Opposition to the Mexican-American War: The Soldiers, the Politicians, Michigan, and the Future Republican Party

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Abstract
On May 13, 1846, the United States of America declared war on the United Mexican States. In response to this declaration, the individual states mustered volunteer regiments and deployed the Regular Army to fight for the Stars and Stripes. Though the war was popular, it did have its detractors-political opposition, religious opposition, and the like, all of which will be thoroughly examined. Furthermore, what did the soldiers sent to war think of the fight in Mexico? This paper’s driving theses is threefold. First, what did the soldiers think of the war and why? Second why did the politicians that oppose the war do so? Thirdly, who in Michigan opposed the wary, why, and did those same people eventually joint the burgeoning Republican Party, a branch of which formed in the same state less than a decade after the end of the Mexican-American War.

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OPPOSITION TO THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR
THE SOLDIERS, THE POLITICIANS, MICHIGAN,
AND THE FUTURE REPUBLICAN PARTY

By

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Thesis and Military Opposition

On May 13, 1846, the United States of America declared war on the United Mexican States. In response to this declaration, the individual states mustered volunteer regiments and deployed the Regular Army to fight for the Stars and Stripes. Though the war was popular, it did have its detractors—political opposition, religious opposition, and the like, all of which will be thoroughly examined. Furthermore, what did the soldiers sent to war think of the fight in Mexico? This paper’s driving thesis is threefold. First, what did the soldiers think of the war and why? Second why did the politicians that oppose the war do so? Thirdly, who in Michigan opposed the war, why, and did those same people eventually join the burgeoning Republican Party, a branch of which formed in the same state less than a decade after the end of the Mexican-American War.

The official cause of the war was both the American annexation of the Republic of Texas, and the border dispute between Mexico and the new state over whether the national border was the Rio Grande River or Nueces River; Texas claimed the Rio Grande, Mexico the Nueces. After the Mexican Army fired upon American soldiers sent into the area by the President, President James K. Polk asked for and received a declaration of war from Congress. The two years of fighting that followed was a valiant but ineffective defensive war for Mexico, after which large chunks of their nation became American territory. The cause and reasons for the war were not that simple, however.

Michigan provided volunteer forces for the war, heeding a second call for troops in 1847.¹ These troops never saw combat, as by the time they arrived Mexico City had all ready been captured.² With so little time spent in Mexico, these soldiers lacked the chance to form an opinion on the war. Some formed the opinion of not wanting to be in
the Army, as over a tenth of the unit deserted. Other soldiers fighting in Mexico longer
did write letters and journals, however. One soldier, a volunteer Colonel from Ohio
named Samuel Ryan Curtis, wrote of the soldier’s arrival by sea to Mexico:

It (Brazos Island landing) is the principal landing, where all poor suffering mortals traveling to post
themselves in Gen. Taylor’s army have to stop. Every vessel exhibits the same picture. A large crowd
of men in dirty underclothes, pale and haggard from several days sea sickness and Bilious remittent
rush on shore where they hope to find some trifling accommodations. But alas! They find a mixture
of Mexicans, officers, mules, wagons, and sailors all and each paying no attention to them. No shelter
for the sick No house or covering they are permitted even to shelter themselves for a few moments.

Clearly, the journey by sea to Mexico was unpleasant and did not put someone in
the mind of writing positively. Col. Curtis wrote earlier of some volunteer’s regrets in
regard to the decision of signing up. Most volunteers from the Midwest were farmers
and unused to travel, so seasickness and homesickness was understandable. And, as
referred to in regards to Michigan’s volunteers, some men did desert. Nonetheless, Col.
Curtis continues to write negatively, this time on the desolate land of Mexico itself:

This sandy desolate place appearing to me like the poorest specimen of earth in North America. The
sun has been intensely hot to day. I was weighed and I draw 179 lbs. a falling off of some 11 lbs.
since I left home. The sand dunes fly like snow and covers everything. It is very unpleasant at night.
Hay! What is that cantering over my “sandy floor.” Down on him stuck him with a sword point!
Ah, it is a crab... Ah kind of saline grass growing in shocks and a kind of springy sea plant like
clover bearing very pretty yellow flora is the only variety of growth. The rest is all sand sand! Sand

Complaining about a war and complaining about the land where one is fighting
are two different issues, however. Col. Curtis does not state an opinion on the war one
way or another, but his comments are possibly the result of dissatisfaction with his
present situation. One such incidence is his comments regarding the Mexican’s lands
staying in the private hands of the “peaceable” Mexican citizens during the occupation of
Matamoros. Because all the citizens claimed to be peaceable, the regiment’s
 quartermaster took the order to heart and took no land. In this case, his dislike is in the
way the law “is kind” to the Mexicans while the American occupiers and emigrating
civilians, seeking to take advantage of the war for profit, suffer.
Preferring your fellow countrymen rather than foreigners is far from an unusual concept, especially when in enemy or possibly hostile territory. Col. Curtis' statements are understandable considering his role of responsibility in the Army. However, he also observed an act of violence against the Mexican people and does not condemn it in his journal. The incident was the burning of "60 or 80 of their huts" and the death of two men over the possibility of the assaulted area harboring, or being suspected of harboring, guerillas.11 In the same passage, he also stated an opinion of avenging the death of a Mexican guide killed in revenge for the previously mentioned destruction.12 Though Col. Curtis did not condemn the war, he wants the American presence in Mexico to be safe and survive the war, and he wants to avenge the death of a compatriot, even a Mexican one. Such sentiments make sense for a soldier of any army, American or not.

For every soldier that dislikes the harsh realm of military life, another enjoys it for the superiority of their former civilian life. This is the case of John Nevin King, who was "...inspired with the same burst of patriotism that drew so many boys and men to the colors as one-year volunteers."13 As President Polk had placed troops in an area he declared to be American soil, and the Mexican Army fired on those troops, President Polk declared that the war was one of national defense. In the immediate aftermath of the declaration of war, support for it would be substantial. Not everyone shared this sentiment, as will be explored later.

Many junior officers' favored a posting near Mexico in the hopes of notable service in combat should war break out, likely sensing that annexing Texas would lead to a further strain of relations with Mexico.14 In any case, the war seemed popular among the soldiers, who predicted that if war did occur it would be quick and easy, and thereby
increase the chance for survival.\textsuperscript{15} Though near the end of the war restlessness spread into the ranks, this does not dissent of a war make.\textsuperscript{16} Such a lack of commentary from the ranks may be indicative of a strong belief in the war, or simply a sense of duty regardless of the orders involved. Either way the American soldiers were silent when it came to their support or opposition for the war and the politics that it entailed.

At least one officer was critical of the war. This young lieutenant, with exceptional cavalry skills, originally assigned as a quartermaster, but, through bravery and proximity to the front, had a long and distinguished career in the army and civilian life. His name was Ulysses S. Grant. In his presumed memoirs, he wrote his critique of the war and his reasoning for such an opinion, beginning, as the war did, over the annexation of Texas:

There was no intimation given that the removal of the 3d and 4th regiments of infantry to the western border of Louisiana was occasioned in any way by the prospective annexation of Texas, but it was generally understood that such was the case. Ostensibly we were intended to prevent filibustering into Texas, but really as a menace to Mexico in case she appeared to contemplate war. Generally the officers of the army were indifferent whether the annexation was consummated or not; but not so all of them. For myself, I was bitterly opposed to the measure, and to this day regard the war, which resulted, as one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation. It was an instance of a republic following the bad example of European monarchies, in not considering justice in their desire to acquire additional territory. Texas was originally a state belonging to the republic of Mexico. It extended from the Sabine River on the east to the Rio Grande on the west, and from the Gulf of Mexico on the south and east to the territory of the United States and New Mexico—another Mexican state at that time—on the north and west. An empire in territory, it had but a very sparse population, until settled by Americans who had received authority from Mexico to colonize. These colonists paid very little attention to the supreme government, and introduced slavery into the state almost from the start, though the constitution of Mexico did not, nor does it now, sanction that institution. Soon they set up an independent government of their own, and war existed, between Texas and Mexico, in name from that time until 1836, when active hostilities very nearly ceased upon the capture of Santa Anna, the Mexican President. Before long, however, the same people—who with permission of Mexico had colonized Texas, and afterwards set up slavery there, and then seceded as soon as they felt strong enough to do so—offered themselves and the State to the United States, and in 1845 their offer was accepted. The occupation, separation and annexation were, from the inception of the movement to its final consummation, a conspiracy to acquire territory out of which slave states might be formed for the American Union.\textsuperscript{17}

In this section, then Lieutenant Grant eloquently explained almost every major criticism of the war with Mexico.\textsuperscript{18} A later entry mentions how troops placed in the
disputed territory of the Texas-Mexican border to initiate the war.¹⁹ But the incursion of slave-holding American causing the Texas Revolution, the imperialism of territorial conquest, the well known weakness of Mexico to defend itself, and the thinly veiled grab for territory stand out as the greatest criticisms of the Mexican-American War, with one notable addition to explore later. Though the military as a whole did not express an opinion on the politics of the war, they did have them in other areas. Many hoped for military glory in what they presumed to be a short conflict. Once in Mexico, the climate proved unfavorable to a population unused to the harshness of desert and jungle. Therefore, Grant’s statements may be hindsight due to his affiliation with later groups within the Republican Party that would have opposed the war. Whether hindsight or his present feelings, he stands out among the other junior officers for stating an actual opinion regarding the war. Opposition to the war existed more strongly in other circles, however.

