Saving the "Slaves of Kings and Priests": The United States, Manifest Destiny, and the Rhetoric of Anti-Catholicism

Michael Solomon

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SAVING THE “SLAVES OF KINGS AND PRIESTS”: THE UNITED STATES,
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By
Michael Solomon

April 2009
SAVING THE “SLAVES OF KINGS AND PRIESTS”: THE UNITED STATES, MANIFEST DESTINY, AND THE RHETORIC OF ANTI-CATHOLICISM

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ABSTRACT

SAVING THE “SLAVES OF KINGS AND PRIESTS”: THE UNITED STATES, MANIFEST DESTINY, AND THE RHETORIC OF ANTI-CATHOLICISM

By
Michael Solomon

May 2009

Thesis Supervised by Professor John J. Dwyer

This paper seeks to demonstrate how anti-Catholicism, like other domestic issues such as race, economics, and politics, influenced U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America during the first half of the nineteenth century. Catholicism, the Roman Catholic Church, and monarchism/despotism were all seen by U.S. elites as interconnected forces that undermined the growth and stability of republicanism in Latin America. U.S. politicians were able to manipulate anti-Catholic rhetoric in order to justify certain U.S. diplomatic policies toward Latin America. Anti-Catholic rhetoric could be separated into missionary and exclusionary arguments. Followers of Manifest Destiny utilized missionary anti-Catholic rhetoric to sanction U.S. territorial expansion while opponents relied on exclusionary anti-Catholic rhetoric to justify halting the further acquisition of territory. Regardless of how they were used, both missionary and exclusionary anti-Catholic rhetoric resonated with Americans because they reaffirmed already held belief of American exceptionalism and Latin American inferiority.
DEDICATION

I would like to thank both Dr. John Dwyer and Dr. Holly Mayer for their advice and guidance on this paper. From struggling to come up with a topic to the inevitable last minute revisions, both Dr. Dwyer and Dr. Mayer gave me the support and insight I needed to write this thesis. The History Department also has my thanks for their financial assistance throughout my two years at Duquesne University. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my family for putting up with my hermit-like lifestyle during this arduous process. More importantly, their love and support has been invaluable - without it, I would still be on page one.
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Introduction

As American troops battled their Mexican neighbors to the south during the summer of 1847, a representative of Pope Pius IX approached Nicholas Brown, the U.S. consul stationed in Rome, with a request to open formal diplomatic relations between the United States and the Papal States. President James K. Polk and Secretary of State James Buchanan agreed that diplomatic relations with the Papal States would be economically beneficial to the United States. Both Polk and Buchanan also embraced the view European liberals held regarding Pius IX; they believed that he was a liberal and reform-minded pontiff who favored expanding civil and religious liberty in the Papal States.¹ Convincing Congress of this, however, was not an easy task. The Polk administration encountered fierce resistance to the opening of official diplomatic relations between the United States and the Papal States. One of the most vociferous opponents was Representative Lewis Charles Levin (A-PA). Levin accused those supporting the creation of a mission to the Papal States of being the “paid agents of the Jesuits” and railed against the perception that Pius IX was a reformer. The Pope, Levin declared, ruled “the most iron-handed hierarchy that ever flourished” and thus to send an official ambassador to the Vatican, Levin argued, was tantamount to acknowledging the spiritual and temporal power of the Pope over the United States.²

¹ Pope Pius IX, upon his election in 1846, advocated various reforms for the Papal States, such as investing in scientific advancements, giving amnesty to revolutionaries and political prisoners, and allowing lay people to participate in governing the Papal States. This liberal agenda was short lived, as Pius IX, after witnessing the outbreak of revolution across Europe in 1848, became a reactionary and reinforced papal authority and conservative regimes throughout Europe.
² Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 437-438.
Numerous other senators and congressmen joined the assault against the mission, which begs the question: why were members of the United States government so adamant in their opposition to an official diplomatic mission to the Papal States? The answer is simultaneously simple and complex. The behavior and attitude of these members of Congress was nothing new in the history of the American republic. Their opposition was based on an anti-Catholic bias that existed in America since the first English colonists approached the shores of Virginia. This anti-Catholic prejudice continued throughout the antebellum period and manifested itself most notably in the form of domestic Nativism. Studies of anti-Catholicism in antebellum America have traced its evolution and impact on domestic affairs. They have not, however, examined how anti-Catholicism shaped United States foreign policy during the early-to-mid-1800s. This paper seeks to do just that.

The great majority of studies on anti-Catholicism in the United States deal largely with Nativism and its role in domestic politics. Because of this, few historians have thoroughly researched the diplomatic aspect of U.S. anti-Catholicism. Historians, such as Frederick Merk and Albert Weinberg, have alluded that the idea of spreading religious freedom was integral to Manifest Destiny and the push for continental empire. The vague notion that religious freedom really meant Protestantism has been suggested by historians such as Merk and Weinberg, but not explicitly fleshed out. Thomas Hietala and Reginald Horsman have singled out race and its influence on Manifest Destiny, but do not take into account how anti-Catholicism and racism intertwined during the era of American continental expansion. The few studies on the international component of U.S. anti-Catholicism focus mainly on the role of anti-Catholicism during the U.S.-Mexican
Ted Hinckley, Isaac McDaniel, and John Pinheiro have analyzed how anti-Catholicism became a factor during the war, but their focus remains on one particular event in U.S.-Latin American relations rather than tracing the trend in U.S.-Latin American relations throughout the antebellum era.

This paper will demonstrate how anti-Catholicism, like many other domestic factors, such as race, economics and politics, influenced U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America, and more specifically Mexico, in the first half of the nineteenth century. It seeks to trace both the domestic and international aspects of U.S. anti-Catholicism to illustrate how the domestic and international past are tied together. U.S. elites saw Catholicism as one of many major reasons why Latin American politics and culture were “inferior” to “enlightened” American republicanism and Protestantism. Anti-Catholic attacks against Latin America were not simply religious in nature, but rather targeted three forces that were seen as intrinsically tied together: Catholicism as a system of religious belief, the Catholic Church as a religious institution, and monarchism/despotism as a form of government. Many Protestant and secular Americans thus believed that all three forces mutually support each other, thereby creating the political and cultural inferiority that existed in Latin America.

Protestant and secular Americans viewed the Catholic religion as an agent of cultural degradation and the Roman Catholic Church as an offensive foreign political threat. First, Catholicism was used to demonstrate the cultural and religious depravity and backwardness of its adherents. Not only was Catholicism perceived to be theologically inferior to Protestantism and a promoter of superstition, it was also used to demonstrate the inferiority of Latin Americans, the decline of European civilization and
the superiority of American culture. Second, many Americans, both Protestant and secular, also saw the Catholic Church as a political threat. The hierarchical Church was considered to be the willing agent of monarchism and political oppression and therefore a menace to the survival of democratic republicanism. When combined together, the perceived political and cultural threats that Catholicism posed towards the United States helped craft a negative perception of Latin America that guided U.S. politicians in shaping their overall policies toward the region. This anti-Catholic mindset helped U.S. politicians explain why Latin America was plagued with political and social turmoil while reinforcing their own ideas of American exceptionalism and elitism.

In order to trace this trend of U.S. anti-Catholicism toward Latin America, this paper will first outline the growth of domestic anti-Catholicism in the United States and then use three case studies to analyze its impact on the major U.S. foreign policy debates about Latin America. The first case study concerns U.S. recognition of the newly independent Latin American states and the formulation of the Monroe Doctrine in the early 1820s. The second examines the Texan revolt in 1836 and the debate over the United States’ annexation of Texas. The third case study covers the diplomacy of the U.S.-Mexican War, the quest for “All Mexico,” and the negotiations over the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in the mid-1840s. All three seminal events in U.S.-Latin American relations during the first half of the nineteenth century were indelibly influenced by domestic anti-Catholicism and marked a longstanding trend in American attitudes toward Latin America.

Besides documenting the anti-Catholic nature of U.S. foreign policy, this paper will also show that anti-Catholicism was a concept that was politically and rhetorically
manipulated to justify certain U.S. diplomatic policies. Anti-Catholic rhetoric, in fact, proved to be so pliable that opposing sides in each foreign policy debate used it to advance their agenda. During an age in U.S. politics when the public greatly prized oratory in a politician, anti-Catholic language proved to be a highly malleable rhetorical device that tapped into the religious prejudices that permeated American society regardless of political affiliation, class, or geography. As a result, politicians advocating very different policies toward Latin America could employ anti-Catholic rhetoric to sway their colleagues and build support among their constituents.

Anti-Catholic rhetoric was typically divided into missionary and exclusionary arguments. Missionary anti-Catholicism was usually employed to justify American territorial expansion. Missionary anti-Catholic rhetoric exemplified the usual expansionist arguments of Manifest Destiny that advocated the extension of American “values” so as to “lift up” and “civilize” a supposedly superstitious and backward Latin American population plagued by Roman Catholicism. Expansionist U.S. officials hoped that by removing the Catholic Church’s position as the official religion of most Latin American countries, as well as its role as the primary educational institution and largest landholder in Latin America, they could extend the United States’ political and cultural sphere of influence throughout the Western Hemisphere. These expansionist U.S. politicians relied on such missionary anti-Catholic rhetoric in order to justify their efforts to increase U.S. influence via cultural or territorial expansion.

Exclusionary anti-Catholicism, on the other hand, was used by politicians who wanted to discourage U.S. intervention into Latin American affairs or American territorial expansion by illustrating the “undesirability” and “political immaturity” of
Latin Americans that resulted from their Catholicism. By considering Catholic Latin Americans as irredeemable and thus unable to govern themselves under stable republics, opponents of intervention and expansion used anti-Catholic rhetoric against their expansionist foes. Regardless of which policy each argument was supporting, U.S. politicians realized that missionary and exclusionary anti-Catholic rhetoric both praised the supposed superiority of American society and culture while denigrating the “inferiority” of Latin Americans. In other words, anti-Catholicism was something that most Americans could identify with and embrace, making it an effective tool to advance larger foreign policy goals.

Within the three case studies, this dichotomy of missionary versus exclusionary anti-Catholic rhetoric occurred on both sides of the debates over Latin American recognition in the 1820s and “All Mexico” in the 1840s. Anti-Catholic rhetoric in the annexation of Texas debate in the 1830s, however, was used primarily by just one side, namely the pro-annexationist Democrats who managed to combine missionary and exclusionary anti-Catholic arguments together to justify the acquisition of predominantly white, Protestant Texas to the Union. This one-sided exception is due largely to the question of population. In the debates over Latin American recognition and “All Mexico,” the states or territories in question were populated with Catholic Latin Americans, which brought into question their ability to create, or function in, a republican system of government. This opened the door to the utilization of a missionary versus anti-Catholic paradigm by U.S. officials.

Texas, however, unlike Mexico and the rest of Latin America, was believed by most U.S. officials to be populated predominantly by white, Protestant American settlers,
which prevented opponents of annexation from using exclusionary anti-Catholic rhetoric to bar their entry into the Union since Catholics were only a small percentage of the Texan population. Texas annexation was a unique event in the usage of anti-Catholic rhetoric in U.S. foreign policy debates since only one side employed it to advance their position. Consequently, the issue of Texas is an anomaly in the trend of U.S. anti-Catholic arguments toward Latin America during the early-to-mid nineteenth century.

Despite the “Texas anomaly,” the missionary versus exclusionary anti-Catholicism paradigm exemplifies, on a larger scale, the two overall attitudes that the United States adopted in its relations with Latin America. Seeing their neighbors to the south as religiously and racially inferior and incapable of self-government, the United States sought to either go forth and “lift up” the Latin Americans or abandon them to their own problems and fate. Regardless, both missionary and exclusionary anti-Catholicism helped craft a negative perception of Latin America that would set the tone for early U.S.-Latin American relations and subsequent eras as well.
Section 1

Literature Review

Scholarly studies of the diplomatic aspect of anti-Catholicism in the early U.S. republic are limited in scope. This is due mostly to the fact that the subject of anti-Catholicism in the United States has traditionally been viewed as a domestic cultural movement with little bearing on U.S. diplomacy. This separation of domestic and international issues by scholars has resulted in two major bodies of literature. The larger of these two bodies of literature focuses on domestic anti-Catholicism and in particular the rise and decline of Nativism in the United States.

The other group consists of scholars who have examined the domestic forces behind early U.S. foreign policy. Most of these studies focused specifically on race and its impact on U.S. expansionism and Manifest Destiny, though some historians such as Ted Hinckley, Isaac McDaniel, and John Pinheiro have examined anti-Catholicism’s role regarding the U.S.-Mexican War. While each of them comes to a different conclusion regarding anti-Catholicism’s impact on the war, all three scholars examined how anti-Catholicism influenced (or was influenced by) U.S. territorial expansion. This paper will analyze how anti-Catholicism became a domestic force used and manipulated by U.S. politicians to justify foreign policy decisions toward Latin America. It will also examine the nature and malleability of anti-Catholic rhetoric and its consistent impact on early U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America from the beginning of Latin American independence in 1810 to the end of the U.S.-Mexican War in 1848.
Most literature on anti-Catholicism in the United States focuses on Nativism in domestic politics and culture. The seminal work in this area is Ray Allen Billington’s *The Protestant Crusade*. Billington’s 1938 study of Nativism in the United States is one of the most comprehensive works detailing its rise and decline and is considered by many historians to be the canon in its field. Billington, however, does not address in depth whether anti-Catholicism and Nativism affected the westward expansion of the United States. Instead, Billington briefly looks at how expansionism affected domestic Nativism during the U.S.-Mexican War. Although he claims that the United States’ war with Mexico excited anti-Catholic sentiment, Billington does not bother to delve into the matter very deeply, thereby minimizing the impact of foreign affairs on American anti-Catholicism.¹

Additional political studies of Nativism in antebellum America emerged in 1980 with Michael Feldman’s *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America*. Feldman compares and contrasts the major urban riots of the Jacksonian era using the Nativist Philadelphia riots of 1844 as a model of how disenfranchised social groups used collective violence to better their social standing.² David Grimsted also studies the riots and the more general disorder of the antebellum period. In *American Mobbing*, Grimsted argues that the Philadelphia riots were the only major riots to occur between 1834 and the 1850s. Despite the fact that the riots were an “ethnic-religious clash,” Grimsted mainly treats them as political since Nativists sought to ensure that Irish Catholic immigrants did

² The Philadelphia riots of 1844 erupted due to a dispute over whether the Catholic Bible could be used in public schools. A Nativist mob, while holding a rally in an Irish Catholic neighborhood, was fired upon by Irish Catholics. Nativists, in retaliation, rioted for several days and burned several Catholic churches before being dispersed by U.S. troops.
not wrest political control away from them. The issue of Nativism and anti-Catholicism was, according to Grimsted, a way to forget the sectional conflict of slavery. By replacing discussion over slavery with the threat of foreign Catholics, Nativists hoped to unite the country against a foreign foe. Nativists, Grimsted maintained, largely did not succeed in their legislative efforts because their proposed laws were already unofficially enforced.³ Dale Knobel, in America for the Americans, also interprets the Nativist movement through a political lens. Unlike Billington, Knobel emphasizes the disorganization and decentralization of the Nativist political parties and their overall relatively weak impact on public policy.⁴

Additional studies on anti-Catholicism have examined the relationship between Protestant ministers and the Nativist movement. John Bodo, in The Protestant Clergy and Public Issues, argues that words such as “Christian,” “religious,” and “Protestant” were considered interchangeable to most antebellum Americans, while words such as “superstition” and “idolatry” were euphemisms for the Catholic Church. Though he elaborated on the underlying meanings behind such common words used in religious rhetoric, Bodo did not connect such usages to the language of Manifest Destiny. Bodo, unlike Billington, does examine the interplay between Protestant ministers and the U.S.-Mexican War. Bodo recounts the positive support that Protestant ministers in the Home Missionary Society lent to the war effort and their hopes to convert Catholic Mexicans to Protestantism.⁵

Richard Carwardine also addresses the role of Protestant ministers in the war, but in a more nuanced way. Carwardine emphasizes that not all Protestant denominations reveled in the acquisition of Texas and Mexico. According to Carwardine, Protestants either decried them as land grabs driven by the South in order to spread slavery, or they were critical of spreading Protestantism by the sword, since this was what, they claimed, the “papists” would do in order to spread their faith. Bodo and Carwardine’s work help to demonstrate the complexity and duality of the use of anti-Catholicism by Protestant ministers towards the war with Mexico. Whether they supported or opposed the U.S.-Mexican War, Protestant ministers were able to utilize anti-Catholic arguments to morally justify their respective positions.6

Carwardine’s work notwithstanding, few historians have examined anti-Catholicism in relation to Manifest Destiny. Albert Weinberg’s study of American expansionism in 1935 spends considerable time on how religious conviction was responsible for Americans’ certainty that God had ordained his creatures to use the earth in a certain manner. Weinberg argues that the idea that Providence had preordained the United States’ triumphant march west was central to the credo of Manifest Destiny. Theologically, such sentiment produced the notion that God existed to further the glory of Americans and not the other way around. While Weinberg makes explicit reference to Calvinism and Protestantism as central to the religious component of Manifest Destiny, he does not acknowledge that Catholicism was deemed a threat to this religious vision.7

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Frederick Merk makes a more direct reference to Catholicism in regard to Manifest Destiny in his book *Manifest Destiny and Mission in America*. Writing in 1963, Merk compared Manifest Destiny to other crusading ideologies seen throughout history, from Islam and Catholicism for Arab and Spanish expansionism respectively to Marxism for Russian and Chinese aggression. According to Merk, most Americans equated Manifest Destiny with, “freedom from established churches headed by monarchs.” Merk vaguely hints that the “most worthy” among American religious denominations were, “perhaps,” the Protestant churches. Despite this allusion to the general American sentiment that the spread of religious freedom meant expanding Protestantism, Merk does not expound on its specific role in the push for territorial expansion.8

While Merk and Weinberg both argued that religious freedom was an essential part of the ideology of Manifest Destiny, Reginald Horsman and Thomas Hietala primarily viewed Manifest Destiny through the prism of race. Writing at the end of the Civil Rights Movement in 1981 and 1985 respectively, Horsman and Hietala analyzed how racism influenced American efforts for continental empire, but minimized the role of religion and specifically anti-Catholicism. Horsman’s *Race and Manifest Destiny* acknowledges that the spread of Christianity was an important component of Manifest Destiny, but he fails to mention anti-Catholicism’s role. Instead, Horsman emphasizes that racial imperial thought was already entrenched in the early republic and firmly established in the United States by the 1850s. By then, Horsman claims, Americans were convinced that American Anglo-Saxons were the only race capable of extending and maintaining republican government within the Western hemisphere. This discovery laid

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the groundwork for the racist imperial thought that would emerge in the later half of the nineteenth century.9

Thomas Hietala also focuses on the centrality of race in early U.S. expansion. Hietala, however, makes the point that the U.S. foreign policy of the 1840s was largely in response to both economic and social domestic pressures. Democrats wanted more land and markets whereas Whigs sought regulation, internal improvements and reform. Slavery and race, as a result, played major roles in U.S. foreign policy because the movement for expansion was driven by a desire to create national stability as opposed to meeting the demands of pioneers moving west or threats from abroad. Hietala’s treatment of anti-Catholicism is extremely limited, as he briefly mentions that “racially conscious Protestant Americans,” believed that “miscegenation and Catholicism in Mexico had prevented the Mexicans from forming a progressive society or a democratic government.” Hietala fails to investigate how anti-Catholicism, like racism, served as a domestic force that influenced U.S. foreign policy.10

Like other historians who failed to analyze the role of anti-Catholicism in Manifest Destiny ideology, Anders Stephanson refers mainly to the “natural theology” that expansionists espoused. While “natural theology” combined rational and religious thinking to argue that geographical boundaries determined the boundaries of a people’s rule, Manifest Destiny also emphasized the spread of American “truth” across the continent. New Englanders, Stephanson maintains, viewed this “truth” as distinctly Protestant in nature. The threat of Catholicism to the spread of Protestantism is only

briefly mentioned as one of the reasons why Protestants supported the war against Mexico.¹¹

While most historians have either focused on anti-Catholicism as a domestic cultural force in the guise of Nativism or vaguely alluded to its role in Manifest Destiny ideology, a number of scholars have examined its role in the U.S.-Mexican War. In 1940, Clayton Sumner Ellsworth studied the numerous responses of various Protestant denominations to the U.S.-Mexican War. Anti-Catholicism during the war, according to Ellsworth, was primarily centered on the initial Protestant beliefs that American Catholics could not remain loyal to the United States in its war against a Catholic country. Anti-Catholicism, in Ellsworth’s opinion, was ultimately not a significant force among the Protestant denominations propelling them towards a certain position regarding the war. Other factors, such as slavery, were deemed more influential by Ellsworth in guiding Protestant churches towards supporting or opposing the war against Mexico.¹²

Ted Hinckley, writing in 1962, likewise concluded that the anti-Catholic crusade of the 1840s was not a significant force during the U.S.-Mexican War. According to Hinckley, there was no unified anti-Catholic base in the United States that could turn the war into a religious crusade because the democratic temperament of the United States in the 1830s and 1840s prevented the overall rise in religious fanaticism.¹³ Expanding on the topic of anti-Catholicism during the U.S.-Mexican War is Isaac McDaniel’s dissertation. McDaniel, like Hinckley, concludes that anti-Catholicism was present, but

not a major cultural force during the war. McDaniel emphasizes that ethnicity was more important in Nativism than religion, and that President James Polk’s efforts to diminish anti-Catholicism as a factor in the war led Americans instead to view the war in racial and national terms.\textsuperscript{14}

More recently John Pinheiro has challenged the idea that anti-Catholicism had only a minor impact on the U.S.-Mexican War. Unlike previous historians, Pinheiro maintains that anti-Catholicism played an integral role in the ideology of Manifest Destiny and the U.S.-Mexican War. Pinheiro specifically uses the U.S.-Mexican War as an example of “how the idea of American expansion had become intertwined with anti-Catholicism both in rhetoric and sentiment.” Using the debates over Texas annexation in 1844 and “All Mexico” in 1847-8, Pinheiro succeeds in demonstrating how anti-Catholic rhetoric could be employed by Nativist and non-Nativist alike. The Nativist movement of the 1840s, Pinheiro illustrates, enabled politicians to use religion in addition to race as a way to manipulate the rhetorical arguments either for or against the war.\textsuperscript{15}

Pinheiro successfully examines the presence and malleability of anti-Catholicism in regards to the U.S.-Mexican War, and to a more limited degree the Texas annexation issue, but he fails to trace this as a general trend in U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America. By limiting his focus to the U.S.-Mexican War, Pinheiro is unable to “connect the dots” concerning the use of anti-Catholic rhetoric from the beginning of the United States’ relationship with independent Latin America to the end of the U.S.-Mexican War. Anti-Catholicism’s deep rootedness in the founding of the United States indicates that

American politicians could very well have utilized such sentiment prior to the zenith of Manifest Destiny hysteria in the 1840s. While Pinheiro focuses on the culmination of U.S. expansionists’ designs on Mexico, this paper intends to expand on Pinheiro’s research and show that anti-Catholicism was a trend evident throughout the United States’ diplomatic relationship with much of Latin America over the issues of recognition and the Monroe Doctrine, and specifically with Mexico over the issues of Texas and the taking of all of Mexico in 1848. As this paper will show, anti-Catholicism was a malleable rhetorical tool that U.S. politicians could use to justify their positions regarding U.S. diplomacy towards Latin America. The anti-Catholicism that U.S. politicians tapped into was deeply rooted in the United States’ culture. Its roots and rise in the United States as a domestic force are important to understand if we are to make sense of its impact on U.S. foreign policy debates.
Section 2

The Rise of Anti-Catholicism in the United States

Anti-Catholicism was not a “new” idea in the United States during the 1830s and 1840s when the Nativist movement began to gather strength. Hatred of the Vatican was an inherited fear English colonists had brought with them from Protestant England to North America. Threats from Catholic France and Spain against Britain and its colonies perpetuated the terror that the long arm of Rome could assert its hold on the spiritual lives of the American colonists. Even an alliance with France during the Revolutionary War was not enough to dispel the deeply rooted anxieties that were a part of the new republic.\(^1\) During the 1830s and early 1840s, anti-Catholicism began to increase again as it became a part of the cultural and political movement known as Nativism.

