

The Young Americans: Emerson, Walker, and the Early Literature of American Empire

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On February 7, 1844, in a lecture read in Boston before the Mercantile Library Association, Ralph Waldo Emerson helped call into being the “Young America” movement, a loose affiliation of political radicals who called for the annexation of Cuba and who believed in America’s Manifest Destiny. Opposed to the “Old Fogies” in the Democratic Party, adherents to the movement such as George Sanders and John O’Sullivan sought a sympathetic presidential candidate who could defeat the anti-expansionist Whigs. Yet even as they worked to influence national debates and public policy regarding overseas expansionism, Sanders and O’Sullivan favored the spread of American power through private as much as public interventions. Sanders, editor of *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, lobbied for the repeal of the neutrality laws in order to permit filibusters, or soldiers of fortune, to move against Cuba and Central America.¹ O’Sullivan not only tried to persuade James Polk in 1848 to purchase Cuba from Spain, but also raised money, arms, and men for Narcisco Lopez’s freebooting missions against the island in the early 1850s. Ever the optimist in his early addresses, Emerson imagined young Americans willingly enlisting themselves in “new moral causes”²; the United States, imbued with a generosity arising from Nature, would become the next melioristic agent of social and political progress around the world. If Emerson imagined a gentle America, the supporters of manifest destiny favored supremacy over beneficence, and warped the philosopher’s exuberant optimism into violent imperialism.

The conflict between idealism and adventurism, between the desire to improve the human condition and the desire to take the land, wealth, and even life

of Indians, or Mexicans, or Central Americans, represents a powerful, persistent contradiction in U.S. culture. Emerson embodies this paradoxical condition: even as *Nature* (1836) embedded the idea, as Eric Cheyfitz has argued (and as I shall return to below), of the “imperial self” in American culture, the transcendentalist favored abolition, protested the displacement of the Cherokee from their ancestral lands, and opposed, albeit timidly, war with Mexico.³ He saw the American assuming leadership of the world, but couldn’t see that such a position might result in the subjugation of those—to take up Conrad’s famous formulation—“who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves.”⁴ Emerson, however unwittingly, did his small part in fostering the filibustering missions of the 1850s; he made available—to philosophers, poets, and freebooters alike—an elegant rhetoric and belief in the power of the American self.

In lines that must have thrilled Sanders and O’Sullivan, the philosopher suggested that where “official government” fails to act, America must rely upon “the increasing disposition of private adventurers to assume its fallen functions.”⁵ If Emerson’s contributions to the discourses of manifest destiny provided an intellectual pedigree for O’Sullivan and other Young Americans, we can locate traces of his work in the writings of the most successful of all American mercenaries, William Walker. A filibusterer against Mexico and Nicaragua, the Tennessean may never have believed in Emerson’s visionary arguments, but like many of his freebooting contemporaries, he disguised his more naked ambitions in a noble, even philosophical rhetoric. Like Sanders and O’Sullivan, Walker represents the energies and language of American idealism bent and twisted into empire-building.

Walker deforms Emersonian beneficence, and I focus here not only on his adventures and writings, but also on two of his subsequent surfacings in American literature before the Spanish-American War. From among the filibusters of the age—Aaron Burr, José Carvajal, Narcisco López, Henry A. Crabb, John Quitman, Count Gaston Raousset-Boulbon, to name only a few—I concentrate on Walker not only because Bret Harte, in *The Crusade of the Excelsior* (1887), and Richard Harding Davis, in *Soldiers of Fortune* (1897), in part base their narratives on the freebooter’s exploits, but also because these two romances dramatize the conflict between idealism and adventurism in American culture. Harte, writing within living memory of the filibuster’s missions, criticizes Walker’s military imperialism, but endorses what he sees as a more polite and potentially efficacious form of economic imperialism tempered by a modest, liberal agenda of good works. *Crusade* acknowledges American rapacity even as it valorizes a much toned-down version of Emerson’s belief in a generous spirit. Davis, writing just before the Spanish-American War, celebrates American military and economic prowess, and portrays Latin Americans as politically corrupt, economically ineffectual and inefficient, and in need of American guidance. Echoing arguments set forth in publications like the *Democratic Review* as early as 1847,⁶ Davis imagines a hard-edged benevolence where the natural intelligence and industry of the

American make conquering foreign lands an easy matter. In Davis' romance, the young, conquering hero must secure U.S. economic interests, and if that should prove to help Latin Americans along the way, no harm done: altruism and freebooting become strangely alike.

The notion of contradictory, intertwined impulses in the culture has long been a focus in American studies. In *People of Paradox* (1972), for example, Michael Kammen investigates cultural "biformities," or "a pair of correlative things, a paradoxical coupling of opposites,"⁷ and argues "that denizens of these United States and their forebears have been unusually and profoundly perplexed by ambivalence and contradictory pulls."⁸ Americans, Kammen asserts, "have historically tended to ignore their biformities, for they feel that inconsistency is a bad thing."⁹ In *Knowledge for What?* (1939), to take an earlier example, Robert S. Lynd explores how individuals and societies hold onto comforting assumptions that help us make sense of social, political, and historical complexities: "The deeply fissured surface of our American culture is padded smooth with this soft amalgam of assumptions and their various symbolic expressions; so much so that most of us tend to pass over the surface most of the time unaware of the relative solidities and insubstantialities of the several areas."¹⁰ Lynd offers lists of the contradictions in American culture, and taking up his format, we could supplement his inventory of competing assumptions: The United States, as the Good Neighbor, seeks to help other nations. *But*: We may, at times, intervene in the affairs of other nations to secure our own interests. Emerson, Walker, Harte, and Davis embody or explore the notion of an American imperial self and the contradictory impulses that have shaped American energies toward its neighbors since the earliest days of the nation; their texts, read together, chart the shifting valences of these impulses—and the attitudes toward them—from the era of manifest destiny to the spectacular creation of an overseas empire in the late 1890s.

William Who?

Although most Americanists know some of the details of Walker's peculiar career path, he remains a somewhat obscure figure, and nearly everyone who writes about him sooner or later complains that no one remembers him. Davis, to take a turn-of-the-century example, grouses that "it is safe to say that to members of the younger generation the name of William Walker conveys absolutely nothing. To them, as a name, 'William Walker' awakens no pride of race or country."¹¹ American screen writer Rudy Wurlitzer, a more contemporary example, offers the same complaint, but in much more scathing and ironic tones: "He has been forgotten in the history books as only a loser can be, and it has been left for the movies to resurrect and identify Walker as an American 'hero.'"¹² Despite such claims, Walker has resurfaced in poems, stories, romances, novels, and films under his own name or in slight disguise on numerous occasions in the past century only to be forgotten or ignored again and again. He shimmers in and

out of historical and cultural focus, and bears out the maxim that what we forget reveals as much about ourselves as what we choose to remember. Americans remember Walker for precisely the same reason we forget him; he points, unabashedly, toward those dimensions of American life that many would rather not confront: the desire to impose our political, military, and economic will upon less powerful nations. Writers and film makers have tended to remember him in order to celebrate or vilify American power; readers and viewers have tended to take up those works that laud American power (such as Davis' *Soldiers*), and ignore those that criticize its excesses (such as Harte's *Crusade*).

