

A GRAY-EYED MAN: CHARACTER, APPEARANCE, AND FILIBUSTERING

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Character is what involuntarily commands respect . . . what makes itself felt, whether its owner be clothed in rags, or in purple and fine linen. . . . The man who has character must be independent, fearless, and discriminating in his judgement. He is not influenced by the position a man holds, or the clothes he wears, in forming the estimate of him.

-“Men of Character”¹

William Walker, or the “gray-eyed man of destiny” as he was commonly known, rose to fame in 1855 on the basis of a remarkable accomplishment. With a band of fifty-eight recruits from San Francisco, he was able to seize control of the government of Nicaragua, becoming commander in chief and later president of the country. Alone among filibusters in a decade that saw repeated attempts to capture new territory in the Western Hemisphere, Walker could claim success, if only for a limited period. In May 1857 Walker surrendered to the commander of the United States Navy after falling to the combined pressure of a Central American army, Great Britain, and threatened American shipping interests. A man of strong character, independent, fearless, and not easily dissuaded, Walker returned to the

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¹ “Men of Character,” *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, 3 (Mar. 1854), 267-69.

region for two more failed filibustering forays before meeting his death, at age thirty-six, in front of a Honduran firing squad in 1860.²

William Walker became one of the key cultural icons of the 1850s as a result of these exploits. His whereabouts in Nicaragua and in the United States were closely watched and reported in newspapers across the country. He was popular especially among workingmen in the South and in New York City. At one of the many fundraisers held for Walker in New York in 1856, Roberdeau Wheat, an experienced filibuster from Louisiana who had fought in Mexico and Cuba, as well as with Walker, addressed his requests to “the poor, the noble, it is to them that I would appeal—to the poor men, the laboring men of the city.” Wheat’s request resulted in \$1,300 in support of Walker.³ According to *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, Walker was encouraged to speak “in reply to the cheers with which he was greeted” whenever he appeared in public in New York City, while one witness remembered that “Walker’s reception in New York, on his return to the United States, was like that of a conqueror . . . tens of thousands of citizens flocked to see the hero.” Visitors to New York City in 1856 might not get to meet Walker himself, but they could attend a three-act musical set in Nicaragua, featuring “General Walker, the Hope of Freedom.”⁴

In late 1859 as Walker toured the country in an attempt to raise money for what would be his final trip to Central America, the *Atlantic Monthly* featured “The Experience of Samuel Absolom, Filibuster,” a two-part memoir anonymously penned by David Deaderick, a young veteran of Walker’s Nicaraguan campaign. Like a large proportion of Walker’s recruits, Deaderick’s alter ego, “known somewhere as Samuel Absolom,” decides to join Walker on his journey to Nicaragua after encountering bad fortune in the gold mines. Reduced in California to donning flour sacks for

² Filibusters were, in Charles H. Brown’s definition, “adventurers taking part in forays against friendly nations to foment revolution or capture the government.” Charles H. Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny: The Lives and Times of the Filibusters* (Chapel Hill, 1980), 3. The best book-length biography of Walker is still Albert Z. Carr, *The World and William Walker* (New York, 1963).

³ “Aid for Walker and the Filibusters, Great Sympathetic meeting in the Tabernacle,” *New York (NY) Herald*, Dec. 21, 1856; see also “The Great Walker Meeting in the Park at New York,” *New York Evening Mirror*, May 24, 1856; “Nicaragua at Tammany Hall,” and “Walker visits Wallack’s Theater,” unidentified clippings, John Hill Wheeler Manuscript Collection (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC); “City News: Sympathy for Nicaragua,” *ibid.*; and Charles Dufour, *Gentle Tiger: The Gallant Life of Roberdeau Wheat* (Baton Rouge, 1957), 77-99.

⁴ *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 15 (July 1857), 402; James Jeffrey Roche, *The Story of the Filibusters* (New York, 1891), 159; Robert E. May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861* (Baton Rouge, 1973), 77.

clothing, he is embarrassed by his appearance and depressed by his failure. Deaderick makes clear at the outset that the increasing class stratification in California has rendered his own situation untenable. "Once, no man knew but this battered hat I sit under might partially cover the head of a nobleman or a man of honor," Deaderick mused; "but men begin to show their quality by the outside, as they do elsewhere in the world, and are judged and spoken to accordingly." With Walker's promise of 250 acres of property in Nicaragua and \$25 a month wages, Deaderick takes off to an unknown land to risk his life for the soldier's uniform. He hopes to improve his appearance and to prove himself a man of character among the sort of "Men of Character" described in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* in 1854— independent, fearless men who are not "influenced by the position a man holds, or the clothes he wears." Deaderick fled to Nicaragua in order to change his luck and find a place where inward character counts more than appearance in determining a man's fate. Unfortunately, Deaderick finds character in Nicaragua as difficult a thing to reveal, and to judge, as it was in San Francisco. By the close of the narrative, Deaderick has lost his illusions about Nicaragua and the opportunity for proving character on the filibustering battlefield. The author's message is clear: Walker's behavior has made a mockery of his idealistic pronouncements in both Nicaragua and America.⁵

"Samuel Absolom, Filibuster" is a remarkable narrative. Not only does it provide a lens on the world of filibustering in its account of the motivation of the leadership and troops in Nicaragua, as well as the relationship between the filibusters and the Nicaraguan people, it also proves revealing of American culture back home. Specifically, Deaderick's account illuminates a crisis in antebellum America between character and appearance. Deaderick is drawn to Nicaragua, he tells us, because he, like other American men, perceives that the growing importance of outward

⁵ David Deaderick III, "The Experience of Samuel Absolom, Filibuster," *Atlantic Monthly*, 4 (Dec. 1859), 653; "Men of Character," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, 3 (Mar. 1854), 267-69. That Deaderick based "The Experience of Samuel Absolom, Filibuster" on his own experience is supported by manuscript materials in the Library of Congress. See the typescript, "The Stirring Adventures of a Lad from Knoxville, Tennessee, David Deaderick III, Who fought with Filibuster William Walker in Nicaragua. (With partial list of companions). Typewritten Notes presented to the Library of Congress by George Magruder Battey III, Washington D.C. Jan. 23, 1940." See also "The Diary or Register of David Anderson Deaderick, esq. Of Knoxville, Tennessee, born 1797, died 1873. Intimate Family glimpses, natural phenomena, scourge of the civil war, customs of the times, 1824-July, 1872," (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 159; and on gold miners as recruits, see Carr, *The World and William Walker*, 116.

appearance, in contrast to inward character, has limited his opportunities in America. He believes that “once, no man knew” or could judge for certain just who was a “nobleman or a man of honor” based on the clothing that one wore. But by the 1850s, Deaderick claims, “men begin to show their quality by the outside,” and appearance had become the measure of character. Deaderick’s story is as much a tale of the difficulties of proving one’s character through a display of manhood in the changing culture of antebellum America as it is a critique of William Walker’s Nicaraguan project.

