

Young American Males and Filibustering in the Age of Manifest Destiny: The United States Army as a Cultural Mirror

Robert E. May

Asked the meaning of the term *filibuster*, modern Americans are likely to conjure up images of politicians rendering long-winded speeches to delay the passage of legislation. Prior to 1900, however, *filibuster* was most frequently applied to American adventurers who raised or participated in private military forces that either invaded or planned to invade foreign countries with which the United States was formally at peace. Although peoples of other countries occasionally filibustered, only the United States gained repute as a filibustering nation.

Filibustering reached its apex before the Civil War, when thousands of Americans risked their lives in expeditions. The most notorious filibuster was William Walker. Walker invaded Mexican Lower California and Sonora in 1853–1854, cast his lot in a Nicaraguan civil war in the spring of 1855, emerged commander-in-chief of the army in a coalition government that October, and had himself inaugurated as president of Nicaragua the following July. However, Walker represented a generation of filibusters. Filibuster activity touched locales other than Mexico and Nicaragua, including Cuba, Ecuador, Canada, Honduras, and Hawaii. “The fever of Filibusterism is on our country. Her pulse beats like a hammer at the wrist, and there’s a very high color on her face,” noted the *New-York Daily Times* in an editorial that could have been dated any time between the Mexican War and Civil War.¹

Filibustering defied international law, United States statutes, and presidential proclamations. Though only Walker’s Nicaragua expedition achieved even short-

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¹ *New-York Daily Times*, March 4, 1854, p. 4.

THE
DESTINY OF NICARAGUA:

CENTRAL AMERICA AS IT WAS, IS, AND MAY BE.



GEN. WILLIAM WALKER.

The political condition of the country; its importance and resources; peculiarities of the people; striking incidents, with engravings of natural scenery.

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BY AN OFFICER IN THE SERVICE OF WALKER.

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1856.

The title page of *The Destiny of Nicaragua* (1856) suggests that Americans include William Walker's intrusion into Central America within their vision of manifest destiny. *Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.*

term success, and although many of the expeditions met bloody ends, filibustering disrupted United States relations with England, Spain, France, and many of the countries of middle and South America. It interfered with United States efforts to purchase Cuba from Spain, complicated the negotiations with Mexico that eventu-

ated in the Gadsden Treaty, affected Anglo-American efforts to resolve controversies about Central America deriving from the disputed Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850, provoked outbreaks of anti-Americanism in Central America, and had a host of domestic ramifications. Filibustering sparked heated debate in Congress, state legislatures, and southern commercial conventions. References to filibusters peppered political party platforms as well as campaign oratory and song. Filibustering helped make and unmake presidents and contributed significantly to the breakdown of sectional relations, which eventuated in the American Civil War.²

Although historians have produced a considerable literature about filibustering's impact upon United States diplomacy and sectional politics, they have been slow to address its significance as a mid-nineteenth-century United States cultural phenomenon. This is partly, I suspect, because historians tend to judge filibustering by the number of adventurers who actually arrived in foreign domains, without taking into account their support networks or the persons who joined filibuster units that disbanded prematurely. Since most filibusters left Gulf Coast or California ports, or crossed the boundary of Texas and Mexico, there has also been a tendency in historical scholarship to explain the filibusters as products of the southern martial spirit, the geopolitics of slavery expansionism, and the lawlessness and labor surplus of post-gold rush California. What has been obscured is filibustering's place in American social history, both North and South.³

Rather than restrict filibustering to the sideshows of America's pre-Civil War drama, historians need to respect its salience and probe its meaning. Filibustering contributed to the rhythm of antebellum life. Newspapers and periodicals published countless news items and editorials about filibuster plots, battles, and trials. Filibuster rallies, recruiting and bond drives, serenades, lectures, parades, and stage plays touched communities throughout much of the country. Filibustering provided the nation with heroes, martyrs, and villains. While Americans were often embarrassed by filibuster depredations in foreign countries, even opponents of the movement sometimes found themselves in awe of filibuster courage under adversity. A United States naval officer reflected, "I have forgiven the crime & delusion of the

² Ray Emerson Curtis, "The Law of Hostile Military Expeditions As Applied in the United States," *American Journal of International Law*, 8 (Jan. 1914), 1-2, 8; Paul Neff Garber, *The Gadsden Treaty* (Philadelphia, 1923), 97-98; Kenneth Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908* (Berkeley, 1967), 187-94; Richard W. Van Alstyne, "American Filibustering and the British Navy: A Caribbean Analogue of Mediterranean Piracy," *American Journal of International Law*, 32 (Jan. 1938), 138-42; Dexter Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine, 1826-1867* (1933; reprint, Gloucester, 1965), 244-46, 324-31; James W. Cortada, *Two Nations over Time: Spain and the United States, 1776-1977* (Westport, 1978), 66-68, 72-74.

³ John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800-1861* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), 96-128; Robert E. May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861* (Baton Rouge, 1973); Rollin G. Osterweis, *Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South* (Baton Rouge, 1949), 172-85; Joe A. Stout, *The Liberators: Filibustering Expeditions into Mexico, 1848-1862, and the Last Thrust of Manifest Destiny* (Los Angeles, 1973). Works emphasizing filibustering's relationship to national culture include Charles H. Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny: The Lives and Times of the Filibusters* (Chapel Hill, 1980); William H. Goetzmann, *When the Eagle Screamed: The Romantic Horizon in American Diplomacy, 1800-1860* (New York, 1966), 74-88; and Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization* (New York, 1985), 242-61. Many other books and articles treat antebellum filibustering. Of especial importance are William O. Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers: The Story of William Walker and His Associates* (New York, 1960); and Basil Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba, 1848-1855* (New York, 1948).

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 General Valle, a... A Cashman
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 Derivatives in the pay of Villama... G. B. BISHOP
 Padre Latorra, a benevolent Priest... W. H. BROWN
 Nicaraguans, Costa Ricans, Niggers, &c.

CHRISTINE, betrothed to Castello
PATLINA, with song of "I won't die an old Maid" Mrs. H. F. NICHOLS
 Nicaraguan Women, Niggers, &c. In the course of the piece.

A New Spanish Dance—"El Trevatore" Miss Henrietta Lang
 And previous to the piece

A NEW MEDLEY FILIBUSTER OVERTURE
 "The Girl I leave behind me" Colombia, the Prize of the Ocean, "Hail to the Chief," "Spring of Shilalah," & "Yankee Doodle," arranged by W. T. Poltracian, New York Professor.

Synopsis of Scenery, Incidents, &c. Act First.

SUBURBS OF GRANADA.
 TERRIFIC COMBAT.—ABDUCTION OF CARISTINE
 Rage and despair of Castillo.
 SONG—"I won't die an old Maid"
DUTY—JOYS OF WEDDED LIFE
 Act 3rd.—Interior of the Old Jail at Rivas.
OUTSKIRTS OF RIVAS

ATTACK OF WALKER'S FORCES
 Flight of the Gilienna, Rescue of Juan Castillo.
 Desperate Conflict and conquest of Granada.
 The grand Plaza, Granada,
 Market Morning.
NICARAGUAN PAS SEUL BY MISS HENRIETTA LANG
 Walker, Rivas Gov.
 Apartment at Cas...

IN HONOR OF RIVAS! GENERAL WALKER'S TRIUMPH.

Playbill for a performance of "Nicaragua" which appeared in New York City (a center of filibustering activity). Stage productions and other media brought filibuster exploits to the attention of a receptive American public. *Courtesy Tennessee State Library and Archives, Tennessee Historical Society Collection, John Heiss Papers, Nicaragua Scrapbook.*

invaders for the immeasurable courage & uncomplaining spirit in which they all to a man met their deaths." Filibustering captured the imagination of common folk. "There are but few men now living who occupy so much of the public mind as Gen. William Walker," regretted the *Louisville Daily Courier*. "He is the theme of conversation among men and women, and children. . . . He is, indeed, the hero of the times." Intellectuals also found that filibustering commanded their attention. Washington Irving concluded that the filibusters signaled a "spirit of mischief" at loose in the country. Filibustering even penetrated the nation's subconscious. Americans found themselves applying the term to matters related only tangentially to private invasions of other countries. The *New-York Tribune* referred to proslavery emigrants in the Kansas Territory as "Col. Buford's Kansas filibusters." Lydia Maria Child read the word backward through time to find William the Conqueror a filibuster. In the late antebellum period, filibustering helped define what it meant to be an American. As a cynic put it in *Harper's Weekly*, "The insatiable spirit of filibusterism . . . forms one of the most amiable virtues of our beloved fellow-countrymen."⁴

Above all, historians need to study filibustering's appeal and meaning to America's young males. Though some filibusters were of advanced age, the great number of them, as might be expected in highly dangerous, physically demanding, and illegal ventures, were young. Walker claimed that all the men involved in his Lower California expedition were young. The average age of the eighty-four filibusters taken prisoner in Narciso López's 1851 expedition to Cuba was 25.9 years. As would happen later in the Civil War, adolescents who had no business soldiering signed up for expeditions. "At the age of fifteen I ran away . . . to join an aggregation of young gentlemen but little older than myself, who enlisted under the banner of General Walker," one of them later recalled, noting that his group was "caught . . . like a bunch of truant kids" while passing down the Mississippi River. John A. Campbell, a Supreme Court justice, observed that filibusters collected together in Mobile were "merely boys."⁵

Perhaps the most telling indication of filibustering's broad appeal to the nation's young males is its impact on the officers and enlisted men of the United States Army. At first glance, the army would seem a most unlikely institution to foster filibustering. The service had a history of antifilibustering responsibilities that dated

⁴ Samuel Francis Du Pont to Charles Henry Davis, Sept. 10, 1851, Samuel Francis Du Pont Papers (Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Del.); *Louisville Daily Courier*, Jan. 15, 1858; Washington Irving to Charles A. Davy, Sept. 12, 1851, Washington Irving Papers (Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville); Samuel Longfellow, ed., *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, with Extracts from His Journals and Correspondence* (2 vols., Boston, 1886), II, 231; *New-York Tribune*, July 18, 1857, p. 4; Lydia Maria Child, *A Romance of the Republic* (Boston, 1867), 357; *Harper's Weekly*, Jan. 10, 1857. For one striking example of how the media popularized and the public lionized the filibusters, see "A Visit to General Walker and Suite," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, June 27, 1857, pp. 56, 55.

