1971

The southern attitude towards Texas, 1844-1846

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Recommended Citation
The Southern Attitude Towards Texas, 1846-1964

Honors Thesis
for
Dr. F. W. Gregory
In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree
Bachelor of Arts
University of Richmond

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1971
PREFACE

The purpose of this paper is to study the Southern attitude towards Texas between 1844 and 1846. To understand the range of Southern opinions it is necessary to realize that Texas was a political issue in national affairs at this time, and national politics were extremely fractious during this era. Both Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun had a hand in the controversy as did the lesser luminaries of the day, Presidents John Tyler, James K. Polk and Martin Van Buren. Because some national overview is vital for a proper perspective on the problem, the first section of this paper is devoted to reviewing the overall political picture.

The second and third sections will be the body of the work. Here the arguments in favor of annexation will be broken down and classified as political, economic, legalistic, or emotional. The role of slavery will be discussed as well as the demographic considerations of Southern opinion in support of annexation. This same approach will be taken in regard to the Southern opposition to the annexation of Texas. As with most historical questions, the contemporary debate was more articulate and more easily preserved in the words of the society's leaders, the politicians. This fact limits the scope of the paper to the extent that the politicians of the day failed to be mirror images of the great majority of their constituents. To make-up for this inbuilt restriction, the fourth section will turn away from declared opinion and bombastic rhetoric.
and examine the actions of Southerners as they indicate an attitude towards Texas.

The outline of the four sections has admitted limitations. A truly exhaustive study would need to take into account the legislative annals of all the Southern states during this period and this paper considers only one primarily and two others at second-hand. Also, a definitive work would require a much broader survey of contemporary public opinion as represented in the newspapers of the day. In this paper the non-Virginian newspapers have been reflected only through secondary sources. A third limitation is the natural perverseness of research materials like the diaries of Thomas Furene Massie, kept while traveling in Texas but kept in an undecipherable shorthand.
I. CONVENTIONS AND CAMPAIGNS

Outside of such restrictions, however, the Texas controversy had wide ramifications as evidenced by the diverse support and opposition it attracted during the course of the struggle. For example, on January 2, 1845, Congressman James E. Belser of Alabama touched all the bases of Texas' importance in the preamble to his bill for annexation. In supporting the admittance of Texas to the Union, Belser drew on its territorial contiguity and its apparent beneficial effect on national tranquility, security and commerce. The Congressman also asserted that annexation was necessary to insure peace and prosperity for America and to maintain the liberty of Texas and the valiant Texans who had, no doubt, just recently arrived from Alabama. But these sentiments that appeared in the full-bloom of stately Southern rhetoric commanded the unlikely support of a New York Whig Congressman less than one year later. On December 10, 1845, Abner Lewis of New York wanted to introduce a bill for the annexation of Texas. Lewis had a much more prosaic line of reasoning. The New York merchants and shippers were suffering economic hardships due to the duty charges of an independent Texas Republic. Added to these two examples of similar opinion is a third statement which will point out the existence of controversy over the Texas question. Senator John M. Berrien of Georgia, a Whig, reported to his colleagues that "while a portion of the people of Georgia were opposed to the annexation of Texas by a Joint Resolution on
the grounds of a want of constitutional power, and many of them because of its inexpediency, yet there was another portion who were decided advocates of the measure." 3

Thus the vitalness of a national overview is more clearly seen. For in some respects the intra-sectional division of the South reflects the ultimate lines of separation at the national level, especially in the struggle between political parties. The tangled nature of the controversy is seen in the picture of a Southern Democrat and a New York Whig both supporting the same measure in practice, if for different reasons, and the people of a single Southern state are of divided opinion due in part to the several factors noted by Senator Berrien. In examining these considerations, politics—the competition for power and leadership—emerges as the key determinant of opinion about the annexation of Texas. The complexities of the issue stand out particularly when studying the Southern attitude towards Texas in the period, 1844 to 1846.

The question of annexation of Texas first arose as a national issue near the end of Andrew Jackson's second administration. A particular combination of forces brought it to a head in 1844 during the struggle for political advantage in that election year. The fight was a three-cornered affair between the national Whigs, national Democrats and President Tyler, unloved by both parties. It is to Tyler, however, that the credit goes for forthrightly bringing the question out into the open. Tyler's political ambitions received a big, and
not disinterested, assist from his second Secretary of State, John C. Calhoun, when the President tried to capture the widely popular issue and have it "reflect glory on his administration." The maverick President had been thoroughly denounced by the Whigs who had elected him Vice-President in 1840. Tyler's only hope as a candidate in 1844 would have been to run as a popular independent or in a third party. Calhoun's presidential ambitions as a Democrat depended on a split between sectional factions of the Party where slavery became the turning point.