Who was Walker? Born in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1824, he was raised in a strict Calvinist home by his father, James Walker, a Scotsman who had inherited a store from an uncle, and his mother, Mary Norvell, the daughter of a wealthy, slave-owning Kentucky family. As a boy, he formed an especially close bond with his mother, reading Sir Walter Scott books aloud to her after she became an invalid; Albert Z. Carr speculates that Walker, like many Southern youth of his day, suffered from what Mark Twain dubbed "The Sir Walter disease," and that these courtly romances influenced his eventual dreams of empire.¹³ A delicate, almost feminine child, he showed considerable intellectual promise: he graduated summa cum laude from the University of Nashville at the age of fourteen, and received his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1843 when he was only nineteen; at twenty-one, he returned from Europe after receiving additional medical training in Paris, Heidelberg, London, and Edinburgh, but instead of going into practice, he studied to be a lawyer and was admitted to the Louisiana bar at age twenty-three. From there, he turned to journalism, and then to adventurism. In 1853, Walker led forty-five men into Mexico with the idea of conquering Lower California and Sonora; after capturing La Paz and Ensenada, and without setting foot in Sonora, he declared the creation of the "Republic of Sonora," and named himself president. After this *coup de plume*—to borrow Charles H. Brown's phrase—Walker and his nearly bootless army were chased back across the American border, the venture a failure.

From Mexico, the would-be Napoleon set his sights on Nicaragua. In 1854, he became interested in a "colonization scheme" proposed by Francisco Castellón, the leader of the Democrats of León. The Democrats, one of the two dominant, long-feuding factions in Nicaraguan politics, had lost the 1853 presidential election to Fruto Chamorro, leader of the Legitimists of Granada. The Democrats charged the Legitimists with fraud, and immediately began to plan a coup from their stronghold in León, the most populous and prosperous city in Nicaragua. Castellón wanted "the renowned Walker" to raise an army of Americans to aid their cause. "Colonization" in turn offered Walker a means to circumvent the American neutrality laws, and with fifty-eight men whom he dubbed "The Immortals," he landed at Realejo on the Pacific coast in June 1855.¹⁴ Walker promptly ignored Castellón's military authority over the Americans and eventually captured Granada, a city on the northern edge of Lake Nicaragua and the seat

of the Legitimist government. Through a series of negotiations, deceptions, secret financial deals, and executions, he called a presidential election and became the *de facto* dictator of Nicaragua in July 1856. In May 1857, the combined forces of Central America (along with mercenaries funded by Walker's American enemy, Cornelius Vanderbilt) forced the filibuster from the isthmus. In 1860, attempting a return to power, Walker was captured and executed on a beach in Honduras.¹⁵

Talented, intelligent, eloquent, enmeshed in the discourses of manifest destiny and the expansionist currents of his day, Walker gave himself over to dreams of empire. Where he could have been one of Emerson's gifted young Americans, he became more and more enamored, as I shall explore below in more detail, with the idea of his mission in the world, with his own greatness. He wanted to be a Caesar; he stands as an early (though by no means singular) example of American imperial desires unleashed. A soldier of fortune operating outside the bounds of U.S. law, Walker nonetheless represents American energies that, by the end of the nineteenth century, would be transformed into fully sanctioned and popularly supported efforts to wrest land and resources away from brown-skinned peoples in Cuba, the Philippines, Hawaii, and elsewhere.

Emerson, O'Sullivan, and Walker

Emerson: agent of empire. The claim seems almost ironic; we perhaps most often think of him as a gentle intellectual possessed of a fervent belief in the promise of the New World. This generous spirit pervades his early writings, including "The Young American." Returning to themes first sounded in 1836, he asserts a teleological force at work in the world:

Men are narrow and selfish, but Genius or Destiny is not narrow, but beneficent. It is not discovered in their calculated and voluntary activity, but in what befalls, with or without design. Only what is inevitable interests us, and it turns out that love and good are inevitable, and in the course of things. That Genius has infused itself into nature. It indicates itself by a small excess of good, a small balance in brute facts always favorable to the side of reason.¹⁶

This passage bespeaks a remarkable utopianism, where human affairs move steadily toward "love and good." The United States, he suggests, cannot help but advance civilization. Nature, "the noblest engineer," tempers the desires of individuals and the state, and ensures that the United States will act in the interest of others: "That serene Power interposes the check upon the caprices and officiousness of our wills."¹⁷ The romantic acknowledges the brutishness of life, but foresees—and hopes to call into being—an America dedicated to altruism rather than rapacity. In his early essays, he helps author the narrative of American idealism.

Emerson's call, in "The Young American," for the United States to lead the world, contains an implicit theory of language and action. With the conviction that Nature guides the nation toward beneficence, the philosopher calls upon young Americans to step forward:

In every age of the world, there has been a leading nation, one of a more generous sentiment, whose eminent citizens were willing to stand for the interests of general justice and humanity, at the risk of being called, by the men of the moment, chimerical and fantastic. Which should be that nation but these States? Which should lead that movement, if not New England? Who should lead the leaders, but the Young American?¹⁸

Although Emerson acknowledges in *Nature's* chapter on "Language" that "the sovereignty of ideas is broken up by the prevalence of secondary desires, the desire of riches, of pleasure, of power, and of praise,"¹⁹ here he suggests that however corruptible language may be, the force of Genius works to invest language with the proper meanings, to freight words with appropriate courses of action. If he suspected that the key phrase, "the interests of general justice and humanity," could be twisted into whatever anyone wanted it to mean, he more firmly hoped that Destiny would lead Americans to discover, occasion by occasion, the true interests of justice and humanity and to act upon them.

Language, as Eric Cheyfitz reads Emerson, serves as the means to power for the American imperial self. In *The Poetics of Imperialism* (1997), Cheyfitz "reads *The Tempest* as a prologue to American literature" and argues that "in *Nature*, as in *The Tempest*, the imperial figure that conquers time and space is not technology but eloquence"²⁰: "The sense conveyed in the passages from both *Nature* and *The Tempest* is of an imperial figure who acts absolutely, that is, immediately, or without resistance, on the world, even though this figure needs the world as words to express, or mediate, his thoughts."²¹ Emerson imagines an American self who, like Prospero, can dominate the world through willpower and words. If he called upon Young Americans to lead the world in 1844, as early as 1836 he envisioned a self that could do just that.²² Emerson's theories of language, eloquence, and the self capture the contradictory impulses in his philosophy: even as he contends that right actions flow from right language for the betterment of humanity, he sees a colossus of the self that uses the technology of language to impose its will upon others. Despite Emerson's faith in Nature and Genius, we have no guarantee that every "caprice of thought"²³ that enters the mind will serve the interests of humanity.

The freebooters very much believed in eloquence as a means to sway public opinion and to shape material practice. O'Sullivan, in the famous 1845 article where he coined the phrase "manifest destiny," piles clause upon clause in his attack on foreign powers for hampering the growth of America:

Why, were other reasoning wanting, in favor of now elevating this question of the reception of Texas into the Union, out of the lower region of our past part dissensions, up to its proper level of a high and broad nationality, it is surely to be found, found abundantly, in the manner in which other nations have undertaken to intrude themselves into it, between U.S. and the proper parties to the case, in a spirit of hostile interference against U.S., for the avowed object of thwarting our policy and hampering our power, limiting our greatness and checking the fulfillment of our *manifest destiny* to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions. (emphasis added)²⁴

The language of “manifest” and “Providence,” if playing upon the Protestant sentiments of O’Sullivan’s readers, nonetheless conveys in less exuberant tones Emerson’s belief that Americans had a responsibility and a right to lead the world. And, once again, the nation’s land and fate are intimately connected. Although O’Sullivan cannot match Emerson’s prose—he runs his sentence into the very earth the philosopher claimed as the source of eloquence—he suggests that big ideas require a sentence structure to match. O’Sullivan strives for verbal virtuosity, but shares little of Emerson’s sense of benevolence; he wants the land, the power, the empire.

