to a two-pronged British plan for competing in the sugar market: placing tariffs on slave produced sugar and emancipating slave territory to equalize the market and means of production.<sup>144</sup> Yet this debate remained largely internal to Southern society and beneath national security arguments. Southerners shared Northerners' republican feelings, and vilifying newly republican European governments for abolishing slavery, particularly France, seemed counter-productive. Appealing to American idealism, the liberal nature of the revolutions made annexation of Cuba appear nothing more than a cynical ploy to save slavery. For the moment, designs on Cuba stalled.

The Polk Administration's behavior and the European uprisings in 1848 complicated the paradox of Manifest Destiny and the importance of Cuba. In 1823, the Monroe Doctrine addressed an immediate issue, prospective re-colonization of Latin America by Spain. Importantly, it took a defensive posture with a passive character.<sup>145</sup> Polk, supported by young Democrats, inverted the Monroe Doctrine by preempting the question of European intent on

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<sup>142</sup> Merk, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansion*, 258.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>144</sup> "British Designs on Cuba," *Greenville Mountaineer* 17 March 1848.

<sup>145</sup> Merk, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansion*, 236.

North America. The annexation of Texas, settlement of the Oregon boundary, and Mexican War had been justified as defensive actions undertaken in the name of protecting North America from European colonization. Expanding republicanism into space kept the Europeans out and solidified the United States' position in North America.<sup>146</sup> Manifest Destiny represented an ideological justification: national security rested on expansion and incorporation of new states as equals in the American polity. This model, the antithesis of hierarchical European colonialism, usually worked passively. Yet, Polk's assumption of European interference led to positive action in order to prevent such impending threats, real or fictitious. However, the uprisings in Europe posed a different problem. The threat of European intervention in North America seemed remote with republicans in charge, but that did not preclude a clash of interests. On what republican nationalist grounds could the United States now justify annexing Cuba?

By 1851, European monarchies had quashed the uprisings and the United States remained the premier republican power in reality and self-perception. The Democrats' victory in the 1852 presidential election reinvigorated its designs on Cuba beneath the republican banner of Manifest Destiny. New Hampshire's Franklin Pierce, another dark horse, crushed the Whigs' newest war hero, General Winfield Scott, 254 to 42 in the Electoral College while the Democrats amassed huge Congressional majorities. The divisions from 1844 and 1848 seemed buried with the Van Burenites back in the fold and Young America occupying a prominent position. The time seemed right for a renewed expansionist foreign policy. In the aftermath of Pierce's election, the *Democratic Review* bluntly stated, "We are for taking possession of the island now."<sup>147</sup> Moreover, *The New York Herald* asserted that conquering Cuba might prove a springboard to

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 279-283 and 286-287.

<sup>147</sup> "The Cuban Debate - Postscript," *United States Democratic Review and Magazine* vol. 31 no. 173 (Nov-Dec 1852) 627.

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conquering Haiti and subordinating it to the white race.<sup>148</sup> An enervated Whig opposition and tremendous amount of political capital seemed to make annexing Cuba possible if not inevitable. The main issue remained the means of annexation.

Secretary of State William Marcy ordered Soulé, the new minister to Spain, not to approach Spain with an offer for Cuba. The island must ““release itself or be released”” and annexation would follow. Yet, the iconoclastic Louisiana young Democrat seemed more intent on honoring his New York supporters who urged him to “bring back ‘a new star’ to ‘shine in the sky of Young America’” than obeying orders from his diplomatic superiors.<sup>149</sup> Among a series of outlandish episodes, he dueled and wounded the French minister. Soulé’s means to obtain Cuba proved equally unorthodox, such as circumventing normal diplomatic channels by appealing directly to the Queen Mother to sell Cuba.<sup>150</sup> When he made no progress with Spanish officials, Soulé tapped his republican connections by funding Spanish rebels who would sell Cuba if the monarchy fell. When the summer uprising failed, all of the captured republicans implicated Soulé and the Pierce Administration by extension.<sup>151</sup> Despite this embarrassment, a setback for Young America’s foreign policy of supporting republicanism, Soulé remained intent on acquiring Cuba. Acting on a suggestion by Marcy, Soulé convened with minister to Britain James Buchanan and minister to France John Mason in the Belgian town of Ostend in early October 1854 to discuss Cuba policy. The timing for annexation seemed ideal with France and England embroiled in the Crimean War with Russia. Rather than proceed quietly, Soulé decided on making a bold written statement. Under Spanish control, Cuba represented a “permanent

