

## PART TWO

# The Documents

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JOHN L. O'SULLIVAN

*Annexation*

*July–August 1845*

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*As editor of the New York Morning News and the United States Democratic Review, John L. O'Sullivan first alluded to the notion of manifest destiny in 1844. It was not until the debate over the annexation of Texas a year later that he actually coined the phrase and fully articulated it as a justification for expansionism. The term gained a life of its own when U.S. representative Robert Winthrop of Massachusetts mocked it in Congress and inadvertently introduced the phrase to a larger audience, which then used it as a rationale for the war with Mexico.*

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It is time now for opposition to the Annexation of Texas to cease, all further agitation of the waters of bitterness and strife, at least in connexion with this question,—even though it may perhaps be required of us as a necessary condition of the freedom of our institutions, that

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From John L. O'Sullivan, "Annexation," *United States Democratic Review*, July–August 1845, 5.

we must live on for ever in a state of unpausing struggle and excitement upon some subject of party division or other. But, in regard to Texas, enough has now been given to Party. It is time for the common duty of Patriotism to the Country to succeed;—or if this claim will not be recognized, it is at least time for common sense to acquiesce with decent grace in the inevitable and the irrevocable.

Texas is now ours. Already, before these words are written, her Convention has undoubtedly ratified the acceptance, by her Congress, of our proffered invitation into the Union; and made the requisite changes in her already republican form of constitution to adopt it to its future federal relations. Her star and her stripe may already be said to have taken their place in the glorious blazon<sup>1</sup> of our common nationality; and the sweep of our eagle's wing already includes within its circuit the wide extent of her fair and fertile land. She is no longer to us a mere geographical space—a certain combination of coast, plain, mountain, valley, forest and stream. She is no longer to us a mere country on the map. She comes within the dear and sacred designation of Our Country; no longer a “*pays*,” she is a part of “*la patrie*,” and that which is at once a sentiment and a virtue, Patriotism, already begins to thrill for her too within the national heart. It is time then that all should cease to treat her as alien, and even adverse—cease to denounce and vilify all and everything connected with her accession—cease to thwart and oppose the remaining steps for its consummation; or where such efforts are felt to be unavailing, at least to embitter the hour of reception by all the most ungracious frowns of aversion and words of unwelcome. There has been enough of all this. It has had its fitting day during the period when, in common with every other possible question of practical policy that can arise, it unfortunately became one of the leading topics of party division, of presidential electioneering. But that period has passed, and with it let its prejudices and its passions, its discords and its denunciations, pass away too. The next session of Congress will see the representatives of the new young State in their places in both our halls of national legislation, side by side with those of the old Thirteen. Let their reception into “the family” be frank, kindly, and cheerful, as befits such an occasion, as comports not less with our own self-respect than patriotic duty towards them. Ill betide those foul birds that delight to [de]file their own nest, and disgust the ear with perpetual discord of ill-omened croak.

<sup>1</sup>blazon: A coat of arms or flag.

Why, were other reasoning wanting, in favor of now elevating this question of the reception of Texas into the Union, out of the lower region of our past party dissensions, up to its proper level of a high and broad nationality, it surely is to be found, found abundantly, in the manner in which other nations have undertaken to intrude themselves into it, between us and the proper parties to the case, in a spirit of hostile interference against us, for the avowed object of thwarting our policy and hampering our power, limiting our greatness and checking the fulfilment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.

## 2

## U.S. CONGRESS

*Naturalization Act*

March 26, 1790

*Enacted by the First Congress, this act established the guidelines for aliens seeking to become naturalized citizens of the United States. It made whiteness mandatory for full American citizenship and set a precedent for incorporating foreigners into the American Republic.*

SECTION 1. *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That any alien, being a free white person, who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for the term of two years, may be admitted to become a citizen thereof, on application to any common law court of record, in any one of the states wherein he shall have resided for the term of one year at least, and making proof to the satisfaction of such court, that he is a person of good character, and taking the oath or affirmation prescribed by law, to support the*

From Richard Peters, ed., *Public Statutes at Large of the United States of America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1853), 1:103–04.