Eloquence and Emersonian mysticism particularly show themselves in what historians take to be Walker’s statement of purpose. In an 1849 article in the *New Orleans Crescent*, the soon-to-be adventurer imagines a fervent, inspired self that must act. And, like Emerson and O’Sullivan, Walker relies on a dramatic language to convey his belief in the power of special individuals:

Unless a man believes that there is something great for him to do, he can do nothing great. Hence so many of the captains and reformers of the world have relied on fate and the stars. A great idea springs up in a man’s soul; it agitates his whole being, transports him from the ignorant present and makes him feel the future in a moment. It is natural for a man so possessed to conceive that he is a special agent for working out in practice the thought that has been revealed to him. . . . Why should such a revelation be made to him, why should he be enabled to perceive what is hidden to others—if not that he should carry it into practice?²⁵

For Walker, a spirit lifts the self out of the moment and unveils the individual’s role in the future course of civilization. The self, so visited, must act: in Emerson, O’Sullivan, and Walker, a Godly or transcendental (or, indeed, worldly and

rapacious) imperative heats the self, forces it to act. In *Nature*, Emerson speaks a similar language: the poet-orator becomes “conscious of a universal soul within or behind his individual life,” and experiences one of those rare “examples of Reason’s momentary grasp of the scepter; the exertions of a power which exists not in time or space, but an instantaneous in-streaming causing power.”²⁶ Where Emerson sees Christ and “the achievements of a principle, as in religious and political revolutions, and in abolition of the Slave-trade,”²⁷ Walker sees the invasion of Mexico, war against the Apaches, and the conquest of Nicaragua. If we don’t know whether Walker read Emerson, we can at least say that Walker, imbued with an imperialist sense of self, fancied himself a philosopher-warrior doing precisely what Emerson called on “adventurers” to do: find some “forlorn” people and make yourself their “king.”

The Would-Be Emperor of the Isthmus

In a few short years, Emerson’s utopianism, his belief in America’s beneficent destiny, transmogrified, at least under the direction of Walker and other filibusters, into colonization schemes, greed, and murder. The freebooters perverted the philosopher’s call for Americans to lead the world into calls for Americans to seize the lands, resources, and lives of Cubans and Central Americans. Where Emerson held that Americans should lead by example and through works of generosity, Walker held that Americans should intervene directly in the affairs of others, and rule through power. In “The Young American,” Emerson, somewhat tongue-in-cheek in his phrasing, suggests that able citizens have a responsibility to lead: “Where is he who seeing a thousand men useless and unhappy, and making the whole region forlorn by their inaction, and conscious himself of possessing the faculty they want, does not hear his call to go and be their king?”²⁸ As part of the address, Emerson analyzes the transition from feudalism to early capitalism, and by no means advocates an American monarchism; rather, he means “king” to signify “leader,” and believes in meritocratic society. In contrast, Walker meant to be a king in the most literal sense: he wanted to be emperor of someplace, anyplace outside of the United States. As early as the 1850s, Emerson and Walker represent what has endured as a structuring tension in American culture: ethereal idealism battling unabashed desires for power.

In Walker’s memoir, *The War in Nicaragua* (1860), the Emersonian language of “nature” becomes the imperialist language of “regeneration.” After his expulsion from Central America in 1857, Walker returned to the United States, and began to organize other filibustering ventures. During this period of relative inactivity, he not only wrote his memoir in part as a commercial for his next expedition, but also as a defense of his isthmian intervention. As he argues, he went to Nicaragua seeking “the regeneration of that part of Central America”²⁹: “From the day the Americans landed at Realejo dates a new epoch, not only for Nicaragua, but for all Central America. Thenceforth it was impossible for the

worn-out societies of those countries to evade or escape the changes the new elements were to work in their domestic as well as in their political organization.”³⁰ Deploying the organic metaphor of “regeneration,” Walker casts himself and his men as agents of civilization, as a spiritual and ethical force on a mission to strip away the corruption that Spanish and *mestizo* culture, Catholicism, and feudalism have wreaked in the isthmus. “Regeneration” sounds noble, and natural; once again, the language of imperialism echoes not only Calvinism, but also romanticism. Further, the “new elements” means not only new to Nicaragua, but new to the world, and these young Americans have a responsibility to revitalize the soil and people of Central America.

In citing “regeneration” as part of his rationale for intervention, Walker drew upon the discourses of the era. Walt Whitman, in a June 6, 1846, editorial in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, supported the annexation of “several of the departments of Mexico” and cast the U.S. mission in strikingly organic terms: “The scope of our government, (like the most sublime principles of Nature), is such that it can readily fit itself, and extend itself, to almost any extent, and to interests and circumstances the most widely different.”³¹ For Whitman—who knew O’Sullivan and other of the New York Young Americans—the United States had a responsibility to liberate, regenerate, and populate parts of Mexico:

We love to indulge in thoughts of the future extent and power of this Republic—because with its increase is the increase of human happiness and liberty.—Therefore we hope that the United States will keep a fast grip on California. What has the miserable, inefficient Mexico—with her superstition, her burlesque upon freedom, her actual tyranny by the few over the many—what has she to do with the great mission of peopling the New World with a noble race? Be it ours, to achieve that mission!³²

In 1847, other American newspapers such as the New York *Herald* also called for the United States to invade Mexico: “The universal Yankee nation can regenerate and disenthral the people of Mexico in a few years; and we believe it is a part of our destiny to civilize that beautiful country.”³³ In the colonial imagination, the self must act upon the Mexican for the Mexican’s benefit; luckily for Americans, the task of liberating Mexicans from the tyranny of their government, language, and culture will prove to be less than arduous.³⁴

As Albert K. Weinberg puts it in *Manifest Destiny* (1935), an important early study of U.S. imperialism, “Expansionist ideology changed during the strange tutelage of a war from an almost Nietzschean self-realization to a quasi-altruism. The moral inspiration of the expansionists during the war [with Mexico] was derived from the conception of a religious duty to regenerate the unfortunate people of the enemy country by bringing them into the life-giving shrine of

American democracy.”³⁵ Walker, as a journalist well versed in the politics and rhetoric of his day, drew upon this popular argument to justify his isthmian adventures.³⁶

If Emerson attempts to describe the logic of beneficence at work in the world, the tendency toward “love and good,” Walker concerns himself in *The War in Nicaragua* with the logic of imperialism, the tendency toward greed and power. The key term in his colonization scheme is “requisite.” The perfect word, it implies the imperative of the colonial venture: once one step is taken, then the next must also be taken to ensure the success of the first, and so on. For Walker, colonization consists of a series of interlocking decisions that organize the military, political, and economic lives of the self and other. After the Immortals captured Granada and officially opened the way for American colonization, he argued that Americans must immigrate in order that the invaders acquire “the strength *requisite* for the maintenance of their privileges” (emphasis added):

The necessity for the American element to predominate in the government of Nicaragua sprang from the clauses in the treaty of peace [signed at the end of the civil war]. In order to carry out the spirit of that treaty—to secure to the Americans in the service of the Republic the rights guaranteed [sic] to them by the full sovereign power of the State—it was *requisite* to get into the country a force capable of protecting it, not only from domestic but from foreign enemies.³⁷ (emphasis added)

Walker’s logic abounds with the commonplaces of colonialism: the colonial venture is legal and moral; the colonizers must control the government and the military in order to protect the colonized from themselves and from (other) outsiders. With the colonization of Nicaragua well underway, the next step almost goes without saying: “it was necessary for the welfare of the Americans that a new election should be called.”³⁸ Although he makes the faintest gestures toward the interests of the isthmians, beneficence has little to do with Walker’s colonizing project.

