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Reconsidering Antebellum U.S. Women's History: Gender, Filibustering, and America's Quest for Empire

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To J. W. Latimer, my
filibustering associate,
J. H. Reagan

Around midnight on an early October evening in 1858, Congressman John H. Reagan of Texas battled off his fatigue and penned an antifilibustering letter to James W. Latimer, a copublisher of the *Dallas Herald*. A day earlier, the *Herald* had printed Latimer's column supporting the pretensions of the American filibuster William Walker to the presidency of Nicaragua. Walker, who had conquered much of the Central American state in 1855–56 before being defeated militarily in 1857 and forced to return to the United States, was just then making arrangements for what in December would become his second attempt to conquer Nicaragua for the second time. Latimer had endorsed Walker's operations, arguing that they would help spread slavery; and he had validated Walker's claims to head a peaceful emigration to Central America rather than what he really was doing—commanding a military force intending aggression against a foreign people. But Reagan categorically rejected Latimer's logic that the adventurer's efforts had anything to offer the South, much less the rest of the United States, and mocked the reasoning that Walker's movement was peaceful. After all, Walker's operation lacked the “women and children,” not to mention the horses and plows, that would indicate a peaceful emigration.¹

Reagan's gendered typecasting of William Walker and his comrades is suggestive. Only men, one surmises, filibustered. Filibustering was an endeavor that had little to do with today's meaning of the word. Rather, it connoted private military expeditions against countries at peace with the United States. The term gained currency in the 1850s, when several thousands of U.S. citizens and recent immigrants joined irregular assaults not only on Nicaragua, but also against Mexico, Honduras, Ecuador, and the Spanish colony of Cuba. In 1850 and then again in 1851, for example, hundreds of Americans participated in native Venezuelan Narciso López's landings on Cuba's northern coast. So many similar attacks occurred that people living elsewhere, even in the distant Hawaiian kingdom, feared that they would be the Americans' next victims.

Though it is tempting to interpret filibustering either as an expression of mid-nineteenth-century American territorial expansionism or as a harbinger of late-nineteenth-century U.S. imperialism, it was both of these things and something else. Many filibusters internalized contemporary racist thought that posited Anglo-American superiority over the darker-skinned, supposedly benighted inhabitants of the Caribbean tropics. Manipulating such maxims, the proto-imperialist Walker justified his quest to create a personal empire for himself including not merely Nicaragua, but also the other Central American states. Other filibusters, however, sought to annex tropical lands into the U.S. polity. After all, as popular discourses of “manifest destiny” had it, Americans derived from Providence the mission of sharing their progressive ways and blessed republican governmental forms with other peoples by absorbing new territory. To southern filibusters like Walker and former Mississippi governor (and Mexican War hero) John A. Quitman, such progressive institutions included slavery. Walker, a native Tennessean, legalized slavery during his Nicaraguan tenure; and Quitman hoped that the expedition against Cuba that he tried to assemble between 1853 and 1855 would thwart Spain’s rumored intent to emancipate the island’s slaves. Quitman hoped that eventually Cuba might enter the Union as one or more new slave states.

However, making all filibusters into imperialists or southern extremists would be misleading reductionism. Large numbers of filibusters, especially those in the enlisted ranks, answered impulses of romantic adventurism, sought escape abroad from personal problems at home, or soldiered mostly for monetary incentives such as military pay and land bonuses. A good number hailed from northern states. Because filibusters conducted their attacks for diverse reasons, including but not confined to conquest and national aggrandizement, they are most accurately defined as practitioners of what Janice E. Thomson labels “nonstate violence”—that is, transnational aggression unauthorized by nation states. Further, since filibusters almost always left U.S. territory as military organizations rather than individually, rarely had contracts with foreign governments, and did not necessarily prioritize monetary gain as their purpose, they resist conflation with mercenaries, though they often displayed similar behaviors. As Guy Arnold reminds us, mercenaries invariably put pecuniary rewards before all other incentives.²

Since filibuster expeditions often came to gruesome ends, we might suspect that Reagan’s characterizing filibustering as a male affair reflected its sanguinary nature. Many adventurers died during filibustering campaigns; and a high percentage of the survivors wound up with wounds, missing limbs, and/or impaired health. B. F. Presbury’s fictional *The Mustee* (1859) is revelatory

when one of its characters, noticing that another character has only two fingers left, responds instinctively by blurting out, "Why, you look as though you had been filibustering with López."³ Most readers at the time would have instantly recognized the obvious allusion to Narciso López, who led private armies from U.S. soil in highly publicized, bloody invasions of Cuba in 1850 and 1851. Further, large numbers of filibusters suffered capture by foreign authorities, leading usually either to their executions or their internments abroad. And since filibustering violated international and U.S. law (the "Neutrality Act" of 1818), malefactors risked prosecution and prison back home if they returned to U.S. soil. Surely women, then excluded from the U.S. military, state militias, and urban police forces, had no place in this bloody, illicit business.

Indeed, filibustering was a lopsidedly male activity, readily identified with the nation's footloose young men, especially southerners bent on expanding slavery and restless urbanites. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* described it as a "manly" course toward what its practitioners believed was the progress of mankind. Most participants could not even conceptualize women comrades, as one Texan revealed inadvertently by repetitiously observing in a letter that "young men in the South" and "young men" would join the "glorious cause" of conquering Mexico, while identifying himself as "quite a young man." One does not find female names on filibuster rosters. Filibusters, as one of Edward Everett Hale's characters put it in a post-Civil War story about earlier times, simply did not bring "ladies" along.⁴

Yet, modern historiography refutes assumptions that women either were excluded from or excluded themselves wholly from any activity occurring in mid-nineteenth-century America's public space. Even before women began agitating concertedly for the vote in the late 1840s, they were already political actors, taking advantage of the fact that male politicians defined as "private and apolitical" virtually all female policy demands short of suffrage. Especially in the North, middle- and upper-class women immersed themselves in abolitionism and other benevolent reform activity that compelled them to petition and lobby legislators, conduct business affairs, and transgress traditional gender boundaries. By the last antebellum decade, female lecturers declaimed regularly in public to mixed audiences on temperance, women's rights, and abolitionism. If female participation at partisan rallies was largely passive and symbolic, and if women's access to public space remained "tenuous," they nonetheless joined in political life. Even women's domestic, sentimental fiction, feminist scholars argue, advanced "political agendas," though many female authors conceived their role as changing society within prescribed gen-

der conventions, often resorting to pseudonyms to get published. The whole concept of a separate “domestic” sphere for women, articulated decades ago by Barbara Welter and others, has become, as Dana Nelson puts it, “consciously problematic.”⁵

Women even became “actors in shaping the nation’s foreign policy,” as Edward P. Crapol observed in a 1987 work. More recently, Amy Kaplan has chided scholars for assuming that foreign policy remained beyond women’s concern. Rather, Kaplan argues, the very concept and language of female domesticity helped define “the contours of the nation and its shifting borders with the foreign.” Using literary sources, Kaplan reveals a complex interplay between American foreign affairs and female apostles of separate spheres at home, arguing the paradox that even champions of female space utilized foreign spheres to make their case. To Kaplan, mid-nineteenth-century domestic fiction revolves around thresholds such as doorways, in turn necessitating explorations of boundaries; works seemingly consumed by issues of “female interiority” are “subjectively scripted by narratives of nation and empire.” Kaplan’s *The Anarchy of Empire* insists that “domestic and foreign spaces are closer than we think.”⁶

Given such scholarship, it is hardly surprising that historiography’s exclusion of women from pre-Civil War filibustering is vulnerable. Provocatively probing antebellum American popular culture, Amy S. Greenberg has deconstructed print culture’s gendered slant on William Walker, and how Americans superimposed concerns about their country’s increasing commercialism upon Walker’s image. Pro-Walker discourse presented him as a leader untainted by monetary motives, who demonstrated bravery characteristic of unfettered masculinity. Critics dismissed Walker’s stereotypically unmasculine traits such as sensitive facial features. Meanwhile, commentators pontificated about female inhabitants in places the filibusters attacked. Shelley Streeby, likewise considering filibustering’s domestic implications, has dissected the gendered constructions of Ned Buntline’s novels about filibustering, *The B’hoys of New York* and *The Mysteries and Miseries of New Orleans*. In both novels, Streeby notes, “empire-building in the Americas” provides “possibly redemptive sites” for the rehabilitation of “damaged urban masculinities.” Thus in *The Mysteries and Miseries of New Orleans*, a young American man joins the 1851 López expedition after murdering his wife’s seducer. More significant, the seduced woman achieves vengeance (and thus agency) by providing the intelligence that helps Spanish authorities in Cuba foil López’s invasion.⁷

One need only consider how William Walker justified his invasion of Mexican Baja, California, and Sonora in 1853–54, which preceded his attack on

Nicaragua, to comprehend the inseparability of gender and American filibustering. During his expedition, Walker rationalized that the filibusters could better guard Mexican female civilians against brutal Apache Indians than had the Mexican government and army: "For years," he addressed his men, Apache Indians had preyed on Sonora's people. "Their property has been taken from them—their wives and children have been massacred, or consigned to a captivity worse than death, by the torturing fire of a worthless foe. The men of Sonora have been forced to see their wives and daughters ravished—and babies at the breast have been torn from their mothers, and murdered before the eyes of captive parents." Walker's filibusters would serve God, chivalrously rescuing helpless women from savage despoilers. Later, in his 1860 autobiography *The War in Nicaragua*, Walker legitimized his conquest by claiming that finely dressed native women had welcomed the filibusters with "pleasing smiles" when they first arrived in Nicaragua; later, native women brought provisions and fruit into his lines, because, unlike his Central American enemies, he did not impress their menfolk into military service. Not surprisingly, Latin American governments and peoples inverted Walker's logic, portraying the filibusters themselves as sexual predators. When Costa Rican president Juan Rafael Mora rallied troops going off to battle Walker, he urged them to expel the "scum of all peoples" who intended, once they pacified Nicaragua, to "invade Costa Rica to find in our wives and daughters . . . gratification for their local passions." Costa Rican troops must defend their homeland as they would the Virgin Mary.⁸

