SECTIONALISM, PARTISAN POLITICS, AND THE MEXICAN WAR

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PREFACE

This thesis looks at the Mexican War with specific attention to the question of whether the war was Southern inspired. In order to examine this matter several methodological approaches have been employed. First, this study reviews the pre-existing historical interpretations of the war for the purpose of determining how the "slavocracy conspiracy" thesis began and why, despite articulate refutations, it lingers. Second, Congressional voting on the questions relating to the Mexican War such as the annexation of Texas, the declaration of war with Mexico, the Wilmot Proviso, the treaty which ended the war, and finally, the Compromise of 1850, have been examined to determine sectional and partisan voting patterns. Third, key figures from the various sections have been examined in order to obtain a fuller understanding of the complexities which characterized the Mexican War and the sectional balance in the period 1845-1850.

The source material used for this study included primarily government documents, especially the Congressional Globe, numerous biographies and other secondary sources dealing with the Mexican War.

I would like to thank several members of the History Department for their assistance and guidance: Dr. Odie B. Faulk, my advisor, whose patience and advice made this exercise truly fruitful, Dr. John Sylvester, whose suggestions added new dimensions to this study, and lastly, Dr. Homer Knight, head of the department, whose encouragement was always welcome.

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CHAPTER I

THE MEXICAN WAR: MYTH AND REALITY

The House Chamber was filled as the clerk read the message of President James K. Polk. Congress was meeting in joint session to hear a presidential call for war with Mexico. The hush was broken only by an occasional cough and by the voice of the clerk reading President Polk's words: "We are called upon by every consideration of duty and patriotism to vindicate with decision the honor, the rights, and the interests of our country."[1] Following the reading of the request, the congregation of Senators and Representatives returned to their respective chambers to consider what the President had asked. The next day, May 12, 1846, Congress had concurred with the President and gave him his declaration of war.

Thus the war with Mexico officially began, a war which has been oversimplified and, consequently, misunderstood. For many, the only needed explanation for the war's existence has been summed up in a single word--sectionalism. Some historians have dismissed it as a Southern war, created by and sustained for the sole benefit of that section. Such generalizations, while perhaps convenient, do not entirely do justice to the facts. An analysis of Congressional roll-call votes proves that the Mexican War was more the promoter of

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[1] Senate Document 337, 29th Cong., 1st sess., Serial 476, p. 5.

sectional discord than the product of sectional interest.

The Mexican War still today is viewed slightly askance by most persons. To many the myth that it was a Southern war is reality. How did this myth begin and why does it persist? A brief examination of the historiography of the war will give some clues. Immediately following the war, histories of the conflagration appeared which viewed it patriotically--as a fine national achievement. One such work, written by H. Judge Moore, tried to show in part that a citizen, or volunteer, army could successfully wage an offensive war.[2] John S. Jenkins' book was favorable to the Democrats and President Polk. Jenkins believed, unlike many later historians, that territorial expansion was not a war aim.[3] Although not persuaded that a Southern conspiracy caused the war, Charles T. Porter in his work criticized American greed, both Northern and Southern, as a cause of the war, thereby foreshadowing a change in historical interpretation.[4]

If the first histories had been biased in favor of America's having fought Mexico, those which appeared for the remainder of the century were equally biased against America's having been involved. Simply stated, many historians who wrote about the war during this period viewed the conflict as a slavocracy conspiracy perpetrated upon a duped nation. The classic treatment of the conspiracy thesis appeared in 1849--William Jay's A Review of the Causes and Consequences

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[2]H. Judge Moore, Scott's Campaign in Mexico (Charleston, S. C.: J. B. Nixon, 1849).

[3]John S. Jenkins, History of the War between the United States and Mexico (Auburn, N.Y.: Derby, Miller & Co., 1849).

[4]Charles T. Porter, Review of the Mexican War (Auburn, N.Y.: Alden & Parsons, 1849).

of the Mexican War.[5] In it he said that the war was unnecessary and that the only reason it was fought was to gain additional slave territory for the South. His account reveals his strong Whig abolitionist tendencies and his disdain for President Polk and the Democrats. Abiel Livermore in his work basically agreed with Jay's slavocracy thesis, but added that the United States was becoming a world power and felt the need of proving itself.[6] As late as 1904 this same thesis was being espoused. James Ford Rhodes, in his work which appeared that year, commented that "Mexico was actually goaded into the war. The principle of the manifest destiny of this country was invoked as a reason for the attempt to add to our territory at the expense of Mexico."[7]

The slavocracy interpretation remained in force for over fifty years. However, in the first part of the twentieth century historians began to see a need for new interpretations of the war, a need for a compromise between the two extremes which had characterized previous accounts. As early as 1892, the shifting viewpoint was in evidence. Cadmus M. Wilcox in his book challenged the conspiracy thesis.[8] The book, a standard military work on the war, brought forth the thesis that America was justified in fighting Mexico and that it was Mexico's

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[5]William Jay, A Review of the Causes and Consequences of the Mexican War (Philadelphia: U. Hunt & Co., 1849).

[6]Abiel A. Livermore, The War with Mexico Reviewed (Boston: American Peace Society, 1850).

[7]James Ford Rhodes, History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 (7 vols.; New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1904).

[8]Cadmus M. Wilcox, History of the Mexican War (Washington, D. C.: Church News Publishing Co., 1892).

demagoguery which led to war. George P. Garrison likewise saw no evidence of a conspiracy in his book Westward Extension, 1841-1850.[9] American claims against Mexico, United States aid to Texas, the annexation of Texas, and the violation of Mexican territory by the United States were four areas of dispute which Garrison thought had led to the war. He furthermore believed that the war had wide national support. Continuing in the anti-conspiracy school, George L. Rives in his two-volume work was less kind to the Americans.[10] Rives revealed a basic sympathy for the Mexicans and Latin culture in general, concluding that the United States could have been more patient with Mexico. Farnham Bishop tried to steer a middle course between patriotism and criticism, while clearly refuting the slavocracy theory.[11]

In 1919 Justin Smith wrote in two volumes what has been ever since considered the definitive work on the Mexican War. A somewhat patriotic account, The War With Mexico emphasized the inevitability of the conflict.[12] Smith believed the demagoguery of Antonio López de Santa Anna and the Mexican government in general to have been one of the main factors leading to war. Smith also felt that American claims were just and that they alone were sufficient

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[9]George P. Garrison, Westward Extension, 1841-1850 (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1906).

[10]George L. Rives, The United States and Mexico, 1821-1848 (New York: C. Schribner's Sons, 1913).

[11]Farnham Bishop, Our First War with Mexico (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1916).

[12]Justin Smith, The War with Mexico (2 vols.; New York: Macmillan Company, 1919).

reason to go to war. He, like many of his fellow historians, believed the annexation of Texas to be the single most important event leading to war.

Following Justin Smith, several influential books and articles appeared. Charles S. Boucher's "In Re that Aggressive Slavocracy" was probably the most articulate refutation of the conspiracy thesis.[13] He pointed out that the most influential slaveholders opposed the war. Eugene I. McCormac in his book showed great admiration for President Polk.[14] He believed that Polk wanted only what was best for the country. Although McCormac felt that Polk possibly was unwise in moving troops to the Rio Grande, he believed that Mexico used this as an excuse for war. Emphasizing the "vacuum theory," Edward Channing in his monumental work of six volumes stated that although the United States had no moral right to expand into Mexican territory, it was the country's destiny to do so.[15]

Edward Channing's expansionist thesis has since been shared by numerous historians. Clayton C. Khol, in his book, viewed the claims question as merely an excuse for American expansionism.[16] Likewise, Jessie S. Reeves believed the war to be a product of American expansion-

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[13]Charles S. Boucher, "In Re that Aggressive Slavocracy" Mississippi Valley Historical Review, VIII (June-September, 1921), 13-79.

[14]Eugene I. McCormac, James K. Polk: A Political Biography (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1922).

[15]Edward Channing, A History of the United States (6 vols., New York: Macmillan Company, 1905-1925).

[16]Clayton C. Kohl, Claims as a Cause of the Mexican War (New York: The Faculty of the Graduate School of New York University, 1914).

ism.[17] Reeves further stated that the United States would have gone to war with Mexico even if Mexican soldiers had not crossed the Rio Grande and attacked American troops. A desire to "regenerate" the Mexican people and fulfill America's Manifest Destiny was the thesis of Albert K. Wineberg's Manifest Destiny.[18]

The pre-World War II years remained ones in which historians continued to emphasize expansionism as the prime reason for war with Mexico. In the only monograph on the subject, John Fuller's The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico pointed out that the movement to acquire the whole of Mexico had, contrary to popular belief, much support in the North and met with surprising resistance in the South.[19] Other historians who following World War II reiterated the expansionism thesis included Allan Nevins, Charles G. Sellers, Otis Singletary, and Frederick Merk.[20]

However, not all later-day historians have centered their argument on the territorial expansionism theory. One notable alteration of the thesis was undertaken by Norman Graebner whose Empire on the Pacific

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[17]Jessie S. Reeves, American Diplomacy under Tyler and Polk (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1907).

[18]Albert K. Wineberg, Manifest Destiny (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1936).

[19]John Fuller, The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1947).

[20]Allan Nevins, Ordeal of Union (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1947); Charles G. Sellers, Jr., James K. Polk, Jacksonian, 1795-1843 (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1957); Otis Singletary, The Mexican War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Frederick Merk, Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History (New York: Knopf, 1963).

stressed economic expansionism as the true cause of the war.[21] The United States wanted California, San Francisco harbor to be exact, for the purpose of carrying on trade with the Orient, said Graebner. The current interest in statistical analysis has led to several studies of the Mexican War. Foremost among these is Joel Silbey's Shrine of Party which examines sectionalism and politics in relation to the Mexican War.[22]

As is readily evident, there have been myriad interpretations of the Mexican War. The slavocracy theory has long been refuted. Yet the myth lingers. Why do so many persist in labeling it a Southern war? The answer may be found, in part, with the age in which it existed. Most persons commonly defined events which happened in nineteenth-century America in terms of the Civil War. Thus the Mexican War neatly can be seen through the prism of that conflict, giving the viewer a distorted but comfortable vision. In reality, the war was much more complex, a fact which many writers have failed to fully grasp. It was a war involving people and passions, parties and ideologies, a nation and its sections.

