



## CHAPTER I

### PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION

FROM that Treaty of Paris in 1783 whereby our Independence was formally acknowledged by Great Britain, to that other Treaty of Paris in 1898 which terminated the War with Spain, the territory of the United States, with one notable exception, was increased by the peaceful method of negotiation and purchase. Viewing the series of operations which began with the colonization of Texas and closed with the Gadsden Purchase as a single transaction, this one exception to the usual mode of procedure—which I call the Conquest of the Southwest—added the largest single increment to the original territory, not even excepting the Louisiana Purchase.

The whole proceeding may be described as



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the story of the spoliation of a weaker power by a stronger, and is the one serious blot upon our national history. The conduct of the United States was wholly indefensible in a large part of the operations about to be discussed, and no truly patriotic citizen can think of it without an abiding sense of shame. Nor can our mortification be diminished by our recognition of the fact that in many particulars the conduct of Mexico during the period was an affront to civilization.

There are three methods of accounting for the Conquest of the Southwest, which is the general name under which I include all of the various acts hereafter to be described. Each of these methods pointedly ignores the others. After much study and a careful consideration of the evidence, I have come to the conclusion that each is in large measure correct. Briefly stated, one cause for the conquest was the desire on the part of the slave-holding states to add new territory to the Union out of which other slave-holding states could be constituted

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from time to time as needed, thus preserving the balance of power as between the slave-holding and the free states.

The second cause was the jealousy, tyranny and misgovernment of the Mexican state of Texas by the Mexican authorities; their refusal to permit the American settlers to enjoy those privileges to which from time immemorial they had been accustomed in England and the United States under the common law; the attempt to keep them under the operation of the Roman or civil law; and the anarchical confusion and instability of the Mexican general government. These brought about the inevitable revolution of Texas against Mexico, in which the sympathy and more material assistance of the United States were freely given to Texas, in violation of international comity, but in conformity to natural relationship. The independence of Texas being assured, thereafter the resulting boundary line on the west was ill defined, and the attempt by the United States, after Texas had been annexed, to de-



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limit its territory by maintaining the extreme Texan claim, naturally produced war.

The third cause is admirably expressed by Theodore Roosevelt, who says, with regard to our encroachments upon the boundaries of neighboring powers, especially beyond the Mississippi and beyond the somewhat indefinite lines of the Louisiana Purchase:

"The general feeling in the West upon this last subject afterward crystallized into what became known as the 'Manifest Destiny' idea, which, reduced to its simplest terms, was: that it was our manifest destiny to swallow up the land of all adjoining nations who were too weak to withstand us; a theory that forthwith obtained immense popularity among all statesmen of easy international morality. . . . Recent historians, for instance, always speak as if our grasping after territory in the Southwest was due solely to the desire of the Southerners to acquire lands out of which to carve new slave-holding States, and as if it was merely a move in the interests of the slave power. This is true enough so far as the motives of Calhoun, Tyler, and the other public leaders of the Gulf and Southern Seaboard States were concerned. But the hearty

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Western support given to the government was due to entirely different causes, the chief among them being the fact that the Westerners honestly believed themselves to be created the heirs of the earth, or at least of so much of it as was known by the name of North America, and were prepared to struggle stoutly for the immediate possession of their heritage."<sup>1</sup>

Thomas H. Benton voiced the popular feeling of his section in these fiery words, quoted by Roosevelt:

"The magnificent valley of the Mississippi is ours, with all its fountains, springs, and floods; and woe to the statesman who shall undertake to surrender one drop of its water, one inch of its soil to any foreign power."

To the mind of Benton, who was accustomed to point westward and say, "There is the East, there is India," the Mississippi Valley doubtless transcended the Rocky Mountains and extended to the Pacific.

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<sup>1</sup> American Statesmen, vol. xxiii. Thomas H. Benton, by Theodore Roosevelt.



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For this spoliation, the United States has been condemned absolutely on the one hand, while on the other, with equal zeal, it has been entirely justified. It does not seem to have occurred to any one that all these motives for action worked together to bring about the end achieved. And it is undoubtedly true that, while the preponderance of wrong-doing was with us, we were not entirely to blame, for there were some extenuating circumstances.