Deaderick’s crisis of character would have resonated with readers in antebellum America: he was not alone in struggling to reconcile character and appearance. Americans were divided over the propriety of aggressive expansionism, and especially Walker’s ventures in Central America. Filibustering not only was illegal, it was widely condemned as immoral and considered by some to be part of a southern agenda to create new slave states out of “redeemed” territory. But as the national debate over filibustering reveals, supporters and opponents were often divided as well over Walker as a model of manly action. It is the purpose of this essay to show how the American reception of William Walker’s Nicaragua adventures was shaped by a national conflict over the relationship between character and appearance in the 1850s and the perception that the appearance of financial success had replaced “traditional” virtues as the measure of a man. Debates over Walker recorded in the press of the time and memoirs and contemporary fiction about Nicaragua reveal that character, manliness, and appearance were contested actively by antebellum Americans who projected their own anxieties about a changing American society onto Walker and his project in Central America. This essay will argue that the perception and reception of foreign policy in the 1850s were influenced by cultural considerations and by a desire among white American men to make a hero of William Walker, the man who promised, but finally could not deliver, character triumphant over both money and appearance.⁶

⁶ A number of recent accounts of filibustering have focused on the sectional nature of support for expansionism, the relationship of different filibustering expeditions to one another, and the role of filibustering expeditions in American foreign policy. For good overviews of Walker’s Nicaraguan adventures in the larger context of Manifest Destiny, see Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*; May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*; and Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (New York, 1963). On the national popularity of filibusters, see Robert E. May, “Young American Males and Filibustering in the Age of Manifest Destiny: The United States as a Cultural Mirror,” *Journal of American History*, 78 (Dec. 1991), 857-86; and May, “Manifest Destiny’s

Character, as understood by antebellum Americans, was an internal state that theoretically was not signified in dress or appearance, but which should “make itself felt,” as *Putnam’s* put it, nonetheless. The outward manifestations of character among men (and indeed character was attributed almost exclusively to white men in the 1850s) were often those of “manliness.” If character was an internal state, manliness was an external one, displayed through a set of characteristics in one’s interactions with others. Neither manliness nor character was the same concept as honor, although threats to the latter, especially in the South, could test the strength of a man’s character and could allow him to reveal his manliness under certain circumstances. Men could also prove their manliness by displaying their physical being, their strength, their concentration, and their will in public, by participating in athletics, by fighting fires as part of volunteer fire companies, or by going to war.⁷

As Deaderick makes clear, it was not manly activity but an appearance of prosperity and “quality” that was too often taken as the measure of character in antebellum America. Among a highly mobile population it was hardly possible that a man could be universally known, and judged, on the basis of his true character. The general public was no longer privy to a man’s character as expressed in his honorable interactions with others. In the absence of real knowledge of a person, strangers looked to the outer man for confirmation of character. In this way, character was rendered transparent—revealed as it was through appearance. It is for this reason, as Karen Halttunen documents in *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, that

Filibusters,” in Sam W. Haynes and Christopher Morris, eds., *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism* (College Station, TX, 1997), 146-79. Other significant recent analyses to consider the cultural meaning of filibustering include Thomas Chaffin, *Fatal Glory: Narciso López and the First Clandestine U.S. War against Cuba* (Charlottesville, VA, 1996); Joseph Allen Stout, *The Liberators: Filibustering Expeditions into Mexico 1848-1862 and the Last Thrust of Manifest Destiny* (Los Angeles, 1973); and Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca, 1985).

⁷ On southern honor see Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as Women, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton, 1996); Edward Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth Century American South* (New York, 1984); and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1982); on the gendered nature of character, see Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots* (Baltimore, 1990); on volunteer firefighting as a display of manliness, see Amy S. Greenberg, *Cause for Alarm: The Volunteer Fire Department in the Nineteenth-Century City* (Princeton, 1998).

hundreds of etiquette manuals and advice guides were directed towards improving that first impression. “The art of engineering all outward expressions of the self in order to impress others had become a central concern” in the antebellum period, she writes. John Kasson has posited a similar explanation for the increasing emphasis placed on rituals of polite behavior among middle-class Americans.⁸

Character was thus contested territory in the 1850s. Although men might concur on what a good character was, they did not agree on how a man possessed of a good character would act or how he would look. A man of character might be “clothed in rags” like the hypothetical man of character described in *Putnam’s Magazine*. But as Deaderick’s experience in San Francisco makes clear, a good character would not be of much use to a man if others believed they could judge him on the basis of appearance. Although *Putnam’s* might caution readers that a man of character is “not influenced by the position [he] holds, or the clothes he wears,” it was clear to the reader of advice guides, to a stranger walking down the street, and to David Deaderick that the man of character should also be an individual of good appearance. After all, even *Putnam’s* agreed that “character . . . makes itself felt.” The dismay that Deaderick expresses about men displaying their “quality” externally is the fear that character had in fact become readily visible to all. Deaderick hoped to prove his character through manly acts in Nicaragua and to find an arena where the outward man, or appearance, is not an obvious indicator of either the inward man or character.

Deaderick quickly realizes that the problematic relationship between appearance and character are no more easily resolved in Nicaragua than in San Francisco, in part because no one in Nicaragua appears or dresses well. Walker’s “yellow-faced, ragged, and dirty” cavalry is mounted “on horses or mules of every color, shape, and size.” Only their “deadly garniture,

⁸ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven, 1982), 40; John Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth Century Urban America* (New York, 1990). On character in general, and the relationship between the inner and outer man, also see Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Handwriting in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven, 1996), 42-107; Warren I. Susman, “‘Personality’ and the Making of Twentieth Century Culture,” in John Higham and Paul Conklin, eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore, 1979), 212-26; E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York, 1993), 222-27; Roberta J. Park, “Biological Thought, Athletics, and the Formation of the ‘Man of Character’: 1830-1900,” in J. A. Mangan and James Walvin, eds., *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940* (Manchester, UK, 1987), 7-33.

rifles, revolvers, and bowie-knives, and their fierce and shaggy looks," keep the new recruits from bursting into laughter when they appear in port. Soon Deaderick looks no better. Food, clothing, and supplies are strictly rationed in Walker's bankrupt army. A general lack of morale is expressed externally in the troops. "There was a morbid, yellowish glaze, almost universal, on their faces," he remembered, "and an unnatural listlessness and utter lack of animation in all their movements and conversation, which contrasted painfully with the boisterous hilarity and rugged healthiness of our late Californian fellow-travelers."

Deaderick's hopes for an improved wardrobe also are dashed. He enviously recounts the uniform of the "soldierlike and respectable" foot soldier, "black felt hats, blue cotton trousers, brogans, and blue flannel shirts, with the letter of their company and the number of the regiment sewed upon the breast in characters of white cloth." Yet even though their uniforms had "become somewhat greasy and louse-seamed" by the time he arrived in Nicaragua, Deaderick finds it difficult to obtain any sort of uniform or exterior marker of his new status as a man of character. Most troops have no "soldier's uniform . . . only the poor man's uniform of rags and dirt, and the spirit of careless, disease-worn, doomed men."

With his appearance in disarray, his behavior quickly degenerates. Like other soldiers, Deaderick is forced to steal to survive. First he takes only food; later he takes a mule from a priest. Deaderick addresses the reader directly on this issue. "Let no one reflect upon the writer," he states. "For him there was no choice; and if he is chargeable with moral depravity, it must be elsewhere,—forsooth, in joining with one who made war unprovided with a military chest sufficient to cover expenses. However this is no matter, one way or the other. The private character of the relater, Samuel Absolom, is not before the reader; nor is it expected that he will care to turn his eye upon it for a moment."

Of course, it is exactly the private character of the man that is of importance here. The public man has already been found wanting in appearance in San Francisco, and now in Nicaragua he is riding a stolen mule without a proper uniform for a cause that Deaderick refers to as "the squalid game." But what Deaderick recognizes in his statement is the difficulty of revealing character and representing it. He reminds the reader that character is not evident from appearance, even the evidence of moral depravity presented by his theft. Nor is it transparent, a thing that can be discerned with a momentary "turn" of an "eye." Deaderick clings to the belief that his character will reveal itself through manly acts, if unmanly acts do not besmirch it. But the fact that he places blame on Walker's lack of money, rather than the manner or cause of the war in Nicaragua, indicates how difficult it is for even as thoughtful a man as Deaderick to

separate the question of character from appearance or from the key to a good appearance—money.⁹

Deaderick's fictional alter-ego and the nonfictional Walker shared difficulties in portraying themselves men of character. Few military leaders have been less physically impressive looking than the "gray-eyed man of destiny." The adoring and verbose poet Joaquim Miller said simply that "Walker was not of imposing presence." Both northern and southern newspapers expressed disappointment and dismay upon first seeing Walker, since, as the New York *Herald* reported, "General Walker does not look like the terrible man he seems to be. . . . When his features are in repose [he] does not look like a man of much energy." As an account in the New Orleans *Delta* titled "The Man of Destiny. A Lesson for Old and Young Fogies" put it, Walker "is a very ordinary-looking person, and cannot boast of any fine physical gifts. . . . He is considerably under the 'middle height,' standing barely five feet four in his boots, and nothing strikingly intellectual in his countenance can be said to counterbalance this serious deficiency in inches."¹⁰

Even Walker's own filibustering allies had difficulty finding much to praise in his looks. According to one supporter, "to the casual observer, his personal appearance, his mild imperfection of face, would not indicate the determined force of his character." Another close ally of Walker's, William Vincent Wells, agreed. "Few persons unacquainted with General Walker would imagine, from his personal appearance, that so much ability lay beneath so plain an exterior," Wells remarked. "In stature, little above five feet four, he presents the appearance of a rather dull, slow-moulded person." Observers generally contended that on Walker, "the mouth, that feature which usually expresses so much, indicates nothing of the real character of the man," and that his "thin, light-colored, and closely cut" hair was also cause for disappointment.¹¹

⁹ David Deaderick III, "The Experience of Samuel Absolom, Filibuster," *Atlantic Monthly*, 4 (Dec. 1859), 654-58.