⁵ William Walker, *The War in Nicaragua* (1860; reprint, Tucson, 1985), 23; Enclosure in Foxhall A. Parker to William A. Graham, Sept. 25, 1851, Letters Received, Squadron Letters, Records of the Secretary of the Navy, RG 45, microfilm 89, reel 92 (National Archives); Asbury Harpending, *The Great Diamond Hoax and Other Stirring Incidents in the Life of Asbury Harpending*, ed. James H. Wilkins (1915; reprint, Norman, 1958), 5; John A. Campbell to Jeremiah S. Black, Nov. 22, 1858, container 19, Jeremiah S. Black Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress).

back to the Washington administration, and the prevention of filibusters emerged as one of the army's most important peacetime missions by the late 1830s. One might well expect the nation's officers and enlisted men to despise their filibuster antagonists. Yet sympathy for filibustering infiltrated army ranks. Some soldiers even resigned commissions and deserted ranks to join filibuster expeditions. While it would be misleading to brush the whole army with the stain of filibustering because of the derelictions and sentiments of a portion of its personnel, it would also be wrong to exempt United States soldiers from filibustering's spell. The army held up a cultural mirror to its nation. To understand the army's place in the story of filibustering is to render more comprehensible the meaning of filibustering to America's civilians.⁶

To antebellum males coming of age, filibustering seemed less bizarre than it does to the modern mind. For one thing, longstanding American traditions of geographical and social mobility, heightened by the transportation revolution of the early nineteenth century, facilitated filibustering. Accustomed to changing home and occupation, young American males found it easy to regard filibustering as just another move. The violent traditions and martial spirit of the United States fostered filibustering. Since colonial times Americans had been in the habit of resorting to arms. Antebellum youths, particularly rural youths, were accustomed to the use of muskets and rifles. And young Americans could not help but absorb the lessons of their country's history of subjugating and exploiting darker-skinned peoples in the name of progress. Many Americans simply assumed that the superiority of their race and governmental institutions gave them the moral right to filibuster abroad. As one newspaper put it in a lengthy elegy to a young man who died filibustering in Central America:

Just South of Texas is a Land,
We call it Nicaragua, and
Men live there who but little know
How they should rule. Hence, to o'erthrow
The tyrant Dolt, brave Walker's cause
Did win Columbia's warm applause.

Similarly, a man seeking a spot in "any organised set of U.S. citizens" invading Cuba rationalized, "What business have a set of Transatlantic degenerate don sons of bitches as the inhabit[ant]s of old Spain to rule such a garden spot[?]"⁷

⁶ Robert W. Coakley, *The Role of Federal Military Forces in Domestic Disorders, 1789-1878* (Washington, 1988), 25-28, 77-83, 110-19.

⁷ George W. Pierson, "Mobility," in *The Comparative Approach to American History*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New York, 1968), 106-20; George R. Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York, 1951); Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York, 1975); W. Eugene Hollon, *Frontier Violence: Another Look* (New York, 1974); Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 158-248; Bruce Collins, *White Society in the Antebellum South* (London, 1985), 78-81; *Columbus* [Miss.] *Democrat*, June 6, 1857; Lawrence Berry

But more than history and tradition nudged young American men into filibuster expeditions. The pre-Civil War period brought rapid modernization, immigration, urbanization, and social disorder to the country—an ideal milieu for filibustering. Just as some youths sought identity in a fluid social environment by joining volunteer militia and fire companies or by frequenting taverns or illegal boxing matches, others cast their fate with filibuster companies. Certainly most immigrants-turned-filibusters seem to have regarded their units as a haven from the nativism and job discrimination that pervaded antebellum American municipal life. Filibuster recruiters promised wages, rations, and, sometimes, land, mines, and other riches to gullible enlistees. “There were some Hungarian and Italian refugees in this expedition,” observed the *New-York Daily Tribune*, “but we are assured that they enlisted only because they had no other means of saving themselves from starving. One man whom we know had not slept under a roof for two nights before he consented to join the assemblage at South Amboy.” German, Hungarian, and Irish immigrants played a visible role in filibuster expeditions departing such mid-Atlantic ports as New York City, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.⁸

The appeal of filibustering crossed class lines. Sons of planters, merchants, and prominent politicians joined clerks, apprentices, and immigrants in filibuster invasions. Some college students dropped out of their institutions to participate. A “young man . . . of the senior class left here quite abruptly a week ago and it is supposed that he put out for Cuba,” a Princeton student noted at the time of López’s last expedition to the island. Filibustering appealed to youthful idealism. A University of Mississippi student contacted the leader of a Cuban filibustering expedition, John A. Quitman, arguing that “a people struggling beneath repression should not only receive the sympathies, but the strong arm of assistance of the republican institutions” of the United States. But in a day of romantic individualism, when many American males were reading Sir Walter Scott, rural and urban youths alike also relished the adventure and opportunity to become a hero that filibustering seemed to promise. “Dear General,” perpetual filibuster Chatham Roberdeau Wheat explained to Quitman, “the height of my ambition is to lead a desperate charge in your presence & then to receive your commendation.” On mere impulse, perhaps after hearing an oration, young men signed up with filibuster units, bought new weapons, and within days were on their way to a filibuster rendezvous. Then they caroused and bonded together, hoping that their funds would hold out until the expedition departed. “The Louisville boys came to join us to-day . . . and we had a gay time before they bid us adieu,” a filibuster jotted in his diary during the opening phases of one operation. Though engaged in illegal activity, the filibusters sometimes inspired public adulation, which only fed the illusory fires of chivalry.

Washington to [Henry Bedinger III?], July 28, 1851, Bedinger-Dandridge Family Papers (William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.).

⁸ Rowland Berthoff, *An Unsettled People: Social Order and Disorder in American History* (New York, 1971), 177–232; Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America* (New York, 1980); Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York, 1977), 39, 87–94; Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Fighting in America* (Ithaca, 1986), 129–47; *New-York Daily Tribune*, April 30, 1851.

At times, crowds of well-wishers lined the docks to cheer filibusters off. The romance might even continue at sea or over the border for a while, until reality set in. "We have got almost there and are going filibustering now sure," one filibuster penciled home from a Nicaragua-bound steamer, exultant that his party had managed to evade the authorities in California. Flags of prospective republics heightened the exhilarating moments, as young American males waited anxiously for a chance to prove their valor to the world.⁹

Filibustering, in short, involved a cross section of young American males. Texans and Californians, to be sure, dominated forays into Mexico. Several expeditions designed to protect or expand slavery attracted a high percentage of southerners. John Quitman's planned attack on Cuba was both a response to rumors that Spanish officials might emancipate the island's slaves and an effort to add a new slave state or two to the Union. Walker's cause became a southern crusade after he reestablished slavery in Nicaragua. But to define filibustering as an episode in American regionalism is to obscure the almost infinite variety of reasons that led young men to join expeditions. Unhappy family lives, broken romances, debts, and troubles with the law were as likely to make a filibuster as was proslavery fanaticism. The potential spoils of war attracted filibusters just as they have enticed countless soldiers and sailors through the ages. After observing a young filibuster bound for Cuba whom he encountered on a Mississippi River steamboat, a traveler noted curtly, "He wants a sugar plantation." One piece of doggerel expressed well the varied origins of America's filibusters:

Hark! We answer from the mountains,
From lowly cot and lordly hall,
From city marts and rural fountains
Bold hearts are answering to your call!¹⁰

Officers and enlisted men in the United States Army, although they often felt the pressures that made filibusters of young American men, were obliged to foil filibustering expeditions. The pre-Civil War army's antifilibustering mission derived primarily from the Neutrality Act of 1818 and specific instructions from the War Department. Section 8 of the 1818 legislation declared it "lawful for the President of the United States, or such other person as he shall have empowered for that purpose, to employ such part of the land or naval forces of the United States

⁹ John T. McMurrin, Jr., to Lemuel P. Conner, Sept. 10, 1851, Lemuel Conner Papers (Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge); A. J. McNeil to Quitman, June 10, 1854, John Quitman Papers (Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson); C. R. Wheat to Quitman, Oct. 29, 1854, *ibid.*; [M. C. Taylor, ed.], "Col. M. C. Taylor's Diary in Lopez Cardenas Expedition, 1850," *Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society*, 19 (Sept. 1921), 79, 80; Marcellus French, "Expedition of the Alamo Rangers," ed. Franklina Gray Bartlett, *Overland Monthly*, 21 (May 1893), 517-23; W. H. Burt to James Wilson, Jr., Oct. 16, 1855, James Wilson, Jr., Papers (New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord).

¹⁰ J. Alexander Fulton Diary, Nov. 22, [1854], microfilm (Delaware State Archives, Dover); "Air: Walker's Grand March," in John P. Heiss Scrapbook (Tennessee Historical Society Collections, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville).

. . . for the purpose of preventing the carrying on of any such expedition or enterprise from the territories or jurisdiction of the United States against the territories or dominions of any foreign prince or state, or of any colony, district, or people, with whom the United States are at peace." War Department orders, generally issued in response to reports reaching Washington of pending filibusters or filibusters in progress, regularly reminded high-ranking officers of their antifilibustering responsibilities.¹¹

Accustomed to obeying orders, army officers generally complied with specific antifilibustering instructions. To many officers the filibusters represented a criminal or ruffraff element in American society. When referring to filibusters, officers were apt to employ epithets like "scoundrels," "outlaws," and "pirates." While some officers genuinely sympathized with the natives of countries attacked by filibusters or worried that filibustering would impair American foreign trade or ignite a war for which the nation was unprepared, more were troubled by convictions that private military expeditions tarnished the honor of the nation that they had dedicated their careers to defend. Officers sensitive about their nation's image welcomed commands to interdict filibuster operations. "They will fillibuster in Mexico," predicted an infantry lieutenant in 1860 when members of the Knights of the Golden Circle were congregating around Brownsville, Texas, "and we will be employed against them. All reason and justice demands that our government . . . should to the extent of its power prevent all attempts to extend the 'Area of Freedom' in the way proposed." Ethan Allen Hitchcock, commander of the army's Pacific Division in the early 1850s, brought an especially intense ideological commitment to his antifilibustering responsibilities. He perceived that illegal expeditions damaged American foreign relations and worried that the expeditions would endanger the Republic by raising anew sectional friction over slavery expansion.¹²

Irrespective of their private feelings, army officers had cause to dislike filibustering from an institutional perspective, since it created an annoyance for troops stationed on the frontier and distracted the army from other duties. In December 1853, for instance, a survey by the Corps of Topographical Engineers of a southern transconti-

¹¹ "An Act in addition to the 'Act for the punishment of certain crimes against the United States,' and to repeal the acts therein mentioned," *Annals of Congress*, 15 cong., 1 sess., II, April 20, 1818, pp. 2567-70; W. W. Bliss to William Freret and John Walker, May 8, 1851, Letters Sent, Records of the Office of the Secretary of War, RG 107 (National Archives); Charles M. Conrad to David E. Twiggs, April 15, 1852, *ibid.*; Graham to Twiggs, Aug. 11, 1852, *ibid.*; U.S. Congress, House, *Correspondence between the Late Secretary of War and General Wool*, House Executive Document 88, Serial Set 956, 35 cong., 1 sess., 1858, p. 6.

