Britain and the annexation of Texas, with particular reference to the slavery question (1836--1845)

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BRITAIN AND THE ANNEXATION OF TEXAS
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE SLAVERY QUESTION
(1836-1845)

by

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CHAPTER I

SLAVERY BELIEFS OF BRITAIN AND AMERICA
Before Texas was admitted to the Union in 1846 as the twenty-eighth state, manifold controversies over its admission had taken place. These controversies were not merely sectional, nor did they simply involve the United States and Mexico. They also reached across the seas and brought Great Britain into sharp discord with the United States. While there were many issues at stake in the conflict between Great Britain and the United States over Texas, one of the most important issues was that of slavery. During the years of the independence of the Republic of Texas, an ideological struggle took place between these two nations, in many instances centering around the slavery question. This struggle brought into play the diplomatic forces of both nations in an attempt to shape the future destiny of Texas. What interests were at stake for Great Britain and the United States? What part did the slavery question play in the diplomacy concerning Texas? How was the diplomatic struggle waged? Did Great Britain intervene in the domestic affairs of the parties concerned? What was the nature of the intervention?

The respective attitudes of Great Britain and the United States toward slavery, prior to the revolution of Texas and its annexation to the United States, help explain the conflict that these two nations faced during the years 1836-1845. The attitude of Great Britain toward slavery grew out of her involvement in the traffic of slaves from Africa to her colonies in the new world. This trade became very successful under the Royal African Company, chartered by Charles II, which carried on a growing trade for a half century. Because of the
large profits gained, the English merchants sought to secure a virtual monopoly of the trade. Because the British navy had control of the seas, a large part of the slave trade was assured. The signing of the Asiento with Spain in 1713 gave Britain and her merchants the consent of Spain to supply the Spanish colonies with slaves for the next thirty years.\(^1\) The agreement itself failed, but the trade was carried on by any British merchant who desired to do so by paying a small duty. This form of slave trade lasted until the first decade of the nineteenth century.

The British, therefore, must be held responsible for transporting most of the Negroes brought to the Americas in pre-revolutionary times. While it is impossible to know the exact number of slaves transported, scholars have estimated the number to be between 40,000 to 100,000 each year until the American Revolution, at which time the trade came to a near standstill.\(^2\)

This traffic in human beings was not without its opponents in England during the eighteenth century. The Anglican Church and its missionaries became increasingly aware of the evils inherent in the trade and were asking for reform on religious grounds. Other religious and humanitarian groups began to demand restrictions or reforms for various reasons. As the latter part of the century drew to a close, these attacks on the slave trade came with greater frequency. The proponents, in turn, rose to the defense of the trade and cited its


advantages to the British economy. The leaders of the defense were mainly the merchants and planters connected with the British West Indies where the economy was based on slave labor.

The political drive for the abolition of the slave trade gathered momentum as the nineteenth century opened. A national conscience had been awakened in Britain and it would not be satisfied until the trade was ended. The abolition of the slave trade by Denmark in 1802 and the short-lived abolition by France in 1794 no doubt sparked the movement in England. The issue of slavery progressively overshadowed all other British colonial questions in the first third of the nineteenth century.³

The man who probably did the most to abolish the slave trade in Britain was William Wilberforce, a member of Parliament. Wilberforce belonged to a group called the "Clapham Sect", which derived its name from the community of Clapham. The group was composed of evangelical churchmen, and they provided the driving leadership in the anti-slavery movement.⁴

In 1807 the abolitionists registered a political and moral victory when Parliament passed a law abolishing the slave trade. To enforce the law, it was made a criminal offense in 1811. Wilberforce and the other leaders of the anti-slavery movement were to be disappointed, however, as they saw other nations continue the trade. They had hoped that the law of 1807 would not only end the slave trade, but would eventually