¹⁰ Joaquim Miller, "With Walker in Nicaragua" (1871), in *The Complete Poetical Works of Joaquim Miller* (1902, rep., New York, 1972), 18; New York *Herald*, June 17, 1857. See also, F. H. Duffee, "Gen. William Walker, Commander in Chief of the Nicaraguan Forces," printed in Philadelphia *Sunday Mercury*, no date, Wheeler Collection; "The Hero of Nicaragua," New Orleans (LA) *Times*, July 19, 1857; "Biographical sketch of General Walker," New York *Herald*, Dec. 26, 1855; "Who Walker is," Louisville (KY) *Times*, Jan 15, 1856; and "The Man of Destiny," New Orleans *Sunday Delta*, July 27, 1856.

¹¹ John H. Wheeler, manuscript of "A new work on Nicaragua . . ." Wheeler Collection; 85; William Wells, *Walker's Expedition to Nicaragua: A History of the Central American War* (New York, 1856), 199-200; "The Man of Destiny," New Orleans *Sunday Delta*, July 27, 1856; "A letter from a Young Washingtonian on his travels," Nov. 29, 1855,

In an age when phrenology promised to reveal an individual's character through a study of bumps on the head, acquaintances looked to his face for the key to his personality. In many men the forehead was revealing, but both Wells and the *Delta* dismissed Walker's as "broad and rounding," and without, the *Delta* remarked, "being unusually characteristic or remarkable." His nose was another disappointment. Walker's nose, according to the *Delta*, "belongs to the school which Nicholas Nickleby denominates the 'composite.'" Wells was even more direct, commenting that Walker's nose was "by no means of that description which physiognomists declare belongs to men of genius. The remark of Napoleon, that a long nose and dilated nostrils always denote the ability to carry out any plan with vigor and promptitude, seems in this case to have gone astray." Furthermore, as one soldier remembered, "a woman's voice was scarcely softer than Walker's."¹²

Deaderick had only a uniform to consider, but Walker's entire physical person inspired suspicion. The difficulties of maintaining a manly image with an appearance like Walker's and a feminine voice were obviously great. In Deaderick's account, however, Walker's inward character makes itself felt regardless of his outward appearance. In the course of the story Walker faces down rebellious troops, "fierce, big-whiskered" officers, and the Costa Ricans, proving with the smallest acts that he is "no trifler." Amidst the squalor, General Walker alone maintains a reputation as "the iron will and reckless courage of the true man of destiny." That the soldiers do not sooner revolt against their condition Deaderick attributes entirely to "fear, though no love, of General Walker." Walker seems to provide evidence that dress, looks, and demeanor were no keys to character. As Deaderick writes, "though there was a nasal whine in the tone of the little General, and no great fire in his unmeaning eye, there was yet a quiet self-reliance about him extremely imposing, and which, as I thought, reached back of any temporary sufflation as tyrant of Rivas, and was passed upon perennial character."¹³

The men may have feared Walker, but they also despised him. Deaderick quickly learns that "the hatred towards General Walker and the

and San Juan del Sud to Messrs. Gales and Seaton, unidentified paper, both in Wheeler Collection.

¹² "The Man of Destiny," New Orleans *Sunday Delta*, July 27, 1856; Wells, *Walker's Expedition to Nicaragua*, 199-200; James Carson Jamison, *With Walker in Nicaragua*, (Columbia, MO, 1909), 18. See Charles Colbert, *A Measure of Perfection; Phrenology and the Fine Arts in America* (Chapel Hill, 1997), on the difficulties of aligning the inward and outward man.

¹³ Deaderick, "The Experience of Samuel Absolom, Filibuster," 660.

service seemed almost universal amongst the privates.” Virtually all of the soldiers feel as though Walker enticed them to Nicaragua “under false pretenses.” Not only has he denied them promised wages and decent food and clothing, but Walker has forced them to bear these indignities without relief, since without a passport from Walker himself, fleeing the country was impossible. Once Costa Rica offered Walker’s soldiers free transit back to the United States, desertion became an epidemic among the men. Deaderick begrudgingly deserts both Walker and his hopes of proving himself as he joins the exodus.¹⁴

Deaderick concludes his narrative with an attack on the romantic fiction that leads boys to war, and returns to his alter ego for one last act of resistance, tellingly an attack on the very uniform he craved upon first landing in Central America. “Samuel Absalom tore the large, dirty canvas letters M. R., signifying Mounted Ranger, off from this blue flannel shirtbreast,” he wrote, “and his experience as filibuster in Nicaragua closed.” At long last Deaderick seems to acknowledge the significance of appearance to character. He ends his own “experience as filibuster” with a simple tear of clothing. Deaderick dramatizes the transparency of character by showing that the character of “Samuel Absalom, filibuster” can be reduced to a pair of letters on a uniform.¹⁵

Throughout “Samuel Absalom, Filibuster,” Deaderick struggles to resolve the tension between the inward and outward man. Of the many failures of the war, it is the failure to reconcile character with its outward expression, manliness, that Deaderick most bemoans. Deaderick never looks the part of the soldier, and he is never able to show his soldierly virtues on the field. Walker does not look the part of the soldier either, and although his character as a man of will shows through, he too fails as a soldier because he lacks so many other things—money, diplomacy, and seemingly human sympathy as well. For Deaderick, Nicaragua is a lost opportunity, not so much because the chance to bring democratic institutions to Nicaragua has failed (the ostensible purpose of the expedition), but because he is unable to prove his true character through a display of manliness on the field.

The cultural negotiations that shape Deaderick’s narrative can be found in virtually all literature on filibustering and expansionism in the antebellum period. If men in these accounts do not directly address the question of character, then they indirectly reflect upon it in discussions of the racial or gendered opportunities offered by excursions south. As Robert Johannsen

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

has shown, gendered language and idealized accounts of Mexican women helped define the Mexican War in the American popular imagination. These same perceptions of sex, gender, and race continued to inform American understandings of expansionism in the decades after the war. John Hill Wheeler, slaveholder and avid expansionist, was appointed United States minister to the Republic of Nicaragua by Franklin Pierce in 1854. He was typical in conceptualizing the Caribbean and Latin America in highly gendered terms. After stopping in Cuba on the way to his post, he recorded in his diary that “as a pure and lovely bride ‘This gem of the Antilles’ will become a part and parcel of the U. S.” The author of a travelogue on Nicaragua drew on that same gendered metaphor with the increasing American presence in that country. “A few years only had elapsed,” he contended, “and lo! the hero of Industry was here, and the rich earth, in generous recompense for his toil, gave back a thousand-fold the seed which he had sown in her genial bosom.”¹⁶