His supporters felt that the Texas controversy would be a convenient vehicle to divide and conquer under the banner of protecting the South's peculiar institution. Calhoun miscalculated the impact of Texas annexation on the Democratic populous, however, and Texas became an issue sui generis within the Party. Although Former President Van Buren was the leading contender for the nomination in 1844, he competed with a large number of potential candidates such as Lewis Cass, James Buchanan, Silas Wright, Richard M. Johnson and James K. Polk. Near the end of April, Van Buren published a letter containing his position on the addition of Texas to the Union. In it, Van Buren came out against immediate annexation, a policy that coincided with Henry Clay's stand and one that was anathema to the Southern Democrats. When the Convention convened on May 27, 1844 in Baltimore at the Egyptian Saloon it soon became clear that the anti-Texas position had cost Van Buren the nomination. No Southern
delegation would give substantial support to Van Buren. From the internecine struggle, Polk of Tennessee, emerged as the party’s choice for a pro-annexationist to oppose the Whig’s Henry Clay.

The nomination of Folk forced the Texas issue on a reluctant Clay. The Whig candidate’s opinion was best known from his anti-annexationist "Raleigh letter" published on April 27, 1844. In it Clay developed the Whip line, saying "the annexation of Texas... without the assent of Mexico [was an action] compromising the national character [and] involving us certainly in a war with Mexico [and] probably with other foreign powers."6 Clay continued to argue that annexation was a hazardous measure due to the weak financial position of the United States at the time and uncalled for by any widespread public opinion. As the campaign developed the fact became obvious that the Whigs had miscalculated the support in the South for affixing Texas to the Union. In July, Clay published two "Alabama letters" that broadened his position to include personal support for annexation under certain conditions. This political maneuvering around an unpopular position could not conciliate either set of extremists, North or South. As a contemporary rhyme said:

He wires in and he wires out,
And leaves the people still in doubt,
Whether the snake that made the track
Was going South or com'in back.7

By adopting a muddled position on an issue of vital interest
to a large segment of the nation, Clay sacrificed the support of both extremes of the national Whig party and thus cost himself the election.8

This macro-view of the annexation question frames a closer study of the Southern attitude. The appendage of Texas to the Union was generally popular with Southerners during this period. However, the requirements of a unified national front demanded that a considerable section of Southern Whigs reject annexation and stand with Clay. At the same time, the "gallant" history of the infant Texas Republic and its close American ties were stirring topics for political rallies. These themes and the viciousness of Texas' predatory parent state, Mexico, were all matters the Democratic stump speakers could wax eloquent on to the joy of their auditors and to the consternation of Southern Whiggery. Thus the Southern attitude towards Texas can be viewed as a microcosm of the national political division as Whig arguments were advanced to meet Democratic enthusiasm in favor of annexation.
II. PRC-ANNEXATION FEELING IN THE SOUTH

In surveying the great segment of Southern feeling in favor of annexation it is necessary to break down the supporting arguments into convenient, even if arbitrary, classes such as political, economic, legalistic, slavery-orientated or emotionalistic. Some classes require further internal divisions. But the fact emerges from all discussion that connecting Texas to the Union was a consummation earnestly desired by many people in the South. This opinion was reflected by Calhoun's letter of instructions to T. A. Howard, the United States' representative to the Republic of Texas, on June 18, 1844, just ten days after the Senate had rejected the Tyler administration's treaty for annexation. "The sentiment of the people [in favor of annexation] was never more satisfactory, and it was constantly proving better; and it was believed that after meeting their constituents, particularly in the South and West, a sufficient number of Congressmen would change to insure passage of a joint resolution." The Secretary of State's opinion was mirrored in the national elections that year and on January 25, 1845, the House of Representatives passed a joint resolution for the annexation of Texas. A month later, on February 27, 1845, the Senate also approved the measure setting the stage for Texas' entry into the Union in December of 1845.

The first category of Southern opinion to be dealt with is labeled political. Under this classification the importance
of annexation to the political future of the South will be seen as the major rallying point of all Southern proponents of subjoining Texas to the Union. The "battle of the petitions," the Southern Whip dilemma, proposed solutions to the crisis and the international aspects of the annexation fever will also receive attention. But the first topic is Texas' political importance to the South. As early as 1837, just one year after the founding of the Republic of Texas, a select committee of the Mississippi State legislature declared in a report that "the annexation of Texas is essential to the safety and repose of the Southern States." In this period of national growth and expansion the South had observed her original political advantage slip away and was now arguing that by appending Texas to the United States, the defense of Southern rights would be bolstered and the Southland could confront the richer, more populous North on terms of greater equality.

The breadth of arguments put forward in the political arena in favor of annexation is tremendous. An excellent summary was provided in the resolution of the Legislature of Mississippi presented to Congress by Mr. William H. Hammett, a Mississippi Democrat, on March 19, 1844. The resolution proclaimed that:

An enlightened policy would dictate that the two countries contiguous in geographical position, inhabited by a kindred people, speaking a common language, producing the same staples, cherishing the same commercial interests and animated by the same love of liberty, should not longer sustain a relation that is now separate and may hereafter become belligerent.
One of the most obvious concerns is the economic relationship between the South and Texas, here seen as a question of political advantage but later developed as a separate grouping in the rationale for annexation.

