

Pierre Soulé: Southern Expansionist and Promoter

By J. PRESTON MOORE

IF THE OSTEND MANIFESTO OF 1854 HAD SUCCEEDED IN its aim of attaching Cuba to the United States, Pierre Soulé would have been reckoned by his contemporaries as one of the shrewdest and boldest American ministers of his time, one who understood the secret of dealing with Spain. Accomplishment would have compensated for mistakes of recklessness and impropriety. The failure of the Spanish mission has caused Soulé to be condemned and perhaps unjustly neglected by students of the period. Despite its sorry outcome, bringing about his return to America under a cloud, the post-Madrid career of the Louisiana diplomat and politician warrants greater consideration than has hitherto been given to it.¹ The impression is created that his tenure of office as minister constituted the pinnacle of his life, an apex from which there was an abrupt descent to obscurity. Actually, the subsequent fifteen years of his life were characterized by

¹ There is no satisfactory biography of Pierre Soulé covering all phases of his many-sided career. None of the following is adequate in its treatment: Alfred Mercier, *Biographie de P. Soulé, Sénateur à Washington* (Paris, 1848); Leon Soulé, *Notice sur Pierre Soulé, avocat à la Nouvelle-Orléans, sénateur de la Louisiane à Washington* (Toulouse, 1901); E. C. Wharton, "Pierre Soulé," in *Appleton's Encyclopedia* (6 vols., New York, 1887-1889), VI, 610-12; Cyprien Dufour, *Esquisses Locales* (New Orleans, 1847); George W. Sanders, "Pierre Soulé," in *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* (Washington, New York, 1837-1859), XXIX, 267-73. A brief summation of his career is to be found in the New Orleans *Picayune*, March 29, 1870. By far the best account of his diplomatic service abroad is Amos Ettinger's study, *The Mission to Spain of Pierre Soulé, 1853-1855* (New Haven, 1932), which suffers from the author's reliance on secondary Spanish materials rather than on the records of the Spanish Foreign Office. See also his article on Soulé in Allen Johnson, Dumas Malone, and Harris E. Starr (eds.), *Dictionary of American Biography* (21 vols. and index, New York, 1928-1944), VII, 405-406. Two articles of much value are Arthur Frecman, "The Early Career of Pierre Soulé," in *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* (New Orleans, 1917-), XXV (1942), 970-1127; and James K. Greer, "Louisiana Politics, 1845-1861," *ibid.*, XIII (1930), 617-54.

activities that loomed importantly on the national and Southern horizons. An inveterate, uninhibited expansionist, a clever manipulator of political strategy in a state where the highly competitive, rough-and-tumble nature of elections called for much skill and easy standards of public morality from contestants for office, an eloquent, persuasive practitioner at the bar, he turned his energy into diverse channels. In the political arena he was the resolute leader of a strong wing of the Democratic party. Not without some success, particularly in 1856, he contended against two redoubtable foes, "King" John Slidell and Judah P. Benjamin, both of whom won favored places for themselves in the Senate and later in the Confederate government. As a Douglas man in 1860, he stood against disunion, but when war came he espoused the South's cause and became the chief defender of the citizens of New Orleans against the Butler regime, his denunciation of which led to his arrest and imprisonment at Fort Lafayette. Released on parole, he made his way secretly to Nassau, whence he slipped past the blockade to Charleston in order to join the staff of his friend General P. G. T. Beauregard. With the close of the conflict he returned to his home to spend the last years of his life in an effort to recoup his fortune by the practice of law. The casual mention that has been his lot in the writings of the late ante-bellum period and in Civil War histories seems attributable also to the failure of a majority of his enterprises, though these were strongly indicative of the movements and forces animating the Old South. Notwithstanding the unhappy termination of his affairs, his influence and role in Southern history justify greater elaboration and treatment.

It is as an expansionist, imperialist, and promoter of Southern interests that he made his chief imprint on national life in the years from 1853 to 1858. The story of his diplomatic career in Madrid, featured by an excess of zeal and imprudence and what was tantamount to betrayal by his superiors, has been competently recounted. An ardent republican by conviction, Pierre Soulé came to monarchist Spain with a chip on his shoulder, and it was promptly knocked off. One may even regard his actions in Europe as being enough to deserve for him the designation as the foremost expansionist among Southern leaders in the ante-bellum era. When one considers the various activities in which he was wholeheartedly engaged in the years after his return,

from 1855 to 1858, little doubt remains as to his pre-eminence in this field. In these years Southern financial and business groups supported, in league with proslavery elements, William Walker's filibustering expedition to Nicaragua, and backed a project for the construction of a railroad and a highway across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in lower Mexico. The Louisianian's close association with both of these ventures substantiates his position as the leader of Southern regional imperialism.

In April 1855 Pierre Soulé, disappointed and disillusioned by the fiasco of his mission to Spain, arrived in the Crescent City from Europe to resume the practice of law. The New Orleans that he found was little different from the city that he had left almost two years before for the legation in Madrid. In 1855 it was a thriving metropolis of over one hundred thousand inhabitants, having extensive and lucrative trading connections with the upper Mississippi Valley and with Havana, Vera Cruz, Mobile, and Galveston around the Gulf. The summers were hot and long, with the high humidity characteristic of towns of the deep South located close to large streams and swamps. To make living more agreeable during those months, the Soulé family, in 1857, occupied a cottage at Mandeville, a resort for New Orleanians on the northern shore of Lake Pontchartrain, reached by lake steamers that maintained a reasonable schedule for those with homes and places of business in the city. Epidemics of yellow fever were not uncommon, making the summers a time of danger and creating the incentive to travel to the springs in the Appalachians and to points along the northern Atlantic seaboard.

