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OF AMERICA, 1815-1848

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To the Memory of John Quincy Adams

Whatever the heats of party may be, however the tone of disappointment against Mr. Adams may sometimes rise to something too like hatred, there is undoubtedly a deep reverence and affection for the man in the nation's heart; and any one may safely prophesy that his reputation, half a century after his death, will be of a very honourable kind. He fought a stout and noble battle in Congress last session in favour of discussion of the slavery question, and in defence of the right of petition upon it; on behalf of women as well as of men. While hunted, held at bay, almost torn to pieces by an outrageous majority—leaving him, I believe, in absolute unity—he preserved a boldness and coolness as amusing as they were admirable. Though he now and then vents his spleen with violence when disappointed in a favourite object, he seems able to bear perfectly well that which it is the great fault of Americans to shrink from, singularity and blame. He seems, at times, reckless of opinion; and this is the point of his character which his countrymen seem, naturally, least able to comprehend.

—Harriet Martineau,
Retrospect of Western Travel, 1838

The War Against Mexico

On the first of May 1846, before word of fighting had even reached Washington, General Taylor pulled most of the Army of Occupation (as it had been named) out of Fort Texas and, leaving only a small garrison behind, fell back toward Port Isabel to protect his supply base from the advancing Mexicans. General Arista had intended to encircle Taylor's smaller force, but a shortage of boats delayed his crossing the river until the Americans had got away. He then besieged Fort Texas and, with his main body, blocked Taylor's return to relieve it. A young U.S. second lieutenant arriving at Port Isabel on May 2 heard his first hostile gunfire, the distant booming of the Mexican cannon starting to bombard the fort. Ulysses Grant never forgot his reaction: He "felt sorry" he had joined the Army.¹

Zachary Taylor had been born into the Virginia plantation gentry; his family were related to both James Madison and Robert E. Lee, and his daughter married Jefferson Davis of Mississippi (overcoming her father's doubts that it was a suitable match). But Taylor grew up in Kentucky, where his father had moved. He had earned his nickname, "Old Rough and Ready," during many years of service in the remote frontier areas where the Regular Army mediated between settlers and Native people. He had served with credit in the War of 1812, Black Hawk's War, and the Seminole War, and no one doubted his courage, but some wondered whether he would really be up to his present assignment. His adversary, Mariano Arista, a handsome, red-haired man who had lived in the United States, enjoyed the respect of both friend and foe.

After taking several days to strengthen the defenses of Port Isabel, Taylor commenced his return to Fort Texas with 2,288 soldiers. On May 8, at a place called Palo Alto, he encountered Arista's force of 3,270 barring his way, its flanks secure, daring him to attack. An artillery duel ensued, in which the U.S. guns inflicted heavy casualties while the Mexican ones had too short a range and lacked high explosive shells.² This forced Arista to do the attacking. The dense chaparral between the armies, which he

1. Ulysses Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, ed. Mary and William McFeely (1885; New York, 1990), 65.

2. Zachary Taylor to Thomas Butler, June 19, 1846, in Zachary Taylor, "*Old Rough and Ready*" *Speaks His Mind* (New Haven, 1960), 5.

had intended to hinder the *yanquis*, now deterred him from advancing his own infantry. So he repeatedly ordered his cavalry to charge. But the horsemen could not break the "hollow square" formation assumed by the U.S. infantry, and they suffered heavy losses from the surprisingly mobile U.S. field guns. At the end of the day neither army had broken through. The Mexicans had suffered worse, but the brilliant U.S. Major Sam Ringgold, who had designed the "flying artillery" that proved so successful, lay mortally wounded.

Arista decided to pick a different position and again try to force Taylor to attack him. So he withdrew a few miles and regrouped behind a *resaca*, a dry riverbed with more thick chaparral before it. The new location protected his troops from the kind of artillery fire they had endured the day before. Taylor's solution was to attack with a mixed force of infantry, cavalry, and mobile artillery, concentrating firepower at short range on the center of the Mexican line. Meanwhile, Taylor's light infantry turned Arista's left flank and got across the *resaca*. Arista himself led his lancers in a final desperate charge but could not overcome U.S. firepower. Fearing now that their line of retreat would be cut, his soldiers took off down the road. When they reached the Rio Grande, many swam across without waiting for boats, some drowning in the attempt. The Americans captured a hundred prisoners, field guns, small arms, and much ammunition the Mexicans could ill afford to lose. Taylor now relieved Fort Texas and renamed it Fort Brown, in honor of its commander, Major Jacob Brown, who had been killed during the siege. On May 18, the Americans crossed the Rio Grande and occupied Matamoros while the Mexican army silently withdrew, accompanied by a thousand women and children, to Monterrey. Matamoros became the place where Taylor received the volunteers who came streaming in during the months to come.³

Taylor's victory in the first major battle demonstrated a superiority in U.S. firepower that would remain a conspicuous feature of the entire war. (The Americans named each day a separate battle—Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma—and counted them as two victories.) As at New Orleans in 1815, the Americans owed their success in large measure to their artillery—the superior range of their guns, the quality and quantity of their ammunition, and the expertise with which the gunners handled their technology. The infantry too had better equipment than their Mexican

3. On Palo Alto/Resaca de la Palma, see John Eisenhower, *So Far from God* (New York, 1989), 71–85; K. Jack Bauer, *The Mexican War* (New York, 1974), 49–63; Charles DuFour, *The Mexican War* (New York, 1968), 64–83; William DePalo, *The Mexican National Army, 1822–1852* (College Station, Tex., 1997), 100.

counterparts, carrying weapons that fired farther, faster, and more accurately. Though most infantrymen bore muskets, some had rifles. Samuel Colt's revolver, patented in 1835, became a commercial success a dozen years later when the inventor got a wartime contract from the U.S. Army for an improved version. What later generations would recognize as the characteristic American mode of warfare, emphasizing industry, engineering, and technological proficiency, was already appearing.⁴ Though rural America, in the person of the Jacksonian President Polk, made the war, industrial-technological America won it.

War highlighted a great disparity between the economic and human resources of the combatant nations. The United States census of 1840 counted a burgeoning population of 17 million. The population of Mexico, by contrast, had declined by 10 percent during the prolonged disorders of her revolution against Spain and then leveled off; the government's calculation of 1842 (not an actual enumeration) showed 7 million Mexicans.⁵ The economies of the two countries displayed an even greater inequality. The years since 1815 had not been kind to the former New Spain; plagued by political instability, independent Mexico had not realized the economic potential of her natural resources. Fierce localism and poor transportation hindered the emergence of an integrated nationwide economy even more than they did in the United States. Independent Mexico received little European immigration and had even expelled its Spanish-born people, losing their talents and skills. Mexico's gross national product fell to less than half the peak attained in 1805; not until the 1870s did it exceed that level. In the absence of financial rationalization, the Mexican government became the prisoner of foreign and domestic creditors: By 1845, 87 percent of its revenues went for debt service.⁶ The republic's financial weakness severely restricted its war-making potential; the Mexican army found it easier to raise troops than to feed, clothe, arm, and pay them. Across the vast northern borderlands, tribal Indians counterattacked against Mexican settlements made in earlier generations, wreaking havoc almost with impunity. The inability of the Mexican nation to defend these areas against the Comanche, Navajo, and Kiowa en-

4. See Donald Houston, "The Superiority of American Artillery," in *The Mexican War*, ed. Odie Faulk and Joseph Stout (Chicago, 1973), 101-9; Waldo Rosebush, *Frontier Steel: The Men and Their Weapons* (Appleton, Wisc., 1958), 111-136.

5. Brantz Mayer, *Mexico as It Was and as It Is* (New York, 1844), 300-301.

6. David Weber, "The Spanish-Mexican Rim," in *The Oxford History of the American West*, ed. Clyde Milner et al. (New York, 1994), 73; Justin Smith, *The War with Mexico* (1919; Gloucester, Mass., 1963), II, 7.

couraged watching U.S. imperialists to judge that it would not be able to defend them against an invading army either.⁷

The war of the United States against Mexico has been called a "rehearsal" for the Civil War that began thirteen years later.⁸ This is true not only in the sense that many senior officers in both Union and Confederate armies got their first experience of combat as junior officers in Mexico. In a strategic sense as well, making war on Mexico presented problems analogous to those of the Civil War. Like the Union in that later conflict, the United States needed to invade and conquer a vast country in the face of determined resistance. As in the Civil War, the U.S. Navy played a major role by blockading ports and preventing the enemy from importing munitions. Mexico, like the South later, enjoyed the benefit of interior lines of communication, which Santa Anna would exploit in the largest battle of the war, Buena Vista. Like the Confederates, the Mexicans strove to gain foreign intervention to preserve their national integrity. Finally, like the Confederacy, Mexico hoped to prolong the conflict until the invaders tired and went home without getting what they came for.

Women played a more conspicuous role with the armies in the U.S.-Mexican War than they did in the Civil War. In Mexico, the armies on both sides had women with them. For generations, armies on campaign had included women in noncombatant positions such as nurses, laundresses, and cooks; in the U.S. Army some were on the payroll, others simply drew rations. Spanish had a word for them, *soldaderas*; in English, they were called "camp followers." Traditionally, officers brought their wives with them, although the U.S. Army followed this custom only occasionally in the Mexican War. Many camp followers, however, married enlisted men. In the Revolution, camp follower "Molly Pitcher" famously took over serving a cannon when her husband was killed; the British army carried its women all the way across the Atlantic. The camp followers in Taylor's army included six-foot-tall Sarah Borginnis, admired for her strength and courage under fire.⁹ Even more than their U.S. counterparts, Mexican soldiers relied for logistical support on their *soldaderas*, who sometimes brought their children. In desperate situations, women with the Mexican army assumed combat roles; a woman who led a cavalry charge by the lancers against the Americans at Monterrey earned

7. Brian Delay, "Independent Indians and the U.S.-Mexican War," *AHR* 112 (2007): 35-68.

8. Alfred Bill, *Rehearsal for Conflict: The War with Mexico* (New York, 1947).

9. Eisenhower, *So Far from God*, 72-73.

praise from her enemies as "a second Joan d'Arc."¹⁰ Because some camp followers were prostitutes, the international evangelical revival of the nineteenth century discouraged armies from employing them. However, the presence of male civilians with the army, such as sutlers, teamsters, and newspaper reporters, continued into the Civil War.

Officers in both armies could take personal servants with them. In the U.S. Army, this meant officers from the South brought slaves. Occasionally these slaves seized an opportunity to desert to freedom on the other side.¹¹ Free black men were not allowed to enlist in the army, though many of them served in the U.S. Navy, as they did in the civilian merchant marine.

The outbreak of warfare along the Rio Grande underscored the need for faster communication in North America. While Andrew Jackson had won the Battle of New Orleans after the treaty of peace had been signed, Old Rough and Ready won his victory before war had been declared, and long before any of the assistance Congress had so hastily authorized could reach him. At this time only 120 miles of telegraph wire had been strung in the United States, none of it south of Richmond. The war brought Professor Morse's experiment to rapid maturity; his Washington-Baltimore line hummed for two and a half hours transmitting President Polk's war message to Congress on May 11. The eagerness of both the government and the press for news from the front stimulated rapid expansion of the telegraph system. By June 1846, the wires connected Washington with Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. War news collected at New Orleans, where the *Picayune* published it. The *Picayune's* star reporter, George Wilkins Kendall, defined the new occupation of war correspondent. A pony express system transmitted copies of the *Picayune* to the closest telegraph line. By the end of the war the telegraph reached as far south as Charleston, and New Orleans news had been brought within three days of Washington. Even so, only one message at a time could be sent over the early wires, so bottlenecks developed. To pool telegraphed news, in 1848 six New York City papers formed the first wire service, the Associated Press.¹²

Because they underestimated the difficulty of the undertaking, President Polk and his advisors had not hesitated to force a war upon Mexico.

10. Elizabeth Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military* (Austin, Tex., 1990); Robert Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas* (New York, 1985), 137-41, quotation from 137.

11. James McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny* (New York, 1992), 112.

12. Kenneth Silverman, *Lightning Man* (New York, 2003), 276-79; Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, 17-19.

They knew that the Mexican armed forces were poorly equipped, and California and New Mexico weakly held, and that the Mexican government, essentially bankrupt, had no prospect of remedying these deficiencies. As a result, the U.S. administration anticipated that a war would be short, easy, and inexpensive. But this reflected little knowledge of Mexican geography, of the hazards of disease to an invading army, or of the Mexican people's resolve. The war had been under way only a few months when the Polk administration began trying to negotiate a peace treaty, assuming that its adversaries would quickly recognize the futility of resistance. Ironically, the winning side in this war was the side more eager to end it; bringing the Mexicans to the peace table proved difficult.

Except for one company of Texas Rangers, the small army that won at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma consisted of regulars, that is, professional soldiers. (The lieutenants included future Civil War generals George Gordon Meade, Ulysses Grant, and James Longstreet.) Most of the volunteers who arrived afterwards to reinforce Taylor's army came from the South and West, at first because of their proximity to the theater of operations, later because enthusiasm for the war cooled rapidly in the Northeast. Although the volunteers quickly swamped the regulars in numbers, their usefulness was limited not only by their lack of training and discipline but also by their enlistment for just one year, at the end of which they were free to leave and often did. Volunteer units were often raised by local politicians authorized to do so; they might prefer to recruit politically loyal men and close their eyes to others willing to serve. Taylor quickly concluded that the whole system of recruiting volunteers was inappropriate.¹³ The short enlistment term helped fill the ranks and reflected the overconfidence of the American public and the Polk administration; eventually, however, the government realized it should ask volunteers to serve for the duration of the war. The experience of the war with Mexico revealed the value of a professional army, especially the professional officer corps; talk of abolishing the military academy at West Point ended.