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<sup>148</sup> “The Mission to Spain-Mr. Soule-Cuba-‘Manifest Destiny.’” *New York Herald* 9 April 1853.

<sup>149</sup> Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 184.

<sup>150</sup> Philip Foner, *A History of Cuba and its Relations with the United States Volume II 1845-1895: From the Era of Annexationists to the Outbreak of the Second War for Independence* (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc. 1963) 97.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.



cause of anxiety and alarm” with all the possibilities of becoming another Haiti. Should Cuba ever pose an imminent threat to American security, “we shall be justified in wresting it from Spain.”<sup>152</sup> The so-called Ostend Manifesto did not remain private for long, the *New York Herald* got wind of it through European contacts. Pierce and young Democrats now had a Cuba crisis, in addition to a domestic crisis, on their hands.

At home, the Kansas-Nebraska Act and its aftershocks severely undermined annexation efforts. Douglas, as chairman of the Senate Committee on Territories, wrote the bill intending to organize the remaining Louisiana Purchase Territory. Douglas had the larger goal of attaining a transcontinental railroad route through the Kansas-Nebraska territory with a crucial terminus at Chicago. Instead, Southern Democrats insisted that Douglas’ bill repeal the Missouri Compromise (the Kansas territory lay above the 36-30 line making it free territory since 1820) as the price of their support, and a violent sectional debate erupted. Northerners, Democrat and Whig alike, bellowed that the South had no interest in keeping slavery a local institution in a free continent. Instead, slave owners now demanded that Congress protect slavery by enslaving free land, and young Democrats under Douglas’ direction aided and abetted this travesty. Northern Democrats might have acquiesced to adding already enslaved Cuba beneath the banner of Manifest Destiny, but as one newspaper stated, “the Nebraska wrong has forever rendered annexation impossible.”<sup>153</sup> Northern voters verified such sentiments by sweeping sixty-six House Northern Democrats out of office in the midterm elections.<sup>154</sup> The South now became the majority section in the Democracy, but Northern public opinion had shifted against further expansion for slave owners’ benefits.

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<sup>152</sup> “The Ostend Manifesto: The Three Filibusters-Buchanan, Mason and Soule,” *New York Herald* 6 August 1856.

<sup>153</sup> “The New York Courier has an article arguing to show that the North (now that the Nebraska bill has passed will never consent to the annexation of Cuba,” *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier* 7 June 1854.

<sup>154</sup> Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 175.

News of the Ostend Manifesto elicited a virulent reaction from Northern public opinion that scorned it as indefensible theft.<sup>155</sup> Divided public opinion, based on section, revealed what seemed increasingly apparent, Democrats' negative vision of government was fraying. That vision which had united young Democrats, Jacksonians, and Southerners was primarily economic in character, free trade and local democratic polities pursuing their economic interests free from government interference. The vision did note that the maximization of each group's interest, economically and politically, lay within the Union. However, territorial expansion invariably invoked the issue of who benefited from adding new lands. The Kansas-Nebraska conflict and poorly executed efforts to buy Cuba eviscerated the notion that expansion did not concern sectional interest. Sectional interest became more powerful when positive action or law became necessary, an outgrowth of Manifest Destiny's paradox.