Political Opposition

Abraham Lincoln, a Congressman at the time, as well as another future Republican President, also opposed the war. In his “Spot Resolutions” of 1847, he criticized the President and whether his claims of soldiers defending American territory from Mexico were accurate. Designed to embarrass the administration and point out how American had begun an unjust war against a defending nation, the Resolutions state:

WHEREAS, The President of the United States, in his message of May 11, 1846, has declared that "the Mexican Government not only refused to receive him [the envoy of the United States], or to listen to his propositions, but, after a long-continued series of menaces, has at last invaded our territory and shed the blood of our fellow-citizens on our own soil."
And again, in his message of December 8, 1846, that "we had ample cause of war against Mexico long before the breaking out of hostilities; but even then we forbore to take redress into our own hands until Mexico herself became the aggressor, by invading our soil in hostile array, and shedding the blood of our citizens."

And yet again, in his message of December 7, 1847, that "the Mexican Government refused even to hear the terms of adjustment which he [our minister of peace] was authorized to propose, and finally, under wholly unjustifiable pretenses, involved the two countries in war, by invading the territory of the State of Texas, striking the first blow, and shedding the blood of our citizens on our own soil."

AND WHEREAS, This House is desirous to obtain a full knowledge of all the facts which go to establish whether the particular spot on which the blood of our citizens was shed was or was not at that time our own soil; therefore,

RESOLVED, By the House of Representatives, that the President of the United States be respectfully requested to inform this House—

First. Whether the spot on which the blood of our citizens was shed, as in his message declared, was or was not within the territory of Spain, at least after the treaty of 1819 until the Mexican revolution.

Second. Whether that spot is or is not within the territory which was wrested from Spain by the revolutionary Government of Mexico....

The essential point of the resolution was to learn whether or not the American soldiers were on properly defined American soil when fired upon. The entire crux of the war was that the United States faced an unprovoked attack by Mexican forces that entered American territory. Congressmen Lincoln is asking for proof that the American soldiers fired upon were unjustly attacked on American soil, or if they were in fact the invaders of Mexican soil and the Mexican Army was defending itself from invasion. In other words, was America defending its sovereignty by going to war against an aggressor, or a land grabbing power seeking to justify a war against a far weaker foe by playing to patriotism and national defense? The correct answer is option two.

Lincoln addressed in the above the only issue Grant left out of his memoirs, that is, the placement of American soldiers in the poorly defined border area between Texas and Mexico, and whether the American troops were on American soil, or were, in fact, on Mexican soil. The above is not the last time Congressmen Lincoln will speak out against the war. In 1848, he does so again, this time in a speech on the House floor:

Some, if not all the gentlemen on, the other side of the House, who have addressed the committee within the last two days, have spoken rather complainingly, if I have rightly understood them, of the vote given a week or ten days ago, declaring that the war with Mexico was unnecessarily and unconstitutionally commenced by the President [James K Polk]....The President, in his first war
message of May 1846, declares that the soil was ours on which hostilities were commenced by Mexico; and he repeats that declaration, almost in the same language, in each successive annual message, thus showing that he esteems that point, a highly essential one. In the importance of that point, I entirely agree with the President. To my judgment, it is the very point, upon which he should be justified, or condemned. In his message of Decr. 1846, it seems to have occurred to him, as is certainly true, that title—ownership—to soil, or any thing else, is not a simple fact; but is a conclusion following one or more simple facts; and that it was incumbent upon him, to present the facts, from which he concluded, the soil was ours, on which the first blood of the war was shed. Accordingly a little below the middle of page twelve in the message last referred to, he enters upon that task; forming an issue, and introducing testimony, extending the whole, to a little below the middle of page fourteen. Now I propose to try to show, that the whole of this,—issue and evidence—is, from beginning to end, the sheerest deception. The issue, as he presents it, is in these words "But there are those who, conceding all this, to be true, assume the ground that the true western boundary of Texas is the Nueces, instead of the Rio Grande; and that, therefore, in marching our army to the east bank of the latter river, we passed the Texan line, and invaded the territory of Mexico." Now this issue, is made up of two affirmatives and no negative. The main deception of it is, that it assumes as true, that one river or the other is necessarily the boundary; and cheats the superficial thinker entirely out of the idea, that possibly the boundary is somewhere between the two, and not actually at either. A further deception is, that it will let in evidence, which a true issue would exclude. A true issue, made by the President, would be about as follows "I say, the soil was ours, on which the first blood was shed; there are those who say it was not."

After stating the President's stance that the American soldiers were on US soil when the Mexican Army fired upon them, and declaring his intent to prove otherwise, he goes on to list, point by point, how the President manipulated the border dispute in order to make President Polk's desire for war a reality. These points all revolve around the two major rivers in the region, and which one was the recognized border. That section of the speech is as follows:

I now proceed to examine the President's evidence, as applicable to such an issue. When that evidence is analyzed, it is all included in the following propositions:

1. That the Rio Grande was the Western boundary of Louisiana as we purchased it of France in 1803.
2. That the Republic of Texas always claimed the Rio Grande, as her Western boundary.
3. That by various acts, she had claimed it on paper.
4. That Santa Anna, in his treaty with Texas, recognized the Rio Grande, as her boundary.
5. That Texas before, and the U. S. after, annexation had exercised jurisdiction beyond the Nueces—between the two rivers.
6. That our Congress, understood the boundary of Texas to extend beyond the Nueces.

Now for each of these in turn.

His first item is, that the Rio Grande was the Western boundary of Louisiana, as we purchased it of France in 1803; and seeming to expect this to be disputed, he argues over the amount of nearly a page, to prove it true; at the end of which he lets us know, that by the treaty of 1819, we sold to Spain the whole country from the Rio Grande eastward, to the Sabine. Now, admitting for the present, that the Rio Grande, was the boundary of Louisiana, what, under heaven, had that to do with the present boundary between us and Mexico? ... His next piece of evidence is that "The Republic of Texas always claimed this river (Rio Grande) as her western boundary.

That is not true, in fact. Texas has claimed it, but she has not always claimed it. There is, at least, one distinguished
exception. Her state constitution,—the republic’s most solemn, and well considered act—that which may, without impropriety, be called her last will and testament revoking all others—makes no such claim. But suppose she had always claimed it. Has not Mexico always claimed the contrary? so that there is but claim against claim, leaving nothing proved, until we get back of the claims, and find which has the better foundation. Though not in the order in which the President presents his evidence, I now consider that class of his statements, which are, in substance, nothing more than that Texas has, by various acts of her convention and congress, claimed the Rio Grande, as her boundary, on paper. ... I next consider the President’s statement that Santa Anna in his treaty with Texas, recognised the Rio Grande, as the western boundary of Texas. Besides the position, so often taken that Santa Anna, while a prisoner of war—a captive—could not bind Mexico by a treaty, which I deem conclusive—besides this, I wish to say something in relation to this treaty, so called by the President, with Santa Anna. If any man would like to be amused by a sight of that little thing, which the President calls by that big name, he can have it, by turning to Niles’ Register volume 50, page 336. And if any one should suppose that Niles’ Register is a curious repository of so mighty a document, as a solemn treaty between nations, I can only say that I learned, to a tolerable degree [of] certainty, by inquiry at the State Department, that the President himself, never saw it anywhere else. By the way, I believe I should not err, if I were to declare, that during the first ten years of the existence of that document, it was never, by any body, called a treaty—that it was never so called, till the President, in his extremity, attempted, by so calling it, to wring something from it in justification of himself in connection with the Mexican war. It has none of the distinguishing features of a treaty. It does not call itself a treaty. Santa Anna does not therein, assume to bind Mexico; he assumes only to act as the President-Commander-in-chief of the Mexican Army and Navy, stipulates that the then present hostilities should cease, and that he would not himself take up arms, nor influence the Mexican people to take up arms, against Texas during the existence of the war of independence [...]. He did not recognise the independence of Texas; he did not assume to put an end to the war; but clearly indicated his expectation of its continuance; he did not say one word about boundary, and, most probably, never thought of it. It is stipulated therein that the Mexican forces shall evacuate the territory of Texas, passing to the other side of the Rio Grande; and in another article, it is stipulated that, to prevent collisions between the armies, the Texan army should not approach nearer than within five leagues—of what is not said—but clearly, from the object stated it is—of the Rio Grande. Now, if this is a treaty, recognising the Rio Grande, as the boundary of Texas, it contains the singular feature [sic], of stipulating, that Texas shall not go within five leagues of her own boundary.24