The president did not welcome the improved image of the Regular Army. Most career army officers were Whigs. They expected the peacetime army, like internal improvements, to benefit from Whig strong government; indeed, the Corps of Engineers, then as now, played a prominent role in constructing internal improvements. In addition, Democratic Party Indian policies—the Removal and the Seminole War—had

13. Zachary Taylor to R. W. Wood, Sept. 3, 1846, *Letters of Zachary Taylor from the Battlefields* (Rochester, N.Y., 1908), 51.

become unpopular with army officers who witnessed their effects at first hand.¹⁴ Polk needed victories, yet feared they might create another Whig military hero like William Henry Harrison. As one who knew wrote sarcastically, the president wanted “a small war, just large enough to require a treaty of peace and not large enough to make military reputations dangerous for the presidency.”¹⁵ The two most successful generals in the war, Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott, became subject to intense jealousy and suspicion by the president because of their Whig political connections; once they had served his purposes he did all he could to disparage their accomplishments and derail their careers. Polk sought to counteract the party affiliation of the regulars in his appointments of “generals of volunteers.” Every one of the thirteen generals Polk made was a Democrat, most of them former officeholders. (Other officers for the volunteer units were chosen by state governors or elected by the men they commanded.) The president even proposed that overall command of the army go to Democratic senator Thomas Hart Benton, though Congress never approved the Missourian’s commission as lieutenant general, and Benton, like most Van Buren Democrats, eventually fell out completely with Polk.¹⁶

Mexico maintained a standing army small by European standards but substantially larger than that of the United States. Besides its war with Texas, this army had also repelled invasions by Spain and France and had subdued several domestic insurrections in the generation since independence. As a result officers often had combat experience; indeed, many of those in the higher ranks had fought for the Spanish king during the Mexican Revolution. Unfortunately many officers felt more loyalty to the army as an institution than to their civilian superiors. Within the Mexican army the cavalry constituted an elite arm, famous for superb horsemanship. The infantry included peasant conscripts even in peacetime, often *indios* with little knowledge of the Spanish language or sense of Mexican nationality, equipped with old muskets sold off by the British army as surplus after the Napoleonic Wars. The antiquated artillery was the weakest branch, a deficiency for which Mexico would pay dearly in coming battles. Although the official salary scales in the Mexican army compared favorably with U.S. ones, in practice the army often went unpaid and unsupplied, and resorted to preying upon local civilians. As the

14. Richard Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army* (College Station, Tex., 1997), 34.

15. Thomas Hart Benton, *Thirty Years' View* (New York, 1856), II, 680.

16. See Marcus Cunliffe, *Soldiers and Civilians* (Boston, 1968), 305–18; Jeffrey A. Smith, *War and Press Freedom* (New York, 1999), 94–98.

war went on, the Mexican army increasingly had recourse to untrained levies, who might go into combat never having fired their weapons. Finally, the states of the Mexican union controlled local militia, called national guard units. Although not necessarily well equipped or trained, the national guard units manifested high *esprit de corps* and in defense of their homes stood up firmly to U.S. firepower.¹⁷

In Zachary Taylor’s force, immigrants made up at least half the enlisted personnel; this was typical of the composition of the regular U.S. Army. The Irish alone constituted a quarter and the Germans 10 percent. The Mexicans made strong appeals to U.S. troops to switch sides, targeting immigrants and Catholics in particular. Their broadsides emphasized the injustice of the invaders’ cause in the eyes of “civilized people” and stressed what North American Catholics had in common with Mexican Catholics. Alluding to well-known riots by U.S. Protestant nativist mobs, a Mexican pamphlet asked, “Can you fight by the side of those who put fire to your temples in Boston and Philadelphia?” Mexico also offered land grants to opposing soldiers who would desert and claim them: two hundred acres for a private, five hundred for a sergeant. Together, the inducements and propaganda had an effect. The first shots in the war were fired on April 4, 1846, not between Mexican and U.S. troops, but by American sentries at an immigrant deserter swimming across the Rio Grande to the Mexican side. (The episode prompted questions in Congress.) Around three hundred U.S. deserters, the great majority of them Catholics and/or immigrants, joined the Mexican army. The Mexicans organized them into a unit of their own named St. Patrick’s Battalion, for the largest single national group among the *sanpatricios* was of Irish origin.¹⁸ In response, the U.S. Army appointed its first two Catholic chaplains (one of whom was killed in service). Most of the 9,207 deserters from the U.S. armed forces did not take up arms against their former comrades but simply disappeared. The desertion rate in the war with Mexico, 8.3 percent, was the highest for any foreign war in United States history—twice as high as that in the Vietnam War. Brutal corporal punishments, doubts about the American cause, and the prejudices of nativist

17. Josefina Zoraida Vazquez, “War and Peace with the United States,” in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. Michael Meyer and William Beezley (New York, 2000), 362; DePalo, *Mexican National Army*, 97, 127; Robert Ryal Miller, *Shamrock and Sword: The Saint Patrick's Battalion in the U.S.-Mexican War* (Norman, Okla., 1989), 39.

18. Peter Stevens, *The Rogue's March: John Riley and the St. Patrick's Battalion* (Washington, 1999), 83, 110, 221. My estimate of the number of U.S. deserters in the Mexican army derives from Stevens, 241–42, and Dennis Wynn, *The San Patricio Soldiers* (El Paso, Tex., 1984), 20.

officers all contributed to the desertion problem. Sometimes regular soldiers deserted to join volunteer units, in search of bounties and a more lax discipline.¹⁹

The conquest of Mexico by the United States turned into a longer, harder, more expensive struggle than the politicians who provoked the conflict had expected. While the size of the armies was small, their casualty rates were high. Indeed, the war against Mexico has been accurately described as the deadliest that the United States has ever fought: One American soldier out of ten died in less than two years of service, while an almost equal number were incapacitated and sent home. Disease accounted for seven-eighths of the deaths. Living in crowded, unsanitary conditions and drinking impure water, the soldiers frequently fell prey to dysentery, body lice, and communicable infections. Regulars suffered less than volunteers, for they understood the importance of clean camps and well-cooked food, and they had all been inoculated against smallpox. In the end, the war cost the United States 12,518 lives and almost one hundred million dollars.²⁰ Mexico lost many more lives and suffered extensive economic and social disruption. Although the total casualties look small by comparison with those of the Civil War, they did not seem small at the time, nor was the American public mollified by the fact that Mexican casualties were higher.

Taylor's early victory over a larger army that chose its ground well got his country's war with Mexico off to an impressive start. Throughout the conflict the U.S. armed forces demonstrated superb strategic planning, tactical leadership, technical skill, and courage. The occupation of so much of Mexico's vast territory by a comparatively small army in less than two years represented an astonishing feat of arms. The extent of this military achievement has never been fully appreciated, because Americans preferred to believe that their national expansion occurred automatically, as the fulfillment of an inevitable and plainly manifest destiny. Once over, the war against Mexico was conveniently forgotten, along with the bitter partisan divisions it provoked among Americans themselves.

II

Although President Polk had invoked the danger to Taylor's troops in securing a swift declaration of war from Congress, he showed little further interest in them once the war had begun. As he laid out his plans to the

19. Miller, *Shamrock and Sword*, 23, 159, 165, 174. Paul Foos, *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair* (Chapel Hill, 2002), 109.

20. Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army*, 139-40.

cabinet on May 30, 1846, these called for rapid seizures of Alta California and Nuevo México, followed soon by a peace treaty on the basis of *uti possidetis*, the United States retaining permanently what its armies had occupied.²¹ Of the two Mexican provinces, California was by far the more important to U.S. policymakers.

As early as June 1845, Secretary of the Navy Bancroft had sent orders to Commodore John D. Sloat of the Pacific Squadron in Honolulu to occupy San Francisco immediately upon the outbreak of war with Mexico. The same month Captain John C. Frémont led a military expedition overland westward from St. Louis. If war broke out, both navy and army would be poised for action in California.²² Frémont's qualifications for his sensitive mission included extensive experience in the Far West; a capable, energetic wife, Jessie Benton Frémont; and the political influence of her father, Senator Thomas Hart Benton. The captain also had a strong sense of his own destiny and a talent for publicity. After crossing the Rockies and the Great Basin, he and his party startled the Mexican authorities in California, where Johann Sutter welcomed them to his estate called New Helvetia on 10 December. By the twenty-seventh, Frémont had made his way to Monterey and a conference with the U.S. consul there, Thomas Oliver Larkin. Larkin, ever an eager conspirator, got "the idea that great plans are meditated to be carried out by certain persons."²³ Frémont assured the Mexicans he was just exploring and would soon leave for Oregon. When his sixty-two heavily armed and ill-mannered visitors still remained on March 8, the suspicious authorities ordered them out. Frémont at first tried to defy the order, then moved his party very slowly northward. Along the way they massacred Indians.²⁴ After two months they reached Klamath Lake just over the California-Oregon border.

On April 17, 1846, a U.S. warship arrived at Monterey bearing Marine Lieutenant Archibald Gillespie with secret instructions from the State Department for both Larkin and Frémont, dated—the courier having come via Mexico City, Mazatlán, and Hawaii—the previous October. The letters appointed Larkin a confidential agent and told him to assure any potential rebels in California that "they would be received as

21. *Diary of James K. Polk*, ed. Milo Quaife (Chicago, 1910), I, 437-40.

22. On the planning of the two-pronged enterprise, see Russel Nye, *George Bancroft* (New York, 1944), 152.

23. Quoted in Neal Harlow, *California Conquered* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982), 62.

24. Tom Chaffin, *Pathfinder: John Charles Frémont and the Course of American Empire* (New York, 2002), 291.

brethren" should they wish to follow the Texan example and seek annexation by the United States. The administration expressed particular anxiety to preempt any British intervention in California.²⁵

(Polk was not the only one to think California might interest the British. Desperate for money to prepare for war with the United States, President Paredes had offered to mortgage California to Britain in return for a loan. If the British had accepted the proposal, the U.S. president's dream of acquiring California would have turned into a nightmare. Ironically, Polk's zealous pursuit of California almost lost it.)²⁶

Consul Larkin eagerly accepted his new assignment, and Gillespie hurried north, catching up with Frémont on May 8. The marine delivered his packet and filled the Pathfinder in on the latest intelligence and gossip, no doubt including that Larkin had told José Castro, *comandante* at Monterey, "Our Flag may fly here in thirty days." In his *Memoirs* Frémont claimed he learned that "possession of California was the chief object of the President." At the end of the conversation Frémont concluded—as he put it—that "my hour had come."²⁷ He turned and headed south, back to raise up a rebellion in California. Neither Frémont's actual orders nor the other messages brought him by Gillespie have ever come to light, so we do not know whether he followed his instructions or went beyond them. Perhaps the government left things ambiguous and expected Frémont to read between the lines. The role of a headstrong military leader on the frontier operating with unclear official authorization—the role of Jackson in Florida and Robert Stockton in Texas—was repeated by Frémont in California. Contemporaries recognized the pattern. Indeed, many filibustering expeditions tried to take over foreign territory by force of arms with no U.S. government authority at all (as happened over the years in Nicaragua, Cuba, Texas, Canada, and the Floridas).²⁸

In 1846, the population of Alta California numbered about fifteen thousand, not counting the much larger number of Native Americans who lived according to their own cultures and largely remained neutral in the war (though some did fight for or against Frémont). Only about

25. For an extended discussion of these orders, see Frederick Merk, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism* (New York, 1966), 111–32.

26. *Ibid.*, 112–15; David Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation* (Columbia, Mo., 1973), 593.

27. John C. Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life* (Chicago, 1887), 489; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 83, 85.

28. See Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld* (Chapel Hill, 2002).

eight hundred of these people were of U.S. origin, most of them very recent arrivals.²⁹ With the reckless daring that characterized his whole life, young Captain Frémont expected to make a successful revolution based on those eight hundred. Although no one in California knew yet that war had broken out between the United States and Mexico, everyone knew enough to think it likely. *Comandante* Castro began to make inquiries about undocumented foreign settlers, and though he was generous with permissions to remain, some emigrants from the U.S. became fearful of eviction. Emboldened by Frémont's presence and probably encouraged by him, a band of these settlers stole a hundred or so horses intended for Castro and then on 14 June abducted a prominent landowner and retired general, Mariano Vallejo, holding him prisoner for two months despite the fact that he was the best friend the Americans had among the *californios*. The next day the rebels seized the town of Sonoma and raised a flag with a crudely pictured grizzly bear on it. After fending off Castro's militia, naming Frémont as their leader, and spiking the seventeenth-century Spanish cannons in the undefended Castillo de San Joaquín overlooking the Golden Gate, the Bear Flaggers gave themselves a celebration at Sonoma on the Fourth of July. At Frémont's insistence, they declared the independence of California, then listened to a reading of Jefferson's Declaration (an invariable feature of American celebrations of the Fourth in those days), and—being in Mexico—danced a *fandango*.³⁰

The significance of this little rebellion was transformed three days later by the appearance of the United States Navy, which took possession of Monterey, as in 1842, without bloodshed. Although no official notification had reached him, Commodore Sloat had taken care to assure himself that there was a war, not wishing to repeat Commodore Jones's embarrassment. While cautious in that way, Sloat showed an astonishing presumptuousness of his own. He proclaimed not simply a wartime occupation but the permanent annexation of California to the United States, which he had no legal authority to do. The next day, July 8, Captain John B. Montgomery of the USS *Portsmouth* performed the same ceremony at Yerba Buena (renamed San Francisco in January 1847). Thus Sloat cut short the possibility of an independent California Republic. In Sonoma, the Stars and Stripes replaced the Bear Flag that had flown for three weeks. When HMS *Juno* visited San Francisco Bay on July 11, the Royal Navy could only observe an American fait accompli.³¹

29. Dufour, *Mexican War*, 138.

30. Harlow, *California Conquered*, 97–114.

31. Bauer, *Mexican War*, 172.

In the middle of the month Robert Stockton arrived, fresh from trying to "manufacture a war" in Texas, and succeeded the ailing Sloat as commander of the Pacific Squadron. Stockton managed to persuade Frémont that a naval commodore (equivalent to a brigadier general) outranked an army captain and then, recognizing a kindred spirit, delegated to him tactical command of U.S. forces on land, into which the Bear Flag rabble were incorporated. The two filibusterers, Stockton and Frémont, then went about conquering the rest of California. They acted with dispatch but also with such tactlessness that they completely alienated most of the *californios*, who, having long enjoyed considerable autonomy, might have welcomed the new regime. On August 13, Stockton occupied Los Angeles, a town of fifteen hundred that had replaced Monterey as Mexican civil capital of California. On August 17, a ship arrived at San Pedro carrying, at last, official news of the U.S. declaration of war. General Castro and Governor Pío Pico having departed with eight hundred followers, Stockton and Frémont thought the war in California over.