¹² Ambrose P. Hill to Thomas Hill, Feb. 4, 1852, Ambrose P. Hill Papers (Virginia Historical Society, Richmond); Francis T. Bryan to William S. Bryan, May 12, 1854, William S. Bryan Papers (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill); John R. Hagner to Peter V. Hagner, Aug. 20, 1855, Peter V. Hagner Papers, *ibid.*; Peter V. Hagner to Aleck Hagner, Jan. 24, 1854, *ibid.*; Joseph H. La Motte to Ellen La Motte, Dec. 22, 1851, La Motte-Coppinger Papers (Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis); Malcolm Edwards, ed., *The California Diary of General E. D. Townsend* (Los Angeles, 1970), 95; Edward L. Hartz to Samuel Hartz, May 2, 1859 [1860], Edward L. Hartz Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); John C. Pemberton to Israel Pemberton, June 1, 1850, Pemberton Family Papers (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia); Ethan Allen Hitchcock to Bladen Dulany, Sept. 30, 1853, Letters Received, Squadron Letters, Records of the Secretary of the Navy, microfilm 89, reel 36; W. A. Croffut, ed., *Fifty Years in Camp and Field: Diary of Major-General Ethan Allen Hitchcock, U.S.A.* (New York, 1909), 389-90, 410-11; "The Memoirs of Brigadier-General William Montgomery Gardner," typescript (United States Military Academy Library, West Point, N.Y.).

mental railroad route was almost canceled as a result of the Walker expedition to Lower California and Sonora. In January 1855, Secretary of State William L. Marcy estimated that the federal government had assigned two-thirds of its entire available ground forces to antifilibuster duty in California, Texas, and New Mexico and noted that this had been accomplished by stripping troops from coastal garrisons and posts in the Indian country. High-ranking army officers resented devoting large blocks of their time to the filibustering annoyance. Gen. Persifor F. Smith, commanding the department of Texas in November 1855, informed Washington that stationing troops on the border to intercept unlawful expeditions collided with his responsibility to protect interior farmers from Indian attack.¹³

Junior officers in the field carried the brunt of hunting down the filibusters and had their own reasons to be disgruntled. "When I left Florida, I had hoped I would not see a tent again for five years," Lt. Ambrose Hill confided to his father in February 1852, lamenting that he and his men were suffering from the cold while posted on the Rio Grande. Hill attributed his distress to antifilibustering duties. "We are in the strong hold of the Filibusters—Carvajal being but some 40 miles from us with some 400 men. There is a store here, and ferry across the river. We have to prevent their crossing, should they attempt it." Capt. Sidney Burbank became appalled when filibuster James H. Callahan and his followers burned Piedras Negras on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande in October 1855. Destruction of the village caused such fear of Mexican retaliation against Eagle Pass on the American side that Burbank had to post guards at the latter locale every night. Sympathizing with the displaced inhabitants of the burned community, Burbank recommended that army rations be issued to those indigent refugees who had crossed to the American side.¹⁴

The Crabb expedition to Mexico proved particularly vexatious to the army. In March 1857, former California state senator Henry A. Crabb invaded Sonora with some ninety followers. Although Crabb soon surrendered to Mexican authorities, and although Crabb and his force (other than a sixteen-year-old boy) were then executed, the expedition complicated affairs for United States troops. In August 1857 soldiers from Fort Buchanan, New Mexico Territory, had to be dispatched to investigate the murder of four Americans staying at Sonoita (just on the American side of the border of Sonora and what is today Arizona) by Mexican soldiers in revenge for the Crabb affair. Subsequent Mexican reprisals against United States citizens, fueled by rumors that Americans were planning new filibusters into Sonora, caused Secretary of War John B. Floyd to send Capt. Richard S. Ewell, commanding officer

¹³ Lynda Lasswell Crist, ed., *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, vol. V (Baton Rouge, 1985), 50–52, 52n, 275; Jefferson Davis to Commanding Officer of the U.S. troops at San Diego, California, Dec. 12, 1853, Letters Sent, Records of the Office of Secretary of War; William R. Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs, 1831–1860* (12 vols., Washington, 1932–1939), IX, 174–77; Persifor F. Smith to Lorenzo Thomas, Oct. 17, 1855, enclosed with Jefferson Davis to William L. Marcy, Nov. 9, 1855, Miscellaneous Letters, Records of the Department of State, RG 59, microfilm 179, reel 148 (National Archives).

¹⁴ Ambrose P. Hill to Thomas Hill, Feb. 4, 1852, Hill Papers; Sidney Burbank to Don Carlos Buell, Oct. 8, 1855, enclosed with Jefferson Davis to Marcy, Nov. 9, 1855, Miscellaneous Letters, Records of the Department of State, microfilm 179, reel 148; Buell to Burbank, Oct. 11, 1855, *ibid.*; Edmund Kirby Smith to Frances Kirby Smith, March 16, 1853, Edmund Kirby Smith Papers (Southern Historical Collection).



Henry A. Crabb. In 1857 Crabb (a former California state senator) led some ninety filibusters to a horrible end in Mexican Sonora. Americans continued to enlist in filibustering expeditions despite news accounts of previous tragedies.
Courtesy Arizona Historical Society.

at Fort Buchanan, to call on Sonoran governor Ignacio Pesqueira and lodge a protest. Mexican officials at Hermosillo arrested and imprisoned Ewell. It took the threat of a naval broadside on Guaymas to spring Ewell after four days in custody.¹⁵

Throughout the pre-Civil War period, army officers tried to curtail hostile expeditions. Since effective prevention depended upon early detection, officers kept an eye on suspect activity. Commanders of posts near the Mexican border, naturally,

¹⁵ Edward E. Dunbar to Charles B. Smith, Aug. 27, 1857, U.S. Congress, House, *Execution of Colonel Crabb and Associates*, House Executive Document 64, Serial Set 955, 35 cong., 1 sess., 1858, pp. 58-61; E. D. Townsend to J. V. D. Reeve, Oct. 10, 1859, filed May 12, 1860, Miscellaneous Letters, Records of the Department of State; Farrelly Alden to Lewis Cass, Nov. 26, 1859, Despatches from United States Consuls in Guaymas, Records of the Department of State, microfilm 284, reel 1.

kept close watch upon known filibusters. However, since filibusters used coastal cities as recruiting and financial centers as well as departure points, military service in metropolitan areas also demanded vigilance from army officers. In fact, so much day-to-day filibuster activity occurred in coastal cities that one officer fell into spying virtually by accident. In September 1857, 1st Lt. George Percy Ihrle, during a leave of absence, took a room at the Metropolitan Hotel in New York City, coincidentally a meeting spot for men planning Walker's second invasion of Nicaragua. Getting wind of the machinations, Ihrle made some discreet inquiries and learned that the intended departure point was New Orleans, unless federal interference in the Crescent City forced a switch to a nearby point on the Gulf coast. Ihrle's report, submitted to the adjutant general, was passed on to the secretary of war.¹⁶

Once it became evident that a filibuster expedition had commenced, army commanders took corrective action. In late May 1855, for instance, upon learning about the imminent departure from New York City of the Henry L. Kinney expedition to Nicaragua, Winfield Scott, commanding general of the army, requested permission from the War Department and President Franklin Pierce to deploy troops from Fort Hamilton on Long Island in New York harbor to interdict Kinney. Later that year the department of Texas issued orders that Captain Burbank deploy forces to prevent Callahan's invasion of Mexico and cut off reinforcements to Callahan from the American side of the Rio Grande. Should Burbank discover that his force was inadequate, he was authorized to draw three additional infantry companies from Fort McIntosh. As Walker's force fled toward the United States–Mexican border near San Diego in the spring of 1854 following the collapse of the filibuster's invasion of Sonora, Gen. John E. Wool dispatched Capt. Justus McKinstry to the boundary to take Walker into federal custody.¹⁷

Since many of the expeditions left United States territory by sea, army officers frequently collaborated with their naval counterparts. Thus in 1851 army and navy officers exchanged information about José María Jesús Carvajal, who led a mixed force of Mexican and American revolutionaries across the Rio Grande to capture Camargo and attack Matamoros, as part of his project to fashion a Republic of the Sierra Madre. Army officers similarly coordinated efforts with customs officials—who had the authority to deny clearance to suspected filibuster vessels—in instances when a show of force was required. In September 1853, when the United States collector at San Francisco lacked a revenue cutter in port to stop Walker's expedition to Mexico, he turned to General Hitchcock for assistance. Hitchcock seized the

¹⁶ Albert G. Brackett to John Withers, April 12, 1858, Letters Received, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, RG 94, microfilm 567, reel 575 (National Archives); John H. King to Withers, July 28, 1858, reel 582, *ibid.*; George P. Ihrle to Samuel Cooper, Sept. 30, 1857, reel 581, *ibid.* George P. Ihrle's information proved to be accurate; William Walker's November 1857 return expedition was based in New Orleans and Mobile. See Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 412–14.

¹⁷ Crist, ed., *Papers of Jefferson Davis*, V, 435; Winfield Scott to Charles Boarman, May 31, 1855, Charles Boarman Letterbooks (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); Alfred Gibbs to Burbank, Oct. 7, 1855, enclosed with Jefferson Davis to Marcy, Nov. 9, 1855, Miscellaneous Letters, Records of the Department of State, microfilm 179, reel 148; Buell to Burbank, Oct. 8, 1855, *ibid.*

Arrow, a brig that Walker had chartered for the enterprise, and had it anchored away from the shore in the harbor under the command of Lt. George P. Andrews.¹⁸

Army vigilance disrupted several filibuster operations. In March 1852 troops under Lt. John Gibbon arrested José Carvajal and eleven of his men after the adventurer crossed the Rio Grande, fought a battle with Mexican troops, and fled toward Brownsville, Texas. Following the sack of Reynosa in March 1853 by some of Carvajal's followers, Maj. Gabriel R. Paul of the Seventh Infantry Regiment surprised Carvajal and his co-filibusters at a dance in Roma, Texas, and took Carvajal into United States military custody a second time. General Hitchcock's seizure of the *Arrow* in 1853 caused Walker to depart on a smaller vessel, and with fewer men, than he intended. This meant that he could not invade his prime target—Sonora—for the time being and had to switch his military objective to Lower California. In May 1854, Captain McKinstry induced the surrender of Walker and his thirty-three remaining followers upon their return to American soil. McKinstry shipped them by private steamer under a parole agreement to the custody of General Wool in San Francisco so that the filibusters might be prosecuted for violating the neutrality laws.¹⁹

Yet, given the frequency of filibustering expeditions, it would be misleading to argue that the army successfully enforced the Neutrality Act. Part of the difficulty related to the magnitude of the filibustering challenge. If the ports on the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific coasts, as well as the Canadian and Mexican boundaries, are conceptualized as the filibuster frontier, it becomes apparent that the army lacked the resources to cope effectually with filibustering. Personnel cuts after the Mexican War left the army with fewer than ten thousand men, hardly the manpower necessary to police all potential filibuster departure points. Congress, in 1855, increased the army's size to 17,867 officers and men—a still inadequate figure. It was especially difficult then, as now, to seal the Mexican border. Teresa Griffin Vielé, married to a first lieutenant stationed at Ringgold Barracks in Texas in 1851–1852, recalled:

Our government ordered that officers should be stationed with a certain number of men and pieces of artillery all along the river to prevent American citizens from crossing to the Mexican side. . . . This however was . . . almost an impracticable thing on so extensive a line; the most they could achieve was to prevent large armed bodies from crossing. Smaller parties could not be stopped, and it was very easy for these to rendezvous and organize on the other side.