In spite of his fifty-four years and relatively small stature, Soulé was commanding in appearance and bearing. Industry, imagination, and a stubborn, unswerving devotion to an objective, together with an acute sensitivity and a propensity for the dramatic, marked his personality. Not the least of his qualities was an impassioned enthusiasm, at times almost of crusading fervor, which in the past had led to impulsive action with disastrous consequences. A vivid portrait of him was penned by John W. Forney, a Philadelphia newspaper editor, when Soulé resided in Washington as a senator from Louisiana: "Of swarthy complexion, black flashing eyes, and Frenchified dress and speech . . . artificial—brilliant in repartee, yet subject to fits of melancholy; impetuous, yet reserved; proud, but polite—in one word,

such a contradiction as Victor Hugo, with a vast fund of knowledge, and a deposit of vanity which was never exhausted."² He possessed a national reputation as an orator, a fact attested by an article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, which lauded "his eloquence, greatly superior to that of the heavy and prolix Yankee orators."³ To one who listened to his addresses in the Senate, "there was a tropical charm about his oratory, which was heightened by his foreign accent and his singularly striking presence and physiognomy."⁴ Indicative of his popularity and widespread demand as a speaker was an invitation by Northern lovers of rhetorical entertainment to deliver the annual Independence Day address in Philadelphia in 1852.⁵

During the years 1855 and 1856 a major focus of attention for Southerners, outside of the constant and increasingly acrimonious debate over slavery, lay in the accomplishments of William Walker in Central America. Concurrently, many New Orleanians were engaged in the organization of a company for the development of a passageway to the Pacific coast across southern Mexico.

To Pierre Soulé both enterprises had unusual merit and appeal. In his mind they contributed to the extension of Southern influence in an area of great importance for future trade and, in the case of the filibuster, to the strengthening of the institution of slavery, already under heavy fire from the abolitionists. His views on American foreign policy coincided generally with those held by Jefferson Davis, J. D. B. De Bow, John A. Quitman, and other Southern leaders. But, though born in France and an exile from Bourbon reaction, he was paradoxically more aggressive and militant in outlook than these native-born Southerners. In urging sectional expansion, he adhered to a logical, consistent position, illustrated by his earlier and fruitless attempts to acquire Cuba from Spain, first by purchase and later by veiled threats. Indeed, his views on expansion were well known to the American public. In what was perhaps his most important speech before the Senate, on March 22, 1852, he had made unmistakably plain his belief in the mystical doctrine of "Manifest Destiny" that foretold the absorption of the entire continent and its island

² John W. Forney, *Anecdotes of Public Men* (2 vols., New York, 1881), I, 57.

³ Alfred Assolant, "Walker et les aventuriers au Nicaragua," in *Revue des Deux Mondes* (Paris, 1831-), 8th Ser., IV (1856), 887.

⁴ C. W. Julian, *Political Recollections, 1840-1872* (Chicago, 1884), 108, 109.

⁵ Ettinger, *Mission to Spain*, 127.

appendages by the great Northern Republic. Addressing the Senate on the subject of nonintervention in Cuba, he concluded a somewhat grandiloquent and bombastic discourse with a glowing allusion to an ever-expanding union:

Sir, public opinion has already responded to that mighty appeal from the past. It scorns the presumptuous thought that you can restrain this now growing country within the narrow sphere of action originally assigned to its nascent energies, and keep it eternally bound up in swaddles. As the infant grows, it will require a more substantial nourishment, a more active exercise. The lusty appetite of its manhood would ill fare with what you might satisfy the soberer demands of a younger age. Attempt not therefore, to stop it in its onward career; for as well you might command the sun not to break through the fleecy clouds that herald its advent in the horizon, or to shroud itself in gloom and darkness as it ascends the meridian.⁶

While rebuffed in his endeavors to adorn the United States with the "Pearl of the Antilles," it is unlikely that his thoughts on the desirability and inevitability of expansion had materially changed since 1852. After the Pierce administration showed hostility toward Quitman's scheme for a filibuster to Cuba in 1855, Soulé's concern shifted to more feasible areas for infiltration and development, to Central America and Mexico.⁷ To the new projects that were taking shape he lent his experience gained abroad as a diplomat, his prestige, and his consummate craft as a promoter. Personal profit as a motive for his participation cannot be gainsaid. His fortune, accumulated mainly by an assiduous application to legal work and by real-estate investments, had suffered from his heavy expenses at the Spanish court. The prospect of adventure, danger, and intrigues must not have been unwelcome to one whose career, beginning with political persecution and flight from his native land, contained a larger quota of duels and suspicious involvements than ordinarily fell to those in public life.

His friendship with William Walker probably began some years before the inauguration of the filibustering expedition. It

⁶ *Washington National Intelligencer*, April 3, 1852.

⁷ Nothing has yet been uncovered to show that he was directly or indirectly linked with Quitman's scheme. See Basil Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba, 1848-1855* (New York, 1948); Diego González, *Historia documentada de los movimientos revolucionarios por la independencia de Cuba de 1852 a 1867* (2 vols., Havana, 1939); J. F. H. Claiborne, *Life and Correspondence of John A. Quitman* (New York, 1860).

seems likely that they were acquainted in 1848 when Walker was editor of the New Orleans *Crescent*. Although the adventurer entered Nicaragua from California, his presence in Central America in 1855 immediately captivated the imagination of the groups in the city and elsewhere in the South, who had backed Narciso López's attempts at the liberation of Cuba some years before. The first public connection between the American movement in Nicaragua and the ex-minister to Spain occurred in April 1856. When Colonel Parker French, Walker's appointee to Washington, found his credentials rejected by Secretary of State William L. Marcy, he repaired to New Orleans to enlist support for the cause. On April 28 Soulé, French, and other partisans spoke before a large crowd of sympathizers gathered at one of the principal hotels.⁸ Declaring that despite "evil influences operating against him [Walker] at the headquarters of the United States Government" the conflict in Nicaragua would be resolved in his favor and the territory ultimately annexed to the Union, Soulé appealed for funds to purchase munitions and supplies for the army. There was no need for volunteers, as more than enough able-bodied men were ready at short notice to join the Liberator.⁹ It was reported by a source not unfriendly to the adventure that the sum subscribed amounted to \$500,000, with \$25,000 having been promised by the speaker.¹⁰ After the major addresses the meeting was adjourned to the gentlemen's dining room in another part of the hotel, where numerous toasts were quaffed to American expansionism and to the health of its dauntless exemplar.¹¹

⁸ William O. Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers* (New York, 1916), 170. According to the friendly New Orleans *Picayune*, the presence of such a large number of persons was unexpected, invitations having been extended to from seventy-five to one hundred prominent citizens, and it created confusion, necessitating a change in the meeting place from the gentlemen's parlor to the rotunda of the Hotel St. Louis. See *El Nicaragiense*, May 31, 1856, quoting from the *Picayune*, April 29, 1856.