In this portion of his speech, Congressmen Lincoln contests the ideas that the Rio Grande was the border claimed by Texas and recognized by Mexico. Naturally a crucial component of the border dispute, Congressmen Lincoln not only calls these statements false, he also alludes to the treaty between Texas and Santa Anna as not officially needing the war. The result of that would be the United States annexing a nation with which a portion of its territory was formerly still at war with. He also states that Texas should avoid placing its army too near the Texan-Mexican border to avoid possible hostilities, something President Polk ignored. Congressmen Lincoln goes on to say:
Next comes the evidence of Texas before annexation, and the United States, afterwards, exercising jurisdiction beyond the Nueces, and between the two rivers. This actual exercise of jurisdiction, is the very class or quality of evidence we want. It is excellent so far as it goes; but does it go far enough? He tells us it went beyond the Nueces; but he does not tell us it went to the Rio Grande. He tells us, jurisdiction was exercised between the two rivers, but he does not tell us it was exercised over all the territory between them. Some simple minded people, think it is possible, to cross one river and go beyond it without going all the way to the next—that jurisdiction may be exercised between two rivers without covering all the country between them.... But next the President tells us, the Congress of the United States understood the state of Texas they admitted into the union, to extend beyond the Nueces. Well, I suppose they did. I certainly so understood it. But how far beyond? That Congress did not understand it to extend clear to the Rio Grande, is quite certain by the fact of their joint resolutions, for admission, expressly leaving all questions of boundary to future adjustment. And it may be added, that Texas herself, is proved to have had the same understanding of it, that our Congress had, by the fact of the exact conformity of her new constitution, to those resolutions.

I am now through the whole of the President’s evidence; and it is a singular fact, that if any one should declare the President sent the army into the midst of a settlement of Mexican people, who had never submitted, by consent or by force, to the authority of Texas or of the United States, and that there, and thereby, the first blood of the war was shed, there is not one word in all the President has said, which would either admit or deny the declaration. This strange omission, it does seem to me, could not have occurred but by design....

Here the issue is which river the border, or if the border exists between the two rivers. He also criticizes President Polk’s apparent alteration of the facts of the border incident to gain support for a war by ignoring evidence that would have proved the American soldiers were in Mexican territory. Furthermore, because the border situation was unclear, sending the Army into the area only increased tension between the two nations, furthering the likelihood that an incident would occur, which is apparently what President Polk wanted. Congressman Lincoln concludes with:

... But now, at the end of about twenty months, during which time our arms have given us the most splendid successes—every department, and every part, land and water, officers and privates, regulars and volunteers, doing all that men could do, and hundreds of things which it had ever before been thought men could not do,—after all this, this same President gives us a long message, without showing us, that, as to the end, he himself, has, even an imaginary conception. As I have before said, he knows not where he is. He is a bewildered, confounded, and miserably perplexed man. God grant he may be able to show, there is not something about his conscious, more painful than all his mental perplexity!}

Through his speech and its contents, several things about the cause of the war become clear. One, at the time, the border between Texas and Mexico was unclear. Two, Texas had agreed to keep the border area demilitarized. Three, President Polk placed
troops in an area that could safely be defined as Mexico. Thus, when the Mexican Army attacked those forces, they were merely defending their homeland from invasion.

Finally, President Polk not only knew all this, he deliberately placed those troops in the area for the express purpose of waging war for territory he could not claim by right.

Since Congressmen Lincoln's speech came in 1848, by which point American victory in the war was certain, all his speech proved was that the war was unfounded in the first place. Though it probably embarrassed the administration, beyond that its use was minimal, and, in fact, was probably the point of the speech in the first place. Generally, then, America's victory in the war itself made any opposition sound like political maneuvering aimed at embarrassing the current administration and the Democrats, which, to be fair, was just as likely to be the case as genuine moral outrage.

As the above suggests, support and opposition to the war tended to divide along party lines. The Democratic Party supported the war, while the Whigs largely opposed it, though they tended to support bills and funding to support the war as a means of supporting the President's actions and maintain a sense of patriotism. The Whigs then have an interesting dichotomy of opposing the war and the President while also supporting the war and the President. Note that the Democrats were in the majority in Congress at the time, and obviously, President Polk was a Democrat. He was also an ardent believer in Manifest Destiny, which, considering he grew up in the south, is not surprising.

The fissure across party lines is a bit misleading, however. Specifically, Whigs opposed the war, but supported the war effort to be patriotic, although a few northern Whigs did not support the effort by voting against various supportive bills. Southern
Democrats tended to be the most supportive of the war due to their strong belief in Manifest Destiny— the right for American to stretch from sea to shining sea. Ironically, one of the most vocal Democratic opponents of the war was John C. Calhoun, of South Carolina. Though a Democrat, Calhoun and several other like-minded Democrats worked with the Whig opposition to confound Polk’s war aims.\textsuperscript{27} Partially due to Presidential ambition, Calhoun was outspokenly against the war nearly from the start. In an 1847 letter, he stated his opinion on the war:

It is true, that very few of either party believed, that there was any just cause of war, or that the Rio Grande was the Western boundary of Texas, or that the Republic of Mexico had made war on us by the invasion of our territory, or any other way; but it is equally true, that by an act of unexampled weakness, to use the mildest terms, both stand by admission on record to the very opposite of their belief. And what is worse, they have by this act of unparalleled weakness, committed large portions of both parties out of Congress to the war, as just and unavoidable on our part.\textsuperscript{28}

Of note is that he stated the same thing as Congressman Lincoln in regards to America’s aggression. Despite Congressional division, they ultimately supported the President’s desire for war. Opposition to the war was not limited to just the Whigs, as some prominent Democrats also opposed the war, and did so as vocally as the Whigs. The Whig’s dissent, however, went mostly ignored because they largely supported the war effort and America was winning a striking victory against Mexico. Furthermore, one historian noted how “committed to a program of controlled, peaceful expansion, Whigs were especially disturbed by Polk’s method of acquiring California and the borderlands of the Southwest.”\textsuperscript{29} That is, they disapproved the acquisition of said land by conquest, as the territory stated is what American claimed from Mexico at the end of the war.

The Whig’s dissent was, like Calhoun and Lincoln’s, related to the aggressive policies of President Polk to gain territory through war, and improperly justified war at that. It was also very vocal; while prominent Democrats who opposed the war remained
largely silent once war broke out, Whigs continued to rail against the war until the very end.\textsuperscript{30} Though divided between north and south on whether the annexation of Texas was a key cause of the war, the Whigs were unified in belief that the border question of the Rio Grande and placing troops near the border did lead to war, in conjunction with aggressive Polk diplomacy.\textsuperscript{31} One vocal Whig who spoke out against land acquisition through conquest was Congressmen Alexander Stephens. Though an ardent believer in Manifest Destiny, he disapproved of Polk’s methods.\textsuperscript{32} He also wanted the time “when the whole continent will be ours, when our institutions shall be diffuse and cherished, and republican government felt and enjoyed throughout... far south to the extreme north, from ocean to ocean.”\textsuperscript{33}

However, “fields of blood and carnage may make men brave and heroic, but seldom tend to make nations either good, virtuous, or great.”\textsuperscript{34} In other words, empires rise and fall through time. The idea of America was that a republic could stand the test of time, but through aggressive expansion America would enter a “downward progress. It is a progress of party-of excitement-of lust of power-a spirit of war-aggression-violence and licentiousness. It is a progress which, if indulged in, would soon sweep over all law, all order, and the Constitution itself.”\textsuperscript{35} Such was the belief and stance on the war held by many Whigs during the war. However, Whig opposition actually took two forms. The one previously described where the Whigs denounced the President’s actions while wholeheartedly supporting the war itself, and a very small group of northern, mostly New England Whigs, who not only vocally opposed the war, but actually voted against supportive war bills.\textsuperscript{36} Fourteen Congressmen in total, these Whigs were abolitionists
who often clashed with the southern Whigs over whether acquiring Mexican territory fulfilled the administration’s attempts at extending slavery.\textsuperscript{37}

Congressman Joshua Reed Giddings, of Ohio, also opposed the war, for the same reasons that Congressmen Lincoln did; he could prove that the American troops placed in the border area were in fact on Mexican soil. Speaking in Congress with regards to the war’s territorial aims, he stated that the:

... invasion of the Mexican territory, and the war into which we now find ourselves thusly precipitated.... I have not time to go into a minute examination of the pretended claims of Texas, and now advocated by our Executive (President Polk), to the country between the Nueces and the Rio Grande. Every intelligent man is aware that so much of Mexico as lies east of this river, was divided into the States of “New Mexico,” Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas...\textsuperscript{38}

Once again, as with Congressman Lincoln, a voice contesting the aggression of Mexico and the proper location of the border spoke out. Here, Giddings specifically detailed the Mexican states that had portions contained within the disputed territory, clearly making the land in question Mexican territory. Though the war was popular, it seems to be a well known secret that America was in fact the aggressor, and Mexico the defender. The popularity of the war in spite of this knowledge can be attributed both to patriotic fervor and Manifest Destiny. The driving force of the southern Democrats, Manifest Destiny was likely a powerful factor in overriding proper border dispute decorum. The fact that President Polk hailed from North Carolina is likely not coincidental. In the immediate aftermath of the border dispute, the truth of the matter, in regards to which side of the border the American soldiers were on, would probably not be well known by anyone except the President. By capitalizing quickly on the incident, and spinning it to suit his needs, he managed to mobilize the nation for war. Once America started winning the war as easily as it did, patriotism likely overrode questions of justification or morality.
As the war dragged on and a new Congress took over the reins of politics, more issues came to light. These issues would alter the anti-war stance as it existed into new forms, as well as repeating the old standby lines. The new issue concerned territorial acquisition from Mexico once the war finally ended. Conservative Whigs favored taking no territory from Mexico, while the antislavery faction of the Whigs also wanted to add a provision called the Wilmot Proviso. The Wilmot Proviso stated simply any territory acquired from Mexico would not be made slave territory. This provision would prevent slavery from expanding further into the southern United States.