The uproar over the Kansas-Nebraska Act and Ostend Manifesto did not end Democratic desires for Cuba. A remnant of the expansionist press still spearheaded by the *Democratic Review* and *The New York Herald* kept debate alive in the North. In a way, Cuba represented a diversion from Northern Democrats' seemingly unceasing troubles; the violence in Kansas, the new and purely sectional Republican Party's alarmingly strong showing in the 1856 presidential election, and the Supreme Court's nullification of popular sovereignty in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*. *The New York Herald* proved the most persistent advocate for annexing Cuba during the Buchanan Administration (1857-1861). It repeated two old refrains, political expediency and national security. First, annexation was "long a popular measure with the masses."<sup>156</sup> Second,

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<sup>155</sup> Foner, *A History of Cuba and its Relations with the United States Volume II*, 103.

<sup>156</sup> "Revival of Plans for the Annexation of Cuba," *New York Herald* 16 November 1857.

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Cuba was “necessary to our development and nothing can prevent its coming into this Union.”<sup>157</sup> The *Democratic Review* concurred and reiterated its belief in the nation’s manifest destiny in a lengthy article which reviewed American policy towards Spain and Cuba since the Louisiana Purchase. It tried to prove that Cuba would eventually enter the Union and that Cuba represented “one additional step towards accomplishment of that great end” of fulfilling the nation’s manifest destiny which the *Democratic Review* had championed since 1845.<sup>158</sup> Yet, both *The New York Herald* and *Democratic Review* said little of interest. They hid behind the vagueness of inevitability, understandable given the dangers of appearing to support slavery. Furthermore, the violence between non-slaveholders and slaveholders in Kansas had complicated the political situation. The corollary of Manifest Destiny and young Democrats’ favorite means to curtail sectionalism, popular sovereignty, was losing its legitimacy.

What the expansionist press said and what Northern Democrats did amounted to two different things. Under Douglas’s direction, Northern Democrats continued to insist on the political expediency of popular sovereignty despite *Dred Scott v. Sandford* and pressure from Buchanan. Douglas led the floor battle against Southern efforts, supported by Buchanan, to admit Kansas as a slave state after a fraudulent election established a pro-slavery territorial government which wrote a pro-slavery constitution for Kansas. *The Charleston Mercury*, Calhoun’s old organ, cut through the rhetoric. If the Northern Democrats could not and would not deliver Kansas as a slave-state, how could they deliver Cuba?<sup>159</sup> Despite the party platform calling for the administration to “insure our ascendancy in the Gulf of Mexico” nothing

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<sup>157</sup> “The United States, Spain and Cuba –The True Position of the Cuba Question,” *New York Herald* 21 February 1858.

<sup>158</sup> “Continental Policy of the United States – The Acquisition of Cuba,” *Democratic Review* vol. 43 no. 1 (April 1859) 2.

<sup>159</sup> “The Red Rag of Cuba for the South,” *The Charleston Mercury* 26 February 1858.

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substantive had occurred.<sup>160</sup> The simple fact remained that Northern Democrats had to answer Republicans' ever more effective charge of subservience to slave owning oligarchs. Notably, Douglas barely won reelection in 1858 and did so by hurling racist epithets at his relatively unknown "Black Republican" opponent, Abraham Lincoln. Policies which young Democrats had advocated, and seemingly had previously enjoyed tremendous public support, now seemed major detriments. The Democracy entered the election year of 1860 in a sorry state.

### **The Price of Paradox: The Democracy's Peril in Charleston, Late April 1860.**

If any Northern Democrat could stand up to the South and win the presidential nomination it would be Douglas. Young America's leader had three major legislative victories to his name by 1860: the Compromise of 1850, the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the defeat of Kansas' admission as a slave state in 1858. Furthermore, Douglas had led young Democrats' fight for the political expediency of popular sovereignty. Yet the convention did not promise any easy victories. Southerners would be at home in Charleston, South Carolina, and Alabama's William Yancey, the leader of the 1848 walkout, would head up the South's uncompromising wing [the fire-eaters]. Importantly, Yancey would have support from the galleries which he lacked twelve years earlier when he took Alabama out of the 1848 convention. The ongoing feud between Buchanan and Douglas was another problem. Buchanan had not forgotten how Douglas and his lieutenants had prevented Kansas's admission, and Louisiana's John Slidell would command the administration's forces bent on blocking Douglas' nomination.<sup>161</sup> Tensions simmered as the delegates filed into Charleston.