⁹ Moved by his eloquence, he presaged that the conquest of Nicaragua would be a steppingstone toward the formation of a confederation comprising in addition the states of Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica, "that would in time, under American energy and industry, become the seat of Empire of the commerce of the world." *El Nicaragiense*, May 31, 1856, quoting New Orleans *Crescent*, April 29, 1856.

¹⁰ The preliminary subscription amounted to \$257,000, which Soulé stated was insufficient "to liberate Nicaragua." Apparently owing to his example in making another donation and his persuasion, the sum was considerably increased. *El Nicaragiense*, May 31, 1856, quoting New York *Herald*, May 10, 1856.

¹¹ Local feeling, voiced by state Senator Hyman, favored the inclusion of planks

The unpredictable course of politics soon enabled Soulé and his friends to win more significant support for the Americanization of the Central American state. Over Slidell's opposition Soulé had been selected to head the Louisiana delegation to the Democratic national convention at Cincinnati, June 2-6, 1856.¹² An effective means of assisting the filibustering movement came in his appointment to the platform committee. While the chairmanship of the committee went to Benjamin Hallett of Massachusetts, Soulé was the most experienced in foreign relations of the small group engaged in drafting resolutions on foreign policy. The platform reported to the convention contained three resolutions stating the official attitude of Democrats toward foreign affairs. The second resolution expressed the deep sympathy of the American people "with the efforts which are being made by the people of Central America to regenerate that portion of the continent which covers the passage across the Interoceanic Isthmus." It was a patent allusion to Walker and was endorsed by an overwhelming vote of 221 to 38. A third resolution asserted the rightful claims of the United States to "ascendency in the Gulf of Mexico" and promised that every effort would be undertaken "to maintain a permanent protection to the great outlets through which are emptied into its water the products raised out of the soil, and the commodities created by the industry of the people of our Western valleys and the Union at large."¹³

There is considerable evidence that the formulation of these forceful statements was Soulé's work. The New York *Times* advanced on good authority that he had proposed "the strong series of resolutions" at the sessions of the committee and it was ex-

in the platform of the national Democratic party expressing sympathy for Nicaraguan independence under Walker's leadership and the payment of indemnity in territory by Colombia "for American blood shed at Panama." *El Nicaragiense*, May 31, 1856, quoting New Orleans *Picayune*, April 29, 1856.

¹² In a letter to a partner of his European ventures, George Sanders, written after the state convention, on April 10, 1856, Soulé deplored the schemes and "paltry manoeuvres" of the Slidell clique and declared that "my friends, like myself, go to Cincinnati not only unpledged but in *no manner committed*" to any candidate. There is no indication of any intent on his part to influence the writing of the platform so that it would contain sympathetic references to Nicaraguan filibustering. Soulé to Sanders, April 10, 1856, in Pierre Soulé Letters (Department of Archives, Louisiana State University).

¹³ *Official Proceedings of the National Democratic Convention, held in Cincinnati, June 2-6, 1856* (Cincinnati, 1856).

pected he would defend them on the floor if opposition arose, but that proved unnecessary.¹⁴ The hostile *Daily Tribune* of New York reported that this was a ticket "double-shotted with filibusterism in Mr. Buchanan's Ostend Conference scheme for stealing Cuba and the 'fast' foreign resolutions of the Marplot Mr. Pierre Soulé."¹⁵ In 1860 Walker, vindicating his exploits in *War in Nicaragua*, emphatically asserted that "the resolutions of the Cincinnati Convention on the Central American policy were drawn by no trembling or unsteady hand. They were not couched in the Delphic sentences behind which timid politicians shrink when they seek the support of their constituents. Clear, distinct, and unmistakable, they could not be read in a dozen sentences by the jugglers, who fancy all political wisdom consists in deceiving the people with words which seem other than they are."¹⁶ The firm hand to which he alluded was Soulé's. In the absence of evidence to the contrary it seems undeniable that this feature of the Democratic platform was the contribution of the author of the Ostend Manifesto.

Upon returning home from Cincinnati Soulé joined the promoters S. F. Slatter and Mason Pilcher in devising ways of providing material support to Walker. Meanwhile, in Central America the coalition of the filibuster and the Liberal leader Patricio Rivas had been disrupted with Rivas' flight from the country and the election of the American as president on June 29.¹⁷ An apparent answer to the financial needs of the infant republic lay in the issuance of bonds, already authorized by governmental decree and secured by public lands. It was ostensibly to arrange the necessary details of this pecuniary measure that Soulé in August decided to pay a visit to Nicaragua. As chief counsel for the New Orleans backers, he bore a responsibility for the legal formalities connected with the marketing and sale of the securities. But other reasons than that of getting a good fee for his services entered into the decision. Speculation in land confiscated from native opponents of the present regime was tempting. Nicaragua was a project of American imperialism in process

¹⁴ *New York Times*, June 11, 1856.

¹⁵ *New York Daily Tribune*, June 11, 1856.

¹⁶ More than likely Soulé confided this to Walker when he visited the filibuster's headquarters at Granada in 1856. See William Walker, *War in Nicaragua* (Mobile, 1860), 275.