Another idea managed to earn the ire of the entirety of the Whigs. This territorial acquisition plan, supported almost exclusively by hard line Democrats, called for the complete conquest of Mexico. To counter-act such a plan, the Whigs attempted to end their division concerning a plan of opposition to the war and any territorial expansion that might occur. While conservative Whigs believed the “No Territory” policy was the only viable solution as it evaded the slavery issue, would end the war much faster than a war of conquest, and, just as vital, it would allow the republic to preserve its moral high ground as a bastion of liberty and freedom. The antislavery Whigs naturally objected to the evasion of the matter of slavery rather than dealing with it directly. The enormity of this division was not lost on the Whigs. The Augusta Daily Chronicle and Sentinel released the following comment in regards to the North’s support of the Wilmot Proviso and the South’s dislike of it: “Can a contest be imagined more frightful and furious than that which this very acquisition of Mexican territory will excite between the North and South?”
Since the majority of the Whigs supported the No Territory policy, it was the policy the Whigs adopted and maintained, despite the antislavery fringe’s complaints. Such complaints did have validity when compared to the American occupation of the future American southwest. A few newspapers supported the antislavery section of the Whigs, however. The *Daily Whig* published a statement calling No Territory “a vehement desire to evade the issue of slavery in order to save the slaveholding wing of the party.”

As the year wore on the concept of conquering all of Mexico received increased support from the Democrats, though actual support for the idea was probably not as large as the Democrats hoped. In August of 1847, another option was thrown onto the table by the *National Era*. Their plan was an immediate cessation of hostilities with Mexico, and an offer to every Mexican state to voluntarily join the Union. Unspoken was that as former members of a nation that abolished slavery, if the Mexican states did join the union, they would have the option of being a free or slave state, and would almost certainly become Free states.

Though bold and clever, Whigs and Democrats alike disliked the idea. Since most Whigs favored No Territory, adding territory, even voluntarily, could still come off as hypocritical. The Democrats would complain of lives lost on the battlefield with only the prospect of territory rather than a guarantee of it. The gaining momentum of the All Mexico plan did not help, either.

In 1847, two groups within the Democratic Party prepared their candidates for possible shots at election, since President Polk was unlikely to run for reelection. The two groups were those that supported Martin Van Buren, and those that supported
Calhoun. Due to complicated divisions within their faction, Van Buren supporters adopted a position that stated their refusal to support any candidate not in favor of No Territory.\textsuperscript{52} Calhoun continued to state his opposition to the war, his dislike of acquiring territory from Mexico, and his belief that such a war would ruin America's republican ideals.\textsuperscript{53}

Through it all, the Whigs managed to release some organized opposition into print. One article against the war pointed out how the war was "the responsibility of the President and his administration in permitting the country to become involved in a war which could and should have been avoided."\textsuperscript{54} It also said that "among a virtuous and wise people, this condemnation alone should be enough to overwhelm those who have been guilty of so great a crime. A civilized and Christian people engaged in an unnecessary war, in the middle of the nineteenth century, is a spectacle of backsliding and crime over which angels may weep."\textsuperscript{55}

Since the position of No Territory was the official stance of the Whigs, the next article's statement managed to try and demonstrate a united front. The article in question stated:

\begin{quote}
there is not a Whig in the United States who does not, with all honest and ingenious minds, reject with scorn the very thought that his country should be engaged in war with a sister republic far below ourselves in every element of strength and greatness, for the real purpose... of effecting a forcible dismemberment of that republic, and of profiting ourselves by the spoils ....\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

As No Territory was the official stance of the Whigs, it was the one, naturally, released in Whig based media. As the war dragged on, the opposition to war shifted from opposing the war, to opposing an end to the war that supported the Democratic idea of Manifest Destiny, such as the annexation of all of Mexico. It also shifted, or in the case of antislavery Whigs and the abolitionists, stayed, on the issue of slavery and its
expansion to the new conquered lands, if any, through the support of the Wilmot Proviso. Though opposition grew due to war weariness and better knowledge of President Polk’s tactics to start the war, it was too late to do anything but ensure as honorable a peace as possible.

As the war moved on, political opposition continued from both Democrats and Whigs. With Whigs divided over slavery and Democrats simply divided, political opposition could just as likely stem from political philosophy as moral outrage. In the end, though, the expansion of slavery and the republican ideals upon which America was supposedly built still remained key issues of opposition even as the war ended. Such opposition was not limited to soldiers and politicians, of course.

Nonpolitical Opposition

If the war could generate such controversy to divide the two parties of the day, what kind of dissent and opposition would occur outside of politics? Religious leaders, abolitionists, pacifists, and even well known writers of the time spoke out against the war. Opposition for the war generally focused in New England, and from here some of the more vocal pacifists made their voices heard. One group of pacifists was the American Peace Society. Though the Society had its radicals, they were small in number, and the Society itself made its stance on the war well-known. Though there was division within the Society on proper anti-war tactics, the Society had three main problems with the war, and an observant reader will probably notice a pattern by now.
One issue was their strong Christian faith, which they believed meant peace, love, and not waging war with your fellow man. To them, war violated Christian law, so they opposed the Mexican-American War on general principle. Secondly, they also feared the effects of imperialist expansion on the economy of America, mainly diverting resources from commerce towards a war machine rather than more traditional economic production. Third, they disliked the effect of war on the republican form of government; they were afraid that expansion by war was to invite a new Caesar or Napoleon to replace the Presidents. Their concerns with the war are similar to Grant’s and partially to Calhoun, who also feared for the moral fiber of an America based on conquest. Instead of targeting the President or causes of the war, the Society feared for the republican and economic future of the nation, while also espousing the dangers of Imperialism and its possible consequences to a republican form of government.

The Society’s opposition endeavored to counter-act America’s zeal for the war through anti-war propaganda. They offered $500 to the best novel about the war. The winner, *The Mexican War Reviewed* by Reverend A.A. Livermore, connected the war with slavery. He also blames American’s “passion for land,” once again connecting the war with expansion. To him, however, slavery was “the main-spring to the war with Mexico. Had the idea of extending the... institutions of the South, and the political power resulting therefrom, been entirely excluded from the question, not a shot would ever been fired.”

Abolitionists proved a more enthusiastic and passionate opposition to the war, as may have been gathered from the abolitionist Whigs. To them, the war was about the expansion of slavery, and their opposition began from the start. William Lloyd Garrison,
an abolitionist from the American Anti-slavery Society, led a vocal faction of said society in a strong anti-war stance. More radical than the rest of abolitionist Society, Garrison and his supporters within the Society distributed petitions and an anti-war resolution that called the war a conflict "of aggression, of invasion, of conquest... and wages solely for the detestable and horrible purpose of extending and perpetuating American slavery throughout the vast territory of Mexico." Garrison also denounced the war in a letter from 1847, where he wrote:

Now, boldly and continually to denounce the war, under such circumstances, as bloody and iniquitous—to impeach the government and the administration—to deplore instead of rejoicing over the victories won by our troops—to wish success to the Mexicans, as the injured party, who are contending for their firesides and their country against enslaving and remorseless invaders—as you can easily imagine, subjects us to great odium, and brings down upon our heads the heavy charge of "treason" and "traitors to the country." But our testimony is not in vain. It burns like fire upon the national conscience.

Such an impassioned argument concerning the war and slavery is, however, somewhat lacking in facts. President Polk's single term is best identified by two acts of land acquisition. These are the Mexican-American War, and the division of the Oregon territory from Great Britain. Though slavery would prove to be an extremely important matter to America in the coming decades, it is unlikely to have been a major concern of President Polk in regards to the war with Mexico. This line of thinking obviously did not stop the abolitionist's anti-war stance.

The abolitionist's pamphlet distribution was one notable antiwar effort. Regular meetings and published accounts of those meetings by abolitionist groups condemning the war occurred on a large scale as well. However, their zeal against the war tended to outrage the public, or at least make them indifferent to their beliefs. Nonetheless, they maintained their strong view that sole causation of the war was slavery. This sets them apart from other dissenters in that while pacifists, Whigs, and Democrats questioned
America’s aggression in starting the war, and expansion through military conquest; to the abolitionist such matters were irrelevant. The war was about slavery, started by America or not, either way slavery was the cause, and the expansion of slavery would be the result.