With the Immortals in military and political control, Walker took the next “requisite” step and seized control of the nation’s wealth. As president, Walker choreographed a huge land-grab:

The general tendency of these several decrees was the same; they were intended to place a large proportion of the land of the country in the hands of the white race. The military force of the State might, for a time, secure the Americans in the government of the Republic, but in order that their possession of government might be permanent, it was *requisite* for them to hold the land.³⁹ (emphasis added)

The War in Nicaragua serves as a manifesto for the next generation of American colonizers; Walker wanted to tell Americans how to get in on empire-building even as the European powers were dividing up the world among themselves. Set side-by-side, Emerson and Walker represent a powerful, entangled contradiction in American culture: each believed in the power of the American self, each imagined a mystical inspiration for the self's actions, but where the philosopher wanted Americans to help and lead others, the filibuster transformed the colonial ideal of regeneration (already a paternalistic impulse) into a desire to steal from and dominate weaker nations.

If historians can largely agree on the facts of Walker's campaigns, what he was up to cannot be so easily resolved. Many Walkerphiles have a theory about who funded Walker, who he worked for (if he worked for anyone), about what political reorganization of the New World his filibustering sought to achieve. Darwin Teilhet, for example, suggests in his novel, *The Lion's Skin* (1955), that Walker's Nicaraguan venture was part of a southern U.S. states' "secessionist conspiracy": as one character remarks, "What were Walker and his California secesh friends after if not to establish a slave empire in the Caribbean to bulwark the eventual establishment of a separate Southern Confederacy?"⁴⁰ Davis, a keen apologist for Walker, offers a similar theory, but ties it less firmly to the idea of a southern conspiracy: "Throughout [Walker's] brief career one must remember that the spring of all his acts was this dream of an empire where slavery would be recognized."⁴¹ Rather than linking himself to the South, Davis suggests, he set out to found his own empire. Brown, a fine historian of filibustering, avoids speculating on motives and concentrates more on goals: "Walker's grand design was to reunite the five Central America states into a confederacy, but this was a project that would have to wait for the future."⁴² In fiction, essays, and history books, dozens of writers and scholars have attempted to understand Walker's invasions, but we ultimately cannot know what he hoped to achieve in Central America. He exists for us now as a complicated series of textual representations and traces; still, if we cannot know, we can at least speculate.

For my own part, I think Walker wanted to be emperor of anywhere. A narcissism pervades his writing and adventures. In *The War in Nicaragua*, he refers to himself in the third person, modeling his narrative after Caesar's *Commentaries*. Although he presents "General Walker" modestly and unheroically, the freebooter records his last general order to his men before their fall: "Reduced to our present position by the cowardice of some, the incapacity of others, and the treachery of many, the army has yet written a page of American history which it is impossible to forget or erase."⁴³ Walker absolves himself of responsibility for the American defeat, and insists upon his place in history. He still sees himself as a special agent: "He is but a blind reader of the past who has not learned that Providence fits its agents for great designs by trials, and sufferings, and persecutions."⁴⁴ Others have undone him, but this only confirms his elect status; beneath the memoir's quiet tone resides Walker's sense of his own grandeur. He knows

he's destined to achieve something great; he possesses a grand vision of his own imperialist self. He invaded Mexico, and declared himself President of Sonora. When that failed, he conquered Nicaragua (a rather remarkable achievement), and declared himself president. When that failed, he regrouped, sailed for Nicaragua again, but allowed himself to be caught up in a dispute over the Bay Islands off Honduras. He went where opportunity afforded itself; he wanted to write his name in history and believed he could improvise an empire.

If Walker, O'Sullivan, and others wanted to conquer foreign lands, many Americans, for many different reasons, protested American expansionism. In 1846, before the House of Representatives, Charles Goodyear spoke against the Oregon acquisition:

I am aware sir, that a claim in our favor paramount to all others has been set up—that of manifest destiny. It runs thus: God had given to this nation the western continent and fullness thereof. . . . I regretted to hear the sentiment avowed in an American Congress, because it implies a doubt of the validity of our own perfect title, and because it ever has been used to justify every act of wholesale violence and rapine that ever disgraced the history of the world. It is the robber's title; but its record is accompanied by the instructive lesson that it ultimately meets the robber's doom.⁴⁵

Goodyear argued that the United States should develop the lands and resources it already possessed, and avoid future conflicts that would inevitably result from expansion. Henry David Thoreau, in "Civil Disobedience" (1848), decried slavery and the war with Mexico, and called upon Americans to follow his example and "refuse allegiance to the State, to withdraw and stand aloof from it effectually."⁴⁶ And, as Frederick Merk documents in "Dissent in the Mexican War" (1970), different factions of the Northern and Southern Whigs (from the radicals to the moderates to the conservatives and Cotton Whigs) "denounced the war as iniquitous and unconstitutional," but had different motives for doing so.⁴⁷ If we can locate a structuring tension in American culture between those who want to seize the land and resources of non-Americans, and those who want to respect their lives and rights, the desires and goals of the competing voices cannot be reduced to a simple binary. Rather, the myriad forces for and against U.S. imperialism exists on a shifting spectrum, where positions diverge, overlap, intertwine; as Merk notes—to take one example—once war with Mexico began, most Whigs "regularly voted supplies and men for the fighting."⁴⁸

Walker's Literary Resurfacings: Harte and Davis

After his execution, Walker faded quickly from public memory. As Carr argues in part, "the coming of the Civil War, with its new crop of heroes, was no

doubt mainly responsible for the country's readiness to forget him, but there may have been also another, more subtle reason—the way of thinking and feeling for which he stood.”⁴⁹ For Carr, Walker was too Byronic to suit the businessmen of the day, too much a threat to their enterprises abroad; a new form of economic rather than paramilitary imperialism was underway. Despite the dimming of his acclaim, the filibuster has since resurfaced in poems, stories, romances, novels, and films over a dozen times.⁵⁰ Two of these treatments, Bret Harte's *The Crusade of the Excelsior* (1887) and Richard Harding Davis' *Soldiers of Fortune* (1897), draw upon Walker's writings and adventures as a means to examine, critique, and celebrate American imperialism in the period between the Civil War and the imperialist triumph of the Spanish-American War. In these decades, American overseas interventionism (as opposed to continental expansionism) transformed from illegal filibustering to economic imperialism supported by military force to fully sanctioned military campaigns and the annexations of entire nations. Intent upon dramatizing these changes in American attitudes and culture, Harte and Davis cast young Americans as their heroes abroad, and offer them as ideals of the imperialist self. Two early narratives of U.S. imperialism, *Crusade* and *Soldiers* explore the shifting tensions in American society between the desire to act beneficently toward the U.S.' neighbors and the desire to dominate the peoples and lands of the hemisphere.

Among the many literary treatments of Walker's adventures, Harte's and Davis' merit particular consideration. Although Harte has all but fallen off the literary map, in the late 1860s and early 1870s, his local color sketches about California were among the most popular works in American writing. His most famous tales—collected in *The Luck of Roaring Camp, and Other Sketches* (1870)—blend romanticism and realism in their depictions of frontier life, and *Crusade* represents an elaboration of these early stories. With the closing of the frontier, American adventurers cast about for new resources to tap and new lands to conquer; Harte dramatizes this turning of American energies abroad.