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<sup>160</sup> Democratic Party Platform of 1856, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29576> (3 December 2010).

<sup>161</sup> Robert Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) 751.

Douglas's convention cadre landed in Charleston with a majority of the delegates pledged to Douglas; New England, New York, New Jersey, the Northwest, and a smattering of delegates from Pennsylvania and the Border South. Yet, Douglas could not reach the two-thirds supermajority if the cotton and upper South remained united in resistance. Alabama's state legislature had again instructed its delegates to leave if the nominee did not embrace federal protection for slavery, and other Southern States seemed more receptive to a walkout this time around.<sup>162</sup> The primary issue for negotiation would be the power of territorial legislatures over slavery. Douglas trod a fine line by offering a sedition bill, criminalizing criticism of slavery, as an olive branch to the South in the ongoing Congressional session while refusing to repudiate popular sovereignty.<sup>163</sup> Instead, Douglas circumvented *Dred Scott v. Sandford's* nullification of popular sovereignty with the "Freeport Doctrine": territorial legislatures could bar slavery by not passing legislation protecting the institution.<sup>164</sup> The cotton South would not give in so easily. The Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Texas, and Arkansas delegations privately met before the convention started and endorsed the Alabama platform.<sup>165</sup> Douglas could either capitulate to a federal slave code for the territories or they would leave.

The convention opened on April 23rd with the usual arguing about rules consuming the first three days with a major problem resulting: Douglas' men had agreed to approve the platform before choosing a nominee (a deviation from precedent). They had tethered the nomination to popular sovereignty's validity. While Douglas' majority could impose the platform on the South, Southern unity with pro-administration forces could prevent Douglas's

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<sup>162</sup> Roy Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948) 277-280.

<sup>163</sup> Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010) 148.

<sup>164</sup> William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion Volume II: Secessionists Triumphant 1854-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 272.

<sup>165</sup> Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy*, 295.

nomination. On April 27th, the problems began when the committee responsible for drafting the platform failed to reach an agreement. With all state delegations represented, Southern committeemen and allies from California and Oregon held a majority. They insisted that territorial legislatures could not inhibit slavery's introduction into the territory, or abolish it in a territory, or impair property rights. Northern Democrats disagreed but were willing to refer the question of a territorial legislature's power over slavery to the Supreme Court, another peace offering to the South. This concession did not satisfy Southerners who had forsaken the negative freedom vision on which the Democratic alliance had rested for thirty-two years. Southerners now affirmed the federal power over slavery they had bitterly contested for decades, whether it was South Carolina nullifying the 1828 federal tariff or resisting the Wilmot Proviso. The majority report stated: "That it is the duty of the Federal Government to protect when necessary, the rights of persons and property on the high seas, *in the Territories*, or wherever else *its Constitutional authority extends*" [italics added]. The minority report, supported by all free state committeemen, reaffirmed popular sovereignty's validity although Northern Democrats would assent to any Supreme Court decision on the subject.<sup>166</sup> Once out of committee, the platform debate neared the anticipated climax.

The introduction of the majority and minority reports for the platforms that night incurred an angry debate. For ninety minutes Yancey vented Southern frustrations by lambasting the Northwest's continued allegiance to popular sovereignty, with thunderous applause occasionally interrupting his tirade. Yancey blasted Douglas for defeating the enslavement of Kansas and his circumvention of *Dred Scott v. Sandford*. Such a turncoat was no friend of the South. Furthermore, Yancey insisted that only federal power could restrain a tyrannical Northern

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 298.