¹⁸ K. Jack Bauer, ed., *The New American State Papers: Naval Affairs* (10 vols., Wilmington, 1981), II, 147–48; Charles Platt to Parker, May 29, 1851, Letters Received, Squadron Letters, Records of the Secretary of the Navy, microfilm 89, reel 92; William Smith to Parker, Nov. 18, 1851, *ibid.*; Dulany to J. C. Dobbin, Oct. 22, 1853, *ibid.*, reel 36; Bliss to Freret and John Walker, May 8, 1851, Letters Sent, Records of the Office of the Secretary of War.

¹⁹ Ernest C. Shearer, "The Carvajal Disturbances," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 55 (Oct. 1951), 222–23, 226–27; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 192–94; Harwood Perry Hinton, "The Military Career of John Ellis Wool, 1812–1863" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1960), 242–44, 256–57; Elisha Whittlesey to Robert McClelland, Sept. 2, 1854, box 131, Consolidated Correspondence File, Office of the Quartermaster General, Records of the Department of War, RG 92 (National Archives). Before Walker's border crossing, Justus McKinstry and another captain crossed into Mexican territory to mediate an agreement between Walker and the Mexicans harassing his retreat. When Walker rejected the Mexican terms of unmolested access to the border for all of Walker's

Gen. David E. Twiggs, commanding the department of Texas in July 1858, informed the War Department that his troops would never be able to prevent filibusters from crossing the Rio Grande since virtually every mile of the "stream" was then fordable. Besides the army had other responsibilities to divert it from antifilibustering efforts. In Texas, most garrisons were customarily stationed in the state's interior, rather than on the Mexican border, as a hedge against Comanche raids on settlements. With some justice, Secretary of State Daniel Webster urged the Mexican government to consider "the vast extent of the frontier" before condemning American authorities for failing to detect filibusters before they crossed the border.²⁰

Even when adequate numbers of soldiers were available, legal constraints restricted military options. For one thing, the United States government recognized the right of expatriation. "Unassociated individuals" possessed full right to renounce their American citizenship and emigrate to or sojourn in another country. Only when persons joined or planned an expedition fitted out on a military basis within American jurisdiction did they become liable under the neutrality laws. This is why the commander at Fort McIntosh, Texas, did nothing more than report the presence of the notorious filibuster Charles F. Henningsen on the border in 1858, despite orders to prevent any expeditions from crossing the Rio Grande. His hands were tied because his men had yet to spot an actual military force accompanying Henningsen. Similarly, General Smith explained in July 1855 that his troops had been unable to effect arrests because the filibusters crossed the border separately to do their planning on Mexican soil and then "singly" retired to the American side "to remain in security until they are ready to operate." In cases when soldiers did intercept armed bands near the border, the filibusters could claim innocent intent, putting the burden of proof upon the army. Since American jurisprudence precluded arrests upon rumor alone, officers had to exert caution. General Smith noted that it was virtually impossible to differentiate filibusters from "the ordinary crowd that loiter about frontier towns" and that he was essentially helpless when, at a time that the border seemed "infested" with Indian bands, the filibusters claimed to be in pursuit of Indian marauders.²¹

Profilibuster public opinion further interfered with army actions against filibustering. When some of López's followers were stranded in Key West following their invasion of Cuba, the local population provided food, shelter, and money for

arms, the officers informed the Mexicans that they would not interfere with a Mexican attack. *New-York Daily Tribune*, June 9, 1854.

²⁰ Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (New York, 1967), 189–90; Walter Millis, *Arms and Men: A Study of American Military History* (New York, 1956), 109–10; Clarence C. Clendenen, *Blood on the Border: The United States Army and the Mexican Irregulars* (London, 1969), 7, 9, 11; [Teresa Griffin Vielé], "Following the Drum": *A Glimpse of Frontier Life* (New York, 1858), 208–9; King to Withers, July 28, 1858, Letters Received, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, microfilm 567, reel 582; Robert E. Lee to Annie Lee, Feb. 22, 1860, Lee Family Papers (Virginia Historical Society); Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence*, IX, 100, 175.

²¹ Marcy to José de Marcoleta, Aug. 22, Oct. 10, 1855, Persifor F. Smith to Cooper, July 14, 1855, in *Diplomatic Correspondence*, ed. Manning, IV, 70–71, 72–73, IX, 191–92n; Brackett to Withers, April 12, 1858, Letters Received, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, microfilm 567, reel 575; Persifor F. Smith to Thomas, Oct. 17, 1855, enclosed with Jefferson Davis to Marcy, Nov. 9, 1855, Miscellaneous Letters, Records of the Department of State, microfilm 179, reel 148.

passenger fares to the mainland (Key West lacked bridge connections at the time), even though the filibusters, according to one of López's men, "were expecting daily United States troops to arrive and make them prisoners." Consistent acquittals of filibusters by juries negated several army efforts to repress filibustering. Army commanders must have felt like modern commentators who complain that the American legal system allows habitual criminals to stalk the streets. Lieutenant Hill, reflecting on court proceedings regarding Carvajal's filibuster in Brownsville, could only anticipate that grand jury hearings would prove a "farce" since "every one" in the vicinity had demonstrated sympathy for the filibuster cause. If army officers expected to convict, punish, or otherwise discourage filibusters, they left no evidence of it in their private correspondence.²²

Wavering by authorities in Washington, particularly during the Pierce administration, also impeded effective enforcement of the Neutrality Act. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis helped thwart filibustering to Cuba and approved steps taken by General Smith and Captain Burbank against the Callahan expedition to Mexico. Nevertheless, Davis held latent profilibuster sentiments, ultimately exposed in public addresses endorsing William Walker. In April 1854 Davis lashed out at General Wool for being overzealous about stopping filibusters from California to Mexico. Davis, cognizant of American fears of tyrannical standing armies, apprehended that Wool's making arrests on his own initiative rather than in response to requests from civilian authorities might provoke a public backlash against the military establishment. Stung by Davis's rebuke, Wool justified his own behavior, which led to a cold dispatch from the secretary reminding Wool that he had "an obligation to render due respect and cheerful obedience to the authority and orders of this Department." The dispute, which still festered as late as December 1857, was aggravated by a War Department order transferring Wool's headquarters from San Francisco to Benicia (to the north), which Wool construed as virtually turning over to lawbreakers one of the nation's key filibuster ports. Ultimately, Wool relaxed his vigilance against expeditions. The Pierce administration similarly hampered General Scott's efforts against the Kinney expedition. Rather than grant Scott's request to deploy troops from Fort Hamilton, Pierce responded that he could not approve any use of Fort Hamilton's guns on vessels passing through the Narrows (the channel between Long Island and Staten Island connecting Upper New York Bay with the Lower Bay and the Atlantic Ocean). When Scott expressed mortification that his request for troops had been misconstrued into the "insane" idea that he would train artillery fire upon suspected ships, he was informed that there was no need to justify administration policy until the general arrived in Washington. Pierce's decision played into the filibuster's hands. Kinney diverted United States marshals in New York City, escaped naval surveillance by switching vessels at the last moment, and landed at San Juan del Sur on Central America's Mosquito Coast that July.²³

²² [F. C. M. Boggess], *A Veteran of Four Wars: The Autobiography of F. C. M. Boggess* (Arcadia, 1900), 25–26; Shearer, "Carvajal Disturbances," 227, 229; Edward S. Wallace, *Destiny and Glory* (New York, 1957), 162; Ambrose P. Hill to Thomas Hill, Feb. 4, 1852, Hill Papers.

²³ Clement Eaton, *Jefferson Davis* (New York, 1977), 99–107; Jefferson Davis endorsement, Nov. 3, 1855, Letters

Sometimes a lack of will or courage on the part of federal civil officials undercut the army's antifilibustering capability. In October 1859 reports circulated that two hundred filibusters had encamped below New Orleans, prepared to join Walker in a new foray against Nicaragua. Responding to rumors that the men expected to be picked up by Cornelius Vanderbilt's mail steamer *Philadelphia* at the Southwest Pass of the Mississippi River, the customs collector at New Orleans denied clearance to the ship and United States District Attorney Henry G. Miller rented a steamboat to rush United States Marshal Joseph M. Kennedy and a company of artillery stationed at Baton Rouge to the filibuster encampment. Miller never expected, however, that Kennedy would be intimidated by the adventurers. When the filibusters spotted the soldiers and declared that they would surrender to the "civil power alone," Kennedy dispensed with the troops. Kennedy justified his decision by explaining that the filibusters had shown an "excitement [which] was uncontrollable" upon sight of the soldiers, and that a "scene of violence and slaughter" would have ensued had he dared employ the troops. Perhaps so. But his timidity allowed seventy-five filibusters to effect an easy escape. Only four filibuster officers remained in Kennedy's custody, and they were released when a grand jury failed to indict them. The *Philadelphia* expedition had been stymied, but the men remained at large to filibuster again.²⁴

No army commander encountered more problems with hostile public opinion, uncooperative civil officials, and unclear signals from Washington than did General Hitchcock during his stint in California. After Hitchcock seized Walker's ship at San Francisco, he was advised by the collector of the port and the United States district attorney that the filibusters and their supporters intended to retake the *Arrow* by force and that it would be best to return the vessel if so challenged. Convinced that both officials had become filibuster sympathizers, Hitchcock refused concessions. Tempers flared. Hitchcock noted:

He [the collector] intimated that he had protected me from the effects of public opinion for having seized the vessel, whereupon I struck my fist down, saying "Damn public opinion!" adding that I would under no circumstances surrender the vessel, and that if any body of men undertook to get possession of her it would be at their peril.