This essay takes scholarship on gender and filibustering a step further. Recent work primarily revolves around images of filibustering in American literary and popular culture. But as Kaplan insists, foreign policy also attracted women's "participation." This piece suggests that although women played a relatively minor role numerically in filibustering, they nonetheless asserted themselves as planners, propagandists, participants, and popularizers—achieving a degree of agency by involvement in the movement, and occasionally exerting leverage at its upper echelons. Though the filibuster John Quitman stereotyped women as "timid" and "disposed to shrink from conflict," numbers of females succumbed to filibustering's siren.⁹

Recovering this story facilitates a more comprehensive portrait of women's involvement in antebellum U.S. territorial growth and foreign relations than is available in extant scholarship. It also casts that activity less romantically than is usual. Generally speaking, scholars exclude women entirely from narratives about antebellum American territorial enterprises. On the rare occasions when women appear in the literature, they commonly do so in the ranks

of northern *anti-imperialists*—petitioning against Indian removal or convening meetings to protest the annexation of Texas, the war with Mexico, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act as slave power machinations to extend unfree labor into new domains. However, the following account, by highlighting the role of women in filibustering, confirms Anne McClintock's challenge in *Imperial Leather* that "gender dynamics were fundamental" within the "imperial enterprise," thus meshing with a whole body of emerging scholarship positioning women in *both* imperial and anti-imperial roles in nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Western hegemonic projects—a rich scholarship that insists on the relevance of gender, sexuality, and family within the discourse of empire.¹⁰

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On August 29, 1849, the wife of U.S. Department of State translator Robert Greenhow asked one of America's most prominent politicians to assist Narciso López's pending filibuster to wrest Cuba from Spanish colonial rule. "Now I must tell you of the progress of the Cuba affair," the future Confederate spy Rose Greenhow alerted U.S. senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. Greenhow explained that she had just breakfasted with the plot's "mover," who had commenced a "perilous undertaking." Steamer transports would leave New York City and New Orleans for Cuba, bearing as many as 2,500 men. But although the passengers were "well-armed" "picked men," their success remained in doubt. Sympathizers who wanted to add Cuba to the American "sisterhood" needed to help.¹¹

Greenhow's solicitation failed. If Calhoun helped López, his contributions have disappeared from the public record. Within weeks, moreover, U.S. naval officers forced López to postpone his invasion by confiscating his ships at New York City and by blockading the filibusters' encampment on an island off the Gulf Coast.¹² Still, Greenhow's informed plea alerts us to antebellum women's complicity in illegal expeditions.

Part of this involvement, as one might expect, played out in domestic fiction. In 1855, a New York publisher brought out a filibustering novel by Lucy Petway Holcombe. *The Free Flag of Cuba*, dedicated to the Cuba filibuster plotter John Quitman, mixes actual filibustering figures with fictional characters in a plot revolving around Narciso López's 1851 fatal Cuba expedition. As Orville Vernon Burton and Georganne B. Burton observe, Holcombe's narrative, though granting her female characters considerable individuality and political voices, nonetheless reinforced gender stereotypes: López's recruits

volunteer to display their manliness, are into male bonding, and have links to knighthood and chivalry; female characters circulate in a prescribed feminine sphere, even when they support filibustering.¹³

Other period works of domestic fiction authored by women included extended passages about filibustering, or allusions to it. Elizabeth D. Livermore's *The Quadroon's Triumph* puts its main character, a light-skinned young woman from the Danish West Indies island of Santa Cruz, aboard a Havana-bound steamer with an American passenger and former acquaintance named George Stephenson. The latter represents "Young America," and boasts that he will "join the next filibustering expedition, and take Cuba and carry it home in his coat-pocket to use as a sugar box, and set up the Hidalgos as ten pins upon his bowling alley." In Louisa Melissa Judd's antifeminist diatribe *Censoria Lictoria*, set during the 1852 U.S. presidential campaign, one character explains to another, "I wonder you and all the old forgies don't take up for Miss Convention and Mrs. Fillibuster!" and another declaims about how aggressors against woman's domestic sphere have been involved in "any amount of 'high-falutin,' fillibuster and 'phifty-four phortyism'." When the youthful immigrant Lilian defends the United States in Catherine Ann Warfield's *Household of Bouverie*, her Europhile grandfather exclaims, "Democrat, Filibuster, fit descendant of the Norman pirate; answer me, Why do you love this land?"¹⁴

One fictive effort even invented a female soldiering with López. In a thirty-one-page pamphlet published in Charleston in 1852, "Sophia Delaplain" tells of being imprisoned in Cuba for unwarranted suspicion of involvement in López's invasion (fig. 1). According to her account, presented as autobiography, she had been evicted from her home by her father, a wealthy New York City merchant, in punishment for her romance with one Mortimer Bowers—an impoverished next-door neighbor. The two lovers, hoping for a new start, boarded a ship for Gold Rush California, not realizing that the vessel belonged to López's filibuster expedition. When arms were distributed aboard ship, she, Bowers, and the other California-bound passengers accepted them and began drilling, faking a willingness to filibuster in the hope of deserting once opportunity presented itself. But their scheme unraveled. After the filibusters arrived at Santiago on Cuba's southern coast, the California contingent mutinied, killing more than half the crew and gaining control of the ship. However, when the author and Bowers landed on Cuban soil to get water, they were captured by Spanish authorities, who distrusted their story. Subsequently, they were imprisoned in a church basement and tortured, with Bowers eventually being hung. Fortunately, the wife of the Spanish magistrate took pity on Delaplain and helped her escape to Baltimore on an English ship.

Determined upon a life of seclusion, she nonetheless had taken the advice of some of Baltimore's "most influential citizens" that she publish her experiences.¹⁵

Not only did American women write pseudonymously about López's filibusters, but women living on the Gulf Coast became the invaders' public boosters. Some one hundred women in Gainesville, Mississippi, for example, paraded in López's honor when he appeared in town following his 1850 Cuba invasion fiasco. In the spring of 1851, when hundreds of López's followers congregated at Jacksonville, Florida, expecting López to sail again momentarily, the local paper recounted how the town's "ladies" had made them "beautiful banners." It is noteworthy that on July 31 that year, when the New Orleans *Louisiana Courier* reported that revolution had erupted in Cuba against Spanish rule, it asked women to contribute their gems and bracelets to a Cuba filibustering committee in the Crescent City.

One need not make too much of such happenings. After all, sewing rested firmly within women's acknowledged domestic domain, and the presenting of banners smacks of the kinds of gestures that women supposedly made to knights during medieval jousts. Revealingly, the *Courier* obscured its call for female engagement in a political question by referencing the virtue and beauty of women that made such sacrifices likely. Nonetheless, such activity conformed to a broader pattern of female involvement in the filibustering movement.¹⁶

Female activity for López peaked after the filibusters actually left New Orleans on the steamer *Pampero*, and on August 12, 1851, landed in Cuba. On September 2, the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* announced that a young local woman's "original patriotic song" would be sung at a benefit for the invaders. Two days later, the *Picayune* announced that a "Ladies' Concert" at Lafayette (in southwestern Louisiana) in support of López would occur the following evening, and that the women of Gretna (a suburb of New Orleans) planned a ball on behalf of the Cubans. After learning that Spanish authorities had crushed the expedition and executed many of its survivors, the Mobile, Alabama, socialite Octavia Walton LeVert, in an exchange of letters with Henry Clay, then U.S. senator from Kentucky, vented anger at what she considered Spain's ruthlessness. On September 1, 1852, the anniversary of López's execution, New Orleans women reportedly filled windows and balconies and crowded the streets

Figure 1.

Filibustering infiltrated American popular culture before the Civil War, and crossed gender lines. Many novels and short stories that addressed filibustering either were authored by women or dealt with gender issues. This piece of anonymously-authored fiction concerned a woman caught up inadvertently in a filibuster against Cuba.

A
THRILLING AND EXCITING ACCOUNT
OF THE
SUFFERINGS AND HORRIBLE TORTURES
INFLECTED ON
MORTIMER BOWERS AND MISS SOPHIA DELAPLAIN,
For a supposed participation with Gen. Lopez in
THE INVASION OF CUBA;
THE TORTURES BEING INFLECTED TO ELICIT INFORMATION RELATING TO
THE EXPEDITION AGAINST THE ISLAND.



THE LAST INTERVIEW BETWEEN MISS DELAPLAIN AND HER FATHER.

CHARLESTON, S. C.:
PUBLISHED BY E. E. BARCLAY; M. B. CROSSON & CO.
1851.

during a mass memorial parade. Around the same time, a woman sent one of López's surviving officers, Chatham Roberdeau Wheat, a silk rosette as a mark of appreciation for his efforts on behalf of human liberty.¹⁷

Women from the mid-Atlantic and Gulf South states, therefore, joined the rituals and discourse of filibustering during the López conspiracy. New England women especially, but also women from other parts of the country, took far less interest. This was partly because women in New England and the Old Northwest (today's Midwest) simply lived further from Cuba. But it also reflected filibustering's association in the popular mind with slavery expansionism, a symbiosis that waxed as the decade progressed.