Travel narratives of Nicaragua, Cuba, and other potential sites of filibustering expeditions that ran in national magazines and newspapers in this period are steeped in gendered images, language, and metaphors, and they send the clear message that a man can succeed in these new fertile territories regardless of wealth or appearance.¹⁷ Ephram G. Squier, a former American minister to Nicaragua, penned two such travelogues (one anonymously) in *Harper’s Monthly Magazine* published in December 1854 and October 1855. Squier’s narratives are representative of the Latin-American travelogue genre in the degree to which ideas of gender and sex shaped the vision of these territories. As Squier makes clear, Nicaragua is a perfect place for men to reclaim their manhood and to succeed in all arenas of life. The women there are beautiful, friendly, and more often than not, scantily clad. In one port, Nicaraguan women wear shirts that “left exposed a strip of skin at the waist, which the wanton wind often made much wider. They all had their hair braided in two long locks, which hung

¹⁶ John Hill Wheeler Diary, Nov. 5, 1854, quoted in Randall O. Hudson, “The Filibuster Minister: The Career of John Hill Wheeler as United States Minister to Nicaragua, 1854-1856,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, 49 (July 1972), 283; E. G. Squier (as anon.), “San Juan,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 10 (Dec. 1854), 59. Gendered metaphors and analogies have governed discourse over potential American territories since the colonial period, and Nicaragua poses no exception to this pattern. See Robert W. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York, 1985); Hietala, *Manifest Design*; and May, *Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, 6-7.

¹⁷ For gendered reports of Nicaragua, see, for example, “Three Weeks in Nicaragua,” San Francisco (CA) *Herald*, Jan 14, 1856; and unsigned letter from Granada to the editor of the San Francisco *Herald*, Feb. 19, 1856, Wheeler Collection.

down behind, and gave them a school-girlly appearance—quite out of keeping with the cool, deliberate manner in which they smoked their cigars.” At Lake Masaya, women bathed nude, while in the next village “Indian women, naked to the waist, sat beneath the trees spinning snow-white cotton.” On the way to León, American visitors encountered washerwomen, who “when occupied with their work” wear less of a costume “even than that of the Georgia Major, which was catalogued as a shirt-collar and a pair of spurs.” Squier waxes poetic about virtually every woman he sees in Nicaragua, whether naked or clothed. One “dark-colored Ceres, her hair stuck full of flowers, displays a dozen baskets heaped up with ripe and luscious fruits, and chants, with a musical voice,

*Tengo narangas, papayas, jocotes,
Melones de agua, de oro, zapotes!
Quieren á comprar?*

Like Nicaragua itself, these women are lovely, fertile, and ready to be bought, but with the currency of character—manliness.¹⁸

Fortunately, Squier contended, the terror of miscegenation that underlay the antiexpansionism movement in the United States has not influenced these women against Americans. In Nagarote one entertains women with a “Virginia *Juba* or break-down” on his guitar, “and might have won unbounded popularity among the dark-skinned beauties of Nagarote had he remained there.” The interest of the lovely women of Nicaragua is not drawn solely to the musically inclined. In comparison to the reportedly lazy men of the country, any American is bound to look good. Local men recline on hammocks “in attitudes suggestive of intense laziness.” Unused to any physical exertion, even a Nicaraguan guide faints repeatedly and has to quit when escorting Americans on a climb up a volcano. It comes as no surprise to the reader that after their successful ascent and descent, the American men “passed the evening in recounting the wonders of the mountain to a bevy of attentive Señoritas, who opened wide their big lustrous eyes, and ejaculated *mira!* at every pause in the narrative.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Squier, “San Juan,” 52; E. G. Squier, “Nicaragua: an Exploration From Ocean to Ocean,” *ibid.*, 11 (Oct. 1855), 744, 748, 755. On Squier, see Carr, *The World and William Walker*, 112. The anonymous “Ranger” in “A Ranger’s Life in Nicaragua” also, incongruously remarked on the beauty of the scantily clad Nicaraguan women in the middle of his critique of the Nicaraguan war. “A Ranger’s Life in Nicaragua,” *Harper’s Weekly*, Apr. 18, 1857, 249.

¹⁹ Squier, “San Juan,” 52; Squier, “Nicaragua: an Exploration From Ocean to Ocean,” 754, 759.

Harper's also published a filibustering "romance" in 1858, "The Old Filibuster," while Walker was attempting to regroup after his first defeat in Nicaragua. The protagonist of this story, set in 1684, may be French, but he is every bit the man as the contemporary filibuster. Sieur Revenau de Lussan, a native of Paris, gave evidence of his roving tendencies when only seven by stealing away from home and making long excursions into the city. "The camp, the drum, the bugle, and the perils of the conflict had a charm for him that no exposure or hardship could break," the author observed. As an adult "freebooter" he sets sail for the New World and ends up in what will become Nicaragua.²⁰

A close reader of "The Old Filibuster" might come to the conclusion that little had changed in Nicaragua over the centuries. In the seventeenth century, as in the nineteenth, women were scantily clad: "clothed with a native cloth from the waist downward"; a Central American town is "distinguished for its beautiful women and loose morals"; and the local men are no competition for the handsome and active newcomers. Here the French pirates enjoyed "the freebooter's paradise." Laden with spoils, with an abundance to eat and drink, with nothing to do, and surrounded by crowds of beautiful women to minister to their pleasures, they passed the time in a round of gaiety and dissipation.

According to both Squier's narratives and the tale of the "Old Filibuster," Nicaragua clearly appeared ripe for adventurous men who demand more from life than a hammock, and any American investment will be amply rewarded. As an example of this, Squier reports the story of Hipp, a naturalized American settler who "had made extensive clearings on both banks of the river" and had "started a flourishing plantation." Hipp has two problems at the outset of this story. As an unmarried man, Hipp is forced "to do his own cooking," and as an American abroad he is unsure about the ability of Nicaragua's government to uphold his land claims. Both of these dilemmas are easily resolved in the course of the tale. Hipp protects his property rights by physically beating some trespassers and then proudly raising an American flag. Soon after he slips a letter into the narrator's hand to be delivered to a "dark-eyed damsel in Granada."²¹

As the story of Hipp indicates, there is no better land than Nicaragua for the hard-working and pugilistic American. It also offers much for the lazy man as well, although such men are not heroes in these travelogues.

²⁰ "An Old Filibuster," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 18 (Dec. 1858), 20. The terms "freebooter" and "filibuster" were used interchangeably in the nineteenth century. Both derive from the Dutch word "vrijbouter" (*vrij*, free + *buit*, booty).

²¹ Squier, "San Juan," 59, 60.

According to Squier, the extensive cacao plantations of Nicaragua require virtually no work and are “one of the most desirable possessions in the world for a man of taste and leisure.” Perhaps it was not men of leisure who were most attracted to Nicaragua, but workingmen, men who, like Deaderick, had not quite succeeded in America.²² A poem in the New York *Picayune* in 1856 put the charms of Nicaragua to this group in an eloquent verse. Nicaragua was a place

Where all things grow without the taming of a plough,
Where men grow fat by feasting, sans the sweat of brow.
Offers its steaming wealth to those who like to seek it,
And own their masters, if they'll stick by and keep it.

The workingman is reassured by this *Picayune* poem that in Nicaragua, success is only a matter of endurance, and no white man need have a master.²³

Clearly Nicaragua offered more than attractive women and easy living to white American men: it also offered an opportunity to assert racial superiority, regardless of income, and to reassert the advantages of whiteness. This was particularly true after Walker passed a decree reintroducing African slavery into Nicaragua in September 1856. The vision of Walker as a racial hero who could provide opportunities otherwise closed to white men, was part of what Richard Slotkin has called “a reformulation of the Frontier project in terms of racial warfare.”²⁴

“Are there not brave, adventuresome, enterprising young Americans in the United States who will come here and assist in the regeneration of . . .