Davis in turn knew Harte's work, particularly his Walker tales, and lists the filibuster prominently among Harte's cast of miscreants:

In the days of gold in San Francisco among the “Forty-niners” William Walker was one of the most famous, most picturesque and popular figures. Jack Oakhurst, gambler; Colonel Starburst, duelist; Yuba Bill, stage-coach driver, were his contemporaries. Bret Harte was one of his keenest admirers, and in two of his stories, thinly disguised under a more appealing name, Walker is the hero.⁵¹

The son of novelist Rebecca Harding Davis and one of the most successful journalists and popular writers of his day (*Soldiers* was the third best-selling novel of 1897⁵²), Davis traveled in literary and political circles with Stephen Crane, Jack

London, Jacob Riis, and Teddy Roosevelt, and his stories, travel sketches, and war correspondence appeared in the *New York Sun*, *Scribner's*, and *Harper's Weekly*, among other periodicals. He was so well-known as a writer and as the model for the escort to the famous Gibson girls that Booth Tarkington, speaking for the "college boy of the early nineties," could remark, "we knew his face as we knew the face of the President of the United States, but we infinitely preferred Davis'."⁵³ From his position of cultural prominence, Davis championed U.S. power, and *Soldiers* assured its readers that young Americans could lead the leaders of the world.

In *Crusade*, Harte perceptively identifies and dissects the contradictory impulses in American culture. Although the rather sprawling romance based upon Walker's Sonoran and Nicaraguan campaigns comes relatively late in his career—during the long decline some scholars characterize as his "hack" years—Harte nonetheless recognized the U.S.' evolving pattern of interventionism abroad, and like Emerson, hoped that kindness would moderate power. As Margaret Duckett argues, Harte shows "critical concern for American civilization and the impact of this civilization on other civilizations."⁵⁴ In his effort to explore this impact, he opposes two forms of American engagement with its weaker neighbors with a third: filibustering and economic imperialism stand in opposition to capital expansion tempered by a progressive social agenda. Harte associates each form with different characters aboard the *Excelsior*, a barque bound from New York to San Francisco, and he places his hope in a pair of American lovers, Eleanor Keene and James Hurlstone. He represents the young couple as philanthropic agents of civilization. Since Harte largely reifies his political analysis into plot—he presents his ideas more through the actions of the various characters than through dialogue, intrusive narration, or sustained patterns of metaphoric language—we must follow the various story lines to observe his exploration of the struggle between rapacity and beneficence in U.S. culture.

Harte explores the first form of imperialism, filibustering, through the exploits of Leonidas Bolivar Perkins.⁵⁵ Based in part on Walker and on Simón Bolívar, "The Liberator" of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru from Spanish rule, Perkins attempts to free militarily "certain distressed patriots of Todos Santos,"⁵⁶ inhabitants of a sleepy, fog-enshrouded Mexican port. He has stranded his fellow American travelers in Todos Santos after commandeering the *Excelsior* for a military mission to South America. Soon after liberating "Quinquambo," a confederacy of South American states, Perkins returns to Mexico to save the patriots "from the effete tyranny of the Church and its government."⁵⁷ Like Walker and many other advocates of manifest destiny, Perkins blames the poor conditions in Mexico on an ineffectual ruling class⁵⁸; like Bolívar, he possesses a grand vision of a United Latin America, but champions Yankee beneficence over Latin American self-determination as the means to achieve this greater state. He wants to add Mexico to his confederation, and seemingly cannot resist an occasion to meddle in the affairs of other nations.

Harte portrays Perkins as a charming expert on the problems of imperialism. Like Walker and O'Sullivan, the filibuster relies on eloquence to persuade Americans of the rightness of his missions. The grandness of the imperialist venture, Harte ironically notes, demands an equally grand eloquence. While on board the *Excelsior*, Perkins explains the impact of European colonialism on "the aborigines of the New World": "The modern North American aborigine has not yet got beyond the tribal condition; mingled with Caucasian blood as he is in Mexico and Central America, he is perfectly capable of self-government."⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the "aborigine" has never obtained self-rule because "he has always been oppressed and kept down by the colonists of the Latin races; he has been little better than a slave to his oppressor for the last two centuries."⁶⁰ Perkins rehearses the racist and anti-European arguments of the era, and promises his American ship-mates that he does not seek his own fortune, but rather "the deliverance of one of those oppressed nations" of South America: "Call me a citizen of the world, with a strong leniency toward young and struggling nationalities; a traveler, at home anywhere; a delighted observer of all things, an admirer of brave men, the devoted slave of charming women—and you have, in one word, a passenger of the good ship *Excelsior*."⁶¹ Harte offers Perkins as a sympathetic character—many of the Americans defend him even after he strands them in Mexico—and to achieve this he transforms Walker's unswerving determination to found his own empire into the gentlemanly pursuit of someone else's good. At the same time, even if Harte wishes us to laud Perkins' emancipatory rhetoric, he wants us to reject his methods: filibustering represents a too dramatic and violent intervention into the domestic affairs of less powerful nations.

While we have no direct evidence that Harte read *The War in Nicaragua*—he may only have known of the filibuster's exploits through newspapers and magazines—his portrayal of Perkins nonetheless shows the romancer to be an astute reader of Walker's imperial rhetoric: he analyzes why freebooting, even if undertaken with the best intentions, turns from liberation into conquest. As Perkins explains in the hours before his execution, "Politics and the science of self-government, although dealing with general principles, are apt to be defined by the individual limitations of the enthusiast. What is good for *himself* he too often deems is applicable to the general public, instead of wisely understanding that what is good for *them* must be good for himself."⁶² Harte shows how beneficence and rapacity become entangled, shows how the contradictions in American culture cannot be so easily separated. On the one hand, he credits Perkins for possessing a genuine sense of altruism; on the other, he shows the ability of power to corrupt even the most noble aspirations. *Crusade* envisions an American imperialist self who acts upon his caprices, losing sight of the generous impulses that first set the colossus in motion; Harte suggests that the filibuster became enamored of his own military and political triumphs and thereby failed to accomplish what he set out to do: regenerate the civilization of the isthmus. In this early treatment of the Walker narrative, he offers a balanced, perceptive take on American energies abroad.

In the second form of undesirable imperialism, a group of stranded American businessmen set out to take over Todos Santos' resources and thereby enrich themselves. As in the case of filibustering, Harte points to the rapacity of the individual as the reason for his opposition. Unsure about the nature of events transpiring aboard the *Excelsior*, Mexican officers arrest Brace, Crosby, Banks, and Winslow. Quintessential entrepreneurs, the four quickly scout their "open air prison" for potential business opportunities. "'And I shall have a look at that played-out mine' said Crosby; 'if it's been worked as they work the land, they've left about as much in it as they've taken out.'"⁶³ Not only do the businessmen think they work harder and smarter than people of color, they also conspire with local radicals and Perkins to overthrow the government of Todos Santos. Like Walker during his Nicaraguan venture, they want to control the region's resources and labor. Motivated by greed, they appear much worse than Perkins: they seek only their own good. Perkins and his co-conspirators represent Americans succumbing to what Emerson characterizes as "secondary desires," the desire for wealth, power, and fame.