⁴A. L. Burt, The British Empire, p. 188.
lead to emancipation. This could not become a reality as long as other nations persisted in carrying on the trade. The British Parliament, however powerful, could not legislate for the world, but it could—and did—incorporate the abolition of the slave trade as a part of its foreign policy and elevated it to a position of international importance. The Tory government began a series of treaties with other powers to block the trade. At the Congress of Vienna in 1814 the British statesmen were untiring in their efforts to secure the abolition of the slave trade. 5

The British rightly felt that there would be new impetus of the trade following the Napoleonic War. Public feeling was running high in Britain and there was a demand that the government use their strong international position to secure universal abolition. During the early summer of 1814 there were 772 petitions bearing almost a million signatures addressed to the House of Commons, encouraging the government to take a strong stand on this matter. 6 The next decade saw a concerted effort on the part of the government, not only to gain international approval of abolition, but also international enforcement by the right of search and visit, which would enable British warships to board and search ships belonging to other nations. However, this turned out to be an impossible goal, for many nations, fearing an ulterior motive on the part of the British, would not consent. The slave trade continued to bring African Negroes to American shores. Her foremost opponent in these matters was her former colony and twice-tested foe, the United

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States.

Britain assumed the leadership of an international crusade against the institution of slavery. In January of 1823, the Anti-Slavery Society was organized in London. Wilberforce, again the champion, was now joined by Thomas Buxton, the parliamentary leader in the cause of abolition. The first plan advanced by Buxton was one of gradual emancipation, but as this process became long and drawn out it was changed to one of immediate freedom for the slaves. There were bitter fights between the contestants. There were threats of revolution in the West Indies and talk of their joining the United States. Actually, the defendants of slavery were fighting a losing cause, particularly after Grey came to power in 1832. In 1833, one year after the passing of the Reform Bill, the abolition of slavery in the British possessions became a reality. The planters were to receive compensation for the loss of their slaves, and a system of apprenticeship was set up to soften their loss of labor and property. Britain would again be defied in her quest for abolition on a world-wide scale, and once again her foremost opponent would be the United States, especially the Southern states.

The majority of the slaves transported to the Western hemisphere were taken to the Southern colonies where the climate and the mode of agriculture were suited to slavery. The slaves made possible the rise of the plantation system on which the economy of the South was based.


8 The apprenticeship system was a complete failure and was abandoned in 1838.
This system which grew in the southern part of the eastern seaboard was also carried westward by its advocates until it had spread into the southern part of the Mississippi Valley.

Despite the general acceptance of both slave-trade and slavery, there were some dissenting voices among the colonists. Most opposition came from the Quakers who protested on religious principles. During the period leading to the American Revolution, the strong emphasis placed on personal liberties influenced the abolition-minded. Immediately following the Revolution, ten of the thirteen original states prohibited the slave trade, and seven had abolished or were to abolish slavery.9

The first important federal action on the question of slavery came during the Constitutional Convention in 1787. By the time the Convention ended the delegates approved an article that restricted the Federal Government from passing any law against the slave trade until 1808. The article came under fire by some Southern conferees, but at this time their defense of slavery was weak, and the article was passed. This article led to the passage of a law prohibiting the slave trade when the time limit was near. President Jefferson, in a message to Congress on December 2, 1806, recommended that action be taken on such a law. The next day Senator Bradley of Vermont introduced a bill in the Senate which became the Act of March 2, 1807. This act, which made slave trade illegal for American merchants, said nothing about the institution of slavery itself.10

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10W. E. DuBois, Slave Trade, p. 95
Though the South voiced opposition to this measure, it did nothing to reverse the trend of the times. In fact, between 1790 and 1820, the apathetic attitude of the slave holders was in marked contrast to their aggressive defense of slavery in later decades. After 1820, however, the attitude of the South decidedly changed to their "positive good theory." This can be attributed to the fact that through inventions like the cotton gin and the power loom, cotton was now a very profitable venture. The large plantation slave system had now gained a secure position and the South had become the chief producer of raw cotton. The arguments in the defense of slavery now increased in number and fervor. Every imaginable defense was raised, including the theory that American slavery was a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophetic curse on Canaan (Genesis IX: 20-27).