Given the political importance of Texas, one of the most interesting aspects of the controversy was the "battle of the petitions". As a means of communication, petitions from constituents to their Representatives and Senators ranked high in the 1840's. During this period many Northern Congressmen were introducing petitions against annexation of Texas and these were met on a nearly one to one bases by Southern petitions in favor of the addition of Texas to the Union. The value of petitions in influencing opinion is demonstrated by the fact that as early as 1838, Senator William C. Preston of South Carolina, declared that the Northern anti-annexation petitions were in effect, if not intent, anti-South political propaganda.15 Thus, in one day during the first strong rush of annexation excitement in the spring of 1844, the Congressional Globe reports introduction of petitions in favor of annexation from Mobile, Alabama,16 Chesterfield and Prince George counties in Virginia and Mr. John Campbell's district in South Carolina.18

The growing sensitivity of the issue is reflected in the House Journal of May 22, 1844. Mr. Belser of Alabama and Howell Cobb of Georgia both presented petitions in favor of annexation and requested that they be printed. In both cases
there was vigorous objection led by the Whig Congressman, John Dickey of Pennsylvania. The influence of petitions is also seen in the fact that even after the Senate rejected the treaty to unite Texas to the Union in 1844, petitions favorable to that end were still regularly introduced. For example, in the House on June 10, 1844, by Joseph A. Woodard of South Carolina and by Senator George McDuffie of the Palmetto State on June 11, 1844.

In the face of this strong popular support for annexation, the Southern Whigs were in a dilemma. In Mississippi, as elsewhere in the South, Whig voters were strongly attracted to the pro-Texas arguments in 1844. Many of these Whigs would support the appending of Texas to the Union until it became a question of party loyalty. However, loyalty was not at all guaranteed. The Nashville Union reported on April 6, 1844 that Clay's supporters in the South were "quaking with fear" over his expected opposition to annexation. And in May, the Whig national standard bearer did come out against "immediate" annexation. As a contemporary of Clay observed, "the Texas question was the only one made and openly advocated everywhere... and upon it all our losses in the South and West occurred."

Thus, the result of the national Whig position on annexation was the loss of Southern support at the polls. But the dilemma can be pictured as a problem for each individual Southern Whig also. Willoughby Newton, a Whig Congressman from Virginia,
who supported the joint resolution for annexation of Texas in 1845, felt compelled to address an open letter to his constituents, defending his seeming violation of Whig principles. Newton declared that his endorsement of annexation rested on two-fold grounds. First, it was an eminently legal action by the Congress. And, secondly, annexation would be good for the South by increasing the Southern political strength and, therefore, lending support to Southern institutions.25 Similarly, most Whigs turned to specific rationales to justify breaking with the national party over this vital policy question. The reasoning used by the Southerners to support the Clay-Whig line will be dealt with in the third section.

One of the key elements in the Texas annexation fight was the controversy over how Texas would be divided up after she was admitted to the Union. It was taken as a matter of course that several smaller states would be carved from this huge southwestern land mass. It was a momentous issue at the time because on the outcome would hang the degree of political advantage to be gained by the South. If four or five states could spawn from the Republic of Texas the Southern political edge would be tremendous. The extension of the South's peculiar institution into the several states formed from Texas would conveniently serve as a balance to the expansion of the free-soil northwest.26 Of the many individual bills offered in 1845 for the annexation of Texas the most original measure was Senator Thomas Hart Benton's attempt at compromise. The
Missourian proposed the creation of two slave states and two free states from the Texas land mass. The Benton bill, however, failed to receive the support of either sectional interest. The ironic part of the whole affair is that while the South was exerting mighty efforts to secure the addition of Texas to the Union in the form of several states, and the final annexation formula allowed for the creation of several new states, the people of Texas had no desire to fragment their huge province. And Texas would never deliver that unique political advantage in the sectional struggle.

In considering the political arguments put forward by Southerners in favor of annexation the international aspects of the controversy lie in three areas. The first involves the fears of English domination of Texas. The South was stirred to action by the threat of English control over the territory which would thus become free-soil. Along with the fears of British abolitionist designs on Texas went a second international factor. It was a generous measure of anti-British sentiment generated by a European power meddling in American affairs. In the resolution of the Mississippi Legislature previously referred to was a section declaring that any European control existing in Texas would be a just cause for war. The third factor for consideration was that immediate annexation was liable to result in a war with Mexico. The Southern opinion was summed up by Congressman Belser of Alabama when he proclaimed that Texas was well worth fighting for.
the official position of the Democratic Party of Mississippi was that if a war with Mexico resulted from annexing Texas to the Union, "let it come."32

The second major classification of Southern opinion in favor of annexation is labeled the economic group. A large part these arguments were addressed to the commercial powers of the North in hopes of swaying Northern opinion in favor of uniting Texas as a merchant's bonanza. A typical example is the long, statistical analysis of William W. Payne of Alabama in the House of Representatives on January 2, 1845.33 His elaborate argument was designed to illustrate a national economic advantage resulting from the annexation of Texas. In 1844, General James Hamilton of South Carolina, a follower of Calhoun and a man of "some political note" among the ardent Free Traders of the South addressed an open letter to Daniel Webster. In his letter, Hamilton set forth reasons why the North should favor annexation and they were all "argumentum ad crumenam." The South Carolinian even suggested that the South might accept an anti-European tariff in bargaining for northern support of Texas' annexation.34 Among the specific economic gains promised by the South from subjoining Texas to the United States were the large duty-free market for northern manufactured goods in Texas and an open market for the farmers of the middle and northwestern states.35