If Harte condemns what he sees as truculent forms of imperialism, he somewhat reluctantly sees advantages to an American presence in Latin America. In the face of much more aggressive forms of intercession, the novel articulates what the right sort of American interventionism should be: business alongside beneficence. As his models, he offers Keene and Hurlstone, two Americans who set up schools for Indian and Mexican children, and win the admiration of the clerical rulers of Todos Santos through these and other good works. As the novel progresses, Harte transforms them from lovelorn travelers into romance versions of Emerson's young Americans.

After the failed revolution, the good-natured and passionate duo receive an invitation to remain in Todos Santos and take over the businesses started by the American conspirators. As superior products of a superior culture, the couple successfully import American enterprise *and* social reform into Mexico: "Hurlstone and Miss Keene alone were invited to remain; but, on later representations, the council graciously included Richard Keene [Eleanor's brother] in the invitation, with the concession of the right to work the mines and control the ranches he and Hurlstone had purchased from their proscribed countrymen."⁶⁴ And, as the narrator goes on to remark, "Although the port of Todos Santos was henceforth open to all commerce, the firm of Hurlstone & Keene long retained the monopoly of trade, and was a recognized power of intelligent civilization and honest progress on the Pacific Coast."⁶⁵ *Crusade* imagines a polite form of U.S. imperialism; as Gary Scharnhorst remarks, "the solution Harte envisions to the related problems of economic exploitation and social unrest is typically mild—benign modernization through commercial trade, a kind of Better BUSINESS code. . . ."⁶⁶ A mild anti-imperialist, Harte settles on this seemingly pro-imperialist ending as a means to acknowledge the economic and military facts of his day even as he might wish to reform them: U.S. economic exploitation of

Central America was already well underway when he wrote *Crusade*.

Even as Harte conjures a romantic, genteel world of tea-sipping, poetry-reading conquistadors, he keeps a half-closed eye on events transpiring abroad. In the 1850s, U.S. firms constructed a transisthmian railroad in Panama and the U.S. government furnished troops to protect it from attacks by Panamanian independence forces; in the same years, in addition to operating the isthmian Accessory Transit Company, Cornelius Vanderbilt began negotiations with both the English and American governments for the construction of a canal across Nicaragua. Between 1865 and 1873, United States forces intervened in Panama three times to protect U.S. commercial ventures—this list of interventions could go on, but these few examples describe the form of economic imperialism supported by military power preferred by U.S. administrations after the Civil War. As secretary of state James G. Blaine put it, the United States sought the “annexation of trade,” not “the annexation of territory.”⁶⁷ Harte, writing at a time when U.S.-built infrastructures were opening Central America to the establishment of U.S.-owned banana and coffee plantations, dramatizes what he sees as the too-invasive nature of the American imperialism. *Crusade* rewrites Walker’s exploits as a means to tilt, however tentatively, against the excesses of U.S. power; at the same time, it strives for a degree of optimism about American culture and assures its readers that there are better ways to engage lesser nations.

If *Crusade* worries over American power, Davis’ *Soldiers* celebrates the U.S.’ impending ascendancy in the hemisphere. A bestseller, the romance played a part in fostering an American overseas empire. In *The Reporter Who Would Be King* (1992), Arthur Lubow makes the rather remarkable claim that “*Soldiers* was so widely read that, in some unquantifiable way, it doubtless helped prime the national psyche for the collective adventure in Cuba.”⁶⁸ If Lubow perhaps overstates matters, the romance’s popularity at least suggests that Davis put into narrative form what many Americans already thought: namely, that the United States should take a more aggressive role overseas. Davis firmly believed in the American imperialist self, and he imagines a young American, Robert Clay, who can easily interpose his will upon a Latin American country. Clay, the swashbuckling hero of *Soldiers*, doesn’t worry too much about beneficence; like his historical progenitor, he’s more concerned with American wealth and power.

Davis, following Harte, bases Clay’s adventures in part on Walker’s exploits. If Davis never left behind a note identifying the freebooter as a source for his narrative, we can still assert with some confidence that he had the Tennessean in mind. We know, for example, that he read Harte, and in *Captain Macklin* (1902), the romance that followed *Soldiers*, Davis explicitly bases the action on the Nicaraguan campaign. Moreover, he celebrates Walker in *Three Gringos in Venezuela and Central America* (1896), a travelogue, and again in *Real Soldiers of Fortune* (1906), a non-fiction book on mercenaries. The romancer greatly admired men of action, and the filibuster figures as a ghost in *Soldiers* in at least two ways: like Walker, Clay’s father dies by execution at the end of a failed

freebooting venture; like Walker, Clay is a well-educated, rhetorically adept mercenary. Walker's story lurks within the romance, and in as much as *Soldiers* did its small part to fuel the war with Spain, Walker lurks within the spirit of adventurism that officially called the American empire into being. For Davis, the Walker narrative serves as the perfect narrative to fantasize about an American *imperium*.

Davis links Clay to the filibuster through an absent father "fighting for a lost cause."⁶⁹ As Clay tearfully explains to his American love interest, "My father, Miss Hope . . . was a filibuster, and went out on the 'Virginus' to help free Cuba, and was shot, against a stone wall. We never knew where he was buried."⁷⁰ Clay's father dies as Walker died and was buried in an unmarked grave; further, the reference to Cuba not only directs the reader to contextualize *Soldiers* in terms of American interests in the "Pearl of the Antilles," but also associates the father with O'Sullivan, López, Quitman, and other freebooters against the island. Davis provides another trace of Walker's adventures through a yacht, the *Vesta*, that Clay makes use of during the counter-revolution: the freebooter sailed for Nicaragua in 1855 aboard a brig of the same name. Clay stands metaphorically as the son of an unnamed, but alluded to father: William Walker. Like his long-lost father, Clay seeks his own good over the good of the Olanchoans.

For Davis, idealism and beneficence serve as an imperative for American economic and military interventionism, but finally amounts to little more than a veneer over a more fundamental argument in favor of pursuing American interests. In *Three Gringos*, Davis argues that the United States must intervene in Latin American nations because Central and South Americans cannot understand government nor economic development. As he remarks, "the value of stability in government is something they cannot be made to understand"⁷¹: "The Central American citizen is no more fit for a republican form of government than he is for an arctic expedition, and what he needs is to have a protectorate established over him, either by the United States or by another power; it does not matter which, so long as it leaves the Nicaragua Canal in our hands."⁷² For Davis, beneficence and imperialism amount to much the same thing: we must intervene on the Latin American's behalf because it suits us economically and geo-politically. *Soldiers*, in turn, dramatizes these beliefs in narrative form. Clay finds the government of Olancho corrupt, but he's not so much interested in establishing a fair regime in its place as he is in protecting the American-owned iron ore mine he supervises. As he remarks, "I've got our concession to look after."⁷³

Where Emerson, Walker, and O'Sullivan viewed eloquence as a primary weapon of the imperial self, Clay relies on a baser form of rhetorical manipulation. He does not so much speak eloquently as tell others what to say. With the coup brewing, Clay instructs his foreman on what to say to the mine workers—who are also government soldiers—in order to secure their loyalty when hostilities break out: he tells him "to point out to them how much better their condition had been since they had entered the mines, and to promise them an increase of

wages if they remained faithful to Mr. Langham's interests, and a small pension to any one who might be injured 'from any cause whatsoever' while serving him."⁷⁴ He goes on to say, "Tell them, if they are loyal, they can live in their shacks rent free hereafter. . . . They are always asking for that. It's a cheap generosity . . . because we've never been able to collect rent from any of them."⁷⁵ Davis' young American tells his subordinates what to say while he concentrates on protecting U.S. investments; he has no qualms about interfering in the politics of Olancho, nor has he more than passing concern for the welfare of his workers. After the counter-coup succeeds, Clay installs the pro-American General Rojas in the presidency, thereby securing the mines safety and heralding actual U.S. policy throughout Central America and the Caribbean basin throughout the twentieth-century: imperialism through domestic proxies.