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[21] Norman Graebner, Empire on the Pacific (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1955).

[22] Joel Silbey, The Shrine of Party (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1967). For a more extensive examination of what historians have written about the Mexican War see Peter T. Harstad and Richard W. Resh, "The Causes of the Mexican War--A Note on Changing Interpretations," Arizona and the West, VI (Winter, 1964), 289-302.

CHAPTER II

THE ANNEXATION OF TEXAS AND THE DECLARATION OF WAR

The first Congressional vote both to create problems with Mexico and at the same time provide Congress with a sectional issue was the annexation of Texas. The Mexican government had ominously warned that the annexation of the Republic of Texas by the United States would be considered a hostile act. Yet despite this warning, the Lone Star Republic was added to the Union in 1845. In the fall of 1843, President John Tyler's administration had begun negotiations with the administration of Sam Houston, completing a treaty of annexation on April 12, 1844. However, the treaty failed to receive the required two-thirds majority needed for ratification in the United States Senate, owing its rejection in large part to the activities of Northern abolitionists.

The "reannexation of Texas" and the "reoccupation of Oregon" were major points in Democratic candidate James K. Polk's platform in the campaign of 1844. Polk won the election, an indication to him of the nation's desire to see Texas become part of the Union. President Taylor likewise was convinced, and prior to leaving office introduced a joint resolution of annexation requiring only a simple majority of both houses of Congress. After long debate, Congress passed the measure, and the President signed it on March 1, 1845. In

his first inaugural address President Polk congratulated Congress for its action, noting that

> The republic of Texas had made known her desire to come into our Union, to form a part of our confederacy, and to enjoy with us the blessing of liberty secured and guaranteed by our constitution. Texas was once a part of our country--was unwisely ceded away to a foreign power--is now independent, and possesses an undoubted right to dispose of a part or the whole of her territory, and to merge her sovereignty as a separate and independent State, in ours. I congratulate my country that, by an act of the last Congress of the United States, the assent of this government has been given to the reunion.[1]

The cause for celebration felt by many doubtless was tempered by Mexico's immediate response. Mexico for its part lived up to its threat and broke diplomatic relations with the United States five days after the joint resolution of annexation was signed.

In addition to the threat of war with Mexico other factors entered into the debate on the annexation of Texas. Of these additional issues, it was the question of slavery which proved to be the crux of the argument. If brought into the Union, the Lone Star State would bring with it a vast amount of territory--slave territory. Many Northerners were resolutely opposed to the addition of any more slave states. The debate, therefore, assumed sectional characteristics. Many states, both North and South, passed their own resolutions giving opinions on the advisability of annexing Texas. As would be expected, many Northern states were against annexation, while nearly every Southern state expressed its opinion in favor of such a move. The Massachusetts legislature passed a resolution against annexation which

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[1] as quoted in John S. Jenkins, James K. Polk and a History of His Administration (New Orleans: Burnett & Bostwick, 1854), p. 155.

complained of the method of annexation, and decried the spread of slavery that would result from adding Texas to the Union. In a passionate conclusion the resolution declared that Massachusetts "will never, by any act or deed, give her consent to the further extension of slavery to any portion of the world."[2] Ohio had similar complaints and remarked in its resolution that its citizens opposed annexation because it would "further extend the undue advantage which the citizens of the slave-holding States have over those of the States in which slavery is not permitted."[3] However not all of the states of the Old Northwest opposed annexation. Michigan voiced its approval.

As could be expected most of the positive responses came from the South. The legislature of Louisiana in its resolution stated that "it is the deliberate opinion that a majority of the people of Louisiana are in favor of the immediate annexation of Texas to the United States by any lawful or constitutional means."[4] Alabama likewise urged annexation. However, sectional unity on this matter was not absolute. The General Assembly of New Hampshire passed a resolution in favor of adding Texas to the Union. Sounding remarkably like those of its Southern neighbors, the resolution declared:

> That we regard it as an insult to the people of Texas, who have gallantly achieved their liberties by the sword of revolution, to make the consent of Mexico a prerequisite to their reannexation to the United States; and that an attempt to procure the assent of Mexico, now convulsed with insurrection and torn with contending factions, each claiming to wield the rightful powers of government, would be as fruitless as unnecessary and uncalled for by the

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[2] Senate Document 141, 28th Cong., 2nd sess., Serial 457, p. 11.

[3] Senate Document 55, 28th Cong., 2nd sess., Serial 464, p. 2.

[4] Senate Document 90, 28th Cong., 2nd sess., Serial 465, p. 1.

justice and law of the case.[5]

On January 25, 1845, the House of Representatives passed the joint resolution of annexation by a vote of 120 to 98.[6] As the various resolutions passed by the states foreshadowed, the debate in the House was bitter. On January 11, Representative J. P. Kennedy of Maryland raised doubts about the method by which annexation would be undertaken, and described the joint resolution then being considered as "contortion, conflict, almost agony of mind, to contrive a way [for annexation to take place] ".[7] Chastising those behind such a move, Kennedy warned that "the spectre of a violated constitution tracks their footsteps, and many are afraid to look behind."[8] On the other side of the question A. P. Stone of Ohio on the day preceding the vote had remarked that Texas must inevitably join the Union because "our republic is to be an ocean-bound republic. Providence intended this western hemisphere to be an asylum for the oppressed, and that our institutions should be their guardians."[9] Such was the moralistic tenor of many remarks both pro and con.

However, the vote in the House revealed that the more pragmatic concerns of party politics were also of great importance. The Democrats under Polk had been elected on an expansionist platform,

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[5] Senate Document 337, 28th Cong., 2nd sess., Serial 450, p. 1.

[6] Congressional Globe, 28th Cong., 2nd sess., XIV, 194. Regional definitions and the make-up of the House of Representatives, 28th Congress, can be found in appendixes A and B.

[7] Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 28th Cong., 2nd sess., XIV, 296.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., p. 227.

TABLE I

THE ANNEXATION OF TEXAS--HOUSE VOTE

	YES		NO	
	Democrat	Whig	Democrat	Whig
Northeast	7		9	15
Middle Atlantic	22		17	23
Northwest	24		4	13
Border	16	4	1	9
South	42	5		7
TOTAL	111	9	31	67

and some Whigs were not particularly eager to help the Democrats fulfill their campaign promises. Thus, the vote reflected a combination of sectional and partisan intersts. Only nine Whigs voted for the measure while there was a considerable amount of Northern Democratic opposition.

Party cohesion in the Senate on the issue of annexation was even greater than in the House. However, like the debate in the House, the oratory which filled the Senate Chamber had a decidedly moral tone. Senator Levi Woodbury of New Hampshire, uring the passage of the resolution and refuting the charges of those opposing it, bellowed:

> What! seizing upon the lands of an unoffending neighbor [Texas], because it is weak, when this resolution merely expresses our assent to that neighbor coming into the Union, and co-operating with us in the great business of self-government; and when, under this constitution, which had been in existence fifty years, without stain or reproach, we had never seized upon a foot of land

belonging to any neighbor, or any remote government.[10]

In the same vein, Senator W. T. Colquitt of Georgia urged that his fellow Senators "bid them [Texans] welcome, as brethren, to share with us a common heritage; and by passing the resolution on your table, paint another star on our flag, under the wings of that proud bird which is the emblem of our nation's glory."[11] On February 27, the Senate narrowly approved the resolution by a vote of 27 to 25.[12] For some, sectional loyalties were secondary to other concerns as is evidenced by five Southerners voting against annexation. Furthermore, in both houses of Congress there were Northern Senators and Representatives who voted for annexation, some of whom feared an increased British influence in North America if Texas remained an independent country.

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[10] Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 28th Cong., 2nd sess., XIV, 233.

[11] Ibid., p. 256.

[12] Congressional Globe, 28th Cong., 2nd sess., XIV, 362. The composition of the Senate, 28th Congress, can be found in Appendix B.

TABLE II

THE ANNEXATION OF TEXAS--SENATE VOTE

	YES		NO	
	Democrat	Whig	Democrat	Whig
Northeast	4			8
Middle Atlantic	3	1		4
Northwest	5			3
Border	2	1		5
South	9	2	1	4
TOTAL	23	4	1	24

The next major vote in Congress was triggered by events in Texas. On April 24, 1846, Mexican troops crossed the Rio Grande, attacked an American patrol, and killed or wounded sixteen Americans. In the text of his war message Polk revealed that General Zachary Taylor had been sent with his troops to the Rio Grande "to protect private property, and to respect personal rights."[13] However, Polk said that Taylor had been directed not to commit any aggressive acts against Mexico or its citizens. Again, according to the message, Polk revealed that General Pedro de Ampudia had, on April 12, ordered Taylor to withdraw his troops north of the Nueces River and that "in event of his failure to comply with these demands, announced that

[13] Senate Document 337, 29th Cong., 1st sess., Serial 476, p. 4.

arms, and arms alone, must decide the question."[14] However, it was not until the twenty-fourth that Ampudia made good his threat. For Taylor and his troops on the Rio Grande the war had begun.

Prior to Polk's receipt of the news that hostilities had commenced, he had been agonizing over the state of relations with Mexico and whether or not to ask Congress for a declaration of war. In his diary entry of May 9, Polk revealed that he had put the question of war with Mexico to a vote of his cabinet and that only the Secretary of the Navy had opposed such action.[15] According to the diary, the Cabinet adjourned about two o'clock in the afternoon; later the same day Polk received word that Taylor's troops had been attacked. The Cabinet was recalled that evening to consider the new developments, and this time all consented to asking Congress for a declaration of war.[16]

With the news of the attack, Polk was assured Congressional support. The next day the clerk read the message Polk had written. The words were strong and forceful. They were words that appealed to the emotional--the national honor had been impugned. Polk had written, "the Mexican government. . . after a long-continued series of menaces, have at last invaded our territory, and shed the blood of our fellow-citizens on our own soil."[17] In his conclusion Polk stated:

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[14]Ibid.

[15]Milo M. Quaife, The Diary of James K. Polk During His Presidency, 1845 to 1849 (4 vols.; Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1910), I, 384.

[16]Ibid., p. 386.

[17]Senate Document 337, 29th Cong., 1st sess., Serial 476, p. 2.