We hope that similar meetings to that held here, will be held all over the country, and if other cities and towns utter such sentiments as those expressed at the meeting in New York, the death knell of political pettifoggery<sup>2</sup> will be rung, and the glory and honor of the country be sustained and vindicated.

<sup>2</sup>*pettifoggery*: Petty, shifty, or unethical practice.

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WALT WHITMAN

*War with Mexico*

May 11, 1846

*As editor of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, the poet and journalist Walt Whitman published several editorials supporting the war with Mexico. Although most of Whitman's pieces had a confrontational tone, they became less zealous as the conflict wore on. By January 1847, he believed that Mexico had been punished enough and appealed for an end to the war. Notice Whitman's racialized views of Mexicans.*

Yes: Mexico must be thoroughly chastised!—We have reached a point in our intercourse with that country, when prompt and effectual demonstrations of force are enjoined upon us by every dictate of right and policy. The news of yesterday has added the last argument wanted to prove the necessity of an immediate Declaration of War by our government toward its southern neighbor.

We are justified in the face of the world, in having treated Mexico with more forbearance than we have ever yet treated an enemy—for Mexico, though contemptible in many respects, is an enemy deserving

From Walt Whitman, *The Gathering of the Forces: Editorials, Essays, Literary and Dramatic Reviews and Other Material Written by Walt Whitman as Editor of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle in 1846 and 1847*, ed. Cleveland Rodgers and John Black (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), 240–42, 246–47.

ing a vigorous "lesson." We have coaxed, excused, listened with deaf ears to the insolent gasconade<sup>1</sup> of her government, submitted thus far to a most offensive rejection of an Ambassador personifying the American nation, and waited for years without payment of the claims of our injured merchants. We have sought peace through every avenue, and shut our eyes to many things, which had they come from England or France, the President would not have dared to pass over without stern and speedy resentment. We have dammed up our memory, of what has passed in the South years ago—of the devilish massacres of some of our bravest and noblest sons, the children not of the South alone, but of the North and West—massacres, not only in defiance of ordinary humanity, but in violation of all the rules of war. Who has read the sickening story of those brutal wholesale murders, so useless for any purpose except gratifying the cowardly appetite of a nation of bravos,<sup>2</sup> willing to shoot down men by the hundred in cold blood—without panting for the day when the prayer of that blood should be listened to—when the vengeance of a retributive God should be meted out to those who so ruthlessly and needlessly slaughtered His image?

That day has arrived. We think there can be no doubt of the truth of yesterday's news; and we are sure the people here, ten to one, are for prompt and effectual hostilities. Tame newspaper comments, such as appear in the leading Democratic print of today, in New York, and the contemptible anti-patriotic criticism of its contemporary Whig organ, do *not* express the sentiments and wishes of the people. Let our arms now be carried with a spirit which shall teach the world that, while we are not forward for a quarrel, America knows how to crush, as well as how to expand!

<sup>1</sup>*gasconade*: Extravagant boasting.

<sup>2</sup>*bravos*: Daring bandits or assassins.

kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it. . . .

How does it become a man to behave toward this American government today? I answer, that he cannot without disgrace be associated with it. I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as *my* government which is the *slave's* government also. . . .

Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison. The proper place today, the only place which Massachusetts has provided for her freer and less desponding spirits, is in her prisons, to be put out and locked out of the State by her own act, as they have already put themselves out by their principles. It is there that the fugitive slave, and the Mexican prisoner on parole, and the Indian come to plead the wrongs of his race should find them; on that separate, but more free and honorable, ground, where the State places those who are not *with* her, but *against* her—the only house in a slave State in which a free man can abide with honor. . . .

If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood.

This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible. If the tax-gatherer, or any other public officer, asks me, as one has done, "But what shall I do?" my answer is, "If you really wish to do anything, resign your office." When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished. But even suppose blood should flow. Is there not a sort of blood shed when the conscience is wounded? Through this wound a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death. I see this blood flowing now.