Davis offers Clay as his ideal of the imperial American self. Young, handsome, effective—an Errol Flynn before Errol Flynn—the mercenary-turned-engineer analyzes the dangers to U.S. investments and easily imposes his will upon the Olanchoans. Davis imagines young Americans poised to rule the hemisphere, and perhaps the world. The imperial self need only exert a little effort, and like Clay, they will find themselves casually uttering something like, "I guess I am the Dictator of Olancho."⁷⁶ Though Clay doesn't really want to be dictator—he'd rather get married and be an engineer—he could be. As Amy Kaplan argues, "swashbuckling romances about knights errant offer a cognitive and libidinal map of U.S. geo-politics during the shift from continental conquest to overseas empire."⁷⁷ In *Soldiers*, Kaplan suggests, Davis creates Clay as "the ideal American man": "fantasies indeed, [novels like *Soldiers*] enact the desire for infinite expansion without colonial annexation, total control through the abdication of political rule, the disembodiment of national power from geographical boundaries."⁷⁸ I agree with much of Kaplan's argument, but *Soldiers* does stand as a fantasy of "colonial annexation"; although Clay declines to be dictator, his refusal gestures toward what remains absent. He cannot annex Olancho, even in a romance, because the United States has not yet begun to construct its overseas empire. Davis, standing on the historical brink of the empire, projects American hegemony throughout the Caribbean basin and beyond, and awaits real young Americans to step forward and take power abroad.

Conclusion

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Young American exists both as a literary construct and a real world phenomenon. Originally a figure on paper, the Young American found his way into Cuba, Mexico, and Central America, but not always in the ways Emerson hoped or anticipated. The philosopher offered the figure as a metaphor for the growing population, wealth, and moral and political power of the young nation, and he forecast a time when the United States would lead other nations. If he literally called on young Americans to consider what roles they could take in the service of weaker nations and peoples, he believed in good

will and acts of kindness. O'Sullivan and other advocates of manifest destiny took up Emerson's language and lobbied for the annexation of overseas territories. Other truly young Americans followed, stepping forward to lead the nation in the construction of empires. Walker was twenty-nine when he led a force against Mexico, and thirty-one when he sailed against Nicaragua. Teddy Roosevelt, an ardent believer in the power of the American imperialist self, was a mere thirty-nine when he organized the Rough Riders and sailed for Cuba. Walker and Roosevelt both wrote about their campaigns—which in turn doubtlessly inspired other adventurers—and both have been the subjects of numerous poems, stories, novels, and films.⁷⁹ The Young American flows off the page and back again, frequently in the context of different forms of U.S. imperialism.

The study of this movement between literary texts and historical event allows us to explore the dreams and fantasies that bleed into material practices; in turn, attention to historical contexts permits us to read American texts in greater depth while filling in what remains a missing piece of American cultural history: the early texts of empire. Even as Emerson's "Young American" address serves as a call to action, it also expresses the bard's wish for the future course of the United States. He wants to call into being a beneficent nation, a people dedicated not only to their own good, but to the good of humankind—at least in the Western hemisphere—as well. In more dramatic terms, romances such as *Crusade* and *Soldiers* not only express the arguments and wishes of their individual authors, but to some degree, the beliefs and fantasies of their readers. Harte and Davis strike me as a perfect pair to consider: Davis knew Harte's work, and they both rewrite the Walker narrative. More importantly, these two early novels of imperialism capture competing desires in American life; Harte hopes for a few good works alongside commercial expansion, while Davis unapologetically longs for an empire. These dream works explore a range of arguments for and against the *imperium* circulating in the culture, and inform our understanding of the beliefs and fantasies that compel the agents and critics of expansionism. The writings, arguments, and actions of filibusters and dissidents, set alongside the literary texts, furnish us with a portrait of the evolving languages, fantasies, and course of empire between the Civil War and the Spanish-American War. They also allow us to explore the structuring and ongoing—and always in flux—bifurcations of American culture.

Notes

My thanks to the editors and readers at *American Studies* for their generous and thorough contributions to this project.

1. While we typically think of "filibusters" as senators attempting to block legislation through endless debate—we see Jimmy Stewart as Jefferson Smith, in Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), struggling on the senate floor to thwart a treacherous land deal—the term also applies to mercenaries who raise private armies to invade foreign lands. A *filibuster* (*filibustero* in Spanish), from the Dutch, *vrijbouter*, or freebooter, refers to pirates or piratical adventurers; the term took hold in the U.S. between 1850 and 1860 to describe soldiers of fortune such as Walker who sought, in contravention of international law, to conquer states in Central America and the West Indies.

2. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Young American," *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays & Lectures* (New York, 1983), 228.

3. See, for example, Emerson's open letter to President Martin Van Buren (April 23, 1838), printed (in slightly different versions) in the *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, May 14, 1838) and the *Yeoman's Gazette* (Concord, May 19, 1838), protesting the removal of the Cherokee. On August 4, 1844, in Concord, Emerson also delivered an address attacking slavery, "On Emancipation in the West Indies."

4. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Ross C. Murfin (1902, rpt. New York, 1996).

5. Emerson, "The Young American," 225.

6. See "Occupation of Mexico," *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* XXI, November 1847, 381. In an unsigned editorial, the writer argues that U.S. forces should occupy—but not annex—Mexico and start the long process of "regenerating" the Mexicans:

Great as is our reverence for the people at large, and respectful as all ought to be to their opinions, we may look in vain among the populace of the Mexican states, for that activity of intellect and vigilant intelligence necessary to those who would govern themselves. A people who are too proverbially indolent to pursue industrial employments, and to dishonestly envious to permit others to enjoy the fruit of their own industry, would make unprofitable and dangerous inmates of our political family.

Davis, as we will see below, makes similar arguments in his non-fiction and fiction of the 1890s.

7. Michael Kammen, *People of Paradox: An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American Civilization* (New York, 1972), 89.

8. *Ibid.*, 107.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Robert S. Lynd, *Knowledge for What?* (Princeton, 1939), 58.

11. Richard Harding Davis, "William Walker, The King of the Filibusters," *Real Soldiers of Fortune* (New York, 1912), 147.

12. Rudy Wurlitzer, "Introduction," *Walker*, ed. Rudy Wurlitzer (New York, 1987), 3. Several other writers make observations similar to Davis' and Wurlitzer's. For example, in a long narrative poem, "Walker in Nicaragua," *Joaquin Miller's Poems* Vol. 2 (San Francisco, 1909), 3, Joaquin Miller sounds the same lament: "I sing this man who sought man's good,/ Who fought for peace, unselfish fought,/ Who fell silent and murmured not./ This man whom no man understood./ This great man so well-nigh forgot. . ." (emphasis added) In his study of "filibustery," *Destiny and Glory* (New York, 1957), 142, Edward S. Wallace writes, "Considering the amount of screaming publicity which he received in his time, William Walker is an astonishingly unknown man today."