Armed with these arguments, the South approved of the continuation of the slave trade even though it was now against federal law. The law was openly broken by American ships that carried on the trade. The Federal Government attempted to suppress the trade, but its apathy was very evident in the lax enforcement of the slave trade act. The administration could not be completely blamed for this laxity since very little money had been appropriated by Congress to provide for the necessary men and ships that effective enforcement would take. The British proposal (involving the right of search and visit) to help in the suppression of the trade was also turned down. Any slave trade ship, regardless of nationality, was then completely protected from

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outside powers by sailing under the American flag.

A strong sectional controversy now emerged between the North and South as to the evils of the institution of slavery. The North was split in its attitudes on the subject due to economic reasons. Many of the Northerners confessed that slavery was evil, but believed that if the South benefitted economically, the whole country would benefit. It was also well known that many of the ships involved in the illegal importation of slaves belonged to New England merchants. The majority of the Northern populace, however, was against slavery and agitated for its reform or termination. The South, on the other hand, was well united in its defense of the institution that they considered the backbone of their economy. It was their firm belief that without slavery, and an adequate supply of slaves, their whole way of life would be destroyed.\textsuperscript{12}

A concomitant conflict was also being waged at this time between the Federal and State Governments in the matter of states' rights. The South maintained that the Federal Government had no right to interfere in a matter that was, according to a strict interpretation of the Constitution, a matter for the states to decide. It was now alleged that any legislation on slavery was, therefore, a right reserved for the states. This fight was very apparent in the controversy waged over

\textsuperscript{12}Kenneth Stamp's Peculiar Instition gives a good account of the pros and cons of the evils of slavery. He also advances the theory that the slave holders were themselves enslaved by the institution. Because of this, and the rising cost of slavery, the institution was slowly dying out.
the admission of Missouri to the Union.\textsuperscript{13}

During the second quarter of the nineteenth century the United States presented a very complex picture to the rest of the world. On the one hand, the Federal Government had outlawed the slave trade, but on the other hand, it appeared to condone it through its lack of enforcement. The North was far from united in its stand on the issue and was unable to make much headway towards abolishing slavery or the slave trade. The South, in contrast, seemed firmly entrenched in its beliefs and wanted the world to know it.

The attitudes of Great Britain and the United States on slavery, consequently, appeared in sharp contrast prior to the conflict over the annexation of Texas. Great Britain, through its abolition of the slave trade (1807) and then slavery (1833) had become the self-appointed but recognized international leader for universal emancipation. There is no doubt that she desired to rid the world of slavery. Ample proof of this were her actions to ask, bribe, or coerce nations to give up the slave trade. Her leading statesmen readily admitted this desire for the complete abolition of slavery. "Great Britain," Aberdeen, the British Foreign Secretary, stated, "desires, and is constantly exerting herself to procure the general abolition of slavery through the world."\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13}Missouri wished to enter the union as a slave state, but was prevented from doing so until Maine was admitted as a free state. In addition to this, slavery would be forbidden in the rest of the Louisiana Purchase territory north of 36°30'. The Missouri Compromise was then followed by the Webster-Hayne debates in 1830 in which the South maintained that the states had final authority over all matters that directly affected them or their citizens.

\textsuperscript{14}Samuel Flagg Bemis, \textit{A Diplomatic History of the United States} (New York, 1947), p. 228.
The United States, in contrast, seemed to stand as the principal defender in the cause of slavery. She would not enforce her slave trade law, nor would she permit the British navy to assist her in its enforcement. American ships now appeared to be the greatest carriers of the slave trade, and many of the slaves were being transported to the southern part of the United States where slavery was held in highest esteem.