¹⁷ Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers*, 170.

of crystallizing, a venture that drew Soulé's natural allegiance and sympathies, and one which, if realized, would spell American, in particular Southern, influence and control over an isthmian route to the Pacific.¹⁸ In order to put the undertaking on a permanent footing the military conqueror required sound advice and counsel from a civilian. Also, the presence in Walker's army of Cuban revolutionists, for a time headed by Domingo de Goicouría, may have led to the thought of a liaison with those most concerned in another conspiracy against the Spanish island.

On August 7 the steamship *Granada* sailed from New Orleans for San Juan del Norte, at the mouth of the San Juan River, with a company of recruits, thinly disguised as "emigrants," under the command of the recruiting officer and soldier of fortune, Colonel P. F. Mancosos. Listed among the passengers for California was the name of P. Soulé.¹⁹ The vessel may have arrived at its destination on the eleventh, but owing to delays in schedule for the river boats and to the hazards of navigating the San Juan River, Soulé did not reach Walker's capital until the twentieth.²⁰ The duration of his sojourn with the revolutionists and filibusters was approximately two weeks.

The presence of this significant personage was enthusiastically acclaimed by *El Nicaragüense*, the organ of the Walker interests. No other Southerner of similar standing and reputation had set foot in the Central American republic since the initiation of the enterprise. No one would. To the editor it was a sign that "before long rich capitalists will come with wealthy merchants and energetic entrepreneurs who with their knowledge, capital, in-

¹⁸ The "Young America" movement had already found lodgment in Nicaragua with the formation of a "Young America Pioneer Club in Nicaragua." *El Nicaragüense*, February 9, 1856. An editorial in this newspaper, June 14, 1856, entitled "The Young South," sought to identify the Nicaraguan enterprise with the aspirations and beliefs of Southerners: "Nicaragua is the first triumph of the Young South. Walker is the Shibolet [sic] of politicians. He represents the militancy of the new church; he exemplifies the doctrine of expansion. Order springs into being where the Young South takes hold; freedom dawns upon the wake of anarchy. The rainbow that connects the East and the West encircles Central America; and he who lives under the cheerful sign, recognizes its beauty and promise. The girdle is significant of the future, which bids, we hope, that all this peninsula will meet in a common family of states. Almost under the equator, in the centre of the known earth . . . a new Republic shall be formed, and its mission shall be to carry out the faith and doctrines of the Young South." Doubtless Soulé would have wholeheartedly endorsed these views.

¹⁹ *New Orleans Daily Delta*, August 7, 1856.

²⁰ *El Nicaragüense*, August 23, 1856.

dustry, and art will bring to the country a true element of public wealth. . . . He [Soulé] is decidedly prepossessed in favor of Central America, although it would be too much to hope that he could be induced to exchange the brilliant prospect before him in the great Northern Confederacy, for a home in this republic."²¹ In his honor, Colonel John H. Wheeler, the American minister, in contrast to Secretary Marcy favorably inclined to the filibuster, tendered a reception at the legation, at which he was the "observed of all observers."²² James Jamison, an officer of the American Phalanx of the Army of Nicaragua, in his recollections of filibustering days commented on Soulé's "courtly appearance, his polished manners, and altogether what might be called his grand air," and noted that "I remember him vividly as one of the most fascinating men I ever saw." Jamison saw Soulé "in close and apparently confidential conference with General Walker in the executive office."²³ The filibuster himself acknowledged that Soulé made "a deep impression on the people of the country," as he spoke Castilian fluently.²⁴

Soulé's influence upon Walker and the domestic policies of the short-lived republic was extensive. Proper procedure for the issuance of the bonds was stipulated by a decree of August 28, making them redeemable in gold or silver at the Bank of Louisiana at the end of twenty years.²⁵ With the immediate purpose of the visit settled, his attention turned toward establishing an enduring foundation for agriculture and commerce. No military man, he gave counsel in the role of an elder statesman.

For the moment the outlook for Walker and his men was auspicious. An invading Costa Rican army, once a serious threat, had been beaten off, and internal opposition from the Conservatives and disaffected Liberals was at its lowest ebb. Optimistic and friendly was the view of the American minister Wheeler, who wrote in a despatch of August 25 to Washington that "the hum of which [machinery] and the noisy roll of the Yankee carts through the streets, advise the natives of Nicaragua

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ James C. Jamison, *With Walker in Nicaragua, or Reminiscences of an Officer of the American Phalanx* (Columbia, Mo., 1909), 94, 95.

²⁴ Walker, *War in Nicaragua*, 238.

²⁵ Item 169, Bond of the Republic of Nicaragua, in Callender I. Fayssoux Collection of William Walker Papers (Department of Middle American Research, Tulane University).

that indolence must yield to enterprise; ignorance to science; and anarchy and revolution to law and order."²⁶

Walker's grandiose design, the establishment of a federation of the Central American states, with the eventual purpose of conquering Cuba, plainly required American approval and support to be lasting. While, in view of the voting power of the antislavery group in Congress, annexation to the Union could be easily blocked, the new state might be allied to the South should secession take place. To secure this attachment of interests and to build a solid basis for the country's economy Walker considered indispensable. The introduction of Negro slavery might bind the region to the South and provide a satisfactory labor force for immigrants desiring to develop Nicaragua's natural resources for agriculture and mining. This was the background for the decree of September 22, paving the way for the readmission of slavery. That the slave trade had been abolished and the English navy stood ready to intercept violators on the high seas had no weight with Walker, blindly convinced that public sentiment in England and throughout the world on this issue would be reversed. The September act of the Nicaraguan government did not of itself re-establish slavery. Instead it made null and void "all acts and decrees of the Federal Constituent Assembly, as well as of the Federal Congress," which had proclaimed the abolition of black servitude. Hence the decree of emancipation was no longer in force. Soulé's ideas on slavery conformed with those expressed by Walker at this time. This, added to the fact that Soulé was present when the act of September 22 was under consideration, leads one to believe that its promulgation may have been partly his handiwork.²⁷ The

²⁶ William R. Manning (ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, Inter-American Affairs, 1831-1860* (11 vols., Washington, 1931-1939), IV, *Central America*, 570.

