■ **Article]**

ENTREMONS. UPF JOURNAL OF WORLD HISTORY
Universitat Pompeu Fabra | Barcelona
Número 11 (Octubre 2020)
www.entremons.org

When Turner meets Prescott: A historiographical analysis of the untold connection between the Napoleonic War in Spain and the Mexican-American War

Ben Swenson
Universitat Pompeu Fabra

Abstract

Excerpts of this historiographic essay will accompany the introduction of the first thesis linking the Spanish War of Independence (1808-1814) and the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). Despite the influence of Spain on the conflict in Mexico, there is little work connecting the two wars. This essay demonstrates that – due to changing perspectives in the United States – the traditional Anglo-Saxon Turnerian east-to-west geographical approach to American history is currently being amended by scholars to include a south-to-north bidirectional narrative that should not only include New Spain, Mexican, and borderlands literature, but also Spanish historiography encompassing the romantic nineteenth century.

Keywords:

Spain, Herbert E. Bolton, Frederick J. Turner, Mexican War, guerrilla warfare, insurgency

When Napoleon Bonaparte overran Spain to place his brother on the throne of that country, he placed armies there to retain the power he obtained; and while we imitated his conduct, we should profit by his example, and take warning from his fate. If we shall build up governments in Mexico, and attempt to keep them in power, we should require an army there of fifty thousand men for the next twenty years.[1]

----- Caleb B. Smith, U.S. Senator, February 3, 1848

Roughly three years before the Mexican-American War William H. Prescott published his highly acclaimed *The History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843). Indicative of mid-nineteenth-century romantic literature, Prescott painted the hills and mountains of Mexico in vivid tones. The historian's glorious recounting of Cortez and his Spanish soldiers depicted a stunning contrast amidst a major transatlantic event: the end of the Aztec Empire and the birth of New Spain. Themes of pristine beauty, colorfully plumed natives, and iron-clad conquistadors offered American readers the perfect blend of embellished history in an era of looming war with Mexico:

Stretching far away at their feet, were seen noble forests of oak, sycamore, and cedar, and beyond, yellow fields of maize and the towering maguey, intermingled with orchards and blooming gardens; for flowers... In the centre of the great basin were beheld the lakes, occupying then a much larger position of its surface than at present; their borders thickly studded with towns and hamlets, and, in the midst, – like some Indian empress with her coronal of pearls, – the fair city of Mexico, with her white towers and pyramidal temples, reposing, as it were, on the high bosom of the waters, – the famed "Venice of the Aztecs." High over all rose the royal hill of Chapoltepec, the residence of the Mexican monarchs, crowned with the same grove of gigantic cypresses, which at this day fling their broad shadows over the land.[2]

Four years later the American army, led by General Winfield Scott, followed in the footsteps of Cortez by climbing the hills west of Veracruz on its way to conquer the Mexican capital. Scott did

[1] *Congressional Globe*, Library of Congress (LOC), Washington D.C., February 3, 1848, 296.
[2] William H. Prescott, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico* (New York: The Modern Library, 1843), 286-7. Accompanying the increasing interest during the Antebellum of Spanish-American history was a repackaging of a historiographical paradigm known as the 'Black Legend.' The Black Legend (*la leyenda negra española*) traced its origins from anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish propaganda disseminated in Spanish-ruled Netherlands in the sixteenth century – from which it then spread to England and its American colonies. The 'legend' was later reformulated ('Prescott's Paradigm') during the Mexican War period. See also: Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, "The Broken Image: The Spanish Empire in the United States after 1898," in *Endless Empire: Spain's Retreat, Europe's Eclipse, America's Decline* (Alfred W. McCoy, Josep M. Fradera, Stephen Jacobson, ed.) University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 2012, 160-166.

not burn his ships, as Cortez had done, but enough romantic similarities abounded to inspire an America engaging in its first foreign war. However, like Cortez, Scott gambled by detaching his army's logistical lifeline in the belief that taking the capital of Mexico would convince the Mexicans that resistance was futile. The conclusion of the war, effected by combinations of luck, skill, heroism, careful planning, and even insubordination, resulted in America's continental fulfillment of a 'Manifest Destiny' that demanded the nation be limited only by the natural boundaries of the world's two greatest oceans.

Yet, for much of the twentieth-century American historians relegated the importance of the Mexican War by considering it a prelude to the sectional fight over slavery. In many respects this perspective was valid. American Civil War casualties by comparison relegate the Mexican conflict. By that standard, historians simply viewed the continental war as a milestone to the larger mid-century conflict. The general narrative following the Civil War was that the United States populated itself with hardy Europeans who moved into the uninhabited and uncultivated frontier. Three years after the US Census declared the frontier closed, Frederick Jackson Turner published his "Frontier Thesis" (1893). For the remainder of the twentieth century, historians focused on an east-to-west Anglo-Saxon Turnerian paradigm as the main impetus behind the historical development of the nation.[3]