## HENRY DAVID THOREAU

*On Civil Disobedience*

1848

*As a protest against the war with Mexico, the famous writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau refused to pay his taxes in July 1846. Two years later, he published the essay "Resistance to Civil Government," originally a lecture, which appeared posthumously with the title "On Civil Disobedience." The piece inspired civil disobedience both in the United States and abroad and continues to serve as an inspiration to those who seek peaceful resistance to government policies.*

I heartily accept the motto, "That government is best which governs least"; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe—"That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it. Witness the present Mexican war, the work of comparatively a few individuals using the standing government as their tool; for, in the outset, the people would not have consented to this measure. . . .

But, to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but *at once* a better government. Let every man make known what

From Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, ed. Paul Lauter (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 17–18, 20.

“Jesu, pity! how it thickens! now retreat and now advance!  
 Right against the blazing cannon shivers Puebla’s<sup>3</sup> charging lance!  
 Down they go, the brave young riders; horse and foot together fall;  
 Like a plowshare in the fallow, through them plow the Northern ball.”

Nearer came the storm and nearer, rolling fast and frightful on:  
 Speak, Ximena, speak and tell us, who has lost, and who has won?  
 “Alas! alas! I know not; friend and foe together fall,  
 O’er the dying rush the living: pray, my sisters, for them all!”

“Lo! the wind the smoke is lifting: Blessed Mother,<sup>4</sup> save my brain!  
 I can see the wounded crawling slowly out from heaps of slain.  
 Now they stagger, blind and bleeding; now they fall, and strive to rise;  
 Hasten, sisters, haste and save them, lest they die before our eyes!”

<sup>3</sup>*Puebla*: A city and state in the central east portion of Mexico.

<sup>4</sup>*Blessed Mother*: The Virgin Mary.

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JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

*The Biglow Papers*

1846

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*James Russell Lowell, a twenty-seven-year-old Boston poet, literary critic, and abolitionist, wrote what became known as The Biglow Papers to protest Massachusetts governor George Briggs’s call for volunteers following the declaration of war against Mexico. The poems in this collection were written in a New England dialect to depict fictional character Hosea Biglow’s views on the conflict.*

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Thrash away, you’ll hev to rattle  
 On them kittle drums o’ yourn,—  
 ’Taint a knowin’ kind o’ cattle  
 Thet is ketched with mouldy corn;

Put in stiff, you fifer feller,  
 Let folks see how spry you be,—  
 Guess you'll toot till you are yell'er  
 'Fore you git ahold o' me!

Thet air flag's a leetle rotten,  
 Hope it aint your Sunday's best;—  
 Fact! it takes a sight o' cotton  
 To stuff out a soger's<sup>1</sup> chest:  
 Sence we farmers hev to pay fer 't,  
 Ef you must wear humps like these,  
 Sposin' you should try salt hay fer 't,  
 It would du ez slick ez grease.

'T would n't suit them Southun fellers,  
 They're a drefle graspin' set,  
 We must ollers blow the bellers  
 Wen they want their irons het;  
 May be it's all right ez preachin',  
 But *my* narves it kind o' grates,  
 Wen I see the overreachin'  
 O' them nigger-driving' States.

Them thet rule us, them slave-traders,  
 Haint they cut a thunderin' swarth,  
 (Helped by Yankee renegaders,  
 Thru the vartu o' the North!  
 We begin to think it's nater  
 To take sarse an' not be riled;—  
 Who'd expect to see a tater  
 All on eend at bein' biled?)

Ez fer war, I call it murder;—  
 There you hev it plain an' flat,  
 I don't want to go no furd'er  
 Than my Testyment fer that;  
 God hez sed so plump an' fairly,  
 It's ez long ez it is broad,  
 An' you've gut to git up airly  
 Ef you want to take in God.

<sup>1</sup> *soger's*: Soldier's.

'Taint your eppyletts an' feathers  
 Make the thing a grain more right;  
 'Taint afoleerin' your bell-wethers  
 Will excuse ye in His sight;  
 Ef you take a sword an' dror it,  
 An' go stick a feller thru,  
 Guv'ment aint to answer for it,  
 God'll send the bill to you.