²⁷ In emphasizing his influence over Walker, Scroggs declares: "No man in the South held more advanced ideas along this line than Pierre Soulé, and his visit to Nicaragua seems to have had the effect of crystallizing the policy of Walker so far as Cuba, annexation, and slavery are concerned." See W. O. Scroggs, "Walker's Designs on Cuba," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (Cedar Rapids, 1914-), I (1914-1915), 210.

On September 1 the exiled Cuban patriots gathered in the parish church at Granada to celebrate a mass for the repose of the soul of Narciso López, the hapless Venezuelan filibuster who lost his life in the expedition of 1851. While Soulé and Walker were probably present, there is no definite proof of it. See *El Nicaraguense*, September 13, 1856. The writer has found nothing to indicate that Soulé kept up, after his intimate identification with the Walker movement, the same

degree of his influence or the extent of his counsel cannot be accurately appraised, there being no admission on Walker's part of any assistance or any direct claim by Soulé to a share in this legislation.

An unrivaled opportunity to speculate in the confiscated lands of native politicians now presented itself. The list of property advertised for sale in *El Nicaragiense* of October 18 on terms of cash or military scrip amounted to \$753,000.²⁸ Among the fine estates was a cacao plantation, known as "Mercedes," located in the foothills of the mountains about twenty miles southwest of Granada and formerly owned by a member of the outlawed Chamorrist faction. It was the most valuable single piece of property disposed of.²⁹ This estate, declared Walker's newspaper, was sold to Mr. Soulé for \$50,000, "a fact which of itself speaks volumes in favor of our order and prosperity." From this act the editor inferred that the purchaser intended shortly thereafter "to make Nicaragua his place of permanent residence," an inference that bespoke as well the wishful thinking of those seeking to attract Americans to the land of the future.³⁰

The exact amount of Soulé's investment in Walker's enterprise is undetermined. There is good reason to believe that he pledged himself to buy the "Mercedes" plantation and that for several months he seriously considered removing his residence to Central America. This he confided to his friend Beauregard in New Orleans.³¹ The ledger of accounts kept by Walker's agents, Slat-

affiliations with the Cuban revolutionists that he had enjoyed before leaving on the mission to Spain. But this is understandable since the filibuster eventually alienated a majority of his Cuban followers by planning the incorporation of the island into his confederation.

²⁸ *El Nicaragiense*, October 18, 1856, item 174, in Fayssoux Collection.

²⁹ Mapa de la República de Nicaragua, 1859, item 146, *ibid.*

³⁰ *El Nicaragiense*, August 30, 1856.

³¹ Major Beauregard, with whom Soulé talked soon after his return to Louisiana, informed his superior in the Treasury Department in Washington: "Mr. P. Soulé is going to emigrate to Nicaragua. He has bought himself a plantation there." Beauregard to Captain A. H. Bowman, October 29, 1856, in Beauregard Papers, 1854-1860 (Department of Archives, Louisiana State University). On the other hand, when federal authorities in 1863 declared Soulé's property forfeited in retaliation for his protest against Butler's military government of New Orleans, a list of his holdings showed 104 lots of ground in and around the city but made no allusion to stocks, bonds, or titles to foreign property. "United States vs. 104 Lots of Ground, Property of Pierre Soulé," item 7801, in Archives of the Federal District Court, New Orleans. Nor is there any reference to Nicaraguan investments or claims in the declaration of an inventory of his estate made by his daughter-in-law, Mrs. Nelvil Soulé, before a notary, October 1, 1870, six months after his death. See the file entitled "The Interdiction of Pierre Soulé," in rec-

ter and Pilcher, shows the payment of two hundred dollars to Soulé on January 20, 1857, doubtless a fee for legal work, and while bonds to the value of \$43,000 were sold to prominent citizens, none was listed as purchased by him.³²

With the completion of the financial transaction and having surveyed much of the occupied countryside and having given freely of his advice, the champion of the filibustering cause announced his intention to depart for San Juan del Norte and home. On August 30 the government sponsored a complimentary dinner for Soulé, attended by twenty of the principal military men and officials, including Brigadier General Birkett D. Fry, who presided, Colonel Wheeler, and the adjutant general. The place of honor was accorded Soulé, while the American minister occupied the seat to the left of the toastmaster. Following the repast, the group assisted at a presidential levee at Walker's palace.³³ On September 2 Soulé boarded the river boat *San Carlos* for San Juan, where he may have lingered for two weeks or longer to secure passage for Havana and New Orleans. Whether by intent or accidentally, he did not reach his destination until October 17, over two months after his departure on the Caribbean excursion. The *Daily Crescent* noted the return of "this distinguished gentleman" and gave expression to an enthusiastic approval of the budding republic: "No matter how much people differ respecting politics, we all agree in regard to Nicaragua, and all of us join in heartfelt wishes for the success of the movement so hopefully inaugurated by General Walker."³⁴

ords of the Second District Court, New Orleans, No. 32833 (Archives of the City of New Orleans). But it is more than probable that by 1863 Soulé regarded any title to landed property in Nicaragua as valueless in view of Walker's flight and the subsequent political upheaval. For the same reason his daughter-in-law would hardly have considered it worth listing seven years later.

³² Accounts of Mason Pilcher, Esq., May 6, 1856-November 3, 1857, item 79, in Fayssoux Collection.

³³ *El Nicaragiense*, September 6, 1856. The editor, after a conversation with Soulé on the eve of his departure, was led to believe that within six months he would return to become a resident of the republic. *Ibid.*, September 13, 1856.

That Soulé's visit caused a deep impression on the filibusters is evident from a ceremony taking place on September 30 for the presentation of a flag to the 1st Rifle Battalion of the Nicaraguan army. At a social gathering held in the evening after the ceremony he was toasted as "the chivalrous advocate of freedom," whose return would be hailed with joy. *Ibid.*, October 4, 1856.