The Nativist movement sprouted in reaction to fears of the increasing influx of foreigners that were arriving in the United States in cities such as Boston, New York and Philadelphia. There were several reason why Nativists reacted negatively to the growing number of immigrants in the United States. A large percentage of the immigrants that arrived during the 1830s and 1840s were Irish or German Catholics. Furthermore, the European monarchies, the Nativists argued, were essentially exporting the poor and criminal elements of their nations to be a financial and social drain on the predominantly Protestant United States. The incoming immigrants were also thought to still be politically loyal to their countries of origin and thus under the sway of European

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\(^1\) Billington, *The Protestant Crusade*, 1-20.
monarchism. Moreover, Nativists were convinced that Irish and German Catholic immigrants were under the power of the Roman Catholic Church embodied in the Pope and the Vatican.

Nativism and Protestantism often were coupled together, as Protestant societies, such as the American Home Missionary Society founded in 1826, propagated the conspiratorial fear that “priests, who as confessors, could discover the workings of home, marketplace, and polling booth and manipulate all invisibly.” The paranoid Nativist mind thus imagined that the Pope, through his army of priests, could infiltrate American society, manipulate the lives of its citizens through the Sacrament of Confession, direct American Catholics from the pulpit to vote a certain way, and thus control the lives (both secular and spiritual) of Americans.

Anti-Catholicism and the American Colonial Experience

Though Nativism and anti-Catholicism as a movement became more pronounced in the 1820s and gained strength through the 1830s and 1840s, its foundations were evident in the establishment of the American colonies. Protestant colonists from England inherited a virulent anti-Catholicism that became a part of the milieu of American colonial everyday culture. With the Protestant English colonies in North America surrounded by Catholic France in Canada and beyond the Mississippi, along with

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4 The Confessional was widely seen by Protestants as the primary method of control priests had over their followers. After confessing their sins, Catholics received absolution by performing a penance given by the priest that typically involved the recitation of certain prayers or the performance of good deeds. Nativists and intolerant Protestants, however, believed these instructions of penance given by the priest were actually orders from the Vatican on how to undermine the political process in the United States and anything else the priest desired of them.
Catholic Spain and Portugal in Florida, the Caribbean, and Central and South America, the colonists felt surrounded by the tightening web of their Catholic enemies. Anti-Catholic sermons were common during the French and Indian War (1754-1763) and other earlier imperial wars in America as Protestant ministers fulminated against their Catholic French enemies.

At the war’s end, Canada and (briefly) Florida became British territories, thus striking a major blow to the power of Catholic France in the New World. Anti-Catholicism persisted, however, and much of it was redirected toward the British as rumors began to circulate during the 1760s about British intentions of establishing an Anglican bishopric for all its North American colonies. The idea of an established Anglican bishopric over the North American colonies, to many Protestant colonists, smacked of the hierarchical nature of Catholicism.5 Other more secular measures, such as the Stamp Act (1765), the Townshend Acts (1767) and the Coercive Acts (1774) helped escalate the crisis between the colonies and mother country. Religious strife between the colonies and Britain reached a fevered pitch when the British government, in the Quebec Act of 1774, allowed the free practice of Catholicism in former French Canada. Anti-popery rhetoric was applied to British actions, as the Protestant colonists feared that Catholicism had corrupted the British government.6 The idea that a “secret Catholicism” had infiltrated the British monarchy was widely popular as it conjured up reminders of the “tyrannical” reigns of Charles I, James II and the Pretender in Scotland

in 1745. George III likewise was decried as a tyrant and Roman Catholic during the American War of Independence for allowing the practice of Catholicism in Canada. Labeling George III a Catholic also helped revolutionaries persuade their fellow colonists to rebel against the king. Rebelling against a Catholic monarch was considered, for many faithful Protestants, to be a morally righteous and patriotic act.

The leaders of the American Revolution likewise expressed their distaste for Roman Catholicism and their fears of Roman Catholic domination over the new republic. Samuel Adams, for instance, declared that Catholicism was the “idolatry of Christians.” Likewise, Thomas Paine decried the “terrors of the Church” and how “men were commanded to believe what the Church told them, or go to the stake.” Alexander Hamilton, in response to the Quebec Act, protested the recognition of Catholicism in Canada because “Roman Catholics who, by reason of their implicit devotion to their priests…will be the voluntary instruments of ambition, and will be ready, at all times, to second the oppressive designs of the administration against the other parts of the empire.”

Thomas Jefferson, well known for his discomfort for organized religion, believed that “In every country and every age the priest has been hostile to liberty. He is always in alliance with the despot abetting his abuses in return for protection to his own.” John Adams would confide to Jefferson later in life that “I have long been decided in opinion that a free government and the Roman Catholick [sic] religion can never exist

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9 Norman Cousins, *In God We Trust: The Religious Beliefs and Ideas of the American Founding Fathers* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 345, 441, 337. The title “priest” is also used in the Anglican Church and while expressions of criticism towards “priests” during the American Revolution might have sometimes been directed specifically at the Anglican Church, fears of the Anglican Church asserting more control over the colonists spiritual lives harkened back to fears of a “secret” Catholicism.
together in any nation or Country.” Firm in their conviction that Roman Catholicism was inimical to both political and religious liberty, many of the Founders believed that the United States should be wary of the Catholic Church and the threat it posed to the new republic.

Despite the obvious contempt that many of the Founders held for the Catholic Church, the participation of American Catholics in the Revolution and the establishment of religious freedom in the Constitution created a spirit of religious tolerance that was severely lacking during the colonial period. In addition to the idea of religious tolerance, the perception that the power of the Pope and the Catholic Church was waning gave rise to an atmosphere of relaxed vigilance. As Protestantism and secular ideas from the Enlightenment appeared to spread across parts of Western Europe in the wake of the French Revolution, the threat from Rome was perceived as minor or non-existent, as the Vatican seemingly could barely maintain control over the Papal States. This indifference towards Catholicism did not last long, however, as anti-Catholicism began to rear its ugly head again during the 1820s.  

The Resurgence and Growth of Nativism

The first major reason for the rise in anti-Catholicism during the 1820s was the beginning of an incredible influx of Irish and German immigrants who were predominantly Catholic. In the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, European governments

rescinded traveling restrictions on their citizens who wished to journey to the United States. Post-war poverty, famine in Ireland, and the crushing social conditions caused by the Industrial Revolution compelled many poor Europeans to cross the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{12} The Catholic population in the United States in 1790 was approximately 35,000. By 1820 the number had increased to 84,000 and by the end of the next twenty years it swelled to 650,000.\textsuperscript{13} Americans living in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, upon witnessing thousands of poor Catholic immigrants take low paying jobs away from them and establish their own communities, became willing to embrace the Nativist arguments. The alarming number of Catholic immigrants streaming into the United States aroused American society’s dormant anti-Catholic prejudices. Coupled with the growing number of Catholic immigrants were other signs of renewed life in the Catholic Church in America. The Papal Jubilee of Leo XII in 1827 issued a call to priests to seek new converts in America, and the First Provincial Council of Catholicity in America met at Baltimore in 1829 to discuss efforts to expand the Church in the United States. The Protestant majority in the United States interpreted such efforts, along with the seemingly endless flow of Catholic immigrants, as an attempt by the Catholic Church to reassert its waning power.\textsuperscript{14}

To counter the growing threat of Catholicism, Protestant evangelicals sought to reinvigorate their missionary efforts at home and abroad. The American Bible Society distributed Protestant Bibles to Catholics in the United States and in Latin America, raising the ire of the Church hierarchy, which in turn denounced Protestant attempts to provide a different version of the Holy Scriptures. Misinterpreting the Catholic Church’s

\textsuperscript{12} Billington, \textit{The Protestant Crusade}, 32-34.
\textsuperscript{14} Billington, \textit{The Protestant Crusade}, 37.
opposition to the Bible Society’s mission as opposition to the Bible itself, Protestant evangelicals became more incensed against Catholicism. Other Protestant societies emerged during the 1820s to combat Catholicism, one of the most important being the American Home Missionary Society, which sought to repel the forces of Rome from the Mississippi Valley region. Founded in 1826, the American Home Missionary Society “expressed alarm at the increasing number of Catholics in the West” and worked to increase the number of Protestant missionaries, Bibles, and churches in the Mississippi Valley area. The 1820s overall saw the creation of thirty religious newspapers advocating some denomination of Protestantism, which ultimately helped to introduce many anti-Catholic writings to the American people.

If the 1820s were characterized as the awakening of anti-Catholic sentiment from a short hibernation, then the following decade saw it reinvigorated with unmatched virulence and fervor. In 1830 Protestant ministers created the New York Protestant Association, which committed itself to exposing the evils of Catholicism. They were largely affiliated with the first weekly anti-Catholic newspaper, The Protestant, established by Reverend George Bourne in 1829 in New York, which published numerous lurid stories pertaining to Catholic priests and nuns and ridiculed the rituals and theology of the Church. After being discredited by Catholic priest John Hughes, The Protestant transformed itself from a sensationalist anti-Catholic paper to one conducting

15 The Daily National Intelligencer, 19 August 1824.
16 Billington, “Anti-Catholic Propaganda and the Home Missionary Movement, 1800-1860,” 372-377. Other smaller societies that operated under the larger umbrella of the American Home Missionary Society had chapters in Maine, Massachusetts, and Missouri. The Western Reserve Domestic Missionary Society, along with the Boston Ladies’ Association for the Evangelization of the West and the American Tract Society also emerged throughout the 1830s and 1840s and emphasized their concern for expelling “Romanism” from the Mississippi Valley region.
theological attacks on Catholic dogma, gaining it more credibility with the Protestant majority.\textsuperscript{17}

The New York Protestant Association and other organizations attempted to hold theological debates against Catholics in order to unveil the horrors of Popery. Such meetings, despite some initial success and popularity, often resulted in violence between Protestant and Catholic attendees. A meeting held by the New York Protestant Association in 1832 ended in a small riot that Protestants blamed on the Catholics. The trend continued throughout the early 1830s, as Catholics and Protestants became less inclined to debate than to physically attack each other.\textsuperscript{18}

The escalation of violence served as a prelude to the events that erupted on the night of August 11, 1834, when an angry mob burned down an Ursaline convent and school in Charleston, Massachusetts just outside of Boston. The mob was incited to action after hearing rumors that a nun was being held there against her will. The originator of this rumor, a young former nun named Rebecca Reed, would later in 1835 write the first anti-Catholic bestseller entitled \textit{Six Months in a Convent}, depicting her “life” at the Ursaline convent. Anticipation of the book was widespread as excerpts were printed to satiate the public’s appetite until the book’s release.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} Dale T. Knobel, “\textit{America for the Americans:}” The Nativist Movement in the United States (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 52; \textit{Truth Teller}, “To the ‘Ministers of the Gospel’ who have recommended \textit{The Protestant} to the patronage of a Christian public,” July 1830, in \textit{Life of the Most Reverend John Hughes, D. D., First Archbishop of New York with Extracts from his Private Correspondence}, ed. John R. G. Hassard (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1866), 105-108. Seeking to discredit the paper, Catholic priest John Hughes wrote several articles to \textit{The Protestant} under the name of “Cranmer” that exaggerated the number of Catholics in the United States, depicted ridiculously false accounts of Catholic rituals, and advocated absurd conspiratorial objectives of the Catholic Church. After revealing his identity in the \textit{Truth Teller}, Hughes confessed he was “satisfied that no enlightened man would believe a line published in \textit{The Protestant}.”

\textsuperscript{18} Billington, \textit{The Protestant Crusade}, 59-61; \textit{Greenville Mountaineer}, 4 April 1835.

Following on the coattails of the Rebecca Reed story was what would become known as the most popular piece of anti-Catholic literature in antebellum America. Another “escaped” nun named Maria Monk claimed that she had fled from the Hotel Dieu Nunnery in Montreal and in 1836 revealed her horrific stories of life in a Catholic convent in *Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery*. Despite the fact that Monk was proven to be a liar and fraud, 300,000 copies of the *Awful Disclosures* were sold in the United States up to the opening shots of the Civil War, making it the second most popular book in antebellum America after *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Books like *Six Months in a Convent* and *Awful Disclosures* were only two of such popular stories in antebellum America. Though mostly fabrications and works of fiction, Americans continued to indulge in their fantasies of lascivious priests and the unspeakable horrors Roman Catholicism perpetuated behind the walls of the nunnery.\(^{20}\)

While books like *Six Months in a Convent*, *Awful Disclosures* and numerous others focused on the sexual perversity supposedly inherent in Catholicism, the 1830s also saw increased agitation over the idea of a Papal conspiracy to conquer the United States via conversion.\(^{21}\) The two major individuals responsible for propagating this idea

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\(^{20}\) Maria Monk, *Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery* (New York: Howe & Bates, 1836), 99; Mary Anne Pagliarini, “The Pure American Woman and the Wicked Catholic Priest: An Analysis of Anti-Catholic Literature in Antebellum America,” *Religion and American Culture* 9, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 99. Monk’s tale captured all of the stereotypical anti-Catholic fears of the real goings on inside the convent’s wall. Lascivious priests, forced to celibacy, fulfilled their sexual desires by reducing the nuns to sexual servitude. The babies that resulted from those unions were subsequently baptized and then strangled, thus ensuring them a place in heaven. It was later proven that Monk became mentally ill after she had run a slate pencil into her head as a child.

\(^{21}\) *Female Convents* by Thomas Roscoe, 1834; *The Nun* by Lewis H. J. Tonna, 1834; *Lorette, History of Louise, Daughter of a Canadian Nun*, 1834; *Open Convents* by Theodore Dwight, 1836; *The American Nun*, 1836; *The Nun of St. Ursula*, 1845; *Priest’s Prisons for Women* by Andrew Cross, 1854; and The
about Catholicism during the mid-1830s were Reverand Lyman Beecher and Samuel F. B. Morse. Rev. Lyman Beecher of Boston fervently believed that the Mississippi Valley region was in danger of falling to Catholicism. Consequently, during the summer of 1834 Beecher traveled across the Eastern seaboard preaching in favor of westward expansion with the intention of spreading Protestantism. The sermons were published in 1835 as *A Plea for the West*, which advanced the thesis of a Catholic invasion of the Mississippi Valley and the ultimate takeover of the United States.22 “The religious and political destiny of our nation,” Beecher believed, “is to be decided in the West. There is the territory, and there soon will be the population, the wealth, and the political power.”23 What imperiled the United States’ advance across the West, according to Beecher, were the Catholic Church and the Catholic monarchs in Europe.

The arch-nemesis of American liberties, Beecher exclaimed, was Clemens von Metternich of Austria, the grand architect of the Concert of Europe in 1815 that established the post-Napoleonic monarchical systems of government across the continent. It was Metternich who helped sustain the papacy with Austrian forces and permitted the influx of Catholic immigrants into the United States. These Catholic immigrants, claimed Beecher, being “A tenth part of the suffrage of the nation, thus condensed and wielded by the Catholic powers of Europe, might decide our elections, perplex our policy, inflame and divide the nation, break the bond of our union, and throw down our free institutions.”24 Metternich, along with other Catholic monarchists in Europe, viewed

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the United States as a threat since it was a source of inspiration for European revolutionaries seeking to establish republican forms of government. Thus, Beecher argued, Metternich and the monarchies of Europe sought to destroy the United States from within in order to reinforce their hold on Europe while opening the door to renewed colonial efforts in the Americas.

Beecher’s sermon against Catholicism also contained a social program to counter the intrigues of the Church. Education, Beecher cried, was the key to halting the spread of Catholicism, especially in the Mississippi Valley. The building of Protestant schools, churches, and libraries in the West and ensuring that every family had a copy of the Bible was crucial in educating Americans of the history and danger that Roman Catholicism posed to American liberties. Beecher thundered that Catholicism would conquer the United States “unless as a nation of republicans, jealous of our liberties, and prompt to sustain them by a thorough intellectual and religious culture as well as by the sword, we arise, all denominations and all political parties, to the work of national education.”

Though he focused mainly on educating Americans of the perils of Catholicism, Beecher hinted at the idea of a violent response to the Catholic threat by including “the sword” as another way to counter the threat posed by Rome.

The other influential individual in the development of the Nativist movement was the painter and later inventor Samuel F. B. Morse. Writing in 1834 in the New York Observer under the pen name “Brutus,” Morse outlined the argument that was published a year later under the title Foreign Conspiracy Against the Liberties of the United States. Morse published other anti-Catholic tracts throughout the 1830s, such as Imminent Dangers to the Free Institutions of the United States Through Foreign Immigration in

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25 Ibid., 166.
1834, *The Proscribed German Student* in 1836, and *Confessions of a French Catholic Priest* in 1837. Each explicitly outlined Morse’s theory concerning the Catholic conspiracy against the United States. In his works Morse espoused the same arguments as Beecher, namely that the pope, under the direction of Austria and other Catholic monarchies in Europe, sought to overthrow the republican institutions of the United States by flooding the country with Catholic immigrants and by converting the American populace to Roman Catholicism. In this way, the monarchies of Europe would destroy the United States as a beacon of republicanism for revolutionaries in Europe and in its colonies while allowing them to re-colonize North America without U.S. interference. The Catholic Church, at the same time, would gain new converts in North America while supporting the European monarchical systems of government.26

*The “Problem” with the Hispanic World*

While both Beecher and Morse focused mainly on the negative domestic effects that Catholicism would have on the United States, their books also incorporated a larger international and historical scope as well. The supposed Catholic conspiracy against the United States was, according to Beecher and Morse, simultaneously part of the ongoing battles between Protestantism and Catholicism since the Reformation and between monarchism and republicanism that began with the Enlightenment. As evidence of the political and moral superiority of Protestant republicanism over Catholic monarchism, Beecher, Morse, and other anti-Catholic writers of the early-to-mid 1800s used Catholic

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countries as examples of moral and cultural depravity. The principle examples used by Beecher, Morse, and others to demonstrate the debilitating effects of Catholicism were Spain and Latin America.

The Hispanic world, according to many Nativist writers, served as the epitome of how Catholicism could cause the downfall of a society. Beecher and Morse’s negative assessments of Latin America were based on the difficulties that the newly independent Latin American countries had in establishing stable republican governments. The inherent flaw with those societies, Beecher and Morse claimed, was their adherence to Roman Catholicism, usually as the official state religion. Not only was Catholicism considered theologically wrong, more importantly the Church and its adherents were believed to be willing tools of the European monarchies and their attempts to reassert control over both North and South America. As the power of the papacy waned in Europe, due to the spread of the Enlightenment and Protestantism, Beecher and others believed that the Vatican hoped to replace lost adherents in Europe by converting Americans to Catholicism. Those attempts would be fostered and encouraged by Catholic monarchies such as Spain, Austria, and France in order to temper and ultimately quell the republican experiment in America.