Great Britain and the United States, because of their opposite viewpoints on slavery, would soon be in conflict over Texas, the rebellious province of Mexico. Many questions were raised in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Why did the conflict occur? Was the issue important enough to cause men to contemplate war? If so, were the interests of each nation enough to justify such thinking? To some, there was no question about the magnitude of the conflict. "The Texas question," to quote one author, "linked with that of Oregon in the Democratic platform of 1844, had far wider ramifications. It assumed, in fact, the dignity of a world problem, for it involved not merely the United States, Texas and Mexico, but Great Britain and France as well. The efforts of these two great European powers to prevent the annexation of Texas to the United States constitutes one of the most interesting and important chapters in the international politics of that day.\(^\text{15}\)

CHAPTER II

THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE AND RECOGNITION
In 1821 Texas was largely an unsettled part of the Mexican nation. At that time, this territory which lay on the southwest border of the United States was inhabited by a few Catholic missionaries and Spanish landlords. It was only natural that settlers from the United States, moving West as they had been doing for many years, would eventually come to the borders of Texas and seek admission. Many of these settlers were Americans in search of more land. In 1822 Steven Austin secured permission from the Mexican government to carry out a plan which permitted American settlers to enter Texas. Austin was granted a large amount of land in Texas for the express purpose of settling this land with American immigrants. At this time the Mexican government was very much in favor of settling this unpopulated province to the north; it meant that the land would be developed and additional revenue would be gained.

The Mexicans, however, set up certain conditions that these settlers would have to abide by upon settling in the province of Texas. They were obliged to swear allegiance to the Mexican government. New immigrants were expected to become members of the Catholic Church. The settlers were willing to do this, since it seemed to be a small price to pay for the lands they would receive. Though these conditions would loom larger in a few years, the lure of cheap land brought a rush of settlers from the southern United States. Many were small farmers, but some were the large plantation owners from the Southern states whose lands had been exhausted in the production of cotton.

As the years went by, the Mexican authorities rightly anticipated
that their free land policy in Texas was a mixed blessing. They began to seriously wonder if they could hold on to their province of Texas. Because of their own unstable government, which had been plagued by political upheavals since its inception, they had been neglecting Texas throughout the years. The Texans, in fact, had been governing themselves more and more; this engendered a spirit of independence. The Mexicans could easily see other problems which would become factors in their sovereignty over the Texas province. The Texans retained their ties with the United States rather than assuming new ones with their adopted country. Since they were Americans, they would continue to live in the way in which they had been accustomed. They could not forget the freedoms they enjoyed under the Constitution of the United States. Therefore, the Texans continued to identify themselves with their mother-country. They sent their children to schools in the United States rather than in Mexico. They carried on their trade with the United States; shipping goods to the United States was easier and more profitable than to Mexico City, eight hundred miles away. They continued to buy their supplies from New Orleans rather than from Mexican merchants. Their religious differences led them to openly defy the Mexican law which allowed only the Roman Catholic Church, the state church of Mexico, to exist in Texas.

It was only a matter of time before the Mexican government would pass restrictive measures against the province of Texas. In the late 1820's and early 1830's, it adopted a "get-tough policy" and passed many laws designed to preserve their jurisdiction over the Texans. One law proclaimed that no more settlers from the United States could come into Texas. Another prohibited bringing slaves to Texas. This was a
blow to the Texan cotton planters who depended on their slave labor. Another law demanded a tax on all goods coming into Texas seaports. Texans felt that this was intended to discourage them from buying in the United States. Furthermore, after Mexican soldiers were stationed in Texas and forts were erected at important points, many American settlers felt that they were being spied upon. They feared they would soon lose all the rights they had under the Mexican government.

As these laws became known in Texas, rumblings started for a movement of independence from Mexico. Steven Austin took it upon himself to go to Mexico City and iron out the differences between the government and the province of Texas. He was imprisoned in Mexico City by the dictatorial president, Santa Anna, and by the time he got back to Texas the movement for independence was well on its way.

Texas proclaimed her independence on March 2, 1836. The subsequent struggle did not last long. Santa Anna went north with his army to crush the revolt, and after two successes at the Battle of the Alamo and Golliad, he was defeated at the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21, 1836. His army was completely routed, and Santa Anna himself was taken prisoner. Only after signing a document that gave Texas her independence was the defeated dictator released. Mexico did not intend to live up to this document, and she would never formally recognize the independence of Texas.