The Central American historian Lorenzo Montúfar's *Walker en Centro-América* (Guatemala City, 1887), 561-63, emphasizes Soulé's influence with Walker and puts the time of his departure from the country around the middle of September.

³⁴ New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, October 18, 1856. Family ties stimulated Soulé's

During the autumn and winter of 1856-1857 New Orleans and Mobile were the centers of recruiting and finance for the southward movement. Soon after returning, Soulé approached Major Beauregard with the hope of enlisting his services in the Nicaraguan army. The West Point graduate, with a good record in the Mexican War, was languishing in the dull, unremunerative routine of the New Orleans Custom House and was flattered by the offer from Walker of second in command. Towards the end of October he wrote to Captain Alexander Bowman, his chief in the Treasury Department: "What do you think of the possibility of my getting a leave of absence for one or two months from the War and Treasury Depts. with permission to leave the U. States? . . . He [Soulé] makes me in the name of Genl. Walker some very brilliant offers, which should everything turn up right, would amply satisfy me."³⁵ By December he had virtually resolved to join in the adventure that held out such promise of rich reward. In another letter to his superior in the capital, he praised the movement highly and formally requested a leave of absence with the suggestion that he might even take up his abode permanently in the Central American republic:

I view his [Walker's] undertaking as a noble and glorious one—to establish the spirit and blessings of our Institutions over that unfortunate country, and the dominion & supremacy of the Anglo-American race, over that poor & degraded mongrel breed of Spaniards & Indians—if he should not do it, someone else will, for it is a mere question of time—one of *manifest destiny*—just as sure & certain as that the prog-

interest in Cuba and filibustering in general. His son's marriage established a relationship with the family of an exiled Cuban adventurer and at the same time with one of the most aristocratic Creole families of New Orleans. On Christmas Eve, 1856, his only son, Nelvil, was married to Louise Mathilde Angele de Sentmanat, the daughter of Francisco de Sentmanat, a Cuban by birth, and Rosas de Marigny. De Sentmanat had a brief, stormy career in Mexican politics from 1840 to 1844. Named by General Santa Anna as governor of the state of Tabasco, he maintained an authoritarian rule in that province until 1843, when he was defeated in battle by General Apudia and forced to withdraw to Cuba. From Havana he transferred his residence to New Orleans, whence in the early part of June 1844 he launched a filibustering expedition to Tabasco. He met with a second military reverse, resulting in his capture and execution together with thirty of his followers. Soulé's association with Mexican affairs was increased by his appointment as guardian for the young daughter of General Meija [Ignacio?], one of Sentmanat's collaborators. See Records of Marriage, Archives of St. Louis Cathedral, New Orleans; *Diccionario Biográfico Mexicano* (2 vols., Mexico City, n.d.), II, 761; New Orleans *Picayune*, March 29, 1870.

³⁵ Beauregard to Bowman, October 29, 1856, in Beauregard Papers, 1854-1860.

ress of civilization in North America is bound to annihilate the Indian race—which, in not many years from now, will be one of legends & of doubtful historical facts. Considering then that my *futurity* [*sic*] depends upon my visiting W. at this present moment, that is by the Steamer of the 26th inst. I must beg you to get Mr. Guthrie's consent to my absence here for about six weeks. . . . Should I finally conclude to exile my self from home & from my friends, I will propose you an arrangement for the conduct of operations here which I think will meet with your approval.³⁶

By the time fixed for his departure the prospects for Walker's success had considerably dimmed, the opposition having rallied and inflicted losses upon the filibuster, and Beauregard abandoned his plan for joining the expedition.

Meanwhile, in the Louisiana metropolis Soulé and other outstanding citizens formed the Nicaraguan committee for the purpose of selling bonds and animating public sentiment, and his name appeared on a list of fifty-eight persons who publicly invited Colonel J. C. Kewen of Walker's army to address a mass meeting on the subject, "Past, Present, and Future of Nicaragua."³⁷ Soulé was "warmly greeted" by "a large audience" at the Lyceum Hall when he introduced Kewen. The visitor gave a brief talk, "worthy of its glorious subject and one which reflected the highest honor upon the speaker."³⁸

In 1857, after Walker's defeat and expulsion from Central America, Soulé turned his hand to a venture purely exploitative and commercial in nature. He became attorney and counsel for a group of stockholders of the Tehuantepec Company, formed by Colonel A. G. Sloo for the construction of a means of transit across the narrow band of land in southern Mexico separating the Gulf from the Pacific. Sloo's claim to the concession made by the Mexican government four years previously was threatened in July 1857 by another set of promoters in New Orleans. Among those involved in this bold move were Senators Benjamin and Slidell, who had ample financial resources and the full support of the Buchanan administration.³⁹ Money joined to political favor pre-

³⁶ Beauregard to Bowman, December 5, 1856, *ibid.*

³⁷ New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, November 24, 1856.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, November 25, 1856.

³⁹ For the background of American interest in the Isthmus see J. Fred Rippy, "Diplomacy of the United States and Mexico regarding the Isthmus of Tehuantepec," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, VI (1919-1920), 503-31; Man-

sented an unbeatable combination. It was their strategy to induce the Mexican authorities to cancel Sloo's grant and issue a new concession to the Tehuantepec Company, which had been reorganized and was now controlled by friends of the two senators. To protect his clients' interest Soulé, accompanied by his son Nelvil, resolved to undertake a hasty journey to the Mexican capital. On August 2 the competing attorneys, Benjamin and Soulé, left for Vera Cruz on board the steamship *Texas*, which, having been engaged in the running of men and supplies to Walker, was an appropriate vessel for the accommodation of another group of would-be exploiters.⁴⁰ The pre-eminent legal talents of the New Orleans bar, Benjamin for the new company and Soulé for Sloo, were to argue their respective cases before the tribunal of President Ignacio Comonfort and his cabinet. Occupying a key role in the intrigues revolving about the struggle for concessions was John Forsyth, the American minister. Here the initial advantage lay with Soulé, who, as a former member of the diplomatic corps, could expect more than ordinary consideration.