Received, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, microfilm 567, reel 529; Crist, ed., *Papers of Jefferson Davis*, V, 63-64, 88, 291-92; Lynda Lasswell Crist and Mary Seaton Dix, eds., *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, vol. VI (Baton Rouge, 1989), 119, 140, 146, 165-66, 166-67n; Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers, and Speeches* (10 vols., Jackson, 1923), II, 374; Hinton, "Military Career of John Ellis Wool," 265-75; Marcus Cunliffe, *Soldiers & Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775-1865* (New York, 1973), 31-56, 101-11; Cooper to Scott, May 30, June 1, 1855, Letters Received, Records of the Office of Secretary of War, microfilm 221, reel 175; Scott to Cooper, May 31, 1855, *ibid.*; James T. Wall, *Manifest Destiny Denied: America's First Intervention in Nicaragua* (Washington, 1981), 54-57. Fort Hamilton was, and is, situated in Brooklyn, on Long Island's southwestern corner, opposite Staten Island.

²⁴ Henry G. Miller to Black, Oct. 8, Oct. 25, 1859, Letters Received, Department of Justice, Attorney General's Papers, RG 60 (National Archives); Joseph M. Kennedy to Black, Oct. 8, 1859, *ibid.*; *New York Times*, Oct. 5, 1859, pp. 1, 4; *ibid.*, Oct. 10, 1859, p. 4; *ibid.*, Oct. 14, 1859, p. 1; *ibid.*, Oct. 18, 1859, p. 4; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 442; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, Oct. 9, 1859, p. 3.

Hitchcock alerted Lieutenant Andrews to expect an attack on the *Arrow*, urging him to hold the *Arrow* if it could be accomplished “without useless bloodshed.” Hitchcock’s reward for detaining the vessel four days until the district attorney reluctantly agreed to institute legal proceedings was a torrent of abuse by the local newspapers, a local judge, and the United States senator from California, John B. Weller. Hitchcock found himself facing a contempt proceeding in California’s superior court and a trespass suit brought against him by Walker for thirty thousand dollars in damages. Furthermore, the district attorney delayed inspecting the *Arrow*’s cargo long enough for Walker to transfer his arms to the schooner *Caroline* on which the filibuster departed for Lower California on October 16, 1853. Compounding Hitchcock’s filibuster headaches, Weller’s fellow senator from California, William Gwin, had the audacity to request that the general provide a “safe conduct” to Henry Crabb (then a California state legislator) so that Crabb could attempt “an independent move on Sonora.” Hitchcock again held his ground but began to despair that the burden of preventing filibusters lay on his shoulder alone.

A pretty thing indeed, that I should be dragooned into giving such a protection to a leading man of a hostile force against Sonora!—and at the solicitation of a senator of the United States! But they have not succeeded. As the matter now stands I am almost alone in this community in opposing the expedition.

Hitchcock hoped that at least Washington approved his position, but he was insecure about the reaction of an administration of announced expansionist proclivities. Hitchcock wrote General Scott that he had given “mortal offence” to all the leading politicians in California and was quite ready to be relieved.²⁵

Given this record of the army’s sustained efforts to repress filibustering in the face of resistance by the public and inadequate help from federal civil officials, it is tempting to exempt the army from America’s filibustering sin. Yet even the army reflected America’s filibustering culture. A surprising amount of profilibuster sentiment infiltrated the officer corps and enlisted ranks in the pre-Civil War period. The balance of this essay probes the appeal of filibustering to men in the United States Army and seeks to explain why army personnel joined or aided filibustering expeditions in contravention of their obligation to uphold the Neutrality Act.

Before the Civil War, army service and filibustering represented competing career options. That young men chose one over the other often had more to do with circumstance than with preference. When Robert Farquharson contacted Quitman in February 1855, he asked if Quitman would let him join his Cuba filibuster force

²⁵ Croffut, ed., *Fifty Years in Camp and Field*, 400–403; “Memoirs of Brigadier-General William Montgomery Gardner,” 56; Edwards, ed., *California Dairy of General E. D. Townsend*, 91–94; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 192–93. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis endorsed Gen. Ethan Allen Hitchcock’s handling of the *Arrow* matter and dispatched Gen. John E. Wool to relieve Hitchcock. Croffut, ed., *Fifty Years in Camp and Field*, 405; Crist, ed., *Papers of Jefferson Davis*, V, 274. The contempt complaint against Hitchcock was dropped on November 8. Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 193.

or if Quitman would pull strings to get him a lieutenant colonelcy in one of the army's new regiments. Either alternative would have sufficed. Obviously the army played second fiddle in the case of a new officer posted to Fort Leavenworth in 1858: "Mr. [Secretary of War John B.] Floyd has appointed in our regiment a gentleman from Richmond whose connection with Quitman . . . was well known; in fact the gentleman went to Greytown [Nicaragua] last May but was too late Walker having surrendered." Similarly, Theodore O'Hara procured his captain's commission in the Second United States Cavalry in March 1855 only after service with López and collaboration with the abortive Quitman Cuba conspiracy, which fell through the same month that O'Hara joined the army. O'Hara's resignation from the army in December 1856 raises suspicions that he intended to link up with William Walker, whose Nicaraguan regime was in danger of collapse at that time. That O'Hara conceived filibustering as an extension of army service comes out in his assuring Quitman, with whom he had served in the Mexican War as a volunteer captain, that he had the "zeal & anxiety to enter again with you into the tented field."²⁶

During the pre-Civil War era, it was by no means clear to young American males aspiring to be soldiers that they would better serve their country or their own interests by joining the army rather than a filibuster cohort. Commissions and promotions were hard to come by in a shrinking army, and peace with foreign nations limited the battlefield experience they might gain to skirmishes against native Americans on the Plains. Small-scale engagements in isolated western regions held little promise for fame or glory. But filibuster commanders such as Walker and Quitman presented themselves as professional soldiers and urged that their ventures be considered as alternatives to army service, while filibuster exploits attracted front-page headlines. Filibuster leaders and recruiters emphasized the possibilities for advancement awaiting filibuster personnel, sometimes pegging pay and rations precisely to army scales. "How would you like to go to Cuba?" one discharged American officer who had fought in Mexico wrote another about a year after hostilities terminated. "There is an expedition on foot and if you will go—just say the word. The inducements are, aside from the glory—two grades higher than you go out; I am authorized to offer you a first Lieutenantcy with two grades higher in the Army of the new Republic—Pay & emoluments same as the Army of the United States." Many men responded instinctively to such incentives. New Yorker Elijah D. Taft, for instance, solicited an officer's slot with Walker, explaining, "I have been fifteen years in commission in the Militia of this State . . . and as I have made that arm of the service my constant study for some years I should like to put in practice in Nicaragua the benefit of these years of study." Filibustering had a similar appeal to graduates of private military academies. Pre-Civil War males who joined the army

²⁶ Robert Farquharson to Quitman, Feb. 7, 1855, John Quitman Papers (Houghton Library, Harvard University); George Washington Hazzard to J. D. Howland, Jan. 25, 1858, George Washington Hazzard Papers (United States Military Academy Library); Crist, ed., *Papers of Jefferson Davis*, V, 402; Theodore O'Hara to William Nelson, March 18, 1854, Quitman Papers (Mississippi Archives); O'Hara to Quitman, Sept. 28, Dec. 22, 1854, *ibid.*; Anderson C. Quisenberry, *López's Expeditions to Cuba, 1850 and 1851* (Louisville, 1906), 34–36; Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army* (2 vols., Washington, 1903), I, 524; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 415; "John C. Tidball Memoirs" (United States Military Academy Library).

rather than filibuster expeditions, therefore, may well have previously given filibustering serious consideration.²⁷

Filibustering remained a temptation even after young men joined the army, especially once they experienced a dose of dull military routine. Filibusters dropped by army posts from time to time. "Filibuster McMicken of Phil. here," Capt. John Charles Casey noted cryptically in his diary while stationed at Fort Brooke in 1856. More important, soldiers found their newspapers filled with reports and rumors of filibuster doings. "News comes that General Lopez has been hung at Havana by the Spanish governor—result of his second expedition against Cuba," Hitchcock recorded in October 1851. "Newspapers represent that great excitement prevails in the States, and that large numbers are going and preparing to go to Cuba to revolutionize it." Tales of pending filibusters circulated from post to post, perpetually intriguing soldiers who craved more romance in their lives. "I have heard a 'rumor' here that appears . . . to be entitled to more credence than rumors generally are," reported a young dragoon from California in 1859. "It is stated that Gen. William Walker . . . is in California, having smuggled himself in under the name of James Wilson; that he will proceed secretly to the frontiers of Sonora. . . . Sonora will then be invaded."²⁸

Had the army provided antifilibuster indoctrination or an intellectual barrier to filibuster thoughts, things might have been different. However, America's soldiers shared civilian ideologies of Anglo-American racial superiority and Manifest Destiny. Capt. Joseph H. La Motte reported from Ringgold Barracks that much was being said around the post about "the indomitable energy & perseverance of the Saxon race." Lt. Theodore Talbot announced, "Our 'Manifest destiny' bids fair for fulfillment." Cognizant of the army's conquests in the recent Mexican War, many officers anticipated additional territorial quests ahead. Even before the war ended, Gen. William Jenkins Worth earned press notice for wanting the annexation of Cuba and Central America. Such wish lists echoed through the army's ranks over subsequent years. "We expect to hear of the annexation of Cuba by the coming mail," Lieutenant Talbot reported to his sister from Columbia Barracks, Oregon Territory, in 1851. In 1859 Gen. William S. Harney took a belligerent position regarding the shooting of a Hudson's Bay Company pig on San Juan Island in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, in part from a conviction that the United States would ultimately annex British Columbia. Manifest Destiny convictions made some officers receptive to filibustering. William Tecumseh Sherman must have been sensitive to filibustering's immorality since he wrote that he favored the acquisition of Cuba by

²⁷ Quitman to Alexander K. McClung, Feb. 4, 1855, John Quitman Papers (Houghton Library); Isaac H. Trahue to Quitman, July 1, 1854, *ibid.*; Slotkin, *Fatal Environment*, 256; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 49; Earl W. Fornell, "Texans and Filibusters in the 1850's," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 59 (April 1956), 418; John S. Slocum to Albert Tracy, June 27, 1849, Albert Tracy Papers (Manuscript Section, New York Public Library, New York, N.Y.); Elijah D. Taft to George B. Hall, Feb. 12, 1856, Appleton Oaksmith Papers (Perkins Library); *Columbus* [Miss.] *Democrat*, June 6, 1857.