> the most energetic and prompt measures, and the immed-
> appearance in arms of a large and overpowering force,
> are recommended to Congress as the most certain and
> efficient means of bringing the existing collision
> with Mexico to a speedy and successful termination.[18]

The House of Representatives quickly began debate on the issue. Representative Jacob Brinkerhoff of Ohio urged a prompt and extensive response to the Mexican attack. He stated that he was "in favor of prosecuting this war in such a manner that our enemy shall be at once crushed--such a war as should fully, instantly, at once bring them to our feet, and compel the conclusion of an honorable peace--a permanent peace."[19] Garrett Davis of Kentucky was less enthusiastic. He commented that "I require only to know that our army is in danger, and whether it be in the territory of the United States or Mexico; I am ready to vote men and money even to the utmost resources of the country for the rescue." He went on to state however, "I protest solemnly against defiling this measure with the unfounded statement that Mexico began this war." Davis proceeded, in blunt fashion, to lay the blame for the war elsewhere, saying, "if the bill contained any recitation upon that point in truth and justice, it should be that this war was begun by the President." He did not share Polk's belief that the attack had occurred on American soil. "The river Nueces is the true western boundary of Texas. The country between that stream and the Del Norte is part of Mexico." Davis saw no need for American troops to have been in the area and accused Polk of plotting the war at the expense of innocent parties helplessly

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[18]Ibid., p. 6.

[19]Congressional Globe, 29th Cong., 1st sess., XV, 792.

involved.[20]

Despite the opposition of Davis (who abstained from the vote on the declaration of war) and a few others, the House passed the declaration on the same day as it was delivered by the overwhelming margin of 174 to 14.[21] Some, like Davis, abstained while others voted in favor of the declaration because they wanted to provide supplies for Taylor's troops, but not necessarily because they wanted a war with Mexico. Thus, some support was qualified by moral doubts. The only opposition to the declaration of war came from a small group of Whig abolitionists who viewed the war as a slavocracy conspiracy. Most Northern Whigs voted for the declaration fearing possible political consequences if they did not. However, the majority of Representatives were motivated by nationalistic concern and believed at the time that war was imperative.

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[20] Ibid., p. 794. Interestingly, Mexico in 1845-1846 had never made such a claim to the Nueces River; they claimed the Sabine River as the boundary.

[21] Congressional Globe, 29th Cong., 1st sess., XV, 795. The composition of the House of Representatives, 29th Congress, can be found in Appendix B.

TABLE III

DECLARATION OF WAR--HOUSE VOTE

	YES			NO	
	Democrat	Whig	Native American	Democrat	Whig
Northeast	8	7			7
Middle Atlantic	27	17	3		2
Northwest	28	5			5
Border	17	12			
South	43	7			
TOTAL	123	48	3		14

The debate in the Senate was considerably more lengthy. John C. Calhoun of South Carolina early in the debate raised the crucial point of whether Congress should declare war. He remarked that

> the President had announced that there is war; but according to my interpretation, there is no war according to the sense of our Constitution. I distinguish between hostilities and war, and God forbid that, acting under the Constitution, we should ever confound one with the other. There may be invasion without war. But it is our sacred duty to make war, and it is for us to determine whether war shall be declared or not. If we have declared war, a state of war exists, and not till then.[22]

Calhoun went on to urge a closer examination of the facts. Then Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri declared his belief that the message concerned two matters, one of which was diplomatic, the other military.

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[22]Ibid., 784.

The message, at his request, was divided and sent to the appropriate committees--Foreign Relations and Military Affairs.[23] For this reason the issue could not be resolved in one day.

The next day the debate continued. Reacting to several proposals that the American response only be a defensive one, Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan retorted, "A Mexican army is upon our soil. Are we to confine our efforts to repelling them? Are we to drive them to the border, and them stop our pursuit?" He added that "the advantage would be altogether on the side of the Mexicans, while the loss would be altogether ours. . . .No vote of mine shall place my country in this situation."[24] John M. Berrien of Georgia, however, continued the line of reasoning brought forth by Calhoun the day before. "A declaration of war is not necessary for the purpose of arming us with all necessary power to repel the invasion, and punish the aggression." Berrien furthermore added that "if recognized by the Government of Mexico, then war exists; if not, the hostility will have been committed by an officer of the Mexican army, and no war will exist between the two countries."[25] Joining the two hesitant Southerners, John Davis of Massachusetts stated that,

> if it turns out that this territory [between the Nueces and the Rio Grande] is debatable ground, a serious responsibility rests somewhere, and presents the question of war in a very different aspect from what it would have possessed had the invasion been made within the acknowledged limits of this country.[26]

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., p. 799.

[25] Ibid., p. 801.

[26] Ibid., p. 786.

Yet despite the reluctance of some of these Senators, the declaration of war was passed by a vote of 40 to 2 on May 12, 1846.[27]

TABLE IV

DECLARATION OF WAR--SENATE VOTE

	YES		NO	
	Democrat	Whig	Democrat	Whig
Northeast	3	2		1
Middle Atlantic	3	2		1
Northwest	5	2		
Border	3	4		
South	12	4		
TOTAL	26	14		2

The two dissenting votes were cast by Whigs: Thomas Clayton of Delaware and John Davis of Massachusetts. John C. Calhoun, a Democrat, plus George Evans of Maine and John Berrien of Georgia, both Whigs, were present but did not vote. Again, there were those who did not wish to oppose supplying Taylor's troops with provisions, but who also did not want to see such action lead to a full scale war with Mexico. Thus, Calhoun, Evans, and Berrien did not give active

[27]Ibid., p. 804. The composition of the Senate, 29th Congress, can be found in Appendix B.

support to the declaration, choosing silence as a reflection of their reservations about the developing conflict. It is interesting that two respected Southern Senators did not actively support the measure. If this was a Southern war, it certainly lacked total Southern support.

CHAPTER III

THE WILMOT PROVISO AND THE BERRIEN RESOLUTION

The news of the declaration of war was received at first enthusiastically in the United States. Americans, both North and South, rushed to volunteer for military service. Citizens meeting in Detroit, Michigan, affirmed their loyalty to the cause, saying, "that Michigan will cheerfully respond to the call of the general government, and furnish her quota of men and means, and hold herself in readiness to defend the honor and soil of our common country."[1] A public demonstration outside city hall in New York City was attended by 50,000 people calling for vigorous measures in prosecuting the war.[2] The war also attracted the interest of various religious groups. Some members of the Catholic Church in America regarded the war as a possible means of adding large numbers of Catholic Mexicans to their fold, while several Protestant sects eyed Mexico as fertile ground for the conversion of deluded papists.[3]

However, as the war progressed it became increasingly more

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[1] Senate Document 395, 29th Cong. 1st sess., Serial 477, p. 4.

[2] Justin Smith, The War with Mexico (New York: Macmillan Company, 1919), II, 268.

[3] Clayton S. Ellsworth, "American Churches and the Mexican War," American Historical Review, XLV (January, 1940), pp. 301-26.

unpopular. Whigs, hoping to recapture the White House and increase their party's power, soon labeled the conflict "Jimmy Polk's War." Northern "Conscience" Whigs attempted to cast doubt on America's moral justification for fighting Mexico. And not all religious groups supported the war; the Quakers were actively involved in anti-war activities. Nor was all the dissatisfaction located in the North; Calhoun became a bitter opponent of the war. Should the United States win the war and thereby gain Mexican territory, the possibility existed that such alien territory would threaten the South's prominent position in national politics. Furthermore, Calhoun feared increased sectional and class conflicts should any Mexican territory be added to the Union.

Calhoun's fear that the Mexican War would lead to additional sectional antagonisms was well founded. The war posed one basic problem. If Mexican territory was added to the United States, would it be free or would it be slave, and who would decide such an important issue? Most Americans wanted California, and many wanted yet more--if not all--of Mexico. But the question of slavery complicated the matter. It is not surprising then, that long before the war was concluded, some Congressmen would propose plans to resolve the thorny problem.

When the Pennsylvanian rose to propose his solution, Congress was busied with the chores of concluding the first session of the Twenty-ninth Congress. What this man suggested, this Davis Wilmot of the Keystone state, was that the territory the United States would gain as a result of the war with its southern neighbor be made permanently free by an act of Congress. It was in August, 1846, that

Wilmot introduced an amendment to the "Two Million Bill," a general appropriations measure. The amendment read,

> Provided, That, as an express and fundamental condition to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico by the United States, by virtue of any treaty which may be negotiated between them, and to the use by the Executive of the money herein appropriated, neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of said territory, except for crime whereof the party shall first be duly convicted.[4]

This amendment, surely one of the more famous in American history, quickly became known as the Wilmot Proviso. Despite the Southern Representatives' strenuous objections, the Proviso was added to the appropriations bill by a vote of 83 to 64.[5] The bill itself likewise was passed and sent to the Senate for consideration. However, the bill reached that chamber only an hour before the time set for adjournment of the session, and as a result it died in the Senate.[6]

Wilmot remained persistent. In February of the next year he reintroduced the Proviso as an amendment to the "Three Million Bill," a replacement for the never-passed "Two Million Bill." As could be expected, the debate in the House was long and passionate. Jacob Brinkerhoff of Ohio declared that "there is no danger of the dissolution of the Union; but if . . . the arms and the blood of this Nation shall be used to propagate slavery over free soil--why, let dissolution come!"[7] Bradford R. Wood of New York delivered a lengthy speech

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[4] Congressional Globe, 29th Cong., 1st sess., XV, 1217.

[5] Ibid., p. 1218.

[6] Charles B. Going, David Wilmot, Free Soiler (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1924), p. 101.

[7] Congressional Globe, 29th Cong., 2nd sess., XVI, 377.

on the Proviso. A Democrat, Wood accepted the growing Northern Whig interpretation of the war--that it was Southern inspired.