In a letter of August 17 from the capital to a New Orleans friend and political associate, Needler R. Jennings, he wrote in a jubilant vein:

The American minister had provided most excellent quarters for me and sent his concierge to take me from the diligence. Of these delicate courtesies I had been advised by letter through the very gracious interposition of Col. Fearn, the secretary of the legation, who came on horseback, at some distance of the city, to deliver to me the message of his Patron.

On the evening I dined with Mr. Forsyth and made on the spot all my preparations to meet the enemy.⁴¹

ning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, IX, 238-42, 929-36, 947-59; Hunter Miller (ed.), *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America* (8 vols., Washington, 1931-1948), VI, 310-29; Pierce Butler, *Judah P. Benjamin* (Philadelphia, 1906), 120-34, 185-89.

⁴⁰ Butler, *Benjamin*, 187.

⁴¹ Soulé to Jennings, August 17, 1857, in Hennen-Jennings Papers (Department of Archives, Louisiana State University).

It is not unlikely that Soulé himself was a shareholder in the older company. See Soulé to Jennings, July 23, 1857, *ibid.* For the complete text of these letters see the author's edition of "Correspondence of Pierre Soulé: The Louisiana Tehuantepec Company," in *Hispanic American Historical Review* (Baltimore, 1918-), XXXII (1952), 59-72.

From the contents of this and subsequent communications to Jennings it is clear that the American minister was partial to the Sloo interests. Benjamin's attitude of self-importance and boastful assertions that he had come as a special envoy from the President of the United States vexed Forsyth no little and made him more favorably disposed to the opposition. Somewhat later, the United States Senator, in a vitriolic note, denounced Forsyth for "treacherous conduct," a charge that grossly exaggerated the facts.⁴²

In due time the rival claimants were admitted to the presence of President Comonfort. Benjamin was received first, Soulé through Forsyth's influence reserving his arguments in order to have the last say. Soulé's interview lasted two hours. Approaching the subject tactfully, he alluded at the outset to the present state of affairs in Spain and its policy toward Mexico. Discovering that Comonfort's views coincided with his on these topics, he then brought up the plea for the Sloo claim. It was his contention that there were no legal grounds for cancellation of the grant, since the Mexican government had not recognized any transfers of title since 1853 and because the grant was incorporated into the Gadsden Treaty [article 8], which had not been amended to Sloo's disadvantage.⁴³ The interview over, he returned to his lodgings with Forsyth, who remarked en route, so Soulé gleefully imparted to Jennings, "Messrs. Lasère [Emile La Sère] and Benjamin had been received with great politeness, but not with the cordiality which had been exhibited to me."⁴⁴

The bright expectations of Sloo's attorney were soon shattered by the weapons at Benjamin's disposal, the frank, acknowledged backing of Buchanan and ready money. The latter expedient in Soulé's mind was a determining factor in the situation, as he confessed sadly, though with a flash of wit, to his old friend: "The Minister of Fomento, it is understood, has received one hundred thousand dollars. He has name [*sic*] Siliceo, and is a full and dark mulatto, just such a being as would run great risk to be put at auction in New Orleans. In New Orleans we sell them, here they sell themselves."⁴⁵

On September 3 and 7 the Mexican government issued decrees

⁴² Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, IX, 240, 241.

⁴³ Soulé to Jennings, August 17, 1857, in Hennen-Jennings Papers.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Soulé to Jennings, September 5, 1857, in Hennen-Jennings Papers.

revoking the Sloo grant and awarding a concession to the company represented by Benjamin and his associates. Thus the chief purpose of Soulé's travel resulted in failure. But inwardly he might rejoice over the knowledge that he had worsted his opponents in a minor degree. For the cogency of his arguments, abetted by Forsyth's friendliness, proved of decided advantage to the harassed Mexican officials, who were able to impose heavy financial obligations from earlier claims, possibly over a million dollars, on the new company and to reduce the terms of the lease from seventy-five to sixty years.⁴⁶

Once again in New Orleans, Soulé busied himself with matters pertaining to Walker. As the latter's attorney he had conferred with the filibuster during a visit to the city the last week of May 1857. Upon this occasion Walker had addressed an "immense crowd" for two hours from a gayly decorated platform, accompanied by a band and "pyrotechnic accessories." Above the speaker's head waved the Stars and Stripes and "immediately below it the tri-colored flag of Nicaragua with its red star in the middle." The *Daily Crescent* rhapsodized: "We never heard any speaker, at any public meeting, more profoundly listened to."⁴⁷ A later editorial erroneously blamed the filibuster's overthrow on the diabolical machinations of the abolitionists: "The source whence this storm of accusation and abuse proceeds renders it harmless. It was initiated by three or four leading Black Republican papers in New York and Philadelphia, and the cry taken up by throats of lesser note—a cry of vengeance against the unpardonable sin of attempting to extend the area of slavery."⁴⁸

Notwithstanding broad manifestations of popular sympathy for Walker's scheme in New Orleans and other points in the South, Buchanan and Secretary of State Lewis Cass acted to prevent a renewal of the expedition. On November 11, the federal authorities at the port of New Orleans, fearing that "emigrants" were being assembled for another attempt, issued a writ for their leader's arrest for violation of the neutrality laws of April

⁴⁶ Lewis Cass to John Forsyth, October 20, 1857, with enclosure of a copy of communication from Benjamin and La Sère to Buchanan, September 19, 1857, in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, IX, 238-42; Forsyth to Cass, November 24, 1857, *ibid.*, 949-57.

⁴⁷ New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, June 1, 1857.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, June 10, 1857.