But not all the economic reasoning was directed at the North. The South was very conscious that should England
control Texas, the flow of cotton from the lands west of the Sabine to the British Isles would supply all the future needs of the British textile mills, cutting Southern cotton out of the market. Another element in the economic group is the way the Southern proponents of annexation handled the question of land values. It was a two-headed argument. In the South they admitted that the addition of Texas would create a drop in land values but that it would only harm the speculators and not the "good" people who worked the land. In the northern-oriented propaganda it was argued that annexing Texas would reduce the price of all government lands by the tremendous extension of the public domain. An argument designed to appeal to the land hungry northern masses who desired to "go West" and take up farming.

The third classification of pro-annexation arguments is called legalistic. The legality of any proposed action concerning the connecting of Texas to the Union was a matter of much debate. In 1838, Senator Preston of South Carolina had introduced a resolution calling for the re-annexation of Texas because the United States had a legal claim that could not be surrendered by treaty (as opponents of annexation claimed the United States did in 1819) but only only by an act of Congress. In positing this argument Preston asserted that the national legislature had the right to re-annex or admit Texas, in opposition to the view expressed by the legislature of the State of Massachusetts in a memorial to Congress. In developing
his reasoning in favor of appending Texas, Preston refutes the Northern argument that Texas would disrupt the political balance of the nation by showing that when the nation was founded there was an imbalance. 41

During the height of the annexation controversy in 1844 and 1845, Congressman Belser renewed the line of analysis that the national legislature had the right to annex foreign territory. 42 And the official view of the Mississippi Democratic Party in 1844 was that we should annex Texas to satisfy the pledge made in the treaty of 1803 with France. 43 Indeed, this appeal to the Louisiana Purchase treaty as giving the United States a legal claim on Texas, and arguing that the "national peace, security and interest" compelled annexation to fulfill that treaty became the mainstay of the pro-annexation legal sentiment. 44 A line of argumentation which from a legal perspective appears very weak.

The fourth classification selected to group the arguments in support of annexation is the influence of slavery on Southern opinion. It is clear that despite all the other declared considerations about annexation a fundamental motive was protection of the South's peculiar institution by maintaining political power. This is seen in the fact that before the new wave of enthusiasm in 1844 and 1845, in Mississippi as elsewhere, previous legislative actions had linked annexation with the continuance of slavery in a most positive fashion. 45 The Democratic organ, Mississippi, supported the addition of Texas
to the Union in 1844 and argued that Texas would resurrect Southern authority which had been declining in national importance. The Democratic Party in Mississippi reasoned that the increase in slave territory would enhance the value of slaves but not multiply the harms of slavery. And the Mississippi Free Trader, a solid supporter of annexation and quick annexation at that, accused the opposition Whigs in 1844 of being abolitionists.

The fact that a Mississippi newspaper could label the slave-owning Mississippi Whigs who supported Henry Clay in 1844 as abolitionists is evidence of the emotionalism stirred up by the Texas controversy in 1844 and 1846. The last classification made of the pro-annexationist's arguments is, therefore, emotionalism. In the opinion of J. H. Smith, in his excellent book *Annexation of Texas*, the annexation fever was a "spontaneous desire to regain a valuable piece of property that had been surrendered imprudently [1819] and now could be had at a bargain." It was generally agreed that the "run mad annexation excitement in the Southern States" had gotten out of hand in 1844 under the guidance of the Folk Democrats.

In one disgusted Whig's opinion: "Poke & Texas, that's the thing, it goes like wild-fire with the folks as kant rede, and don't pit no papers." But it is wrong to consider the election campaign of 1844 as the sole stimulus for emotionalism. Texas was a cause of its own. As early as 1836, the Natchez *Daily Courier* was proclaiming that the annexation
issue was showing who were for "Texas and liberty to the South" or against "Texas and white freedom in the South." 51

From these five categories local stump speakers and Senators alike drew arguments to give expression to the strong Southern attitude that favored the annexation of Texas immediately. Running throughout them all is the current of political advantage to be gained by fastening the mass of Texas onto the Southern section of the nation. The feelings peaked in 1845 with the admittance of Texas to the Union. But despite the strong, warm support of a vast segment of the South, annexation fever was not completely epidemic in the South. In the third section, the arguments of the anti-annexationists will stand to the fore.
III. ANTI-ANNEXATION FEELING IN THE SOUTH

The opposition to annexation in the South employed two quite dissimilar methods of rebuking the pro-Texas attitude that was so popular. At one time the opponents of Texas would take great pains to set down a large number of specific arguments to contradict the reasoning put forward by the friends of Texas. And then the tactics would change and the point of attack becomes a personal vendetta against President Tyler's actions in initiating the annexation excitement. In this section the "antis" rebuttal of the arguments advanced by the proponents will be presented first. The next part will concern the political case supported as a rationale for rejecting the connection of Texas to the Union. In the third portion the anti-Tyler aspect of the controversy is considered and the last element in this section will be a look at the demographic breakdown of the opposition.