²² Detailed information on Walker’s soldiers can be found in Item 120, Register of the Army of the Republic of Nicaragua, and Folder 85: Men and Stores sent to Caribbean Sea, 1860, both in Callender Fayassoux Collection (Howard Tilton Library, Tulane University, New Orleans). Based on a study of the Army of the Republic in 1857 by Dr. Alejandro Bolaños G. Masaya, conducted in 1972, and another done by myself of “immigrants” to Nicaragua in 1860, the following observations can be made about the men who chose to follow Walker. Their average age was slightly over twenty-six years old, the vast majority listed some form of skilled labor for their occupation, and very few listed an occupation that could be considered white collar. Between twenty-eight percent (in 1860) and fifty-nine percent (in 1857) of the men were born in northern states. Although the race of individuals was not listed, complexion was. Most were described as “fair.”

²³ “All about Walker,” attributed to “Sarey’s Hands,” New York *Picayune*, Jan. 19, 1856. This poem was published before Walker’s slavery decree.

²⁴ Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York, 1985), 250. On Walker’s reasons for reintroducing slavery, see William Walker, *The War in Nicaragua* (Mobile, 1860), 266.

the whole of Central America,” readers in New Orleans were asked by a correspondent from Walker’s final foray to Honduras in 1860. The white men who joined Walker’s army and the armies of other filibusters answered yes. As the discourse surrounding Walker makes clear, many of them had high expectations for Central America. Here they might find a good life, lovely women, and perhaps an opportunity to achieve success based on their personal character at a time when a focus on outward appearance, they thought, held them back in the United States.²⁵

But Americans at home were hardly unanimous in their evaluation of the filibuster character. William Walker attracted at least as many critics as he did supporters during the late 1850s. Strangely enough, each camp focused on the same issue, and both employed the same language to either justify or condemn his behavior. These concerns, over the proper relationship of appearance and character, and between behavior and character, were much the same issues as drove Deaderick to Nicaragua. In an editorial highly critical of filibustering, *Harper’s* made it clear that no abolitionist agenda motivated it to disavow aggressive expansionism on the eve of William Walker’s first filibustering expedition to Sonora. *Harper’s* instead argued that both filibusters and abolitionists were unworthy of respect for exactly the same reason: they both rejected the force of law but took refuge in the protection of laws when threatened. Both camps clearly lacked character, insofar each failed to exhibit manly consistency in their behavior. “Ultra abolitionists will boldly preach disunion,” *Harper’s* wrote, but when threatened, “away to the Mayor run these consistent men, and demand the protection of the very laws they have been so ruthlessly assaulting.” The same “beautiful consistency is manifested by their filibustering antipodes.” Filibusters “get up a pirate war in contempt of the national sovereignty; they denounce all legal attempts to restrain them as interfering with the ‘higher law’ of their impressionable sympathies. The moment, however, they begin to experience personally some of the evils of their rash procedures, forthwith we hear them talking very learnedly and disinterestedly about the law of nations.” In other words, both members of these groups failed to be men of character: rather than resolutely face the implications of their beliefs and actions, they protected themselves with law.²⁶

²⁵ Squier, “Nicaragua: an Exploration From Ocean to Ocean,” 744; “Our Special Correspondent at Truxillo, Aug. 18, 1860,” *New Orleans Delta*, Sept. 4, 1860.

²⁶ “Editor’s Table,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 6 (Jan. 1853), 266, 268. The claim that filibusters invoked the “law of nations” referred to the demand for United States protection made by filibusters in Cuba in 1852 after capture by Spanish authorities.

A later editorial in *Harper's*, "Cowards and Brave Men," returned to the question of manhood and filibustering in an oblique way. Acknowledging that filibusters might win respect as models of manhood, the magazine offered an opposing model of bravery. In the midst of Walker's Nicaraguan campaign, the magazine argued that true bravery is not revealed in battle. "The soldier fights because he must," it maintained. "He can not help himself." As examples of "less doubtful heroism" *Harper's* offered several.

Pestilence is a more appalling calamity than War, and requires a stouter heart to meet it. . . . Still greater courage and firmness are required to remain poor, when there is a chance of becoming rich by means which most men do not scruple to employ. . . . But the most decisive proof of independence and courage is to be truly religious . . . in a gay, and worldly, and proud society.

The San Francisco *Alta California* claimed that most filibusters were men who had failed in "half a dozen different professions," and were "too good to work and too afraid to steal." A narrative of the war published in *Harper's Weekly* in 1857, "A Ranger's Life in Nicaragua," claimed that men were corrupted by filibustering. "It does not appear that fillibusterism improves the character," the author wrote. Even men of "a superior order" become shirkers and "slaves" under the tedium of the soldier's routine in Nicaragua. In the aftermath of Walker's slavery decree, this final critique carried a particularly clear message to proslavery and free-soil readers alike.²⁷

As newspaper accounts of the filibuster war in Nicaragua reveal, disgruntled soldiers also realized that an effective attack on Walker would have to incorporate a critique of his character and those of his officers. The *New York Times* coverage in March 1857 of the final battles of the Nicaragua war included a variety of differing accounts of both the battle and the state of Walker's army. One witness reported that Walker was "burning the dead bodies" of fallen soldiers. The most damning account of Walker's army came from William Brown, a late recruit to the army. Brown claimed that not only did officers steal money from dead recruits, but that after promising several soldiers \$100 to put out a fire, the same officers reneged. Furthermore, "the officers treated the men as if they were dogs."

²⁷ "Editor's Table: Cowards and Brave Men," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 12 (Feb. 1856), 400-12; San Francisco *Alta California*, Oct. 7, 1854; "A Ranger's Life in Nicaragua," *Harper's Weekly*, Mar. 28, 1857, 202.

These officers clearly were no men of character, and Nicaragua was no place for a soldier to prove himself.²⁸

In December 1857 Walker was arrested on Nicaraguan soil during a carefully planned return to the country where he still considered himself president. American naval officer, Commodore Hiram Paulding, not Nicaraguans, arrested him. The American debate over Paulding's arrest of Walker reveals just how central the issue of character was to the latter's program. Paulding justified his arrest of Walker on a reading of the filibuster's character, since at the time of arrest it was not clear that Walker had broken any laws. As *Harper's* reported, "the propriety of the course taken by Commodore Paulding in arresting Walker upon foreign soil has been questioned." But in his dispatch to the government Paulding explained, "I could not regard Walker and his followers in any other light than as outlaws who had escaped from the vigilance of the officers of the Government, and left our shores for the purpose of rapine and murder." By arresting Walker, Paulding hoped to "vindicate the law and redeem the honor of our country," he stated.²⁹

Walker received extensive support in this affair, since it generally was acknowledged that Paulding exceeded his rights in arresting him upon foreign soil. Nonetheless, many politicians agreed with Paulding's assessment of the filibuster character. Though criticizing Paulding, President James Buchanan claimed that Walker's expedition was little more than "an invitation to reckless and lawless men to rob, plunder, and murder the unoffending citizens of neighboring States." Senator James Pearce of Maryland agreed and summed up the importance of the underlying reading of gender and character to both positions in his statement to Congress. "Nothing surprises me more than the sympathy which is expressed for General Walker," he claimed. "In a few localities . . . he may be regarded as a hero; but the larger part of our countrymen view him as an offender against our laws, a violator of the laws of nations, and a cold, relentless oppressor of the people whom he ruled with military rigor." If Walker displayed manly characteristics, Pearce claimed, they were manly characteristics of a long dead era. Walker, he stated "is an ambitious dreamer. The enterprise which he has undertaken is one that does not belong to the age, and is not in accordance with its spirit. . . . It belongs,

²⁸ "Report of the Battle of Rivas," *New York Daily Times*, Mar. 21, 1857.