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majority and guarantee the South her rights in the territories. Ohio's George Pugh gave the Northern response to Southern bullying. Northern Democrats were the South's allies, but Northerners would not sacrifice popular sovereignty thereby opening themselves up to more Republican attacks. "Gentlemen of the South, you mistake us-you mistake us-we will not do it."<sup>167</sup> With no agreement close, and tiring of stalemate, the Douglas cadre prepared to call a vote on the platform. Sensing the end neared, Southerners filibustered to force another day of negotiation and the extra day ultimately amounted to more failed bargaining.<sup>168</sup>

On April 30<sup>th</sup> the Douglas cadre swapped the minority report for the majority report to be the platform, 165-138, with New England, New York, the Northwest, most of New Jersey, a minority of Pennsylvania, and a smattering of upper South delegates carrying the vote. The North had won, but it agreed to the concession of abiding by any Supreme Court ruling on popular sovereignty. With a pro-Douglas platform now inevitable Arkansas, Texas, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida refused to vote on Northerners' latest concession. As an added enticement, the majority agreed to write Democratic support for the annexation of Cuba into the platform. The same states refused to vote.<sup>169</sup> Cuba meant little if slavery did not have explicit protections, and the break between the positive and negative visions now came to fruition. On a motion to lay the platform on the table for final approval, Stuart of Michigan lambasted the non-voting Southern states. Northern Democrats had ceded much to Southerners in the past and had yet again made concessions, which only six years ago Southerners had embraced (annexing Cuba). If pro-Douglas men were sick of Southern obstruction and willing to let a few delegates leave, the administration forces needed the fire-eaters in the convention.

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<sup>167</sup> Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 753-754.

<sup>168</sup> Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy*, 301.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

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Slidell met with Yancey the previous night, imploring him to stay with his troops and fight Douglas' nomination. However, the orders had been given and Alabama exited after Stuart's speech but to the Douglas cadre's surprise Alabama had support. Mississippi, Louisiana, South Carolina, Arkansas, Florida, and Texas walked out with each round of Southern oratory generating applause from the galleries. When Georgia left the next morning, eight Southern states in all, seven of whom would form the Confederacy in less than a year, had bolted.<sup>170</sup> After narrowly escaping disruption in 1844 and 1848, the Democracy now shattered.

### **The Rising Tide: Douglas Invades the South for the Union, Summer and Autumn 1860**

The Democratic split did not heal. In two separate conventions each section nominated its own candidate, Kentucky's John Breckinridge (Buchanan's vice-president) for the South and Douglas for the North. Recognizing the peril the Union faced, Douglas decided to break with tradition by stumping for the presidency and the preservation of the Union. Beginning in mid-July, he spoke in New York and New England before heading into the upper South. In Norfolk, Virginia on August 25th, Douglas denied the South had any right to secede based on Lincoln's election. Echoing Jackson during the nullification crisis thirty year earlier, Douglas declared the president would be justified in enforcing the laws if any states attempted to secede.<sup>171</sup> In Raleigh, North Carolina five days later Douglas linked popular sovereignty to the survival of the Union. On this democratic principle "the peace and harmony of the country can be maintained and the perpetuity of the Union ensured."<sup>172</sup> From the upper South, Douglas headed home to Illinois to encourage his faithful supporters. The favorite son could prevail if the Northwest held and enough Union-loving men crushed the abolitionists and secessionists at the ballot box across

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<sup>170</sup> Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 756.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 788-789.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 790.



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the country. The October 9th state elections proved disheartening as Republicans swept state offices in Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Ohio.<sup>173</sup> With Lincoln's victory seemingly assured, Douglas decided to speak in the Deep South.

After a brief stopover in Tennessee, Douglas spoke in Atlanta, Georgia on October 30<sup>th</sup>. The Southern press had been fuming for days about Lincoln's impending election and how any loyal Southerner would support secession, while secessionist orators such as Georgia's Robert Toombs had all but urged armed resistance to Douglas and his pro-Union message. Undeterred, Douglas reiterated that secession in response to Lincoln's election was treason and resistance by the federal government would be justified.<sup>174</sup> After a few days of speaking around Georgia, Douglas arrived in the heart of secessionism, Montgomery, Alabama. Despite published threats against him in the press, he spoke from the steps of the state capital (soon to be, however briefly, the Confederacy's capital) on November 2nd. With Yancey in attendance, Douglas attacked Alabama's fire-eaters for triggering not just the convention walkout but the recent "conspiracy on foot to break up this Union." Appealing directly to the people, Douglas called on Southerners to "rally around the principle of non-intervention, and we will crush our Northern abolitionism and Southern disunion."<sup>175</sup> On November 6th, the day after Douglas concluded his campaign in Mobile, Alabama, Lincoln won the election. Douglas's herculean effort had failed. After a brief stopover in New Orleans where he met with supporters led by Soulé, Douglas headed home.<sup>176</sup> Another Congressional session beckoned in December and he would lead the compromise effort with Democratic majorities in the House and the Senate, Lincoln had won an empty victory. In a little over a month South Carolina would secede, within three months the

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 797.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 798-800.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 800-801.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 802 and 805.