²⁸ John Charles Casey Diary, May 21, 1856 (United States Military Academy Library); Croffut, ed., *Fifty Years in Camp and Field*, 389; Harold D. Langley, ed., *To Utah with the Dragoons and Glimpses of Life in Arizona and California, 1858-1859* (Salt Lake City, 1974), 160; William H. T. Walker to Adam, Jan. 4, 1855, William H. T. Walker Papers (Perkins Library).

"fair means." Yet, he also confessed revealingly that the island promised such benefit to his country that he sometimes found himself hoping that the filibusters would succeed in conquering the Spanish colony.²⁹

Nowhere in the army establishment was there more satisfaction about the Mexican War than at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Before the conflict with Mexico, the institution had been subjected to severe civilian criticism. Antagonists contended that the academy engendered aristocracy, that free education at the public's expense was unconstitutional, and that the education was wasted because so many graduates left the military for more remunerative employment in the private sector. Several state legislatures passed resolutions calling for the institution's abolition. However, West Pointers came into their own in the Mexican War, achieving so much recognition that their fame all but eliminated the movement to terminate the academy. Naturally, pride about West Point's contributions to the effort against Mexico waxed intense at the academy throughout the pre-Civil War years. The return of the engineers to the academy at the war's conclusion was forever imprinted on the mind of William Whitman Bailey, who came of age at the Point.

There was an illumination of the old North and South barracks, and I can see, even now, the word 'Victory,' as it was formed by the lights of the former building. There was a day-time procession, too, in which the cadets bore the trophy flags, which are now draped in the chapel. The band played a Mexican march. At that time and for some years after, there was much talk about the Mexican War.

Following the war mementos from the conflict were put on display. In new cadets entering academy life, the exhibits must have inspired a sense of awe. "Our chapel is a very pretty building, tastefully decorated on the inside and receiving a military aspect from the flags and cannon ranged along the walls, trophies taken in 1812 and in Mexico," observed plebe Thomas Rowland in a letter home in 1859.³⁰

Mexican War legend helped mold West Point into a breeding ground for Manifest Destiny apostles. While some cadets and officers at the Point found talk of further expansion repulsive, many coveted more territory for their country. If it took war to effect such growth, so much the better because war would provide opportunities for promotion and fame. Thus one cadet wrote his mother in 1856, in the middle of a national crisis with England, "Hurrah for Canada & a Brevet!" The next year, another cadet fretted that he was to graduate too late to qualify for a spot on the expedition against the Mormons in Utah but predicted that he would have other opportunities, "perhaps in Cuba." On July 4, 1855, Cadet Guilford D. Bailey of

²⁹ Joseph H. La Motte to Ellen La Motte, Dec. 22, 1851, La Motte-Coppinger Papers; Robert V. Hine and Savoie Lottinville, eds., *Soldier in the West: Letters of Theodore Talbot during his Service in California, Mexico, and Oregon, 1848-53* (Norman, 1972), 161; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, Jan. 27, 1848; Reginald C. Stuart, *United States Expansionism and British North America, 1775-1871* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 234; William Tecumseh Sherman to his brother, May 6, 1851, Oct. 22, 1852, William T. Sherman Papers (Ohio Historical Society, Columbus).

³⁰ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point* (Baltimore, 1966), 106-46; Cunliffe, *Soldiers & Civilians*, 172-75; Ambrose P. Hill to Thomas and Fannie Hill, March 16, 1847, Hill Papers; William Whitman Bailey, *My Boyhood at West Point* (Providence, 1891), 10; Sir James E. Alexander, *Passages in the Life of a Soldier, or, Military Service in the East and West* (London, 1857), 127; Thomas Rowland, "Letters of a Virginia Cadet at West Point, 1859-1861," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 14 (Jan. 1915), 207.

New York made territorial expansion the focus of his Independence Day oration. Fellow cadet James H. Wilson noted in disgust, "Mr Cadet Bailey delivered the oration it was nothing but a piece of bombast . . . he is in favor of taking Cuba by force."³¹

From Manifest Destiny West Pointers had to make only a short ideological jump to filibuster destiny. In his July 4, 1859, oration, first classman William W. McCreery expressed his hope that the United States take Cuba by a "fair fight" rather than by filibuster. But he was also quick to reject assertions that "the American filibuster" was a "ruthless pirate" and to explain that most filibusters were simply hotheaded romantics of "generous" intent. Other West Pointers found no need to apologize for filibustering at all. "It was filibuster," plebe Henry A. Du Pont reported to his father about a Texas cadet's oration in the West Point chapel on July 4, 1856. And, once graduated, West Pointers found little cause to put filibuster emotions behind them. "[James E.] Slaughter is here, the 2 Lieutenant of the Company," Ambrose Hill reported home from the Texas frontier in 1852. "He is . . . a terrible Filibuster." Teresa Vielé recalled that many of the officers stationed with her husband at Ringgold Barracks felt a conflict between profilibuster private feelings and their army obligations. When she once alerted some filibusters as to the whereabouts of an army patrol on their track, the officers merely "winked" at her behavior.³²

For southerners in the army, a sectionalist imperative reinforced filibuster inclinations. While some southern army officers shed their sectional mentality through the process of serving their nation, others clung tightly to their regional affiliation. Army captain Thomas Claiborne told fellow Tennessean John Overton that he hoped that "our people" would "go to work & help Bill Walker" and advised Overton to "help the good cause" while mentioning his own regret at not being in a position to do something tangible for Walker himself. Should Walker maintain his position in Nicaragua, Claiborne asserted, it would "ensure the integrity of the whole South." Similarly, South Carolina native James Longstreet thought filibustering might help Chihuahua secede from Mexico so that it might become a slave state.³³

Southern officers did not necessarily offend or alienate their Yankee peers with their slave expansion perspective. Some northern-born officers harbored abolitionist

³¹ George D. Bayard to Jane Dashiell Bayard, May 18, 1856, George D. Bayard Papers (United States Military Academy Library); Samuel Benjamin to his mother, Nov. 1, 1857, Samuel Benjamin Papers, *ibid.*; James Harrison Wilson Diary, July 4, 1855 (Historical Society of Delaware, Wilmington); Cyrus B. Comstock Diary, June 6, 1854, Elizabeth Comstock Papers (State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Area Research Center, Lacrosse). An extract from a typed copy of the diary was provided me by Professor William Skelton, University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point.

³² "An Address Delivered by Cadet W. W. McCreery of the First Class, to the Corps of Cadets of the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, N.Y., on 4th July, 1859" (United States Military Academy Library); Henry A. Du Pont to his father, July 7, 1856, Henry A. Du Pont Papers (Hagley Museum and Library); Ambrose P. Hill to Thomas Hill, Feb. 4, 1852, Hill Papers; [Vielé], "Following the Drum," 208, 211.

³³ K. Jack Bauer, *Zachary Taylor: Soldier, Planter, Statesman of the Old Southwest* (Baton Rouge, 1985), 289-90; Thomas Claiborne to John Overton, n.d., enclosed with Annie Claiborne to her sister, Feb. 5, 1857, Thomas Claiborne Papers (Southern Historical Collection); James Longstreet to William Porcher Miles, Feb. 27, 1860, William Porcher Miles Papers, *ibid.* John Overton took Thomas Claiborne's advice to heart and threw a dinner for Walker in 1858 following the filibuster's return from his second Nicaraguan expedition. John Bertien Lindsley Diary, Feb. 11, 1858, Lindsley Family Papers (Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tenn.).

sentiments. Many others, however, absorbed the soft stance on slavery of the Democratic party's "doughface" faction. Furthermore, northern officers took advantage of regulations permitting personal servants and often used slaves in that capacity. Cross-sectional friendships linking together northern and southern officers, or what Jeb Stuart identified as "a sentiment of mutual forbearance," supplemented the physical presence of slaves in the army, forging tolerance for southern demands for new territorial acquisitions.³⁴

Given the empathy for filibustering within the army, it is not surprising that some army officers ignored the spirit of their orders and provided filibusters with aid and comfort. When a group of destitute, returning Cuba filibusters arrived at Charlotte Harbor on Florida's west coast in 1850, they were pleasantly surprised by the hospitality provided by an army captain, who landed there with a group of soldiers shortly afterwards. The officer drank with them, sympathized with their cause, informed them that he expected orders for their arrest, and intimated that they should depart so that he would not have to commit such a "repugnant" act. The filibusters took this advice and traveled to Tampa, where they encountered another congenial officer, General Twiggs, then at Fort Brooke. "I called this morning to see Gen. Twiggs, and found him very talkative," one of the filibusters noted in his diary. Twiggs told the filibusters that their decision to flee Cuba was premature, provided them with three days' rations, and advised them to leave town before he would be forced to arrest them. A year later, Twiggs's lethargic response to the planned departure of López's ship, the *Pampero*, from New Orleans helped enable López to launch his final, and fatal, Cuban expedition.³⁵

During the Callahan foray of 1855, Sidney Burbank helped cover a filibuster retreat. On the morning of October 4, Burbank learned that Callahan's band had been defeated, that it had retreated to the banks of the then-swollen Rio Grande, and that it was in danger of being annihilated by pursuing Mexican and Indian forces. Burbank ordered that heavy cannon from Fort Duncan be positioned to command the anticipated recrossing of the filibusters to American soil. It was only after Callahan spurned Burbank's gesture by occupying Piedras Negras to await reinforcements and then burned the village at the approach of Mexican forces that Burbank lost sympathy for the beleaguered filibusters. When Callahan sent a message begging Burbank's protection, the captain answered that Callahan would have to live with the consequences of his earlier mistake but that he might still effect a safe withdrawal to the American side of the river if he would abandon his horses. When Callahan sent yet another message saying that his boat had broken free and drifted downriver cutting off all chance of escape, Burbank called an officers' meeting to reconsider army intervention on the filibusters' behalf. Only news that the boat had

³⁴ James L. Morrison, Jr., *"The Best School in the World": West Point, the Pre-Civil War Years, 1833-1866* (Kent, 1986), 126-30; Cunliffe, *Soldiers & Civilians*, 360-84; Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898* (New York, 1986), 92-95; Peter W. Hairston, ed., "J. E. B. Stuart's Letters to His Hairston Kin," *North Carolina Historical Review*, 51 (July 1974), 269-70.