However, as the United States moves into the twenty-first century, and changing demographics begins to alter the way we record the past, another obvious milestone appears which illuminates the present. In historiographical terms the war against Mexico marked the moment when Turnerians gave way to Prescott, and America's first war of conquest ushered the history of the United States into the exclusive club of empire. From this perspective, the Civil War was the pivot point from a confederate or states' rights Jeffersonian construction towards federalist centralization on a Napoleonic model.[4] From an imperial perspective, the war against Mexico marks a departure from Turnerian historiography and a unidirectional east-west approach to a bidirectional approach

[3] Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History", first published in *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin* (Madison, 1893); Ray Allen Billington, *Western Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* (New York: Macmillan, 1949); Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (New York: Knopf, 1963); Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York: Random House, 1965); Michael A. Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

[4] Tocqueville's interwar musings still offer pertinent interpretations in the transitory period of American democracy to empire. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, 2 Vols* (Reprint: New York: J. & H.G. Langley, New York, 1841). For a unique contemporary examination of empires see: Josep M. Fradera, *The Imperial Nation: Citizens and Subjects in the British, French, Spanish, and American Empires* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

that must include Spain as the *other* mother country from which American historiography will project itself in order to maintain relevance. In short, while Anglo-Saxonism in the American tradition will always have foundational historiographical priority, 'Yankee Latinism' from a south to north perspective, especially following the Civil War, is taking on more importance in a synthesized bidirectional narrative.[5]

For most of the twentieth-century the bidirectional approach to American history in the United States was the exclusive ground of one of Turner's former students – Herbert Bolton.[6] It was Bolton who argued that – while Turner's theory had validity – the contribution to North American history by the Spanish was essential to a comprehensive approach. Bolton's lonely road was later shared by John Francis Bannon, who picked up Bolton's torch by illuminating histories of the American Southwest in a number of works, the most well-known of which is *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513-1821* (1970).[7] In 1992, historian David J. Weber helped solidify the existence of the 'Bolton School' with his much-hailed work, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (1992).[8]

Bolton School historiography does not discard the importance of England in bringing about the American colonies and subsequent founding of the most stable and powerful of all nation-states Europe had ever created. While Mexico was being ruled by the kings of Spain, the eastern American colonies were sparsely populated backwaters. The fact that England would eventually usurp the Spanish empire in the Atlantic World was no small feat, and America was the product of that ascendancy. That trajectory changed dramatically when the united colonies decided to divorce the mother country in the late-eighteenth century to pursue its own goals – that of North American

[5] Filibustering narratives by historians such as Robert May, highlight the north-to-south influence. See: Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).
[6] Herbert E. Bolton, *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronical of Old Florida and the Southwest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921); "The Epic of Greater America", in *The American Historical Review* 38 (April 1933): 448-477; See also, Bolton, *Texas in the Middle Eighteenth Century: Studies in Spanish Colonial History and Administration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1915). For a comparative essay on Bolton and Turner see: Albert L. Hurtado, "Bolton and Turner: The Borderlands and American Exceptionalism", in *The Western Historical Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2013): 4-20. Hurtado argues that Bolton was not aware that he had challenged his former teacher's unidirectional theory.
[7] John Francis Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970). Bannon compiled much of Bolton's works. Another influential proponent of Latin American history was Harvard historian Henry Clarence Haring. See Haring, *The Spanish Empire in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947).
[8] David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982). For a historiographical essay see Weber: "The Spanish Legacy and the American Imagination", in *The Western Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (Feb. 1992): 5-24. "It mattered not, then, if Anglo Americans ever met a Spaniard or visited a Spanish-American colony. The Black Legend informed Anglo-American judgements about political, economic, religious, and social forces that have shaped the Spanish provinces from Florida to California, as well as throughout the hemisphere." (Weber: "The Spanish Legacy", 7).

expansion on their own terms. All the vestiges of successful government: enlightenment, mission, leadership, commerce – the required necessities of transplanting stability and success in the New World, were attributes of the American system during the expansion period leading up to the continental-determining war with Mexico in 1846.

That being understood, the Spanish presence in the Americas makes England a relative newcomer to North America. The Spaniards were a fixture on the continent nearly three hundred years before Anglo-Saxons began crossing the Mississippi River in significant numbers. Take the oldest state capital of Santa Fe (1610) as an example. The importance of this cannot be discounted, nor can the implications, because the very nature of Mexico itself, perhaps best understood by its progenitor, will change the history of the United States in the twenty-first century. In other words, America is becoming Anglo-Saxon *and* Latin – hybridized with a tangential and important history of African-slavery in which both English and Spanish historians have spheres of influence.

So where do we begin? If the American War with Mexico in 1846 marked the beginnings of American continental empire on the Napoleonic model, it is only logical to examine the real Napoleonic empire and its struggle with Spain a generation earlier. Despite the similarities, there is almost no historiography comparing the two conflicts. This is not surprising, considering American history had been dominated by the Anglo-Saxon perspective for more than one hundred and fifty years. Revisionist histories, beginning in the Vietnam era of the 1960s and 1970s, focused on the victimization of groups without agency – portraying them as helpless pawns pushed by aggressive conquerors. This perspective, although illuminating the *other* side of the paradigm in many ways, relegated those groups' historical freedom of action while simultaneously painting agents of American empire as mindless brutes. The reality is that *all* had some agency, and some of these adjustments are just beginning to be addressed by contemporary historians who view the victimization narrative pitting losers and winners as lacking realist perspective.[9]

It is also appropriate to point out that the revisionism that occurred during the period was influenced in a manner similar to how countercultural segments of the American population skeptically viewed the war in Vietnam. The period necessarily contributed to the point of view that

[9] Historical depictions of Native Americans, for example, are perhaps the most egregious, with both sides being equally incorrect. Romanticists depicted Indians living in harmony with nature, revisionists depicted native Americans as helpless victims of American expansion, and Anglo-Saxon historians depicted them as unchristianized savages. For a paradigm-busting work, see: Charles C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2005).