²⁹ *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 16 (Feb. 1858), 400; *Justification of Commodore Paulding's Arrest of Walker and his command at Puenta Arenas. Speech of James R. Doolittle, of Wisconsin. Delivered to the United States Senate, January 21, 1858* (Washington, DC, 1858), 13.

rather to that dark period in the Christian era . . . when the Vikings and Northmen went wherever they could, disregarding the obligations of national justice, making might right, and carrying rapacity and rapine wherever they went.”³⁰

Senator John Slidell of Louisiana agreed with Pearce that although perhaps a hero in another age, Walker was an anachronism now. Referring to “this new William the Conqueror” who “proceeded to dispossess the ancient proprietors of their domains, distributing them among his adherents,” Slidell bemoaned the fact that Paulding had “succeeded, in the eyes for many of our people, in investing [Walker] with the martyr’s crown; and pseudo-martyrs have, in all ages, found devotees to worship at their shrine.”³¹

Paulding, in contrast, was a true man for the age, Pearce asserted. He used “no language disrespectful to General Walker

. . . no language . . . which could be considered disgraceful to that officer.” But nonetheless, Paulding spoke, and carried himself, and behaved, with the manly display of true character. “We do not wish our officers when executing a stern duty to speak with bated breath, and accompany the act by apologetic flourishes, Pearce maintained. “We want them to speak like men, like officers; to speak whatever is to be said, plainly, frankly, without apology and necessary qualification. This is what Commodore Paulding has done.” In other words, Walker’s bad character was evident from actions only considered manly in a long dead age of violence and aggression. Paulding’s good character was revealed in his manly and forthright prevention of and restraint from violence.³²

Putnam’s magazine shared many of the assumptions about the lawless, unmanly character of the filibuster with critics like Senator Pearce. After listing “filibusteros” among the possible political factions available to a

³⁰ Congressional Globe, 34th Cong., 1st sess., 1538; *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 16 (Mar. 1858), 544. Soon after this “grave error,” Buchanan relieved Paulding of his command. For support of Walker over Paulding see the *Philadelphia Evening Argus*, Dec. 19, 1857. The *Baltimore Sun*, the *Washington Evening Star*, *The States* (Washington, DC), and the *New York Herald* also supported Walker over Paulding.

³¹ Congressional Globe, 34th Cong., 1st sess., 1538; other southerners opposing Walker included Virginian John Letcher and the Texas fire-eater Louis Wigfall, who called Walker a pirate. May, *Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, 194. Slidell also had personal reasons for opposing Walker. Once a supporter of filibustering, Slidell may have opposed Walker because of his personal enmity for the increasingly visible Walker ally, Pierre Soulé.

³² Congressional Globe, 34th Cong., 1st sess., 1538. One has to question what sort of language Pearce considered insulting, given that Paulding called Walker an “outlaw” who intended “rapine and murder.”

voter in its 1854 editorial "Our Parties and Politics," *Putnam's* condemned the "propagandists of the South" for their filibustering fantasies. "We know that schemes, open and secret, are prosecuted for the acquisition of Cuba . . . eager grasping eyes are set on Mexico . . . another senator has broached the recognition of the Dominican Republic, with an ulterior view to its annexation." For observers, "eager grasping" or outright aggression was an antiquated sign of manliness.³³

But what, then, would be the new manly behavior to signify true character? Just six months later, in the editorial "Men of Character," *Putnam's* provided a seeming justification of filibustering when answering this question. The magazine saw clearly the appropriate relationship between manliness and character when it claimed that "character is what involuntarily commands respect. . . . It is what makes itself felt," regardless of external appearance. "Pride and self-reliance almost always accompany" character, *Putnam's* claimed. "Its possessor is not easily moved by either censure or applause, and is utterly indifferent to what Mrs. Grundy will say." Seemingly predicting and justifying Walker's obsessive behavior, *Putnam's* stated that "the man who has character must be independent, fearless, and discriminating in his judgement. He is not influenced by the position a man holds, or the clothes he wears, in forming the estimate of him."³⁴

Given that a magazine openly hostile to filibustering would acknowledge that character expressed itself through manly fearlessness and independence, it is perhaps not surprising that supporters of aggressive expansionism would celebrate Walker and his fellow filibusters as the true manly men of the 1850s. The profilibustering position had several elements that reveal the contours of another reigning view of manhood in this period, one contrary to that expressed by Paulding's supporters. It rejected the idea that Commodore's dignified restraint best expressed true character. Heroicized accounts, such as "The Man of Destiny" in the New Orleans *Sunday Delta*, presented Walker as the fulfillment of the definition of character offered by *Putnam's*. He was a man of will, a man above pecuniary concerns, a man who offered the promise of salvation through manly action despite an unimpressive appearance. With a "strong substratum of Scotch common sense in his character," Walker boasted a fine genetic heritage, not unimportant, given the racial component of filibustering. He was gifted with a good education, but was wise enough to see the limitations of book-learning. Walker "discovered the law to be a

³³ "Our Parties and Politics," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* (Sept. 1854), 233, 244-45.

³⁴ "Men of Character," *ibid.*, 267-69.

very poor wet-nurse and contemptuously dropped its nipple” in favor of filibustering. In other words, he became a man when he rejected the feminized virtues of learning for manly action. Walker’s education was not as significant in his greatness as was his self-knowledge. While in college, he gained not only a knowledge of Latin, but “a tolerable knowledge of himself . . . for self-knowledge is the basis of all daring thoughts and daring deeds.” Indeed, this self-knowledge, identified in the definition of character in *Putnam’s*, separated the brave men from cowards. Cowards would be recognized not only by the eyes of men of character, but by a greater eye as well. “The coward does not know himself, but God knows him, and even if he buried his head in the sand, ostrich-like, the great eye would perceive and despise his meanness.”³⁵

Walker’s eye, as well, despised all meanness. Although his “blue-gray eye observed quietly . . . without any demonstrativeness or unnecessary display,” boosters noted that Walker never left his will in doubt. Indeed, it is to Walker’s “Jacksonian willingness to ‘take the responsibility’” that “the conqueror of Nicaragua” owed his fame: “Assuredly, ‘Danton! no weakness!’ appears to be his motto.” Walker was a man of “daring spirit, capable of great combinations, fitted with an iron will, resolute and just, wise and bold . . . a true Man of Destiny.” According to another paper, Walker was such a powerful figure that he frightened the less manly Costa Ricans. “An American merchant” living in Costa Rica reported that “the Costa Rican soldiers are all terrified of ‘Walker’s demoniac power. . . . The superstitious dread of Walker’s miraculous power and ubiquity is more in his favor than any real force he can command.”³⁶

William Walker was admirable not only as a man of will, but also as an individual of pure motives, uncorrupted by love of money. As his good friend, William Vincent Wells, wrote, “A remarkable trait in General Walker is an utter disregard of personal ease or luxury, and an indifference to wealth. His motives are pure and honorable, and his aspirations *beyond riches*. This is a difficult statement for the money-worshipping crowd to believe, but his whole life demonstrates the fact.”³⁷

³⁵ “The Man of Destiny,” *New Orleans Sunday Delta*, July 27, 1856.

³⁶ *Ibid.* Although Walker rarely was compared to Andrew Jackson so directly as in this account, the elements of his personality celebrated by boosters are largely the same as those for which Jackson was venerated. On the elements of Jackson’s myth, see John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (New York, 1953); and unidentified newspaper articles on Walker, Callender Fayassoux Collection.

³⁷ Wells, *Walker’s Expedition to Nicaragua*, 199-200. On Walker-boosting, see for example, the *New York Sun*, Jan. 2, 1856; “Who is General Walker,” *New York Daily News*, Feb. 8, 1856; “General Walker’s Early Love,” *Baltimore American Democrat*, Feb.