Turning first to the responses the "antis" made to the popular policy of annexation, it is evident that they were trying to chill the wild enthusiasm in an avalanche of high-toned reasoning. If the classifications used to group the pro-annexation feelings are again set up, the arguments of the adversaries of subjoining Texas to the Union will fit into a similar mold. Some of the twelve arguments recorded here are drawn from Clay's "Salem Letter" as cited by J. H. Smith in The Annexation of Texas. The rest are from a speech delivered by Senator Benton on June 15, 1844.
In responding to the political advantage arguments, Clay asserted that the annexation of Texas would touch off a wave of acquisition that would lead to the North insisting on the annexation of Canada, a course of affairs that the South could not in principle oppose.\(^{52}\) Clay was also opposed to adding Texas to the Union because it would lead to a dishonorable and hazardous war for the United States.\(^{53}\) Benton's major line of response to the question of political benefits from annexing Texas was that such an action was harmful because it would lead to disunion. He characterized the addition of Texas as a maneuver to get the South out of the Union and not to get Texas in.\(^{54}\) Benton also argued that the United States' efforts to affix Texas to the Union were politically disadvantageous since it would alienate all the South American Republics.\(^{55}\)

In answering the proponents of annexation on legal grounds, the "antis" had the best case and the best form of counter-appeal to the excitement of annexation fever. Clay's principle contention was that after the Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819, the United States had no legal claim on Texas and could not justly annex territory that was not recognized as a sovereign state by the legal claimant, Mexico.\(^{56}\) Benton went further in questioning the justice of subjoining Texas to the Union. He complained that not only was the Republic of Texas not recognized by Mexico but that Texas claimed a large amount of land that was not actually under the control of the infant Republic and thus Texas was not even sovereign over her own
territory. Senator Benton moreover asserted three other arguments to prove the illegality of the annexationist's actions. First, that the actions of President Tyler and his Secretary of State, Calhoun, were illegal in giving support to the military forces of Texas and in negotiating the original annexation treaty. Benton also reasoned that since the Senate had rejected the annexation treaty it was illegal to resort to the use of a joint resolution initiated in the House of Representatives. And lastly, the Missouri Senator claimed that annexation would violate treaties of peace and friendship with Mexico.

These two redoubtable foes of the annexation plan proposed in 1845; each had an economic argument to complicate the struggle. Clay warned the clamorers for appending Texas to the Union that they would likewise inherit that southwestern Republic's national debt of some thirteen million dollars. And Benton without setting a figure in dollars and cents bemoaned the loss of Mexican commerce as a result of the annexation of Texas.

Considering the underlying importance of the problem it is strange that there were not more specific responses to the annexationist's cries that the preservation of slavery rested on the swift attachment of Texas to the Union. Benton's bill for annexation took notice of the fact that much of Texas was unfit for agricultural production by slave labor but in the large group of publicly circulated arguments considered here, only one dealt with slavery specifically. In his "Raleigh letter"
Clay maintained that at best only two new states could be carved from Texas and that that was not a very significant political advantage for the South. 63

Not being content with just replying to the analysis of the pro-annexationists, the opponents of connecting Texas to the Union advanced their own negative political case. It was carried forward on at least three lines: the principle of states' rights and non-interference, the fact that annexation was deemed unconstitutional and lastly that it would result in a dishonorable war. In 1844, the majority of the hot-headed states' rights groups, in particular in South Carolina, were using the Texas controversy to revive the emotions of nullification and to stir up feelings friendly to secession if the South did not set her way in annexing Texas. 64 The details of the nullifiers use of the Texas struggle are properly another story. However, going back to 1836, the concept of states' rights and non-interference in respect to Texas was set down by Governor McDuffie of South Carolina. In his message to the legislature, McDuffie urged a policy of strict neutrality towards Texas. His reasoning was that the United States can not justly interfere with a sovereign state's (Mexico) internal disputes. 65 At that time General Hamilton of South Carolina had opposed the analysis as impractical and by 1844 McDuffie had dropped the contention and become a supporter of immediate annexation.

The question of constitutionality is probably the
most popular among the foes of fastening Texas to the Union. Such contentions had respectability and legal status and worked to cut through the emotional fervor of the pro-annexationists. From the wealth of legalistic responses to the annexers analysis it is clear that the "antis" pinned great hopes on the observance of strict legal niceties in our dealings over Texas. As already mentioned, Benton felt that the use of a joint resolution was unconstitutional. In the Richmond Whig for March 22, 1844, a correspondent in Washington published a typical letter protesting the annexation action. "I pass over the fact that there is no provision in the Constitution that can be imagined to warrant the admission into our Union of a foreign state. Everybody knows that."66

But even those who were willing to concede the legality of annexation found grounds to oppose any rapid addition of Texas to the Union in the fear of war. The Whig correspondent just referred to points out that adopting Texas will surely "embroil us in war."67 Congressman William P. Thomasson of Kentucky, who had no qualms about the constitutional questions, felt, however, that it was not the appropriate moment to annex Texas and that it should never be done without the approval of Mexico, thus avoiding war.68 The oftentimes weak resolve of the Southern opposition to appending Texas to the Union was illustrated by the two qualifications Thomasson made on his position. First, that if any power other than Mexico tried to establish control over Texas, the United States could justly
annex that territory and go to war to protect her interests. Secondly, that while he was insisting on fair play for Mexico, Thomasson recognized that it was likely that his constituents did not share his concern. Nonetheless, this noble soul was going to stand in opposition to an unjust action "even if the consequence was the loss of my seat."?