America was indeed an empire. That discussion, if nothing else, had been avoided by earlier historians who argued that America remained within a uniquely exceptional category despite abundant evidence to the contrary – particularly after the Spanish-American War of 1898 demonstrated that the United States was willing to play the European imperial game to further its own economic and strategic interests.[10]

The traditional American point of view of the Mexican War is equally one-sided. Anglo-Saxon nationalist historians simply focused on the war without taking the Mexican perspective into account.[11] This is not surprising considering the laudable progress and prosperity of the era. Arguing the nationalist case, it is indisputable that white Americans settled the West in large numbers turning what had been an unpopulated region into an economic and agricultural giant. Traditional narratives from the Mexican side, which many Hispanic Americans (often called *norteños* by revanchists) adhere to irrationally and somewhat instinctively, simply depict white Americans as land-hungry brutes without the self-reflection needed to understand why many *norteños* welcomed the new invaders, their markets, and their laws. Neither side has properly accounted for the infighting within Mexico prior to the war as a factor in that conflict.[12] Mexican historians have buried their royalist (i.e. Spanish) past, instead focusing on revolutionary figures with more contemporary mass appeal than substance. This was ideological history promoted by an institutionalized revolution (PRI) which harbored a lingering resentment towards the United States.[13] The revisionist history assuaged those resentments by promoting a mythic ethnohistory

[10] Mexican-American War histories during this period often draw out these parallels, depicting the US as an aggressor. John H. Schroder, *Mr. Polk's War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1973); Jack K. Bauer, *The Mexican War, 1846-1848* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1974); David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973).

[11] George Lockhart Rives, *The United States and Mexico, 1821-1848, 2 Vols* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913); Justin Smith, *The War with Mexico*, *2 Vols* (New York: Macmillan, 1919). While Rives focuses much on Anglo-American diplomacy, Smith's detailed and nuanced understanding of the war (while ethnocentric) still make this work preeminent among Mexican-American War histories. For a paternal and expansive 'Yankee' take on New Spain and Mexican history see: Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Mexico, 6 Vols* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1883-1888).

[12] Michael P. Costeloe, "The Mexican Church and the Rebellion of the Polkos", in *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 46, no. 2 (May 1966): 170-178; Pedro Santoni: "A Fear of the People: The Civic Militia of Mexico in 1845", in *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 68, no. 2 (May 1988): 269-288; Justin Smith, "La Republica de Rio Grande", in *The American Historical Review* 25, no. 4 (July 1920): 660-675.

[13] Robert A. Potash, "Historiography of Mexico since 1821", in *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 40, no. 3 (Aug. 1960): 383-424. "The writing of history in Mexico since 1920 has inevitably reflected the influences of the Mexican Revolution and the political and social forces it unleashed. The revival of the Church-State conflict, the agrarian reform and the accompanying *indigenista* movement, the intensification of nationalism and the consequent difficulties with foreign countries, especially the United States, were all features of Mexican life which could not but obtrude into the writings of those who dealt with the national past in the 1920's and 1930's." Potash, however, writing in 1960, says that economic progress since that time allowed Mexican historians "greater detachment." (*Ibid.*, 391-2.)

with the *reconquista* of lost lands being the major theme. The historian David Weber addressed this phenomenon in 1992:

Chicano historians (like their Mexican counterparts) tended to identify themselves more closely with their Indian or mestizo ancestors than with Spaniards. Indeed, some of the most influential Chicano scholars adopted a long-range Indian perspective that reduced the three-century Spanish era to a relatively brief interlude. At the heart of that indigenous perspective was the powerful idea of a Chicano homeland called Aztlán.[14]

Although arguably more complicated due to its volatility during the *caudillo* period, Mexican historiography has glorified revolution without depicting its devastating social and political consequences.[15] Despite numerous accounts of America's first foreign war, there is a lack of a synthesized approach to a subject that deserves a complex analysis. To be fair, no side is perfect. Equally important is the virtually nonexistent literature on the Mexican-American War from the Spanish perspective. Embroiled in the Carlist Wars (1833-1876) for a generation after the French were ousted from Spain, Spanish historians have understandably overlooked Carlist participation in the Mexican War.[16]

The most nuanced perspective currently is a reassertion by various historians of the porous and ambiguous nature of the borderlands between empires in the nineteenth century. Historians such as Brian DeLay and Andrew Torget have contributed to recent understanding while keeping their distance from politically-loaded narratives with tainted histories.[17] These histories, a revival of the

[14] Weber, "The Spanish Legacy", 19. "Like the myth of Aztlán, which became a powerful symbol for the Chicano movement, provided a semblance of historical unity for the distinct historical experiences of *californios*, *arizonenses*, *nuevomexicanos*, and *tejanos*, but could not, of course, serve to unify all Hispanos in America in the twentieth century." (*Ibid*., 20). Spanish historians are thus uniquely positioned to illuminate Mexican history critically. Mexican historians for much of the (PRI) period used ideology and victimization by northern aggressors as a continual theme in its historiography. The Spanish have a keener and more objective approach in this sense, with an acute understanding of Mexican colonial institutions due to its historical connections.