H.A. Boardman, a Philadelphia Presbyterian minister, preached to his congregation that the difference in progress between the United States and South America rested fundamentally on difference in religion. “Opposition to popery,” Boardman declared to his congregation, “has created the difference between our free, happy, and prosperous Republic, and the States of South America, which seem doomed
to perpetual anarchy and depression.” Like most other anti-Catholic polemics, and to a much larger extent many Protestant and secular Americans, Boardman believed that Roman Catholicism was a tool for despotism, both spiritual and political and that it was one of the many reasons why Catholic countries, especially the newly independent states of Latin America, were destined for political and cultural denigration.

Such anti-Catholic views of Spain and Latin America were not limited to Protestant preachers and avowed Nativist writers and politicians. Important American intellectuals, such as Washington Irving, George Ticknor, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Mary Peabody Mann, and William Hickling Prescott, likewise perceived a decadent and corrupt Catholicism as the cornerstone of Spanish and Latin American culture. The bigotry and fanaticism that resulted from Spanish Catholicism, these intellectuals argued, was the root of Spain and Latin America’s decline and turmoil respectively. While the popular writings of Monk, Reed, Beecher, and Morse appealed to the majority of Protestant and secular Americans, the books of Irving, Ticknor, Longfellow, Mann, and Prescott were directed toward the intellectual and political elite of the United States.

While local Nativist parties that began to emerge throughout the mid-1830s in major cities, such as New York, Boston and Philadelphia, sought measures to extend the naturalization period for immigrants, anti-Catholicism also had an international aspect to it. When viewing other nations (especially Catholic Canada and Latin America), anti-Catholic prejudices helped form opinions that Americans would hold with regard to

diplomatic relations with other countries. As Protestant Americans gazed westward towards the Pacific, preconceived notions of the debilitating role Catholicism played in Latin America played a part in the diplomatic decision-making process of the young republic towards its neighbors to the south. While anti-Catholicism began to rear its ugly head during the 1820s, the Spanish colonies of Latin America were already in the midst of revolution. While Latin American rebels struggled to throw off the Spanish yoke, members of the U.S. government were divided over whether or not to recognize the rebel Latin American colonies as independent states. At stake, it was argued, were the security of the relatively weak United States and the very cause of republicanism throughout the Western Hemisphere. With the resurgence of anti-Catholicism in the 1810s and 1820s, the United States thus became embroiled in a fierce debate over how to respond to an international crisis that was affected in many ways by anti-Catholic prejudices.
Section 3

Anti-Catholicism, Latin American Recognition, and the Monroe Doctrine

The insurrections that began in 1810 throughout Latin America sparked within the United States a spirited debate over how the U.S. government should officially respond to the struggles of the Latin American rebels for independence. With the Federalist Party in decline and virtually non-existent in Congress, the debate over Latin American recognition produced tensions within Thomas Jefferson’s Democratic-Republican Party that defied sectional differences. While each faction argued over the issue of recognition, both sides relied on anti-Catholic rhetoric to justify their positions. In an age politics where politicians were known and respected for their oratory, U.S. politicians tapped into anti-Catholic rhetoric and sentiment in order to persuade their colleagues and constituents of the soundness of their policies. Since anti-Catholicism largely defied sectional differences in the United States, it proved to be a flexible religious prejudice that U.S. politicians could meld and bend to serve the larger foreign policy needs of the country as they saw fit.

The debate over recognition consisted of two different phases. Initially during the 1810s, U.S. politicians debated whether or not to break neutrality and recognize the rebel Latin American movements as belligerents. The debate shifted in the 1820s after the Latin American colonies achieved independence from Spain and became states. The question changed to whether or not the U.S. government should recognize the newly
independent Latin American states. Uniting both phases of the recognition debate is the fact that both those in favor of and those opposed to recognition of Latin America utilized the same respective anti-Catholic arguments in both phases. While the debates over recognition centered on larger cultural and political concerns about Latin America, Catholicism became a useful catchphrase to summarize these more general cultural worries.

Many Democratic-Republicans, led by Speaker of the House Henry Clay (DR-KY), advocated recognizing Spain’s rebellious Latin American colonies as fully independent states and even suggested lending financial or military aid to the rebels in their fight against Spain. In the aftermath of the U.S. “victory” over the British in the War of 1812, many Democratic Republicans ecstatically believed that the United States had won their second War of Independence. Thus when they looked at the struggles in Latin America against Spain, they inevitably thought they were witnessing the irrepresible march of liberty and republicanism throughout the Western Hemisphere. Many of the supporters of recognition envisioned the cause of Latin American independence to be ideologically similar to the American War for Independence. They hoped that the Latin Americans would not only gain political independence from Spain, but also would establish republican forms of government that ensured religious toleration. Religious toleration, however, often served as a coded word for Protestantism as many Americans considered Roman Catholicism to be inimical to the principle of religious freedom. The hope, then, of many Americans for the Latin American rebels to establish religious toleration ultimately meant the opening up of their societies to Protestantism. Supporters thus employed missionary anti-Catholic rhetoric by denouncing the
“despotism” and “bigotry” of Spanish Catholicism in Latin America and hoped that the Latin American rebels would mirror the United States and reject the idea of an established religion. Recognition, Clay and other U.S. politicians believed, would ensure that Latin America not only adopted U.S. political, but also cultural values and thus ensure the United States’ leadership of the Western Hemisphere.

Other Democratic-Republicans were more cautious about recognition and stressed that the United States should maintain neutrality in the struggle between Spain and its American colonies. Opponents of recognition were less optimistic about the ability of the Latin American states to set up republican forms of government. One reason was the immense economic, political, and cultural influence of the Catholic Church. Consequently, they employed an exclusionary anti-Catholic argument to justify neutrality. Realizing that few Latin American rebels advocated the separation of church and state, opponents of recognition remained skeptical that Latin Americans truly understood the concept of republican government. Religious freedom and republicanism, to the great majority of Americans, were inseparable, thus to compromise the integrity of one was to compromise the other. Therefore, it was practical diplomacy not to involve the United States in a possible war with Spain over recognizing Latin American states that were doomed to fail due to their inability to escape the crushing legacy of Spanish Catholicism.

**Insurrection in Latin America and U.S. Neutrality**

Americans reacted with interest when insurrection erupted in Mexico on September 16, 1810. As dawn broke on the village of Dolores, Father Miguel Hidalgo y
Costilla ran to his church and rang the bells to summon the sleepy villagers. Expecting to hear mass, the people of Dolores instead heard from their parish priest a call to arms against the colonial government of Spain. Summoning his parishioners to fight against the Spanish officials in Mexico in the name of Catholicism and the rightful Spanish monarch Ferdinand VII, Hidalgo gathered an army that eventually swelled to nearly 25,000. Though Hidalgo’s army was routed in four months by Spanish colonial loyalists, and Hidalgo himself subsequently captured, excommunicated from the Catholic Church, and executed, the winds of change had been unleashed across Spain’s colonies in the “New World.” As fellow priest José María Morelos and others raised the fallen banner of Hidalgo, the Latin American Wars of Independence captured the attention of many Americans in the United States.1

U.S. newspapers kept track of the insurrection and recounted how “At Saltee the republican army was headed by a priest, who had thrown off the gown for the sword.”2 As the war between Spain and its American colonies progressed, U.S. newspapers recounted how the Catholic Church stood in opposition to the cause of Latin America independence. When Morelos was captured and condemned by the Inquisition as “a heretic, atheist, deist, materialist, and for other crimes of the competence of the holy tribunal” and subsequently executed, many Americans seethed over the injustice perpetrated by the Spanish Inquisition and the Roman Catholic Church. “The tyranny, superstition, and fanaticism, which exercises openly its sway in the capital of the new world,” The Daily National Intelligencer fumed, “[has] sacrificed a most virtuous

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patriot.”³ Other Americans decried the backwardness of Mexico and how it “has been bound up by Spain in all the ligatures of restrictions, monopolies, prohibitions, seclusions, and superstition” and that thanks to the American and French revolutions the Mexican people’s “dormant qualities” were beginning to show.⁴

Despite such expressions of popular encouragement from Americans, actual support, especially on the part of the U.S. government, was something else. When insurrection erupted in Latin America in the 1810s, President James Madison’s policy was to maintain neutrality during the conflict. Growing tensions between the United States and Great Britain over maritime trade rights and impressment, among other things, culminated in the War of 1812, prevented the U.S. government from devoting more attention to the conflict in Latin America. After succeeding Madison to the presidency, James Monroe and his secretary of state, John Quincy Adams, intended to continue Madison’s policy of neutrality. Despite the euphoria that many Americans felt in the aftermath of the War of 1812 about their “victory” over Britain, Adams recognized that relations between the United States and Europe were incredibly tense and that the young American republic had barely survived the war.

For Adams, neutrality was a pragmatic policy as he hoped to avoid provoking a conflict with Spain over recognizing the rebel colonies as independent states. Relations between the United States and Spain were already tense, as Spain did not recognize the legitimacy of Napoleon’s sale of the Louisiana Territory to the United States in 1803, denounced the attempts of American filibusters to invade Spain’s colonies, and reacted with indignation to General Andrew Jackson’s invasion of Eastern Florida in 1817. The

³ *Daily National Intelligencer*, 21 June 1816.
⁴ *St. Louis Enquirer*, 10 June 1819.
recognition of Latin American independence, Adams believed, could possibly result in another war that the militarily weak United States might not win.\(^5\)

Adams also believed that the revolutions in Latin America were different in character and ideals from the American Revolution because of the Latin American rebels’ insistence on maintaining Roman Catholicism as the official state religion. The revolutions in Latin America, Adams claimed, were “not likely to promote the spirit of freedom or order by their example. They have not the first elements of free or good government. Arbitrary power, military and ecclesiastical, was stamped upon their education, their habits, and upon all their institutions.”\(^6\) Adams’ fear of the debilitating effects of the Roman Catholic Church was something he learned from his father, former president John Adams, and also acquired during his long diplomatic service in Europe early in his career. While traveling through Spain in 1785, the young John Quincy Adams disparagingly wrote of Catholicism and its affect on the population:

> Poor creatures, they are [eaten] up by their priests. Near[ly] three quarters of what they earn goes to the Priests and with the other quarter they must live as they can. Thus is the whole of this kingdom deceived and deluded by their religion. I thank Almighty God that I was born in a country where anybody may get a good living if they please.\(^7\)

Adams’ opinions reflected the general consensus of Protestant New England’s beliefs regarding Catholicism and its incompatibility with republicanism. Adams’ dismal view of Catholicism and Latin America’s chances to establish republican forms of government

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\(^5\) James L. Lewis, Jr., *John Quincy Adams: Policymaker for the Union* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2001), 54. Adams also feared provoking Great Britain, as the British warned the United States not expand territorially at the expense of its Latin American neighbors.


likewise came from his own elitist political beliefs. Though a member of the Democratic-Republican Party, Adams still advocated many policies associated with the elitist, and now defunct Federalist Party. As the bastion of a dying Federalist Party, New England traditionally had opposed policies that might anger or restrict trade with Great Britain. The combined factors of dying elitist Federalist politics, New England anti-Catholicism, and Adams’ own ethnocentrism resulted in his wariness of recognizing the Latin American states. ⁸

Despite the desires of Monroe’s administration to maintain U.S. neutrality during the wars between Spain and its Latin American colonies, the issue of diplomatic recognition sparked intense debate within Congress. If the United States officially recognized Spain’s rebellious American colonies, it would diplomatically endorse Latin American claims of being independent states. Leading the charge for recognition of the rebellious Spanish colonies was Speaker of the House Henry Clay. Clay’s passionate support for Latin American independence was evident as early as 1813 when he opposed President James Madison’s attempt to strengthen the neutrality laws of the United States so as not to anger Spain. Though he was defeated in his efforts in 1813, Clay sought to assert his new powers as Speaker of the House in the 15th Congress to make Latin American independence a policy matter of primary importance. Clay, as a War Hawk during the War of 1812, fiercely advocated an activist foreign policy that defended American rights and respectability while championing the cause of liberalism and

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⁸ Though Adams’ views on religion, particularly his anti-Catholicism, are well documented, James Monroe’s religious ideas are relatively unknown. Monroe rarely wrote about religion or invoked religious language in his public addresses, leading scholars to conclude that either he was deeply private about his beliefs or that religion was for him altogether unimportant. He was, however, a Freemason, which leads one to conclude that Monroe was possibly critical of organized religion (with Roman Catholicism being the most hierarchical form of Christianity). See David L. Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 99-107.
republicanism abroad. This passion for aiding the “advance of liberty” throughout the
globe was coupled with Clay’s resentment towards President Monroe, who had awarded
the position of secretary of state, traditionally seen as the stepping-stone to the
presidency, to John Quincy Adams instead of Clay. As a result of this perceived “snub,”
Clay sought to use his position as Speaker of the House to challenge the Monroe
administration on all policy matters, the first being the issue of Latin American
independence. ⁹

Missionary Anti-Catholic Rhetoric and the Supporters of Latin American
Recognition

On March 25, 1818, Clay proposed to the House that appropriations be made to
send a minister to Buenos Aires. Though it was not a formal resolution proposing
recognition, Clay’s bill ignited a debate in Congress that Adams and other cabinet
officials saw as a direct congressional challenge to the administration’s foreign policy. In
the midst of this bureaucratic wrangling, both supporters and opponents of recognition in
the 15th Congress utilized anti-Catholic rhetoric to validate their own agendas. Clay and
the supporters of recognition were able to frame the debate around ideological concerns.
By doing so, they claimed moral superiority in their arguments in the hope of portraying
their opponents as cynical obstructionists all too willing to sacrifice the ideals of the
nation to play international power politics.

Immediately addressing one major concern Adams and opponents of recognition
held, Clay remarked to the House, “it is sometimes said that they [Latin Americans] are

154-155.
too ignorant and too superstitious to admit of the existence of free government.” That charge, Clay insisted, was ignorant, as the Latin Americans “worshipped the same God with us. Their prayers were offered up in their temples to the same Redeemer, whose intercession was expected to save us. All religions,” Clay reminded his audience, “united with Government, were more or less inimical to liberty. All, separated from Government, were compatible with liberty.” Clay asked the House to forgive the Latin Americans for their “less advanced” understanding of religious toleration and that any superstition in Latin America was simply the legacy of Spanish tyranny.  

Clay noted to his colleagues that the Spanish provinces had many difficulties to overcome, such as a class of nobles, a caste system, an Indian population, and “the great influence of the clergy.” Without such impediments, Clay believed that the Latin American revolutions would follow the American Revolutionary model.

While Clay called for understanding between Catholics and Protestants and emphasized their common Christian beliefs, he nevertheless regarded Latin Americans’ understanding of the role of religion in a republican and democratic society to be backward and unsophisticated. Clay recognized that the Latin American rebels did not intend on establishing religious toleration upon winning independence. He was, unlike Adams and other opponents of recognition, however, optimistic that over time the new Latin American states would, with the example and guidance of the United States, eventually embrace the concept of religious freedom.

Henry St. George Tucker (DR-VA) also challenged opponents of recognition on the charge that Latin Americans were incapable of self-government. Because of the

11 Ibid., 1619-1620.
religious despotism Catholic Spain had imposed upon her colonies, Latin America had been, according to Tucker, “for centuries, in the deepest gloom of ignorance and superstition, into which it is the interest of tyrants forever to plunge the victims of their power.” The road to undoing the evils of Spain, Tucker warned the House, would not be quick or easy. “Let us remember,” he said to his colleagues in the House, “that the throes of revolution are most violent, where the mind has been least enlightened.” Critics of recognizing Spain’s colonies, Tucker said, should be happy for what little had been achieved in the revolution so far, as the Latin Americans were not as enlightened as their neighbors in the United States. Like Clay, Tucker acknowledged that religious freedom was not an intrinsic part of the Latin American revolutionaries, but expressed hope that such a goal might be realized in the future. In the eyes of the recognitionists, it was more important to seize the moment and ensure that Latin America became independent rather than squander the opportunity of advancing the cause of liberty out of fear of Spanish retaliation and ideological concerns.¹²

Others in Congress also championed Clay’s efforts for recognition of the rebellious Spanish colonies, however they did not echo his lukewarm tolerance of Catholicism. Instead, they used the opportunity to denounce the “evils” that Spanish Catholicism inflicted on Latin America and expressed their hope that Latin America would free itself from the control of the Catholic Church. By incorporating the “horrors” of Roman Catholicism in their indictments of Spanish colonial rule, congressmen hoped to demonstrate ideologically why U.S. recognition of Latin America was morally right. The whole world, according to Representative Thomas B. Robertson (DR-LA), was watching in anticipation what would transpire in Latin America. The United States,

Robertson argued, could not in good conscience remain silent while those “who promote... the dogmas of priestcraft, and the doctrines of despotism” fought to quell Latin American independence. Robertson urged the United States to seize Florida from Spain as way of compelling her to relinquish her hold on Latin America; a fate that Robertson believed was inevitable. “I will not believe,” he retorted to the doubters in Congress of Latin America’s ability for self-governance, “that they [Latin Americans] are intended, by an all-wise Providence, to remain the slaves of kings and priests.”

Representative John Floyd (DR-VA) likewise excoriated the abuses of Spanish Catholicism in Latin America and used it as an example of why the United States was ideologically bound to help the cause of the Latin American rebels. According to Floyd, the people of Latin America were “haunted continually by the phantoms of the imagination... with racks, and tortures, and the inquisition.” Catholic Spain, according to Floyd:

must be torn from her foundation to expiate the horrible sacrilege she has committed; in defiling the temples of that God whom they pretend to adore, in calling upon his name, at the holy altars, with perjured oaths, to witness their treacheries and deceit, when they were about to shed such oceans of innocent blood, and with mockery to sanctify the deed.

Spanish Catholics may believe they are Christian, Floyd stated to the House, but the violent and barbaric manner in which they waged war against the rebels seemed to prove how un-Christian Catholic Spain really was. Could the United States in good conscience, Floyd asked the House, leave the Latin Americans in the hands of a barbaric and un-

13 Ibid., 1536-1538.
14 Ibid., 1551.
15 Ibid., 1555.
Christian Spain? Not only did Floyd appeal to the consciences of his colleagues, he also reiterated the common Protestant perception that Catholicism was not even a true form of Christianity, but rather the product of superstition and idolatry.16

Other representatives chose to stress the inevitability of Latin American independence and the United States’ role as the leader of liberty and republicanism throughout the world. Representative Richard Mentor Johnson (DR-KY), like Robertson, fervently believed that “the principles of religious toleration and political emancipation must march on steadily” and that it was “the will of Heaven that South America should be free.” With God on the side of freedom and republicanism, the Spanish government and “the spies of the inquisition” were not powerful enough “to stop the march, and avert the progress of correct revolutionary principles.”17 Representative John Holmes (DR-MA) attacked Spain for the “ignorance, bigotry, despotism, and beggary” that was rampant throughout Spain itself. Being in such a condition, Holmes asked the House, how could they ever compete with “young, vigorous, athletic America?” By contrasting Spain with the United States, Holmes intended to demonstrate how Catholicism had caused Spain and Latin America’s decline, whereas Protestantism and religious freedom ensured the United States’ vitality as a nation.18

*Exclusionary Anti-Catholic Rhetoric and the Opponents of Latin American Recognition*

While supporters of recognition used missionary anti-Catholic rhetoric to illustrate the moral imperative of U.S. support for Latin America’s struggle for

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16 Though John Floyd had nothing pleasant to say about Catholicism in 1818, he would later convert to Catholicism in 1832 because of his daughter’s conversion.
independence, opponents of recognition used exclusionary anti-Catholic language to demonstrate how the rebellious provinces of Spain were not ready for self-government. Opponents of recognition were uneasy with endorsing the revolutions in Latin America because many of the rebel leaders, especially those who were priests, did not call for religious toleration, but instead sought to maintain Catholicism as the official religion of the new governments. For many Americans, republicanism was intrinsically intertwined with religious freedom. Thus, for some U.S. officials, the failure of the Latin American rebel leaders to call for religious freedom in their call to arms indicated their inability to fully grasp the idea of “true” republicanism.

Representative John Forsyth (DR-GA) challenged Clay and his supporters on the readiness of Latin America for independence. The Latin Americans, “with [their] intellect enervated by despotism, and soul withered by superstition” could not possibly have the capacity to establish responsible republican institutions. He pointed to the limited degree in which “true” republican ideas had spread throughout Latin America and stated that in every revolution (much like Jefferson’s belief) some “bigoted priest…poured out the holy oil of despotism, and bid the agitated waves be still.” If the Catholic clergy were responsible for the quelling of liberty throughout the ages, then why should there be any different outcome expected in Latin America, Forsyth asked, where the Spanish monarchy and Catholicism held sway for hundreds of years? To recognize the Latin American states, Forsyth argued, was not worth risking the delicate peace maintained between the United States and Spain in order to aid the doomed cause of the Latin American rebels.

19 Ibid., 1508-1509, 1646.
George Robertson (DR-GA) and George Poindexter (DR-MS) also were wary of supporting a revolution that would not guarantee “all that is dear to man – his life, liberty, property, and the religion of his choice.”

George Robertson personally hoped that “the principles of enlightened liberty” would eradicate in Spain’s colonies “every remnant of royalty, superstition, and despotic hierarchy… and secure for themselves… the blessings of free government and free religion.” Once this was accomplished, Robertson fervently hoped that “the whole South American population may be seen worshipping as freemen, in the temple of freedom, and bowing as Christians at the altar of a Christian God.”