But in late September 1846, the *californios* rose in revolt against the U.S. occupation, using such weapons as they could find. In contrast to the ease with which the Mexican authorities had been expelled, subjugating these resolute people took hard fighting. They surrounded the U.S. garrison in Los Angeles under Lieutenant Gillespie, who then capitulated. A Swedish immigrant named Johan Braune ("Juan Flaco," or Lean John) carried news of the uprising five hundred miles north to San Francisco in five days; at one point he had to run twenty-seven miles between horses.³² Stockton thereupon headed back south by ship. Although a naval officer, he undertook operations on land with a mixed force of army, navy, marines, and local volunteers. Meanwhile the *californios* retook Santa Barbara and San Diego and captured Oliver Larkin. Stockton proved unable to reconquer southern California and awaited reinforcements under Stephen Watts Kearny, coming across the desert from New Mexico. At San Pascual on December 6, 1846, the overconfident Kearny attacked *californios* under Andres Pico; in the ensuing battle, the improvised lances of Pico's horsemen proved at least a match for the sabers of the U.S. cavalry. It turned out that Stockton had to rescue Kearny, not the other way around. After Stockton and Kearny had joined up, however, their combined forces were able to win the Battle of Los Angeles on January 8 (shouting "New Orleans!" as they charged, since it was the anniversary of Jackson's victory) and retake the capital. A few days later Frémont's

32. William Dofflemyer, "Juan Flaco: The Paul Revere of California," *Pacific Historian* 13 (1969): 5-21.

"California Battalion" showed up, a mixture of U.S. soldiers with settler volunteers and Native American allies, having marched all the way from northern California. The now outnumbered insurgents realized the game was up. Frémont, ignoring the two senior officers, signed a regional peace treaty with the *californios* at Cahuenga on January 13, 1847, that promised them the rights of American citizens and ended fighting in Alta California.³³

On January 19, Stockton prepared to return to sea and named Frémont "governor of the territory of California," though the commodore lacked any authority to establish civil rule.³⁴ Kearny actually possessed the proper authority from Washington to set up a government in California, but Stockton and Frémont refused to acknowledge this. After a month's standoff, Kearny fortunately prevailed; the erratic, contentious Frémont would not have made a good governor.³⁵ Stockton was replaced by Commodore Branford Shubrick; Frémont, by Colonel Richard Mason as military governor. Back east, Kearny charged Frémont with insubordination despite a long-standing friendship between the two. A court-martial attracting nationwide attention convicted Frémont, but his sentence of dismissal from the service was remitted by the president. The angry Pathfinder then resigned from the army anyway and became a popular celebrity. Polk might have acted differently if he had known that Frémont would run for president against the Democrats in 1856 on a platform favoring the restriction of slavery.³⁶

III

Second only to California in importance as an object of President Polk's war was New Mexico. For this acquisition too he planned carefully and early. In 1845, Polk sent out two major military reconnaissance expeditions into the West, one to the Rockies and the other through the Indian Territory to Santa Fe. They came back with useful intelligence, both geographical and human, relating to the Native American populations of the vast region in which the army would operate in years to come.³⁷

33. Lisbeth Haas, "War in California, 1846-1848," *California History* 76 (1997): 331-55.

34. Stockton's proclamation is quoted in Dale Walker, *Bear Flag Rising* (New York, 1999), 254.

35. On Frémont's personality, see Andrew Rolle, *John Charles Frémont: Character as Destiny* (Norman, Okla., 1991).

36. See Bernard DeVoto, *The Year of Decision, 1846* (Boston, 1943), 455-67.

37. William Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West* (New Haven, 1959), 109-11.

Upon the declaration of war in May 1846, it did not take long for Polk to assemble what was called the Army of the West with the conquest of New Mexico its first objective. As its commander he appointed Brigadier General Stephen Watts Kearny (pronounced "Karny"), a tough, capable officer with extensive frontier experience. On June 5, Kearny's advance guard departed from Fort Leavenworth in present-day eastern Kansas. The Army of the West included 648 regulars and 1,000 Missouri volunteers, with 16 cannons and enormous supply trains consisting of 1,556 wagons, 459 horses, 3,658 mules, and 14,904 oxen and cattle. The largest military force ever seen in that part of the world, it manifested the extraordinary logistical resources available to the United States. To facilitate grazing by so many animals, the army moved in a number of separate detachments.³⁸ Looking ahead to the postwar period, Kearny's army included Lieutenant William Emory of the topographical engineers, assigned to map the area in the expectation of its annexation. (One of the transcontinental railroads would follow a route he suggested.) Bringing up the rear of the invading force came another 1,000 Missouri volunteers and, all the way from Council Bluffs, Iowa, the Mormon Battalion of 500 men and 70 women camp followers.³⁹

The Mormon Battalion represented a bargain struck between James Knox Polk and Brigham Young. Young wanted the federal government's goodwill, especially when it began to seem likely that his intended destination would be annexed by the United States; Polk could use the troops. It was a heavy tax on the community's manpower, but the soldiers' pay would help the financially hard-pressed migration. Brother Brigham prompted men to volunteer and chose the company officers; Kearny chose Lieutenant Colonel Philip Cooke, a gentile, as the battalion commander.

In spite of the formidable nature of the forces at his command, Kearny preferred to avoid a battle. While armies usually try to keep their strength and disposition secret from the enemy, Kearny deliberately revealed his, intending to convince the *nuevomexicanos* that resistance was useless. In this he followed orders, for his civilian superiors hoped to disrupt the profitable commerce between Santa Fe and St. Louis as little as possible. In the generation since Mexico opened up her markets in 1821, the Santa Fe Trail had become the premier mercantile artery of the West, and Americans traded even as far south as Saltillo and Chihuahua. Within Santa Fe itself, some merchants, both Hispanic and Anglo, regarded a takeover by

38. Bauer, *Mexican War*, 127–34.

39. Stanley Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball* (Urbana, Ill., 1981), 151.

the United States as facilitating their commercial relations; these were called the "American party." A majority of people, however, including the Catholic clergy, regarded the prospect as an imposition of alien rule. Four thousand *nuevomexicanos* volunteered to defend Mexican sovereignty against the invaders. The governor assembled them at Apache Canyon, an ideal defensive location through which Kearny's army would have to pass to reach Santa Fe.⁴⁰

Manuel Armijo, a self-made businessman, had been an effective governor of New Mexico. In 1841, his soldiers had captured an expedition by the Republic of Texas against Santa Fe and had marched the prisoners to Mexico City in triumph. This time, however, Kearny's army dwarfed the Texan one. On August 12, a delegation from the invaders arrived under a flag of truce. Armijo parleyed long in private with James Magoffin, Kearny's civilian agent. Within a few days Armijo disbanded his militia and fled to Chihuahua. Many Mexicans accused him of having taken a bribe from the *gringos*. Armijo did seem flush with money, and Magoffin later requested a reimbursement of fifty thousand dollars from the U.S. Treasury, of which thirty thousand was paid. Still, the governor might have decided that his volunteers with their primitive weapons could not long delay the inevitable and wanted to avoid the bloodshed. Armijo's motives, like those of Santa Anna, have long been the subject of speculation.⁴¹

On August 18, 1846, the Army of the West marched through Apache Canyon, entered Santa Fe without firing a shot and raised the Stars and Stripes. The soldiers had come 856 miles since June. The following Sunday General Kearny attended Mass, hoping the *santafeciños* would see it as a conciliatory gesture. The Americans built a fort with the aid of local stonemasons; two officers and a scholarly enlisted man drew up a new legal code for New Mexico. The Spanish crown had intended its northern borderlands to constitute a barrier against intrusion, but California, New Mexico, and Texas all wound up serving as gateways for it.⁴²

Eighteen-year-old Susan Magoffin (sister-in-law of secret agent James) kept a diary that tells us much of what we know about life in occupied

40. Howard Lamar, *The Far Southwest* (New York, 1970), 56–65; Stephen Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe* (Norman, Okla., 2002) 294–310.

41. Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, II, 682–84; Daniel Tyler, "Governor Armijo's Moment of Truth," in Faulk and Stout, *The Mexican War*, 137–43; Brooke Caruso, *The Mexican Spy Company* (London, 1991), 99–100.

42. Lamar, *Far Southwest*, 63; see also Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800–1850* (Cambridge, Eng., 2005).

Santa Fe and the difficulties there of sorting out true and false rumors of events elsewhere. Kearny sent detachments out to show the Apaches, Navajos, and Utes that from now on they would share their country with a more formidable white presence. It had been expected that much of the Army of the West would continue on from New Mexico to cooperate in the conquest of California. Accordingly, Kearny set out on September 25 for San Diego with the famous Kit Carson as guide, though when he heard that Stockton and Frémont had subdued California, he decided to take a mere hundred dragoons with him. Only later did Kearny realize that his expedition would have to fight the *californios*.

Before leaving, Kearny dispatched the 924 volunteers of the First Missouri Regiment under Colonel Alexander Doniphan to Chihuahua, more than five hundred miles to the south, in order to keep its trade within the orbit of Santa Fe. Three hundred wagonloads of traders and goods went with the expedition; Chihuahua would “buy American” at gunpoint. Doniphan had demonstrated his courage in Missouri as a gentile lawyer willing to stand up for Mormon rights. On this remarkable expedition he would demonstrate his qualities once again. Doniphan and his force accomplished their mission, along the way winning two battles and living off the country, to the anger of the luckless Mexican civilians in their path. His tough frontiersmen then marched another six hundred miles east to hook up with Taylor’s army, and when they got home at the end of their one-year enlistments they found their exploits had become legendary, even if they had little impact on the outcome of the war.⁴³

In October both the Second Missouri Regiment and the Mormon Battalion arrived in Santa Fe. The Missourians stayed as an occupying force, but, after resting for a week, most of the Mormons continued on to California, following a somewhat different route from Kearny’s in order to increase geographical information, especially for a railroad route. They arrived in San Diego on January 29 and 30, 1847, ragged and footsore, a little too late to participate in the fighting. They had marched two thousand miles from Iowa and endured many hardships, particularly in the final leg of their journey, when they had to disassemble their wagons, carry them over the mountains, and put them back together again. These infantrymen were discharged in July 1847 without ever having heard a shot fired in anger. Brigham Young had promised that none of them would be lost to enemy action, and so it proved, though only 335 men and 3 women got all the way to San Diego. After discharge, some of them undertook the

43. There is a vivid account of Doniphan’s exploits in DeVoto, *Year of Decision*, 382–407; a more sober assessment in Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe*, 404–23.

long journey back to Iowa to rejoin the Mormons there; some worked in California for a while. The great majority made their way eventually to Utah.⁴⁴

Washington had instructed Kearny to leave as many Mexican officials as possible in office; instead, before his departure he appointed a civil government for New Mexico controlled by the “American party” merchant faction and headed by Charles Bent, the owner of Bent’s Fort, who had married into a prominent Mexican family. These merchants welcomed the sudden expansion of trade with St. Louis (over \$1,000,000 worth of merchandise in the first few months, triple any previous year’s total).⁴⁵ Although this government included some Hispanics, the old Santa Fe elite and the Roman Catholic clergy felt marginalized, and those in all social classes who had wanted to resist the *yanquis* remained unreconciled. Undisciplined, carousing volunteer soldiers made the occupation unpopular. The Pueblo Indians, who had rebelled against Spanish and Mexican authority in the past, resented the newly imposed authority of the United States. On January 17, 1847, Pueblos and Mexicans joined together and rose against the U.S. occupation. The uprising centered in Taos, the second most important city of New Mexico and a trading center in its own right. Governor Bent, there on business, was killed along with others of the “American party” and his scalp paraded through the streets. Colonel Sterling Price, who had succeeded Kearny, moved quickly to crush the rebellion where it had broken out and nip it in the bud where it was still a conspiracy. The last group of insurgents were captured fighting in the Taos Pueblo Church, where they had taken refuge, on February 4. Instead of being treated as prisoners of war, sixteen of the captives were tried for murder and treason, convicted, and hanged. Hector Lewis Garrard, a young American who observed their trial, wrote: “I left the room, sick at heart. Justice! Out upon the word, when its distorted meaning is the warrant for murdering those who defend to the last their country and their homes.” On June 26, 1847, Secretary of War Marcy ruled that the *insurrectos* could not be guilty of treason, since they owed no allegiance to the United States, but by this time all the sentences save one had been carried out.⁴⁶

After the suppression of the uprising, New Mexico remained under an effective military dictatorship for four years until the organization of a

44. Norma Ricketts, *The Mormon Battalion* (Logan, Utah, 1996).

45. David Dary, *The Santa Fe Trail* (New York, 2000), 194.

46. James Crutchfield, *Tragedy at Taos* (Plano, Tex., 1995), 144; Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe*, 381–402, Garrard quoted on 400.

territorial government authorized by Congress in the Compromise of 1850. Of New Mexico's fifty to sixty thousand people in 1846, only about one thousand civilians were Anglo-American.⁴⁷ Although her population greatly exceeded that of either Texas or California at the time, New Mexico would have to wait sixty-six years for the statehood they both received promptly.

IV

Americans like to suppose that political partisanship diminishes in wartime. Whatever the general merits of this supposition, it does not apply to the war with Mexico, so highly politicized in both its origin and its conduct. Abraham Lincoln called it "a war of conquest fought to catch votes."⁴⁸ Yet the war turned out to be much less politically popular than American expansion and its slogan "manifest destiny." Notwithstanding the public appeal of imperialist braggadocio, the actual waging of war turned off many Americans outside the Southwest; the initial enthusiasm proved short-lived. Although successful on the battlefield and reaping huge territorial gains for the United States, the war with Mexico did not redound to the political advantage of either President Polk or his party.