Certainly such patterns continued during William Walker's filibusters to Nicaragua. In early 1857, when the "Alamo Rangers," a company of some eighty men, prepared to rush from San Antonio, Texas, to shore up Walker's cause, local women presented them with a lone-star banner inscribed with their band's name and the motto "Remember you are Texans." After Walker arrived in New Orleans months later following the collapse of his régime, a local woman honored him with a fifteen-stanza poem, which concluded by celebrating Walker as an agent of America's expansion:

All hail to thee, Chief! Heaven's blessings may rest
On the battle-scarred brow of our national guest,
And soon may our Eagle fly over the sea,
And plant there a branch of our national tree.¹⁸

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Not only have historians glossed over female boosterism for filibustering, but they have almost ignored women who actually participated in filibustering expeditions. The San Francisco *Daily Alta California* highlighted one such case, for example, when recounting how Captain John Chapman brought his wife on William Walker's invasion of Mexico. According to the paper, Mrs. Chapman not only nursed Walker's sick and wounded; she had actually inspired the men with her own heroism. When Walker's capital of Ensenada, in Baja, California, was besieged by Mexican forces, she had turned up "at the post of danger" and fired through "loop holes" at the enemy. Even companions already accustomed to her courage were taken aback by her bravery under fire. Three days later, another San Francisco sheet published a letter from a lieutenant in Walker's army confirming this account: Mrs. Chapman used her pistol and rifle "so manfully, that she was looked upon as about as good a

man as any one of the party.” Such highly gendered language suggests how stereotypically masculine filibustering was supposed to be.¹⁹

Had not contemporary conventions been so prejudiced against female involvement in warfare, more such women would undoubtedly turn up in filibustering's military record. The case of Teresa Griffin Vielé, who was raised in New York City and married to a lieutenant in the 1st U.S. Infantry Regiment, is suggestive. Living at Ringgold Barracks, Texas (about a mile from the Texan border town of Rio Grande City), with her officer husband in the fall of 1851 at the time of the Tejano José María Jesús Carbajal's invasion of northern Mexico, Vielé found herself captivated by the filibusters. In her autobiographical “*Following the Drum*,” published a few years later, Vielé recalled that filibusters hanging about Rio Grande City, their rendezvous, had more “true-souled honesty and genuine generosity” than people supposed, and that Carbajal, his “excessively ugly face notwithstanding,” wore his sombrero stylishly, seemed bright, and spoke with a “pure English accent.” When Carbajal battled Mexican forces just across the Rio Grande at Camargo and soldiers from Ringgold Barracks deserted to join the filibuster's ranks, Vielé could barely contain her excitement. She hurried to the fort's balcony to observe the fighting, and later remembered that when American male civilians in the vicinity armed themselves with the idea of reinforcing Carbajal, even “the women wanted to go.” Once the adventurers retreated back to U.S. soil, she helped the “outlaws,” some of whom she knew “quite intimately,” by alerting them to the location of U.S. army officers seeking to arrest them. Unashamed by her complicity with criminal activity, Vielé rationalized that many in the army sympathized with the filibusters anyway, and pro-filibustering feeling ran so strongly in Texas that civil strife would have erupted had the army actually interdicted Carbajal's men.²⁰

Unlike fighting, however, emigration fell firmly within the women's sphere. We should not be surprised that an American woman got press notice for participating in a nonmilitary capacity in the Henry L. Kinney filibuster of 1855—an attempt by a Texan entrepreneur to take over part of Great Britain's “Mosquito Coast” protectorate on Central America's eastern coast. On October 27, the *Central American*, Kinney's newspaper, identified its associate editor as Mrs. F. L. Lewellyn, “formerly Editress of the American Sentinel, City of New York.” According to the piece, Lewellyn had migrated to Kinney's colony for health reasons. The same issue carried her account of traveling along the Mosquito Coast, with observations about the region's flora, the course of the Indian River, the area's mixed-race inhabitants, and a hotel where she was staying.²¹

American men, in fact, anticipated their wives' journeying to pacified filibuster domains. Thus as Texas's U.S. senator Sam Houston in 1859 pondered filibustering into northern Mexico to establish an American protectorate, he alerted his spouse that she and three of their children should accompany him. When Memphis *Appeal* editor Benjamin F. Dill informed John Quitman that his brother wanted to serve on Quitman's filibuster staff, he added that his own wife sent her remembrances to Quitman and that she intended to buy "a nice little villa" in Cuba once the filibusters took it.²²

William Walker's conquest of Nicaragua made emigration a genuine family option. No sooner did Walker establish himself there than he sought to solidify his tenure by enticing fellow Americans. According to a November 1855 decree by Patricio Rivas, a native Nicaraguan serving as president of Walker's régime, Americans could claim for free up to 250 acres of Nicaragua's public domain if they emigrated singly to Nicaragua, or 350 acres if they came as a family. Title would be granted after six months, and the Rivas government promised exemption from tariffs, "extraordinary *Taxes* and *Contributions*," and "Public Service, except when the public safety shall otherwise demand."²³ Once word reached the United States, American families began gambling their futures on Walker, little suspecting that he would use the law's loophole about public safety to impress arriving male emigrants into his army. Though the emigrants were largely single males, a goodly number brought women with them (fig. 2).

Some families apparently finalized their emigration plans hurriedly. When the Nicaragua-bound *Northern Light* left New York City's Pier 3 on December 24, a screaming profilibustering crowd ashore cheered women sighted on its deck as Nicaragua's "future mothers." In February 1856, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (New York City) acknowledged reports that families were arriving at Nicaragua's Atlantic and Pacific ports, and that a "Mrs. Mary Rider, late of Albany, N.Y." was among the immigrants. The next month, a correspondent of a California newspaper aboard a vessel off Nicaragua's Pacific coast noted that ten of the passengers planned residencies in Nicaragua, only half of them as recruits for Walker's army. The balance, "migrating on their own hook," included the Yorks and their three sons from Illinois, who had gone to California to mine, had contracted the frontier impulse to "move on," and now sought "a new home." Presumably, the reporter predicted, the Yorks would either ranch in Nicaragua or establish a public house there. Months later, correspondent "J" of the San Francisco *Daily Herald*, from Virgin Bay, in Nicaragua's interior, reported seeing "several ladies who are here as settlers or visitors by the last steamer from New York." Around the same time, when

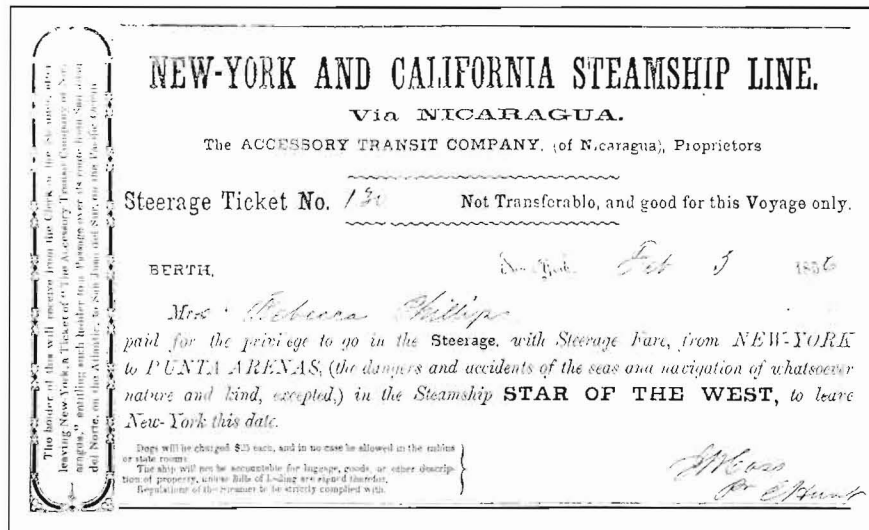


Figure 2.
 Steerage Ticket. February 8,
 1856. Some U.S. women in the
 mid-1850s took passage from
 U.S. coastal ports for William
 Walker's Nicaraguan "republic,"
 sometimes in transit to or from
 California, on other occasions
 with the intention of settling
 there. A few wound up engaging
 militarily in his cause. Printed
 courtesy of Duke University.