That Walker's character was revealed through his bravery, honor, and will was constantly reiterated by boosters. All of these aspects of Walker's character were recognized and praised in one of the key events in his career, the "Liberty and Nicaragua" meeting held in New York's Central Park on a Friday evening in May 1856. Attended by thousands of Walker's supporters in New York in the midst of his success in Nicaragua, an assortment of national politicians lauded the man and his efforts. Lewis Cass predicted that "the difficulties which General Walker has encountered and overcome will place his name high on the roll of the distinguished men of his age." General William Cazneau, a Texas entrepreneur who had served as special agent to the Dominican Republic under President Pierce, announced that "no true man" would dare cross Walker for he was the "lion of Spanish-American regeneration." The San Francisco editor Edward A. Pollard was most effusive in his praise of Walker, and he extolled the man in terms that indicate the centrality of discourses of character to Walker's public persona. Pollard claimed to be speaking in order to "vindicate the personal character and personal motives of General Walker." Walker was praiseworthy, according to Pollard, because he was not "animated . . . by any purposes of private aggrandizement, by any hope of public fame," nor was he driven by "the passion of ambition." Walker was simply, in Pollard's words, "a hero . . . not a man who courts applause, or who cares for public opinion." Rather, he was a man of will, "who is bound to carry out his won ideas of duty and right in the cause of progress." Pollard predicted lasting fame for Walker and received extensive "applause and cheers" for his words.³⁸

7, 1856; and William Frank Stewart, *Last of the Filibusters: Recollections of the Siege of Rivas* (Sacramento, 1857), 7. These elements even appear in personal correspondence about Walker. See for example, J. C. W. Brennan correspondence, Stockton, CA, Oct. 31, 1860 (Manuscript Collection, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA). Even some critical sources admitted that Walker's will inspired respect and "an interest which none can help feeling in one who has manifested so much boldness, energy and resolution." One obituary of Walker noted that although he demonstrated "a disregard of national law and the common moralities of civilized nations" and had led the United States government to be viewed as "ambitious, deceitful, and treacherous by those who, before Gen. Walker visited them, looked upon our Republic as a model for imitation," nonetheless, the paper concluded, "his career exhibits . . . invincible firmness of character; a bravery unsurpassed and a confidence in his own ability impossible to be shaken." New Orleans *Picayune*, Sept. 19, 1860.

³⁸ "Speeches delivered at the 'Liberty and Nicaragua' meeting, held in Central Park, Friday evening, May 23rd, 1856," in Wells, *Walker's Expedition to Nicaragua*, 227-28, 236, 280-81; May, *Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, 94; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 324.

De Bow's Review reiterated these points in 1858 in the aftermath of his Nicaraguan defeat. "The true character of William Walker is, as we sincerely believe, but little known," *De Bow's* professed. "He is a man incapable of sordid or selfish motives, and entirely destitute of any thing like ambition, in the popular sense of the term. . . . With all the mild thoughtfulness and gentle manners of true decision of character . . . the regenerator of Central America might readily pass under hasty observation as a very commonplace and unimportant individual. The secret of his character lies in the suppressed enthusiasm of his heart."³⁹

Thus William Walker was lauded as an incorruptible man, an individual beyond reach of money, a person of absolute will. Some believed that to such men America, and indeed the Americas, should look. A correspondent to the *New York Tribune* from Truxillo, Honduras, in 1860 stated that "a dead country is to be resurrected; who will undertake the work if Americans refuse? It is a work worthy of the age, and many will soon see the greatness of the enterprise in which the band of Americans now here have embarked." A letter to *El Nicaraguense* from an "Amigo del Sud" made the point that those who were anxious to emigrate to Nicaragua "are not fillibusters [*sic*] in the usual sense of that word, but simply emigrants, worthy descendants or imitators of those who penetrated the dense forests of the West and the plains of Texas, and whose energy and industry made our country what it is."⁴⁰

If men of the past created America, many wondered, why reject as anachronistic the standards of valor that made those men heroes? Filibuster boosters refused to do so. Many revered Walker as the true offspring of American patriots. John H. Wheeler wrote in a manuscript draft on Walker's adventures in Nicaragua that "like Lafayette, he has come to aid in the struggles for liberty; like Washington he sought no imoulient or reward, except the gratitude of the country and the liberation of its citizens." A report titled "Antiquity of Fillibusterism [*sic*]," signed by "A Soldier in Co. E." in *El Nicaraguense*, Walker's newspaper in Nicaragua, summed up this position. Comparing those who object to filibustering to "tottering crowned heads," the author offered a historical justification of this better model of manhood. "Was it the native Saxon or the fillibustering Norman who instilled vigor and energy into the English nation?" the author asked rhetorically. "Who fought for and gained American independence but

³⁹ "The Walker Expedition, 1855," *De Bow's Review*, 24 (Feb. 1858), 150.

⁴⁰ "The Walker Expedition," *New York Herald*, Sept. 1, 1860; letter from "Amigo del Sud" in New Orleans published in *El Nicaraguense* (Granada, Nicaragua), Jan. 25, 1856.

adventurers? . . . I of Nicaragua am but a representative of the fillibusters of the past.”⁴¹

Some writers looked further afield for models of filibustering greatness. In one account he was “the heroic Viking of our times, the great nation-builder, the representative of Republican progress, Col. William Walker.” An account in the *Pennsylvanian* took a different tack in its Viking analogy. “The intrepid soldier of freedom is held near in every liberty loving heart,” it noted. “The Dane was repelled as an invader, Walker was hailed as a savior. . . . The Dane was a destroyer, but the ‘gray-eyed’ man is a regenerator.”⁴²

Although this justification turned Pearce’s condemnation—that filibusters were men of the past—on its head, another endorsement of filibustering took a contrary tack. Filibusters were great men not because they embodied a fine historical model, but rather because they fulfilled a modern ideal of manhood. The Oakland *Leader* reported that Walker “holds not his power by the hereditary sanction of the divine right of kings, but by the more modern and substantial tenure of conquest and force of arms. . . . Who shall say that . . . infusing into the breasts of its present degraded population a national ambition, is not worthy of some commendation.” Another account praised Walker for learning a true Jacksonian history lesson: “The world shifts and changes. What was true a century ago is not true to-day; what is true to-day will not be true in a century hence.”⁴³

The most ambitious accounts managed to join the past and present in their celebration of Walker and show that he was admirable both for his historical and modern qualities. As the New Orleans *Sunday Delta* reported in a review of Walker’s book, *The War in Nicaragua*, Walker personified “American Viking Politics,” and was himself a Viking for today’s world. Walker, the paper wrote, “is a remarkable type of the representative men of the day of this country. It would be difficult to name another person who

⁴¹ John H. Wheeler, “A new work on Nicaragua, the centre of central America. Its past history, present position and future prospects,” Wheeler Collection; “Antiquity of Filibusterism,” by “A Soldier in Co. E.,” *El Nicaraguense*, Jan. 25, 1856. This author had a point. As Robert May argues, “Americans since the birth of the republic had been in the habit of conducting private military invasions into foreign lands, and they had been doing it despite a sequence of federal laws and prosecutions in federal courts designed to discourage that very behavior.” May, “Manifest Destiny’s Filibusters,” 150.

⁴² “The Man of Destiny,” New Orleans *Sunday Delta*, July 27, 1856; “Affairs in Nicaragua,” *The Pennsylvanian*, n.d., Wheeler Collection.

⁴³ Oakland *Leader* quoted in *El Nicaraguense*, Jan. 25, 1856; “The Man of Destiny,” *New Orleans Sunday Delta*, July 27, 1856.

combines more closely and inseparably the worker and the thinker. His whole career . . . looks like incarnate thought in action." Indeed, the *Delta* declared, "It is hard to say whether he is more a man of the times or of the future." The paper had no doubt that a recent publication by Walker was "calculated to exert a peculiar charm alike over men of action and men of meditation."⁴⁴

Even *Harper's*, which altered its opinion of filibustering once Walker captured Nicaragua, declared Walker a wonderful combination of old and new. "We have again and again called Walker a hero," it commented. "We are obliged to recognize a persistence, and endurance, a resolute heroism which merit a higher place in human esteem that can be ceded to all the knights errant of history and Faerydom. . . . The difference is that ours is a nineteenth century hero. . . . Who knows how soon he may replace the laurel of the hero with the diadem of a king?"⁴⁵

Walker's greatness thus lay in the fact that he was out of step with the times. This was revealed to supporters not only because his actions represented a seemingly disappearing standard of manliness, but because, above all else, he appeared immune to the corrupting power of money that so disabled men in the current age. According to a correspondent of the Boston *Herald*, "General Walker, purely unselfish, has only the ambition . . . of having his name placed high among those who have been the benefactors of mankind." That the spirit of filibustering was above the petty interests of the businessman was clear to the New Orleans *Sunday Delta*. "It is a strange thing in this age of dollars and dotage, of huckstering and bargaining, and universal buying and selling . . . to see the Kinghood of the old Scandinavian sailors, with its lofty hopes, its inexhaustible daring, its almost arrogant self-reliance, reappearing suddenly in our midst," the editor asserted. "Wall Street can not understand it." The New Orleans *Times* agreed that "in an age wedded too much to mean and sordid pursuit," Walker was "one of the most distinguished men of his generation." For men who feared that an appearance of wealth had grown more important than internal character in antebellum America, Walker provided the reassurance of a largely fictional past when different values prevailed. A

⁴⁴ "General Walker's Book," New Orleans *Sunday Delta*, Apr. 8, 1860.