> The South obtained the whole of Texas. . . .She now claims whatever of Mexico shall be acquired by this war. After clutching the whole of Texas and involving us in war she now talks of the fairness of dividing these Mexican conquests. She should have thought of this before. It is too late now. Come what may, so far as I am concerned, slavery shall go no further; and the threat that you will dissolve the Union unless permitted to extend slavery over these newly acquired territories, and where it does not now exist, is as empty as the wind.[8]

Wood did not share the belief of some of his colleagues that slavery would not be profitable and therefore would not exist in territories gained from Mexico because of a hostile environment. He pointed out that, "slavery exists even in the colds of Russia. It will go wherever man in his cupidity of lust and power can carry it, and remain just as long as it is possible."[9] Joshua Giddings of Ohio likewise accepted the view of the South's culpability with regard to the war and the spread of slavery. However, he wanted to attack the problem at its source--the actual annexation of any war-gained territory. Giddings declared, "I greatly fear, sir, if we add to the extent of our southwestern border it will prove an extension of slavery." He went on to comment that

> I am. . . opposed to obtaining any more territory in that direction or in any other. I would confine Texas to the precise limits occupied by her at the time of annexation. Beyond that I would not extend the power of the slaveholder to recapture his slave. I would leave the whole country beyond the valley of the Nueces free. Let it be a place of refuge, unpolluted by the footsteps of the slave-catcher; where the panting

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[8] Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 29th Cong., 2nd sess., XVI, 388.

[9] Ibid.

> fugitive may rest in safety; where no Texan master shall have power to seize or reenslave him as he may now do in our free States.[10]

To a Southerner those were fighting words, and his response was measured in kind.

Southerners resorted to their particular interpretation of the Constitution to attack the legality and morality of the Wilmot Proviso. Thomas H. Bayly of Virginia used just such a line of reasoning when he spoke to the subject. He pointed out that "the Constitution guaranties [sic] to each State a republican form of government, the fundamental principle of which is the right of self-government." He added that "the very definition of tyranny is to be subject to laws in the enactment and continuance of which we have no voice; the very definition of republicanism is the right to govern ourselves." Continuing his remarks about the Constitution and the Missouri Compromise Bayly concluded:

> This proposition to exclude slavery from all the territories hereafter acquired without any reference to its geographical position evinces bad faith upon the part of the non-slaveholding States. It is not only a palpable violation of the Constitution but also of the Missouri compromise.[11]

The vote on the Wilmot Proviso came on February 15, 1847, and the amendment was approved by a vote of 115 to 106.[12] The vote was overwhelmingly sectional as could be expected, for it was a sectional issue. As such it elicited a sectional response.

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[10] Ibid., p. 456.

[11] Ibid., p. 391.

[12] Congressional Globe, 29th Cong., 2nd sess., XVI, 425.

TABLE V

THE WILMOT PROVISO--SECOND HOUSE VOTE

	YES			NO	
	Democrat	Whig	Native American	Democrat	Whig
Northeast	10	20			
Middle Atlantic	31	23	3	5	1
Northwest	17	11		11	
Border				18	13
South				48	10
TOTAL	58	54	3	82	24

Within the Senate there were those who wished to avert what seemed to be an impending crisis. Senator John Berrien of Georgia proposed an amendment of his own to the "Three Million Bill". The amendment stated:

> Provided, always, And it is hereby declared to be the true intent and meaning of Congress in making this appropriation, that the war with Mexico ought not to be prosecuted by this Government with any view to the dismemberment of that republic, or to the acquisition by conquest of any portion of her territory; that this Government ever desires to maintain and preserve peaceful and friendly relations with all nations, and particularly with the neighboring republic of Mexico, will always be ready to enter into negotiations, with a view to terminate the present unhappy conflict on terms which shall secure the just rights and preserve inviolate the national honor of the United States and Mexico; serve those amicable relations which ought always to exist between neighboring republics, that the boundary of the State of Texas should be definitely settled, and that provision be made by the republic of Mexico for the prompt and equitable settlement

of the just claims of our citizens on that republic.[13]

Voicing the concern of Calhoun, Berrien warned that "the acquisition of territory must bring before us. . . a question which now menaces the permanence of this Union."[14] Senator James T. Morehead of Kentucky agreed and asked, "Have we not land enough to satisfy any American citizen? Or is there such a pressing necessity to have more that we will endanger all that is dear to us in the pursuit of this policy?"[15] However, the pleas of these and other Senators were in vain; (most Americans did not want to renounce expansionism completely) the amendment failed and the Senate was faced either with accepting or rejecting the proviso of David Wilmot.

President Polk did not remain completely aloof from the proceedings. He wrote in his diary on January 4, 1847, that "the slavery question is assuming a fearful & most important aspect." He added that it "will be attended with terrible consequences to the country, and cannot fail to destroy the Democratic party, if it does not ultimately threaten the Union itself."[16] As for the Wilmot Proviso and the method by which its passage was being attempted, Polk commented:

> It is a domestic and not a foreign question, and to connect it with the appropriations for prosecuting the war, or with the two million appropriation with a view to obtain peace, can result in no good, but must divide the country by a sectional line & lead to the worst consequences. . . . I deplore this state of

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[13]Ibid., p. 326.

[14]Ibid., p. 330.

[15]Ibid., p. 345.

[16]Quaife, The Diary of James K. Polk, II, 305.

> things; I will do all I can to correct it; I will do my duty and leave the rest to God and my country.[17]

Clearly Polk did not approve of the Proviso--neither of the spirit which motivated it nor the means by which it was to be accomplished.

The Senate undertook lengthy debate on the Proviso and the "Three Million Bill" which reflected the same moralistic tone that had been evident in the House. The degree to which presidential pressure influenced the outcome of the vote is difficult to estimate. However, the Senate did finally reject the Proviso by a margin of 31 to 21 on March 1, 1847.[18] Like that of the House, the vote in the Senate was non-partisan--but sectional. The Northeastern Senators voted unanimously for, while Southern Senators voted unanimously against, the Proviso. Senators from the Northwest and Border states gave most of their votes to the opposition and thereby assured defeat of the amendment.

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[17] Ibid., p. 306.

[18] Congressional Globe, 29th Cong., 2nd sess., XVI. 555.

TABLE VI

THE WILMOT PROVISO--SENATE VOTE

	YES		NO	
	Democrat	Whig	Democrat	Whig
Northeast	4	8		
Middle Atlantic	3	3	1	
Northwest		1	3	
Border	1	1	4	5
South			13	5
TOTAL	8	13	21	10

David Wilmot made one last attempt to add the Proviso to the "Three Million Bill" when the House of Representatives reconsidered it. This time the House narrowly rejected the amendment by a vote of 97 in favor to 102 opposed on March 3, 1847.[19] As had been the case in the Senate, the crucial votes came from the Representatives from the Middle Atlantic and Northwestern states. In the second vote the Middle Atlantic states doubled their opposing votes (from six to twelve) with the state of Pennsylvania providing the largest number of negative votes.

[19] Ibid., p. 573.

TABLE VII

THE WILMOT PROVISO--THIRD HOUSE VOTE

	YES			NO	
	Democrat	Whig	Native American	Democrat	Whig
Northeast	9	20			
Middle Atlantic	25	19	1	12	
Northwest	13	10		10	
Border				18	11
South				42	9
TOTAL	47	49	1	82	20

The Wilmot Proviso provided an issue for the mid-term election of 1846. In that election the Whigs gained control of the House, scoring significant victories in the Middle Atlantic and Northwest regions. Northern sentiment favored the Proviso, and some Northern Democrats who had opposed the Proviso found themselves victims of the Whig anti-slavery onslaught.

The Wilmot Proviso had been rejected. It would be reintroduced from time to time, but would not gain Congressional approval until the South had withdrawn from the Union. Although the amendment had failed, it had not done so by large margins, however. The dialogue which developed as a result of the measure was heated and often far from healthy. Yes, the Proviso had been defeated, but not until it had polarized Congress and stirred deep and abiding resentment in the South.

CHAPTER IV

THE TREATY OF GUADALUPE-HIDALGO AND THE COMPROMISE OF 1850

The war did finally end. Nicolas Trist, the Chief Clerk of the State Department, had been sent with General Winfield Scott's army to be on hand to negotiate a peace settlement with the Mexican government. Trist's performance had not pleased the President, however, and in October of 1847 the State Department had sent a note recalling him. Trist had ignored the note and continued negotiations without authorization, which had shocked and infuriated Polk. On February 2, 1848, in the Mexico City suburb of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, Trist had signed a treaty of peace with Mexico and forwarded it to Washington. The treaty called for Mexican recognition of the Rio Grande as the southern boundary of Texas and for a vast cession of land which included California, New Mexico, and points in between, for which the United States agreed to pay Mexico the sum of $15,000,000. The United States, on the other hand, agreed to pay all American claims against Mexico, which eventually amounted to more than three million dollars. Also the treaty included a provision for the establishment of a separate commission to survey the boundary between the two countries.

President Polk noted in his diary on February 19, 1848, that he had received the treaty and also commented, "Mr. Trist has acted

very badly. . . , but notwithstanding this, if on further examination the Treaty is one that can be accepted, it should not be rejected on account of his bad conduct."[1] Polk, very much the pragmatist, did submit the treaty to the Senate for ratification although it had been negotiated without official American sanction. The Senate dutifully ratified the treaty on March 10, 1848, by a vote of 38 in favor to 14 against.[2] The vote was basically non-sectional and non-partisan, although a larger percentage of Whigs than Democrats voted against the treaty. Justin Smith, the war's chief historian, sarcastically pointed out:

> The inefficient and shameless war was now brilliant and most creditable. Indeed, the Whigs chose for a standard-bearer a man [Zachary Taylor] who represented professionally the military spirit they had raised pious hands against, who belonged to the slaveholding order so plainly viewed askance by the New Commandment, who had recommended the advance to the Rio Grande, who had aimed the cannon at Matamoros, who had advised appropriating Mexican territory by force of arms, and who owed in fact all his prominence to playing a leading role in the 'illegal, unrighteous, and damnable' war.[3]

Clearly most Northern Senators were not unhappy with the treaty. On the other hand, four Southern Senators (two Democrats and two Whigs), fearing the addition of alien territory, voted against the treaty. If the Mexican War had been a slavocracy conspiracy, it had been a curious one indeed!

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[1] Quaife, The Diary of James K. Polk, III, 345.

[2] Senate Executive Document 52, 30th Cong., 1st sess., Serial 509, p. 36. The composition of the Senate, 30th Congress, can be found in Appendix B.

[3] Smith, The War with Mexico, II, 268.