Another aspect of the political case advanced to reject the annexation movement was a series of three arguments sketching out scenarios as to whose best interests were furthered by avoiding annexation. It was asserted that the interests of the Republic of Texas would be best served by remaining unattached to the United States because Texas could thus avoid the problems of sectional strife imminent in the Union. This argument continues to paint a rosy picture for the future of the soon-to-be-great southwestern Republic, a picture that would be shattered by connection to the American Union. A second vision was hung on the assumption that eventually the South would separate from the United States. This line of reasoning was that an independent Texas, as a powerful slave-owning Republic, would be a safe haven for the South at the time of secession. The third future looking element in the "antis" political analysis was that England would never gain heretomy over the Republic of Texas. As expounded by Senator Benton, there were four reasons why the English could not afford to adopt Texas: the loss of silver from Mexican mines, the loss of commerce, the alienation of
Latin America's seven million people and the prohibitive cost of the war necessary to maintain such dominance.73

In the arguments of the opponents of annexation there was a special object for emotionalism. Since nearly all of the "antis" were hard-line Whigs, they had an extraordinary hatred for the man that they had elected Vice-President in 1840 and who had during his inherited term as President repudiated the national Whig platform. On John Tyler's actions and ambitions fell a good deal of Whig enthusiasm in the form of extremely malevolent invective. The Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser of March 19, 1844, carried a report concerning the beginnings of the Tyler administration's negotiations for the annexation of Texas. The paper deplored the "secrecy, the unauthorized, and most improper secrecy." They wanted to know the reason for all the circumspection. "Is the acting President afraid of the People?" This Whig organ claimed that it was Tyler's trick to become President on his own, "de jure" instead of "de facto." And the paper dismissed the annexation question as a "flash in the pan." The real issue is not the value of annexing Texas but the suspicious motives of "acting President" Tyler and the need for open discussion on the controversy.74

That same newspaper, on March 22, 1844, gave an excellent example of the venom being poured out on Tyler.

Vague rumors of some such movement [annexation] were in circulation, but those the most credulous of Tyler's consummate stupidity and the most ready
to believe in his coxcombry, never surmised that he would push matters to this extremity, without a word of encouragement from the people, unless Texas land speculators can be called the People, and without the knowledge of Congress for near four months in actual Session! The whole affair surpasses credibility. 75

The demographic considerations of the Texas annexation controversy in the South suggest no conclusions that are out of line from the inferences already drawn. In the Senate vote on the annexation treaty on June 2, 1845, eight of the ten Southern Senators who opposed the treaty were Whigs, a division on strict political grounds. The Whig Senators were solid in Kentucky and Tennessee and the "anti" got both Virginia votes although Senator William C. Rives of Virginia was not a Whig partisan. The Senators of Georgia and North Carolina split on party lines. 76 One interesting note was that despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of opposition in Mississippi to adding Texas to the Union came from the Whig planters who were, incidentally, the majority slave holders, 77 Senator John Henderson of Mississippi, a Whig, voted in favor of annexation. In the House, the only Southern states to oppose annexation at the time of the joint resolution in January, 1845, were North Carolina, Virginia and Kentucky. In Kentucky, the home state of Clay, the split was five and five, in favor and opposed to annexation. The North Carolina division was five in favor and four opposed with the opposition representing a large district in the southwestern part of the state and also the northeast corner. The Virginia partition was
eleven "ayes" and three "nays". The "antis" were mainly from the western part of the state that would secede from Virginia during the War between the States.78

From this opposition came the controversy over Texas annexation in the South in 1844 and 1845. But in the face of this significant section of anti-annexation feeling, the South lead the nation in electing a Southern President, pledged to acquiring Texas in 1844 and provided the impetus to carry through the fight until Texas was admitted to the Union in December of 1845.
IV. VOTING WITH ONE'S FEET

In this section there are two subdivisions. First, a view of who settled in Texas in the years preceding the two year period of political history that has been examined. The second part will be devoted to the major reason people moved to Texas- the attraction of the land. It was a common sight to see the initials G.T.T.- Gone to Texas- chalked on the doors of houses in the South during the decades of the 1830's and 1840's. In the years between 1836 and 1846, the population of Texas had more than quadrupled from immigration and natural expansion. In 1837, there were between 25,000 and 30,000 people and they held 3,000 to 4,000 slaves. By 1847, the total number of inhabitants was 142,000 free whites and 30,000 slaves.