Not only were Latin Americans forced to worship under a hierarchical and superstitious church, they were not even considered to be fully Christian (unlike Clay’s view), as they could only truly worship a “Christian God” once they had escaped from the vise of the idolatrous Roman Catholic Church.

In George Poindexter’s opinion, “Religious toleration [in Mexico] was scouted as altogether inadmissible, and irreconcilable with the habits of the people. The Catholic religion was established…and the written instrument which they had promulgated to the world contained scarcely a single republican feature.” Poindexter was not opposed to the spread of American republican institutions and liberty, as he wished to “confine the Powers of Europe to the boundaries which nature had proscribed, and to establish an American confederacy of Sovereignties, uncontrolled by the doctrines of European policy.” He believed that such “would promote the progress of science and the diffusion of liberal principles over the countries enveloped in ignorance, bigotry, and

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20 Ibid., 1625.
In many ways, his hopes foreshadowed the future Monroe Doctrine, which aimed to keep the European Powers out of the Western Hemisphere and propagate American political and cultural values so as to mold Latin America in the image of the United States. Since the Latin American rebel leaders failed to call for religious toleration in their fight against Spain, Poindexter argued it was unwise to indulge in America’s dream of extending “the realm of liberty” when doing so might provoke war with Spain and other European powers.

Reversal of Policy: Recognizing the New Latin American States

By 1822, the diplomatic and military situation in Latin America dramatically altered as Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and the United Provinces of Rio de la Plata (Argentina) achieved independence from Spain. Realizing that diplomatic relations could be established with these independent states without becoming involved in an ongoing war with Spain, Monroe’s administration began to reverse its position on recognition. Even John Quincy Adams, who still harbored doubts about the ability of the Latin Americans for self-government, ultimately urged recognizing Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and Argentina. With the threat of war with Spain now a non-issue, both Monroe and Adams hoped to guide the Latin American states into adopting American political and cultural values and thus ensure the United States’ leadership of the Western Hemisphere. Ministers were thus dispatched to the five newly independent Latin

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23 In 1820, Spain underwent a civil war between royalists and liberal forces. The tentative government of the Liberals and the general instability in Spain facilitated in the granting of independence.
American states to assess the political, economic, social, and cultural situation in each country.²⁴

As the House came together to vote in agreement with President Monroe’s decision to recognize Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and Argentina as independent states and dispatch ministers to them, celebratory rhetoric announced the end of Catholicism’s hold on Latin America. David Trimble (DR-KY) declared that now “all the Americas are free – free as ourselves” for they were “free in their property, their persons, and religion – They own no Lord but him in heaven, No power but what consent has given.”²⁵ Joel R. Poinsett (DR-VA) denounced Spain’s policy of using “ignorance and superstition” to “keep them [the colonies] in subjection.” Specifically addressing the Catholic Church, Poinsett stated how “Dread of religious toleration…excited the clergy to oppose the revolution. The influence they exercised over the minds of the people was unbounded; and had not a few virtuous, well-enlightened priests espoused the cause of liberty, the colonies would still be dependent.”²⁶

Though Poinsett implicitly acknowledged the roles of Hidalgo and Morales in beginning the revolution, his respect for them centered on the misconceived notion that their respective insurrections sought to establish religious toleration. For the supporters of recognition, it was easier to rhetorically refashion Hidalgo and Morelos as crusaders for religious toleration rather than mention their devotion to upholding Catholicism as the state religion. In contrast to “enlightened” priests such as Hidalgo and Morelos, Poinsett warned that the majority of the clergy in Latin America “will exert their influence to prevent [independence]. America was to them a source of ambition and profit. The

²⁴ Lewis, John Quincy Adams, 88.
²⁶ Ibid., 1396.
possession of America extended their spiritual dominion and augmented their temporal wealth.” Though they intended on recognizing the new Latin American states, the crusade to spread American political and cultural values would not be an easy road as the clergy still held considerable sway and would not willingly abandon their positions of economic, political, and cultural power.

The entire House of Representatives voted in favor of recognition, except for one nay vote cast by Robert S. Garnett (DR-VA). Refusing to believe that the Latin Americans were capable of self-government, Garnett argued to his colleagues that “the power and influence of the priesthood and the landed aristocracy” was still strong throughout Latin America and would tirelessly strive to undo the liberal reforms achieved by the revolutions. The earlier objections and concerns voiced by congressmen regarding the apparent incompatibility of Catholicism with republicanism appeared prophetic when the conservative General Agustín de Iturbide, the former head of the Royalist Army of New Spain (Mexico), established in 1821 Roman Catholicism as the state religion of the Empire of Mexico and proclaimed himself Emperor Augustín I. When Congress returned a few weeks later, Garnett criticized Iturbide’s autocracy and his support for Catholicism as the established religion of the Mexican Empire:

It might be the best form of government of which they are capable; it might even evince a masterly policy in Iturbide, that to engage a powerful priesthood in favor of the revolution, by promising to protect them; but the exclusive tolerance of one religion, to be enforced by such means, is calculated to show that the people are still ignorant of the true principles of free government.29

27 Ibid., 1401.
Iturbide’s actions, Garnett claimed, clearly demonstrated that Roman Catholicism and monarchism were intertwined and inseparable. It also indicated that Latin Americans, and specifically the Mexicans, were ill prepared for true republicanism due to their adherence to the hierarchical and “superstitious” Catholic religion. As most of the clergy openly sided with the Spanish royalist forces against the rebel movements and thereby opposed the cause of religious liberty in Mexico, Garnett warned that the crusade to spread religious freedom in Latin America was not going to be easily accomplished as long as the Catholic Church retained any power.

Though Iturbide was forced to abdicate and flee Mexico by 1823, his short reign nevertheless confirmed in the minds of many U.S. politicians that the Catholic Church and monarchism were mutually supportive institutions. Those who opposed recognizing the rebel Latin American colonies cited this connection between Catholicism, the Catholic Church, and monarchism to support their conclusion that the Latin Americans were incapable of understanding and establishing stable republican governments. In addition to Iturbide’s short reign as the Emperor of Mexico, U.S. elites and diplomats would also point to the impact of Catholicism in other Latin American countries to demonstrate Latin America’s political and cultural maturity.

U.S. Diplomatic Assessments of Latin America

Negative diplomatic assessments of Latin America by U.S. ministers reiterated many of the concerns that opponents of recognition of Latin America held. In each report, the Catholic religion and the Church hierarchy were seen as bulwarks against republicanism and allied with the forces of monarchism and despotism. In the aftermath
of the Latin American Wars of Independence, the Church aligned itself with the new Latin American political elite, which came from the rural and industrial upper class. In order to safeguard their wealth and avert social revolution, the landed and industrial elite and the Church became allies. The new elites thus made Roman Catholicism the official state religion and allowed the Church to retain most of its land and wealth while the Church preached respect for the new elites and for the social and political status quo. U.S. diplomats thus saw this alliance between the Latin American elites and the Church as preventing the fulfillment of republican principles from being established in the new Latin American states.

Secretary of State Adams, despite his earlier misgivings, seemed willing to embrace the cause of spreading “the liberty of conscience and of religious worship” in Latin America. The military despotism and the power of the Catholic Church that held sway over Latin America, according to Adams, was about to be swept away by the “spirit of the age.” Adams, believing it was imperative in forming the basis of U.S.-Latin American relations, thus instructed his diplomats to persuade and assist the Latin American governments in establishing religious toleration in their respective countries.30

Adams’ newfound optimism regarding the spread of religious freedom in Latin America, however, was soon dashed by negative reports from his ministers. The U.S. ministers sent to Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Paraguay, and Peru soon sent back to Adams their assessments of each country’s revolutionary progress, most of which was negative and dealt largely with the Church’s influence over the people. Each minister invariably found the Catholic Church to be a major force for monarchism and counter-

revolution, as well as an inveterate foe of republicanism and religious freedom. As a result, the reports diminished American expectations for the swift spread of religious toleration and stable republican governments throughout Latin America.

The monarchical sympathies of the Church and its ties to not only Spain, France, Austria, and other Catholic European nations, but also to military despotism in Latin America would continually be cited by U.S. politicians and diplomats as one of the many reasons why Catholicism was detrimental to Latin America’s growth in republicanism and also of the threat it posed towards the United States’ liberty and its control over the Western Hemisphere. U.S. officials feared that European priests, seeking converts in the New World, would eventually be followed by European armies seeking new colonies. European interference in the Western Hemisphere would thus compromise the security of the young and relatively weak United States. Frustrated with the Latin Americans for their inability to establish stable republics, due to their “inferior” race and religion, Adams, Monroe and other U.S. politicians concluded that the United States must assume control of the Western Hemisphere. As the weak, “mongrel,” Catholic Latin Americans were still susceptible to European dominance, it was imperative that the white, Protestant, and democratic United States take on a protectionist and dominating role in the Western Hemisphere to keep European powers out and Latin America peaceful. Thus, by doing this, the United States would enhance its own security.

Theodorick Bland, serving as a Special Commissioner to South America, reported to Secretary of State Adams on the conditions of both Paraguay and Chile and the detrimental effect the Church had on both countries. Paraguayans, Bland told Adams, had the skill and industry to greatly improve their country, but “Their stern
Protestant Americans, their religion…inculcated in their youth” prevented them from questioning established doctrines and traditions. As a result, the creativity and inquisitiveness necessary for Paraguay to modernize and create stable free governments was stunted by the nature of Catholicism.  

Bland more extensively relayed to Adams the immense influence of the Church in Chile. The magnitude of the Church’s power in Chile reminded Bland “of the Spanish saying, that, in [Chile], ‘it is doubtful whether the state be in the church, or the church in the state.’” American Protestantism, Bland told Adams, was radically different from the Catholicism that was prevalent in Chile, as the earlier American colonist “had his mind imperceptibly enlarged and invigorated, his polemical skill continually improved, and his reasoning faculties sharpened and prepared for political as well as religious subjects” due to the nature of Protestant Christianity. Catholicism in Chile, however, dulled the mind and denied investigative inquiry:

The mind hears the dogma dictated which it is commanded to believe, without daring to doubt, or presuming to ask a question. Men are faithful but not rational believers: the rich and shining ceremonies of the church glitter before the senses; they yield reverence from habit; and their minds, overshadowed with a gloomy obeisance, rest content in a kind of irrational silence.

Stupified and mesmerized by the rituals of the Church and prohibited from questioning and arguing tenets of their faith, the Chileans, Bland believed, were not nearly as ready intellectually as the Americans were for self-government. To the great majority of Protestant Americans, their religion was inextricable linked to republicanism because of

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the independent nature of the Protestant religion. Most Americans believed that since Protestantism lacked a structured hierarchy, had many denominations, permitted (relative) independent reading and interpretation of the Bible, and was foremost considered a religion based on reason, it created in its followers the qualities necessary for the stable function of a republic. Catholicism, on the other hand, supposedly blinded its followers with superstition and obedience to a hierarchical priesthood that often worked in tandem with monarchy. Such a religion, Protestants claimed, could only produce “slaves to kings and priests” and not reasonable men able to think and govern themselves.

Like Bland’s assessment of Paraguay and Chile, Caesar A. Rodney reported to Adams the impediments the Church placed on “free government” in Argentina. Though the revolution in Argentina held many republican principles, Rodney resented that “A church establishment…of the Catholic faith, [which] is contrary to our ideas of religious freedom,” was incorporated into the constitution. Despite efforts of some Argentines to establish religious toleration, “the ignorant and superstitious part of the people, together with the regular clergy, would not be satisfied with such a measure.”34 The establishment of a state church, especially a Catholic one, was not, in Rodney’s opinion, compatible with American ideas of religious freedom. John M. Forbes, also serving as a Special Agent of the United States at Buenos Aires, wrote to Adams in despair of how all of the factions “discontented by the civil and military reforms and other measures of the Government, rallied with the Ecclesiastics” to oppose republican forces in Argentina.35

The Church in Colombia also did not escape being depicted by U.S. diplomats as being responsible for cultural depravity and defending monarchism. Charles S. Todd, the U.S. agent to Colombia, informed Secretary of State Adams that in order to spread the ideas of religious freedom and republicanism in Colombia, it was imperative to replace the Church as the primary educational institution in Latin America with “a more liberal system of education or the Priests may obtain the same blighting influence over them, as they have already acquired over their Ancestors.” The Colombian Government, however, was afraid of eliminating the Church’s power for fear that “anarchy or a counter revolution would prevail and eventuate in placing a Military despot at the Head over the ruins of a Government of Laws.”

Like Lyman Beecher and Samuel Morse would argue a decade later, Todd believed that education was a crucial tool to combat the “indolence” that Catholicism generated in its followers. It also coincided with the American belief that only an educated citizenry could successfully maintain a republican form of government.

The most numerous reports about Catholicism’s debilitating political and cultural role came from Joel R. Poinsett, who became the United States’ first minister to Mexico. When appointed to serve as a special agent to Latin America from 1810 to 1814 by President James Madison, Poinsett informed Madison’s administration that “The Clergy whose influence here is very great have generally in the confessional and by every secret means in their power, opposed the progress of this country.”

Like most Protestants, Poinsett saw the confessional as the chief method of the Catholic priest in controlling his congregation, and he reiterated this belief to then Secretary of State James Monroe.

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37 Joel Roberts Poinsett to James Monroe, 20 February 1813, DCLA, Vol. II, 897.
After serving in the House of Representatives, Poinsett was again appointed to serve as a diplomat to Latin America. Poinsett, like Bland, outlined the negative impact that the Catholic Church and the Jesuits played in the subjugation of Paraguay. The conquest of Paraguay, according to Poinsett, was really accomplished by the Jesuits’ subtle conversion tactics and not by Spain’s military adventurers. Instrumental in the initial conquest, Catholic priests were vital to the dominance of Spain over Latin America due to their “great influence over the minds of the people.”

In explaining why the people of Peru did not take an active role in the revolution, Poinsett pointed to the Catholic Church and more specifically to the role of Catholic monks from Europe:

> The European monks sent from Spain were chosen from amongst the most zealous and intelligent, and from the pulpit and in the confessional chair successfully inculcated the doctrines of divine right, and of unqualified submission to the King, and, above all, of implicit belief in the infallibility of the clergy.

Poinsett made the effort to specify that European priests were the most responsible for drilling into the minds of their congregations to be loyal to the king of Spain. James Brown, the U.S. minister to France, likewise expressed his concern to future Secretary of State Henry Clay over the role of European priests and their supposed ill intentions towards Latin America. “Those new states [LA states],” Brown wrote to Clay, “have trouble enough in store for them, in the armies of intriguers in the shape of Jesuits priests

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39 Ibid., 465.
and Missionaries, which will be sent in Swarms from the European Hive to prey upon their industry, and practice upon their credulity.”40

Such a distinction marked a growing trend in anti-Catholic rhetoric regarding the differences between the Catholic priests of Europe and those from Latin America. European priests were known more for their ability to “dupe” the people of Latin America whereas Latin American priests were known more for their supposed ignorance and stupidity. Race and ethnicity were not only used to make a distinction between the white Protestants in the United States from Latin American Catholics, but also within the Catholic priesthood. White priests from Europe ultimately helped subjugate Latin America while their fellow Latin American priests, who were seen as racially inferior, simply helped perpetuate a veil of ignorance and intolerance among their fellow Latinos. The introduction of a racial difference within the Catholic priesthood revealed the growing sense of elitism and ethnocentrism in the United States toward their southern neighbors. If the Latin Americans could not guarantee the stability of their republican governments, U.S. elites argued, it was reasonable to assume that a white European priest was more cunning and intelligent than a “lazy” and racially “inferior” Latin American priest.

*The Threat of Catholicism and the Monroe Doctrine*

In the midst of all of these dour depictions of the Catholic Church’s role in the emerging Latin American states, the threat that the Holy Alliance in Europe might assist Spain in the recovery of its lost colonies created a firestorm of debate within the Monroe

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administration. On the counsel of Adams, Monroe decided to reject joining the British overture in issuing a joint condemnation of European meddling in the Western Hemisphere and instead issued the proclamation unilaterally. Monroe’s message to Congress on December 2, 1823, known later as the Monroe Doctrine, stated plainly that the United States would view any European effort to control their Latin American neighbors either overtly or covertly as an “unfriendly” action against the United States.41

Not only did the United States perceive European attempts to control Latin America, such as the Holy Alliance’s proposed military assistance to Spain in 1823 to recover its colonies, as unacceptable, it also decried any methods or forms of oppression that Europe might utilize in order to regain its control over part of the Western Hemisphere. As noted earlier, the Catholic Church was considered to be one such method of control and the monarchical political sentiments of the clergy in the new Latin American states worried U.S. diplomats. Though not explicitly stated in the Monroe Doctrine, Catholicism was perceived by U.S. officials to be a manner of European control that the United States should guard against.

Even after the Monroe Doctrine was issued, the fear of European ties to the Catholic Church in Latin America persisted in diplomatic circles. John Forbes, the U.S. minister in Buenos Aires, believed that with the decline of Spain’s power in Latin America, it opened up a race between Britain and France for control of Spain’s former colonies. Catholic France would seek, Forbes feared, the aid of the Latin American clergy in creating support for French domination in the region.42 James Brown, the U.S. minister to France, also expressed his concern about the ties between Catholic France,

Catholic Spain, and the clergy in Latin America to Adams’ Secretary of State Henry Clay. As the Monroe Doctrine in the short-term failed to resolve the Holy Alliance crisis (Anglo-French diplomacy did), it also failed to alleviate U.S. fears of the monarchist sympathies of Catholicism in Latin America.

The failure to uproot Catholicism in Latin America convinced many U.S. politicians that in order to protect the United States’ national security, it would either have to expand its territory at the expense of Latin America or tighten control of its current borders. Either way, a general antipathy toward Latin America’s chances at progress remained consistent in the United States and reinforced elitist views of American exceptionalism. Likewise, Catholicism’s continued strength in Latin America permitted U.S. politicians to utilize anti-Catholic rhetoric to validate their own foreign policy agendas toward the region.

Recognition, the Monroe Doctrine, and the Paradigm of Missionary versus Exclusionary Anti-Catholicism

The United States’ recognition of the new Latin American states and the subsequent declaration of the Monroe Doctrine were clear attempts to drive certain European powers out of the Western Hemisphere and replace European domination with American influence and leadership. Proponents of recognizing Spain’s former colonies ultimately hoped to mold the new Latin American states into an image reflecting the

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44 After Spain’s Liberal Government was overthrown by France and absolute monarchism restored in 1823, Spain attempted to regain its Latin American colonies throughout the rest of 1820s. President Adams and Secretary of State Clay effectively backpedaled the meaning of the Monroe Doctrine and sought diplomatic help from Britain, France and Russia to intercede with Spain. Spain’s final failure to reclaim Mexico in 1829 spelled the end of its attempts at reconquest and finally acknowledged Mexico’s independence in 1836.
political and cultural values of the United States. Opponents objected to such a course of action not because they did not desire the Latin Americans to adopt the same political institutions and cultural values of the United States, but because they did not believe it could be accomplished due to the crushing legacy of Spanish tyranny, both political and religious. Bound up in both arguments for and against recognition was the anti-Catholicism that was an integral part of the United States’ culture.

Both sides of the debate regarding Latin American recognition utilized anti-Catholicism to justify their position on how to diplomatically proceed in a volatile situation that could result in a war between the United States and Spain. The debates over recognition thus established a paradigm that pitted expansionist and missionary anti-Catholic rhetoric against protectionist and exclusionary anti-Catholic rhetoric. Though the debate over recognition encompassed both the issue of U.S. support for the Latin American rebels against Spain during the Wars of Independence and the issue in 1823 of U.S. recognition of the newly independent Latin American states, the anti-Catholic arguments of both sides remained the same. Those in favor of recognition expounded on the horrors that Catholicism brought to Latin America and their desire to help liberate Latin Americans from the tyranny of Spain and the superstition of the Catholic Church. Opponents of recognition likewise recounted the negative qualities of Catholicism, and that because of its immense power and stranglehold over the people of Latin America, the revolutionaries had no chance of succeeding in establishing legitimate republican governments that mirrored the one created by the United States.

The fact that politicians were able to wield anti-Catholicism in their arguments for both sides of the debate demonstrates how flexible anti-Catholicism was as a political
issue. Anti-Catholicism could easily be used in a cogent and understandable way on both sides of the issue of recognizing Spain’s former colonies. Proponents of recognition could urge for the spread of American ideals to counter the “despotic” legacy of the Church while opponents could quite as easily rely on the negative impact of Catholicism to demonstrate how unprepared the Latin Americans were for independence. Despite the different policy aims that missionary and exclusionary anti-Catholic rhetoric were used for, both reaffirmed the belief of most Americans in U.S. political and cultural exceptionalism.

The negative diplomatic reports of the U.S. ministers sent to Latin America pertaining to the Catholic Church’s power certainly dampened the enthusiasm that many Americans held for the prospects of spreading American ideals about government and religion. Herman Allen, the U.S. minister to Chile, lamented to Adams and later to Clay how Chile, on the cusp of achieving independence and liberty, willingly surrendered the principle of religious toleration in order to preserve the established position of the Church.\(^{45}\) When the Latin American states secretly negotiated with the Vatican on filling the vacant bishoprics caused by the revolution behind Spain’s back, Alexander Everett, the U.S. minister to Spain, acknowledged to Clay that such an agreement would be helpful in establishing order, “but whether it will tend to confirm their present republican form of [government] is perhaps more doubtful.”\(^{46}\) Though the negative reports about the power of Catholicism in Latin America dampened the spirits of those hoping that complete religious toleration would sweep Latin America, proponents of expanding the


United States’ power and influence did not relinquish their hopes for the rest of the North American continent as expansionists gazed longingly towards the Pacific.