TABLE VIII

THE TREATY OF GUADALUPE-HIDALGO

	YES		NO	
	Democrat	Whig	Democrat	Whig
Northeast	4	4		3
Middle Atlantic	4	2		1
Northwest	4		3	1
Border	1	4	2	
South	13	2	2	2
TOTAL	26	12	7	7

The years which immediately followed the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo were trying ones. By 1850, the nation was threatened with disunion. Some of the troubles had been caused by the Mexican War; others had not. In 1849, California, New Mexico, and Utah (Deseret) applied for statehood. The question of slavery in these areas loomed large; Northerners wanted it prohibited there while Southerners wanted it permitted. To further complicate matters, Texas had attempted to organize New Mexico County (the part of present-day New Mexico east of the Rio Grande) only to be spurned by New Mexicans, as well as Presidents Zachary Taylor and Millard Filmore. The problem reached such grave proportions that Texas, unwilling to give up a large part of its territory without some sort of compensation, threatened to organize the area by force if necessary. In addition, the North wanted the slave trade abolished in the District of Columbia, while

the South wanted a strong fugitive slave law. Neither section favored the other's proposal.

Congress was badly divided, and talk of secession was not rare. Into this impasse stepped Henry Clay, returned to the Senate for his last great effort. Clay proposed a series of compromises. California would be admitted as a free state as it had requested. Texas would not exercise jurisdiction over eastern New Mexico but would be compensated for its loss (Texas eventually was paid $10,000,000). New Mexico and Utah would be made territories, and they would choose (according to the doctrine of popular sovereignty), upon admittance to the Union, whether they wished to be slave or free. A fugitive slave law would be enacted and the marketing of slaves in the District of Columbia would be forbidden. The bill was originally reported out of committee in the form of one bill--a fact which made passage impossible. The Ominbus Bill, as it was called in its unitary form, was debated endlessly. It was, in fact, the subject of some of the greatest oratory in American history. Senator Thomas Hart Benton objected to the Compromise because of the manner in which California was to be admitted. He remarked:

> California is a State, and has a right to be treated as other States have been, when asking admission into the Union, and none of which have been subjected to the indignity of having their application coupled with the decision of other, inferior, and, to them, foreign questions.
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> I object to it upon principle--that principle of fair legislation which requires every measure to stand or fall upon its own merits, unaided by stronger measures, unimpeded by weaker ones.[4]

Concluding his speech, Benton urged the Senate to consider carefully

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[4] Congressional Globe, 31st Cong., 1st sess., XXI, Part I, 656.

the Compromise measures and to remember the framework in which all such matters should be considered. In the spirit of calmness, he noted:

> The Constitution is the compromise. It is the binding compromise, and has been faithfully kept by every Congress from 1789 to 1850; and there is not reason to suppose it will not continue to be kept. If it shall not be kept, it will be time enough, after the breach is committed, to think of the remedy--the remedy of disunion. We should no more look ahead for the causes of disunion, than we should look ahead for the causes of separation from our wives, or for the murder of our mothers.[5]

Henry Clay rose to make his reply to Senator Benton's criticisms. The modest Clay, clearly disturbed by the divisiveness the bill had generated, stated:

> There is bad and good mixed together. You may vote against it if you please in toto, because of the bad there is in it, or you may vote for it, because you approve of the greater amount of good there is in it. The question for the time is, whether there is more of the good than of the bad in the bill; and if the good outweighs the bad, that will be a further consideration for voting for the whole measure.[6]

Senator Calhoun made a proposition of his own. In essence the venerable Southern Senator wanted Congress to guarantee the rights of the South and to provide a sectional equilibrium between the two sections. He, for one, believed the nation headed for disunion, and remarked:

> It is a great mistake to suppose that disunion can be effected by a single blow. The cords which bind these States together in one common Union are far too numerous for that. Disunion must be the work of time. It is only through a long process, and successively, that the cords can be snapped, until the whole fabric falls assunder. Already the agitation of the slavery question has snapped some of the most important, and has greatly weakened all the others.[7]

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[5]Ibid., p. 657.

[6]Ibid., p. 661.

[7]Ibid., p. 453.

Perhaps prophetically, Calhoun warned that the South's interests must be protected. He believed much of the so-called Compromise of 1850 to be injurious to the South. Therefore he opposed the measure in its lump sum.

There were others similarly disenchanted by the compromise Clay offered. One especially influential antagonist was Senator William H. Seward. A young Northern radical, Seward believed the Compromise too lenient on the matter of slavery. His "Higher Law" speech earned for him a place of recognition in the annals of great American oratory. In his speech Seward bellowed:

> I AM OPPOSED TO ANY SUCH COMPROMISE, IN ANY AND ALL THE FORMS IN WHICH IT HAS BEEN PROPOSED, because, while admitting the purity and the patriotism of all from whom it is my misfortune to differ, I think all legislative compromises radically wrong and essentially vicious. They involve the surrender of the exercise of judgment and conscience on distinct and separate questions, at distinct and separate times, with the indispensible advantages it affords for ascertaining the truth. They involve a relinquishment of the right to reconsider in future the decisions of the present, on questions prematurely anticipated; and they are a usurpation as to future questions of the province of future legislators.[8]

Seward attacked the argument Southerners had put forward that the Constitution protected their rights as slave-holders. He expressed his belief that there was a higher law than the Constitution, saying

> It is true, indeed, that the national domain is ours; it is true, it was acquired by the valor and with the wealth of the whole nation; but we hold, nevertheless, no arbitrary power over it. We hold no arbitrary authority over any thing, whether acquired lawfully, or seized by usurpation. The Constitution regulates our stewardships; the Constitution devotes the domain to union, to justice, to welfare, and to liberty.
>
> But there is a higher law than the Constitution,

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[8] Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 31st Cong., 1st. sess, XXII, Part I, 262.

> which regulates our authority over the domain, and devotes it to the same noble purposes.[9]

Because of this higher law, Seward could not justify voting for popular sovereignty or for the fugitive slave law because they were designed to perpetuate the barbaric institution of slavery.

As eloquent and as moving as many of the speeches had been, it was the speech of Daniel Webster of Massachusetts which proved to be classic. Resolutely opposed to slavery, Webster nonetheless supported the Compromise. The logic he stated in his "Seventh of March Speech" was convincing, and his oratory was persuasive. When Texas entered the Union, he said it had retained the right to divide itself into as many as five states--presumably slave. Webster declared that he would support Texas in any such move since it originally had been given permission by Congress to separate into additional states and that he would "not violate the faith of the Government."[10]

But what of the territories they were legislating for now? Should slavery be forbidden? Webster's answer was surprising. He declared:

> As to California and New Mexico, I hold slavery to be excluded from those territories by a law even superior to that which admits and sanctions it in Texas--I mean the law of nature--of physical geography--the law of the formation of the earth. . . . California and New Mexico are Asiatic in their formation and scenery. They are composed of vast ridges of mountains, of enormous height, with sometimes broken ridges and deep valleys. There may be in California. . . , some tracts of valuable land. But it is not so in New Mexico.[11]

Although Webster's geography may have been faulty, the grain of truth

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[9]Ibid., p. 265.

[10]Congressional Globe, 31st Cong., 1st sess., XXI, Part I, 480.

[11]Ibid.

was there. California, New Mexico, and the rest of the Mexican Cession largely were unsuitable for the Southern cotton culture.

Despite various urgings for acceptance of the Omnibus bill, passage could not be obtained. President Zachary Taylor, who relied on William H. Seward for much of his advice, was opposed to the bill. When, in July of 1850, Congress finally began to vote on the Compromise, it immediately was choked by numerous amendments by Senators who disliked one provision or another. Clay left Washington on August 2, wearied from the months of debate and battling, and in poor health.

It was during his absence that victory for his compromise was obtained. The various measures incorporated in the bill were separated, thus allowing Congressmen to consider the merits of each without having to come to some decision based on the relative worth of the proposals in the aggregate sum. Another event also helped assure acceptance. President Taylor had died on July 9, and his successor, Millard Filmore, was in favor of compromise, unlike his predecessor who had been opposed to it.

The first of the proposals to be considered was the bill to adjust the Texas boundary between that state and New Mexico and to pay Texas for its loss. The vote was taken on August 9, with 30 voting in favor and 20 against.[12] The vote was basically non-partisan and non-sectional. Although Texans generally approved of the measure (both Texas Senators voted in favor of the bill), they were unable to convince some of their Southern colleagues who believed that Texas was giving away too much territory. Some Northern opposition came

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[12]Ibid., XXI, Part II, 1555. The composition of the Senate, 31st Congress, can be found in Appendix B.

TABLE IX

TEXAS BOUNDARY BILL--SENATE VOTE

	YES		NO		
	Democrat	Whig	Democrat	Whig	Free Soil
Northeast	2	6		2	1
Middle Atlantic	2	3		1	
Northwest	7		3		1
Border		2	3	1	
South	5	3	7	1	
TOTAL	16	14	13	5	2

from those Senators who disliked paying Texas $10,000,000 for the territory.

The vote in the House of Representatives on the Texas boundary question came on September 6. There it was decided affirmatively by the narrow vote of 108 to 97.[13] As in the Senate the House vote was non-partisan and non-sectional. The only exception to this pattern was that the Free Soil Party voted unanimously against the bill in the House as well as in the Senate.

[13]Ibid., p. 1764. The composition of the House, 31st Congress, can be found in Appendix B.

TABLE X

TEXAS BOUNDARY VOTE--HOUSE VOTE

	YES		NO		
	Democrat	Whig	Democrat	Whig	Free Soil
Northeast	5	6	6	8	2
Middle Atlantic	9	19		25	2
Northwest	17	1	11	8	5
Border	17	12	1		
South	10	12	27	2	
TOTAL	58	50	45	43	9

On August 13, the Senate voted on the bill to admit California as a state. This particular bill was heavily debated. Northerners wanted the entrance of California as a free state, a provision which was included in the bill. Southerners, of course, wanted to gain a foothold in the West. The vote was favorable to the admission as a free state by the margin of 34 to 18 and strongly reflected sectional positions on the matter of slavery.[14]

[14] Ibid., p. 1573.

TABLE XI

THE CALIFORNIA BILL--SENATE VOTE

	YES			NO	
	Democrat	Whig	Free Soil	Democrat	Whig
Northeast	3	7	1		
Middle Atlantic	2	5			
Northwest	11		1		
Border	1	2		2	1
South	1			12	3
TOTAL	18	14	2	14	4

The House voted on the California Bill on September 7, passing it by the overwhelming margin of 150 to 56.[15] Like the Senate vote, the House vote on California reflected the same sectional bias, and in roughly the same proportion.