It is absolutely certain—indeed, it is nowhere authoritatively denied, but on the contrary it has been affirmed many times by the people of the South, through their representatives, that they did most earnestly desire to acquire territory south of the line of the Missouri Compromise out of which to create slave-holding states; that their desire for the annexation of Texas was based primarily upon that possibility; that they prosecuted the war with Mexico for the avowed purpose of securing the territory between 36° 30' (the line of the compromise) and the Rio Grande, clear to the Pacific,

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in order that they might have some place of overflow for their slave-holding population, to counterbalance the possible free states in the upper portion of the Louisiana Purchase in which the bulk of that vast increment lay.<sup>1</sup>

It is equally obvious that such vacillation, such misgovernment, such exploitation of the public for private ends, as was exhibited by the Mexican government and the successive adventurers who assumed the Dictatorship during the earlier years of Texan history, inevitably would have produced a revolution among a people trained under the free and orderly democratic institutions of America, as the Texans had been. This revolution would have

<sup>1</sup> The solidarity and the political domination of the South in our affairs for the first eighty years of our national existence is one of the most remarkable facts in our history—an *Imperium in Imperio*! The solidarity still remains; if a charge is brought against an Alabamian, for instance, the whole South is affronted and resentful! When a New Yorker or a Chicagoan is faulted, the North or the West do not feel that they have been insulted. It will be good for the South, and the country, when the solidarity is broken; but that will never be, I fear, until the negro question is settled definitely in some way. The political domination is ended long since.



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occurred entirely independent of the question of slavery. The Texan Republic must inevitably have been established if there had not been a slave in the United States, although the action of the Mexican government—one of the few good things to its credit, by the way—on the question of slavery, undoubtedly greatly increased the irritation of Texans. Nor could the United States be justly blamed for the subsequent annexation of the Texan territory, even though the prime reason for annexation was the possible creation of slave states, *if the United States had stopped with annexation*. As a matter of fact, the possession of Texas whetted the desire of the United States for the acquisition of further territory which, in pursuance of that “Manifest Destiny,” we took iniquitous and unjust means to acquire, the indefinite boundary line and certain shadowy and fictitious claims furnishing the necessary pretext. The utter helplessness of Mexico after the war, rendered the seizure of California easy, and that without any pretext at all.

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In the whole transaction, from a legal and moral standpoint, Mexico occupied the correct position, but—and it is a singular commentary on that fact—Mexico had largely forfeited her claim to consideration by the hideous crimes and excesses of which she had been guilty, and the frightful punishments she had inflicted upon her victims, as well as by her failure to establish a stable and efficient government. I am sure that in the minds of the people of the United States there was a contempt for her vacillation only surpassed by the positive hatreds engendered by her unspeakable cruelties in Texas. For the former we might have had charity; to the true patriots among her citizens—and there were not a few—we might, we should, have given the help and encouragement a weak and struggling country seeking independence and stability has a right to expect from a great, a free, and an enlightened people.

But all these considerations were lost sight of in a righteous indignation over the butchery



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of the Alamo and the massacre at Goliad; and it was felt that Mexico should be punished, and punished she accordingly was—by conquest and robbery. In other words, the gross misconduct of Mexico had to a large extent obscured the moral issue, and by many of our citizens the issue therefore was not seen clearly. That is one of the extenuating circumstances to which I have alluded, and perhaps the principal one. A nation may have a righteous cause and yet forfeit the good opinion of its neighbors by unrighteous conduct in its endeavor to maintain it.

Nor may it be gainsaid, in the light of subsequent developments, that it was vastly better for humanity in general and for the conquered section in particular, that it should become a part of the United States rather than remain a part of Mexico. Mexico probably never could have administered and developed California and the West as we have done. And Mexico, now a homogeneous state south of the Rio Grande, has probably become

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much better able to work out her destiny without the lost territory—just as Spain really profited by the loss of her rebellious colonies in 1898.

All this, however, does not condone our method of acquiring the territory in question.