Though John Quincy Adams advised his countrymen not to go abroad “in search of monsters to destroy,” his heart was firmly set on acquiring for the United States a continental empire that stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. Andrew Jackson’s invasion of Florida and the continuing success of the revolutionaries in Latin America prompted the Spanish king to begin negotiations for the cession of Florida and to settle boundary issues pertaining to Spanish territories in North America left unsettled by the Napoleonic Wars and the Louisiana Purchase. Progress in the diplomatic negotiations was slow, and Adams complained to no end about the delays the Spanish king and his foreign minister Don Luis de Onís were making regarding the treaty.

Many of the delays, Adams learned from the French minister Guillaume Hyde de Neuville, were due in large part to Onís’ fear of being blamed by the Spanish priests in the king’s Council for relinquishing too much territory. “Nothing could be more ridiculous and disgusting,” Adams fumed when informed of the power of Spain’s priesthood in the negotiations, “But these priests, who had no measures of their own to propose, and were never responsible for anything, were always setting up the honor and dignity of Spain, the glory of the monarchy, and talking as in the time of Charles the Fifth.” Compounded with Adams’ frustration over the lethargic pace of the negotiations was his inability to include Texas within the boundaries of the United States.

In order to placate the Spanish and anti-slavery advocates in Congress, Adams was forced to cede Texas to the Spanish during the negotiations, despite his belief that

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47 Lewis, John Quincy Adams, 55.
Texas was a part of the Louisiana Purchase, and thus had legally been sold to the United States by the French. Despite the tenuous claims of Adams and the United States regarding Texas, the failure of the Transcontinental Treaty, signed in 1819, to include Texas within the United States produced an outcry among Americans that would fuel what would become the Texas annexation movement. Like the earlier debate over recognizing Spain’s colonies, the push for Texas’ annexation resurrected anti-Catholic fears that expansionists used to their advantage.
Section 4

Texas Annexation and the Combination of Missionary and Exclusionary Anti-Catholic Rhetoric

After years of hungrily eyeing the Mexican state of Texas, President Andrew Jackson, along with many expansionist minded Americans, were ecstatic when Americans in Texas revolted against Mexico City in 1836. The possibility of acquiring what they failed to make part of the United States through the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819, suddenly became a reality to many American politicians and diplomats. Capitalizing on the Texans revolt against Mexico City, many expansionist minded U.S. politicians worked to recognize Texas’ independence and subsequently annex them into the Union. In the midst of this debate, anti-Catholic rhetoric was prolific as many Americans sympathized with the Protestant Anglo-Saxon Texans’ stand against the “despotic” and Catholic Mexico of General Antonio López de Santa Anna. Unlike the debates over recognition of the new Latin American states and the Monroe Doctrine, where anti-Catholicism was used by opposing sides to justify their particular positions, this time around anti-Catholic rhetoric was mostly employed by one side, namely the expansionists who sought Texas’ annexation. U.S. officials, pundits, and the general public, who opposed annexation, on the other hand, rarely if ever played the anti-Catholic card to block absorption of Texas to the Union.

The issue of U.S. annexation of Texas opened up the larger question of territorial expansion and how it would affect the United States domestically and internationally.
U.S. politicians desired Texas’ acquisition for a variety of reasons, a major one being national security. Once Texas rebelled against Mexico City in 1836, U.S. policymakers were afraid that Great Britain might intervene in the dispute and possibly seize Texas for itself. In order to prevent British, and in general European, intervention in the Western Hemisphere, expansionists urged that the United States seize Texas before the British did. Economically, Texas was desirable due to its abundance of natural resources and its additional avenues of trade. Jackson and other expansionists also believed that Texas had originally been part of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 and wrongly traded away by John Quincy Adams to Spain in 1819. Bound up in this question was the unavoidable issue of slavery and its possible extension into U.S. territories. Expansionist Southerners not only saw Texas as a suitable place for the spread of slavery, they also hoped that by bringing Texas into the Union as a slave state they could boost the representation and political power of the slave states in the halls of Congress. Fearing exactly this scenario, Northern Democrats and Whigs vociferously opposed efforts to annex Texas to halt the growth of slavery.

The injection of slavery into the debate over annexing Texas, expansionist Democrats and Southerners worried, would only divide the nation and prevent the general public from endorsing the cause of annexation. Anti-Catholic rhetoric, as a result, became a useful rhetorical tool that defied sectional differences and was something that most Protestant Americans embraced. By painting the Mexicans seeking the subjugation of rebellious Texas as superstitious Catholics slavishly following the dictates of their priests and General Santa Anna, expansionists hoped to excite the republican sympathies and Protestant religious passions of Americans so as to build support for
Texas’ annexation. In utilizing anti-Catholic rhetoric in this regard, expansionist Democrats managed to combine both missionary and exclusionary anti-Catholic language into their arguments for Texas’ annexation. Expansionist Democrats could thus simultaneously urge the “rescue” of Protestant Texas from Catholic Mexico while stressing the “inferiority” and “backwardness” of the Mexicans. Opponents of annexation, as a result of this oratorical monopoly on anti-Catholic rhetoric, were forced to rely on other rhetorical devices rather than religious prejudice to argue against expansion.

Another trend that emerged over the issue of Texas annexation was the growing use of racist language coupled with anti-Catholicism. In order to explain the failure of the recent Latin American revolutions to create stable republican governments, American politicians blamed these failures on the “fact” that Latin Americans were simply an inferior race woefully unprepared for republicanism and trapped in a superstitious Catholic religion that closed the mind to reason and logic. The rising domestic crisis over slavery intensified racial rhetoric as the issue of slavery became invariably intertwined with the quest for Texas annexation. As Southern Democrats sought to annex Texas into the Union, and thereby spread the institution of slavery, it became all the more imperative to demonstrate the similarities between the white Protestant Texans and their American brethren so as to increase national support for their expansionist agenda.

Anti-Catholicism and the Texan Revolt of 1836

In 1825 the newly independent and republican nation known as the United States of Mexico enacted a colonization law to encourage settlers to populate the state of Texas
on its northern border. In order to assimilate settlers to Mexican culture, and ensure that they remain loyal to the federal government, settlers were required to become Catholic, could not settle within sixty miles of the border, all official transactions were to be conducted in Spanish, and settlers who married Mexicans received additional land. “The new settlers,” as Lars Schoultz put it, “simply ignored all but the last of these measures.”¹ The requirement to convert to Catholicism, in particular, raised the ire of Protestant American settlers who were unaccustomed to facing restrictions on their religious beliefs. Despite the Mexican government’s intentions to attract Europeans, Americans, and their fellow Mexicans to populate Texas, the majority of the settlers were slaveholding Americans rushing to acquire land for themselves. The massive influx of Americans worried the Mexican government and in 1828 the Tèran Commission conducted a fact-finding mission that concluded that American settlers were part of the United States government’s plot to absorb Texas into the Union as it did Florida.² To curtail the influx of American settlers into Texas, Mexican President Anastasio Bustamante, during his first administration (1830-1832), prohibited additional Americans from entering the state. The law proved ineffective as the Mexicans had no conceivable way of guarding the border to prevent the illegal crossing of American over it.³

The crisis brewing between Texas and Mexico came to a head in 1834 when Mexican President Antonio López de Santa Anna consolidated his power over the federal government and began centralizing rule from Mexico City. Santa Anna’s seizure of

¹ Schoultz, Beneath the United States, 18.
² Merk, Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History, 20-21. It was well known by the Spanish and Mexicans that the United States had sought to acquire Florida. Andrew Jackson’s pursuit of the Seminoles into Florida, along with the influx of American settlers, undermined Spanish authority and forced Spain to recognize that Florida was no longer under its control, which prompted Madrid to sell it to the United States.
³ Will Fowler, Santa Anna of Mexico (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 162-163.
power emerged from the continuous violent conflict between Mexican conservatives and liberals over control of the government. Mexican conservatives championed political centralism, *fueros,*

4 no basic civil liberties, and Roman Catholicism as the official state religion. Mexican liberals, on the other hand, favored federalism, the end of *fueros,* civil liberties, and religious toleration. When Santa Anna’s vice-president, Gómez Farías, enacted laws that seized non-essential Church property to help pay Mexico’s debt, the clergy and military incited rebellion and urged Santa Anna to defend their interests. After expelling Farías from the government, Santa Anna annulled the 1824 Constitution, dismissed Congress, and replaced the federalist system of government with centralized political rule from Mexico City. Such undemocratic and heavy-handed behavior led Texas and other Mexican states to rebel against Santa Anna’s government in Mexico City.5

As the Texans prepared to defend themselves against Santa Anna’s encroaching federal army, what emerged during and after the conflict was a national myth that defined the struggle in racial and religious terms. Texans saw themselves as a small, patriotic band of Anglo-Saxons determined to face the tyrannical and “mongrel” Mexican forces of Santa Anna. The depiction helped craft the Texan myth that would be used constantly during the debates over the conflict.6 Intertwined within the racial rhetoric was anti-Catholicism as the Texans clearly defined the struggle as not only one between Anglo-

4 *Fueros* in Latin America were specific sets of laws and privileges established for a certain class or estate within society. The most important (and controversial) ones in Latin America were the *fueros* for the Church and the military, which gave them political and socioeconomic benefits, as well as separate courts of law, that the rest of the population did not have.


Saxons and Mexicans, but between enlightened Protestantism and backwards Catholicism.

In establishing the principles of their revolt against Mexico, the leaders of the Texan revolt stated plainly in the Texas Declaration of Independence that they were fighting against Santa Anna’s centralization of power, which advanced only the interests “of the army and the priesthood, both the eternal enemies of civil liberty, the ever ready minions of power, and the usual instruments of tyrants.” They accused Santa Anna of overturning the Mexican Constitution, of forcing them to “submit to the most intolerable of all tyranny, the combined despotism of the sword and the priesthood,” and to accept a national religion “calculated to promote the temporal interest of its human functionaries, rather than the glory of the true and living God.” To Protestant Texans, Santa Anna’s support for and from the Catholic priesthood reinforced already established American fears that Catholicism and despotism went hand in hand and that rebellion was the patriotic and morally correct course of action.7

Stephen F. Austin, who led the second and ultimately successful migration of U.S. settlers to Texas in 1821, traveled north to convince the American public of the righteousness of the Texan cause and request American aid. Austin denounced the supposed ineptitude of the Mexican people and their incapacity for self-government since their liberation from Spain. The cause of Texan independence, Austin argued, was “truly and emphatically the cause of liberty, which is the cause of philanthropy, of religion, of mankind.” He urged the United States government to publically announce its sympathy toward Texas’ cause, just as they had done with other republican minded nations and

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factions around the world, such as “the liberal party in priest-ridden Spain.” Texas’ liberation, Austin promised, would help advance the tide of republicanism and religious freedom in Mexico, “where for ages past the banner of the inquisition, of intolerance, and of despotism” reigned. Austin also wrote urgently to President Andrew Jackson and other prominent members of the U.S. government for support and intervention. Santa Anna had declared, Austin pleaded to Jackson, “a national war against heretics [sic] that an additional Army of 8,000 men is organizing under Gen[eral] Cortazar in Mexico to march to Texas and exterminate the heretic [sic] [A]mericans.” Austin, in his requests for U.S. support, defined the war as not only one of liberty versus tyranny, or Anglo-Saxons versus Mexicans, but also one of Protestants versus Catholics.

When the dust settled at the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21, 1836, the Texans, led by Samuel Houston, had captured Santa Anna, who had personally commanded the Mexicans into battle. U.S. newspapers joyously celebrated the Texan victory and denounced the “tyrant Santa Anna.” Andrew Jackson, who strongly supported the Texan cause, but was compelled to adhere to the United States’ treaty of friendship with Mexico, advised Houston of his options. He congratulated Houston on not executing Santa Anna and that keeping him alive not only demonstrated the moral righteousness of the Texan cause, but also served a practical purpose. As the “pride of the Mexican soldiers and the favorite of the Priesthood,” Santa Anna’s captivity prevented “the

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10 New York Spectator, 19 May 1836; Floridian, 21 May 1836; Indiana Journal, 4 June 1836.
priests…[from] furnish[ing] the supplies for another campaign."\textsuperscript{11} Holding Santa Anna hostage in effect impaired the influence and power of the Church in Mexico since they were unable or unwilling to continue financing the war against Texas without possibly endangering the life of their backer, Santa Anna.

\textit{The Push for the Annexation of Texas in 1836, Round One}

Neutrality was not something that many U.S. congressmen desired in the wake of the victory of San Jacinto. As the Texan revolt progressed, congressmen sympathetic to Texan independence and eager to annex them into the Union not only invoked the Texan myth of Anglo-Saxon courage against the “mongrel” Mexican hordes, but also relied heavily on anti-Catholic imagery to demonstrate the similarities between Texans and Americans and the vast chasm that separated them from the Mexicans. By arousing American passions to rescue the beleaguered Protestant Texans from the Catholic Mexican armies, expansionist congressmen hoped to build public and congressional support in favor of annexation. Leading the charge for intervention and annexation in Congress were Senators William C. Preston (D-SC) and Robert J. Walker (D-MS). Both expansionist southerners and Democrats, Preston and Walker reinforced the image of the Texans as a people who shared the same race, political philosophy, and religious creed as their American brethren to the north that required protection from the so called racially inferior and “superstitious” Catholic Mexicans.

Both Preston and Walker vehemently urged Congress to recognize Texas’ independence and to authorize President Jackson to intervene on their behalf. In order to

\textsuperscript{11} Andrew Jackson to General Samuel Houston, 4 September 1836, \textit{Correspondence of Andrew Jackson}, Vol. V, 424-425.
create sympathy for the Texans, Preston and Walker utilized anti-Catholic language that would arouse the religious prejudices of most Protestant or secular Americans and build a growing consensus for intervention and annexation. Preston echoed to the Senate the Texan belief that Santa Anna was the “destroyer” of the Mexican government and was “exciting their [the Mexicans] love of plunder and religious fanaticism” in his war against Texas. Walker reinforced this opinion with more overt anti-Catholicism by declaring “Santa Anna, and his priests, and mercenaries, and myrmidons...[were] the rebels” and not the Texans.12 The Texans, according to Preston and Walker, were the true patriots as they fought to preserve the last vestiges of Mexico’s liberty from Santa Anna, whose war against the Texans was supported “by a superstitious Catholicism, goaded on by a miserable priesthood, against that invincible Anglo-Saxon race. It was at once a war of religion and liberty.”13

Intervention and annexation, however, were seen by Northerners and anti-slavery Whigs as a plot to expand the institution of slavery. In order to belie the fact that Texas’ independence and possible incorporation into the United States was largely championed by Southern Democrats hoping to spread slavery, Walker declared that the sympathies for Texas were not “southern feelings – they were not northern feelings – no, they were the feelings which were wholly American, prompted by an ardent zeal for civil and religious liberty.”14 By emphasizing the religious struggle between Catholic Mexico and Protestant Texas, Walker hoped to unite his fellow congressmen behind an anti-Catholicism that was more national in scope than the purely sectional issue of slavery.

12 Register of Debates, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 1414, 1418.
13 Ibid., 1455.
14 Ibid., 1528.
Though not all of Walker and Preston’s colleagues favored immediate annexation, most of them sympathized greatly with the Texan cause. Senator John M. Niles (D-CT), who suggested allowing some time to pass between Texas’ independence before bringing up annexation, clearly viewed the Texans as racially and morally superior to the Mexicans. Though the population of Mexicans vastly outnumbered that of the Texans, “The intelligence, the physical and moral energies of a people are of more importance than their numbers,” Niles stated to the Senate. “How many Mexicans are equal to one Texan? Let the victory of San Jacinto answer,” he cried. Others, such as Senator Samuel L. Southard (NR-NJ), a devout Presbyterian, fulminated against the atrocities committed by Mexicans against Texans. Though Southard denounced the violence of “Christian upon Christian,” he pointed to San Jacinto as a prime example that “liberty, justice, valor – moral, physical, and intellectual power – discriminate that race [Anglo-Saxon] wherever it goes.”

Of the U.S. congressmen who opposed intervention and annexation in 1836, only William R. D. King (D-AL) employed anti-Catholic remarks in his argument against it. King, like many of his colleagues in Congress, opposed abandoning neutrality in favor of Texas for the same reasons that opponents of recognizing the Latin American states gave. “Why should our course now be made to differ,” King asked, “from that pursued by us when South America was struggling to free herself from the grinding tyranny of Spain, from the horrors of the inquisition?” Without knowing whether Texas would succeed in their revolt, it would be unwise to provoke hostilities between the United States and Mexico. Though King employed a general anti-Catholic jab at the inquisition, it was

15 Ibid., 1917.
16 Ibid., 1924, 1927.
17 Ibid., 1530.
hardly of the same caliber that Preston and Walker used to denigrate Catholic Mexico. While Preston, Walker, and other proponents of intervention and annexation attacked outright Mexican Catholicism as a source of tyranny, King was only able to attack Catholicism in relation to Spain’s former control of Latin America.

The inability of King and other opponents of annexation to utilize anti-Catholic rhetoric in any meaningful way was due to the very nature of the issue. Since the majority of Americans saw Texas as being mostly populated with white, Protestant American settlers, expansionist Democrats were able to argue for the acquisition of territory that was culturally American through its racial and religious composition. It was an argument that combined both the exclusionary and missionary aspects of anti-Catholic rhetoric into one passionate, yet “rational” case for intervention and annexation. Opponents, as a result, could not denounce the tyranny of Mexican Catholicism and the threat it posed to Protestant Texas (since there were so few Catholics in the state), and then proceed to argue that the United States should leave Texas to its own fate. If opponents of annexation wished to build popular and congressional support for their agenda, it was easier to play on the fears of slavery’s expansion than to denounce Mexican Catholicism.

Despite the urgent pleas of Texas’ commissioners for annexation, President Jackson was forced to abandon his quest for annexation due to a variety of reasons, both

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18 The ethnic makeup of Texas was in fact more complicated and diverse than most Americans realized at the time. Though U.S. politicians presented Texas as exclusively populated by Protestant Anglo-Americans, large groups of Mexicans and Native Americans were part of Texas’ population. See Andrés Reséndez, Changing National Identities on the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1-14.
domestic and international.\textsuperscript{19} Whigs and Northern Democrats feared that Texas’ inclusion into the Union would boost the power of the slave states in the Senate and House of Representatives and blocked efforts for annexation in Congress. Other complications further prevented annexation in 1836 as funding for a possible U.S. intervention was scarce, annexation would violate multiple treaties of friendship between the United States and Mexico, and U.S. agents in Texas believed that the state was far from the harmonious picture that was presented to the public. Once Jackson’s vice-president, Martin Van Buren was elected president, the issue of Texas annexation began to fade into the background in light of an economic recession.\textsuperscript{20} Though it would disappear from the newspapers for a while, the issue of Texas and westward expansion would simmer below the surface while the previously mentioned Nativist and anti-Catholic movement began to gain momentum.

\textit{The Rise of Political Nativism}

As the Texan revolt and subsequent demand for its annexation reverberated throughout the nation, it coincided with the outbreak of Nativist violence towards Catholics and the publication of such popular anti-Catholic books as Maria Monk’s \textit{Awful Disclosures}, Lyman Beecher’s \textit{Plea for the West}, and Samuel Morse’s \textit{Foreign Conspiracy}. The Nativist movement, which was mostly a cultural movement prior to 1830, at this time began to organize into political parties. New York ministers, in 1830, created the New York Protestant Association, which attempted to get Nativist politicians


elected to local offices. Later a more overtly Nativist political organization called the Native American Democratic Association (NADA) was formed in 1835 in New York City that ran Nativist candidates for positions in the city government. The most notable attempt was Samuel Morse’s bid for mayor of New York in 1836, which failed due to the Whig Party’s unwillingness to support Morse.\(^{21}\) Though the NADA disappeared by 1838, local Nativist political parties began to organize in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and other major cities on the eastern seaboard. The Nativist political effort consisted entirely of local parties and wards that had no national direction or central control. This lack of centralized organization contributed largely to the inability of Nativists to elect any candidates to national office during the 1830s.\(^{22}\)

In 1843, controversy in New York public schools over whether to use the Protestant or Catholic Bible instigated Nativists to create the American Republican Party. The main platform of the party consisted of an extension of the naturalization period to twenty-one years, that public schools use the King James Bible, and the prohibition of non-native born Americans to public office. The party also embraced a reform-minded agenda that attacked corruption and big business, and its members viewed themselves as the founders of a truly “American” or national party which decried sectionalism and partisanship. The American Republican Party was, in many ways, a cultural and political effort to purify American institutions and unify a divided country against a foreign Catholic foe.

The party’s success in New York began to spread as Nativists in Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, and New Orleans soon created extensions of the American


\(^{22}\) Knobel, “America for the Americans,” 82.
Republican Party in each city. Capitalizing on the Bible controversy, Nativists organized a political rally in Philadelphia on May 3, 1844, in the heart of Kensington, an Irish Catholic neighborhood. Violence erupted and sparked a series of riots that ended in the destruction of two Catholic churches, other private property, and the declaration of martial law in Philadelphia. The riots did irreparable damage to the American Republican Party as both Democrats and Whigs decried the actions of the “church burners.” The Philadelphia riots, being the only major riots to occur in antebellum America between 1834 (the burning of the Ursaline convent) and the 1850s (with the return of Nativism in the form of the Know-Nothing Party), may have seriously ruined the political ambitions of the American Republican Party, but the anti-Catholicism that engendered it survived and even flourished again with the reexamination of the Texas annexation issue in 1844.