[15] Ibid., p. 1772.

TABLE XII

THE CALIFORNIA BILL--HOUSE VOTE

	YES			NO	
	Democrat	Whig	Free Soil	Democrat	Whig
Northeast	13	9	2		
Middle Atlantic	10	45	2		
Northwest	28	9	6		
Border	11	12		8	
South		3		38	10
TOTAL	62	78	10	46	10

The third of the compromise measures to be considered by the Senate was the bill to make New Mexico a territory with the right of popular sovereignty. The vote, taken on August 15, was 27 to 10 in favor.[16] It was primarily sectional, but not as rigidly as was the vote on the Wilmot Proviso. Opposition to the measure came from Representatives in the Northeast, Middle Atlantic, and Northwest regions who detested the concept of popular sovereignty. Southerners, both Whig and Democrat, voted unanimously for the bill.

[16]Ibid., p. 1589. The vote in the House of Representatives to make New Mexico a territory was combined with the vote on the Texas boundary question.

TABLE XIII

THE NEW MEXICO BILL--SENATE VOTE

	YES		NO		
	Democrat	Whig	Democrat	Whig	Free Soil
Northeast	2		2	4	
Middle Atlantic	2	2		1	
Northwest	7		2		1
Border	2	1			
South	7	4			
TOTAL	20	7	4	5	1

The next matter to be considered by the Senate was the Fugitive Slave Law. The concern over this bill was sectional--the South wanted it and the North opposed it--and the vote of August 23, with 27 to 12 in favor, revealed a strong, but not absolute sectional bias.[17]

[17] Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 31st Cong., 1st. sess., XXII, Part II, 1630.

TABLE XIV

THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW--SENATE VOTE

	YES		NO		
	Democrat	Whig	Democrat	Whig	Free Soil
Northeast			1	6	
Middle Atlantic	1	2		2	
Northwest	2		2		1
Border	2	3			
South	13	4			
TOTAL	18	9	3	8	1

The House vote on the Fugitive Slave law came on September 12 and was 109 to 75 in favor.[18] There the vote was much less sectional than in the Senate. In fact, six New Englanders voted for the measure while one Southerner voted against it. Despite the fact that the compromise measures originated in the Senate, the spirit of compromise and of union was stronger in the House of Representatives.

[18] Congressional Globe, 31st Cong., 1st sess., XXI, Part II, 1807.

TABLE XV

THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW--HOUSE VOTE

	YES		NO		
	Demo-crat	Whig	Demo crat	Whig	Free Soil
Northeast	5	1	3	9	4
Middle Atlantic	8	1		32	2
Northwest	14	2	13	6	6
Border	17	11			
South	36	13			
West	1		1		
TOTAL	81	28	17	47	12

Another matter which excited sectional interest was that of prohibiting the slave trade in the District of Columbia. This time it was the North who favored the bill and the South that opposed it. On September 16, the Senate voted on the Slave Trade bill, approving the measure by a margin of 33 to 19.[19]

[19]Ibid., p. 1830.

TABLE XVI

SLAVE TRADE BILL--SENATE VOTE

	YES			NO	
	Democrat	Whig	Free Soil	Democrat	Whig
Northeast	2	5	1		
Middle Atlantic	2	5			
Northwest	11		1		
Border	1	2		2	2
South	1			10	5
West	1		1		
TOTAL	18	12	3	12	7

The House voted on the Slave Trade bill on September 17, giving its consent by the wide margin of 124 to 59.[20] Like the vote in the Senate, the House tally showed sectional divisions.

[20]Ibid., p. 1837.

TABLE XVII

SLAVE TRADE BILL--HOUSE VOTE

	YES			NO	
	Democrat	Whig	Free Soil	Democrat	Whig
Northeast	11	12	1		
Middle Atlantic	10	43	2		
Northwest	29	8	3		
Border	1	1		13	7
South	1	1		30	9
West	1				
TOTAL	53	65	6	43	16

Finally, there was one additional vote connected with the Compromise of 1850. On September 7 the House passed the bill establishing the Territory of Utah. Like the bill to organize New Mexico, the Utah measure contained a provision for popular sovereignty. It was approved by the margin of 97 to 85.[21]

[21]Ibid., p. 1776.

TABLE XVIII

THE UTAH BILL--HOUSE VOTE

	YES		NO		
	Democrat	Whig	Democrat	Whig	Free Soil
Northeast	5	2	4	9	4
Middle Atlantic	10	10		28	2
Northwest	15		10	8	5
Border	15	11			
South	17	12	15		
TOTAL	62	35	29	45	11

Unlike the vote in the Senate on the New Mexico bill, the House vote on the Utah question was basically non-partisan and non-sectional, although, as in the Senate, all Southerners voted for the measure.

Thus Congress had enacted the compromises of Henry Clay. Temporarily they provided the cement to hold together a crumbling nation. The votes showed that sectional considerations were still very present if somewhat restrained. On the matter of popular sovereignty there were those who voted in favor of measures embodying the principle in the interest of union. On the other hand, there also were those who morally could not justify a vote for popular sovereignty, be it a Northerner who saw it as a sanction for slavery, or a Southerner who saw it as a betrayal of his cause. Similar concerns guided the votes on the Slave Trade and Fugitive Slave bills. A William Seward could declare that compromise was folly, while a Henry

Clay could urge compromise at all costs. For the remainder of Senators and Representatives, it was necessary for them to probe their individual consciences to find the answer to the question of which was the more important--Union or their personal principles. In 1850, a majority of congressmen decided in favor of Union.

CHAPTER V

PERSONALITIES AND CONCLUSION

The complexities which characterized the Mexican War were best revealed in the thoughts and actions of the people who lived through the conflict, especially those persons in the government who had a direct or indirect say as to how the war should be prosecuted. As has been shown, the war created hostilities not only between the United States and the Republic of Mexico, but also between North and South within the United States. Doves and hawks, slaveholders and abolitionists found expression through the Mexican War. Each had specific desire as to the outcome of the conflict and to the blueprint for the future which the conclusion of the war would make necessary. President James K. Polk, Senators Thomas Hart Benton, Henry Clay, William Seward, John C. Calhoun, Daniel Webster, and Lewis Cass, plus Representative David Wilmot--these were the men who directed the course of the nation during the troubled times of the war and the years which immediately followed the peace treaty. They came from every section of the country. Some were very representative of their section's desires, while others, moved by other considerations, were less often in accord with their provincial brethren. Some, like Benton, Clay, Calhoun, and Webster, were statesmen of the old school. Others, like Seward and Wilmot, were young firebrands who would live through the holocaust of the Civil War. Wars are created by men, fought by men, and ended

by men. The solution to the enigma which was the Mexican War can, therefore, in part be found with the protagonists--the men of action.

The oldest of ten children, James Knox Polk was born on November 2, 1795, in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. The young Polk, influenced mainly by his mother, was a rather serious lad and strongly religious. In 1806 he moved to Tennessee with his family where he was educated. However, for his higher education he returned to the University of North Carolina where he enrolled in the sophomore class in 1815. After graduation Polk studied in the law office of Felix Grundy in Tennessee. Several years later he ran for the state legislature, won, and served for two years. In 1824, he married Sarah Childress, and in 1825 was elected to the House of Representatives as an ardent Jacksonian.

Polk rose in political stature and power during the administration of Andrew Jackson. He was elected Speaker of the House in 1835, and from 1839 to 1841 he served as governor of Tennessee. He ran for reelection in 1841 and 1843, but was defeated both times. Then in 1844, with Jackson's blessings, Polk was nominated on the ninth ballot as the Democratic candidate for President, largely because of his stand in favor of territorial expansion. He ran on a platform calling for the "reoccupation of Oregon" and the "reannexation of Texas." Polk, of course, won the election, and in doing so became the youngest President to serve to that time. As President he asked for and obtained, Congressional permission to terminate the joint occupation of Oregon with Great Britain. In 1846 he presented the Senate with a treaty calling for the present boundaries between the United States and Canada, which the Senate dutifully ratified. War had been avoided

with Great Britain. Neither side had gained all of the Oregon Territory it desired; each had compromised. However, compromise was unobtainable with Mexico.[1]

There were many points of dispute between the United States and Mexico. There was Texas, the fact that it had been annexed by the United States and that it claimed its boundary to be the Rio Grande. There was California--the United States was interested in acquiring access to the Pacific, especially the excellent harbor at San Francisco. And finally, there was the claims question. Numerous pronunciamientos, or revolutions, had caused much damage to American property, and the American government had continually sought redress. Mexico, during the administration of Andrew Jackson, had agreed to binding arbitration, but had walked out after only one-third of the claims had been settled. The pronunciamientos which had created the claims had also created a situation in which the normal functioning of government, especially with regard to foreign relations, was made virtually impossible. The accepted avenues of negotiation between the United States and Mexico, for all practical purposes, did not exist, and by the choice of Mexico, not the United States.

However, Polk was not dissuaded from trying. The President sent John Slidell to negotiate all points of dispute between the two countries. He was instructed to attempt to purchase California, ideally by exchanging this territory for the unsettled claims. Mexican officials refused even to receive Slidell, claiming their national

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[1]For additional biographical information see Eugene McCormac, James K. Polk, A Political Biography (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965).

honor had been insulted by the suggestion that they sell California. Polk has been often criticized for the Slidell mission and his attempt to buy California, both by his contemporaries and later by historians. In all fairness to Polk, it should be noted that the United States had paid France for Louisiana and Spain for Florida, and neither France or Spain played the part of the insulted party. And five years after the war, Mexico cheerfully accepted ten million dollars for a piece of nearly worthless territory later called by historians the Gadsden Purchase. Why was not their national honor impuned then? It is quite simple. A nation's honor generally is insulted only when the "offended" party wishes it so.

And what of the Texas boundary question? Who was right--Texas and the United States, or the Republic of Mexico? At best the territory between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande was disputed ground; neither side had complete control. Texans claimed the area, but Mexico had never recognized that state's independence even though much of the rest of the world, including most of Europe, had. When General Antonio López de Santa Anna, leader of the Mexican forces during the Texas Revolution, had been captured, he had agreed to the Rio Grande as the southern boundary of Texas in the Treaties of Velasco. Mexico never ratified the treaties; however, after the United States had annexed Texas, and as a result of British pressure, Mexico agreed to recognize the independence of Texas with the Rio Grande as the boundary of Texas. As with their "impugned" national honor, Mexicans claimed the Sabine River as the boundary, and used this claim as an issue when they thought it convenient. Polk had every right to send troops into the area. The fact that Mexicans attacked

them was again a matter of their choice.