⁴⁵ *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 14 (Jan. 1857), quoted in Carr, *The World and William Walker*, 113.

man like Walker, or a man who followed Walker, could prove his character to all through manly acts, regardless of his appearance.⁴⁶

Or could he? For Americans like Deaderick, uncomfortable with the increasing significance of appearance in America, Walker seemed to provide an ideal model. Seeming above the sordid interests of personal wealth, and constantly proving his character through manly action, Walker provided an extremely seductive model of manhood in the decade before the Civil War. But Walker found himself trapped in the same quandary as did Deaderick. In a country increasingly focused on the external signs of character, Walker might reject the appeal of wealth, but he could not, finally, reject the demands of appearance.

Like Deaderick, Walker's followers wanted it both ways. What they desired was that character make itself "felt" as *Putnam's* put it. Filibusters demanded that true character reveal itself on the outside at the same time that they rejected the idea that character was apparent to all and that money could buy an appearance that signified character. For this reason, Deaderick focuses much attention on the soldier's uniform. His clothes never measure up to the inward picture he carries of himself. Even though Deaderick resents being judged by his appearance, he feels, and he believes, that character should reveal itself outwardly.

It is in the resolution of Walker's own appearance problem that the crisis of character in America becomes clearest. The most dedicated booster admitted that the trouble with Walker was his extremely unprepossessing appearance. Short, fair, and slim of build, his appearance belied his character, or so boosters claimed. Even his voice was nearly as soft as a woman's. Was it possible that Walker's character could be both silent and entirely invisible?

The answer, of course, was no. In America in the 1850s it was impossible that character could remain invisible. Deaderick's character is disclosed by his uniform and Walker's is revealed, finally, in his eye. As the lone outward sign of his character, a description of his gray eyes became a central aspect of accounts of the great filibuster. As "a letter from a Young Washingtonian on his travels" reported to the press in late 1855, "we could hardly believe that the little insignificant looking person before us was the man who had shown such great talents as a military leader. . . . The only thing remarkable in his appearance are his eyes, which are large, of a light

⁴⁶ "Letter on Nicaragua," *Boston Herald*, Jan. 18, 1856; "The Man of Destiny," *New Orleans Sunday Delta*, July 27, 1856; "The Hero of Nicaragua," *The New Orleans Times*, July 19, 1857. See also "Our New York correspondence," *Public Register* (Lancaster, PA), Jan. 19, 1856, for another pro-Walker letter along the same lines.

gray, and project in such a way that they look almost pointed.” In another account, his eyes were “almost hypnotic in their power.” William Wells went to great lengths to explain that “numerous descriptions have been attempted by newspaper correspondents to do justice to this ‘gray eye,’ but they convey a faint picture of the original; nor has the true expression ever been obtained by the daguerreotype.” Only the true believer can attempt to describe such a signifying eye. About “the principle feature of his countenance,” the *Delta* described an eye “of a blue-gray color, large, intelligent, occasionally dreamy, it has a thousand different expressions. Like the relentless eye of Chatham, which held his rivals in constant check, it never loses sight of an enemy for a moment; and its possessor holds you, as the Ancient Mariner held the wedding guest, by its mysterious and glittering power.”⁴⁷

Wells’s account adds that it “would be difficult, in any written description, to convey an adequate idea” of this eye. Still he tries. “It is a deep and intensely brilliant *blue-gray*,” he observes, “large and intelligent, and the calm unimpassioned manner with which he fixes this upon whoever he comes in contact with, seems to penetrate the inmost thoughts. That he is highly educated, appears at the first glance.” Walker’s eye, so central to physical accounts of the man, made it possible that a “small-sized and rather unattractive man” could become a manly model.⁴⁸ Walker’s eye was the outward sign of his character.

To a man of character, of course, this equation of an eye and a man would be wholly unacceptable. Walker himself was quite uncomfortable with the relationship between character and appearance that the wide circulation of his own likeness implied. As he wrote to a close supporter from New York on March 5, 1860, about his coming publication, *The War in Nicaragua*, “the publisher intends on putting an approved likeness of the

⁴⁷ “A letter from a Young Washingtonian on his travels” to Messrs. Gales and Seaton, Nov. 29, 1855, Wheeler collection; “The Man of Destiny,” New Orleans *Sunday Delta*, July 27, 1856; Jamison, *With Walker in Nicaragua*, 18; Wells, *Walker’s Expedition to Nicaragua*, 199-200.

⁴⁸ Wells, *Walker’s Expedition to Nicaragua*, 199-200. For more on Walker’s gray eye, see T. Robinson Warren, *Dust and Foam; or Three Oceans and Two Continents* (New York, 1859), 184, 211-14; the *Daily States* (Washington, DC), June 12, 1857; unidentified clipping from a London paper, Wheeler collection; Richard Miller Devens, *Our First Century: Being a Popular Descriptive Portraiture of the One Hundred Great and Memorable Events of Perpetual Interest in the History of our Country* (Springfield, MA, 1882), 744; and Stewart, *Last of the Filibusters*, 5, 11.

Author in the book; and although it offends my sense of propriety I have to submit to it as a part of the 'hunting' of the trader."⁴⁹

Yet Walker also allowed his own paper in Nicaragua, *El Nicaraguense*, to manufacture the legend that the indigenous peoples of Nicaragua believed they would be delivered from Spanish oppression by a "gray-eyed man" of the Anglo-Saxon race. Admitting mid-story that "there is in these facts a tincture of romance almost too charming to reveal," *El Nicaraguense* nonetheless maintained that "the prophecy is deemed by the Indians as fulfilled" when visiting natives "hailed" Walker "as the 'gray eyed man,' so long and anxiously waited for by them and their fathers." American publications quickly picked up the story, reporting the fulfillment of "the superstitious old tradition, that a fair man, with 'eyes the color of the heavens,' would come across the sea and restore to the Indians the peace and abundance of their ancient days."⁵⁰

When *El Nicaraguense* concluded its fabricated story of prophesy fulfilled by stating that "the Gray-eyed man has come," it unwittingly revealed more than just the lengths to which Walker was willing to go to justify his presence in Nicaragua. It also revealed the victory of appearance in the battle to define character in America. William Walker's lasting identification as the "gray-eyed man of destiny" is a final irony. Walker's appeal to so many Americans rested on their vision of him as a man whose character was proven through action, not appearance, and whose filibustering excursions seemingly offered the opportunity for other men to prove their character in a similar manner. But even Walker had to display his character externally. Perhaps *El Nicaraguense* was correct in stating that "the Gray-eyed man has come," but it was Americans, and not the Nicaraguans, who seem to have been waiting.

⁴⁹ Walker to Fayassoux, Mar. 5, 1860, Callender Fayassoux Collection.

⁵⁰ "Additional from Central America, State of Affairs in Nicaragua," unidentified clipping, Wheeler Collection; *El Nicaraguense*, Dec. 8, 1856. Walker's complicity in the story is reported in Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 308. See also New York *Daily News* clipping, n.d., Wheeler Collection. His identification as the "gray-eyed man," Richard Slotkin points out, constantly reinforced the vision of Walker as race hero. Slotkin, *Fatal Environment*, 252.