[15] The *caudillo* (strongman) period of Mexican history, which witnessed fifty different governments in the thirty years after independence, is best epitomized by Santa Anna. Anna himself was president of Mexico on five separate occasions. Potash writes of the Mexican historiography: "The era from 1821 to 1855, which has long suffered the implicit neglect of excessive concentration on the single figure of Santa Anna, is at last undergoing a reexamination." Potash, "Historiography of Mexico since 1821," 406.

[16] For a look at Carlist motivations during the period see: Mario Etchechury-Barrera, "From settlers and foreign subjects to 'armed citizens.' Militarization and political loyalties of Spaniard residents in Montevideo, 1838-1845," in *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar* (RUHM), Vol. 4, No. 8 (2015), 119-142. American historians have not accounted for Carlist participation in the Mexican War.

[17] Brian DeLay, *The War of a Thousand Deserts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). Andrew J. Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2015).

approach by Walter Prescott Webb in his work, *The Great Plains* (1931), adhere to the perspective that geographically Texas represented a confluence and clash of not only Anglo-Saxon and Spanish-American civilizations – but of Native American as well. Written without the nationalist and ethnocentric vigor of Webb, these and other histories help illuminate the multi-faceted and multi-layered nature of the vast borderlands stretching from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific. They are, in sum, the progeny of Bolton's earlier rebellious deviations from Turner.[18]

Although the borderlands play an important role in the American war against Mexico, they do not connect the Spanish war against Napoleon with the Mexican-American War. Historians generally refrain from making predictions, but in the absence of a synthesized bi-directional Turnerian and Latin theoretical approach to a new comparative war history, a hypothetical approach may aid our understanding of the past. For example, if historians were writing the history of a second civil war in the United States which started in California after that state seceded from the Union, where would historians start? Would a guerrilla war in California have historic factors originating in Mexico or Spain, or both? How would historians make a proper accounting for such an event? Replace California with the large state of Texas (a separate republic for a decade) in another thought experiment and similar questions arise. Fortunately for the United States, that event has not occurred. However, if such a calamity had come to fruition, historians might point to Latin America as the source of such a history while buttressing that perspective with a confederate approach to constitutional construction. In that vein, California *secessionistas* would argue along lines as pro-slavery Southerners did to justify a Confederate exit from the Union.

Moving backwards through time, we recognize that Spanish royalists fought and won a bloody insurgency in New Spain for many years before finally acceding to demands for independence from the mother country. The series of wars which killed hundreds of thousands of Mexicans occurred at the same time the Spanish were fighting the First French Empire led by Napoleon. Whether or not one agrees the war against France was won because of the insurgency is a moot point. A nasty insurgency ensued in Spain which killed hundreds of thousands of civilians *is* the point. During the same period, an equally bloody civil war (rebellion, insurgency, guerrilla war; semantically it could be called any of these) occurred in New Spain which resulted in comparable death and destruction. The violent nature of that conflict is undeniable, yet, Mexican revisionist historians would have

[18] Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (New York: Ginn and Company, 1931). While Webb was Turnerian, he kept his focus mostly on Texas – iterating the three-civilization theory of Texas. See also: Webb, *The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1935).

their readers believe that Anglo-Saxons (beginning with the Texans) stole 'their' land. If we accept the historical reality of the insurgencies which roiled Spain and New Spain during the early nineteenth century – how do we accommodate this with the relatively peaceful nature of the American occupation of Mexico? If we are to believe the Mexicans were willing to fight an endless war to preserve their country – as the Mexican federalists (*Puros*) claimed they would – why was there not an insurgency comparable to the anti-royalist conflict that developed after conventional Mexican forces were defeated in 1847? The question raises an interesting contradiction between rhetoric and reality.

One of the factors rarely addressed is that people on both sides of the border anticipated the war. According to those observers the American march west was viewed as inevitable. One U.S. Senator advocating the annexation of all of Mexico even described it as "fixed as the laws of gravitation."[19] After the loss of Texas, Mexican politicians were thrust into an impossible situation. Their pride forced them to claim that *Tejas* was, and always would be part of Mexico, and that any attempt by the Americans to annex it to the United States would be considered a hostile act. The first curtain raised in that drama occurred in 1835 with the Texas rebellion. By 1845, Mexican opposition to the idea of an independent Texas, although resented, was at least reaching a level of acceptance among a segment of the realist crowd within Mexican circles.