It finally should be noted that by nineteenth-century standards the United States had every right to go to war with Mexico over the claims question alone. France had declared war on Mexico in 1838 because Mexico refused to pay French claims. Polk did not want war with Mexico as some have charged; however, he was not afraid to fight. He wanted negotiations, but after that approach failed, believed that war to be the only way to settle the serious disputes between the two countries. He has been much maligned about this war. But the all-of-Mexico movement, which gained momentum during the war, was most popular in the North rather than the South.[2] And the treaty which ended the conflict had strong support in the North. Very few people at that time complained of adding the territories gained by fighting. Polk was far from a perfect President--his attacks on Generals Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott because they were successful Whigs was at best injudicious--yet he was far from the war-mongering monster many have made him out to be.

Thomas Hart Benton, called by one of his biographers "the Magnificent Missourian" and by his contemporaries "Old Bullion Benton," was born at Hillsboro, Virginia, on March 14, 1782. Educated in North Carolina, he also attended the University of that state as had Polk. Afterward he moved to Tennessee where he served as a state senator

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[2]As the war with Mexico progressed it became increasingly obvious that the United States would win handily. The armies of Generals Taylor and Scott were driving into the heart of Mexico. Many in the United States wanted to conquer and occupy the whole of Mexico, and after dictating the peace, annex all of Mexico to the United States. However, the end of the war came before this movement gained enough momentum to achieve this end and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo settled the issue.

in 1809 and was admitted to the bar in 1811. He participated in the War of 1812, and, following that conflict, moved in 1815 to St. Louis. There he became the editor of the Missouri Enquirer. In 1820 Benton was elected to the United States Senate, and the next year married Elizabeth McDowell of Virginia. A hard money man, he helped lead the fight against the Second National Bank during Jackson's administration. Benton lost his seat in the Senate in the election of 1850, largely because he had opposed the Compromise. He ran for the House and was elected, but lost this seat in the next election. Then in 1856 he ran for governor and was defeated. He died in 1858 of cancer.[3]

To say that Benton was colorful would be too mild. His career in the Senate was a long one. And there he gained such power as to be the West's most outspoken Senator. Benton did not always reflect his state's viewpoints as is indicated by the fact that he was turned out of office because of his stand on the Compromise of 1850. He did have his principles, although he was a slaveholder and a Southerner by birth. However, he did not always follow the South in its fight to extend slavery. On the question of the annexation of Texas, Benton was much less enthusiastic than other Southerners. He feared war with Mexico, did not see a threat of British intervention in the affairs of Texas as did Calhoun, and felt that the boundaries Texas claimed were unrealistic. He favored negotiation with Mexico before American annexation and a reduction of Texas' boundaries, leaving the Rio Grande valley in Mexican hands. However, he reluctantly voted for the joint

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[3]For additional biographical information see Elbert B. Smith, Magnificent Missourian: the Life of Thomas Hart Benton (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1957).

resolution of annexation, prophetically fearing what might occur as a result.

Benton's reluctance extended from the annexation of Texas to the declaration of war with Mexico. He believed the area in which the attack was made on Taylor's troops was disputed ground and he wished more time to consider the possibility of an existence of war. However, he firmly believed that no time should be wasted in showing support for Taylor's troops and voted for the declaration, but with reservations.

Reluctance did not characterize Benton's stand on the Wilmot Proviso, however. He stood resolutely against it. He had always been concerned with sectional harmony, and this accounts in part for his stand on Texas. The addition of large amounts of territory only brought up the problem of how it should be dispensed--slave or free? This position was further revealed by his vote on the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Benton opposed the treaty for the same reason he had opposed Texas' liberal boundaries--the sectional fight to resolve the issue would be intense.

Benton was not opposed to compromise, he was a unionist and wanted to see the Nation saved. However, he did oppose Clay's compromise in its original omnibus form, largely because he believed that the admission of California should not be tied to the other matters contained in the Compromise. After the Compromise was divided into its separate measures, Benton supported most of them. He voted for the New Mexico bill, the admission of California, and surprisingly (since nearly every Southerner opposed it as did most Missourians) the bill to forbid the slave trade in the District of Columbia. Not surprisingly, he opposed the Texas boundary bill, believing that

Texas had no real claim to the land it was receiving compensation for losing.

Throughout his career in politics Benton stood for what he believed. He was a politician of the old school, loving the Union more than his section. Yet he was quick to speak and vote for the interests of Missouri and of the West in general. Benton was a powerful figure in the Senate. His influence on the votes of others, especially those from his own section, was undeniable. His views on the annexation of Texas, the war with Mexico, and the Compromise of 1850, while not necessarily triumphant, were of importance and revealed in part the complexities which characterized the issues.

Lewis Cass of Michigan, another figure of importance, had been born in New England on October 9, 1782. He attended the academy at Exeter and later, after graduation, taught school in Wilmington, Delaware. He moved to Ohio where he set up law practice in 1802, and at age twenty-four he was elected to the Ohio legislature. He served in the army during the War of 1812 as a colonel. Following the war he moved to Detroit, Michigan, in 1818. His first major appointment was in the War Department during the administration of Jackson. Then in 1845, he was elected to the Senate from Michigan. His rise to power in the Democratic Party was rapid. He received the Democratic nomination for the Presidency in 1848 and resigned his seat in the Senate to run. After his defeat, he returned to the Senate. Later, between 1857 and 1860, he would serve as President James Buchanan's

secretary of state. He died on June 17, 1866.[4]

Cass was always the nationalist. He gave full support to the War of 1812 and backed Polk completely on the prosecution of the Mexican War. In fact, Cass could have been termed an imperialist. However, he abhored sectional disunity and violently opposed the Wilmot Proviso; thus he wholeheartedly favored Clay's compromise measures, including the controversial Fugitive Slave bill. In short, he believed in the Union and desired to see it remain one, even at the cost of some of the anti-slavery principles which various of his Northwestern and Northern colleagues espoused.

The South's greatest spokesman in the decades preceding the Compromise of 1850 was John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. He was born on March 18, 1782, and was educated in South Carolina and in Connecticut at Yale University. After graduating from Yale, he studied law at the Tapping Reeve's school in Litchfield. He then returned to Charleston where he was admitted to the bar in 1807. He was elected to the national House of Representatives in 1810 where he gained prominence as a "war hawk," urging war with Great Britain. He was appointed secretary of war by President James Monroe. Then in 1824 Calhoun was elected vice-president and served in that capacity under Presidents John Quincey Adams and Andrew Jackson. It was during Jackson's administration that he became involved with the nullification dispute in which he opposed Jackson. He was appointed secretary of state in John Tyler's cabinet following the death of Abel Upshur and

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[4]For additional biographical information see Frank B. Woodford, Lewis Cass, the Last Jeffersonian (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1950).

in this capacity he labored for the annexation of Texas. When Polk took office, he did not desire the services of Calhoun and terminated his cabinet post. Calhoun thereupon entered the Senate where he remained in office until his death on March 31, 1850.[5]

John C. Calhoun was one of the more enigmatic figures in American history. He certainly was a brilliant theoretician, and he was a persuasive speaker. Calhoun loved the nation, yet he loved his region more and constantly was striving to guard against his section's erosion of political power and influence. He defended slavery as a positive good and villified Northern abolitionists. Calhoun would save the Union only if the South enjoyed a protected position--and only if the "peculiar institution" could be made safe against the onslaughts of anti-slavery crusaders. And he favored the annexation of Texas, hoping that it would add to the political strength of an increasingly outnumbered South. However, he opposed the Mexican War, fearing the addition of territory which did not share the South's culture, and which if added to the Union might further dilute the South's position in national politics. Gerald White Johnson in his analysis of Calhoun noted that "technological advances, with the economic changes they enforced, were coercing the North to oppose slavery, independently of the crusade of the moralists; but this truth Calhoun never envisaged."[6] Simply stated, Calhoun was fighting for a dying system. Tragically, he represented a large body of Southerners who also had failed to

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[5]For additional biographical information see Margaret Coit, John C. Calhoun, American Portrait (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1950).

[6]Gerald White Johnson, American's Silver Age (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1939), p. 239.

understand these changes.

By the 1850's Massachusetts had become noted for its statesmen and politicians. One of the more notable of these was Daniel Webster. Born on January 18, 1782, in Salisbury, New Hampshire, he suffered poor health as a child. Nonetheless, he entered Phillips Exeter Academy at age fourteen. After graduation, he returned to Salisbury to study law and in 1805 was admitted to the Boston bar. Two years later he moved to Portsmouth, Massachusetts. Webster married Grace Fletcher of New Hampshire on May 29, 1808; afterward, he practiced law successfully in Portsmouth and gradually gained political influence in his state. He became well known after the publishing of his pamphlet Considerations of the Embargo Act in 1808 in which he defended the rights of New England's commercial interests against Thomas Jefferson's Embargo Act. He was elected to Congress in 1812.

He gained national prominence when in 1819 he successfully pleaded the case of Dartmouth College. In 1827, Webster was elected to the United States Senate. His first wife died in January of 1828, and he remarried in December, 1829, to Caroline Le Roy of New York. He was made secretary of state under William Henry Harrison and served for both him and President Tyler. However, he resigned from the Tyler cabinet in 1843 and returned to the Senate in 1845. He later returned briefly to the State Department as secretary of state under President Millard Filmore, and died on October 24, 1852.[7]

Daniel Webster was very much the sectionalist--he always looked

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[7]For additional biographical information see Charles M. Fuess, Daniel Webster (2 vols.; Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1930).

after the interests of New England. And he hated slavery, continually striving to limit it. However, Webster was also a nationalist; like Benton, Clay, Cass and others, he loved the Union and was willing to compromise to guarantee the continuance of the Republic. He opposed the annexation of Texas and the resultant spread of slavery; he favored a limited Mexican War. Yet in 1850 Webster was totally in favor of compromise. His Seventh of March speech revealed that Webster considered the Union more important than clinging to principle when such action was unnecessary--nature would limit slavery. As a spokesman for New England, Webster gave the nation some of its finest oratory, and more importantly, the calm reasoning required for the Union's stability.