Wut's the use o' meetin'-goin'  
 Every Sabbath, wet or dry,  
 Ef it's right to go amowin'  
 Feller-men like oats an' rye?  
 I dunno but wut it's pooty  
 Trainin' round in bobtail coats,—  
 But it's currus Christian dooty  
 This ere cuttin' folks's throats.

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

Aint it cute to see a Yankee  
 Take sech everlastin' pains,  
 All to git the Devil's thankee,  
 Helpin' on 'em weld their chains?  
 Wy, it's jest ez clear ez figgers,  
 Clear ez one an' one make two,  
 Chaps that make black slaves o' niggers  
 Want to make wite slaves o' you.

Most of the convents of monks and friars were converted into quarters and hospitals, and groups of volunteers, with six-barrelled pistols and large hunting knives in their belts, traversed the city, and filled the drinking shops and cafés. The regular troops were dressed in blue, but the volunteers and the multitude of adventurers who came with the army went about with their boots over their pantaloons, and with ridiculous hats and garments, so that they looked like clowns at a carnival.

... Among the regular officers, particularly the artillery and engineers, some young men of education and study might be recognised; but the officers of volunteers in general had the same rough manners as the soldiers, whom they treated with a familiarity far from conducive to good discipline. Every observing man wondered how those bands of vicious volunteers, without discipline, without subordination, and without experience in the management of arms, or knowledge of tactics, could have conquered our battalions, who were so well trained, instructed, obedient, patient, and, to say still more, so valiant.

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JOHN C. CALHOUN

*Speech on the War with Mexico**January 4, 1848*

*John C. Calhoun was a member of the Democratic Party, former vice president, and U.S. Senator from South Carolina when he delivered this speech on January 4, 1848, during the "All Mexico Movement" debate. In it, he expressed his concern about the acquisition of more Mexican territory. Note Calhoun's reasons for opposing the Republic's territorial expansion.*

From Clyde Wilson and Shirley Bright Cook, eds., *Papers of John C. Calhoun* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 25:64–65, 68–69.

The next reason which my resolutions assign, is, that it is without example or precedent, either to hold Mexico as a province, or to incorporate her into our Union. No example of such a line of policy can be found. We have conquered many of the neighboring tribes of Indians, but we never thought of holding them in subjection—never of incorporating them into our Union. They have either been left as an independent people amongst us, or been driven into the forests.

I know further, sir, that we have never dreamt of incorporating into our Union any but the Caucasian race—the free white race. To incorporate Mexico, would be the very first instance of the kind of incorporating an Indian race; for more than half of the Mexicans are Indians, and the other is composed chiefly of mixed tribes. I protest against such a union as that! Ours, sir, is the Government of a white race. The greatest misfortunes of Spanish America are to be traced to the fatal error of placing these colored races on an equality with the white race. That error destroyed the social arrangement which formed the basis of society. The Portuguese [in Brazil] and ourselves have escaped—the Portuguese at least to some extent—and we are the only people on this continent which have made revolutions without being followed by anarchy. And yet it is professed and talked about to erect these Mexicans into a Territorial Government, and place them on an equality with the people of the United States. I protest utterly against such a project.

Sir, it is a remarkable fact, that in the whole history of man, as far as my knowledge extends, there is no instance whatever of any civilized colored races being found equal to the establishment of free popular government, although by far the largest portion of the human family is composed of these races. And even in the savage state we scarcely find them any where with such government, except it be our noble savages—for noble I will call them. They, for the most part, had free institutions, but they are easily sustained amongst a savage people. Are we to overlook this fact? Are we to associate with ourselves as equals, companions, and fellow-citizens, the Indians and mixed race of Mexico? Sir, I should consider such a thing as fatal to our institutions.

The next two reasons which I assigned, were that it would be in conflict with the genius and character of our institutions, and subversive of our free government. I take these two together, as they are so intimately connected; and now of the first—to hold Mexico in subjection. . . .