However, the very combative nature of Mexican politics, which often resulted in coups, countercoups, and revolts, restricted any moderate-minded Mexican politician from even considering a peaceful solution. While many American historians have tended to overlook the imperialist tendencies of James K. Polk, it is equally important to remember that the Mexicans themselves made it nearly impossible to make peace. The last president who tried, José Herrera, was ousted from power months before the war broke out for even considering talking to Polk's envoy John Slidell. Thus, the Mexicans put themselves in the position where it became contemplatable for American imperialists to attempt the entire annexation of Mexico. *All or nothing* was a dangerous gamble by an incensed Mexican polity – and the result was almost nothing.

Conservative Mexicans believed other avenues offered remedies to stymie American encroachment. As mentioned, the royalist history of Mexico has generally been relegated by popular histories that focus on the insurgent freedom fighter struggling against the odds to liberate

[19] *Congressional Globe, 30th Congress*. Senator Daniel Dickinson (NY), Jan. 12, 1848, 158. Dickinson was a strong Polk ally in the Senate pushing for annexation.

the people from despotism. There is truth to this narrative, but it is seldom discussed that there was a large segment of the Mexican elite who believed in Mexico's historic connections with Spain and sought to reconstitute them as a buttress to American expansion. From the royalist point of view (personified in the intellectualism of Lucas Alamán[20]) Spanish reunification and alliance with Mexico would limit the encroaching Yankees – making them think twice before provoking a war of conquest. This alliance was supported by the higher echelons within the Catholic Church in Mexico, which was always sparring with liberal politicians to maintain its traditional power and influence. Therefore, to discount the royalist presence is tantamount to denying the influence of the Roman Catholic church in Mexico.[21] American diplomats, it should be noted, spent much of their correspondence during the pre- and post-war period describing the intricate relationships between the aristocracy, army, and church. There always existed a paranoia among American leadership (hence the Monroe Doctrine) that royalist proclivities in Mexico advocated by conservatives like Alamán would reconstitute themselves – making the push for empire at the expense of Mexico much more difficult.

Returning to the similarities between the War of Independence in Spain and the Mexican-American War, we realize that American intellectuals contemporary to the Mexican War were not without an acute understanding of the conflict in Spain between 1808 and 1814. In "The Image of Spain in American Literature, 1815-1865", the historian Miguel González-Gerth notes that eastern cities such as New York and Boston were "offshoots of English Metropolitanism," but it was the nineteenth century when "the United States was discovering Hispania."[22] He also cites the "variant American attitudes towards Spain in the Peninsula and Spain in the Americas" during the period, which derived from contemporary events:

To the average American's desire for romantic escape, and to the impact of English and Continental writing with Spanish overtones on writers and readers in the United States, there must

[20] Lucas Alamán, *Historia de Mexico con una noticia preliminar del sistema de gobierno que regia en 1808 y el estado en que se hallaba el país en el mismo año, 5 Vols* (1849) (Reprint: Mexico City: Victoriano Agüeros y Comp., Editores, 1884).
[21] Some Peninsular War historians relegate the importance of the Catholic Church in Spain and its influence on the insurgency and anti-French sentiment in Spanish society. See: Charles Esdaile, *The Peninsular War: A New History* (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2003). Although he does recognize the guerrilla war, Esdaile portrays the British as the reason for Napoleon's defeat in Spain. For an interesting read on conservative Mexican views of the French Revolution along Spanish lines see: Carlos Herrejon Peredo, "La revolucion francesa en sermones y otros testimonios de Mexico, 1791-1823", in *Colegio de Mexico*, Mexico, (1991): 97-110.
[22] Miguel González-Gerth, "The Image of Spain in American Literature, 1815-1865", in *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 4, no. 2 (Apr. 1962), 257.

be added a third element, one of political and economic nature current at the time, that of the Spanish-American struggle of independence (1810-1824), as well as that of the French occupation of Spain (1808-1813).[23]

Indeed, it is no surprise that Americans looked to the Napoleonic Wars in Europe and particularly the War of Independence in Spain when examining the looming war with Mexico. The understanding of what transpired the previous generation is also apparent in Prescott's comment that "official returns of the old Castilian crusaders, whether in the Old World or the New, are scarcely more trustworthy than a French *imperial* bulletin in our day."[24] Intellectuals wrote with this background in mind. In other words, although the country continued to look west, the spirit of the age leaned intellectually to Europe and its history.