13. Albert Z. Carr, *The World and William Walker* (New York, 1963), 3.

14. The Immortals, also known as the American Phalanx (*La Falange Americana*), was a force of mercenaries, some of whom had served with Walker during his Sonoran campaign. Others were European soldiers of fortune, would-be American adventurers disappointed at the closing of the frontier, and failed forty-niners casting about for other forms of gold.

15. I have assembled this sketch of Walker's education and career from a number of biographies and histories, among them: William O. Scroggs, *Filibusters and Financiers* (New York, 1916); Achmed Abdullah and T. Compton Pakenham, *Dreamers of Empire* (New York, 1929); Lawrence Greene, *The Filibuster* (Indianapolis, 1937); Carr, *The World and William Walker*; and, Charles H. Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny* (Chapel Hill, 1980). One of the most important primary sources remains Walker's memoir, *The War in Nicaragua* (Mobile, 1860; reprinted Detroit, 1971).

16. Emerson, "The Young American," 217.

17. *Ibid.*, 218.

18. *Ibid.*, 226.

19. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays & Lectures* (New York, 1983): 22.

20. Eric Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism* Expanded Edition (Philadelphia, 1997), 31.

21. *Ibid.*, 28.

22. Quentin Anderson, in *The Imperial Self* (New York, 1971), 6, likewise explores Emerson's radical sense of self; for the philosopher, "the personal God was one person too many for the soul which sought its authority in an exploration of its own consciousness." Like Cheyfitz, Anderson suggests that Emerson planted the idea of the imperial self in American culture: "We must be clear about the kind of effect we attribute to Emerson and Emersonianism before 1850: it was a highly important symptom, and what it portended was centrally exhibited later, in industrial America following the Civil War" (56).

23. Emerson, "Nature," 35.

24. John L. O'Sullivan, "Annexation," *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, XVII, July 1845, 5.

25. Quoted in Carr, *The World and William Walker*, 37.
26. Emerson, "Nature," 47.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Emerson, "The Young American," 225.
29. Walker, *War*, 25.
30. *Ibid.*, 34.
31. Walt Whitman, "Annexation," *The Gathering of the Forces*, ed. Cleveland Rodgers and John Black, 2 vols. (New York, 1920), I, 242-243.
32. Walt Whitman, "Our Territory on the Pacific," *The Gathering of the Forces*, ed. Cleveland Rodgers and John Black, 2 vols. (New York, 1920), I, 246-247.
33. Quoted in Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States 1492-Present Revised* and Updated Edition (New York, 1995), 152.
34. If Walker's language of "regeneration" drew upon the organic and natural imagery of American romanticism, it also collided with another, even more powerful discourse that emerged in the same decade: evolution. The subtitle to Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859)—"Or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life"—sounds like a filibuster slogan, and as Albert K. Weinberg (*Manifest Destiny*, Baltimore, 1935, 190-223) points out, the rhetoric of "natural growth" had long been a part of the pro-expansionist argument. Darwin's theories found a sympathetic audience among those interested in annexing Cuba and other lands to add to the republic, and we can hear echoes of "natural selection" in *The War in Nicaragua* (1860): "That which you ignorantly call 'Filibusterism' is not the offspring of hasty passions or ill-regulated desire; it is the fruit of the sure, unerring instincts which act in accordance with laws as old as creation" (429-430).
35. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny*, 161.
36. Walker worked for the New Orleans *Crescent* (1848-50), a nominally Whig paper that supported the annexation of Cuba, but not war with Spain. A colleague of his on the *Crescent* for a brief time: Walt Whitman.
37. Walker, *War*, 156.
38. *Ibid.*, 222.
39. *Ibid.*, 253-254.
40. Darwin Teilhet, *The Lion's Skin* (New York, 1955), 293-294.
41. Davis, "William Walker, The King of the Filibusters," 154.
42. Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 322.
43. Walker, *War*, 428.
44. *Ibid.*, 430.
45. Charles Goodyear, "The Oregon Question: The Speech of Mr. C. Goodyear," *The Congressional Globe Appendix*, First Session, Twenty-Ninth Congress, New Series 1845-6 (Washington, 1846), 110.
46. Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, ed. Owen Thomas (New York, 1966), 239.
47. Frederick Merk, "Dissent in the Mexican War," *Dissent in Three American Wars* (Cambridge, 1970), 45.
48. *Ibid.*, 45.
49. Carr, *The World and William Walker*, 272.
50. For other literary and cinematic treatments of the Walker narrative see, for example, Joaquin Miller, "With Walker in Nicaragua" (1871; narrative poem), Bret Harte, "Peter Schroeder" (1879; short story), Ernesto Cardenal, "Con Walker en Nicaragua" (1950; poems), Robert Houston, *The Nation Thief* (1984; novel), and Alex Cox, *Walker* (1987; film).
51. Davis, "William Walker, The King of the Filibusters," 148.
52. Alice Payne Hackett, *70 Years of Best Sellers 1895-1965* (New York, 1967), 93.
53. Booth Tarkington, "Richard Harding Davis," *Van Bibber and Others. The Novels and Stories of Richard Harding Davis* Crossroads Edition, vol. I (New York, 1916), ix.
54. Margaret Duckett, "The 'Crusade' of a Nineteenth-Century Liberal," *Tennessee Studies in Literature*, IV (1959), 109.
55. For a much more sustained, direct fictional treatment of Bolívar's life, see Gabriel García Márquez's masterful, comic novel, *The General in His Labyrinth*.
56. Bret Harte, *The Crusade of the Excelsior, The Writings of Bret Harte*, Vol. VI (Boston, 1896), 214. The reference to "Todos Santos" reinforces Perkins' connection to Walker: after the raid on La Paz during his Mexican adventure, the filibuster sailed north and declared Ensenada de Todos Santos the capital of his newly formed "republic."
57. *Ibid.*
58. In *The War in Nicaragua*, in the process of explaining and defending his first filibustering mission, Walker argues that the Mexican government could not manage Lower California: "the skulking form of the half-clothed Indian, relapsing into savagism from which the holy fathers had rescued him, all declared the sort of protection Mexico had given to the persons as well as the property

of the Peninsula" (23). He knows who must step in and set matters right: "On none more immediately than on the American people, did the duty devolve of relieving the frontier from the cruelties of savage war" (21).

59. Harte, *Crusade*, 14.
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*, 60.
62. *Ibid.*, 242.
63. *Ibid.*, 108.
64. *Ibid.*, 245.
65. *Ibid.*, 245-246.
66. Gary Scharnhorst, *Bret Harte* (New York, 1992), 105.
67. Quoted in Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions* Expanded Edition (New York, 1984), 33.
68. Arthur Lubow, *The Reporter Who Would be King* (New York, 1992), 124.
69. Richard Harding Davis, *Soldiers of Fortune* (New York, 1897), 96.
70. *Ibid.*, 170.
71. Richard Harding Davis, *Three Gringos in Venezuela and Central America* (New York, 1896), 143.
72. *Ibid.*, 146.
73. Davis, *Soldiers*, 194.
74. *Ibid.*, 240.
75. *Ibid.*
76. *Ibid.*, 333.
77. Amy Kaplan, "Romancing the Empire: The Embodiment of American Masculinity in the Popular Historical Novel of the 1890's," *American Literary History* (Winter 1990) Vol. 2, No. 4, 661.
78. *Ibid.*, 671.
79. For literary treatments of Roosevelt's adventures see, for example, Will Henry, *San Juan Hill* (1962; novel), Noel B. Gerson, *TR* (1970; novel), and Gore Vidal, *Empire* (1987; novel).