English naval officer John W. Tarleton searched an American merchant ship recently arrived at San Juan del Norte for filibusters, passengers claimed they intended residencies rather than positions in Walker's army. According to the merchant ship's captain, one passenger told Tarleton "that he was going there with his wife and two children to settle. That another man then said, he also was going there with his wife to settle." At this point, Tarleton told the passengers that he would not further delay them.²⁴

According to her reminiscence, eventually published in the *Tennessee Historical Magazine*, Elleanor Callaghan and several family members, including her sister and niece, left Council Bluffs, Iowa, for Nicaragua on April 4, 1856, embarking by schooner from New Orleans on May 7. In addition to some 150 military recruits for Walker, six families were aboard who were anxious to capitalize on Rivas's land "inducements." After a British officer, probably Tarleton, inspected the vessel at San Juan, Callaghan and her companions proceeded to Granada, then Walker's capital, where her sister and niece soon died of tropical fevers. Callaghan's party apparently never claimed any land grants. Rather, Callaghan became a dependent of Walker's beleaguered régime, and shuttled between places under Walker's control until the collapse of the filibuster's government in late April 1857.²⁵

By that time, female emigration to Nicaragua had been augmented by yet another seemingly generous initiative by Walker's régime. In July 1856, days after being inaugurated as Nicaragua's "president," Walker decreed the confiscation of land owned by Nicaraguans who had resisted his takeover. Other rules passed during Walker's tenure gave English-speaking Americans advantages in registering land and in litigation over titles. Enticed by this seeming bonanza, additional U.S. women found their way there. Fortunately, Walker's organization preserved a register listing more than a thousand emigrants, including a small minority of women. Sometimes females in these records bore their actual names (e.g., "Miss Angeline A Carhart"); in other instances they appeared under such classifications as "wife," "Family," "daught.," and "Lady." Benjamin F. Turner of Troy, New York, for instance, emigrated with his wife, two children, and eight trunks, two boxes, and three carpetbags. Newspaper reports supplement the agency's book. Thus the New Orleans *Daily Creole* reported "several families" aboard the steamer *Tennessee*, just cleared for Nicaragua. After Walker's defeat, the New York *Times* carried a letter of Robert A. Fulton, a printer, explaining that he had emigrated to Nicaragua with his wife and mother intending to take up 250 acres of land, but joined Walker's Second Rifle Regiment after being told that he would have to perform army service for twelve months before receiving his land warrant. Now stranded in New York, where he had been evacuated, Fulton wished that the city's printers would provide funds so that he could get himself and his wife and mother, both of whom had fallen sick during their filibustering experience, back to their homes.²⁶

Not all American female emigrants accompanied husbands intending to farm. Christopher Lilly, a onetime Bowery, New York City, boxer, U.S.-Mexican War officer, and San Francisco rowdy who sailed for Nicaragua with his spouse after running afoul of the San Francisco Vigilance Committee, hoped to rack up profits transporting Costa Rican coffee to Walker's forces. Ned Bingham, a former New York City actor who had been shot in Panama and paralyzed in his legs, went to Nicaragua with his wife, also an actor, hoping to teach school there. He wound up in Walker's army despite his disability, and suffered yet another wound when Walker's forces were besieged at Granada. Apparently his wife and children died from cholera during this period. The dime novelist and ornithologist Charles W. Webber also took a wife, herself reputedly an "admirable sketcher," to Nicaragua. He became a private in Walker's service, and died "in action."²⁷

Then, too, spouses and female relations of Walker's officer corps made their way to Nicaragua. One of Walker's officers reported from Granada in Febru-

ary 1856 that Walker's adjutant general had just arrived "with his accomplished lady." About a year later, a newspaper correspondent noted that one of Walker's generals had just married Elizabeth Hathaway of Boston, the step-daughter of one of Walker's ordnance officers, who also had brought his wife to Nicaragua. Among Walker's other commanders taking spouses to Nicaragua was General Birkett D. Fry. When Fry prepared to return to Nicaragua in February 1857 following a recruiting visit to California, the *Daily Alta California* noted that his "beautiful and intelligent wife" would "again" be accompanying him.²⁸

Apparently some of these female emigrants and sojourners, much like Civil War regimental "daughters," eventually engaged in combat. Elleanor Callaghan's account portrays its author as a helpless victim appalled by sights of wounded soldiers. In April 1857 during the siege of Rivas, Callaghan is thrown to the floor when a cannonball crashes through a room where she is conversing with "two other Ladys" and her brother. On another occasion, when Elleanor is cooking, a ball misses her by only three feet. Callaghan's account implies that she ripped up her underclothes to make bandages for Walker's injured men, but if so, this was about as far as she went for the cause. Filibuster veteran William Stewart's reminiscence tells us that another American woman had one of her legs exploded "to atoms" at Rivas, without indicating that she was involved in the fighting. This victim, according to Callaghan, subsequently lost her life to gangrene, after the limb (which Callaghan identified as a foot), was amputated. However, Mts. Bingham, according to one report, served as a nurse to Walker's forces. And the *Daily Alta California* reported that Elizabeth Hathaway "approached" becoming a "true heroine" when Walker's forces were besieged at Granada.²⁹

Following the collapse of Walker's regime, a reporter caught up in New York City with some of Walker's officers' wives and learned quickly that they were "filibusters indeed"—believers that "Nicaragua *must* be American." According to their testimony, during the siege of Rivas they had gathered up twenty-four-pound shot fired at the filibusters by Costa Rican forces and recast them into six-pound shot at the city's furnace. Their only complaint was that the Nicaraguan cause needed a more "humane" and "provident" leader than Walker—one who could conciliate native peoples. This report comports with an observation by Los Angeles *Star* editor William A. Wallace, who had socialized with the Walker officer Edward J. C. Kewen and spouse while Edward was in California on a mission for Walker. Wallace described Mrs. Kewen as a "filibuster" who had assisted her husband "at several of the battles in Nicaragua."³⁰

How many American women got enmeshed in Walker's fighting is anybody's guess. When U.S. naval officer Charles H. Davis in April 1857 began mediating terms between Walker and Central American forces besieging him at Rivas, he arranged a truce to evacuate to Nicaragua's Pacific coast women and children trapped with the filibusters. According to Stewart, these numbered between forty and fifty.³¹ Stewart's figures, however, neither distinguish between American women and female Nicaraguan natives nor account for American women who had died in Nicaragua, left Nicaragua, or were living elsewhere in the country at the time.

* * * * *

U.S. women addressed filibustering politically, in addition to participating in expeditions. The outspoken Washington, D.C., journalist Anne Royall, in editorials in her weekly, *The Huntress*, for example, lambasted Spain's "unqualified cruelty" in putting Narciso López's captured filibusters to death without the benefit of trial; but she also

suggested that filibusters were mercenary, "bad idea men" who should stay at home and make bread rather than conquer Cuba and grow coffee trees. Royall feared that Americans might snatch up one country after another, until the world was in the

American grip. Sarah P. Remond, a black abolitionist, informed an English audience in 1859 that filibustering demonstrated that America's entire governmental system had been corrupted. But public women, far more typically, endorsed filibustering, especially Walker's cause.³²

Consider, for instance, the positive slant of well-published Anna Ella Carroll on Walker's régime (fig. 3). The daughter of a onetime Maryland planter who held office as legislator and governor, Carroll was living in Baltimore in 1856 when she printed a diatribe, *Review of Pierce's Administration*, which referenced filibustering, to boost the presidential campaign of the nativist American Party's candidate Millard Fillmore. Although Carroll denounced sentiment within the incumbent Democrat Franklin Pierce's administration to acquire Cuba by force if Spain would not sell it (an idea articulated by U.S. diplomats in the notorious "Ostend Manifesto") and argued that America would benefit more by promoting its foreign trade than from territorial growth, she nonetheless indicted the president for indicating sympathy for Cuba fili-

Figure 3.

Photograph of Anna Ella Carroll, the anti-Catholic Baltimorean who boosted William Walker's cause in her publications. Image in Anna E. Carroll, *The Great American Battle; Or, The Contest Between Christianity and Political Romanism* (New York and Auburn: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1856), unnumbered page opposite page 13.



busters and then double-crossing them. Further, she lambasted Pierce for refusing to receive officially Parker H. French, Walker's appointee as minister to the United States. True, Pierce had eventually reversed course and received a different representative from Walker's government, but he did this, Carroll contended, only from political expediency—the “noble” Walker's cause and his “gallant American legion” were so popular that Pierce dared not further offend the electorate. However, although Carroll promoted Walker's régime and the conversion of Catholic Mexicans to Protestantism by U.S. missionaries, she discounted the prospect of Latin America's impoverished, “benighted papists” joining the American polity as equal citizens: such lower orders could hardly appreciate “Anglo-American liberty” as applied through U.S. laws. Far better, she believed, for Walker to abet Nicaraguans' quest for liberty on their own soil. So Carroll announced in *A Star of the West* (1857) that Walker represented God and the American republic alike in liberating Nicaragua's masses from priests and despots. Carroll sent Walker a copy of her new book, which led to Walker's promising that he would visit her in person.³³

The author, adventurer, and lobbyist Jane McManus Storm Cazneau, an upstate New York native, became even more involved with filibustering than did Carroll, so much so that a Vicksburg, Mississippi, newspaper headlined her as a “FEMALE FILLIBUSTER.” Like Carroll the daughter of a political figure, Jane McManus had been connected with Texas land colonization schemes in the early 1830s. As a columnist for eastern newspapers and journals, including John L. O'Sullivan's expansionist *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* between 1839 and the mid-1840s, often using a pseudonym, she promoted American territorial growth conceptually and programmatically. She endorsed American aspirations to control Oregon (then jointly occupied by the United States and Great Britain), and especially championed U.S. annexation of Texas, perhaps coining the term “manifest destiny,” customarily attributed to O'Sullivan. In 1847 she added Cuba to her agenda, promoting in the *New York Sun* and other forums the liberation of the island by filibuster and its annexation to the United States. McManus also served as intermediary between Cuban filibusters and influential American politicians, including President James K. Polk, and for a while edited in New York City (under her pseudonym Cora Montgomery) the bilingual Cuban exile revolutionary newspaper *La Verdad*. A private letter in 1854 that she wrote congratulating the *Sun*'s editor for pieces that might persuade Congress to repeal the Neutrality Act lays bare her proflibustering proclivities.³⁴