Whig opposition to the war displayed remarkable consistency. The Whigs had taken strong exception to the assertion that even before the congressional declaration, war existed by the act of Mexico. They continued to dispute this throughout the war, arguing that President Polk, not President Paredes, bore responsibility for the resort to force; the invasion of the disputed territory and blockade of the Rio Grande, not the skirmish of April 25, marked the initiation of hostilities. "Shut your eyes to the whole course of events through the last twelve years," declared Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*, "and it will become easy to prove that we are a meek, unoffending, ill used people, and that Mexico has kicked, cuffed and grossly imposed upon us. Only assume premises enough, as Polk does, and you may prove that it is New Orleans which has just been threatened with a cannonade instead of Matamoras [*sic*], and that it is the Mississippi which has been formally blockaded by a stranger fleet and army instead of the Rio del Norte [Rio Grande]."⁴⁹ Polk's abuse of his powers as commander in chief reminded Whigs of Andrew Jackson; once

47. Lamar, *Far Southwest*, 71, 82.

48. "Speech at Wilmington, Delaware" (June 10, 1848), *Collected Works of AL*, I, 476.

49. *New York Tribune*, May 13, 1846, quoted in Frederick Merk, "Dissent in the Mexican War," in S. E. Morison, F. Merk, and F. Freidel, *Dissent in Three American Wars* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), 40-41.

again they took up the cudgels against executive usurpation. "No power but Congress can declare war," noted Daniel Webster, "but what is the value of this constitutional provision, if the President of his own authority may make such military movements as must bring on war?"⁵⁰ Surprisingly, American victories in battle did nothing to moderate Whig disapproval of the war. Except in Louisiana and Mississippi, southern Whigs condemned the war as vigorously as northern ones. In a series of speeches displaying eloquence and learning, Representative Alexander Stephens of Georgia decried Polk's "masked design of provoking Mexico to war" and the administration's "principle that patriotism consists in pliant subserviency to Executive will."⁵¹

Most of the Whig members of Congress continued to vote supplies to the armed forces while denouncing the administration for sending them into battle. They believed the soldiers and sailors entitled to the support of the government even when the government had abused their trust. Although historians have usually characterized their behavior as inconsistent, these Whig politicians accurately reflected the attitude of their Whig constituents. While Whigs disapproved of starting the war, they remained patriotic Americans, and most of them rejoiced at news of American victories. A radical minority of northern Whigs, however, refused to vote for war appropriations and demanded to bring the troops home. Joshua Giddings, the burly and outspoken radical Whig representative from the Ohio Western Reserve, invoked the example of the Whig members of Parliament who refused to vote in favor of supplies to wage an unjust war against the rebelling American colonists. Interestingly, the most defiant statement of opposition to the war came not from a radical but from a respected mainstream Whig, Senator Thomas Corwin of Ohio. Addressing the proadministration expansionists on February 11, 1847, he declared, "If I were a Mexican I would tell you, 'Have you not room enough in your own country to bury your dead men? If you come into mine we will greet you with bloody hands, and welcome you to hospitable graves.'"⁵² Fourteen years later, Abraham Lincoln appointed Tom Corwin minister plenipotentiary to Mexico.

Opposition to any further territorial acquisitions from Mexico (beyond Texas) constituted a policy on which all Whigs, moderate and radical,

50. Daniel Webster, "Public Dinner at Philadelphia" (Dec. 2, 1846), *Writings and Speeches* (Boston, 1903), IV, 31-32.

51. *Congressional Globe*, 29th Cong., 1st sess., 15 (June 16, 1846), Appendix, 948; *ibid.*, 2nd sess., 16 (Feb. 12, 1847), Appendix, 351.

52. *Congressional Globe*, 29th Cong., 2nd sess., Appendix, 216-17.

could agree. In principle, this represented a logical deduction from their opposition to a war of aggression. If the war was unjust, it would be immoral to use it to force Mexico to cede land to the United States. The most careful presentation of this position came from the eighty-six-year-old Jeffersonian statesman Albert Gallatin: *Peace with Mexico* (1847).⁵³ The policy of "No Territory" also made sense in practical terms. Whig politicians realized that a debate over whether to extend slavery into newly acquired territories would break their party wide apart across sectional lines. Never having been much enamored of the advantages of dispersing population across a vast territory, they preferred to forgo territory rather than see their party destroyed and the Union itself threatened by an argument over the spoils of war.⁵⁴

Most Democratic politicians felt they had less to fear from expansion than the Whigs, their northern voters being less sensitive to slavery as a moral issue. Nevertheless, the Democratic Party was by no means immune to harm from the issue of slavery extension, as events would demonstrate. Indeed, some Democrats also came to oppose the war in varying degrees. Calhoun had resisted its declaration and continued to fear the consequences of the territorial acquisitions he knew Polk wanted from it. Disappointed at not being retained as secretary of state, Calhoun had reason to fear Polk as a rival for the leadership of southern sectionalism. Eventually the president gave up trying to keep Calhoun on board; he "has no patriotism," Young Hickory concluded.⁵⁵ But Democratic discontent extended to the North and West too. Some Democrats there felt they had been tricked into backing Polk's demand for all of Texas only to be betrayed by him in their own demand for all of Oregon. And some who had nursed a romantic vision of peaceful expansion found themselves embarrassed by Polk's militancy toward Mexico; these included John L. O'Sullivan, the very editor who had made the term "manifest destiny" famous. When O'Sullivan went public with his doubts about the necessity of the war, he was promptly fired from the *New York Morning News*; he then resigned from the *Democratic Review* and sold his interest in it. Without O'Sullivan, the *Democratic Review* proved unable to sustain its intellectual distinction.⁵⁶

53. *Writings of Albert Gallatin*, ed. Henry Adams (New York, 1960), III, 555-91.

54. See Michael Morrison, "New Territory Versus No Territory," *Western Historical Quarterly* 23 (1992): 25-51.

55. Polk, *Diary*, II, 459 (April 5, 1847).

56. Robert Sampson, *John L. O'Sullivan and His Times* (Kent, Ohio, 2003), 201-4; Gilman Ostrander, *Republic of Letters* (Madison, Wisc., 1999), 220.

Other issues made for Democratic difficulties too; the administration's legislative program exposed rifts within the party. The Walker Tariff, named for the secretary of the Treasury and passed at his behest in the summer of 1846, repealed the Whig Tariff of 1842 and abandoned the principle of protection by substituting modest ad valorem rates for product-specific duties. This reaped goodwill among members of the British Liberal Party and American exporters committed to free trade, but it dismayed protectionist Pennsylvania Democrats in Congress, forcing them to choose between party loyalty and the economic interest of their constituents. The Walker Tariff only passed the Senate thanks to the votes of the two new (Democratic) senators from Texas. Meanwhile, a group of northwestern Democratic congressmen made common cause with the Whigs to pass an internal improvements bill providing federal subsidies for the dredging of rivers and harbors. Polk vetoed the measure, following the example of Jackson's Maysville Road Veto; this left its Democratic supporters feeling that the president cared nothing for their concerns. All these factors combined with the administration's general lack of candor to undermine trust, even among Democrats. Democratic senator John Dix of New York wrote Martin Van Buren that in Polk's war, "fraud is carried out to its consummation by a violation of every just consideration of national dignity, duty, and policy."⁵⁷

In the long run, the most significant division of American opinion exacerbated by the war in Mexico was that between North and South. The doctrine of America's manifest destiny had not sprung originally from a slave power conspiracy but from policies with nationwide appeal and deep cultural roots. When James Knox Polk came into office, territorial expansion did not constitute a sectional issue but a party one. Beyond party advantage, Polk's desire for California and New Mexico seems (insofar as one can speculate about this secretive person's motives) prompted more by a geopolitical vision of national power, to make the United States dominant over North America, than by an intention to strengthen the institution of slavery. Polk did not share Calhoun's disposition to view all matters in terms of their impact on the slavery question. Nevertheless, as his term went by, his administration increasingly appeared narrowly southern in outlook. The president's imperialist objectives came to prompt a bitter sectional dispute over slavery's extension, bearing out Calhoun's foreboding.

57. Michael Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party* (New York, 1999), 232-37; John Dix to Martin Van Buren, May 16, 1846, quoted in John Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War* (Madison, Wisc., 1973), 21.

What brought the simmering discontent of northern Democrats to a boil was Polk's bizarre conspiracy with Santa Anna, now exiled in Cuba. Secret discussions with a go-between named Alejandro Atocha persuaded Polk that if he arranged safe passage back to Mexico for Santa Anna, the former dictator would seize power again and then conclude a treaty of peace along the lines Polk desired. This plot had actually been laid even before the war began and helps explain Polk's confidence that it would be a short one. In August 1846, by prior arrangement, a British ship bearing Santa Anna from Cuba passed through the U.S. blockade into the port of Veracruz. Military defeats having discredited Paredes and his *centralistas*, Santa Anna exploited his old charisma and did indeed return to the presidency within a few months. But the consummate opportunist decided to betray the *gringos* rather than his countrymen. He broke whatever promise he had made to Polk, allied with the prowar wing of the *federalistas*, and set about rallying the Mexican public to support the war effort. Atocha's proposal had taken advantage of the administration's proclivity for deviousness and secrecy to help Santa Anna regain power. As Thomas Hart Benton aptly expressed it in his memoirs, "Never were men at the head of a government [in wartime] less imbued with military spirit, or more addicted to intrigue" than Polk and his cabinet. In December 1846, congressional Whigs exposed the Polk-Santa Anna conspiracy. For a time the administration denied its existence, but Polk admitted it in his Annual Message to Congress later that month. The Democratic congressional majority refused to conduct the full inquiry into the subject that Whigs demanded. Santa Anna's return animated Mexican resistance and prolonged the war. Polk finally realized that he had been duped and that Alejandro Atocha was "a great scoundrel."⁵⁸

When he was expecting an early peace settlement with Santa Anna, Polk requested from Congress in August 1846 a \$2 million appropriation for "defraying any extraordinary expenses which may be incurred in the intercourse between the United States and foreign nations." The president wanted the funds available for a quick down payment on the purchase of land from Mexico. Any Mexican government that ceded territory to the United States would risk overthrow, and this money (Polk explained in his diary) would enable it to pay the army and keep it loyal.⁵⁹ Others noticed that the money would also be available for bribes—perhaps to Santa Anna himself. The bill betrayed the administration's intention to obtain territorial concessions, though this had not yet been publicly avowed as a

war aim. Whig radicals had been accusing the administration of seeking to expand the area of slavery; now, other northerners came to share this concern. When Representative Hugh White, a New York Whig, warned that Congress must prevent Polk from employing the requested money to extend slavery, a dozen northern Democratic congressmen decided to send Polk a message that he could no longer take them for granted. One of them, David Wilmot of Pennsylvania, introduced an amendment to the \$2 million appropriation specifying that slavery should not be permitted in any territory acquired by it. Wilmot's famous "proviso" passed the House, 83 to 64, on a cross-party sectional vote. In the Senate, the entire appropriation, proviso and all, was filibustered⁶⁰ to death during the waning hours of the session by a prominent Whig in defense of the party's principle of No Territory.

Wilmot and his friends belonged to the Van Buren wing of the party, who had hoped to salvage some of the vast expanse of Texas for free soil and felt that Polk had manipulated and misled them on this and other matters. The Van Burenites had no representative in the cabinet and had been ignored in the distribution of patronage, even in New York. But Wilmot's proviso appealed to many besides Van Buren followers. All northern Whig Representatives and fifty-two of the fifty-six northern Democrats in the House voted for it. Polk sent his request for money to make peace with Mexico on the same day (August 8, 1846) that he submitted the Oregon Treaty to the Senate, making it at last clear to all northern Democrats that although they had supported his expansionist plans in the southwest, he would not support theirs for the 54° 40' line. Polk's disposition to compromise with Britain but not with Mexico no doubt reflected his estimate of the different power of the two countries, but contemporaries attributed it to the dominance of the South over the North in policymaking. Growing dissatisfaction among the northern electorate with southern political power had already manifested itself in the repeal of the gag rule sixteen months earlier. Now, opposition to the extension (as distinguished from the existence) of slavery proved to be a cause on which many ordinary northern voters and politicians from both major parties could join together.

Wilmot differentiated himself sharply from the abolitionist movement. He framed his measure as an appeal to the white working class, not as a humanitarian benefit to blacks. Calling his proposal the "White Man's

58. Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, II, 680–82; Polk, *Diary*, III, 329 (Feb. 7, 1848).

59. Polk, *Diary*, II, 76–77 (Aug. 10, 1846).

60. "Filibuster," derived from a Dutch word for "freebooter," had two distinct meanings in this period: adventurers undertaking illegal expeditions, and the obstruction of legislative action by endless debate.

Proviso," he boasted that his purpose was to "preserve for free white labor a fair country, a rich inheritance, where the sons of toil, of my own race and own color, can live without the disgrace which association with Negro slavery brings upon free labor."⁶¹ The proviso remained an issue in the second session of the Twenty-ninth Congress in the winter of 1846–47; it passed the House again (repeatedly), but not the Senate, where the South was stronger. In the end, Polk got his appropriation (increased to \$3 million) without Wilmot's amendment—and without the Whig amendment sponsored by Georgia's John Berrien, ruling out the acquisition of territory from Mexico altogether. But ten northern state legislatures adopted resolutions endorsing Wilmot's proviso in various forms, demonstrating its continued potential as an issue.⁶²

The Wilmot Proviso tended to identify opposition to the war, at least in the North, with opposition to slavery and/or its extension. Abolitionists had already made the link; so had the radical land-reformers like George Henry Evans who targeted the northern working class. Opposition to the war drew strength from religious denominations that had long harbored antislavery advocates, notably New School Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Freewill Baptists, Unitarians, and Quakers, though it was by no means confined to them. A few war critics embraced the entirely pacifist position of the American Peace Society and its international movement, but more typically they objected to the particular war then being waged. (The Peace Society gave Polk credit for avoiding war with Britain, if not Mexico.) Opposition to the war and its territorial aggrandizement required at least a qualified rejection of the assumption that the spread of American civilization constituted a moral good and heralded the millennium. Abolitionists of course had long challenged acceptance of America's special virtue, though it had been commonly assumed by other evangelicals. Now, many other Protestants challenged it, all the more remarkably in a war directed at a Catholic people. "Never have I so much feared the judgments of God on us as a nation," warned James W. Alexander, an Old School Presbyterian minister and war critic.⁶³ An erring Israel, the United States needed prophetic voices to recall the nation to its proper (rather than its "manifest") destiny.