20, 1818. Walker was, however, released on bail of two thousand dollars, provided by S. F. Slatter, to appear in court November 19. When Walker departed for Mobile before that date, the federal district court initiated a motion for forfeiture of the bond. Soulé, on Slatter's behalf, drew up in his own handwriting an affidavit and motion for delay and suspension, which was presented to the court January 5, 1858. On February 3 the attorney notified the court that the defendant had been delayed in Nashville, but would answer all charges upon his arrival. In the celebrated trial that took place during the first week of June, Walker, assisted by Soulé, presented his own case to the jury, resulting in the decision of *nolle prosequi*.⁴⁹

The finale in the relations of the filibuster and his chief New Orleans backer occurred late in the summer and early fall of 1858. It had become a habit now for the Louisianian to be away from the city during the intolerably oppressive months of August and September. In August he set out for Washington and New York. The exact purpose of this trip, whose itinerary took him by the famous resort town of Old Point Comfort, Virginia, for a conference with A. Dudley Mann, former assistant secretary of state, and ex-President Tyler, is obscure.⁵⁰ Rumor had it in New Orleans that he had been called to Washington by Buchanan for consultation about policy toward Mexico, Central America, and Cuba.⁵¹ The *New York Times* speculated at random that his visit served a number of ends. "It is understood," commented its Washington correspondent, "that he is to have an interview with General Walker, who has a plan for taking over the Yucatan with a view to an eventual descent on Cuba."⁵² In another story the same correspondent stated that "if that is his errand he will of course consult Mr. Buchanan, and show him that no more favor-

⁴⁹ "United States vs. William Walker," Docket no. 2, in Archives of the Federal District Court, New Orleans.

⁵⁰ Ambrose Dudley Mann, a Virginian by ancestry and a resident of Washington, was an active member of the Southern Rights party, toward which Soulé was sympathetically inclined. Before his appointment as Assistant Secretary of State, 1853-1856, he had gone on a special mission to Hungary with authority to recognize Kossuth's revolutionary government if it held sufficient promise of permanency. In collaboration with the former Department of State official, the ex-minister to Spain was reportedly engaged in drawing up a vindication of his policy in Madrid, and this may have been a topic of conversation. See *Dictionary of American Biography*, XI, 239-40; *New York Times*, August 27, 1858.

⁵¹ *New Orleans Daily Delta*, September 3, 1858.

⁵² *New York Times*, August 27, 1858.

able moment than the present can occur for the execution of the project." It was suggested as well that business matters relating to the Sloo branch of the Tehuantepec Company and even national politics were the explanation.⁵³ As events showed, one of his major purposes was to see the filibuster.

On September 2 the former diplomat to Spain was in New York City, having previously spent a few days in Washington, and, on good evidence, conferred with Walker. What was transacted by the two "filibusters" remains unknown.⁵⁴ The policy of the administration, at the time more capable of favorable interpretation for filibustering, and renewed discord between the Liberals and Conservatives in Nicaragua were sufficient reasons for the contemplation of another design. But if such were agreed upon, it was not immediately put into force. Soulé returned to New Orleans, after another stopover in the capital.⁵⁵ Although Walker resumed his filibustering from New Orleans in 1859 and 1860, his efforts drew no more than half-hearted support in the city, since Buchanan and Cass frowned upon any intrusion by force into Central America in those years, and in consequence any movement stood but the slightest chance of realization.

The year 1858 marked an end to Soulé's active association with pre-Civil War filibustering and exploitative enterprises directed at the Hispanic countries bordering on the Gulf and the Caribbean. For three years he had been the fervent, unabashed protagonist of the most extreme imperialistic groups among Southerners seeking for sectional and personal profit to gain control over isthmian routes to the Pacific. Idealistic and selfish impulses generated an enthusiasm and a constancy of purpose that endured until the possibility of success had completely failed. An erstwhile member of George Sanders' company of "Young America," he strove for "American ascendancy in the Gulf," but realizing the growing cleavage between North and South, he saw an opportunity in the Americanization of Nicaragua to strengthen his section in a notable fashion by introducing black servitude. Extraordinary rewards beckoned to land speculators and to stockholders of companies that obtained concessions for the construction of a passageway to the Pacific. His defeat was the result of

⁵³ *Ibid.*, September 1, 1858.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, September 2, 1858.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, September 6, 1858.

the hostile policy of the administration, the opposition of the Vanderbilt interests in New York, and, in the case of the Sloo faction of the Tehuantepec Company, of the superior financial resources of Benjamin and his associates. Basically, a reason for his reverses lay partly within himself. He accomplished little because of a natural inability to understand the practical difficulties surrounding these schemes and because of a tendency to let imagination and audacity supplant good judgment. In the light of his later political career in Louisiana, his participation in these ventures revealed more ardor than acumen. It was the contention of some that the collapse of the Walker movement dealt an adverse blow to his standing with the electorate of the state, where he had to battle the powerful coalition of Slidell and Benjamin for control of the Democratic machine. Such was the opinion of the Monroe, Louisiana, correspondent of the *Daily Crescent*:

Mr. Soulé was the patron saint of General Walker, the future Hospodar of Central America. He blindly believed he was eminently promoting the paramount interest of the South by Americanizing this portion of the Continent, and all his energy, and wild, ardent enthusiasm were directed to the accomplishment of this cherished aim. No man better than Mr. Slidell understands the prestige of success in any enterprise upon the fortunes of a man. Success sanctifies; defeat defames. To defeat the enterprise of Walker was to defame Soulé at home, and to annihilate his power with the Democracy.⁵⁶

But his avowed, though futile, championship of this type of imperialism did not destroy his hold on sections of the rank and file and upon certain local politicians. The Douglas faction of the Democratic party in the state continued to recognize him as its leader, and in this capacity he headed the Louisiana delegation to the Baltimore Convention in 1860 in a vain effort to bridge the widening gap between the Northern and Southern wings of the national organization.

⁵⁶ New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, December 11, 1858.