The historian Robert W. Johannsen, in his work, *To the Halls of the Montezumas* (1985), was the first modern author to draw thematic parallels between the two wars. Pioneering because it avoided exclusively covering military aspects of the war, Johannsen did a remarkable job at illustrating the romantic zeitgeist existing in mid-nineteenth-century America and the portrayal of the Yankee adventure in Mexico along epic lines akin to that of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe. Johannsen wrote that it was "Napoleon who aroused the midcentury's romantic imagination." Themes such as patriotic virtue, heroism, republicanism, and chivalry, all played important roles in a foreign war which writers such as Prescott compared to medieval knights of legend, Napoleon, and other epic historical figures. Johannsen commented on the literature of that era:

English historians like Archibald Alison, Charles Willian Vane, and W.F.P Napier (the "Thucydides of Modern Times") found ready audiences in the United States for their accounts of the campaigns against Napoleon. Long excerpts from their books were reprinted in the press, and Vane's and Napier's works were published in new American editions during the Mexican War. Drawing an implicit analogy between the Peninsular War and the war with Mexico… The analogy was not uncommon. The *Literary World* printed extracts from a mother's letter to her son who had departed for Mexico, warning the younger volunteer that "there is good Spanish blood in parts of Mexico, and Spaniards are not cowards, as the Peninsular war will testify." More often Mexicans were

[23] *Ibid*., 259. González-Gerth claims "1815 is highly significant in the history of American literature, particularly where it concerns Spanish culture." (*Ibid*., 257) Some of the more influential works during the period include Washington Irving's *Life of Columbus* (1829), *A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada* (1829), and *Alhambra* (1832).
[24] Prescott, 232.

upbraided for not coming up to the standard set by their brethren in Spain. If they had, "the whole scene would be a wonderful representation of the peninsula in 1809."[25]

Thankfully for American soldiers and Mexican civilians the war was not a 'wonderful representation' of the war Spain. But the idea existed – as it was one of the most apropos historical comparisons within living memory – that the wars were similar in many ways. The popularity of Napier's *History of the War in the Peninsula* during the Mexican conflict offered perspective to the American one. Joel Tyler Headley, another popular writer of the era, even dedicated his work *Napoleon and His Marshals* (1846) to General Winfield Scott a year before the U.S. Army landed on the beaches of Veracruz. Whether or not Headley anticipated the war is speculation, but its popularity (i.e. commercial success) inspired other writers to follow suit.[26]

However, military comparisons between the two wars are rare. The contemporary military historian Timothy D. Johnson was among the first to call for such a comparison by pointing out the influence of French military thinking on General Winfield Scott and the effective pacification policies of the occupation army.[27] Other historians, drawing important lines of inquiry between early nineteenth-century French military organization (and tactics) and the American military, have skirted direct connections between the wars.[28] Johnson and Johannsen in this regard were among the first to claim that Scott had learned from French mistakes in Spain and applied those lessons to Mexico successfully. Nevertheless, most accounts of the war by U.S. historians tend to portray the American effort in a two-dimensional light without taking the multifaceted complexities

[25] Robert A. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 75-76; Sir Archibald Anderson (1792-1867), *History of Europe from the Commencement of the French Revolution in 1789 to the Restoration of the Bourbons in 1815, 10 vol.* (1833-1843); Charles William Vane (1778-1854), *Narrative of the Peninsular War* (1828); Willian Francis Patrick Napier (1785-1860), *History of the War in the Peninsula and the South of France, from the Year 1807 to the Year 1814, 6 vol.* (1828-40).

[26] Johannsen, 75. Johannsen notes that Headley's popularity provoked "inspired imitators" such as the anonymous *Napoleon: His Army and His Generals* (1847) Rufus Wilmot Griswold's *Napoleon and the Marshals of the Empire* (1848). (*Ibid.*)

[27] Timothy D. Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998); Johnson, *A Gallant Little Army: The Mexico City Campaign* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007). To be fair, even though Johannsen did not focus on the military aspects of the war, he drew some important parallels outlined by James Pohl (footnote 24) apropos to the comparative war history such as Jomini's influence on Scott. (Johannsen, 75).

[28] James W. Pohl, "The Influence of Antoine Henri de Jomini on Winfield Scott's Campaign in the Mexican War", in *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 77, No. 1 (July 1973): 85-110; Michael A. Bonura, *Under the Shadow of Napoleon: French Influence on the American Way of Warfare from Independence to the Eve of World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Jochen S. Arndt, "The True Napoleon of the West: General Winfield Scott's Mexico City Campaign and the Origins of the U.S. Army's Combined-Arms Combat Division", in *The Journal of Military History* 76, no. 3 (July 2012): 649-671. Pohl also compared the guerrilla war in Vietnam with the American Revolution: Pohl, "The American Revolution and the Vietnamese War: Pertinent Military Analogies", in *The History Teacher* 7, no. 2 (Feb. 1974): 255-265.

inherent in Mexico into account.[29] Equally dismissed are the machinations of the U.S. annexationists (All Mexico Movement) and their desire to incorporate the entirety of Mexico into a reconfigured American military empire modeled along Napoleonic lines.[30]

European and American historians are beginning to reinterpret the history of the United States during the mid-nineteenth century in interesting ways. Some of these interpretations have roots in the older imperial school histories and could thus be labeled *neo-imperial* in their outlook.[31] The constant interaction between Europe and the Americas during this period is seminal in this perspective. Although it was Europe acting as the change-agent to the Americas in its nascent post-1492 stage of development, as the Americas became more populated change became reciprocal. In other words, the interaction resulted in a political 'Columbian Exchange.' Even a cursory look at American reaction to the European revolutions of 1848 at the end of the Mexican War show an intrinsic interest in the political manifestations of the Old World – impossible to overlook due to the many intimate connections existing between millions of American immigrants and their native European countries.