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Confederacy would come into existence, within four months Congressional conciliation would fail, within five months four more states would secede, and within seven months the man who embodied Young America would die.

## Epilogue: The Day Manifest Destiny Died

“And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from Heaven, burning as it were a lamp.”

Revelations 8:10

In 1845, Americans chased continental dreams. Young Democrats believed that adding land would regenerate the American democracy and freedom that both sections shared and venerated. By embracing free development in land and principle, they sought to intensify the United States' inherent greatness as a republic of free men. What the sections did not share in the way of domestic institutions, they shared in abstractions essential to American nationality. Young Democrats, while bombastic, used the vagueness inherent in ideology as a means to unite the party and the nation. Their fathers' country was inward looking and unsure of itself, nearly torn apart by the War of 1812 and Missouri Compromise debates. In response, the nation fell back on agrarianism. The Whig economic program, entailing hierarchy and government direction, represented another version of such anxieties: democracy could never lead to national greatness. A nation needed direction from above for effective development according to the Whigs' vision. Young Democrats rejected these visions in favor of something far different, sanctification. Manifest Destiny took the Puritan idea of election and secularized it, finding the United States' election in its democratic character: democracy represented the new truth in the New Israel (North America). Knit together by contiguous space and the democratic superstructure, both realized and idealized, young Democrats saw the pursuit of local interests as

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vital building blocks towards forming coherent national interests and nationhood. Local interest became state interests which then conglomerated into national interests, with all persons finding common cause as Americans. The integrity of the Union was not subject to debate.

Something had changed by 1861. Why did the Democratic alliance, long successful, collapse? By changing Democratic positions, young Democrats changed the foundation for the partnership. For decades the Democracy articulated a negative vision which the party platform constantly reiterated in the phrase, “the Federal Government is one of limited powers.” The young Democrats opened the door for positive action and legislation with Manifest Destiny acting, unintentionally, as a justification. Expansion, and the attempt to annex Cuba, involved positive action: circumventing the Constitution to annex Texas, threatening war with Britain for all of Oregon, prosecuting an offensive war against Mexico, and either purchasing or seizing Cuba. This was not O’Sullivan’s vision of an apparent destiny peacefully progressing towards fulfillment, but an aggressive exercise of government power towards a specified end. By 1861, the South had witnessed the benefit of government power and inverted young Democrats’ model: national interests drew on state interests which responded to powerful local interests such as slavery. Sectionalism grew out of nationalist policy.

Beneath starlight at 4:30 am on April 12, 1861, South Carolina’s sons began the Southern War for Independence. Within thirty-three hours, Confederate cannons had created a mass of rubble under which Young America’s Manifest Destiny lay buried. The rebels raised the flag of fallen stars above battered Fort Sumter as a salute to Providence for bestowing its favor on the Confederacy. The Confederacy had resolved the paradox of Manifest Destiny which plagued the old Union for the past seventeen years. There would be no more contradiction in expanding freedom and slavery because white men’s freedom now depended upon Africans’ bondage. The

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Confederacy would be a slave owner's kingdom on Earth, just as Young America had spoken of North America as a dominion of freedom in the preceding years. And so a new nation dedicated to the idea that all men are not created equal went to war confident that no weapon formed against it could prevail.<sup>177</sup> Yet, the claim of divine support blinded the Confederacy, like its predecessor, to a vital truth. Providence stood aloof.

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<sup>177</sup> ““No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me,’ saith the Lord.” Isaiah 54:17

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