As mentioned earlier, religious groups and leader did oppose the war. Besides a few notable leaders though, the only groups to express anti-war sentiment as a religious group were the Unitarians, Congregationalists, and the Society of Friends, more commonly known as Quakers. Other religious groups supported the war, were too fragmented to express a vocal opinion, or were indifferent because of a dislike of involving themselves with politics. One of the previously notable leaders was Theodore Parker, who delivered several sermons and speeches that opposed the war. In one such sermon on June 7, 1846, he spoke in detail of the evils of war and how war is not proper for such a civilized age. At least some of the religious opposition to the war resulted from the same beliefs of the evils of war as believed by the pacifists.

In a later sermon from June 1848, he spoke out more directly against the Mexican-American War. In this sermon, he said, “there are two things about this war quite remarkable. The first is, the manner of its commencement. It was begun illegally, without the action of the constitutional authorities; begun by the command of the President of the United States, who ordered the American army into a territory which the Mexicans claimed as their own. The President says ‘It is ours,’ but the Mexicans also claimed it, and were in possession thereof until forcibly expelled....”

Though President Polk did manipulate the situation to cause the war, he did, at least, seek a Congressional declaration of war. His tactics to start the war were
underhanded, and illegal, but not necessarily in the way Parker is suggesting. Still, he brings attention to the issue of President Polk exacerbating matters with Mexico to achieve war, and the fact that the territory was claimed by Mexico, which had the stronger legal standing than Texas because of the treaty with Santa Anna. Parker's sermon goes on the say:

...the other remarkable thing about the war is, the manner of its conclusion. The treaty of peace which has just been ratified by the Mexican authorities, and which puts an end to the war, was negotiated by a man who had no more legal authority than any one of us has to do it. Mr. Polk made the war, without consulting Congress, and that body adopted the war by a vote almost unanimous. Mr. Nicholas P. Trist made the treaty, without consulting the President; yes, even after the President had ordered him to return home. As the Congress adopted Mr. Polk's war, so Mr. Polk adopted Mr. Trist's treaty, and the war illegally begun is brought informally to a close. Mr. Polk is now in the President's chair, seated on the throne of the Union, although he made the war...  

In addition to the Christian pacifism noted earlier, Parker spoke of the controversial creation of the war over the border dispute. He also makes a link to imperialism by referring to the President's chair as a throne. This discourse is similar to many previous ones, but his direct criticism of the President and his actions are stronger than in other portions of dissent. He also criticizes how people spoke out against the war, but took no action. Since the actions of the abolitionists took in their anti-war stance tended to make them alienated or rejected by the public during the war, his call for action is unsurprisingly uncommon among anti-war speakers and writers.

As mentioned before, three main religious groups opposed the war. The Unitarians and Congregationalists, largely centered in New England, existed in an area of strong opposition to the war. This was due to both distance from Mexico and the large abolitionist sentiment in the region. Disdain for the south's perceived grip on national politics, as most Presidents at the time hailed from the South, also contributed to the strong opposition to the war. The Quaker's dissent was due mostly to their pacifist and antislavery policies that marked a cornerstone of their religion. When religious leaders
outside of these three religions spoke out against the war, they did so out of disdain for war itself and also belief in the war's basis in promoting slavery.\textsuperscript{78}

This line of opposition is the same for the pacifists and the abolitionists. It was also similar to what Parker spoke of in his sermons, indicating a similarity among the religious groups opposition for the war. Many religious groups utilized both sermons and writing to speak out against the war.\textsuperscript{79} Well-known writers of the time also opposed it. Margaret Fuller, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville, and Henry David Thoreau all opposed the war.\textsuperscript{80} These writers, well known at the time and even in the present, used their writing to express the fears they felt when they viewed the war and all it entailed.\textsuperscript{81} Though these writers were reluctant to throw themselves into politics, they did leave behind some writings on the matter.

Although Margaret Fuller was in Europe during the war, she still wrote of her opposition in letters to the \textit{New York Tribune}. Within them she took the stance of equating the war with the expansion of slavery, and accusing America of abandoning its "high calling."\textsuperscript{82} Thoreau did not write but participated in civil disobedience, by refusing to pay his taxes, which would indirectly support the war, in a symbolic act of opposition.\textsuperscript{83} Emerson kept his thoughts on the war private, feeling he and other writers shouldn't meddle in political affairs.\textsuperscript{84} He did write in a personal journal, however. Within those journal pages he outlined the fear of moral decay the war would bring to the American republic, a relatively common feeling as this research has demonstrated.\textsuperscript{85}

Melville was busy at the time advancing his literary career, but he did comment on two issues he found with the war. First, he feared repercussions of the war from European powers, mainly Great Britain, over the previously mentioned issue with the
Oregon Territory and worry of an expansionist America. Second, he compared the war to imperialist aggression, writing that “Lord, the day is at hand when we will be able to talk of our killed and wounded like some of the old Eastern Conquerors reckoning up by the thousands…”

Though perhaps less notable in modern times, Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, wrote a lengthy attack on the war:

"This is the spirit in which a portion of the Press, which admits that our treatment of Mexico has been ruffianly and piratical, and that the invasion of her territory by Gen. Taylor is a flagrant outrage, now exhorts our People to rally in all their strength, to lavish their blood and treasure in the vindictive prosecution of War on Mexico. We protest against such counsel ... "We can easily defeat the armies of Mexico, slaughter them by thousands, and pursue them perhaps to their capital; we can conquer and 'annex' their territory; but what then? Have the histories of the ruin of Greek and Roman liberty consequent on such extensions of empire by the sword no lesson for us? Who believes that a score of victories over Mexico, the 'annexation' of half her provinces, will give us more Liberty, a purer Morality, a more prosperous Industry, than we now have? ... Is not Life miserable enough, comes not Death soon enough, without resort to the hideous enginery of War? "People of the United States! Your Rulers are precipitating you into a fathomless abyss of crime and calamity; Why sleep you thought less on its verge, as though this was not your business, or Murder could be hid from the sight of God by a few flimsy rags called banners? Awake and arrest the work of butchery ere it shall be too late to preserve your souls from the guilt of wholesale slaughter!"

Greeley’s purpose for opposition was the same as Grant’s and Lincoln’s, only more eloquently put. He felt that the war with Mexico was a war of conquest that would lead to the ruination of the United States, by linking it to the rise and fall of ancient Greece and Rome. From all the gathered information regarding the opposition to the war, two groups seem to emerge, overlapping in some cases. Educated writers, dissident Democrats, pacifists, and most Whig politicians protested the war out of a fear of tyranny, European style imperialism, and the moral decay of the nation and the founding principles of a republic fighting war for defense, and not wars of territorial expansion. They also disapproved of President Polk’s placement of troops in the disputed border territory and calling for war after they had been attacked by the Mexican Army, since Mexico was defending its territory, not, as President Polk claimed, the other way around.
Most northern Whigs and the abolitionists opposed the war because they believed the war was about the expansion of slavery. To them, the war's underhanded causation was of second importance to the greater evil of slavery. The most radical of the opposition, they tended to also be the most ignored by the other groups for their fringe beliefs. A vocal minority within the minority of the opposition at large, their cause of dissent ended up being the most important one in the wake of the coming decades after the war with Mexico.

Though the literary opposition had fewer members and was far less vocal than most other realms of opposition, it is interesting to note the overarching theme between the literary opposition, political opposition, and religious opposition. A common fear of imperialism and loss of American morality and high ideal pervades many of their thoughts about the war. More than simple pacifism or abolitionism, this line of opposition shows patriotism and a strong belief in the ideals of the American republic. Dislike for President Polk's underhanded scheming in making Mexico look like the aggressor also stands out as an issue. Though it may not seem as important an issue, perhaps because of the vocal radicalism of abolitionism, it is still one repeated along with the other reasons.

Disdain for the aggression of the war resonates whenever someone refers to America as fighting the "republic of Mexico." Why is America, a fellow republic, fighting another bastion of civil liberty and freedom in the name of territorial expansion? It is no wonder then that this line of thought enters into the opposition alongside other issues. Though some opposition was clearly political or religious, this kind of opposition
speaks to the very heart and soul of the American ideal. Such opposition is a desperate cry to prevent the fall into imperialism many believed might occur from such a war.

**Michigan Opposition**

The new focus on opposition strictly from or within Michigan is because an early form of the Republican Party formed from Michigan in 1854. Through examining who opposed the Mexican-American War, why they did it, and even how they did it, new insight into who would form the Republican Party may be brought to light. Since the Republican Party formed mainly to address slavery, an issue that became increasingly important after the territorial acquisition from Mexico, Michigan’s opposition is exceptionally relevant to the greater opposition to the war.

In order to properly understand Michigan’s opposition, some political and development background regarding the Wolverine state would be beneficial. During the war Michigan’s elected politicians were overwhelmingly Democrat. All members of both houses of Congress, except for a one year exception by William Woodbridge, were Democrats. The Governor was a Democrat. The Lieutenant Governor was a Democrat. The state had voted for President Polk in 1844, and would vote Democrat in 1848.\(^{89}\) There were a lot of Democrats in Michigan, in other words.