The Push for the Annexation of Texas in 1844, Round Two

When Britain offered in 1842 to help mediate the ongoing conflict between Mexico and Texas, President John Tyler and his administration became alarmed at the possibility of European meddling in the United States’ backyard. U.S. officials feared that Texas, as an independent, yet weak and under-populated country, would become the target of European colonial ambitions. Though Mexico City declined Britain’s offer, it renewed hostilities with Texas, which prompted further requests from Texas to the United States for protection and annexation. Tyler, along with Secretary of State Abel P. Upshur and later Secretary of State John C. Calhoun, began fervently negotiating a new

treaty of annexation. Evangelical Protestant ministers and their faithful had not been idle over the years. Upon Texas’ declaration of independence many Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians flocked to Texas as they saw the newly independent state as a launching pad for further evangelical missions south into Catholic Mexico. Others perceived Protestant Texas as still imperiled by the threat of “Papal Mexico,” and sought to build support for Texas’ protection and annexation by the United States and establish further Protestant missions into Mexico.

While President Tyler commenced with the labored process of negotiating the possible annexation of Texas, debate resumed again in Congress over an issue that had been discussed just eight years earlier. The great majority of those in favor of annexation were all Southern and Western Democrats who mingled racial rhetoric along with religious imagery and overt anti-Catholicism. Once again leading the effort for Texas’ annexation, Senator Robert J. Walker employed such a combination of prejudices as he lambasted the instability of Mexico. Walker criticized Mexico’s first revolution against Spain by derisively referring to Miguel Hidalgo as a “mad-cap priest” who started “a war, not for independence, but of one race against another.” The subsequent revolutions that plagued Mexico, Walker insisted:

Have been the work of a mercenary army, and of a cruel, ambitious, and licentious priesthood...a priesthood, cruel and rapacious, ready to establish the inquisition, denouncing liberty of conscience as a crime, and yet with scarcely ever a profession of piety, pre-eminent only for the most daring profligacy and the most revolting licentiousness. Such, with very few exceptions, are the army and priesthood of Mexico.

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Though Walker’s faith in the ability of white, Protestant Texas to defend itself against Catholic Mexico was intense, he asked his fellow senators if Mexico was able to reconquer Texas, “ought we to consent to establish this ignorant and fanatical colored population upon the borders of Louisiana and Arkansas, in contact with the slave population, and within the very heart of the Mississippi?” Walker’s answer was a resounding no, as “it could never be permitted” to let the “semi-barbarous hordes of Mexico, now openly engaged in the crusade of abolition” take Texas. Not only did Walker dismiss the celebratory reputation that Fr. Hidalgo had enjoyed in the United States during the struggle for Latin American independence, he insisted that Texas be absorbed into the Union in order to prevent Catholic Mexico, with its abolitionist stance on slavery, influence American slaves near the U.S.-Mexico border.

Senator James Buchanan (D-PA), like Walker, was confident that the “imbecile and indolent Mexican race” would never defeat Texas and that it was more likely that Texas would destroy Mexico if hostilities were to commence. If Texas were invaded by Mexico, Buchanan proclaimed to the Senate, “let her government proclaim a crusade against Mexico, and thousands and tens of thousands of the hot and fiery spirits of the west will rush to the rescue of their brethren.” A Mexican invasion of Texas, Buchanan believed, would initiate a religious war as thousands of American Protestant westerners would rush to the aid of Texas against Catholic Mexico. By incorporating Texas into the Union, the United States could secure for Texas “the blessings of freedom, law, religion, social refinement, and all that made human life desirable, over the vast masses of

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28 Ibid., 557.
29 Ibid., 726.
mankind.\textsuperscript{30} Senator Sidney Breese likewise was confident that the annexation of Texas, which was “peopled by our own kindred – alike in institutions, manners, customs, language, laws, and religion…will be hailed with joy by a large majority of the Union.”\textsuperscript{31}

While employing anti-Catholic and religiously charged language to sanction the absorption of Texas into the Union, many expansionist Democrats were also able to simultaneously defend their Catholic constituents in the United States by differentiating between Mexican and American Catholicism. Such flexibility in anti-Catholic rhetoric permitted U.S. politicians to defend and advance both domestic and foreign policy interests. Representative William J. Brown (D-IN) declared that civil and religious liberty would advance side by side with that of the Anglo-Saxon race. Not only would the Anglo-Saxon race help Texas flourish by building “on the prairies of Texas temples dedicated to the simple and devout modes of worship incident to our religion,” but would swiftly move south where “it would cover all Mexico.” After employing anti-Catholic and religiously charged language for annexing Texas, Brown turned around and lambasted New England’s opposition to Texas’ annexation and blamed their fallen level of respect throughout the country on the anti-Catholic mob that burned down the Ursaline convent outside of Boston in 1834.\textsuperscript{32} Like his fellow Democrats, Brown was able to capitalize on anti-Catholic sentiment by directing it toward foreign Mexico while simultaneously attacking Nativism and its support among Northern Whigs. Brown, as a result, was able to use anti-Catholicism for his expansionist agenda while defending the


\textsuperscript{31} Congressional Globe, 28\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 1\textsuperscript{st} Session, Appendix, 538.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 97-98.
Democratic Party’s Catholic constituency. Anti-Catholic rhetoric, thus, proved to be a malleable tool that could be shaped for both domestic and foreign policy ends.

Representative Andrew Johnson (D-TN) utilized a similar method of rhetorical dexterity when he criticized Representative Thomas Clingman’s (W-NC) attack on Irish-American Catholics voting for James K. Polk and the Democratic Party. Johnson defended the religious rights of American Catholics, but when it came to the issue of Texas he reframed the question as to whether or not Texans were being allowed the freedom to worship as they chose, or “Had they been compelled to bow to a religion they did not profess?” Like “the twelve spies in olden times,” the Texans, Johnson believed, had gone forth to “the only remaining portion of Canaan destined by God for his American Israel” and now returned “with the country itself…willing to lay [it] down at our feet.”

How then, could the United States refuse this divinely ordained mission? Like Brown, Johnson was able to exercise considerable oratorical agility because of the malleable nature of anti-Catholicism. Because American Catholics comprised a large portion of the Democratic vote, both Brown and Johnson were able to defend the right of American Catholics to worship according to their own beliefs, while pointing out the danger of the religiously intolerant Catholic Church in Mexico that threatened Protestant Texas.

Other U.S. congressmen joined in on the expansionist and missionary rhetoric that Brown utilized. Some even alluded to the belief that not only was Texas meant by Providence to be a part of the Union, but all of Mexico might one day be absorbed. Representative John A. McClernand (D-IL) demanded that the United States extend “the shield of the American Union over our kindred Texans” as they were “the same glorious

33 Congressional Globe, 28th Congress, 2nd Session, Appendix, 221-223.
Anglo-Saxon race, whose high destiny is to civilize and Christianize the world.”\textsuperscript{34} Representative Orlando Ficklin (D-IL) excoriated how the Texans were deceived into believing their liberties would be protected by a Mexico where “A corrupt priesthood, with an affiliated moneyed aristocracy, have waged unceasing upon the liberties of the people.” The annexation of Texas, Ficklin believed, would advance the progress of civilization, “whose beneficent light will penetrate to those dark abodes where ignorance, superstition, and crime have reigned since the days of Cortes and Pizarro.”\textsuperscript{35}

To Representative James Belser (D-SC), Texas had been bequeathed by God to the United States and “those whom God has thus united let not nations put asunder.” Belser firmly believed that God favored the spread “of liberty everywhere, and was anxious to see that day come when our sacred national banner shall float over Texas, over Oregon, over [California] and over Canada too.”\textsuperscript{36} Representative Alfred P. Stone (D-MA) spoke with religious fervor about the missionary role that the United States played in God’s plan as he declared that either in 1844 or at some point in the future, “Texas will be annexed; and not only Texas, but every inch of land on this continent.” The conquest of all of North America by the United States was divinely preordained, according to Stone, and thus “The lone star will be added to our flag, and that flag will, at some period in our history, not only float from the fortress of Quebec, but from temples dedicated to liberty erected over the graves of the Montezumas.”\textsuperscript{37} Such religious reasoning embraced the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny, and advocated the belief that American

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 622.  
\textsuperscript{35} Congressional Globe, 28\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session, 183-184.  
\textsuperscript{36} Congressional Globe, 28\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 1\textsuperscript{st} Session, Appendix, 525.  
\textsuperscript{37} Congressional Globe, 28\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session, Appendix, 227.
expansionism across the continent was the will of God and that civil (republicanism) and religious (Protestantism) liberty would follow in its wake.

While many who supported the annexation of Texas advocated or invoked heavenly blessings towards further expansionist goals encompassing all of North America, others were more discriminatory in their expansionist ambitions.

Representative John W. Tibbatts (D-KY) believed that if Texas was left “in the hands of others, it may become the habitation of despotism and slaves, subject to the vile dominion of the inquisition and superstition.” Mexico, in its failed military efforts to regain control of Texas, had violated “the rights of humanity and the usages of Christianity,” and therefore was undesirable for possible annexation. Senator Levi Woodbury (D-NH), in reference to the possibility of annexing Mexico along with Texas, flatly denied the feasibility of the matter. Mexican annexation was undesirable to Woodbury, as the “Christians and republicans” of the United States were unlikely to “admit a state of pagans and monarchists, which continued to retain a government and political and religious views totally contrary” to the United States. Annexing Texas, on the other hand, was a welcome prospect, as “They were a people who worshipped like ourselves; and hold the same faith,” unlike Catholic Mexico. By expressing his willingness to annex Texas, but not Mexico, Woodbury, along with many of his fellow Democrats,

38 Richard Bruce Winders, Crisis in the Southwest: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle over Texas (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2002), 50-64. After Santa Anna’s failed attempt to quell the Texan Revolt in 1836, Mexican Centralists renewed hostilities with Texas in 1841 in order to bring it back under Mexican control. When the Texans were able to repulse Mexico’s ill-coordinated raids, it essentially ruined Mexico’s chance of reconquering Texas and reaffirmed Mexican “inferiority” in the minds of Americans.
39 Congressional Globe, 28th Congress, 1st Session, 446; Congressional Globe, 28th Congress, 2nd Session, 114.
demonstrated how the push for Texas annexation could include both the exclusionary and missionary aspects of anti-Catholic rhetoric.\textsuperscript{40}

While the great majority of those who invoked religious language or more overt anti-Catholic rhetoric used it in favor of annexing Texas, only a small handful of individuals employed vague anti-Catholic allusions against absorbing Texas into the Union. Opponents of annexation, as in 1836, did not rely on overt anti-Catholic language to advance their arguments, but instead criticized annexationists for using the idea of “religious freedom” to further their expansionist agenda. Senator Alexander Barrow (W-LA) agreed with his colleagues in denouncing the efforts of the Holy Alliance to enforce Roman Catholicism and monarchism throughout its territories. Barrow, however, pointed out that the idea of Manifest Destiny was but the ideological “converse” of the Holy Alliance’s mission. Just as the Holy Alliance sought to spread monarchism and Catholicism, the disciples of Manifest Destiny sought to extend republicanism and religious toleration (Protestantism) by force and territorial expansion. If the Holy Alliance’s mission was wrong, Barrow asked the Senate, “was it not equally wrong [of] us to pretend that it was our duty to annex Texas to the United States, in order thereby to extend the area of freedom?”\textsuperscript{41}

Likewise, Senator James T. Morehead (W-KY) warned that the pursuit of expanding republicanism and religious freedom would not end with Texas, but “might then go south on our own continent” into Mexico and the rest of Latin America. Texas’ annexation, Morehead feared, would not satisfy the thirst for territorial expansion. Senator William S. Archer (W-VA) also contested the notion that Texas would be the end

\textsuperscript{40} Congressional Globe, 28th Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session, Appendix, 236-238.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 393.
of “our scheme of the extension of dominion.” The continuous pursuit of extending the United States’ territory, Archer believed, was constantly being supported by the notion of spreading “democratic” ideas and the “religious fanaticism” of those who invoked the will of Providence to justify their territorial ambitions. Unable to effectively utilize anti-Catholic rhetoric against the annexation of Texas, opponents charged that the supposedly noble act of spreading religious freedom across the continent was nothing but a smokescreen for naked territorial ambition and a quest for empire.42

Opponents of annexation successfully blocked President Tyler’s treaty in the Senate, but Whigs and opponents of expansionism failed to block Tyler’s joint resolution, which passed in the House by 120 to 98 on January 25, 1845 and subsequently the Senate by 27 to 15 on March 1, 1845. With the acquisition of Texas, the United States absorbed into the Union a territory that many expansionists believed had rightly been a part of the United States since the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, had wrongly been traded away by John Quincy Adams in the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819, and was populated by Protestant Anglo-Saxons who championed the political and religious values of the United States.

Comparing Latin American Recognition and the Annexation of Texas: The Combination of Missionary and Exclusionary Anti-Catholic Rhetoric

What is striking about the debates over recognizing the new Latin American states and Texas annexation is the change in how anti-Catholic rhetoric was utilized by opposing U.S. policymakers. When employing anti-Catholicism in their justifications for or against recognition of Spain’s former Latin American colonies, U.S. politicians used it

42 Ibid., 330.
on both sides of the argument. Since the debate centered on the recognition of a foreign people’s struggle for independence, whose political and religious backgrounds were perceived as inherently different from the United States, the exclusionary and missionary aspects of anti-Catholic rhetoric were thus exploited by both opponents and proponents respectively to validate their own policies.

The debate over Texas, on the other hand, differed from the debate on recognition because Americans were deciding whether to incorporate a territory populated mostly with white Protestants from the United States who believed their way of life was being threatened by Catholic Mexico. As the Texan revolution exploded in the midst of the publication of numerous anti-Catholic books, expansionist Democrats were able to tap into the rampant anti-Catholicism growing in the United States by promising aid to their fellow Protestants in Texas against the despotism of Catholic Mexico. When using religious language or invoking divine favor to justify their expansionist agenda, Democrats were able to utilize anti-Catholicism to their benefit by attacking Mexican Catholicism, while simultaneously defending the rights of the American Catholics who constituted a sizable portion of their political base. The corrupt Santa Anna regime, brought to power with the support of the priesthood, became an easy target for anti-Catholic attacks mingled with patriotic declarations of support for the beleaguered Texans and their fight for civil and religious freedom.

Democratic proponents of annexation also hoped that anti-Catholic rhetoric could help mask sectional differences regarding the extension of slavery into Texas. Anti-Catholicism, unlike slavery, was not a sectional issue that would further divide the country over expansion. Thus, expansionist Democrats were able to construct an
argument that combined both exclusionary and missionary aspects of anti-Catholic rhetoric to advance the annexation argument. Because of the makeup of Texas’ population, the combination of missionary and exclusionary anti-Catholic rhetoric afforded annexationists a variety of rhetorical arguments. Zealous Manifest Destiny followers could employ missionary anti-Catholicism to champion Texas’ annexation and eventually the rest of the continent while moderate expansionists could be more discriminating by annexing white Protestant Texas but not Catholic Mexico. Opponents of incorporating Texas into the Union were unable to twist anti-Catholicism to fit their arguments against aiding and absorbing Protestant Texas into the Union. As a result of the Democrats’ monopoly over both the exclusionary and missionary aspects of anti-Catholic rhetoric, opponents could only attack the idea of spreading religious freedom in the credo of Manifest Destiny, make unsuccessful and vague jabs at Catholicism in general, or ignore Catholicism altogether as they raised other issues, such as slavery instead.

Expansionists rejoiced when Texas was finally annexed in 1845, but many ardent disciples of Manifest Destiny still hungered for the lands further west that were still owned by Mexico. Conflict with Mexico, however, was not far off. With the annexation of Texas, the United States not only acquired Texas’ border conflict with Mexico, but also outraged the Mexican government by annexing a territory that Mexicans refused to acknowledge as an independent state. With the election of the expansionist James K. Polk to the presidency, a border conflict soon ignited war between the Protestant United States and Catholic Mexico. While both missionary and exclusionary anti-Catholicism was almost entirely used by expansionists to promote the annexation of Texas, the debate
over annexing the entirety of Mexico’s territory at the end of the U.S.-Mexican War in 1848 restored the original rhetorical paradigm of missionary versus exclusionary anti-Catholicism.
Section 5

Anti-Catholicism, the U.S.-Mexican War, and the “All Mexico” Question

For U.S. expansionists, the annexation of Texas was a great achievement since the country successfully acquired an independent republic populated by fellow Anglo-Saxons who touted their Protestant faith and were strong in their support for republican government. Critics of annexation, however, were soon proven right that by absorbing Texas into the Union, the United States inevitably absorbed the border controversy between Texas and Mexico. The newly elected President James K. Polk had fervently campaigned for the acquisition of Texas and once in office he helped to finalize the annexation process that President Tyler had set in motion.

Polk strongly supported Texas’ claim that its southern boundary was at the Rio Grande. Mexico, on the other hand, countered that if such an international border existed, it was located at the Nueces River approximately 150 miles further north.¹ In addition to the explosive border issue, the controversies over the claims of U.S. citizens against the Mexican government and U.S. diplomatic efforts to acquire California further undermined U.S.-Mexican relations.² Polk and Secretary of State James Buchanan continuously tried to purchase New Mexico and California and dispatched John Slidell to

¹ Mexico officially did not recognize Texas as an independent state and regarded it as a rebel province. As a result, the Mexican government did not officially acknowledge the existence of an international border between Texas and Mexico.
² Leonard, James K. Polk, 147-148. The losses endured by U.S. citizens, due to Mexico’s frequent revolutions, caused them to file claims to the Mexican government totaling close to $3 million. By 1844, Mexico had defaulted on its payments to American claimants.
Mexico City for this reason. The more pressure Polk and Slidell placed on Mexico to sell its coveted northern territories, the more resistant and hostile many Mexicans and General Mariano Paredes y Arrillago’s administration became. Slidell, hoping to compel Paredes to receive him and negotiate, demanded that Mexico had two weeks left or else it would face a war with the United States. When hostilities erupted between the armies of Generals Zachary Taylor and Manuel Arista on the Rio Grande, Polk asked Congress to declare war against Mexico.

As with Latin American independence and Texas annexation, anti-Catholicism once again figured into the equation and, in this case, shaped Polk’s diplomatic strategy during the U.S.-Mexican War. When the fate of Mexico was being decided, U.S. politicians employed anti-Catholic rhetoric to justify whether to seize all of Mexico’s territory, only parts of it, or nothing at all. As previously seen, anti-Catholicism as a domestic cultural movement was growing in the United States between the 1820s and 1840s. Previous administrations, especially John Quincy Adams’ and Andrew Jackson’s, either sought to diminish the power of the Catholic Church in Latin America or maintained a wariness about directly associating with it. Polk’s administration, however, worked with the Catholic Church, both in the United States and Mexico to advance its foreign policy goals, namely a quick end to the U.S.-Mexican War and a favorable peace that would deliver New Mexico and California into the United States’ hands.

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3 Initially Polk attempted to reach a deal with Mexican President José Joaquin Herrera, but Herrera’s willingness to discuss the matter compelled the archconservative and jingoistic General Paredes to seize control of the government.
Not only did anti-Catholicism help shape the Polk administration’s diplomacy towards Mexico, U.S. officials also used it to justify their positions on the possible annexation of all of Mexico. The “All Mexico” debate also saw the return of the missionary versus exclusionary anti-Catholicism paradigm used in the debate on Latin American recognition. Expansionists, as with the debate on recognition, relied on the missionary aspect of anti-Catholic rhetoric to validate their aim to absorb all of Mexico. Opponents, likewise, challenged such arguments with exclusionary anti-Catholic language that mirrored the concerns of opponents of Latin American recognition. Unlike the issue of Texas, where expansionist Democrats were able to combine both exclusionary and missionary anti-Catholic rhetoric to push for the annexation of what was perceived to be a Protestant Anglo-Saxon region, the question of “All Mexico” concerned the diplomatic fate of a Catholic Latin American country that was considered racially and religiously “inferior” to the United States. Since expansionist Democrats could not claim they were rescuing fellow Protestants in advocating for “All Mexico,” they lost the monopoly on anti-Catholic rhetoric they held during the Texas Annexation debate.