Marriage to the Texas politician and entrepreneur William L. Cazneau in 1849 drew her deeper into filibustering circles. In May 1856, after William

publicly endorsed Walker's Nicaraguan cause and the relaxation of enforcement of the Neutrality Act, Jane pressured New York *Sun* editor Moses S. Beach to promote lectures about Walker's régime in New York City so that Americans would emigrate to Nicaragua. Apparently with money-making schemes in mind, the couple traveled to Walker's republic, arriving for Walker's inauguration on July 12. In April 1856, before the journey, Jane spoke about plans for a silver speculation. In 1857, following the trip, her husband mentioned his claims to "valuable" Nicaraguan mineral holdings. Further, while the Cazneaus sojourned in Nicaragua in August 1856, William contracted with Walker to send him one thousand male "colonists," certainly a euphemism for military reinforcements. Just before Walker fell from power in 1857, Jane implored Attorney General Jeremiah Black that the U.S. government recognize Walker's government to enhance U.S. trading and transit interests in Central America, and that it ratify a treaty designed to encourage American domination of Nicaragua that had been worked out by U.S. minister John H. Wheeler with Walker's government.³⁵

Following Walker's return to the United States, the Cazneaus endorsed the filibuster's continuing pretensions to be Nicaragua's legitimate ruler. Jane instructed Black that although she did not care personally about Walker, the United States had an interest in allowing him to bring armed men back to Nicaragua. Walker was an ally at a time when Great Britain, America's commercial rival in Central America, supported the filibuster's Costa Rican enemies. Only after Walker's second expedition to Central America failed did the Cazneaus change their tune and claim that they were really antifilibustering and merely wished Americans peacefully settled in the tropics. In April 1858, Jane Cazneau had the effrontery to suggest that the post-Walker native-controlled Nicaraguan government give her a grant to colonize American families there, on the logic that Nicaraguan authorities should welcome such emigrants as a buffer against future filibuster attacks. Once U.S. settlers owned Nicaraguan coffee groves, they would resist filibustering intruders. Nothing came of this absurd proposal, which presumed that Nicaragua's leaders would overlook her filibustering past.³⁶

Like Cazneau, the female temperance figure Sarah Pellet traveled to Walker's republic and publicly endorsed the filibuster. In February 1856, Walker's newspaper, *El Nicaragiense* noted that Pellet had arrived "to see us" and would remain for two weeks, journeying as far as the undeveloped "facilities for carriage" would permit. Not only had Walker's men shown her considerable politeness, but one of Walker's aides had become taken with this "fair apostle of temperance." Following her sojourn, Pellet traveled to New Orleans, where

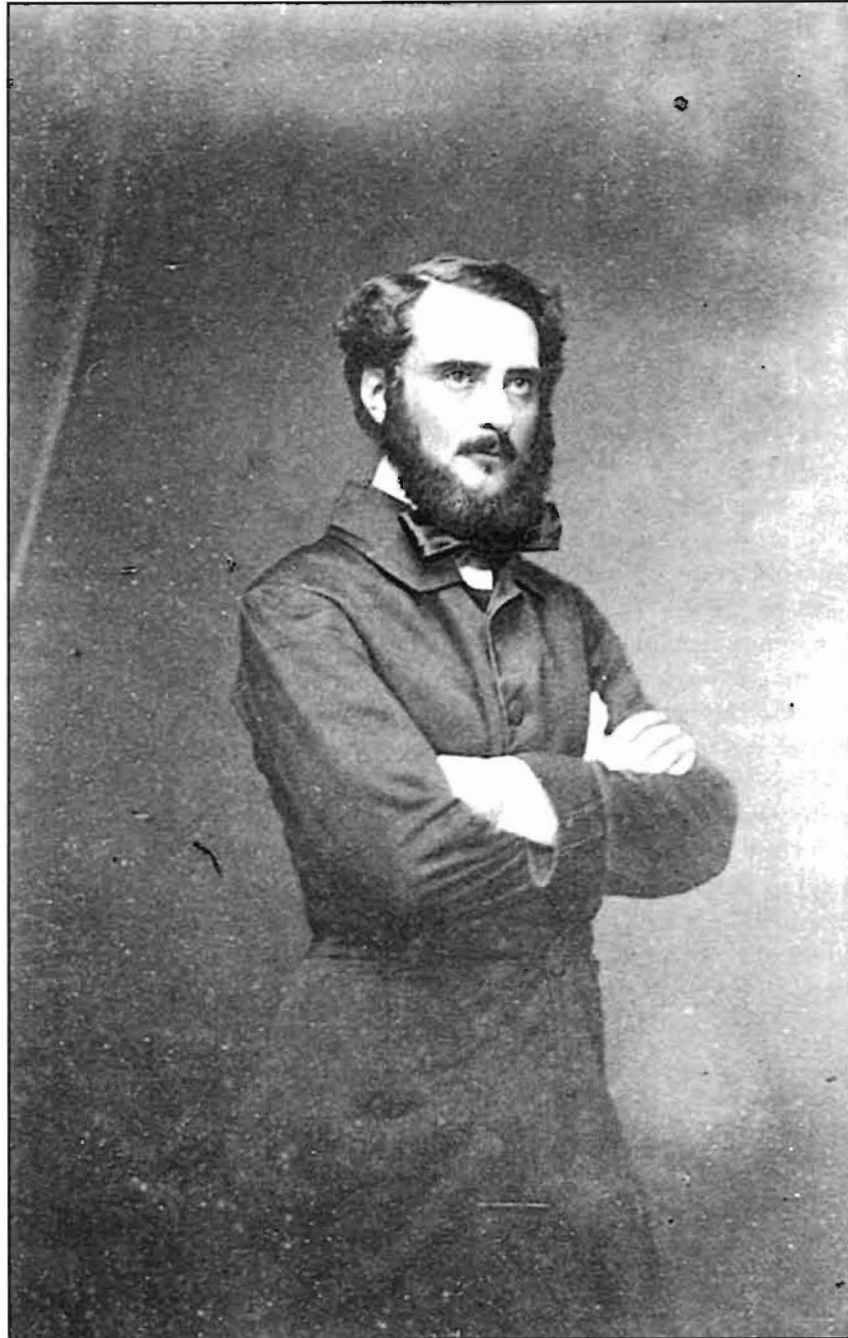
she scheduled a public lecture about Nicaragua's natural resources and its promise as a locus where "American republicanism" was extending its domain. According to the *Daily Picayune*, Pellet "discoursed" with enthusiasm about the "magnificent 'manifest destiny'" before the occupied country. Pellet's small audience remained interested in her talk, observed the *Picayune*, despite her soft voice.³⁷

Before closing this pantheon of female filibusters, we should also admit Anna J. Sanders and Amy Morris Bradley. Sanders, the wife of George N. Sanders (the *Democratic Review's* owner as of late 1851 and a prominent "Young America" proponent of republican revolutionaries in Europe), circulated in filibustering circles in New York City. Her diary reveals interactions with such filibustering icons as the Cuba and Mexico filibuster Chatham Roberdeau Wheat; the European military adventurer, Charles Frederick Henningsen, who became Walker's artillery chief in Nicaragua (fig.

4); New York congressman Mike Walsh of the Quitman conspiracy against Cuba; and the former U.S. senator from Louisiana and one-time minister to Spain Pierre Soulé, a vocal booster for Walker's Nicaragua movement. In one entry, obviously posted on filibustering, Sanders notes that "Gen. Wheat will now I suppose soon know what he is to do," in relation to Mexican revolutionary affairs. Throughout 1856, she follows Walker's military movements in Nicaragua, exposing her own profilibustering inclinations. She worries that Pierce's indecision about embracing Walker's cause might do the filibusters in; yet she also admires the bravery of Walker's filibuster rival Henry Kinney. Sanders's diary applauds Kinney's "discretion" in establishing a government at San Juan del Norte. One entry in 1857 even suggests her own instrumentality in the Kinney operation. Noting her husband's distaste for Secretary of State William Marcy, who was notoriously cautious regarding American expansionist initiatives, Anna notes that Kinney had "promised" to give her documents that would enable her to expose Marcy's failings to the general public.³⁸

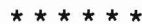
A teacher and nanny in Costa Rica during Walker's incumbency across the border, Amy Bradley became obsessed with the filibuster. In 1856, she closely followed Walker's Nicaraguan campaigns, hoping for his arrival in Costa Rica, although she wished "no harm" to her host country. That August, upon hearing reports that a commanding majority of voters in Nicaragua had elected Walker president, she could scarcely contain her excitement, confiding to her diary conversations about "the success of Walker and the ultimate destiny of

Figure 4. Photograph of Charles Frederick Henningsen, who commanded William Walker's artillery in Nicaragua. Photograph courtesy of Paul Bolcik.