Furthermore, the state was sparsely populated at the time, its population in 1840 being 212,267.\(^{90}\) Only thirty-two counties of the future eighty-three existed, exclusively in the south eastern portion of the Lower Peninsula.\(^{91}\) With most of the state still unsettled, the idea of fighting a war for more land seemed pointless. Nonetheless, the state largely supported the war and the President. However, there were those that
opposed the war. Several small Whig presses were vocal opponents, as were other papers, including the antislavery *Signal of Liberty*. So despite the majority of the state supporting the war, a distinct minority of opposition did exist.

As with the nation at large, the major opponents to the war in Michigan were Whigs and abolitionists. Whig opposition sometimes attacked the Democrats rather than the war itself. William H. Thompson, editor of the *Oakland Gazette* of Pontiac, Michigan, counter-attacked Democrat insinuations against the Whigs with the following statement: "There is moral treason committed now, against our beloved country; and it is by those who for purposes purely selfish, seek to retain the supposed honors and emoluments of office, by exciting a thirst for human slaughter."92

Another Whig newspaper angered by Democratic name calling was the Marshall *Statesman*. Angered over being called a traitor, the editor retorted by stating "we (the Whigs) may be traitors, but if so, it is because we desire to preserve inviolate the honor of our Republic, to extricate her from the difficulties into which unprincipled men have plunged her, and as speedily as possible to stop the shedding of our countrymen's blood."93 Both editors speak of the loss of American honor by engaging in the war with Mexico. The *Kalamazoo Michigan Telegraph* stated something similar, publishing that war would damage "the honor of the republic, which aspires to be the model of the world."94 The effects on the morality of America obviously mattered even in the wake of political discord.

The *Oakland Gazette* railed against the war and President Polk by saying:

...we sent a large army far beyond the acknowledged bounds of Texas, in sight of Mexican settlements, and watched its every movement with anxious care. And at last, provoked by our insolence, goaded by our insults, and threatened with the deep disgrace in the eyes of the whole world, Mexico has struck the blow:- she has dared attempt to vindicate her rights!"95
This statement not only demonstrated knowledge of American aggression in causing the war, it also pointed to Mexico’s innocence in the matter. Though the *Gazette* does not say so, the insinuation of the war being perpetrated for land acquisition is present. Many newspapers did write in opposition of the war, one group with access to their own newspaper addressed a concern of the war other than American honor.

The abolitionists unleashed the most vocal and wide-ranging opposition. Or, at the very least, their beliefs transcend the abolitionist movement and are present in other areas of Michigan opposition as well. In particular, the Michigan State Antislavery Society is among the most prominent of these opponents. Harnessing the media to their cause, they utilized the newspaper *Signal of Liberty* to speak out against the war, from the paper’s Ann Arbor location. In a paper from 1847, the *Liberty* denounced what it calls “the great southern scheme.”96 The scheme referenced was the conquering of Mexican territory to expand slavery. The article attacked the goal of conquest, stating “…of the incorporation into the American Union, of the left bank of the Rio Grande was such an enormous outrage, what shall be said of the present scheme to subdue nearly the whole of Mexico, together with the Californias, and annex them to the United States? When can we be pointed to usurpation parallel to the… history, even of the most despotical governments that have had an existence?”97

Besides just slavery, the article also made a comparison between the war with Mexico and the European “enlightened despots” of the era. This article is not only accusing America, specifically in this case the President and southern states that strongly supported Manifest Destiny, of imperialism. It is also mocking the idea of a more liberal-minded autocratic ruler who grants some civil rights and liberties to appease the masses.
Now the accusation of imperialism brings up images of the Czars, the French Revolution, and the eagle of the Kingdom of Prussia. Other Michigan newspapers made similar accusations, and not just ones run by radical peripheries. The Hillsdale Whig Standard published an article in June 30, 1846 that stated:

…the spirit of Monarchy is war and aggrandizement, the spirit of republicanism is peace and moderation. The history of nations, from the earliest recorded time, prove the truth of these sentiments; and the prominent events which are now transpiring throughout the world, bear farther testimony to the same truth... The wars of Republicanism are not of aggression and subjugation, but of defense and honor... ⁹⁸

American republican honor obviously weighed heavily on the opponents of the war, regardless of their political background. The concentration of opposition within Michigan newspapers is interesting, especially considering the minority status of the opposition, both in the state and the nation at large. This is probably a result of the rural nature of Michigan at the time. Every county or small town published a local newspaper. Usually only a few pages, they allowed the local farmers and handworkers to stay in touch with state, national, and even international issues. Another Statesman article states how:

…the people of Michigan, yield to none in true patriotism, and sincere love of country, and are ready to lay down their lives in defense of that country, and its liberties... in support of any just war- they nevertheless, can discover no obligation of patriotism, which requires them to shed their blood... lavished, in a war of conquest, which promises no result but the extension of slave territory, and the still more overbearing predominance of the slave power, which now rules our country with a rod of iron. ⁹⁹

In Michigan, at least, the two ideals of abolitionism and republican honor were tied together. It was not enough for the war to be a war of conquest. It also became a war of conquest for the advancement of slavery. These two sentiments are the strongest opposing points in Michigan, and even affected the state's government. A 1847 state congressional resolution in support of the war listed no slavery in any conquered territory from Mexico as a resolution. ¹⁰¹ Though only one of four resolutions, the rest of which
were very Democratic in their content-one resolution acknowledged Mexico’s aggression in starting the war- such a mix of Democratic and abolition platform in a formal government document is very striking.

In addition to their newspaper opposition, the Society itself issued opposition through their annual convention resolutions in 1847, which they then published in the Signal. Two of the resolutions stated that “we utterly deprecate the war with Mexico, as unjust, unchristian, uncalled for, and an act more in accordance with the days of savage ignorance, than those of an (so-called) enlightened and Christian republic of the Nineteenth Century.”\textsuperscript{102} There 1848 meeting reaffirmed this sentiment, saying:

That our present war upon Mexico is a war of aggression on the part of the United States—unnecessary, unjust, and consequently, impolitic— that it had its origin in the avowed object of the administration, of extending and perpetuating slavery, & that it is the duty of our Senators and Representatives in Congress, by withholding the means of carrying it on to bring it to as speedy a close as possible.\textsuperscript{103}

In addition to their antislavery stance, they also were aware of, and fully acknowledged, the war as the result of American aggression. This set them apart from other abolitionist groups, who seemed to ignore who was the aggressor in order to focus more on the evils of slavery. The Grand River Eagle reported something similar. In an article mentioning the passing of a bill to support the war effort, the preamble of the bill became contested by the Whigs because it “declared that war existed by the act of Mexico.”\textsuperscript{104} Near the end of the war the Eagle published another article that stated:

The President has perverted the Administration of Government to the foul purpose of extending the institution of Slavery. It was intended by the framers of the Constitution that Congress should be the War-making Power, the President, overriding the Constitution, breaks into the department allotted to the Legislature, decides to engage the Nation in War, and orders our Armies to invade the territories of a neighboring Republic.... The Country now wants Peace, and the Executive is determined to have War.... The whole is an infamous game to propagate Slavery, and strengthen the hands of the Executive. More territory must be had- that is for Slavery.... More troops must be raised... used in raising mighty Armies and prosecuting War of Conquest. Indeed the policy of the Administration throws all our National affairs into ruinous confusion. Our prosperity is the growth of peaceful and industrious and not of War and Rapine.\textsuperscript{105}
Slavery as a cause for the war was mentioned again, this time in a Whig newspaper, rather than strictly an abolitionist one, also coupled with complaint of war for territorial acquisition. The two seem to be one and the same when it comes to Michigan's opposition; to expand aggressively is to expand slavery, and to expand slavery territory must be acquired by any means necessary. When it came to antislavery sentiment and the war, even the average citizen could be impassioned to oppose the war.

A farmer from Schoolcraft, Michigan wrote to a relative:

The base minions of slavery headed James K. Polk rallied to the support of their cherished institution and setting forth with ardor of affected patriotism the blessings which would return to their country's interest. But all of their confident predictions have been falsified and war in all its destructive now rages on our southwestern frontier and this desolation of war, the bitter anguish of the dying and the blood that now flows lik water is all for the purpose of strengthening an institution which stifles the energies and blunts the nobler faculties of the human soul. 106

The expansion of slavery appeared to be a grave concern for Michigan opposition, whether in the realm of politics, media, or even the voting base. The above reinforces the possibility that, for Michiganders at least, the expansion of slavery and corruption of republican ideals through conquest were intertwined. More Michiganders seemed to oppose slavery then on the national scale, while also fearing the decay of republican morality in equal measure to the nation at large and their disdain for slavery and its growth.