³⁵ [Boggess], *Veteran of Four Wars*, 26-27; [Taylor], ed., "Col. M. C. Taylor's Diary," 87; Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba*, 160.

been recovered and that Mexican forces would let Callahan recross saved Burbank from having to determine just how far the army might go in an effort to save filibuster lives. General Smith, Burbank's superior, endorsed Burbank's handling of the crisis. Yet Smith seems to have sensed that Burbank's behavior bordered on fraternization with filibusters, since he ordered the captain to restrict future contact with filibusters to written correspondence.³⁶

At times, army officers and enlisted men acted out their expansionist fantasies by joining expeditions. The process began in the waning days of the Mexican War, as thousands of young volunteers were mustered out of the service while their officers pondered restricted promotion opportunities for the indefinite future. The thoughts of some soldiers turned to the Mexican state of Yucatán (which had seceded from Mexico in 1846 and been neutral during the Mexican War) and Cuba. In Yucatán, warfare had broken out between the white governing class and native Mayan Indians. Yucatán whites established contact with American military personnel in Mexico. Meanwhile the Havana Club, a Cuban organization dedicated to replacing Spanish rule with incorporation into the United States, sent an agent to Mexico to contact Gen. William J. Worth. Meeting with Worth in Jalapa, the Cuban agent offered \$3 million in return for Worth's recruiting a filibuster army of five thousand troops to invade the island and crush its Spanish garrison. According to one Cuban involved in the filibuster movement, Worth indicated a willingness to cooperate as soon as he resigned his army commission. Certainly Worth had ample opportunity to make filibuster arrangements. As things turned out, he wound up commanding the last American occupation forces in Mexico City. He did not evacuate the capital until June 1848.³⁷

By late May, American army circles in Mexico City were buzzing with filibuster rumors. "There are officers in the city of Mexico trying to raise companies to go to Yucatan," noted one American soldier in his journal. The *Daily American Star*, the American organ in Mexico City, reported that some American soldiers had already enrolled in the Yucatán filibuster force and that the filibusters were hoping to recruit a party of four to five hundred men. Soldiers who wanted to "spend the summer in a delightful country, rather than return to their homes in the dull season" were advised to drop by the *Star* office for enlistment information. Filibuster plots persisted into early June, though there seems to have been confusion over whether the destination would be Yucatán or Cuba. Lt. Henry Jackson Hunt informed Col. James Duncan from the Mexican capital on June 2 that General Worth had asked him to alert Duncan that Worth and Capt. Robert E. Lee had some "rich developments" in the works. Hunt's language leaves the distinct impression that the "developments" were filibusters.

³⁶ Burbank to Buell, Oct. 4, Oct. 8, 1855, enclosed with Jefferson Davis to Marcy, Nov. 9, 1855, Miscellaneous Letters, Records of the Department of State, microfilm 179, reel 148; Buell to Burbank, Oct. 11, 1855, *ibid.*

³⁷ Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 33–34; Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba*, 75–76; Mary W. Williams, "Secessionist Diplomacy of Yucatán," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 9 (May 1929), 133–43. Basil Rauch speculates that the Cubans selected William Jenkins Worth because he had recently quarreled with his superior—Gen. Winfield Scott. Worth had even been temporarily under military arrest. Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba*, 75.

People say we must go to Yucatan. Hope not. Cuba's my weakness—*after that*—Yucatan if you please. In the meantime let the peons there elevate the standards of humanity by cutting each others throats—and thus rid the world of some of the worst species [of] men of humanity extant.³⁸

Worth's Cuba plot never quite passed from talk to action. Tipped off by the United States consul at Havana, the Polk administration ordered that all transport vessels returning troops to the United States from Veracruz avoid Cuban ports. Although Worth continued his negotiations with Cuban exiles after his return to the States and sent an agent to Cuba to assess how much support invaders could anticipate from the Cuban populace, he vacillated about formally accepting the filibuster commission. Once Worth received an assignment to command the military departments of Texas and New Mexico and left Washington in December 1848 for the Southwest, he removed himself from the filibustering picture. Lee also rejected filibustering after considering a separate proposal in the summer of 1848 that he head a Cuba invasion.³⁹

In the war's aftermath, however, officers and enlisted men continued to demonstrate interest in Cuba filibusters. Lt. William L. Crittenden resigned his commission in March 1849, served briefly in the New Orleans customhouse, and then met his death as a battalion commander during López's final expedition to Cuba in August 1851. Two enlisted men serving at Key West would have died with Crittenden had they succeeded in their scheme to desert and take a sloop to López's steamer while it was off the keys prior to its departure for Cuba. Unable to reach López's vessel in time, they took refuge on a ship in Key West harbor, hoping to join the filibusters later. Lieutenant Hill, who hunted them down and confined them with ball and chain, observed that later the filibuster aspirants were "delighted I caught them, or they would have been shot or garotted with the rest of Lopez's men." Meanwhile, American soldiers did filibuster in Yucatán. Two lieutenants in the army's Thirteenth Infantry Regiment, Joseph A. White and David G. Wilds, accepted commissions in the Yucatán service. They recruited over five hundred discharged soldiers at \$8 per month plus a 320-acre land bonus. The volunteers sailed from New Orleans in December 1848, spent a couple of months in inconclusive counter-guerrilla warfare against the Mayas, suffered casualties, and never received the expected remuneration. Most of the survivors returned to the Crescent City in March 1849.⁴⁰

³⁸ Jacob Oswandel, *Notes of the Mexican War, 1846–47–48* (Philadelphia, 1885), 560; *Mexico City Daily American Star*, May 27, 1848; Henry Jackson Hunt to James Duncan, June 2, 1848, James Duncan Papers (United States Military Academy Library).

³⁹ Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence*, XI, 439–40, 53, 59; Philip S. Foner, *A History of Cuba and Its Relations with the United States* (2 vols., New York, 1962–1963), II, 42–43; Lewis Pinckney Jones, "Carolinians and Cubans: The Elliots and Gonzales, Their Work and Their Writings" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1952), Part I, 32–33, 81–83; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 47–48; Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba*, 79–80; Varina Davis, *Jefferson Davis—A Memoir by His Wife* (2 vols., New York, 1891), II, 409–11.

⁴⁰ Foner, *History of Cuba*, II, 58; George Washington Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy from 1802 to 1867* (2 vols., New York, 1868), II, 139; Ambrose P. Hill to Lucy Russell Saunders, Sept. 12, 1851, Hill Papers; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 33–38. *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, March 24, 1849, p. 3.



John A. Quitman, c. 1864. Quitman, a Mexican War general, Mississippi governor, and Cuba filibuster, helped render filibustering respectable to many Americans — including several officers in the United States Army.
Courtesy William R. Perkins Library, Duke University.

When John Quitman succeeded López as commander of the Cuba filibusters, the connection between the army and filibustering became even more pronounced. One of the nation's most successful generals in the Mexican War, Quitman had earned a reservoir of respect from the army's regular officer corps, even though he served as a volunteer for most of the war and was mustered out of the service at the end of the conflict. Filibusters anticipated that once Quitman joined their ranks, the cream of the United States Army would flock to his standard. Quitman accepted a commission from the Cuban Junta, an organization of Cuban exiles, in August

1853. Subsequently, some of Quitman's favorite wartime comrades, including officers still in the regular army, flocked to the filibuster standard. Cadmus M. Wilcox, assistant instructor of military tactics at West Point, who had fought with Quitman at Chapultepec, requested seventy days' leave to reconnoiter Cuba on Quitman's behalf and gave serious thought to resigning his commission and becoming a filibuster. "I look on Cuba as our future field of glory & usefulness & am almost disposed to wait no longer but to turn Phillibuster at once" he wrote to Quitman in May 1854. "I would like to hear from you on Cuba matters . . . I really think that we ought not to buy it. The sooner we take it the better." Wilcox retained his commission, but others proved bolder. Lt. Gustavus Woodson Smith, a West Point graduate who had been brevetted a captain for his Mexican War accomplishments, was an assistant professor of engineering at the military academy. Upset over poor promotion prospects, Smith also found teaching excruciatingly boring and frustrating: "Nothing of consequence doing here. Quiet, dull, & stupid. Cadets ignorant, & ill natured—resenting, as an affront not to be submitted to, any attempt to teach them. Ain't they going to graduate in 6 weeks." On December 18, 1854, Smith resigned his commission to join Quitman's staff. That very day, Capt. Mansfield Lovell, a classmate of Smith's at West Point who had been Quitman's aide-de-camp for part of the war, took the same step.⁴¹

The resignations caused a stir in the army establishment. William H. T. Walker, commandant of cadets at the academy, conjectured accurately on January 4, 1855, that Smith and Lovell intended to join Quitman in a "descent upon Cuba." Quitman's intentions, in fact, were such a badly kept secret that there is reason to assume that Smith and Lovell were not the only officers involved in the plot. The *New York Herald* later claimed that "many" army officers would have participated in Quitman's Cuba operation had it ever actually departed for the island.⁴²

Only two months separated the cancellation of Quitman's Cuba project in March 1855 and the launching of William Walker's Nicaragua enterprise. For some restless souls in the army, the temptation of an apparently successful filibuster expedition proved irresistible. Nicaragua enticed adventure-craving cadets at the military academy like George D. Bayard. In April 1856, two months prior to his scheduled graduation, Bayard alerted his mother that he might not give active service much of a chance before turning filibuster. His letter beautifully expresses the filibuster impulse within army circles.

Several of us talk of going to Nicaragua. If I am not pleased with my Corps I think I will probably resign & go there. I could easily obtain a Captains commission & there is a good opening. Walker is greatly in want of scientific men & then he will

⁴¹ Robert E. May, *John A. Quitman: Old South Crusader* (Baton Rouge, 1985), 181–82; John Henderson to John A. Quitman, July 2, 1850, Quitman Papers (Mississippi Archives); Cadmus M. Wilcox to John A. Quitman, May 8, 1854, *ibid.*; G. W. Smith to C. A. L. Lamar, Feb. 21, 1855, *ibid.*; J. W. McDonald to G. W. Smith, March 13, 1855, *ibid.*; Harry Maury to G. W. Smith, March 23, 1855, *ibid.*; J. F. H. Claiborne, *Life and Correspondence of John A. Quitman* (2 vols., New York, 1860), II, 389–90; John A. Quitman to F. Henry Quitman, Feb. 19, 1855, John Quitman Papers (Historical Society of Pennsylvania); Cullum, *Biographical Register*, II, 45, 46.

⁴² William H. T. Walker to Adam, Jan. 4, 1855, William H. T. Walker Papers; *New York Herald*, July 19, 1858, p. 1.

want especially in organizing his ordnance and artillery. With that commission one or two campaigns there would be more pleasant than Indian fighting in New Mexico & the probabilities are that some thing would "turn up" there & in our Army there is no hope of anything of that kind. Even should I not be pleased with the life there I could resign & return benefited at least by military experience which would come in play in the event of a war, in the mean time devoting my attention to Law. This however is the worst side of the picture for I think in Nicaragua to a young man of energy & talent, "there is no such word as *fail*." Besides the opportunity of distinguishing myself there would be fine opportunities for making a fortune. It is a fine country & wealthy Gold mines have already been discovered. What do you say to Nicaragua?