Anti-Catholicism and the Diplomacy of James K. Polk

Concern over the Church’s power throughout Latin America, though more particularly in Mexico, continued during the early days of Polk’s administration. On the eve of war between the United States and Mexico, the U.S. Consul in Mexico, John Black, reported to Secretary of State Buchanan rumors of a possible monarchist coup supported by the Catholic Church. Buchanan then instructed John Slidell that in addition
to buying New Mexico and California he was to investigate the validity of whether “the clergy would generally favor such a project.” 6 Most likely the coup Black was referring to was General Paredes’ eventual seizure of power, which drove President Herrera from office. Paredes was known in Mexico and the United States for his monarchical sympathies. As the new President of Mexico, the militant Paredes refused to see Slidell and as tensions increased on both sides of the border, many U.S. officials worried that Mexico would seek European assistance against them. While some U.S. politicians worried about British intervention,7 others wondered if France would “be stirred up by a threat that Mexico will have her National Catholic Religion exterminated.” If Catholic France came to the aid of Mexico, it was feared that the French might join the abolitionist Mexicans and their priests in a war “for their Religion and for a Regular Crusade against Slavery.” 8

When war broke out between the United States and Mexico, the Polk administration anticipated a quick U.S. victory that would force Mexico back to the negotiating table. Such dreams, Polk and his cabinet soon realized, were far from reality as Mexico was not easily defeated. As the war dragged on, the Mexican army capitalized on the anti-Catholic atmosphere in the United States Army. All U.S. Army chaplains were Protestant, which deprived many American Catholic enlisted men the opportunity to practice their religion. Seizing this opportunity to plant discord among their enemies, General Pedro Ampudia, the Commander of the Army of the North, began spreading

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7 Britain had a Treaty of Amity and Commerce with Mexico, which U.S. politicians feared would prompt British intervention to protect their economic interests.
pamphlets and leaflets to Catholic Americans serving in the U.S. Army calling on them to desert and join their fellow Catholics on the Mexican side.⁹ Mexican priests also helped rally their countrymen by using the pulpit to disseminate the message that the United States had declared war on Mexico in order to eradicate Catholicism south of the border. By transforming the conflict into a war to defend Catholicism, the Mexican clergy hoped to encourage their fellow Mexicans to enlist in the army and defend the nation.¹⁰

To counter the notion that the United States sought to “overthrow their religion and rob their churches,” Polk met with Archbishop John Hughes¹¹ to discuss the possibility of assigning two Catholic priests to Zachary Taylor’s army to administer the spiritual needs of Catholic American troops. Polk also hoped that these priests would prove to Mexico that the United States was not waging a holy war against Catholicism. By undercutting the Mexican clergy’s propaganda, Polk tried to diminish Mexico’s religious fervor to continue resisting the American invasion. Archbishop Hughes not only agreed with the plan, but he also offered to travel with some priests to Mexico City and speak with the archbishop of Mexico so as to allay their fears of a rampaging Protestant army. Polk was immensely satisfied with the meeting with Hughes and hoped that this would assuage fears that the war with Mexico might be interpreted as a religious conflict.¹²

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⁹ Michael Hogan, *The Irish Soldiers of Mexico* (Guadalajara, Mexico: Fondo Editorial Universitario, 1997), 143-144. The most famous group of deserters was known as the San Patricio Battalion. Consisting of hundreds of primarily Irish and German Catholics, the San Patricios were involved in much of the heavy fighting of the war. Nativists in Congress, led by Lewis C. Levin, used the San Patricios as a reason why Catholics could not be trusted as loyal citizens of the United States. *Congressional Globe, 29th Congress, 1st Session, Appendix*, 606; *Congressional Globe, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, Appendix*, 387.

¹⁰ Semi-Weekly Natchez Courier, 6 July 1847.

¹¹ Archbishop John Hughes was the same priest who discredited *The Protestant* in 1830.

Polk’s willingness to use the American Catholic hierarchy to help aid the war effort was a profound reversal in the attitudes of previous U.S. presidents towards the Church. Though Polk himself was a Presbyterian and personally held no love for Catholicism, he was pragmatic enough to use them to his diplomatic advantage. Such close dealings, however, between the American president and the Catholic Church were not universally well received. Word of Polk’s meeting with Hughes reached the ears of the Nativists and other anti-Catholic politicians and newspapers, resulting in a tremendous outcry. With Polk’s election in 1844, the American Republican Party sent six congressmen to the House of Representatives. The leading member of the congressional Nativists, Lewis C. Levin, vociferously attacked the president for his collaboration with a Catholic bishop. The resulting criticism compelled Hughes to withdraw his services and illustrated the amount of political pressure the Nativists were able to assert on the government and Church leaders alike.

Polk’s appointment of the two Jesuits as chaplains also sparked further controversy among Nativists and anti-Catholics when Presbyterian minister William. L. McCalla approached the president with a request to become an army chaplain. McCalla demanded that Polk appoint him as a chaplain in the army or else he would attack the administration for employing Jesuit priests. Polk, who found McCalla to be a “fanatic” and “hypocrite,” informed him that as a Catholic country, Mexico’s “Priests had great influence over that ignorant people” and that the two chaplains were intended to help dissuade the Mexicans that the United States was waging a war against their religion. After Polk denied McCalla’s request, Levin printed in his Philadelphia newspaper, the *Daily Sun*, McCalla’s accusation that the president had hired Catholic priests as
government spies and not as chaplains. Polk denied McCalla’s accusations and refused to comment further on the matter.\textsuperscript{13}

As the war dragged on longer than Polk, Buchanan, or the other members of the cabinet anticipated, the president was eager to conduct clandestine diplomatic maneuvers in order to hasten its end. Polk already was willing to utilize the services of American Catholics in order to obtain his diplomatic and military objectives, and he now tried to turn the Mexican Church into a potential advocate for peace. By August of 1846, the anti-clerical Liberal Party in Mexico had driven Paredes from power and in order to finance the war effort against the United States, the Liberals sought to seize non-ecclesiastical Church property. With the new Liberal government’s policy of confiscating some of the Church’s extensive holdings, Polk hoped to capitalize on the wedge between the new Liberal Mexican government and the country’s clergy by turning the clergy against the Mexican government and the war.\textsuperscript{14}

In order to assess the political situation and test if a favorable peace was possible, Polk and Buchanan accepted the volunteer services of Moses Y. Beach to act as an agent of the United States. As an expansionist Democrat and the editor of the New York \textit{Sun}, Beach was widely known among American Catholics. Polk and Buchanan hoped that Beach would be able to use his reputation to investigate the rumors of a possible peace party in Mexico. It was rumored that the Mexican clergy was planning a coup against the now anti-clerical Santa Anna, who had returned to power. If the coup was successful, Buchanan and Beach believed the new clergy-backed Mexican government would be


\textsuperscript{14} Henderson, \textit{A Glorious Defeat}, 160-161.
willing to end the war and sell large amounts of territory to the United States in order to protect the Church’s numerous properties elsewhere in the country.¹⁵

Accompanied by a fellow correspondent for the Sun, Mrs. Jane McManus Storms, who was Catholic, Beach traveled to Mexico with favorable introductions from heads of the Catholic Church in the United States and Cuba. Beach supposedly convinced the Mexican bishops of Guadalupe, Puebla, and Michoacan that their support for the war against the United States only kept Santa Anna and his anti-clerical administration in power. Beach persuaded them to withhold all aid and support for the war effort and to lobby their allies in the Mexican Congress to sue for peace. In the aftermath of Santa Anna’s fall, Beach pledged, the U.S. government would protect the Church’s vast holdings.¹⁶

Though Beach believed that his status as a confidential agent empowered him to negotiate a peace with Mexico, Polk hoped that he did not “misconstrue his authority” and make a treaty with the Mexican government, though it would be “a good joke” if he did. If the Mexican clerical rebellion was successful and Beach exceeded his authority and proceeded to make a treaty with the new Mexican government that proved satisfactory, Polk was willing to submit it to the Senate for ratification.¹⁷ When Gómez Farías, Santa Anna’s vice-president, decided to seize Church property in order to raise revenue for the war effort, Beach urged the Mexican clergy to mount a revolt against the regime. In the midst of the clergy uprising, Beach attempted to negotiate an official


¹⁶ Moses Y. Beach to James Buchanan, 4 June 1847, DCIAA, Vol. VIII, 906-907; Binder, James Buchanan and the American Empire, 108.

¹⁷ Polk, the Diary of a President, 1845-1849, Covering the Mexican War, the Acquisition of Oregon, and the Conquest of California and the Southwest, 14 April 1846, Ed. Allan Nevins (London: Longmans & Green, 1952), 217-218.
treaty between Washington and Mexico City. Santa Anna, however, returned to Mexico City with his army from the Buena Vista campaign against Zachary Taylor, which caused the clerical uprising to melt away and forced Beach and Storms to flee to the gulf state of Veracruz. Santa Anna subsequently persuaded the clergy to donate one and a half million pesos to the government coffers in exchange for the nullification of Farias’ seizure of Church property laws. Making his way back to the United States, Beach informed Polk and Buchanan of the results of his mission, claiming he helped start the clerical uprising, which kept Santa Anna from campaigning against Taylor or Scott, and delivered to Polk “valuable information” about Mexico’s internal affairs.\(^{18}\)

Polk and Buchanan’s desire to obtain a swift and favorable outcome to the war, in addition to gaining California and New Mexico, prompted them to endorse Beach’s attempt for a quid-pro-quo agreement with the Mexican clergy. By sanctioning Beach’s mission, Polk essentially violated a precedent established by previous administrations that viewed dealings with the Catholic Church with suspicion. Even though Polk was aware of the history of the Mexican clergy’s support for monarchy and recent warnings from Consul Black of a possible monarchist coup blessed by the Church, Polk endorsed a diplomatic mission that hinged on the success of a revolt backed by the Mexican Catholic clergy. Though Polk did not intend to bring a monarchy or some form of despotism to Mexico in exchange for peace, his pragmatism and penchant for diplomatic intrigue made Beach’s mission a seemingly acceptable alternative to fighting a prolonged war that was only growing more unpopular among U.S. citizens. Thus, while Polk worked aggressively to expel Russian and British efforts to claim the Pacific West in the name of

\(^{18}\) Moses Beach to James Buchanan, 4 June 1847, DCIAA, Vol. VIII, 907; Merk, Manifest Destiny and Mission in America, 132-134; Binder, James Buchanan and the American Empire, 108-109; Henderson, A Glorious Defeat, 162-163; Polk, the Diary of a President, 11 May 1847, 230.
spreading American values and the Monroe Doctrine, he was not above fomenting a clerical rebellion in Mexico. As a result, an American president, while actively working to drive Europeans from the west coast of North America, almost undermined the Monroe Doctrine he was purporting to uphold.

*The Debate over “All Mexico,” and the Return of Missionary versus Exclusionary anti-Catholic Rhetoric*

The quest for continental expansion, which was Polk’s primary objective for the war, set the parameters for the next great debate on U.S. diplomacy. After Moses Beach delivered his report to Polk and Buchanan, he resumed writing for the *New York Sun* and, based on his observations in Mexico, published an editorial on April 14, 1847, calling for the complete annexation of Mexico by the United States. Though other newspapers had previously called for the complete annexation of Mexico, it was Beach’s article that sparked a firestorm in the American press over how much territory should be taken. The annexation of Texas had emboldened many expansionists in their desire to add more territory to the United States. Even before hostilities broke out between the two countries, zealous U.S. newspaper editors called for the complete annexation of Mexico as the final objective of the coming war.19

Adding fuel to the fire were Lewis C. Levin and his fellow Nativists. Most Nativists supported the “All Mexico” movement that was growing throughout the country and in the halls of Congress. Nativists in general believed that the complete annexation of Mexico would further the spread of American ideals and institutions, such as

republicanism, capitalism, and Protestantism. With Mexico’s absorption into the Union, most Nativists believed, Protestantism would invariably overwhelm Catholicism and its hold on the Mexican people. Most Nativists thus readily embraced the ideology of Manifest Destiny and the continental expansionism of the United States.

Levin, however, as the leader of a small, radical third party in Congress, was in a precarious position, as supporting the wrong side of the “All Mexico” debate could spell political doom for the American Republican Party in Congress. As a result, politics forced Levin to switch back and forth throughout the debate between support for and against “All Mexico.” As the leader of the Nativist party, Levin also was forced to wrestle with both the exclusionary and missionary aspects of the anti-Catholicism intrinsic to his party’s platform and decide which anti-Catholic argument applied to the annexation of “All Mexico.” Unlike most of his fellow Nativists, Levin personally was skeptical of the ability and desirability of the United States to annex the entirety of Mexico. Always lurking in the back of Levin’s mind was the fear that Polk and the Democrats wanted to acquire territory from Mexico in order to bring more Catholics into the United States. Because most Catholics generally voted Democratic, to bring millions more into the country was, in Levin’s opinion, a gross misuse of executive power to serve the needs of a single party.20 Worse yet, it also would help propagate the spread of Catholicism in the United States. In addition to these arguments, Levin did not believe that Protestant evangelism would “purge their [the Mexicans’] minds of the delusions of

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20 By 1840, the estimated number of Catholics in the United States was around 650,000. The 1840 U.S. census determined that approximately 17,069,453 people lived in the United States, with 2,487,355 being slaves. To bring in millions of Catholic Mexicans into the United States would significantly boost the total U.S. Catholic population.
priestcraft.” This line of exclusionary anti-Catholic reasoning led Levin to initially oppose the “All Mexico” movement.

As General Winfield Scott’s troops moved to occupy Mexico City late in 1847, Levin reversed his position and advanced a missionary anti-Catholic argument. As the “All Mexico” movement gained strength and a U.S. victory appeared imminent, Levin hoped to secure his party’s place on the winning side of the expansionist debate over Mexico. Seeing the defeat and annexation of Mexico as a political and military inevitability, Levin claimed that the annexation of all of Mexico would ultimately spread “Civil and religious liberty… an open Bible… [and] Christian principles.” Joining his fellow Nativists, Levin embraced the march to what many expansionists considered the culmination of Manifest Destiny as they sought to enact their cultural imperialist agenda over their southern neighbor.

As the Nativists closed ranks in support of “All Mexico” by espousing missionary anti-Catholic rhetoric, other congressmen likewise employed anti-Catholic language to urge the complete annexation of Mexico. After Mexico established Catholicism as its official religion after gaining independence from Spain, many U.S. expansionists argued that only direct U.S. occupation and control would rectify the lack of religious freedom in Mexico. Only then would Mexicans truly begin to grasp the relationship between religious toleration, republicanism, and “free government.” Senator Lewis Cass (D-MI), the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Military Affairs and favored Democratic candidate for the upcoming 1848 presidential election, expressed his support for the war

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21 Daily Sun, 14 April 1847.
22 Daily Sun, 10, 17, 28 January 1848, 16 February 1848. An “open Bible” was one of the major differences that Protestants saw between their version of Christianity and Roman Catholicism. Where Protestants had Bibles written in local vernacular, the Catholic Bible was written in Latin, thus compelling the common layman to rely on the priesthood for interpretation.
and “All Mexico.” The complete annexation of Mexico, Cass claimed, “will meliorate their condition, civil, religious, social, and political,” by instilling American political, social, and cultural values on the Mexican populace. U.S. control, as a result, would guarantee religious tolerance, which would displace the Catholic Church as the official religion of Mexico.

Other U.S. congressmen joined in the message of advancing the cause of religious freedom. Senator Sidney Breese (D-IL) declared that by annexing all of Mexico “Education will be diffused among the masses; speech, the press, and religion will be free.” The United States would thus be able to secure “all their rights, civil and religious.” Senator Daniel Dickinson (D-NY) likewise believed that “the Mexican people…have the good fortune to fall within our jurisdiction…[we] may regard it as a special interposition of Providential favor.” The United States government would thus “elevate their condition in the scale of moral and social being” and “leave them with all just relations to each other, enjoying the religion they venerate, and the altars where they are wont to worship.”

To bring religious freedom to Mexico ultimately meant the abolition of Catholicism’s role as the state’s official religion. A “corrupt” church would no longer hold dominion over the minds of the Mexican people and they would be free to choose how to worship God, as it was assumed that if given the chance, most Mexicans would abandon Catholicism for Protestantism.

While the majority of those who advocated “All Mexico” hid their anti-Catholic rhetoric under the veil of Manifest Destiny’s spread of religious freedom (and other American ideals), Senator Thomas J. Rusk (D-TX) relied on more outward expressions of

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23 *Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 427.*
24 *Ibid., 349-350.*
25 *Ibid., 87.*
anti-Catholicism while connecting it with the threat of monarchism and European
intervention in the Western Hemisphere. Rusk declared that Mexico had to be absorbed
by the United States because it was really under the control of Great Britain. To illustrate
his point, Rusk reminded the Senate of the “stupendous scheme” of Fr. Eugenio
MacNamara to establish a colony of 10,000 Irish Catholics in Alta (upper) California in
1846 with the aid of the British Hudson Bay Company. Rusk read to the Senate a copy
of the MacNamara Grant, which stated, “I wish, in the first place, to advance the cause of
Catholicism; in the second, to contribute to the happiness of my countrymen; and thirdly,
I desire to put an obstacle in the way of further usurpations on the part of an irreligious
and anti-Catholic nation.” Rusk failed to mention to the Senate that the Mexican
government under Mariano Parades had denied MacNamara’s grant for fear that the Irish
would eventually join their “Anglo-Saxon brethren in the United States.”

Yet despite the use of anti-Catholic rhetoric by those who championed “All
Mexico,” those who opposed annexation of either all or even some of Mexico also
utilized it. As one of the Congressional giants leading the opposition against the war and
the “All Mexico” movement, Senator John C. Calhoun (D-SC), who had served as the
chairman of the Finance Committee in the 29th Congress, utilized race, anti-Catholicism,
and pragmatism in his argument against complete annexation. Calhoun asked the Senate:

> How can we bring into our Union eight millions of people
> all professing one religion – and all concentrated under a
> powerful and wealthy priesthood, without subjecting the

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26Ibid., 362; Pinheiro, “‘Religion Without Restriction,’” 86.
country to the most violent religious conflict, and bringing
the government in the end under the control of a single
sect?²⁷

For Calhoun, the answer was a resounding no. The incorporation of millions of Catholic Mexicans into the United States was dangerous, according to Calhoun, as they were all under the control of the rich and corrupt priests who took orders from the Vatican. With the American Protestants on one side and the Catholics (including American Catholics and the newly naturalized Mexicans) on the other, Calhoun believed that the battle lines for a tumultuous and violent religious war in the United States would be set and only one side would emerge the winner (the worst case scenario being a triumphant Catholic Church). Religious strife in America could be avoided, Calhoun believed, if Catholic Mexico was not annexed.

Besides the threat of unleashing a nascent religious war by incorporating such a large population of Catholics into the Union, Calhoun argued it would be impossible to establish a republican government in Mexico. “Where is the intelligence in Mexico,” Calhoun asked, “for the construction and preservation of such a Government?...The great body of the intelligence and wealth of Mexico is concentrated in the priesthood, who are naturally disinclined to that form [American democracy] of Government.”²⁸ In Calhoun’s mind, any attempt to spread civil and religious liberty to either Mexico or around the globe was simply “a sad delusion” since the Catholic hierarchy in Mexico,

and by insinuation the whole Catholic religion, was inimical to the concept of republican government.\textsuperscript{29}

Joining Calhoun in his argument against “All Mexico” was the recently elected Senator John Bell (W-TN). Bell shared the same concerns Calhoun did about the ability of Catholic Mexicans to effectively establish stable republican governments. For Bell, the “overweening influence of the higher [Catholic] clergy” in Mexico was the source of the Mexican people’s “intellectual inferiority.”\textsuperscript{30} Though he attempted to plead ignorance about which sect of Christianity was most pure, Bell outwardly stated that “wherever Protestantism has prevailed, there you find planted deepest and strongest the seeds and the growth of civil liberty.” Catholicism, on the other hand, was responsible for ignorance, despotism, and corruption. As a result, the Catholic Mexicans had been too indoctrinated with the hierarchical and corrupt nature of the Catholic Church and therefore had no firmly held convictions regarding the preservation of republican and federal ideals. Their religion considered, “a mummery,” and their church “an insuperable barrier” to the establishment of civil and religious liberty, the Mexican people were hopelessly unprepared to become a part of the United States. Bell’s attack not only criticized the Catholic Church, but also stated plainly the old belief that was intrinsic to the anti-Catholic message of Manifest Destiny, that Protestantism was crucial for the spread of civil and religious freedom.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{29} Congressional Globe, 30\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 1\textsuperscript{st} Session, Appendix, 51; Pinheiro, “‘Religion Without Restriction,’” 88-89.

\textsuperscript{30} Most of the schools in Mexico were run by the Catholic Church. This near monopoly that the Church had on education convinced many Americans, such as John Bell, that the Catholic Church was responsible for purposely indoctrinating Mexico’s youth to respect the Church and the ideas of monarchism/despotism.

\textsuperscript{31} Congressional Globe, 30\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 1\textsuperscript{st} Session, Appendix, 196.
Many in Congress who opposed “All Mexico” often utilized comparisons to republican Rome’s transformation into an empire as a warning to the young American republic and its quest for territory. Senator Joseph Underwood (W-KY) relied on this comparison and coupled it with a condemnation of Manifest Destiny’s “law of necessity – [by] some decree of the Almighty – to overturn the civil and religious institutions of all other nations on this continent.” Underwood likened those in favor of annexation to the Crusaders of the Middle Ages who, seeking to reclaim the Holy Land on the pope’s decree, sought to conquer it by the sword. The Whig senator from Kentucky also feared, like Levin originally did, that the incorporation of Catholic Mexicans into the Union would bolster the ranks of the Democratic Party. The Democrats already controlled the Senate with 38 members to the Whig’s 21, while the Whigs barely maintained possession of the House with 116 members to the Democrats’ 110 (with Levin being the sole representative of the American Republican Party). An increase in Democratic representation in Congress, many Whigs and Nativists feared, would upset the slight majority they held in the House of Representatives.32

Others in the House of Representatives also stated their opposition to the acquisition of all of Mexico while reiterating the same exclusionary anti-Catholic arguments used in the Senate. Representative George P. Marsh (W-VT) castigated the Mexican people for being “cursed with the worst possible forms of misrule – tyranny of the soldier and the tyranny of the priest.” As they were incapable of effective self-government due to their Catholicism, Marsh believed they were unfit to become citizens

32 Ibid., 308.
Representative Orlando B. Ficklin (D-IL) called the Mexican people “ignorant, degraded, and superstitious,” and that:

The power of the priesthood is as absolute in politics as in religion; and in this way they have established a despotism over the souls and bodies of their church members. The ignorance and superstition of the masses have enabled their rulers to dupe them into a war with the United States.