Not all Northern congressmen were as moderate as Daniel Webster. There was a new, younger breed which began to make its presence felt during the decade of the Mexican War. Some of these men found compromise less pleasing than confrontation in forwarding their cause. One such man was David Wilmot. He was born on January 20, 1814, in Pennsylvania, and there he was educated. In 1832, he entered a law office in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, and married Anne Morgan of Bethlehem four years later. He was elected to the House of Representatives in 1845 and served until 1851. In that year he was elected presiding judge of the 13th Pennsylvania district and served in that capacity until 1861. He helped to establish the Republican Party in Pennsylvania and was their first candidate for governor. President Abraham Lincoln offered Wilmot a position in his cabinet, but he refused. Instead he filled the vacated seat of the Senator from Pennsylvania who did accept a position in Lincoln's cabinet, and served

in the Senate from 1861 to 1863. After he left the Senate, Lincoln appointed him a justice on the Court of Claims, but his declining health precluded effective service. He died on March 16, 1868.[8]

As political careers go, Wilmot's was less than distinguished. It was rather short, but it was quite eventful. David Wilmot was a man of the moment. He represented a small but growing viewpoint in the North--that slavery must not be allowed to spread under any circumstances, and, in fact, should be abolished in the entire of the United States. At a time of great sectional strain, his Proviso calling for the prohibition of slavery in the territory gained as a result of the Mexican War was additional fuel for the already raging sectional fire.

Another such radical was William Seward of New York. Born on May 16, 1801, he was educated in New York and graduated from Union College at age fifteen. He was admitted to the state bar in 1822, moving up to the state senate in 1830. However, he served only one term, for he was defeated for reelection in 1833. He also was defeated for governor in 1834 when he ran on the Anti-Mason ticket, but was elected to the governorship in 1838 and 1840. Seward was elected to the United States Senate in 1848 on the tide of a strong anti-slavery sentiment in New York. With the organization of the Republican Party, Seward became one of its most articulate spokesmen. Later, he served as secretary of state under Lincoln and Andrew Johnson, a position he filled creditably. He retired to his home in Auburn, New York, in 1871 following a trip around the world. He died on October 10, 1872.[9]

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[8]For additional biographical information see Charles B. Going, David Wilmot, Free Soiler (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1924).

[9]For additional biographical information see Glyndon Van Deusen, William Henry Seward (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

Seward's career in politics was much more distinguished than that of Wilmot, for he became one of the abolitionists most articulate proponents. He was a man who stood on principle. He would oppose Clay's compromises because they left unchanged the moral wrongs of slavery. However, his position mellowed somewhat under the tutelage of President Lincoln. And in the end, he supported Lincoln's plan for reconstruction with mercy for the South, a fact which cost him his popularity.

In this morass of extremists and sectionalists, there was one man who acted to hold the beleaguered nation together. That man was Henry Clay. He was born on April 12, 1777, in Virginia. Despite a scant education, he secured a position of clerk in the High Court of Chancery in 1792, and remained there for four years. Then in 1796 he began studying law in Richmond before moving to Lexington, Kentucky, the following year to establish a practice. In Kentucky Clay became famous for his skill as a lawyer. Clay was elected to the national Senate in 1806 but served only briefly; then in 1807 he was elected to the Kentucky House of Representatives where he became the speaker. And in 1810 he again was elected to national office, this time the House. He quickly earned recognition as the spokesman for the West and as a hawk favoring war with England. He took part in the negotiations at Ghent following the war with Great Britain. When he returned, he was made speaker of the House of Representatives. He became an ardent champion of internal improvements, the second national bank, and a high protective tariff--the American system as it was called.

In 1820, Clay saved the nation from greater turmoil by offering

his Missouri Compromise, by which the question of slavery in the Louisiana Territory was settled. An unsuccessful candidate for the presidency in 1824, he served as John Quincey Adams' secretary of state, was sent to the Senate in 1831, and ran unsuccessfully against Jackson in the presidential election of 1832. Clay remained in the Senate until 1842 when he retired. However, he left retirment in 1844 to run on the Whig ticket for president against James K. Polk, again to lose. Finally, he returned to the Senate in 1849, there to push for the acceptance of his Compromise of 1850. Soon afterward, ill-health caused him to leave the Senate, and he died on June 29, 1852.[10]

Clay was an unusual man in that he was rarely neutral--he had supporters, and he had enemies. There was one principle which guided Clay's political career, his dedication to the Union. This dedication quite possibly cost him the presidency, for it led him frequently to take positions which were unpopular with one or another section of the country. Carl Shurz, one of Clay's most reknowned biographers, in analyzing Clay's stand on the annexation of Texas remarked that "Clay, in a large sense a Southern man with Northern principles, disliked annexation because his instinct told him that it meant the propagation of slavery, and that endangered the Union."[11] His position on Texas cost him the election with Polk. Yet, despite his personal disappointments, his service to the nation was noteworthy. His ability to come

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[10]For additional biographical information see Glyndon Van Deusen, The Life of Henry Clay (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1937).

[11]Carl Shurz, Life of Henry Clay (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1915), II, 244.

to the fore with compromises when most needed earned for him the title of "the Great Compromiser." The nation would miss his services during the decade of the 1850's.

These then were the men who guided the destiny of the nation in the stresses of the period 1845-1850. Some represented the forces of union, others the forces of division. They belonged to troubled times. It was during these times that the Mexican War came into being and passed into history. Seemingly it was a simple war. The United States accomplished all its goals and more. As wars go, it was neither a large conflict not a lengthy one. Yet this war held for the nation anguish beyond the usual grief which accompanies death and destruction. Weary with sectional battling over the question of slavery and freedom, the country was faced once again with having to resolve the issue of slavery in the newly acquired territories. The solution to the problem did not come easily or quickly.

The Mexican War has been viewed from nearly every angle. Rarely has it been praised, and it often has been misunderstood. Many persons have confused the results of the war--increased sectional tension--with the causes of the war. Consequently, the South has been charged with instigating the war. Many point to the annexation of Texas as a cause for the war, and justly so, saying that the South wanted Texas in the Union as a slave state. The rest of the syllogism proposed that since the South worked diligently to gain Texas' admission, the fruit of the effort, the war with Mexico, should also be laid at the feet of the South. True, many in the South did want Texas added to the Union, but so did many Northerners. In fact, as the roll-call vote on the joint resolution showed, the vote was primarily a party rather

than a sectional vote--many Southern Whigs opposed the measure.

There are other facts which tend to explode the myth that the war was Southern inspired. Calhoun, Berrien, and other Southern followers opposed the war, while many Northern congressmen and countless private citizens in that section urged vigorous prosecution of the conflict. It can be said with some certainty that the South supported the war effort with more enthusiasm than the North. However, the South has always been more militant and military, especially in ante bellum days.

Further, opposition to the war quickly assumed partisan characteristics. And the section of the country most opposed to the war was New England, the traditional Whig stronghold. The South, on the other hand, was overwhelmingly Democratic. Finally, the North accepted, in large part, the treaty which ended the war, while some Southerners rejected it. If the war had been fought to add potential slave territory to the Union, why then the Northern support to such a move and why was there any Southern opposition?

As with most events in history, the Mexican War defies division into black and white, right and wrong, heroes and villains. It began on a nationalistic note and ended on a sectional one, mirroring the complexities of its age. Partisan politics and sectional strife combined to fragment Congress and the nation as a whole. The war served as the vehicle to party power and as an unfortunate contributor to sectional unease. The question of slavery in the territories gained as a result of war with Mexico greatly strained the nation and sowed the seeds of disunion. It made the Compromise of 1850 necessary, a compromise which only tenuously held the nation together. The decade which it had helped to usher in would, in the final analysis, prove to be more than the Union could bear.

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APPENDIX A

The geographic regions, for the purpose of vote analysis, are defined as follows:

Northeast--	Maine Vermont New Hampshire Massachusetts Connecticut Rhode Island
Middle Atlantic--	New York New Jersey Pennsylvania Delaware
Northwest--	Illinois Indiana Ohio Iowa (admitted December 28, 1846) Wisconsin (admitted May 29, 1848)
Border--	Missouri Tennessee Kentucky Maryland
South--	Virginia North Carolina South Carolina Georgia Alabama Mississippi Louisiana Arkansas Texas (admitted December 29, 1845)
West--	California (admitted September 9, 1850)

APPENDIX B

The following is a breakdown of the political composition of the Congresses in the period 1845 to 1850. This composition was obtained by using Thomas Alexander's Sectional Stress and Party Stain (Nashville, 1967), Joel Silbey's The Shrine of Party (Pittsburg, 1967), the Biographical Directory of the American Congress, and the Congressional Globe. Figures for the House of Representatives are based on the total Representatives who served including resignations and their respective replacements (does not include those Representatives who never took their seats). For the Senate, the figures are compiled on the basis of two Senators from each state (does not include Senators filling vacant seats formerly held by members of their party).

TWENTY-EIGHTH CONGRESS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

	Democrat	Whig
Northeast	15	15
Middle Atlantic	41	27
Northwest	29	12
Border	17	15
South	47	13
(total)	149	82

SENATE

	Democrat	Whig
Northeast	4	9
Middle Atlantic	6	5
Northwest	5	3
Border	3	6
South	12	6
(total)	30	29

TWENTY-NINTH CONGRESS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

	Democrat	Whig	Native American
Northeast	10	19	
Middle Atlantic	37	28	3
Northwest	29	12	
Border	21	13	
South	53	11	
(total)	150	84	3

SENATE

	Democrat	Whig
Northeast	6	9
Middle Atlantic	5	4
Northwest	6	2
Border	3	5
South	18	6
(total)	30	26

THIRTIETH CONGRESS

SENATE

	Democrat	Whig
Northeast	4	8
Middle Atlantic	4	4
Northwest	11	1
Border	3	5
South	16	4
(total)	38	23

THIRTY-FIRST CONGRESS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

	Democrat	Whig	Free Soil
Northeast	12	17	4
Middle Atlantic	13	51	3
Northwest	34	9	6
Border	20	12	
South	46	16	
(total)	125	105	13

SENATE

	Democrat	Whig	Free Soil
Northeast	3	8	1
Middle Atlantic	2	6	
Northwest	10	1	1
Border	4	4	
South	15	5	
(total)	34	24	2

VITA[2]

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