Central America,” and her expectation that anarchy, war, and other regional evils would as a result abate. “How I admire the Spirit of that man who holds such a reckless set of men—as it is said he has—in such good condition or rather that he governs them as he does—what a power there must be in him.” Given her reverence for Walker, we should hardly be surprised at Bradley’s longing to meet him personally.³⁹

The next spring, crossing the Panamanian isthmus while traveling back to the United States around the time Walker’s régime collapsed, Bradley met members of Walker’s vanquished officer corps. These encounters confirmed her romanticized take on America’s filibusters. She found Samuel Lockridge especially attractive and thought Henningsen “noble looking.” Once home in her native Maine, Bradley pursued closer relationships, especially with Henningsen, who resided in New York City. She procured his autograph, and asked Henningsen and his wife to see her in Boston for a social get-together, suggesting as a meeting spot the obelisk commemorating Dr. Joseph Warren, the most noted Bostonian to fall at the battle of Bunker Hill: “O that we lovers of Liberty could all meet once, near that Granite Monument, where the noble Warren fell!” By late June Bradley was so insinuated within the filibuster community that Walker operative Charles J. Macdonald informed her that the filibuster leader wanted to meet his “admirer.” Perhaps they could get to know each other once “The Gray-eyed Man” was reinstalled in Nicaragua and she had returned to Costa Rica. Bradley answered that she would probably never go back, expressing surprise that Walker planned to invade Nicaragua anew. Such a move, Bradley thought, might involve the United States in a war with Great Britain. When Macdonald asked Bradley to reconsider so that she could spy for the filibusters in San José, Bradley rejoined that she would never return to Costa Rica with “Billy” again on the loose. Were she to do so, she would surely become the target of anti-American reprisals. But Bradley had hardly converted to antifilibusterism: she still believed that Walker served “the good of mankind.”⁴⁰



The preceding narrative not only writes white American women into the history of antebellum filibustering, but it also invests some of them with agency—that is, the will and potential to influence filibustering’s course. Such agency, however, eluded the war wives and other women of what might be called filibustering’s “home front,” though they sometimes crossed political boundaries to alleviate the expeditions’ domestic dislocations.

Had opinion polls existed in antebellum America, women almost certainly would have registered greater disapproval of filibustering than did men. One teases this conclusion from a conversation when a man turned up at the New York City hotel where William Walker stayed following his return from Nicaragua and asked Walker about his son's fate. The father reportedly remarked that he had fit out his son for Nicaragua, but that his wife was "almost distracted" by worry about their child. Many American women, in fact, implored male relations and friends to abstain from filibustering. Thus a female relation of the future United States senator from Pennsylvania Matt Quay chided her "wayward coz" that her antifilibustering "Lectures" should have provided "antidotes" for his Cuba filibustering tendencies. Similarly, when the mother of Texan John Baylor learned of his interest in joining William Walker's army in Nicaragua, she pleaded that he banish the thought, since "too much cutting and slashing" occurred there "for a family man." One woman adopted the stratagem of hiding her husband's mail to prevent him from filibustering. In 1855, her deceived spouse contacted Cuba filibustering leader John Quitman to express his fear that he had missed the embarkation date for Cuba since Quitman's last letter had "got into my wife's hand, who suppressed it until yesterday."⁴¹

Quitman apparently kept his own wife, Eliza, in the dark about his intrigues, so certain was he that she would oppose his sailing. Quitman's daughter-in-law, visiting his Natchez mansion "Monmouth," found Eliza seemingly oblivious to Cuban affairs, even though it was rumored in both Natchez and New Orleans that "the Cuban expedition" would depart momentarily. Quitman's reading of his spouse was shrewd. Years earlier, upon hearing accounts of her husband's connections with López, Eliza asked her neighbor and relation by marriage, John McMurran (also Quitman's law partner), to investigate what was going on. Now, convinced that her husband had enlisted their son, Henry, in his Cuba scheme without consulting her, she begged Henry to "resist" filibustering's "temptation," for it would break her heart if he surrendered to it.⁴²

What surprises, however, is how many of filibustering's home front women entered the public sphere to achieve what might be called damage control over their male loved ones' reckless decisions. Some women, for example, tried to retrieve men from expeditions in progress. Thus in January 1856, a woman of about eighteen years of age reportedly appeared at the office of New York City's mayor, hoping to persuade him to prevent her brother from sailing in *The Star of the West* "to join the filibusters under General Walker." Around the same time, Eleuthera du Pont Smith of Wilmington, Delaware, asked that the

Maryland congressman Henry Winter Davis turn sleuth and find her nephew, who had absconded from an apprenticeship and confided to acquaintances his intention of going to Nicaragua. Similarly, an Alabama widow used a former Mississippi state legislator as an intermediary in a bid to extract her seventeen-year-old son from Henry L. Kinney's 1855 expedition to Central America.⁴³

When all else failed, many women petitioned federal officials to intercede. As might be expected given contemporary gender norms, some women approached federal officials through male intermediaries. Surprisingly, though, many women solicited government figures directly. Sarah Graffan went straight to the top. She asked President Millard Fillmore to help her son John, a mate aboard the *Georgiana*, a vessel in the first López attack on Cuba, who had been captured by the Spanish, imprisoned at Havana, and then sent overseas for penal work. Like any "devoted mother," she would "disclaim for her son" any immunity from punishment "under the color of filial relationship" had he actually committed a crime; but he had sailed believing that the *Georgiana* was carrying emigrants for California rather than filibusters to Cuba. Apparently her protest, assisted by a petition from Maine's congressmen, worked, as the government took up the case and Spain announced Graffan's release. Similarly, Ophelia P. Talbot invoked Fillmore's intervention on behalf of her only son, James M. Wilson. Talbot lamented that James, merely a naive nineteen-year-old, had been "duped" into filibustering because he was unemployed and desperate to help his poor, unhealthy mother. "Dear President," she begged, "will it be possible for you to do any thing? Can you comfort me? I am wearing away." Saying that she could not bear news that her son had been executed or imprisoned for life, she apologized for daring "to address the President." But Fillmore was the only person who could help her, and he would pity her if he could but see her miserable condition. Later, after the Fillmore administration transmitted her appeal to the Spanish government and Spain pardoned Wilson and agreed to his return home, she movingly thanked Fillmore (and God). U.S. minister to Spain Daniel Barringer noted that Spain's queen had been influenced by the widow Talbot's "touching appeal" in asking "mercy for an only child." Mary McDonald handled a similar situation even more aggressively. Confessedly distressed after her brother Edmund was taken captive by Spanish forces during López's 1851 invasion of Cuba (but proud that her "American Tiger" had been captured bravely fending off enemy combatants with the handle of his broken sword), McDonald organized a bipartisan family lobbying effort, with appeals to Kentucky's Democratic governor-elect Lazarus Powell and national Whig leaders, including Attorney General John Crittenden, Secretary of War Charles M. Conrad, and Henry Clay, hoping to spring Edmund from Spanish prison.⁴⁴

At least two American women traveled to Cuba to get their sons freed from Spanish jails. Mary McDonald noted an acquaintance had departed for Havana "to petition for her Sons release," only to learn upon her arrival that he had been sent abroad for penal labor. However, according to McDonald, this woman won the captain general's promise that her son would be released upon arriving in Spain. Fanny Thrasher not only went to Havana to solicit the captain general to liberate her son John, an American resident in Havana suspected (apparently with good cause) by the Spanish of collaboration with the filibusters and arrested after the 1851 invasion; she also converted the case into a national cause célèbre when the captain general sent John abroad for internment at Cadiz. On the day that John left port, his mother penned a letter to President Fillmore, begging his attention "to the entreaties of a mother, that justice may be done." Mrs. Thrasher wanted U.S. diplomats in Spain instructed to procure John's release, and asked that the Spanish compensate John for business and property losses. Her letter, which appeared in the press, instigated the calling of a public meeting at Banks's Arcade in New Orleans on December 10, 1851, to pressure the U.S. government into providing John Thrasher with "due protection and ample justice." A couple of weeks after her first letter, Fanny Thrasher issued a second public letter, this time accusing the U.S. consul in Havana, Allen F. Owen, of setting her son up for arrest by the Spanish. Eventually, Congress passed resolutions on John's behalf and America's legation in Madrid took up the case. Bowing to this mounting pressure, Spain's government liberated Thrasher in early 1852.⁴⁵

The Walker expeditions generated similar correspondence. Joseph Hall's mother, for instance, tried to persuade Secretary of State Marcy to extricate her son from Walker's military. Jennings Estelle's sister became so upset after learning that Walker had executed Jennings for murdering another filibuster that she contacted the wife of John Wheeler, the U.S. minister to Nicaragua. Recalling that Jennings, whom she had raised, had been a sickly and affectionate child, she described Walker as ruthless, implied that he had trumped up the case against her brother, and requested Mrs. Wheeler to discover the facts by interviewing participants on her brother's court-martial. She also requested that Mrs. Wheeler arrange for Jennings's body to be sent home.⁴⁶

It would be misleading, therefore, to reduce filibustering's home front females into passive victims of male criminal acts. Rather, many such women contested filibustering's outcomes, achieving mixed results. The important point, from a modern perspective, is not whether or not individual women succeeded in their personal diplomatic endeavors, but rather that they made so many such efforts. Collectively these initiatives, though undertaken in the spirit of preserving the domestic sphere, threatened its stability.



So far, our investigation substantiates an argument advanced decades ago by the historian Mary Beard—that from the time of “Christian contests with barbarism,” women played a “powerful” hand in humankind’s “infamies.” But granting women agency in filibustering only tangentially positions the movement within American feminism. Rather, the above narrative begs some final questions. Was there a unique female perspective on filibustering, or did women’s attitudes converge with male ideologies? After all, Ann Gordon has argued in a survey of the evolution of women’s history as a field, that though feminism’s meaning is contested among scholars, there is a consensus that “gender must be an important category of analysis” in feminist studies.⁴⁷ We need to probe whether female filibustering activists conceptualized their own involvement as either an overt or subversive contribution to women’s rights.