This thesis referred to in this essay is the first to link the Spanish War of Independence and the Mexican-American War. For this reason, it is neither part of the Bolton borderlands approach (although certainly related) nor Turnerian. Militarily there is a large amount of material from which to draw new and interesting lines of inquiry.[32] Special attention is devoted to guerrilla warfare –

[29] For a groundbreaking contextual examination of the Mexican guerrilla war pertinent to this thesis see: Irving W. Levinson, *Wars within War: Mexican Guerrillas, Domestic Elites, and the United States of American, 1846-1848* (Fort Worth: TCU Press, 2005). Levinson's work, while addressing conventional military victories, takes into account domestic Mexican political turbulence, the strategic importance of the American supply lines between Veracruz and Mexico City during the occupation, and the Mexican guerrillas attempts to disrupt essential American supply corridors.

[30] John Douglas Pitts Fuller, *The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico, 1846-1848* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1936). Richard R. Stenberg, "The Failure of Polk's Mexican War Intrigue", in *Pacific Historical Review* 4, no. 1 (March 1935): 39-68; and Stenberg, "Polk and Frémont, 1845-1846", in *Pacific Historical Review* 7, no. 3 (Sept. 1938): 211-227. Stenberg refutes G.L. Rives and J.H. Smith's "peaceable Polk" position.

[31] Sam W. Haynes, and Gerald D. Saxon, *Contested Empire: Rethinking the Texas Revolution* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2015). Some of the first objective narratives of the Mexican sides of things are: Cecil Robinson, *The View From Chapultepec: Mexican Writers on the Mexican War* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989); Pedro Santoni, *Mexicans at Arms: Puro Federalists and the Politics of War, 1845-1848* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1996); Timothy J. Henderson, *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and Its war with the United States* (New York: New Hill and Wang, 2007).

[32] A comparative war history from a female perspective could be done here, as similarities often reappear. See: Irene Castells and Gloria Espigado, *Heroínas y patriotas Mujeres de 1808* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2009). See also: Barton C. Hacker, "Women and Military Institutions in Early Modern Europe: A Reconnaissance", in *Signs* 6, no. 4, (Summer 1981): 643-671. Hacker writes "In general, the vast literature on revolutionary and guerrilla warfare largely ignores women."; "The Dutch Wars of Independence against Spain, the English Civil War, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Spanish War of independence against France, all furnish instances of women fighting alongside men in the

which gained international recognition in the hills and plains of Spain during the Napoleonic Wars. That is the focus, albeit there are other important non-military factors that need to be addressed to answer the question: Why was the American occupation of Mexico successful? Historiographically and geographically the Spanish are in a prime position to add to the narrative where the British perspective ceases to be applicable – west of the Mississippi River in the Viceroyalty of New Spain.

To be sure, Anglo-Saxonism will remain a crucial perspective in future histories of North America – particularly where a strong Great Britain asserted its commercial and political interests in the hemisphere (often at the expense of the Spanish) following American independence. It could also be argued that the centralist-spirit of Napoleon lives on in the American empire today. Tocqueville would agree with that sentiment. However, it is the Spanish that can add the most in illuminating a bidirectional history of American empire informed more by Don Quixote than John Bull – especially in the vast expanses of the west where tea time is less common than tequila. Traces of the French empire in North America may be relegated to certain areas in Canada and communities such as New Orleans, but it is the Spanish who are ascendant. Indeed, *Nueva España* and Mexico are part of North America. Were they ever not? To maintain relevance American historians will need to synthesize more material from the south in a bidirectional interpretation of American history – as Herbert Bolton originally advocated but without a theory, because theories do not apply to sagas written by Spanish-speaking Vikings or English-speaking Aztecs. In other words, it is Frederick Jackson Turner meets William H. Prescott, and all the romantic ugliness and disorder that that encounter entails.

Bibliography

Alamán, Lucas. *Historia de Mexico con una noticia preliminar del sistema de gobierno que regia en 1808 y el estado en que se hallaba el país en el mismo año, 5 Vols* (1849), Reprint: Mexico: Victoriano Agüeros y Comp., Editores, 1884.

Arndt, Jochen S. "The True Napoleon of the West: General Winfield Scott's Mexico City Campaign and the Origins of the U.S. Army's Combined-Arms Combat Division", in *The Journal of Military History* 76, no. 3 (July 2012): 649-671.

Bancroft, Hubert Howe. *History of Mexico, 6 Vols.* San Francisco: The History Company, 1883-1888.

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as do any number of similar conflicts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (Hacker, 658)

Bannon, John Francis. *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1970.

Bauer, Jack K. *The Mexican War, 1846-1848*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1974.

Billington, Ray Allen. *Western Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*. New York: Macmillan, 1949.

Bolton, Herbert E. *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronical of Old Florida and the Southwest*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921.

_____. "The Epic of Greater America", in *The American Historical Review*, No. 38 (April 1933): 448-477.

_____. *Texas in the Middle Eighteenth Century: Studies in Spanish Colonial History and Administration*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1915.

Bonura, Michael A. *Under the Shadow of Napoleon: French Influence on the American Way of Warfare from Independence to the Eve of World War II*. New York: New York University Press, 2012.