If the “ignorant” and “superstitious” population of Mexico had been tricked by the Church and their political leaders into waging war against the United States, Ficklin argued, it would be patriotic not to want them in the Union.34

Others in the House of Representatives relied on anti-Catholic rhetoric to state their concerns over the negative influence the Catholic Mexicans might have on the occupying U.S. troops. Representative Patrick Tompkins (W-MS), chairman of the Committee on Expenditures in the Department of the Navy, resurrected the assertion that Spain was able to conquer the indigenous Mexican population due to “the subtlety of the Spanish Jesuits.” Since the Spanish were supposedly only able to subdue Mexico through the religious control of the Catholic Church, Tompkins insinuated that the United States likewise might have to enforce religious restrictions in order to maintain control over the conquered Mexicans. Such a course of action, Tompkins declared, was one the United States should not take.35

Some U.S. officials, such as Representative Truman Smith (W-CT), decried the moral disintegration of the Mexican people and their negative influence on the occupying U.S. troops. Smith charged that the inhabitants of this “Sodom” were “under the control of the clergy [to] an extraordinary degree” and feared

33 Ibid., 339.
34 Ibid., 355; Pinheiro, “‘Religion Without Restriction,’” 89-90.
35 Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 488.
that occupying U.S. troops would soon adopt the supposed vices and immoral behavior that U.S. politicians assumed were typical in Mexican society.

The debate over annexing all of Mexico was in many ways similar to and distinct from the previous debates over U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America (and more specifically Mexico). Like the argument over the United States recognizing Latin American independence, the “All Mexico” debate saw the employment of anti-Catholic language not only to support, but also criticize the move for total annexation. It followed the same rhetorical paradigm that U.S. politicians used in the recognition debate: Those in support of recognition (or complete annexation) couched their anti-Catholicism in typical Manifest Destiny language that was missionary in temperament and emphasized the divinely sanctioned spread of American republicanism and religious liberty. Those who opposed recognition (or complete annexation) similarly used exclusionary anti-Catholic rhetoric to justify the inability of the Latin Americans (or specifically the Mexicans) to govern themselves or become U.S. citizens.

**Nicholas Trist and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo**

As members of Congress from various political stripes utilized anti-Catholic rhetoric over the Mexico question, President Polk dispatched Nicholas P. Trist to Mexico to negotiate a peace treaty. Buchanan instructed Trist to ensure that any treaty drawn up by him and his Mexican counterparts would guarantee that Mexicans living in the annexed territories would be “protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty, property and the religion which they profess.”

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practice of Catholicism in the conquered territories, Trist’s perception of the Catholic religion was anything but favorable as he journeyed through Mexico. The American diplomat was appalled at “the lazy, ignorant and stupid monks, whose views do not extend beyond the round of purely animal enjoyments...[and] the common love of and greed after, money and property, mixed up with an idol-worship fanaticism,” along with their enormous influence over the Mexican people. Trist’s remarks smacked of the typical anti-Catholic sentiment held by most American diplomats over the past three decades when they reported on conditions in Latin America.

Trist, however, was surprised when he discovered that the upper clergy, like many influential members of the Mexican upper classes, desired the collapse of peace talks between the United States and Santa Anna and the occupation of Mexico City by General Winfield Scott. The Catholic Church was the largest institutional landowner in Mexico and its vast property holdings translated into considerable wealth and political power for the Mexican clergy. Believing that the United States “intended to exercise dominion over [Mexico] after the fashion of...Spain,” ecclesiastical officials in Mexico hoped that the American occupation would “lead to a state of things [that] above all respect[ed] church property instead of subjecting it to contributions [and] forced loans, and threatening it with wholesale confiscations.” Seeing the Mexican Liberal Party’s policy of seizing non-ecclesiastical Church property as a threat to their influence and Santa Anna as an unstable force in Mexican politics, the Mexican clergy turned to the United States for

38 Trist to Buchanan, 24 August 1847, DCIAA, Vol. VIII, 929.
protection against its domestic enemies.\textsuperscript{39} It was a far cry from the 1820s when the United States debated the possibility of intervening in the Latin American revolutions and rescuing them from the corrupt Catholicism they had inherited from Spain. It was also a surprising turnaround for the Mexican clergy, who had viewed the United States up to the middle of the war as an enemy of the Church, to suddenly categorize the United States government as a friend. It is doubtful that Trist saw the irony in the United States becoming the “new Spain,” as he reported that though he preferred withdrawing to an established border and negotiating a peace, he was tempted by the benefits of a full occupation.\textsuperscript{40}

While discussing with the Mexican commissioners the proposed boundary between the United States and Mexico, the issue of slavery in the United States’ acquired territories came up. The Mexican commissioners pushed for its complete exclusion in conquered Mexican territories, to which Trist balked. In reply to Trist’s objections, the Mexican commissioners reframed the issue by hypothetically asking him:

\begin{quote}
[I]f it were proposed to the People of the United States to part with a portion of their territory, in order that the Inquisition should be therein established, the proposal could not excite stronger feelings of abhorrence than those awakened in Mexico by the prospect of the introduction of slavery in any territory parted with by her.
\end{quote}

Trist stated that while their understanding of slavery in the United States was “erroneous,” he understood their comparison and that he could never submit to the U.S. Senate a treaty that mentioned slavery at all. The issue of slavery was thus dropped from

\textsuperscript{39} From 1828 to 1848 Santa Anna managed to overthrow the Mexican government five times, switching his allegiance between the Liberals and Conservatives throughout his career.

\textsuperscript{40} Trist to Buchanan, 25 October 1847, \textit{DCIAA}, Vol. VIII, 959; Trist to Buchanan, 24 August 1847, \textit{DCIAA}, Vol. VIII, 929.
the rough draft of the treaty. It was an awkward and significant encounter at the negotiating table between two institutions that had caused the United States and Mexico to view each other with suspicion and disdain for the past two decades. Americans viewed Mexican Catholicism as a superstitious religion that debilitated the minds of Mexicans and prevented them from establishing stable republican governments, while the Mexicans saw American slavery as a gross violation of the dignity of the human person.41 The Mexican Commissioners subsequently worked to ensure that the treaty stated that Church property in former Mexican territories would be preserved, that Mexican Catholics would be allowed to practice their religion freely, and that Mexican Catholics in now U.S. territories would be allowed to communicate with their Catholic bishops in Mexico.42

When Nicholas Trist’s treaty arrived in the Senate, senators cringed at the terms of the peace. “All Mexico” supporters were outraged that the entire country had not been annexed, while those who had either opposed the war or any amount of territorial acquisition were angered that half of Mexico would be taken by the United States. What many senators were concerned with in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo were the provisions in Article IX that outlined the specific rights of Catholic Mexicans in U.S. territories.43 This supposedly special status awarded to the Catholic Church, not to mention that Catholic authorities still in Mexico would be allowed to exercise some control over Catholic Mexicans now living in the United States, made a few senators wary. After three days of debate, the Senate managed to whittle down the original three-

41 Trist to Buchanan, 4 September 1847, DCIAA, Vol. VIII, 938.
42 Herrera, Couto, Villamil, Atristain to Trist, 6 September 1847, DCIAA, Vol. VIII, 942.
paragraph Article IX to one paragraph and eliminate any mention of the Catholic Church, its property, the Catholic Mexican hierarchy, or the specific rights of Catholic Mexicans in U.S. territory. The revised Article IX simply stated that Mexicans now living in the newly acquired U.S. territories would be “free [to] exercise...their religion without restriction.” The specific rights and privileges that the Mexican clergy had hoped to retain for Mexican Catholics were thus watered down to a general statement on the free exercise of religion.

Likewise, in order to hasten the treaty’s passage, the issue of slavery was never mentioned so as to garner the broadest amount of support from American Northerners and Southerners and from the Mexicans. Though the compromise enabled the treaty’s ratification, it certainly did not indicate an understanding or solution between Mexicans and Americans on slavery and Catholicism. If anything, it was simply a way for Americans to avoid enflaming the sectional crisis while alleviating their uneasiness over granting the Catholic Church special rights and privileges in U.S. territory.

Despite these measures taken by the Senate, Levin and the American Republican Party were not satisfied with the treaty. First, Levin and the Nativists did not believe the treaty would maintain the peace between the United States and Mexico. Permanent peace would not be achieved, Levin declared, unless “an American Government is formally established in the city of Mexico, over the entire republic.” Annexing half of Mexico, it seemed to the Nativists, would not suffice in completely vanquishing their Catholic Mexican foes. In their eyes, the only way to ensure that the peace was not broken was to

45 Daily Sun, 28 January 1848; Daily Sun, 28 February 1848.
absorb all of Mexico. Since the treaty failed to either annex all of Mexico, and thus fulfill the ideal goal of Manifest Destiny, or exclude any territory, so as to prevent the absorption of Mexican Catholics into the United States, Levin and the Nativists criticized the treaty and refused to endorse it.46

Despite the objections of the Nativists and other senators dissatisfied with Trist’s work, the Senate ratified the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on March 10, 1848 by a vote of 38 to 14. The bilateral agreement established the U.S.-Mexico border at the Rio Grande River. In addition, Mexico renounced her claims to Texas, New Mexico, and Alta California for $15 million. Despite the criticism levied at Trist for ignoring his recall and continued squabbles over the amount of territory that would be annexed, the U.S. Senate on the whole was eager for peace with Mexico.47 Despite Polk’s fears that the Senate, after severely editing Article IX, X and XII, had made alterations “of such a character as to jeopard [sic] its ratification by Mexico,” the treaty was ultimately ratified by Mexico on May 19 by a legislative vote of 51 to 34 and a Senate vote of 33 to 4.48 The war was finally over. In its triumph, the United States acquired half of Mexico, expanded its territory to the Pacific Ocean, and realized its dreams of continental expansion.

47 Bauer, The Mexican War, 384-387; Fuller, The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico, 158-159.
48 The Diary of James K. Polk, Vol. III, 376-379. Articles X and XII concerned Mexico’s retaining land grants in Texas and the payment of $15 million for Texas, California, and New Mexico, respectively.
“All Mexico” and the Return of the Missionary versus Exclusionary Paradigm

As was the case with the debate over U.S. recognition of Latin America, the debate concerning the U.S. annexation of “All Mexico” saw both supporters and critics of complete annexation employ missionary and exclusionary anti-Catholic language to strengthen their arguments. It also restored the same rhetorical paradigm that U.S. politicians used in the recognition debate: Supporters couched their anti-Catholicism in typical Manifest Destiny language emphasizing the divinely sanctioned spread of American republicanism and religious liberty, whether to the Latin American republics through recognition, or to the Pacific Ocean via annexation. On the other hand, opponents of both issues used anti-Catholic rhetoric to justify the inability of the Latin Americans to govern themselves (hence there would be no need to recognize their failed governments) or be incorporated into the Union due to their political immaturity. Thus, the malleability of anti-Catholic rhetoric that had been monopolized by expansionist Democrats during the Texas issue returned for the debate over “All Mexico.”

The return of the original anti-Catholic rhetorical pattern used in the recognition debate depended largely on the question of population. Expansionists desired Texas not only because it would extend slavery, but also because they considered it to be largely populated by white Protestants who were proponents of the American system of republican government. The debate over “All Mexico” likewise was shaped by the question of “conquered” peoples. Taking not only the sparsely populated territories of New Mexico and California, but also the densely populated southern half of Mexico, would require the United States to take in millions of Mexicans who were religiously,
racially, socially, and politically inferior, in the eyes of most Americans. This question
over the fate of Catholic Mexicans in the U.S. quest for continental empire, in turn,
allowed U.S. politicians to use anti-Catholic rhetoric and argue their preferred policy
agenda. Anti-Catholicism thus returned as a universal rhetorical tool that U.S.
policymakers employed to justify their foreign policy goals while reaffirming their belief
in U.S. superiority and Latin American inferiority.

While some historians have viewed the 1840s and the U.S.-Mexican War as the
zenith of anti-Catholicism in the United States’ attitude towards Latin America in the
antebellum era, there are several indications of its eventual decline. The Philadelphia
riots of 1844 crippled the Nativist movement with the stain of lawlessness, ultimately
stunting its political growth and forcing the party to merge with the Whigs in 1848. The
decline of Nativism and Polk’s efforts to diffuse Nativist critiques of the war, while
reaching out to Catholics in the United States and Mexico, indicate that anti-Catholicism
as a domestic cultural force that shaped U.S. foreign policy was waning.

Polk’s willingness to work with Mexican Catholics broke with the precedents
established by John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson to either outwardly or subtly
undermine the Church’s position in Latin America. Though anti-Catholic diatribes
resonated through the halls of Congress in the 1840s (during Polk’s administration), they
were noticeably lacking in the White House. Regardless of this lack of anti-Catholic
zealotry on Polk’s part, disciples of Manifest Destiny gleefully declared that the racially
and religiously superior American republic had defeated inferior Catholic Mexico.
Manifest Destiny, it seemed in their eyes, had triumphed.
Conclusion

As revolution erupted in the streets of Europe in early 1848, the United States Senate was in the midst of debating the treaty that would end its war with Mexico. While senators remarked with wonder and praise the seemingly inevitable rise of republicanism that was enveloping Europe, they noted that their victory over Mexico was synonymous with a victory for republicanism in North America. For the faithful who championed Manifest Destiny, the U.S.-Mexican War was the culmination of their efforts to secure the Pacific West for the United States and simultaneously spread the “blessings” of American republicanism, federalism, capitalism and religious freedom. In their quest to extend the liberties of the United States into new territories, most proponents of Manifest Destiny also believed they were expanding Protestant Christianity and driving out Roman Catholicism.

Most historians have failed to incorporate anti-Catholicism into their studies on Manifest Destiny and early U.S. expansionism. While the majority of scholars who studied U.S. anti-Catholicism have focused purely on the Nativist movement in domestic politics, a few others have examined such issues as race and religion as components of Manifest Destiny. These studies certainly provide a fuller picture of the history of early U.S. expansionism, but they either minimalize or leave out entirely the impact of anti-Catholicism in the credo of Manifest Destiny. Other historians have specifically addressed the issue of anti-Catholicism in early U.S. diplomacy towards Latin America, but confined their analysis to the U.S.-Mexican War. This paper has, therefore, tried to
fill the gaps in the literature by using three case studies to trace the evolution of anti-Catholicism in early U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America.

Each of the three case studies, Latin American recognition, Texas annexation, and “All Mexico,” demonstrate that the anti-Catholic nature of Manifest Destiny was evident not only in the U.S.-Mexican War, but also during the early republic as U.S. politicians debated their nation’s foreign policy toward the newly emerging Latin American republics and the annexation of Texas. In each of the three debates, anti-Catholic rhetoric proved to be a malleable tool that U.S. officials used to advocate their stance on larger national security issues. Whether it was defending the United States’ control of the Western Hemisphere, acquiring new markets and resources, extending the institution of slavery, or augmenting their political power in Congress, U.S. politicians relied on anti-Catholicism to bolster their respective arguments on protecting U.S. interests. Although many truly believed in the anti-Catholic rhetoric they spouted, the question of whether or not anti-Catholicism was used cynically or truthfully can become a red herring. What matters most is that U.S. politicians believed that such arguments would resonate with both their constituents and colleagues. Regardless of how they were used, anti-Catholic arguments reaffirmed for most Protestant and secular Americans previously held convictions of American political and cultural exceptionalism and greatness, in contrast to Latin American backwardness and inferiority.

This flexibility in anti-Catholicism resulted in a rhetorical dichotomy between missionary and exclusionary anti-Catholic arguments that was established during the debate on Latin American recognition. Henry Clay and his supporters in Congress, believing that recognition of the Latin American rebel movements in the 1810s as
belligerents would instill American political and cultural values in the new Latin American states, and ultimately establish U.S. control of the Western Hemisphere. The recognitionists used missionary anti-Catholic rhetoric to denounce Latin America’s ties with a Catholicism that was superstitious, hierarchical, and monarchical in its political preferences. Opponents, in turn, used exclusionary anti-Catholic rhetoric to illustrate the inability of the Latin American rebels to create stable republican governments. Breaking the United States’ neutrality in the conflict between Spain and her American colonies, they argued, was therefore not worth risking war against a declining, yet still formidable European power.

After Latin America won its independence from Spain in the 1820s, anti-U.S. Catholic rhetoric remained prevalent as many Americans saw the failure of the new Latin American nations to fully embrace the idea of religious freedom once they gained their independence from Spain. Most anti-Catholic rhetoric utilized during the recognition debate denounced the effects of Spanish Catholicism on Latin America. They also expressed hope that Latin Americans would remove the Church’s privileged place in Latin American society, namely as the official religion of many states, as the main institution that provided education, and as the largest corporate landholder almost everywhere south of the border. John Quincy Adams’ hope that the Church’s power in Latin America would be swept away by the “spirit of the age” ultimately proved to be in vain, as the newly established Latin American republics maintained Catholicism as their state religion. Even the Monroe Doctrine’s implicit denunciation of Catholicism as a tool of European monarchism in 1823 did not alleviate the fears many U.S. officials had toward the continuing power of the Church in Latin America. This disillusionment that
Americans held toward religious freedom in Latin America was evident in the diplomatic reports sent back to Washington, which continued throughout the rest of the 1820s. Latin America, in the minds of many Protestant Americans, had failed to grasp the connection between religious freedom and political liberty. Consequently, their efforts to establish and maintain stable republican governments were seen by most Americans as flawed and doomed to result in oligarchy and dictatorship.

Because the Catholic Church remained an entrenched political, economic, and cultural force throughout much of Latin America after their Wars of Independence, U.S. politicians were able to point to its continuing hold over Latin America to influence the question over Texas annexation. The missionary versus exclusionary paradigm collapsed in this case, as expansionist Democrats managed to combine both missionary and exclusionary rhetoric into one anti-Catholic argument that called for the “rescue” and absorption of fellow white, Protestant Americans into the Union. They also hoped that by demonstrating the backwardness and despotism of the Mexican state, vis-à-vis the Mexican Catholic Church, they could convince their fellow citizens that defending and absorbing Texas was not a sectional ploy to extend slavery, but rather a moral and patriotic duty, which all Americans should support. Opponents of annexation could not utilize exclusionary anti-Catholic arguments due to the few Mexicans and Catholics living in Texas. Because of this monopolization of anti-Catholic rhetoric by expansionist Democrats, Northerners and Whigs were forced to rely on other arguments to oppose annexation.

The combination of missionary and exclusionary anti-Catholicism as a rhetorical tool by expansionist Democrats evaporated in the debate over “All Mexico” as opponents
used religious prejudice to ensure the United States did not absorb Catholic Mexicans via territorial expansion. The malleability of anti-Catholicism as a rhetorical tool, in the end, became a double-edged sword for expansionists, as opponents of “All Mexico” were able to resurrect exclusionary arguments similar to those used during the recognition debate to prevent the annexation of the densely Catholic-populated southern half of Mexico. The original paradigm of missionary versus exclusionary anti-Catholicism established in the recognition debates was thus restored over the question of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the debate over “All Mexico.”

While this paper has traced the evolution of anti-Catholic rhetoric by U.S. officials towards Latin America, primarily from the 1820s to 1848, further research might answer questions or confirm arguments that this paper raises. While this paper uses three case studies to analyze anti-Catholic rhetoric by Americans toward Latin America, further research might utilize more case studies to answer several questions. Additional case studies of U.S. expansionism from both the early and late nineteenth century might confirm the existence of a missionary versus exclusionary paradigm in anti-Catholic rhetoric. It also might elaborate more on the question of the “Texas anomaly,” if in fact it is an anomaly at all, as it could very well be the dominant trend in U.S. anti-Catholic rhetoric toward Latin America. As the “Texas anomaly” occurred due to a question of population, most likely the same pattern will appear in further research on anti-Catholicism and U.S. expansionism. When the territory in question is predominantly populated with Catholic Latin Americans (or other native peoples), the missionary versus exclusionary paradigm will occur. If the population is white and Protestant, then the paradigm will not work as it restricts the use of missionary and exclusionary arguments to
one side only. Since these cases were few and far between in the history of U.S. expansionism, it is likely that Texas is the anti-Catholic rhetorical anomaly.

Anti-Catholicism was just one of many issues and “isms” that were part of Manifest Destiny ideology. As with the issue of race, anti-Catholicism illustrates how domestic cultural movements can influence war and diplomacy. The inclusion of anti-Catholicism’s impact on early U.S. expansionism demonstrates the complex interplay between U.S. domestic affairs and its foreign relations, which provides us with a better understanding of early U.S.-Latin American relations. Anti-Catholicism was, as historian John Pinheiro noted, intrinsically bound up in the ideology and language of Manifest Destiny. However, as this paper has tried to show, it was also a weapon wielded by those who challenged Manifest Destiny. The use of anti-Catholic rhetoric, as a result, unfortunately demonstrates the flexibility of religious prejudice in advancing foreign policy goals. Anti-Catholicism thus became part of the larger history of the two distinct paths in early U.S.-Latin American relations: Either to fully exert its power and influence as Missionary America or defend its interests and security as Exclusionary America.
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