61. Quoted in Charles Going, *David Wilmot* (New York, 1924), 174.

62. Eric Foner, "The Wilmot Proviso Revisited," *JAH* 56 (1969), 262–79; Michael Holt, *The Fate of Their Country* (New York, 2004), 26; Michael Morrison, *Slavery and the American West* (Chapel Hill, 1997), 40–45, 72–81.

63. Richard Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven, 1993), 143–47 quotation from 146. See also Jonathan Sassi, *Republic of Righteousness* (New York, 2001), 185–95.

Geographically, New England and areas of New England settlement provided the most fertile ground for radical Whiggery, as for antislavery. In Massachusetts the radicals felt strong enough to challenge the moderate Whigs, and the party split into factions, nicknamed "Conscience" Whigs and "Cotton" Whigs, that persisted until Lincoln's Republican Party reunited them. The Conscience Whigs included practically all the Transcendentalists. Posterity remembers Henry David Thoreau's lecture-turned-essay against slavery and the war upon Mexico that we call "Civil Disobedience," to which he gave a more militant title, "Resistance to Civil Government." More widely read was the poetry of Garrisonian abolitionist James Russell Lowell. Adopting the persona and dialect of a simple Yankee farmer, "Hosea Biglow," Lowell wrote:

They may talk o' Freedom's airy
Tell they're purple in the face,—
It's a grand gret cemetary
Fer the birthrights of our race;
They jest want this Californy
So's to lug new slave-states in
To abuse ye, an' to scorn ye,
An' to plunder ye like sin.⁶⁴

The administration also had its literary supporters, including Nathaniel Hawthorne and Fenimore Cooper. Walt Whitman, who still thought of himself as a Jacksonian Democrat (though he would break with the party in 1848), wrote in the *Brooklyn Eagle* soon after the war started: "What has miserable, inefficient Mexico—with her superstition, her burlesque upon freedom, her actual tyranny by the few over the many—what has she to do with the great mission of peopling the new world with a noble race? Be it ours, to achieve that mission!" The term "race" was used loosely but confidently in such assertions, with no fixed definition. "Race" provided the most common justification in the United States for expropriating land from Mexico, as it did for taking that of the Native American tribes. Captain William S. Henry very typically remarked of the disputed area along the Rio Grande, "It certainly never was intended that this lovely land should remain in the hands of an ignorant and degenerate race." Occasionally a few Americans dissented from this kind of racial presumption. Joel Poinsett, the South Carolinian who had been John Quincy Adams's minister to Mexico, understood its people perhaps

64. Originally published in newspapers, the collected poems then appeared as James Russell Lowell, *The Biglow Papers* (Boston, 1848), quotation from 6–7.

better than anyone else in the United States and urged his countrymen to live alongside them in friendship: "Why we are in the habit of abusing them now as a degraded race I do not understand."⁶⁵

The midterm congressional elections, scattered, as was then the practice, through several months of 1846-47, turned against the administration, particularly in the North. From being outnumbered almost two to one (143 to 77) in the House of Representatives, the Whigs won enough seats to gain a narrow majority (115 to 108). Although the Democrats gained in the Senate, the House results significantly altered the balance of power. The results realized Van Buren's fear that the war would hurt northern Democrats because Whigs could "charge with plausibility if not truth" that it was "waged for the extension of slavery."⁶⁶ Whigs certainly regarded the outcome as a vote of no confidence in the war, even though it was by no means the only issue in the election. Fear of the Wilmot Proviso stiffened the commitment of southern Whigs to the principle of No Territory. The Walker Tariff aroused the fears of protectionists, and the Whigs gained House seats in Pennsylvania. They gained still more in New York state, where they benefited from the votes of the anti-rent movement and the split in the Democratic Party between Van Burenites (now called "Barnburners") and the administration supporters (called "Hunkers" by their critics because they "hunkered" after offices that only Washington could bestow).⁶⁷ Under the ponderous timetable of the Constitution prior to the Twentieth Amendment, the Thirtieth Congress would not take office until December 1847, by which time the major battles in Mexico had all been fought. But the elections put Polk on notice that his administration did not enjoy popularity enough to risk asking for a tax increase to finance the war during the congressional session in the winter of 1846-47. Polk devoted two-thirds of December's Annual Message to Congress to justifying the war. He complained that those who accused his administration of "aggression" would only "protract the war" and give the enemy "aid and comfort." This was a serious charge, for it used the words of the Constitution that define treason. Whig representative Daniel King of Massachusetts made this answer: "If an earnest desire to save my country from ruin and disgrace be treason, then I am a traitor."⁶⁸

65. Whitman in the *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 7, 1846; the other quotations come from Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, 291, 294. See also Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981).

66. Van Buren, quoted in Holt, *Fate of Their Country*, 18.

67. Holt, *Rise and Fall of Whig Party*, 238-45.

68. "Second Annual Message" (Dec. 8, 1846), *Presidential Messages*, IV, 471-506, quotations from 473; Daniel King quoted in Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War*, 79.

V

Old Rough and Ready had his shortcomings as a commander. The same casual attitude he showed toward uniforms and ceremony, which made him popular with his troops, he also displayed toward hygiene. His soldiers suffered high rates of disease, especially dysentery, in Corpus Christi, Matamoros, and then in Camargo, the Mexican town where the Army of Occupation gradually moved during the sweltering months of July and August 1846. One in eight of the U.S. soldiers encamped at Camargo for six weeks that summer died there—a loss as bad as if they had fought a battle and suffered heavy casualties. "I have seen more suffering since I came out here than I could have imagined," observed Lieutenant George McClellan; "the volunteers literally die like dogs."⁶⁹ Apparently, some volunteers never learned not to fill their canteens and kettles downstream from where others washed their horses.

Taylor tolerated a certain laxity about discipline too. The young men who responded to the call to fight for America's manifest destiny brought with them the fierce individualism, propensity to violence, and racial animosity so widespread in civilian society. These rowdy volunteers fought with each other and the army's regulars. They pillaged the local Mexican civilians, sometimes murdering them in retaliation for real or imagined affronts. A Regular Army private wrote to his father, "The majority of the Volunteers sent here are a disgrace to the nation; think of one of them shooting a woman while washing on the bank of the river—merely to test his rifle; another tore forcibly from a Mexican woman the rings from her ears. Their officers take no notice of these outrages."⁷⁰ The Texans got an especially bad reputation for seeking to avenge wrongs committed during their revolution, but it was Arkansas volunteers who perpetrated a massacre of twenty to thirty Mexican civilians, in response to the killing of one of their own number.⁷¹ Although many U.S. officers deplored all this, they did little to prevent it, and the administration refused to support legislation that would have helped bring the volunteers under military justice. Indeed, the ideology of American expansion seemed to legitimate the assertion of force by the strong and the destruction or expropriation of those who resisted. As the war went on, the administration actually encouraged harsh treatment of occupied areas in an effort to press the

69. Quoted in Milton Meltzer, *Bound for the Rio Grande* (New York, 1974), 111.

70. *Charleston Mercury*, March 2, 1847, quoted in Foos, *Short, Offhand, Killing Affair*, 116.

71. For an eyewitness account, see John Chamberlain, *My Confession*, ed. William Goetzmann (Austin, Tex., 1996; written 1855-61), 132-34.

Mexicans to sign a peace treaty ceding land. Not surprisingly, out of the sullen local populace arose guerrilla fighters, usually termed *rancheros*, who raided the *yanquis* as opportunity presented, provoking, inevitably, more reprisals.

The strategic city of Monterrey (then often spelled Monterey), population fifteen thousand, capital of the state of Nuevo León, constituted Taylor's military objective. But his army could move only slowly because of a shortage of transport. Kearny's Army of the West (to which the War Department gave priority) had taken most of the wagons immediately available, and the Polk administration both wanted and expected an inexpensive, brief war. In September Taylor substituted Mexican pack mules for wagons, and, keeping baggage to a minimum, advanced toward Monterrey with 3,200 regulars and 3,000 volunteers, leaving 4,700 behind because they were either too ill to march or had no way to transport their supplies.⁷²

General Pedro de Ampudia, back in command after Arista's defeat, with 7,000 soldiers and perhaps 3,000 local irregulars, awaited the invaders approaching Monterrey from the northeast. His people had barricaded the city itself and fortified its outlying defenses. On September 19, following a council of war with his officers, Taylor sent General William Worth with 2,000 soldiers in a wide arc around the north of the city to seize the road going west to Saltillo, thereby cutting off the garrison of Monterrey from either supplies or reinforcements. Such an ambitious "turning movement" represented a risky tactic. Worth spent the twentieth getting into position and then attacked the road on the morning of September 21. Taylor's main body meanwhile created a diversion in Ampudia's front. Worth's enterprise, executed with heroism and efficiency, succeeded. The diversion, however, produced heavy U.S. casualties, perhaps because Taylor underestimated the Mexican defenders, perhaps because his subordinate commanders tried too hard to drive their attacks home instead of merely keeping the enemy busy. On the second day of the battle, Worth again made use of morning fog as cover for infantry attacks, then won an artillery duel in the afternoon sunshine. By the end of the day he had taken the Bishop's Palace, a key Mexican strongpoint. After this Ampudia pulled his forces back into the city itself.

The third day of the battle saw Worth's and Taylor's forces enter Monterrey from west and east, respectively, leading to fierce house-to-house combat that left both sides exhausted. Maria Josefa Zozaya, a Mexican woman, ministered to the intermingled wounded of the two armies until

72. Eisenhower, *So Far from God*, 111.

she was killed; the U.S. press called her "the heroine martyr of Monterrey."⁷³ The defenders had stored ammunition in the cathedral, but their enemies found this out and prepared to shell it. Rather than have a giant explosion devastate the city, Ampudia negotiated its surrender on the fourth day. Taylor, whose undersupplied army had little ammunition or provisions left, granted generous terms in return for the city and an end to the fighting. Having no way to deal with thousands of prisoners, he allowed Ampudia's troops to evacuate Monterrey with some of their weapons, accompanied by those civilians who preferred to abandon their homes rather than live under U.S. occupation. Lieutenant George Meade paid "a tribute of respect to the gallantry of the Mexicans, who had defended their place as long as it was in their power." But one unit in the enemy army prompted loud curses from the U.S. soldiers who watched them ride out of town: the *sanpatricios*. Forty-eight of the deserters in the battalion had been personally recruited along the Rio Grande by John Riley, a recent immigrant from Ireland, formerly a sergeant in the U.S. Army, now a captain of artillery in the Mexican one. Others switched sides in resentment at the treatment of Mexican civilians and Catholic church buildings.⁷⁴ Most immigrants in the U.S. Army demonstrated full loyalty to their adopted country and resented the *sanpatricios*.

Negotiators representing the two armies agreed to take no further military action during an eight-week armistice. Taylor felt his soldiers would not be ready for further action much sooner anyway, and most of them agreed, Lieutenant Mead and Colonel Jefferson Davis being among those who endorsed the utility of the truce. The Battle of Monterrey made Taylor and Worth heroes with the U.S. public, but not with the administration in Washington. To the president, the war consisted of tokens moved on a map like pieces on a chessboard; he could not relate to weary soldiers needing a respite from fighting. When he learned of the armistice, Polk, furious, commanded Taylor to call it off (though because of time spent in communication, the truce still lasted over six weeks). The official communication to Taylor, sent through Secretary of War Marcy, added not a word of personal praise for capturing Monterrey.⁷⁵ From that time on neither Taylor nor Polk trusted the other.

73. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, 138.

74. Meade quoted in Meltzer, *Bound for the Rio Grande*, 128; Stevens, *Rogue's March*, 103, 143-44, 156-58.

75. Zachary Taylor to R. C. Wood, Sept. 16, 1846, *Letters from the Battlefields*, 62; William Marcy to Zachary Taylor, Oct. 13, 1846, quoted in Dufour, *Mexican War*, 163.

The rejection of U.S. peace overtures by Mexico, combined with the hard-fought Battle of Monterrey and Santa Anna's conduct since his return, convinced the administration in Washington that their original plan for a brief war and easy conquests would prove inadequate. Nothing short of a decisive defeat in the national heartland could persuade any Mexican government to consent to the loss of its vast northern patrimony. All U.S. strategists agreed, however, on the impracticality of an advance southward from Monterrey to the city of Mexico across deserts and mountains. Hence plans had to be drawn up for an invasion from the Gulf inland to the capital city and a commander designated for it. Ruling out Taylor (who had been confiding lately in Kentucky's Whig senator John Crittenden, not one of Polk's favorites), the president reluctantly made the obvious appointment of Winfield Scott, the army's senior general, to head the undertaking.⁷⁶ Although his relations with the administration had often been strained, Scott proved a superb choice, and his advance from Veracruz to Mexico City became not only the crowning achievement of his long career but a model campaign for students of military history. Even after Scott had assumed his new command, Polk continued to recommend that Congress make Senator Benton a lieutenant general with authority over Scott. (It is not clear that Polk actually desired this extraordinary commission; Secretary of War Marcy later told an interviewer that the president went through the motions to flatter Benton and retain his political support, while of course deeply offending Scott.)⁷⁷

To mount Scott's operation required diverting troops and resources from Taylor's army. Although Scott tried to explain this to Taylor in person, he got delayed en route to northern Mexico, and the two generals missed connections. Taylor was bound to be disappointed in having the principal operations shift to another theater and another commander, and now he saw his best and most experienced units ordered away. The resentment he felt toward Scott compounded and complicated the suspicion with which he already regarded President Polk. With the armistice over, Taylor pushed ahead to Saltillo and then south to a position near a hacienda called Buena Vista.

Mexican partisans ambushed a courier bearing the plans for the transfer of units from Taylor to Scott, and thus Santa Anna became aware both of the impending attack on his capital and that Taylor now commanded a

76. Polk, *Diary*, II, 242–44 (Nov. 18, 1846); Paul Bergeron, *The Presidency of James K. Polk* (Lawrence, Kans., 1987), 92–94.