The people who made up this flood of settlers were mainly from the South. Of the colonists arriving in Texas after 1821, fully three-fourths were from states west of the Alleghenies Mountains and south of the Ohio and Missouri Rivers, including Missouri. The United States census of 1850 showed a total population of 212,000, including 58,000 slaves. One-third of the inhabitants were natives of Texas and another third were from the central southern states, with Tennessee the leading source of immigrants, contributing 18,000 people to the new state. Another 22,000 free citizens had come from the South Atlantic states, mainly North and South Carolina. In light of the fact that the controversy over the annexation of Texas was to a significant, if unadmitted, degree a struggle
for the preservation of slavery, it is interesting to note that the number of immigrants from Kentucky, Tennessee and Missouri, the less extensive slave-owning states, was much greater than the movement from the more solid slaveholding areas. As Frederick Turner Jackson describes them, these colonists were of the Scotch-Irish stock that made up Andrew Jackson's constituency, the "contentious, Calvinistic advocates of liberty."  

The main attraction of Texas to these hearty settlers was the vast amount of land contained within the borders of the new state. Many immigrants were undoubtedly influenced by the type of short notices used by the Watchman of the South, the Virginia Presbyterian newspaper, as fillers on April 11, 1844 and reprinted again on May 30th.

Texas presents from the best and most authentic geographical information a superficial area of 350,000 square miles, that is, it is 5 times as large as the Commonwealth of Virginia, more than twice as large as the Kingdom of France and 10 times as large as England and Wales.

Not only was this enormous bulk of land open to settlement, the infant Republic was exceedingly liberal with its wealth. For example, the Watchman carried an article on April 18, 1844, concerning the "extensive colonization" activities of a former Virginia Congressman, General C. F. Mercer. This gentleman had contracted with the Republic of Texas for some 24,000 square miles of land and was offering quarter sections of land to actual immigrants for less than ten dollars. Individual settlers were also active. A. W. Moore of Mississippi
and a small party of other prospective immigrants spent two months traveling in Texas looking for good farm lands with dependable water, available timber and rich soil. Their journey was in the summer of 1846 and they reported only a few good farming areas still left vacant and a growing problem of disputed claims and land titles. 

This vast migration from the Southern states into Texas would appear to reflect a new facet in the Southern attitude towards Texas. The concept of Texas as the frontier, however, would have been generated by an entirely different set of considerations than those that affected the annexation controversy. As the Moore expedition suggests, it was probable that the most valuable part of that southwestern frontier were already closed-off by 1847.
SUMMARY

The thrust of this study has been that the determining factor in the southern attitude towards Texas in the period, 1845 to 1846, was politics. Here politics has been broadly defined as the "competition for power and leadership." Thus, the manifold considerations that come into men's minds in seeking mastery over a situation, be it a nation, a national party or a sectional interest, all contributed to the forming of "political" decisions concerning annexation. Each classification of argument discussed became an element in the construction of an opinion. The hard-line Whigs supporting their oppositionist rationale, while the Polk Democrats rode the popular theory of immediate annexation into office. The wide range of arguments used to promote each side of the question is indicative of the real diversification of sentiment available in the area described as "the South." But the goal has been to provide a clear view of an attitude, not reconstruction of a specific impervious dogma.

Ancillary to the thesis of politics arbitrating opinions, but vital for a perspective on the importance of the Texas controversy are two other notions. First, that since annexation became a national issue, the Southern attitude was a crucial factor in setting the course of national politics in the election of 1844. If the South's sway in the Federal legislative bodies was really in danger as the pro-annexationist's arguments suggested, its influence in national elections was
still powerful. The second factor for consideration is that before and perhaps beyond the controversy over adding Texas to the Union, Texas was the frontier of the South. It seems quite likely that annexation appeared to some people as a means of protecting that frontier, of safeguarding their privilege to eventually move on to Texas. Hence, to the extent that the impulse of migration to the frontier affected the Southern attitude towards Texas, there is available a non-political analysis of its growth. But such an attitudinal development would complement and not be in conflict with the development of political considerations largely in favor of annexation.
FOOTNOTES

1 U.S., Congress, Congressional Globe, 28th Cong., 2d sess., (1845), 81.
3 Ibid., 89.
6 Poage, Clay, 138.
7 Ibid., 147.
8 Ibid., 151.
10 Globe, 28th Cong., 2d sess., (1845), 194.
11 Ibid., 356.
12 James E. Winston, "Annexation of Texas and the Mississippi Democrats," The Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XXV (July, 1921), 2.
13 Ibid., 3.
15 William C. Preston, Speech of Mr. Preston of South Carolina, on the Annexation of Texas, April 24, 1838, (Washington, 1838), 14.
16 Globe, 28th Cong., 1st sess., (1844), 600.
17 Ibid., 607.
18 Ibid., 609.
19 Ibid., 615.
20 Ibid., 658.
22 Ibid., 3.
23 Sellers, Polk, 67.
24 Poage, Clay, 150.
30 Globe, 28th Cong., 1st sess., (1844), 408.
31 Globe, 28th Cong., 2d sess., (1845), 87.
33 Globe, 28th Cong., 2d sess., (1845), 92.
36 Ibid., 4.
37 Ibid., 5.
38 Ibid., 7.
39 Preston, Speech, 5.
40 Ibid., 12.
41 Ibid., 15.
42 Globe, 28th Cong., 2d sess., (1845), 87.
44 Ibid., 6.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 4.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., 12.
51 Ibid., 3.
52 Smith, Annexation of Texas, 241.
53 Ibid.
55 Ibid., 2.
56 Smith, Annexation of Texas, 241.
57 Benton, Speech, 5.
58 Ibid., 1.
59 Ibid., 4-5.
60 Ibid., 5.
61 Smith, Annexation of Texas, 241.
62 Benton, Speech, 5.
63 Smith, Annexation of Texas, 241.
64 Benton, Speech, 14-16.
65 Elizabeth Howard West, "Southern Opposition to the Annexation of Texas," The Southwestern Historical Quarterly XVIII (July, 1914), 78-79.
66 Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser, 22 March 1844.