Boorstin, Daniel. *The Americans: The National Experience*. New York: Random House, 1965.

Castells, Irene, and Espigado, Gloria. *Heroínas y patriotas Mujeres de 1808*. Madrid: Cátedra, 2009.

Congressional Globe, Library of Congress (LOC), 21st- 30th Congress, Washington DC, 1829-1849.

Costeloe, Michael P. "The Mexican Church and the Rebellion of the Polkos", in *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 46, no. 2 (May 1966): 170-178.

DeLay, Brian. *The War of a Thousand Deserts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

Esdaile, Charles. *The Peninsular War: A New History*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Etchechury-Barrera, Mario. "From settlers and foreign subjects to 'armed citizens.' Militarization and political loyalties of Spaniard residents in Montevideo, 1838-1845." *Revista Universitaria de Historia Militar* (RUHM), Vol. 4, No. 8 (2015), 119-142.

Fradera, Josep M. *The Imperial Nation: Citizens and Subjects in the British, French, Spanish, and American Empires.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018.

Fuller, John Douglas Pitts. *The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico, 1846-1848*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1936.

González-Gerth, Miguel. "The Image of Spain in American Literature, 1815-1865", in *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 4, no. 2 (Apr. 1962): 257-272.

Hacker, Barton C. "Women and Military Institutions in Early Modern Europe: A Reconnaissance", in *Signs* 6, no. 4, (Summer 1981): 643-671.

Haring, Henry Clarence. *The Spanish Empire in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1947.

Haynes, Sam W, and Saxon, Gerald D: *Contested Empire: Rethinking the Texas Revolution*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2015.
Henderson, Timothy J. *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and Its war with the United States*. New York: New Hill and Wang, 2007.

Hurtado, Albert L. "Bolton and Turner: The Borderlands and American Exceptionalism", in *The Western Historical Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2013): 4-20.

Johannsen, Robert A. *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Johnson, Timothy D. *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998.

_____. *A Gallant Little Army: The Mexico City Campaign*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007.

Levinson, Irving W. *Wars within War: Mexican Guerrillas, Domestic Elites, and the United States of American, 1846-1848*. Fort Worth: TCU Press, 2005.
Merk, Frederick. *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History*. New York: Knopf, 1963.

Mann, Charles C. *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2005.
May, Robert E. *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
Morrison, Michael A. *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
Peredo, Carlos Herrejon. "La revolucion francesa en sermones y otros testimonios de Mexico, 1791-1823", in *Colegio de Mexico*, Mexico, (1991): 97-110.

Pletcher, David M. *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973.

Pohl, James W. "The Influence of Antoine Henri de Jomini on Winfield Scott's Campaign in the Mexican War", in *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (July 1973): 85-110.

_____. "The American Revolution and the Vietnamese War: Pertinent Military Analogies", in *The History Teacher* 7, no. 2 (Feb. 1974): 255-265.

Potash, Robert A. "Historiography of Mexico since 1821", in *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 40, no. 3 (Aug. 1960): 383-424.

Prescott, William H. *The History of the Conquest of Mexico*. New York: The Modern Library, 1843.

Rives, George Lockhart. *The United States and Mexico, 1821-1848, 2 Vols*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913.

Robinson, Cecil. *The View From Chapultepec: Mexican Writers on the Mexican War*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989.

Santoni, Pedro. "A Fear of the People: The Civic Militia of Mexico in 1845", in *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 68, no. 2 (May 1988): 269-288.

_____. *Mexicans at Arms: Puro Federalists and the Politics of War, 1845-1848*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1996.

Schmidt-Nowara, Christopher. "The Broken Image: The Spanish Empire in the United States after 1898," in *Endless Empire: Spain's Retreat, Europe's Eclipse, America's Decline* (Alfred W. McCoy, Josep M. Fradera, Stephen Jacobson, ed.) University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 2012, 160-166.

Schroder, John H. *Mr. Polk's War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1973.

Smith, Justin. *The War with Mexico, 2 Vols*. New York: Macmillan, 1919.

_____. "La Republica de Rio Grande." *The American Historical Review* 25, No. 4 (July 1920): 660-675.

Stenberg, Richard R. "The Failure of Polk's Mexican War Intrigue", in *Pacific Historical Review* 4, No. 1 (March 1935): 39-68.

_____. "Polk and Frémont, 1845-1846", in *Pacific Historical Review* 7, No. 3 (Sept. 1938): 211-227.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America, 2 Vols*. Reprint: New York: J. & H.G. Langley, 1841.

Torget, Andrew J. *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

Turner, Frederick Jackson. "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." Madison: *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, 1893.

U.S. Congress. Congressional Globe (Globe). 21st Congress.- 30th Congress. Washington D.C., 1829-1849.

Webb, Walter Prescott. *The Great Plains*. New York: Ginn and Company, 1931.

_____. *The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1935.

Weber, David J. *The Spanish Frontier in North America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

_____. *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982.

_____. "The Spanish Legacy and the American Imagination", in *The Western Historical Quarterly* 23, No. 1 (Feb. 1992): 5-24.