77. Parker Scammon, "A Chapter of the Mexican War," *Magazine of American History* 14 (Dec. 1885): 564–65.

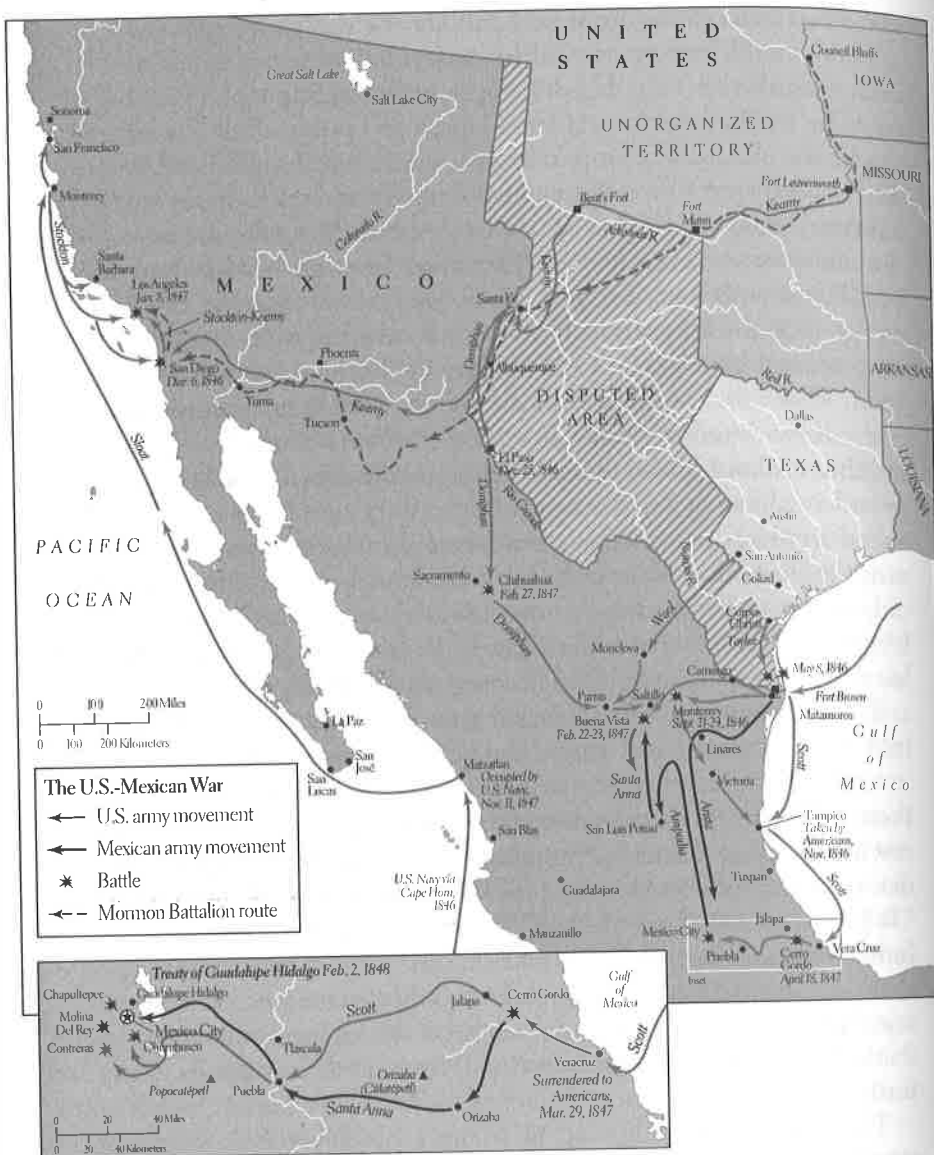
shrunk force consisting almost entirely of green volunteers. A cautious general would have responded by concentrating forces to defend Veracruz and Mexico City. Instead, eager to show his people a victory, the *caudillo* amassed the largest armed force he could—about twenty thousand men plus many camp followers—and moved them north to crush Taylor's depleted army. (Raising the troops proved difficult, for only a few Mexican states supplied their full quotas; borrowing the money to fund the offensive was even harder.) Departing from his headquarters at San Luis Potosí on January 28, 1847, Santa Anna's levies marched first through winter sleet and then through desert heat, with confusion, poor logistical support, and less than half the artillery their table of organization stipulated. When they reached Taylor's vicinity, having taken three weeks to come three hundred miles, desertion and attrition had reduced their number to about fifteen thousand effectives. Warned of Santa Anna's approach by a courageous Texan scout, the Americans fell back into a valley called La Angostura (the Narrows) where the Mexican numerical superiority would count for less. Taylor had about forty-five hundred troops, only a few of them, dragoons and cannoneers, being regulars. Meanwhile, Mexican cavalry under General Urrea made common cause with local partisans to interdict Taylor's long supply line.⁷⁸

The retreating Americans burned some supplies to prevent their falling into enemy hands, and when Santa Anna came across the fires, he jumped to the conclusion that his opponents had fled in disorder. He therefore pushed his troops, tired from their long march, forward without rest into position to attack. Santa Anna then summoned Taylor to surrender in the face of overwhelming force; Old Rough and Ready responded, "Tell Santa Anna to go to Hell!" The reply sent in Spanish used more formal language but made his refusal clear.⁷⁹ It was February 22, George Washington's Birthday, the American soldiers remembered. In preliminary fighting, the Mexicans won control of the high ground on their right flank. That chilly night, the two armies slept on their weapons, ready for further action.

The next morning, hoping to overawe his adversaries, Santa Anna staged a grand review of his army within sight of the U.S. lines (but outside of cannon range). There followed the war's largest battle, named Buena Vista in the United States and La Angostura in Mexico. Both armies consisted largely of amateur soldiers with brief training and no combat experience. Both had suffered from desertions and logistical difficulties. The

78. DePalo, *Mexican National Army*, 109–10.

79. Quoted in Dufour, *Mexican War*, 172.



Mexicans had the advantage of numbers, the U.S. side that of tactical defense. In the morning the Mexicans renewed their assault on the defenders' left flank, and in fierce fighting drove back the volunteers from Indiana, Arkansas, and Kentucky. One fleeing deserter encountered the formidable camp follower Sarah Borginnis and cried out that the battle was lost. But she "knocked him sprawling" (in the words of an eyewitness)

and said, "You damned son of a bitch, there ain't Mexicans enough in Mexico to whip old Taylor." In fact, Old Rough and Ready had absented himself to check on his base in Saltillo; he returned at 9:00 A.M. to be told by his second in command, John Wool, "General, we are whipped." "That is for me to determine," retorted Taylor; he immediately rushed the Mississippi volunteers commanded by Jefferson Davis, whom he had brought up from Saltillo, into the breach and plugged it. The glory Davis won that day would encourage him later to take a hands-on approach to his role as commander in chief of the armies of the Southern Confederacy.⁸⁰ In the nick of time, U.S. dragoons repulsed an attempt by Mexican lancers to encircle Taylor's army. During the afternoon two more massive Mexican attacks on the American left flank halted in the face of superior U.S. firepower, notwithstanding the efforts of the *sanpatricios* manning Mexican artillery. When Taylor ordered a charge, however, his attacking units were decimated and repulsed. Cold rain fell. During the night, Taylor's small army clung to their position and received some welcome reinforcements.⁸¹

Santa Anna had pushed his soldiers to their limit. They were in no condition to renew their attack. Heavy fighting on top of forced marches had left them exhausted; many had scarcely had an opportunity to eat in the past two days, even though the *soldaderas* came up to the front lines to re-supply them. During the night of February 23–24, the Mexican army silently withdrew, leaving campfires burning to fool their enemies. The next morning Taylor's battered soldiers could hardly believe their good fortune. It had been, as Wellington said after Waterloo, "a near run thing."⁸² Santa Anna intended to renew the fight as soon as his soldiers had rested, but their heavy casualties and their commander's obvious indifference to their welfare sent the desertion rate soaring. With his army melting away, Santa Anna's officers persuaded him to begin the long march back to San Luis Potosí. The *caudillo* left behind more than two hundred of his wounded, but along the way he displayed U.S. cannons and flags his soldiers had captured early in the battle as evidence of what he claimed had been a victory. In truth, both armies had fought heroically and sustained heavy casualties: 746 on the U.S. side and about 1,600 on the Mexican. Death played no partisan favorites; American

80. Quotations from Joseph Chance, *Jefferson Davis's Mexican War Regiment* (Jackson, Miss., 1991), 98, and Eisenhower, *So Far from God*, 188.

81. On the Battle of Buena Vista, see Eisenhower, *So Far from God*, 166–91; Bauer, *Mexican War*, 206–18; Dufour, *Mexican War*, 171–84.

82. Quoted in Eisenhower, *So Far from God*, 191.

heroes killed included both Colonel Archibald Yell, former governor of Arkansas, Democrat and ardent expansionist, and Lieutenant Colonel Henry Clay Jr., son of the senator who had worked so hard for peace and who grieved that the young man had given his life in "this most unnecessary and horrible war."⁸³ The Battle of Buena Vista constituted a tactical draw, but in its true significance a major U.S. victory, since Santa Anna had not succeeded, despite making a supreme effort, in destroying Taylor's vulnerable force. Had Santa Anna won, he could have retaken much of northern Mexico, and the U.S. high command might well have aborted Scott's campaign against Mexico City in order to shore up the defense of the Rio Grande. Some commentators feel Santa Anna should have renewed the attack after a brief respite; certainly his army sustained losses from desertion on the march back to San Luis Potosí as heavy as those another battle would have inflicted.⁸⁴

After the battle the Americans also withdrew. If Taylor had had more regulars available he might have tried pursuing, but instead he deemed it prudent to lead his army back to Monterrey to wait out the rest of the war. His volunteers had endured their baptism of fire and had proved themselves.

VI

Winfield Scott, one of the greatest soldiers the United States Army has ever produced, wore the stars of a general for more than fifty years, in three major wars (1812, Mexico, and the Civil War) and through several intervening frontier confrontations and campaigns, including Indian Removal and the Canadian rebellion crisis of 1837–38. Taken prisoner, exchanged, and later wounded in the War of 1812, Scott found himself celebrated for his individual exploits as well as for his judgment in command. The handsome, six-foot-four-inch Virginian became a brigadier general at the age of twenty-seven and won glory at the Battle of Chippewa in 1814, the sole American success on the Canadian–U.S. Niagara front. At the end of the War of 1812 only Andrew Jackson exceeded Scott in fame as a national hero. Both men had large egos, and not surprisingly within a few years they had developed a strong personal animosity. To the public, Jackson typified the frontiersman who took up arms when occasion required;

83. Quoted in Robert Remini, *Henry Clay* (New York, 1991), 685. Daniel Webster, another Whig critic of the war, also lost a son in it.

84. DePalo, *Mexican National Army*, 115. Santa Anna's own after-action report appears in "Letters of Santa Anna," ed. Justin Smith, *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1917* (Washington, 1920), 413–14.

Scott, on the other hand, typified the quintessential professional soldier, a less favorable image expressed in his unflattering nickname "Old Fuss 'n' Feathers" (an allusion to the plumes on a general's hat). Like so many others who shared his Whig political views, General Scott was a modernizer and an institution-builder. His nationalism took the form not of belligerent imperialism but of devotion to the central government and the rule of law. When the ultimate crisis came in 1861, Scott would choose not his home state but his country.

The military campaign from the Gulf to the City of Mexico represented the summit of Winfield Scott's professional career; sixty years old in 1846, he had waited long for this opportunity. The landing at Veracruz constituted the most ambitious amphibious operation the United States armed forces would conduct before D-Day in 1944. Besides the formidable string of forts protecting Veracruz, planners had to take into account the fact that the port had no proper harbor and that it was prone to severe northern winds half the year and endemic yellow fever the other half. The difficulties brought out the best in Scott: his recognition of the importance of logistics, training, and staff work, his meticulous attention to detail. A perceptive biographer has suggested that he prefigured the military "technocrat." Scott benefited from the services of Thomas Jesup, the army's experienced quartermaster general; the two had had their differences, but both were conscientious professionals. Since President Polk insisted on waging war and cutting taxes at the same time, Scott and Jesup had to scale back requests and scramble to provide troops and supplies for the operation.⁸⁵

Invading Mexico from the Gulf required amassing an enormous flotilla of ships. The necessary cooperation between army and navy had a political as well as an interservice dimension. Beginning with Jackson, the Democratic Party had been friendly to the navy as protector of overseas commerce and international free trade, while the peacetime army had looked to the Whigs for support. (Significantly, it was Polk's Democratic administration that founded the U.S. Naval Academy.) Fortunately, Scott developed good relations with the navy's Gulf Squadron under Commodore David Conner and, after Conner's retirement, Commodore Matthew Perry. The navy had already blockaded Mexico's ports and welcomed an additional role. In November 1846, Commodore Conner occupied the Gulf port of Tampico without a fight, thanks to information

85. Allan Peskin, *Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms* (Kent, Ohio, 2003), 59; Robert Smith, "The Impossible Campaign Attempted," *Military History* 10 (1993): 34–42, 92–96.

supplied by Ann Chase, who took advantage of her British citizenship to live in the city as a U.S. spy. Working with a naval officer, Scott helped design a flat-bottomed landing craft to float the invasion troops onto the Mexican beach. Scott's understanding of the potential contribution of the navy in combined operations would bear fruit again later in his "Anaconda Plan" for blockading the Southern Confederacy. Ironically, Scott succeeded less well in securing cooperation among the officers within the army itself, for his two regular subordinates, William Worth and David Twiggs, were bitter rivals, while Gideon Pillow, commanding the volunteers, was a Tennessee crony of Polk's who shared his taste for intrigue and constantly worked to undermine Scott in the president's eyes. But the general had selected a personal staff of outstanding ability, including Colonels Joseph Totten and Ethan Allen Hitchcock and Scott's own favorite, Captain Robert E. Lee.⁸⁶

On March 9, 1847, only two weeks after Taylor had saved his army at Buena Vista, Scott's armada of over a hundred ships delivered ten thousand U.S. troops to a beach three miles south of Veracruz and beyond the reach of its batteries. Santa Anna had not had time to bring his main force from San Luis Potosí to contest the landing, and Juan Morales, commanding the Veracruz garrison of only five thousand ill-trained militia, chose not to do so either. The Mexican general put his faith in the city's stone defenses. A string of forts rendered Veracruz virtually impregnable by sea, while a wall fifteen feet high protected its landward side. Scott operated under a fixed timetable; he had to complete the reduction of Veracruz and move inland before the onset of the yellow fever season a month later. He had three options: to assault and take the city by storm, to besiege it and starve the occupants out, or to force a capitulation by bombardment. He chose the third course. Scott had long been mindful of the power of artillery; as peacetime general in chief, he had nurtured the mobile artillery that had proved so effective on the battlefields of Mexico. On March 22, Morales having declined Scott's summons to surrender, U.S. mortars commenced firing shells over the walls of Veracruz and down into the city, wreaking havoc on military targets and civilians alike. But what Scott most wanted was to pound a breach in the city's defensive wall. The government not having provided the heavy ordnance he had requested, Scott turned to his friends in the fleet. They did not care to risk their wooden ships in a firefight with the formidable seaward fortifications of Veracruz, but the navy lent Scott both guns and crews to ferry them ashore where they could batter the landward wall, the weakest point in

the city's defenses. The bombardment continued day and night. Sixty-seven hundred projectiles landed in the city, starting fires and inflicting over a thousand casualties, two-thirds of them civilian, including about 180 deaths. "My heart bled for the inhabitants," commented Captain Lee, who had helped direct the cannon fire; "it was terrible to think of the women and children."⁸⁷ By March 26, with the wall breached, the hospital and post office among the buildings hit, the population feeling abandoned by their government, and the many neutral civilians in the port city terrified, a flag of truce signaled the start of surrender negotiations. Three days later the Mexican troops marched out to be paroled (that is, allowed to go home after signing a promise not to fight anymore unless exchanged for U.S. prisoners).