67 Ibid.

68 Globe, 28th Cong., 1st sess., (1844), 575.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 West, "Opposition," 81-82.

72 Ibid.

73 Benton, Speech, 5.

74 Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser, 19 March 1844.

75 Ibid., 22 March 1844.

76 Globe, 28th Cong., 1st sess., 652.


80 Ibid., 9-10.

81 Gerald Ashford, "Jacksonian Liberalism and Spanish Law in Early Texas," The Southwestern Historical Quarterly LVII (July, 1953), 2.

82 Hogan, The Texas Republic, 10.


84 Ibid., 19.

85 Watchman of the South, 11 April 1844.

86 Hogan, The Texas Republic, 10.
87 Watchman of the South, 18 April 1844.

Primary Sources


This is a particularly valuable source because Senator Benton's speech was not reported in the *Globe*. The speech is a very complete summary of the major arguments used by the opponents of annexation.


As the principle record of the public debate over the annexation of Texas, the *Globe* is a mainstay of this paper. Its influence is like the bulk of an iceberg, nine-tenths below the surface. For every *Globe* citation there are many more similar indications of opinion to be found in the record of proceedings. Perhaps the most important part of the *Globe* record is the preservation of the major speeches of the men who molded and led public opinion. Another significant contribution is the record of voting on the measures before the Congress.


This is an example of the way the Southern Whigs were able to violate the party line in supporting the annexation of Texas, and this letter also illustrates the factors that were most likely to influence opinion, from the perspective of a contemporary to the controversy.


Preston, William Campbell. *Speech of Mr. Preston of South Carolina, on the Annexation of Texas, April 24, 1838*. Washington, 1838.

This speech in the Virginia Historical Society holdings was of interest because of its early date. In it, six years before the controversy really became important in American politics, Preston was developing the same argu-
ments that the pro-annexationists were to rely on in 1844.

**Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser**, 19 March 1844, 22 March 1844.

These papers in the collection at the Virginia Historical Society provided a close look at the contemporary Whig opinion about Texas. It was a bit surprising that there was not more notice taken of the Texas controversy, however, the Library only had the March, 1844 issues.

**Watchman of the South**, 11 April 1844, 18 April 1844, 30 May 1844.

This newspaper is the official organ of the Virginia Presbyterians and is not directed toward political commentary. It is a valuable source of social history, nonetheless.

**Secondary Sources**


Binkley's book was devoted to the study of the annexation struggle from the Texan's point of view and, therefore, not particularly useful in my paper.


This is a selection of entries from Moore's diary, kept during a two-month trip through Texas in search of potential farmlands to settle on. It is edited by E. C. Barker, the co-editor of The Southwestern Historical Quarterly. The article gives an informative picture of the problems of travelling in a frontier region and of contemporary society in Texas.


Poage's chapters on "The Lone Star," and "The Embodiment of Whig Principles" were the major source of my information on the political activities of Henry Clay in relation to annexation. Poage has made extensive use of the newspaper of the time.


This is Sellers' second volume on James K. Polk, and his chapter "Polk and Texas" is the principal source for my survey of the 1844 Democratic Presidential nomination fight which led to the establishment of Texas as a campaign issue and Polk's election. Sellers' work is largely based on the correspondence of Polk and his contemporaries.


From the selective readings made in this book it is obviously a more valuable source than most of the other monographs. Smith's citations are almost completely from primary sources.


West, Elizabeth Howard. "Southern Opposition to the Annexation of Texas." The Southwestern Historical Quarterly XVIII (July, 1914), 74-82.
Winston, James E. "Annexation of Texas and the Mississippi Democrats." The Southwestern Historical Quarterly XXV (July, 1921), 1-25.

As evidenced by the large number of citations, this article is a most valuable mine of information. Mr. Winston has drawn an overwhelming majority of his references from the State of Mississippi's Department of Archives and History, thus opening a mass of data that would otherwise have been unavailable to me. It is often the case, as indicated in the text, that my notes are of the primary materials cited by Winston. In his article dealing exclusively with the Mississippi Democrats, Winston draws the conclusion that avowed protection of slavery was the most basic consideration in the controversy over Texas, with fears of English interference running a close second. The conclusions of my paper reflect a different emphasis and thus different results, as I try to consider the attitude of the whole South and not just the Mississippi Democrats.