As with the nation at large, religious leaders also spoke out against the war. Either individually or as a religious group, there opposition added to the vocal minority of Michigan's dissent. Reverend George Duffield and others followed the greater religious opposition of Christian pacifism. 107 Others took up the antislavery position. The Michigan Association of Free Will Baptists adopted a resolution at an annual conference in 1847 that stated, "whereas war now exists between the United States and
Mexico, and whereas, in our opinion, it has grown out of, and is designed for the
extension of American Slavery; therefore resolved that we the FWB Annual Conference
of Mich. express our disapprobation of the declaration and prosecution of said war.”¹⁰⁸

Sometimes the clerical opposition met with political opposition from the other
side. Reverend Duffield’s condemnation of the war was denounced in the Democratic
Free Press, a Detroit newspaper now known as the Detroit Free Press.¹⁰⁹ In response,
the Statesman retorted “… we have fallen upon strange times, if ministers of the gospel
must be told by political partisans what they must and must not, preach.”¹¹⁰ In Michigan
then the opposition of politicians, abolitionists, and the clergy mingle together in a way
they did not in the opposition to the war on a national level. Abolitionists not affiliated
with a newspaper also opposed the war.

James G. Birney, who lived in Saginaw County at the time of war, was a
prominent abolitionist. In one letter, he wrote how “it is bad, at all times, to go to war
even in a just cause, but doubly so, in an unjust one. Mexico but little expected… that
her first war of defense, would be against the oldest republic of this continent, whose
institutions she had endeavored to copy.”¹¹¹ In that letter he related the Christian belief
of pacifism expressed by previous clergy, as well as disheartenment at American going to
war unjustly. A later letter sent to Birney expresses dismay at the prospect of any
territory gained from Mexico becoming slave territory.¹¹² Though Birney did not say
anything similar in the letters, as an abolitionist he likely believed the same thing.

There were no truly prominent Michigan writers at the time of the war to
comment on it, however, an intellectual opposing voice did exist in Michigan. The Alpha
Nu Literary Society of the University of Michigan used their periodical *Sybil* to publish the following opposing statement:

(War) dries up the elements of national prosperity, it blunts the morals of people & excites a morbid spirit of restlessness, therefore I cannot coincide with a certain distinguished citizen among us- ‘That the hearts of the people should be prepared for war.’ My motto would be- The hearts of the people should be prepared for peace.... The spirit of war and conquest, which even at this early period of our history seems to seize many of politicians & say to the people, ‘Be ye prepared for war,’ is a political mania that ought to be frowned down by every citizen.

Here the intellectual voice of opposition speaks the same fear of imperialism as Reverend Birney, Duffield, and the Whigs and abolitionists. The belief of an unjust war coupled with the fear of American imperialism ring as strong reasons of opposition along with the fear of the spread of slavery. However, disdain for the expansion of slavery permeates a great deal of the opposition to Michigan, mostly in the nonpolitical forms of newspapers and the clergy. Politician’s likely feared tyranny and imperialism more than an abolitionists, because the abolitionists focus on antislavery was so strong. Perhaps this unusually large concentration of abolitionist sentiment is why a new party was able to enter politics, especially if a large part of that party’s platform was to oppose slavery and its expansion westward.

**Rise of the Republican Party in Michigan**

Michigan opposition to the war, as stated, was a minority of the population. However, those that did oppose the war eventually formed the Michigan branch of the Republican Party. Just as the Mexican-American War links to the Civil War, so too, is the war with Mexico linked to the birth and growth of the Republican Party. This is especially so in Michigan, where a few short years after its birth in the state, the Republicans swept the Democrats out of the state’s high offices in a stunning change of
party following for the people. Such a striking change does not, however, happen overnight.

In 1855 a new batch of politicians entered Michigan’s government. The high government posts and the Congressmen, except for one Congressman, were all Republicans. Examining their political backgrounds may indicate whether they opposed the war, or at least belonged to a group that did. The first Republican governor was Kinsley S. Bingham. Before the Republican Party he was a Democrat, but one who opposed slavery and supported the Wilmot Proviso.\textsuperscript{115} He was also present in Jackson, Michigan, in 1854, at one of the proposed first meetings of the Republican Party, and certainly the first large scale meeting in Michigan.\textsuperscript{116} Former Democrats that opposed slavery were likely to be future Republicans, because the Democratic Party increasingly fractured over the issue of slavery. Though his stance on the war itself is not clear, he may have been one of the people who disapproved of the war, but did not oppose it out of patriotism.

George Coe was the Lieutenant Governor at the time. Unlike Bingham he had been a Whig. He was present at the 1856 Republican Convention in Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{117} Again it cannot be conclusively said whether he opposed the war or not, but it can be presumed he did as a former Whig. As the Whigs generally opposed the war, it is likely LT. Governor Coe did so, as well. Former Whigs can be added to the list of future Republicans, along with dissenting Democrats. Both groups generally opposed the war with Mexico, even if they did not do so openly as individuals.

The Michigan Secretary of State, John McKinney, was a former Democrat turned Republican.\textsuperscript{118} Little is recorded of his political career, so any presumptions on his stance
on the war would be guessing. Jacob M. Howard, the Attorney General, is easier to place. A former Whig, he was not only present at the 1854 meeting in Jackson, he also helped write the party platform for that meeting. As he also supposedly helped create the Thirteenth Amendment that abolished slavery, to call him antislavery would not be a stretch of the facts. Very little politically related information is recorded concerning The State Treasurer, Silas M. Holmes, but he, too, was a Republican.

Concerning Congressmen, after Bingham and Howard, who served as Senators consecutively, Zachariah Chandler occupied the second senatorial post. He, like Bingham, opposed slavery and its expansion, and was a former Whig. From the House of Representatives, three of the four congressmen were Republicans; one was a Democrat. These three were William A. Howard, Henry Waldron, and David S. Walbridge, respectively. Representative Howard’s views are unclear, however, before he was a Republican he was a Whig, though whether he personally opposed the war or not is unknown.

Representative Waldron, like Howard, was also a Whig before becoming a Republican. So, too, was David S. Walbridge. From this examination of the first elected Republican politicians in Michigan, a few generalities can be extracted. Most of them were antislavery, a trait that is a portion of the Republican Party’s platform in their 1856 convention. If not antislavery, the vast majority of them were at least Whigs, who either opposed the war, or, at the very least, disapproved of it, either from abolitionist beliefs, or merely from being the opposing party of the in power Democrats at the time of war. From this, it can be safely said that Democrats that opposed the war
and slavery, as well as Whigs and other antislavery groups, formed the new Republican Party, in Michigan if not the nation as a whole.

For the Party’s growth as a whole within Michigan, the above provides a good example of the norm for the new party. In the earliest days of the party it was not so much a truly organized political entity, but more of a coalition between like-minded groups that adopted the label before it became official. Three of these groups are known to have opposed the war: abolitionists, Whigs, and northern Democrats. The third group was a small short lived third party called the Free Soil Party. Founded in 1848 and ending in 1854 after dissolving to support the two major parties, their antislavery beliefs make their joining with the Republicans unsurprising. They were also an exclusively northern party, and Michigan was one of the states in which they were located. In their early days they worked to get supporters of the Wilmot Proviso elected into office. Though the party did not exist until after the war was over, the people that formed it, like those that formed the Republican Party, opposed the expansion or existence of slavery. If they believed the war was part of that expansion, they would have likely opposed it.

In fact, before the Republican Party gained momentum, early antislavery organization among the abolitionists, Whigs, and Democrats, did so under the Free Soil banner. This can be confusing because this is the same coalition that would become the official Republican Party. For now, they were too loosely unified to be identified as such. The coalition crumbled because the Democratic support for Lewis Cass was more unified in its goals than the Free Soil coalition, which had to deal with political ambitions and Cass’ ability to downplay the issue of extending slavery.
The coalition that came to become the Republican Party in Michigan regained momentum and cohesion in the wake of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. After that, a new party was finally formed, and proved more stable than the previous coalition. This is partially due to Senator Cass' purging of Free Soilers from the Democratic ranks of the north, and working to prevent pro-Wilmot Proviso Democrats into political or party office in Michigan. Once the Kansas-Nebraska Act received the support of the Michigan Democrats, bitter pro Proviso Democrats flocked to the early Republican Party. This, coupled with electoral success in 1854, gave the new Party a sense of permanence through their political success, further contributing to its stability.

The Wilmot Proviso was an important issue in Michigan, to drive so many to the Republican flag. Though support for the Wilmot Proviso is in itself not opposition to the war with Mexico, it can be said that support of the Proviso opposes the expansion of slavery. Since many in Michigan—as did others on the national scale—appear to have believed the war was enacted to expand slavery westward, for Michiganders the two issues were not entirely inseparable. Opposing the expansion of slavery brought the Whigs, Free Soilers, and abolitionists to join the Republican movement. Support for the Wilmot Proviso brought Democrats, as did more opposition to slavery.

From Michigan to the nation at large, it should be noted that many Whigs flocked to the ranks of the Republican Party. This is because they couldn’t stomach the latest slave holding President to take office, Zachary Taylor. His status as a general in the Mexican-American War did not help matters, either, for the Whigs. Ironically he won the election on the Whig ticket, which was perhaps the most infuriating issue for the Whigs that did join the Republicans. President Taylor was the last Whig elected
President. It should also be noted that President's Lincoln and Grant opposed the war, and both became Republican Presidents. Lincoln, as stated earlier, was originally a Whig.