Eager to move most of his army inland before the yellow fever descended, Scott arranged to govern Veracruz with a skeleton force. This necessitated conciliating the local population. Unlike Taylor, Scott insisted on strict control of his occupying troops and allowed no outrages to be perpetrated on civilians. He paid for supplies his soldiers needed, instead of just commandeering them as the Polk administration had told him to do in order to save money. He reopened the port to the commerce of the world, so normal business activity could resume, but with U.S. officials collecting the customary tariff duties. And he stationed a guard by every Catholic church to protect it and its worshippers. All this happened not a moment too soon: On April 9, two deaths from yellow fever were reported.⁸⁸

Why had Mexico's most important port and the gateway to the nation's heartland been so weakly defended? Why was there no attempt to relieve the siege of Veracruz? A revolt had broken out in Mexico City against the government. As divided as people were in the United States over political partisanship, section, and the wisdom of the war, the Mexican public was even more disunited—by region, class, and ideology. When Santa Anna went off to lead the army against Taylor, he left his vice president, Valentín Gómez Farías, in Mexico City as acting president. Gómez Farías was a *federalista puro*, prowar and anticlerical. He had been instrumental in secularizing the California missions back in 1833, and this time he had another program to seize church property for the benefit of the state. Faced with a desperate shortage of money to wage war, on January 11, 1847, Gómez Farías signed a law requisitioning 15 million pesos (a peso being worth about the same as a U.S. dollar) from the Roman Catholic

86. Peskin, *Winfield Scott*, 147–50.

87. Quoted in John Weems, *To Conquer a Peace* (Garden City, N.Y., 1974), 338.

88. Peskin, *Winfield Scott*, 160.

Church. The church, which as Mexico's largest institutional investor often acted like a bank, had loaned money to the government in the past but was not disposed to accept confiscation of about 10 percent of its assets.⁸⁹ Ecclesiastical authorities in the capital secretly funded an uprising against the government by some upper-middle-class, proclerical national guard units stationed in Mexico City. The revolt also received encouragement from Moses Beach and Jane Storm of the *New York Sun*, ostensibly in the city on business. (Civilians traveled surprisingly freely in the nineteenth century, even between countries at war with each other.) Actually the two were on a secret mission for the U.S. government, hoping to overthrow the Mexican government and install one that would make peace.⁹⁰ Although the church commanded widespread loyalty and sympathy, the rebellion proved highly unpopular, interfering as it did with the defense of the country against invasion. It got the derisive name "revolt of the *polkos*" from the polka dance then fashionable among the city's elite. Despite being small in scope, the revolt of the *polkos* preoccupied the Mexican government, preventing aid to Veracruz. Santa Anna's return to the capital on March 21 ended the revolt but at a cost. He turned his back on those who had elected him (as he had done in 1834), rescinded the requisition, fired Gómez Farías by abolishing the vice presidency, and settled for another loan of 1.5 million pesos from the church—a pittance in relation to the government's wartime needs.⁹¹

Scott advanced toward Mexico City via Jalapa and Puebla, following the same route that Hernán Cortez had taken 328 years earlier, as many noticed at the time. William Hickling Prescott's vividly written *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843) constituted favorite reading among the intellectually inclined members of the U.S. Army (though Prescott, a New England Whig, deplored the current conquest of Mexico as "mad and unprincipled"). Promising the crowds to die fighting rather than let the enemy enter "the imperial capital of Azteca," Santa Anna came out to meet Scott's army on the border between the coastal plain and the high country, not far from his own estate, El Encero.⁹² To oppose the invaders

89. Estimated by DePalo, *Mexican National Army*, 223, n. 113.

90. Working with only fragments of evidence, historians have given various accounts of this mission; the fullest is Anna Nelson, *Secret Agents* (New York, 1988), 72–95.

91. Michael Casteloe, "The Mexican Church and the Rebellion of the 'Polkos,'" *Hispanic American Historical Review* 46 (1966): 170–78; Pedro Santoni, *Mexicans at Arms: Puro Federalists and the Politics of War* (Fort Worth, Tex., 1996), 171–207.

92. Prescott quoted in Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, 245; Santa Anna quoted in Eisenhower, *So Far from God*, 271.

he gathered a force of about twelve thousand, half of them veterans of Buena Vista and the rest untrained raw recruits.

Cerro Gordo, also called Cerro Telégrafo (Signal Hill), a thousand feet high, dominated the road to Mexico City, and there Santa Anna concentrated his defense. Half a mile north of it lay another hill, La Atalaya (the Watchtower). Two Mexican engineering officers recommended placing artillery atop La Atalaya, but *el presidente* dismissed their advice, supposing that no one could get through the rough terrain and thick briars to approach from that direction.⁹³ In one of the most brilliant undertakings of his long and brilliant career, Robert E. Lee reconnoitered a trail that U.S. troops could cut through underbrush, bypassing the main highway where the Mexicans awaited them, and coming up on La Atalaya. At one point the daring scout had to lie motionless behind a log while Mexican soldiers sat on it and chatted only inches away. On April 17, 1847, Lee guided Twigg's division of regulars along the route he had traced. With La Atalaya only lightly defended, the Americans captured it and that night installed heavy guns, laboriously carried along Lee's pathway, on the hilltop. At dawn the next day, this artillery supported an assault on Cerro Gordo itself, while other U.S. units struck the Mexican army at both front and rear. Santa Anna's outmaneuvered forces fled, as did their commander, leaving behind a vast amount of equipment that included virtually all their artillery, twenty thousand pesos in coin intended to meet the army's payroll, and an artificial leg Santa Anna wore to replace the one he had lost fighting the French. (Amused U.S. soldiers made up a parody of one of their favorite songs, "The Girl I Left Behind Me," entitled "The Leg I Left Behind Me.") Scott's army took some four thousand Mexican prisoners—a thousand of whom promptly escaped in all the confusion. The general and his staff soon relaxed in Santa Anna's hacienda, El Encero, where the perceptive Colonel Hitchcock noticed that all the *caudillo's* art works were foreign; none of them showed "the genius of the Mexicans."⁹⁴

By cold logic, the Battle of Cerro Gordo should have put an end to the Mexican war effort. That it did not was due less to the Mexican government and high command than to the stubborn determination of the people themselves not to accept defeat. Scott's small army could only advance slowly, and in fact took four more months to reach the historic capital of

93. Carol Christensen and Thomas Christensen, *The U.S.-Mexican War* (San Francisco, 1998), 180.

94. Ethan Allen Hitchcock, journal entry for April 20, 1847, in *Fifty Years in Camp and Field*, ed. W. A. Croffut (New York, 1909), 253. The song parody can be viewed at www.ku.edu/carrie/docs/texts/mexwar.htm.

Mexican civilization. When it occupied Puebla, the second largest city in the country and one that had been a center of opposition to Santa Anna, some of the church authorities cooperated with the invaders, but ordinary Mexicans who did so exposed themselves to ostracism or worse from their fellow citizens.⁹⁵

Scott waited in Puebla six weeks of the summer for reinforcements to replace the volunteers whose one-year enlistments expired. Only 10 percent of those whose time was up chose to reenlist. The mood of the soldiers had become one of disenchantment as the grim reality of war sank in. Captain Kirby Smith of the Regular Army wrote home to his wife about his change of attitude since the war began. "How differently I feel now with regard to the war from what I did then! *Then vague visions of glory and a speedy peace floated through my brain.*" Now he felt only gloomy foreboding. "Alas, the chance is I shall never see you again!" Captain Smith would fall mortally wounded on September 8, before word of his promotion to lieutenant colonel reached him.⁹⁶ Guerrilla actions along Scott's exposed supply line, made all the more tenuous by a shortage of transport, eventually prompted the U.S. general to cut himself off from his base of operations and live off the country when he resumed his advance—an example that stuck in the mind of Lieutenant Grant, who would do the same in his campaign against Vicksburg in 1863. Grant also remembered the valor of his Mexican adversaries, even in their defeat: "I have seen as brave stands made by some of these men as I have ever seen made by soldiers," he wrote in his *Memoirs*.⁹⁷

In June, Santa Anna hinted, through a message sent via the British, that he might make peace in return for a million-dollar bribe, with ten thousand up front. Scott and the State Department representative Nicholas Trist, who was authorized to negotiate with the Mexicans, after hesitation and discussion with the other American generals, decided to send the ten thousand. The money disappeared to no discernible purpose. Santa Anna may well have been prepared to sell out his country's interests; the Mexican Congress suspected it, and had passed a law on April 20 making unauthorized peace negotiations treason. Scott's willingness to pursue any avenue for peace, after it became known to the U.S. public and administration (probably revealed by Gideon Pillow), would come back to haunt him.⁹⁸

95. Christensen and Christensen, *U.S.-Mexican War*, 187.

96. Emma Blackwood, ed., *To Mexico with Scott: Letters of Captain E. Kirby Smith* (Cambridge, Mass., 1917), 155, 183, and 9.

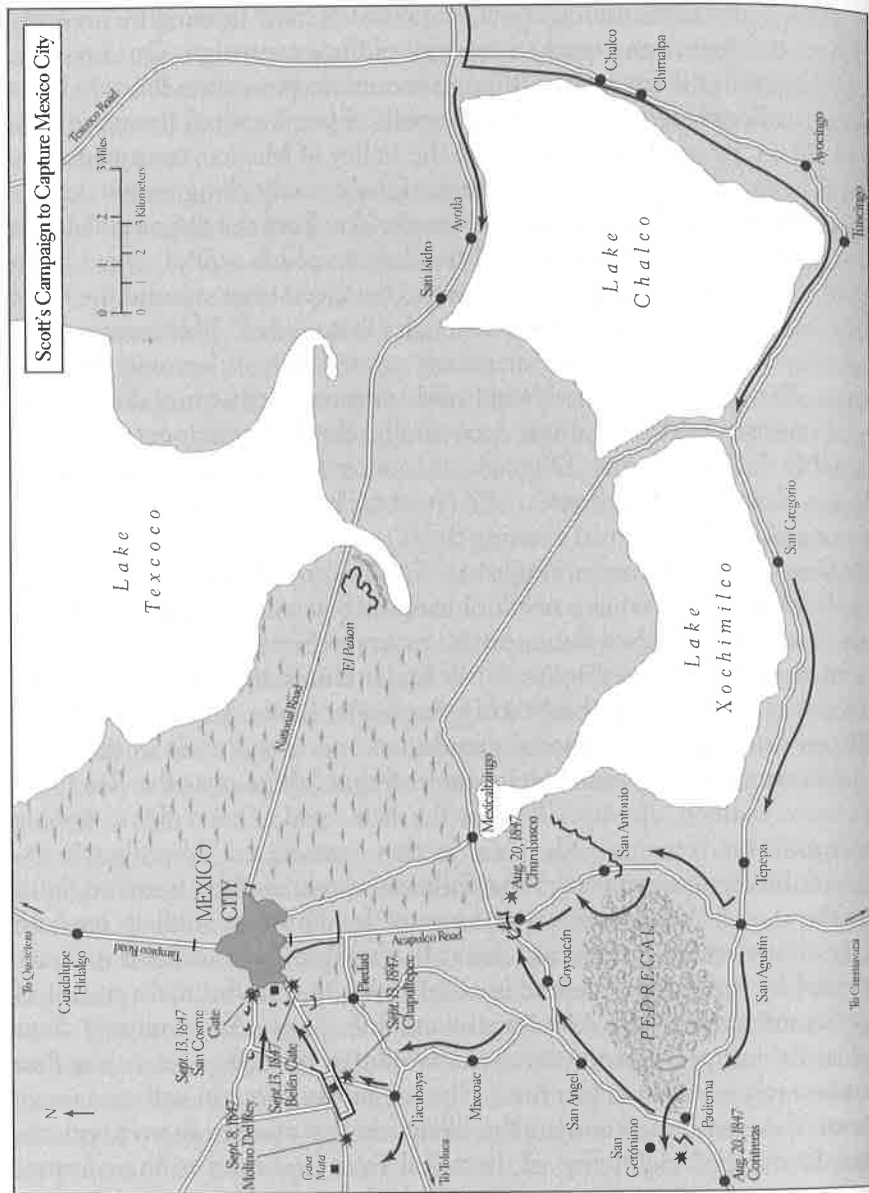
97. Grant, *Memoirs*, 115.