The record suggests that women rarely, if ever, self-consciously embraced filibustering to advance women’s causes. There is little reason to suspect that such thoughts influenced the historically voiceless female emigrants to Walker’s Nicaragua. Furthermore, only Sarah Pellet of the profilibustering female publicists treated above gained notice for promoting women’s rights. Nothing suggests, moreover, that Pellet advocated Walker’s cause as a feminist stroke. Jane Cazneau in 1856 urged the journalist Moses S. Beach to promote lectures about Walker that Pellet had scheduled for New York City, but Cazneau evinced no sense of feminist sisterhood with Pellet. Rather, Cazneau mocked the Seneca Falls women’s rights convention of 1848. And Anna Carroll maintained her distance from women’s rights until well after the Civil War. Whatever contribution profilibustering women made to women’s rights occurred subconsciously. How revealing, in this regard, that when the jingoistic novelist Lucy Holcombe championed López’s invasion of Cuba using the character Mabel Royal as her authorial voice, she had Royal suggest that women should promote their own ideas by indoctrinating their sons rather than by struggling “in active life” (i.e., the public sphere). Women, argued this woman who had entered the public sphere with a novel that was anything but apolitical, should confine their politics to the domestic circle—or what many historians of early America dub the responsibilities of “republican motherhood.”⁴⁸

Perhaps filibustering’s female champions circulated so comfortably within public space that they could afford to shun feminist battles. Coming from relatively privileged backgrounds and encouraged by the men around them to be politically informed and to circulate in public, they had few inhibitions about speaking out. Only Lucy Holcombe of the patriarchal South seems to

have been conflicted about going public. After the initial publisher she selected for *The Free Flag of Cuba* rejected it on the grounds that it was too controversial and would inflame the American public, Holcombe contacted John Quitman for support, suggesting that the publisher attributed too much “influence to a romance which has only the power of a woman’s pen: for I hold woman, though morally superior, has only such intellectual equality as the chivalry of man permits.” Given such inhibitions, Holcombe published her novel under the possibly male pseudonym H. M. Hardimann.⁴⁹

Certainly analysis of Carroll’s career supports the case that these women’s sense of privilege enabled their public activities. Janet Coryell has highlighted the very undomestic nature of Carroll’s discourse with male politicians—a discourse that revolved around “political news and gossip, reports and opinions, rumors and plans, articles and editorials.” And Jane Cazneau’s casualness about her own political exertions is arresting, as when she sent a letter in 1857 to President James Buchanan about Cuba, concluding presumptuously: “In the hope that you will favor me with an interview I will call this evening at half past seven.” Years earlier, William L. Marcy, then secretary of war, mentioned his own respect for Cazneau’s “political principles” in a letter to a third party. Certainly George Sanders encouraged Anna’s participation in American political life. In April 1856 she sent political advice to former U.S. minister to Spain Pierre Soulé, noting that she had been charged to do so by George. And when C. J. Macdonald told Amy Bradley to ignore the “abusive articles appearing about Walker in the New York papers,” he surely exposed his own expectation that women like Bradley had political opinions and kept current with the news.⁵⁰

By their very polish and self-confidence, such outspoken women won de facto toleration from men as quasi-males. How appropriate that onetime U.S. senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri alluded to Cazneau’s “masculine” approach to politics and war, and that a newspaper suggested in 1854, after she traveled to the Dominican Republic following her husband’s appointment as U.S. commissioner there, that the “intellectual” Jane was truly the commissioner in everything but formal title.⁵¹

Not surprisingly, then, filibustering’s female promoters, for the most part, concurred with the same ethnocentric, racist arguments that their male colleagues promoted, rather than articulated divergent ideologies. Female filibustering boosters affirmed that U.S. political institutions distanced those of Spanish-ruled Cuba and independent Gulf-Caribbean states alike, and that Anglo-Americans possessed superior racial traits and more progressive habits when compared to the native peoples of the tropics. Thus Amy Bradley, after

dining at a “miserable” Costa Rican rancho “where a native family—worse than our Indians—dwelt with hens, pigs, dogs, cats, parrots and what not” in a single room, stereotyped all Central Americans as “a very filthy race of beings.” Filibustering, from this cross-gendered perspective, would better the quality of life in attacked locales by introducing U.S. enterprise and by loosening the grip of corrupt, reactionary, and tyrannical priests and autocrats over the benighted darker-skinned, even “enslaved” Catholic inhabitants of the region. As Bradley put it, Walker was “nearer the right than these people.” Or as Carroll pontificated, God wanted Walker to “deliver” Nicaragua’s “misguided” people from the “humiliating condition to which tyranny and priestcraft” reduced them. Since Americans so obviously outmatched Latin Americans, the further Americans exported their institutions the better. As one female “fillbuster” put it to Walker’s New Orleans agent following Walker’s capture in Honduras in 1860, it was unfortunate that the filibuster had not commanded sufficient manpower to “sweep Central America from Mexico to Panama, and beyond.” She demanded that his supporters mount a last-minute effort to rescue him.

In the warped perspective of filibustering’s male and female boosters alike, America’s invading adventurers had been virtually cloned from the European revolutionaries who had crossed the Atlantic in the 1770s to assist the American colonists in winning their own liberation from British rule. Walker had accomplished “for Nicaraguan liberty,” Carroll maintained in *The Star of the West*, “what Lafayette, De Kalb, Pulaski, Kosciusko, had done for American liberty.” Lucy Holcombe referenced the same eighteenth-century paladins for López’s followers in *The Free Flag of Cuba*.⁵²

Ironically, but hardly inconsistently, the very women who urged America’s adventuring heroes to bring U.S. liberty to Latin America’s supposedly benighted peoples, also embraced—or at least tolerated—black slavery’s existence in or expansion into the tropics. Not surprisingly, the southerner Lucy Holcombe embedded doses of proslavery propaganda within her novel. Thus a family slave of her fictional filibustering hero Ralph Dudley rejects as an insult the very notion of being given his freedom. Throughout the narrative, black servants shower childlike devotion on whites, with Holcombe editorializing, “It is a hard matter to convince a negro that there is anything which a white man cannot do.” Holcombe insists that filibustering is necessary to ward off Spain’s emancipating Cuba’s slaves and introducing “the undying stain of African equality” in the island. But like Holcombe, the northern-born and sometime resident Cazneau also worried that Spain might turn Cuba over “to the blacks.” And it is worth noting that Cazneau, Carroll (who eventually freed

her family's slaves), and even the privately antislavery New Englander Amy Bradley continued supporting Walker's Nicaraguan cause *after* he legalized slavery in his conquered domain. Few feminists would have endorsed such positions, given the overlapping nature of the antebellum women's rights and abolition movements. But, again, Cazneau, Carroll, and company, for all their defying gender conventions, hardly sought feminist credentials.⁵³

One would not wish to suggest that antebellum male and female perspectives on filibustering and empire perfectly meshed. As Amy S. Greenberg perceptively notes, there were subtle differences. Carroll emphasized William Walker's mild temperament, while making her case for the spread of American and Protestant institutions abroad. Holcombe balanced her endorsement of filibustering with a female character who pleaded with her fiancé to refrain from soldiering with López. Jane Cazneau ultimately embraced colonization schemes abroad as an alternative to conquest, and her writings avoided some of the most flagrantly aggressive phraseology common to male expansionist polemics. But I would suggest that the gap between the sexes, when it came to filibustering, remained narrow throughout the period, especially in the South, where desires to extend slavery gave filibustering an aura of political urgency. When Mississippian John Quitman's daughter Louisa in 1851 wished that Americans would rush to Cuba to punish "cowardly Spaniards" for executing López's filibusters, her language matched the invective of many male newspaper editors, not only in the South but also in the North. We can only wonder how much women might have done on filibustering's behalf after Walker's death in 1860 had not Union victory in the Civil War repressed southern slavery expansion for good. How fitting, in this regard, that a woman sitting in the gallery during the debates at the Arkansas secession convention in 1861 tossed a bouquet at a delegate who suggested that a grand southern empire awaited the slave states once they seceded, including not only the places that the filibusters had recently attacked, but also the rest of Central America and the Caribbean Sea and all of South America. Her bouquet serves as a fitting metaphor for a decade in which filibustering and American imperialism had been surprisingly intertwined with gender.⁵⁴

Notes

I would like to thank my colleague Nancy F. Gabin for her suggestions regarding this article.

- 1 John H. Reagan to James W. Latimer, Oct. 7, 1858, John H. Reagan Papers, Texas State Archives and Library, Austin, Tex.; Clarksville (Tex.) *Standard*, Sept. 15, 1858; Dallas *Herald*, Sept. 22, 1858.

2. Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 82–116, 251–67; Janice E. Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns: State Building and Extraterritorial Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 26–32, 118–40; Guy Arnold, *Mercenaries: The Scourge of the Third World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), ix. The term *imperialism* generally connotes colonial control over subject peoples. Because U.S. territorial growth from 1800 to the Civil War generally involved conferring citizenship upon white residents of annexed lands, most scholars apply the term *expansionism* rather than *imperialism* to that phase of U.S. territorial growth. However, Etsuko Taketani, in *U.S. Women Writers and the Discourses of Colonialism, 1825–1861* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 4–6, 93–124, argues the artificiality of distinguishing between U.S. expansion and imperialism, using U.S. involvement in the Chinese opium trade to blur the distinction.
3. B. F. Presbury, *The Mustee; Or, Love and Liberty* (Boston: Shepard, Clark & Brown, 1859), 425.
4. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 9 (Aug. 1854): 403; Columbus B. Smith to Sam Houston, May 6, 1860, Govetnors Papers, Texas State Archives; Edward Everett Hale, *Philip Nolan's Friends: A Story of the Change of Western Empire* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Company, 1877), 84.
5. Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780–1920," *American Historical Review* 89 (Jan. 1984): 631; Glenna Matthews, *The Rise of Public Woman: Woman's Power and Woman's Place in the United States, 1630–1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3; Dana D. Nelson, "Women in Public," in *Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing*, ed. Dale M. Bauer and Philip Gould (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 39, 41; Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 151–74.
6. Edward P. Crapol, ed., *Women and American Foreign Policy: Lobbyists, Critics, and Insiders* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1987), viii, 1–18; Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," *American Literature* 70 (Sept. 1998): 581–606; Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1.
7. Amy S. Greenberg, "A Gray-Eyed Man: Character, Appearance, and Filibustering," *Journal of the Early Republic* 20 (Winter 2000): 673–99; Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 139, 149–55. Ned Buntline was Edward Z. C. Judson's pen name. For the filibusters' self-image as "soldierly brothers" and a "freemasonry' of warriors," see Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization* (New York: Atheneum, 1985), 256. Greenberg elaborates her findings in *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
8. Walker address in *San Diego Herald*, Jan. 28, 1854, copy in Rufus Kay Wyllys, "William Walker's Invasion of Sonora, 1854," *Arizona Historical Review* 6 (Oct. 1935): 63; William Walker, *The War in Nicaragua* (1860; repr. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 37, 99; Mora's address excerpted in Lowell Gudmundson and Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, *Central America, 1821–1871: Liberalism before Liberal Reform* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 109–10.
9. John A. Quitman to Eliza Quitman, Sept. 21, 1850, Quitman Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina (hereafter SHC).
10. Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women's Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 90–92, 99, 158; Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 142–44, 252n; Marilyn Schultz Blackwell, "Meddling in Politics: Clarina Howard Nichols and Antebellum Political Culture," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24 (Spring 2004): 35, 51; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 7; Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Tracey Jean Boisseau, *White Queen: May French Sheldon and the Imperial Origins of American Feminist Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 15–16, 62–74, 101–24, 198–260, 288–307.
11. Rose Greenhow to John C. Calhoun, Aug. 29, 1849, in "Correspondence of John C. Calhoun," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1899*, ed. J. Franklin Jameson, 2 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900), 2: 1203–4; Robert Greenhow to Calhoun, Aug. 12, 1849, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Clyde N. Wilson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 27: 25.

12. For López's filibustering plots, see Tom Chaffin, *Fatal Glory: Narciso López and the First Clandestine U.S. War against Cuba* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996); Charles H. Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny: The Lives and Times of the Filibusters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 39–88.
13. Orville Vernon Burton and Georganne B. Burton, eds., *The Free Flag of Cuba: The Last Novel of Lucy Holcombe Pickens* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 3–7, 15, 18, 20, 27–28, 31, 33, 38.
14. Elizabeth D. Livermore, *The Quadroon's Triumph: A Tale for the Times* (Cincinnati: Truman and Spofford, 1855), 2: 78, 95, 110; Louise Elemjay (Louisa Melissa Judd), *Censoria Lictoria; Or, What I Think of You. From the Notes and Minutes of Miss Betsey Trotwood's Official Tour* (New York: John F. Trow, 1855), 25, 43; Catherine Ann Warfield, *The Household of Bouverie; or, The Elixir of Gold: A Romance*, 2 vols. (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1860), 1: 278. Meanwhile male-authored fiction intertwined female characters with filibustering. F. Clinton Barrington (Julius Warren Lewis), *Conrado de Beltran; or, The Buccaneer of the Gulf: A Romantic Story of the Sea and Shore* (Boston: Frederick Gleason, 1851), 8, 44, 66; Fred. Folio, *Lucy Boston; or, Woman's Rights and Spiritualism: Illustrating the Follies and Delusions of the Nineteenth Century* (Buffalo, N.Y.: John E. Beardsley, 1855), 230, 231, 309, 405; Francis Marion Dimmick, *Anna Clayton; or, The Enquirer after Truth* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1859), 83. The anonymously authored "Mr. Seedy," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 15 (Sept. 1857): 529–33, has a suicidal male character disappointed in love consider filibustering.
15. *A Thrilling and Exciting Account of the Sufferings and Horrible Tortures Inflicted on Mortimer Bowers and Miss Sophia Delaplain, by the Spanish Authorities, for a Supposed Participation with Gen. Lopez in the Invasion of Cuba; Together with the Plan of the Campaign of López* (Charleston: E. E. Barclay, 1852).
16. Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 67; Antonio Rafael de la Cova, "Cuban Filibustering in Jacksonville in 1851," *Northeast Florida History* 3 (1996): 17–34; New Orleans *Louisiana Courier*, July 31, 1851.
17. New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, Sept. 2, 4, 1851, Sept. 2, 1852; Henry Clay to Ocravia Walton LeVert, Nov. 14, 1851, *The Papers of Henry Clay*, ed. Melba Porter Hay, 11 vols. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1959–1992), 10: 931; Charles L. Dufour, *Gentle Tiger: The Gallant Life of Roberdeau Wheat* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 71. A Savannah paper noted that the "ladies of Jacksonville" (Florida) nursed a man taken sick on the *Pampero's* voyage to Cuba and returned to the U.S. Correspondent's letter in *Savannah Republican*, reprinted in Washington (D.C.) *Daily National Intelligencer*, Oct. 23, 1851.
18. *Galveston* (Tex.) *Tri-Weekly News*, Feb. 24, 1857; poem quoted in William O. Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers: The Story of William Walker and His Associates* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 316n.
19. San Francisco *Daily Alta California*, Jan. 10, 1854; (San Juan del Norte) *Central American*, Oct. 27, 1855; Alejandro Bolaños-Geyer, *William Walker: The Gray-Eyed Man of Destiny*, vol. 2, *The Californias* (Lake St. Louis: Privately Printed, 1989), 212, 217; San Francisco *Daily Placer Times and Transcript*, Jan. 13, 1854.
20. [Teresa Griffin Vielé], "Following the Drum": *A Glimpse of Frontier Life* (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1858), 83, 149, 191–211.
21. San Juan del Norte *Central American*, Oct. 27, 1855.
22. Sam Houston to Margaret Houston, Jan. 29, 1859, in *The Writings of Sam Houston, 1813–1863* (Austin: Jenkins Publishing Company, 1970), 7: 225; Benjamin F. Dill to John Anthony Quitman, June 17, Quitman to Dill June 7, 1854, John A. Quitman Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History (hereafter MDA).
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24. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Jan. 5, Feb. 23, 1856; San Francisco *Daily Alta California*, Mar. 23, 1856; San Francisco *Daily Herald*, June 2, 1856; Deposition of Edward L. Tinklepaugh, May 6, 1856, *Senate Exec. Doc.*, 34th Cong., 1st sess., #68, 152–55.
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26. "Register Book—New Orleans Agency of Nicaraguan Emigration Company," Fayssoux Collection; New Orleans *Daily Creole*, Oct. 10, 1856; Robert A. Fulton to the editors, July 2, in New York *Daily Times*, July 4, 1857.

27. Correspondent's report from Panama, Oct. 1857, in *New York Times*, Nov. 5, 1857; *Harper's Weekly*, Feb. 7, 1857; San Francisco *Daily Alta California*, Feb. 10, 1857; San Francisco *Daily Herald*, Mar. 10, 1856; Henry S. Garlick to "Friend Fayssoux," June 6, 1860, in William McLellan Fayssoux Papers, SHC; William V. Wells, *Walker's Expedition to Nicaragua: A History of the Central American War . . .* (New York: Stringer and Townsend, 1856), 187; Paul Foos, *A Short, Offhand Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict during the Mexican-American War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 117–19.
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31. Stewart, *Last of the Fillibusters*, 34n, 35, 36; Scroggs, ed., "With Walker," 322–23.
32. "The Cuba Affair," "Cuba News . . .," (Washington, D.C.) *The Huntress*, Sept. 6, 13, respectively, 1851; Elizabeth J. Clapp, "A Virago-Errant in Enchanted Armor?": Anne Royall's 1829 Trial as a Common Scold," *Journal of the Early Republic* 23 (Summer 2003): 207–32; *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, ed. C. Peter Ripley, vol. 1, *The British Isles, 1830–1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985–92), 436.
33. Anna Ella Carroll, *A Review of Pierce's Administration; Showing Its Only Popular Measures to Have Originated with the Executive of Millard Fillmore* (Boston: James French & Company, 1856), 95–97, 104–105; Carroll, *The Star of the West; or, National Men and National Measures* (New York: Miller, Orton & Co., 1857), 345–91; Janet L. Coryell, *Neither Heroine nor Fool: Anna Ella Carroll of Maryland* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990); C. Kay Larson, *Great Necessities: The Life, Times, and Writings of Anna Ella Carroll, 1815–1894* (n.p.: Xlibris, 2004), 131–33, 150–51.
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38. Anna J. Sanders Journal, July 11, Aug. (no exact date), Nov. 2, Dec. 30, 1852, Jan. 14, Feb. 3, 8, Aug. 16, 1853, Aug. 10, 1855, Oct. 1, 16, 1855, Apr. 17, May 19, 31, Sept. 10, 1856, Jan. 14, 1857, George N. Sanders Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (hereafter LC).
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40. Bradley Journal, Apr. 18, Bradley to Charles F. Henningsen, June 11, 1857, Charles J. Macdonald to Bradley, June 27, 1857, Bradley to Charles J. Macdonald, July 6, 15, 1857, Bradley to Ferdinand Schlesinger, July 30, 1857, Bradley Letterbook and Journal.
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49. Henrietta M. Hardimann (Lucy Holcombe) to John A. Quitman, Jan. 1855 (no exact date), John Quitman Papers, MDA.
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