Bayard graduated and stuck things out in the service. But other soldiers took the step that Bayard had only contemplated. When naval commodore Hiram Paulding evacuated destitute filibusters from Central America in 1857 after the collapse of Walker's regime, he noted that a filibuster colonel was "late an officer in the U.S. Army." Half a year later, when Paulding forced Walker's surrender at Punta Arenas following the filibuster's reinvasion of Nicaragua, he took into custody the Mexican War hero Thomas Henry, who had served in the regular army until October 1855, as well as other former United States army soldiers. In lodging a complaint with President James Buchanan about Paulding's interference, Walker noted that some of the men apprehended had at one time "led your soldiers across the continent."⁴³

Army officers and enlisted men also participated in filibusters to northern Mexico. Teresa Vielé recalled that enlisted men "daily" deserted Ringgold Barracks to join Carvajal during the filibuster's siege of Camargo. So many soldiers defected to Carvajal that Secretary of State Webster informed the United States minister to Mexico that the frontier army's capacity to enforce the neutrality statutes had become seriously curtailed.⁴⁴

The most startling aspect of the army/filibustering story concerns the officers, some of whom became famous Civil War generals, who went to the filibuster brink but never quite made the ultimate commitment. Mention has already been made of Cadmus Wilcox. Several of his peers experienced similar emotions. In 1855, while surveying the Gadsden Purchase, Lt. William H. Emory heard that Chihuahua's elite desired annexation to the United States and seriously contemplated an invitation from a wealthy Chihuahuan to visit the state in pursuit of that end. "I despise underground work and fillibusterism in all its forms and phases," Emory confided to United States Sen. James A. Pearce. But he also affirmed that he would go should

⁴³ George D. Bayard to Jane Dashiell Bayard, April 20, 1856, Bayard Papers; Hiram Paulding to Isaac Toucey, June 28, 1857, Letters Received, Squadron Letters, Records of the Secretary of the Navy, microfilm 89, reel 97; *New York Times*, Jan. 7, 1858, p. 2; K. Jack Bauer, *The Mexican War: 1846-1848* (New York, 1974), 267; Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army*, I, 524; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 415; Don Russell, ed., *Five Years a Dragoon ('49 to '54) And Other Adventures on the Great Plains by Percival G. Lowe* (Norman, 1965), 117, 118.

⁴⁴ Shearer, "Carvajal Disturbances," 213-14, 221; [Vielé], "Following the Drum," 194. In 1857 former United States army lieutenant Thomas D. Johns participated in Crabb's invasion of Sonora. U.S. Congress, House, *Execution of Colonel Crabb and Associates*, 83.

he conclude that this would benefit either his own government or the Chihuahuans. Similarly, P. G. T. Beauregard almost provided his talents to Walker's Nicaragua. Bored with his routine as superintending engineer of the customhouse at New Orleans and convinced that Walker intended the "glorious undertaking" of creating a "Central American Republic, based on our own system, & extending from the Isthmus of Panama to the Sierra Madre," Beauregard asked that Quitman (with whom he had served in Mexico) recommend him to Walker for a commission. It was only after Walker sacked the Nicaraguan city of Granada in November 1856 that Beauregard backed off. The filibuster, from Beauregard's perspective, had displayed "a ferocity, & Vandalism, unworthy of the American Character" and no longer deserved support.⁴⁵

Such flirtation with filibustering survived Walker's eviction from Nicaragua in 1857. No sooner did Walker arrive on American soil in May than he started to organize men and matériel for a return to Nicaragua. That summer and fall, four former Mexican War officers and future Civil War generals—Johnson Kelly Duncan (who had resigned his lieutenantcy in 1855), George B. McClellan (who had resigned his lieutenantcy in January 1857 and become chief engineer of the Illinois Central Railroad), Gustavus Smith, and Lovell—corresponded about joining Walker and rescuing the tropics from the "mongrel occupants" who stood in the way of the area's regeneration. "The fact is Mac," Duncan urged McClellan, "if we don't embrace some chance like this, our day and generation will pass amidst the quiets of peace, . . . our lives will be devoted to the accumulation of dollars and cents." Duncan suggested that McClellan might become Walker's highest-ranking subordinate and that the army group might even take control of the movement if Walker faltered. It is difficult to determine how many other army officers were making plans to accompany Walker's next filibuster. One of Walker's principal organizers reported, "We shall have a much better class of men in the next expedition already we have one major, four captains, and eight Lieutenants all in good standing now in the United States army who hold themselves ready to resign and march when the order is given to move." The Duncan-McClellan-Smith-Lovell coterie dropped out of the scheme prior to Walker's departure in November, to the relief of another future Civil War notable, Lt. Col. Joseph Johnston. Johnston had been kept posted on his compeers' preliminary planning but had concluded that Walker was no better than a "robber."⁴⁶

No sooner had the Duncan group turned away from Walker than it trained its sights on Mexico. In early 1858, Lovell and Johnston negotiated with Mexican Liberals about inserting four thousand American filibusters into the Mexican civil war on the Liberals' side. McClellan, promised a leading role in the force, became

⁴⁵ William H. Emory to James A. Pearce, Jan. 17, 1855, James A. Pearce Papers (Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore); P. G. T. Beauregard to Persifor F. Smith, Jan. 24, 1856 [1857], Persifor Frazer Smith Papers (Historical Society of Pennsylvania); May, *John A. Quitman*, 189, 193, 194, 445.

⁴⁶ Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon* (New York, 1988), 49–50, 52–53; C. J. Macdonald to Amy Morris Bradley, July 8, 1857, Amy Morris Bradley Papers (Perkins Library); Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army*, I, 388; William Walker to Johnson Kelly Duncan, Feb. 1, 1858, William Walker Miscellaneous Manuscripts (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

excited about the prospects of military service "in a righteous cause & with fair prospect of distinction." The project fell through that February due to Mexican suspicions of the plotters' intent. Yet Johnston found it hard to make a clean break. Sent to Mexico by the War Department a year later to investigate United States military transit rights across Mexican territory, Johnston considered "founding a Spanish castle upon the basis of last year." Only upon discovering that Liberal leaders remained unreceptive did Johnston inform McClellan that the scheme was truly hopeless. The "Filibustees," as Johnston referred to his clique in July 1860, would have to exert their energies in other ways. Ironically, at the very time that Johnston called it quits on dreams of Mexican filibustering, another future Confederate military leader decided to filibuster south of the border. Maj. James Longstreet, army paymaster at Albuquerque, New Mexico Territory, informed Congressman William P. Miles in February 1860 that he and "one or two friends" had been "working very hard, for several years past, to get Chihuahua into the U.S." and that the appropriate moment had arrived. Longstreet wanted Miles to lobby President Buchanan to approve his raising a regiment of volunteers. Longstreet promised he would march the volunteers into Chihuahua within forty days after their authorization. Furthermore, the foray would bring extra dividends: "Once we got a foot hold in Chihuahua Sonora, which is more important, will very soon follow."⁴⁷

Without the interruption of the Civil War, army involvement in filibuster machinations would most likely have persisted indefinitely. Perhaps it would have escalated. Even after the conflict, officers and enlisted men continued to make an occasional contribution to filibustering, either through involvement in expeditions or through lax enforcement of legislation. The difference was that the age of Manifest Destiny had dissolved into new forms of expansion, and filibustering itself had a greatly reduced hold on the American scene.⁴⁸

In *Captain Macklin: His Memoirs*, by Richard Harding Davis, a fictional work set in the 1880s, a West Point cadet dismissed from the academy for infractions of rules seeks an alternative outlet for his irrepressible soldiering instincts. This former cadet, one Royal Macklin, decides to go to Honduras where liberal revolutionaries had invited foreigners to join their cause. When Royal's cousin and love interest, Beatrice, protests that Royal has no right to play "filibuster" in the affairs of a foreign country, Royal rebuts, "William Walker was a filibuster. . . . He took Nicaragua with 200 men and held it for two years against 20,000. I must begin somewhere." Upon arriving at the revolutionaries' headquarters, Royal encounters second-in-command

⁴⁷ John S. Thrasher to Quitman, Feb. 19, 1858, Quitman Papers (Mississippi Department of Archives and History); Sears, *George B. McClellan*, 55–57; Gilbert E. Govan and James W. Livingood, *A Different Valor: The Story of General Joseph E. Johnston, C.S.A.* (Indianapolis, 1956), 23–26; Longstreet to Miles, Feb. 27, 1860, Miles Papers.

⁴⁸ Stuart, *United States Expansionism*, 248; Richard H. Bradford, *The Virginius Affair* (Boulder, 1980), 11; Andrew F. Rolle, "Futile Filibustering to Baja California, 1888–1890," *Pacific Historical Review*, 20 (May 1951), 163; Peter Gerhard, "The Socialist Invasion of Baja California, 1911," *ibid.*, 15 (Sept. 1946), 297, 304; Robert Wooster, "The Army and the Politics of Expansion: Texas and the Southwestern Borderlands, 1870–1886," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 93 (Oct. 1989), 151–67.

Major Webster, a brave old man “who as a boy had invaded Central America with William Walker’s expedition.” Shortly before the men attack Tegucigalpa, the capital, Webster encourages his followers by invoking the image of America’s most successful filibuster, telling his companions that Walker had brought “peace and justice and prosperity” to the natives of Central America, and that they should adopt “Walker’s motto” of “Five or none”—a reference to Walker’s dream of ultimately conquering five Central American countries. Royal is appropriately inspired: “We all cheered and cheered again.” The filibusters take the capital, rule Honduras briefly, announce their progressive intentions, but then lose power. Most are killed. However, Macklin escapes to the United States. The novel ends with Royal heading off for Marseilles to join a battalion of French Zouaves bound for distant parts.⁴⁹

Davis, a turn-of-the-century novelist and war correspondent, sensed the appeal of filibustering to America’s men in uniform and its would-be soldiers, something that would be overlooked by later historians. There was a point to making Macklin a West Point reject. And Davis understood something more—that filibustering’s meaning to the American people reached back in time to the conquest of America’s native peoples, the ideology of Manifest Destiny, and the taste for foreign conquest cultivated in the Mexican War. Royal, the son of separated parents, cites his maternal grandfather as the person who most inspired his military career. “My grandfather,” Royal recalls, “had served through the Mexican War, in the Indian campaigns on the plains, and during the War of the Rebellion.” Colored prints of Mexican War battles graced the walls of grandfather’s sitting room, and Royal could remember being taken by his grandfather to a reunion of the Aztec Club, a Mexican War veterans’ organization. In essence, the story of fictional filibuster Royal Macklin, though set in the Gilded Age, becomes both a reminder of the fascination filibustering held for antebellum young men and a lingering clue to a national filibustering culture.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Richard Harding Davis, *Captain Macklin: His Memoirs* (New York, 1902), 47, 198–99.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 10–12.