98. Pletcher, *Diplomacy of Annexation*, 504–11.

It took all Scott's military genius and much hard fighting by his army before the Americans reached the goal of their campaign. On August 7, 1847, 10,738 of them set out through mountain passes ten thousand feet high, undertaking to capture a metropolis of two hundred thousand people. The City of Mexico, located in the Valley of Mexico, occupied an island in the midst of marshland, approachable only along certain causeways. Santa Anna had recovered, phoenix-like, from the disgrace of defeat at Cerro Gordo and commanded the defense of his capital. Once again gathering troops and equipment, he had managed to get around the naval blockade by importing weapons through Guatemala.⁹⁹ This consummate salesman was always better at raising armies than at keeping or using them. Santa Anna assumed Scott would advance by the most direct route and constructed fortifications accordingly. But U.S. engineer officers—notably Colonel James Duncan and, once again, Captain Robert E. Lee—identified other routes, and Scott took his army via the south, a force guided by Lee even crossing the rugged bed of dried lava called the Pedregal. At Contreras on August 20, Scott's army overcame that of General Gabriel Valencia as a result of jealousy between the Mexican generals; Valencia disobeyed Santa Anna's orders in hopes of getting credit for a victory himself, whereupon Santa Anna refused to reinforce Valencia. To cover his withdrawal following the battle, Santa Anna placed some fifteen hundred local national guardsmen and *sanpatricios* in the Franciscan monastery of San Mateo, protecting a bridge over the Río Churubusco (named, appropriately, for the Aztec god of war). Scott, hoping to smash the retreating Mexicans as they crossed the Churubusco, ordered the monastery taken. What followed was one of the toughest fights of the war, a demonstration of heroism by common soldiers on both sides. Time and again the attackers charged through cornfields to be repulsed by the dogged defenders. Only after the militia had run out of ammunition were the Mexicans overcome; Santa Anna refused their pleas for resupply, having erroneously written off their case as hopeless and merely a means to buy time. The *sanpatricios* fought with a courage born of desperation, knowing the likely fate that awaited them as prisoners. In the end eighty-five of them fell into the hands of their former comrades; about sixty-five had died in the battle, and a hundred or more escaped.¹⁰⁰

99. Smith, *War with Mexico*, II, 87.

100. On Churubusco, see Bauer, *Mexican War*, 296–300, and for a contemporary Mexican account, Ramón Alcaraz et al., *The Other Side*, trans. Albert Ramsey (New York, 1850), 291–98.



At this point Scott could have entered Mexico City. He chose not to, believing that his hungry troops, temporarily disorganized by battle, would pillage and burn. In such a state of disorder, he explained to the secretary of war, all Mexican government might dissolve, leaving no one with whom he could make a treaty.¹⁰¹ Scott's objective was not to create an urban wasteland but to "conquer a peace" (in the phrase of the time), so he halted at the city gates and offered to negotiate. Secret messages had once again given Scott reason to hope that the unpredictable Santa Anna would come to terms. A truce commenced on August 21, but the talks it permitted led nowhere, since the Mexicans proved unwilling to cede as much territory as the U.S. negotiators demanded. Meanwhile, Santa Anna strengthened his defenses, and Scott purchased provisions from his enemies. (Rather than buy still more, he turned loose some three thousand Mexican prisoners.) By September 6, the two sides felt ready to resume the war. Santa Anna called upon the city's people to "preserve your altars from infamous violation, and your daughters and your wives from the extremity of insult."¹⁰²

Intelligence reports reached Scott that the Mexicans were re-casting church bells into cannons at a flour mill called Molino del Rey. The general ordered a quick raid on the mill conducted in the early morning of September 8. Unfortunately Santa Anna's own intelligence warned him in time to prepare a warm reception for the attackers, and the engagement turned into a major battle. Before the Americans succeeded in destroying the site, they suffered almost eight hundred casualties, fully a quarter of their troops engaged, making it a Pyrrhic victory for an army that had only about eight thousand effectives now available for advance into the enemy capital. Worse, the intelligence on which the attack was based turned out to be faulty: The Molino contained no weapons of mass destruction.

Within sight of Molino del Rey stood the mount of Chapultepec with its castle atop it, originally built for the Viceroy of New Spain, now the Colegio Militar, the Mexican military academy. This strongpoint protected the southwest entrance to Mexico City, and Scott immediately turned his attention to its reduction. The castle loomed very formidable, and the Americans undertook its reduction with seriousness. A fourteen-hour bombardment on September 12 preceded an assault on the morning of the thirteenth. Santa Anna had not adequately garrisoned the position. The castle itself held only about two hundred Mexican soldiers, along

101. Winfield Scott to William Marcy, Aug. 18, 1847, in Bauer, *Mexican War*, 301.

102. Quoted in Otis Singletary, *The Mexican War* (Chicago, 1960), 94.

with fifty-nine cadets, ranging in age from thirteen to nineteen, who had requested permission to participate in the defense of their college. About six hundred more Mexican soldiers occupied the hill outside the building. In the van of the U.S. assault came volunteers of Franklin Pierce's brigade—although Brigadier General Pierce himself was laid up with an injury due to falling off his horse. (His absence from battle did not prevent Pierce from being elected president of the United States in 1852.) Participants in the assault included Captain Robert Anderson and Lieutenants Ulysses Grant, James Longstreet, and George Pickett, whose names would become familiar to all Americans in the coming years. With the aid of scaling ladders, the attackers climbed up into the fortress. The defenders resolved to sell their lives dearly. Those who died included six of the young cadets, who are remembered today in Mexico as Los Niños Héroes and memorialized in a monument near the Colegio Militar.

The raising of the Stars and Stripes over the castle was a glorious moment for the U.S. Army, but it sent a macabre message to thirty former *sanpatricios* captured at Churubusco and convicted by court-martial of desertion. Bound at their individual gallows, they were forced to stand and watch the castle on the skyline for four hours until the appearance of the U.S. flag signaled their execution. Twenty other *sanpatricios* had already been hanged. General Scott had, however, tempered justice with mercy when he reviewed the sentences of the court-martial. He had pardoned five of the seventy convicted and commuted the sentences of fifteen others to the lesser punishment of fifty lashes and branding with a D on the cheek. To the anger of many in the army, John Riley was among those whose lives the general spared. The most prominent turncoat had deserted before the declaration of war, and Scott noted that the death penalty did not apply to desertion in peacetime. Surprisingly, the well-publicized punishments meted out to the *sanpatricios* did not prevent about a hundred more U.S. soldiers from going over to the Mexicans during the remaining months of the war. Many deserters simply melted into the Mexican population; Riley himself reentered the Mexican army, wore his hair long to hide his branding scars, and after promotion to colonel retired. Neither he nor anyone else appears to have received the promised Mexican land grant. Although the U.S. Army and loyal Irish Americans in particular regarded the *sanpatricios* as a disgrace (for several decades in the later nineteenth century the War Department denied their existence), there is a monument to them, with annual commemorations, in Mexico.¹⁰³

103. Stevens, *Rogue's March*, 270–76, 295–301; Miller, *Shamrock and Sword*, 178–85; Wynn, *San Patricio Soldiers*, 286.

The Americans pressed on immediately to exploit their capture of Chapultepec, moving along two causeways and overcoming stiff resistance to seize two gates on the western side of the city, Belen and San Cosme, before nightfall on the thirteenth. After conferring with his officers, Santa Anna decided to spare the historic capital destruction in house-to-house fighting, and evacuated his remaining nine thousand soldiers to Guadalupe Hidalgo north of the city. At dawn on September 14, the municipal authorities surrendered, and the flag of the United States flew over the center of Mexico City by 7:00 A.M. An hour later, Winfield Scott rode into the Zócalo, the grand plaza bordered by the National Palace, the city hall, and the cathedral, resplendent in his full dress uniform, a stark contrast to the ragged and dirty combat soldiers who lined up before him in parade formation. The conqueror, this new Cortez, dispatched a unit of U.S. Marines to secure the palace, which North Americans called the Hall of the Montezumas. (The anonymous lyrics of the Marines' Hymn commemorate the episode.) In due course Scott took up residence in the palace himself, in quarters formerly occupied by the presidents of the Mexican Republic and the viceroys of New Spain, on the site where Aztec emperors had ruled. As military governor of the city, Scott named volunteer Major General John Quitman, who had experience as governor of Mississippi.

The early days of the occupation proved harrowing even for hardened veterans. Although the city's middle class and ruling elite had acquiesced in the surrender, the poorer people, perhaps having less to lose, rose up against the intruders as people in California and New Mexico had done. Those without weapons threw stones and imprecations. After several days of fighting the mob, the army imposed order by a combination of sternness and conciliation, but *yanquis* who wandered into unfamiliar neighborhoods always did so at some risk. For the next nine months, the U.S. Army occupied Mexico City. Gradually the businesses, cafes, bars, and houses of prostitution reopened and found the strangers from faraway farms and towns to be willing customers. As early as September 30, a soldier from western Pennsylvania could write in his diary, "In the evening we went to the Theatre Nacianal-De-Santa-Anna which is undoubtedly the finest building of the kind on this continent."¹⁰⁴ Reactions to Mexican culture, especially Catholicism, varied greatly. A lieutenant wrote to his sister, "You have no idea of the flummery that we see here every day, all of which the Mexicans call religion." But a sergeant who visited the cathedral

104. "The Journal of William Joseph McWilliams," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 52 (1969): 388.

recorded feelings of awe in his journal. "Like the poor Indians who are kneeling around the altar, we are lost in amazement at the splendors around us."¹⁰⁵ Of course, the *norteamericanos* primarily perpetuated their own culture. Almost immediately, they began to publish two newspapers, the *American Star* and the *North American*, with sections in both English and Spanish.

By now widely blamed for his country's defeat, Santa Anna resigned the Mexican presidency on September 16, retaining command of the army. He made a final attempt to dislodge Scott's occupation of Mexico City by besieging Puebla, but as usual his artillery was not up to the task, and he failed to retake the city. On October 7, the new acting president, Manuel de la Peña y Peña, who as foreign minister in 1845 had tried to avoid the war, dismissed Santa Anna and ordered him to prepare for a court-martial. The *caudillo* fled and made his way to Jamaica. The Mexican government set up a temporary capital in Querétaro, some 125 miles northwest of Mexico City. The Mexican army no longer possessed the capability to conduct operations, but resistance by guerrillas continued, especially along the route between Mexico City and Veracruz, which the invaders relied on for reinforcements and the evacuation of their sick and wounded.

Winfield Scott had achieved one of the monumental military victories of the nineteenth century. He had successfully carried out a major amphibious operation, reduced the formidable fortress of Veracruz, and, overcoming shortages of heavy artillery and transportation, fought his way through difficult terrain to capture one of the world's great capitals. Along the way he set an example that Grant and Sherman would follow in the Civil War by cutting himself off from his base of operations. The army he commanded consisted largely of novices, thousands of whom departed when their enlistments expired in the middle of the campaign. He managed despite the political hostility of his president and many of the officers whom that president placed around him. The duke of Wellington, who followed Scott's campaign with close attention, called it "unsurpassed in military annals" and declared Scott "the greatest living soldier"—high praise coming from the victor of Waterloo. The military historian John Eisenhower, after reviewing Scott's whole career in three major wars, has concluded that Scott "may well have been the most

capable soldier this country has ever produced"—high praise coming from the son of Dwight Eisenhower.¹⁰⁶

Yet the victor of Mexico City did not remain in command of his army much longer than did the vanquished. Gideon Pillow poisoned President Polk's mind against Scott and inflamed his fear of a Whig military hero's emergence. Meanwhile, General Pillow treated his commander with insolence and publicly claimed that most of the credit for the campaign's success was due to his own efforts. Scott reminded officers in his command not to publish comments without his approval, and when Pillow and Colonel James Duncan defied the rule, he ordered them court-martialed. President Polk intervened and dismissed Scott on January 13, 1848, revoking the court-martial and setting up instead a "court of inquiry" to investigate Scott along with his subordinates. He also charged Scott with compromising military operations by an attempt to bribe Santa Anna into making peace—a peculiar accusation, considering Polk's own record of relations with Santa Anna. "To suspend a successful general in command of an army in the heart of an enemy's country, [and] to try the judge in place of the accused, is to upset all discipline," declared the astounded Robert E. Lee. The army overwhelmingly sympathized with Scott in this situation. "No general ever possessed the hearts of his troops to a greater extent than does Gen. Scott," asserted Captain George McClellan.¹⁰⁷ The Mexicans, with their experience of military coups, were astonished that Scott dutifully obeyed the order to relinquish command of the army when it arrived on February 18.

Polk stacked the composition of his "court of inquiry" in favor of Pillow and against Scott. Sorting through the complicated charges and countercharges, the inquiry's inconclusive findings in July 1848 "whitewashed" Pillow and took no position on Polk's charge against Scott. The protracted hearings served Polk's political ends. They kept the conqueror of Mexico under a cloud during the critical period when the Whig party was choosing a presidential candidate for 1848. Congress, more appreciative of Scott's achievement than the president, passed a joint resolution on March 9, 1848, thanking Old Fuss 'n' Feathers for his services and directing the president to award him a medal for "his valor, skill, and judicious conduct." It was Gideon Pillow, however, who dined at the White House.¹⁰⁸

106. Wellington quoted in Bauer, *Mexican War*, 322; Eisenhower, *So Far from God*, xxv.

107. Lee in a letter to his brother, Sidney Smith Lee, quoted in Dufour, *Mexican War*, 281; McClellan to his mother, March 22, 1848, in *Chronicles of the Gringos*, 440.

108. Bauer, *Mexican War*, 371–74. "Whitewashing" was Scott's term, quoted in Peskin, *Winfield Scott*, 203.

105. William Davis to Elizabeth Davis, Jan. 11, 1848, in *Chronicles of the Gringos*, ed. George W. Smith and Charles Judah (Albuquerque, N.M., 1968), 411; Thomas Barclay, journal entry for Sept. 27, 1847, in *Volunteers: Mexican War Journals*, ed. Allan Peskin (Kent, Ohio, 1991), 195.