All across settled Michigan, small pockets of opposition to the war with Mexico made their voice of dissent heard against the pro war uproar of the very Democratic state. Whigs opposed the war both on political principal and belief in the loss of republican honor, a belief shared across the state. Intellectuals, abolitionists, religious leaders, all believed that the war with Mexico was a disgrace on the spirit of liberty and freedom America supposedly upheld. In both their fear of American imperialism and the spread of slavery Michigan shared the same fears as other dissenters to the war on the national level. In Michigan, however, the pockets of opposition seem to link together more strongly than at the national level, especially in their concern for the expansion of slavery. This is most likely due to a combination of the state's small population and the focus of the opposition from one single state, rather than from the nation as a whole. It's status as a northern state may contribute, as well.

In part because of the large New England background of the state, in terms of population at least, Michiganders who opposed the war for other reasons also opposed the expansion of slavery. Normally other reasons for opposition and the abolitionist reasons were separated, but here they mingle with the imperialist worries, the stain on republican honor from waging an unjust war, and the political opposition from the minority party. This helps explain why the Republican Party was able to expand so rapidly in the state, as at the time of its creation, one of its major platform aims was to prevent the expansion of slavery. Considering the people who became early Republicans, this is a likely. More
than one state opposed the war and slavery; Michigan and the other states in opposition came to form the early Republican Party that would cause a new entrant into the arena of government, and along with it, the Civil War that followed the political stance of no expansion of slavery into the Territory acquired from Mexico.

Conclusions

The Mexican-American War was controversial during its time, though the actual opposition was a minority. Despite the controversy, it had a large amount of support while it existed, even helping to catapult a man into the Presidency. Only in later times has it come to be seen as a stain on the ideals of America—if it’s even remembered at all. However, there was clearly a vocal minority that opposed the war and all that was wrong with it. The Whigs that opposed the war did so both for political reasons and a genuine concern for the belief that a republic should only engage in war for self defense. To do otherwise was to risk imperialism and tyranny. They also expressed outrage over the false pretenses of the war, strengthening their belief in the war as a war of aggression, not of national defense.

Abolitionists feared the expansion of slavery into any territory that would be taken from Mexico, perhaps rightly so. Though the more radical stance in terms of realistic beliefs in comparison to the other causes for opposition, their stance has, in hindsight, become one of the most prophetic considering the Civil War that followed twelve years later. The despair over a war of conquest and the loss of republican ideals is less clearly understood in modern times, but this cause of opposition is one of the most commonly expressed across the nonpolitical, political, and even military opposition.
Religious leaders, notable writers, and an aging Grant all shared this belief. It is safe to say then, that the reason for the opposition to the war was threefold, perhaps fourfold.

It was relatively well known that the American troops placed on the border were in Mexican territory when Mexico attacked them. Furthermore, their placement was deliberately done by the President to incite the Mexicans to war. After this occurred, President Polk altered the events in his speeches to make America seem the defender, creating a patriotic fervor that allowed the war to go forward before the truth could come forward, if it would have made a difference.

The reason for opposition was the fear of the expansion of slavery into any new territory. Also, a fear that both the expansion of slavery and engaging in foreign wars for the sake of conquest would lead to the loss of American morality, republican ideals, and perhaps even to tyranny. A republic was supposed to engage in war for national defense and security, not to expand itself at the expense of another nation, and certainly not at the expense of a sister republic. These reasons for opposition repeat multiple times on the national level, by abolitionists, Whigs, dissident Democrats, clergy, and writers. These same reasons repeat in the opposition expressed by Michigan. From that Michigan opposition, a new Party began to rise. Started in small pockets across the nation, Michigan’s Republican Party was formed by the same people that opposed the war with Mexico: abolitionists, Whigs, and northern Democrats.

The Mexican-American War is often overshadowed by the American Civil War, certainly in lives lost and impact on the greater nation. It is important to not forget this war, however. From the minor opposition from the war with Mexico was expressed everything that was wrong with its reason for existence and its execution, and unless that
opposition is remembered, history may repeat itself. More than that, it must be
remembered that the opposition was drowned out by patriotic fervor and the cries of
Manifest Destiny. Some people, at least, recognized what was wrong with the war, and
some even prophetically pronounced that the results of the war with Mexico might lead to
a fracture within the United States itself.
Endnotes:


2 Erwin, "Descriptive Roll," pg 17.

3 Erwin, "Descriptive Roll," pg 18-23.

4 Most officers of Volunteer Regiments were elected by the Regiment from amongst the volunteers. This was the case for Colonel Curtis.


7 Erwin, "Descriptive Roll," pg 18-23.


9 Ibid., pg 32.

10 Ibid., pg 32.

11 Ibid., pg 36.

12 Ibid., pg 36.


15 Watson, pg 469.


17 Grant, Ulysses S. *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, I, New York, Charles L. Webster
and Company, 1885, chapter 3.

Technically Former President Grant, but you get the point.

Grant, Personal Memoirs, ch. 3.

Lincoln, Abraham, "Spot Resolutions" 1847, National Archives and Records Administration, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives.

The irony of this war considering recent illegal immigration issues is hilarious.

The speech is edited for brevity and does not appear in its entirety within this thesis. You're welcome.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Schroeder, Mr. Polk's War, pg 26.

Ibid., pg 26.

Ibid., pg. 28.


Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War*, pg. 29.

Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War*, pg. 28.


Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War*, pg. 120.

Ibid., pg. 120.

Ibid., pg. 124.

*Augusta Daily Chronicle and Sentinel* (Georgia), May 18, 1847.

Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War*, pg. 124.

Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War*, pg. 125.

*Daily Whig* (Boston), July 30, 1847.

Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War*, pg. 127.

*National Era* (Washington, DC), August 19, 1847.

Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War*, pg. 129.

Ibid., pg. 129.

Ibid., pg. 129.

Ibid., pg. 131.

Ibid., pg. 131.

Ibid., pg. 131.


"The Whigs and the War," pg. 311.

Ibid., pg. 332.

Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War*, pg. 94.

63 Livermore, pg. 14.

64 The fact that the land in question was poorly suited to plantation farming was not widely known until after the land had been obtained and surveyed. Hence why the idea of slavery moving west was considered so viable at the time. The precedent set by Texas also contributed to this matter.

65 Schroeder, pg. 99.


68 Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War*, pg. 100.

69 Ibid., pg. 101.

70 Ibid., pg. 107.


72 Parker, “Speeches...”, pg. 51.

73 Ibid., pg. 51.

74 Ibid., pg. 52.

75 Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War*, pg. 108.

76 Ibid., pg. 35.

77 Ibid., pg. 108.
Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War*, pg. 110.

Ibid., pg. 110.

Ibid., pg. 116.

Ibid., pg. 116.

Fuller, Margaret, Letter 18 to the *New York Tribune* (November, December 1847), in *The Writings of Margaret Fuller*, ed. Wade, Mason (New York, 1941), pg 427.


Ibid., pg. 116.

Ibid., pg. 117.

Ibid., pg. 118.


*New York Tribune* (New York City), May 12, 1846.

Though to be fair, Democrat candidate Lewis Cass was from Michigan.

United States Census Record, Population Census of States and Territories, census of 1840.

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*Oakland Gazette* (Pontiac), January 27, 1847.

*Statesman* (Marshall), May 26, 1846.

*Kalamazoo Michigan Telegraph* (Kalamazoo), 1846.

*Oakland Gazette* (Pontiac), May 20, 1846.

*Signal of Liberty* (Ann Arbor), June 19, 1847.

*Signal of Liberty* (Ann Arbor), August 22, 1847.
98 Hillsdale Whig Standard (Hillsdale) June 30, 1846.

99 Statesman (Marshall), October 13, 1846.

100 Southern politicians tended to dominate government at the national level.

101 Senate documents, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, March 1, 1847, pg 207.

102 Signal of Liberty (Ann Arbor), February 13, 1847.

103 Signal of Liberty (Ann Arbor), February 8, 1848.

104 Grand River Eagle (Grand Rapids), June 23, 1847.

105 Grand River Eagle (Grand Rapids), February 18, 1848.


107 Duffield, George, Sermon “Following after Peace and Holiness”, October 3, 1847.

108 Free Will Baptists, Michigan Association Papers, Minutes of Annual Meetings, June 11, 1847.

109 Democratic Free Press (Detroit), July 10, 1846.

110 Statesman (Marshall), July 21, 1846.


113 Opposition to a war from a University. Some things never change.

114 Sybil (Alpha Nu Literary Society periodical), May 29, 1846.


117 Bingham, Stephen D., Early history of Michigan, with biographies of state officers,
members of Congress, judges and legislators, Pub. pursuant to act 59, 1887, (Ann Arbor, MI, 1887), pg. 181.


121 Bingham, *Early history of Michigan*, pg. 349.

122 Ibid., pg. 164.

123 Ibid., pg. 359.

124 Ibid., pg. 663.

125 Ibid., pg. 662.


128 Seavoy, Ronald E., pg 349.

129 Ibid., pg 352.

130 Ibid., pg 358.

131 Ibid., pg 369-370.
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