At the time of the revolt in 1836, the Anglo-American population east of the Nueces River was approximately thirty thousand, plus some five thousand Negro slaves.¹ This was a small population for a nation

¹S. F. Bemis, Diplomatic History, p. 218.
that would now have to fight an even greater fight than that of the revolution from Mexico. The Texans realized that in order to become a full-fledged nation, they must be recognized by other world powers. This recognition would give them not only the prestige of a full-fledged nation, but would also enable them to seek the financial help they desperately needed after the revolution from Mexico.

The nation from whom they first sought recognition was the United States. The Texans were soon to be disappointed, however, for they found that the land of their birth was in no hurry to grant them the recognition that they so desired. It would be almost a year from the date the Texans declared their independence until the United States formally recognized them as a nation. The Texans themselves believed that the United States would rapidly grant them the recognition which they desired since their population was composed largely of former Americans. The Mexican authorities also thought that the United States would grant Texas recognition.

The government of the United States, under the administration of President Andrew Jackson, did not want to risk offending Mexico by recognizing Texas before it was sure that the Texans could retain the independence that they had so recently gained. The Mexicans had made it known that recognition, or annexation which they feared more, would be a cause for war against the United States. In truth, the government of the United States had suffered a minor embarrassment over the Texan fight for independence. When the revolution had started, many Americans, primarily from the Southern and Western states, had volunteered to fight for Texas and ventured to Texas for the express purpose of helping that province gain her independence, a situation which Mexico
City disapproved of. To the latter it appeared that the United States conspired to take Texas from them. Therefore, instant recognition on the part of the United States would make it appear that the Mexicans were right in their suspicions.

American abolitionists also argued against the recognition of Texas. They knew only too well that there were slaves in Texas, and that the Texans would want to keep these slaves, for they were very much a part of their economy. They were positive that if the country of Texas would ever become a state it would enter the Union as a slave state. They could be sure of this, since the Texan constitution forbade the emancipation of slaves. In fact, the importation of additional slaves was legal in Texas. Free Negroes were not allowed to reside in Texas without the approval of the Texan Congress.²

The abolitionists of the North, then, found themselves in agreement with the Mexican government's contention that there was a great plot in the United States behind the revolution. They believed that the slave holders had conspired to settle Texas, revolt, annex it to the United States, and make it another slave state. In the opinion of many abolitionists, Andrew Jackson himself was at the head of this "slaveocracy" plot. His agent in Texas was supposedly Sam Houston. While it is doubtful that Andrew Jackson was party to such a scheme, rumors to that effect spread. Perhaps this was why Andrew Jackson felt that he should not push for the recognition of Texas. Such action on his part would only lay foundation to the rumor.³

³S. F. Bemis, Diplomatic History, p. 224.
The Northern states of the United States were also against the recognition of Texas, not on the purely humanitarian grounds of slavery, but because politically they feared that they would lose the lead they now held in the Congress of the United States. At this time the North had a majority in Congress; as long as they held this majority, they could control the reins of United States legislation. The North, along with the abolitionists, realized that if Texas were ever to become a part of the United States, the huge territory covered by Texas could easily be divided into several states, all of which would become future slave states. With these four or five prospective states, the Northern sectionalists would loose the majority they now enjoyed.

But recognition could not be put off indefinitely because there were parties in the United States that favored this recognition. The slave states of the South, for the express purpose of gaining Texas as a slave state, exerted a great deal of pressure for the admission of Texas to the Union. There were also pressures from many Northerners who had relatives or friends in Texas and felt a strong kinship toward Texas for this reason. Because of this they wanted to at least recognize, not necessarily annex, Texas.

Other factors also explain how the Texas Republic finally gained the recognition of the United States. It was rumored that in order to satisfy British business men who held Mexican bonds, Mexico was getting ready to sell Texas to England. This, of course, would not be tolerated by the South, and even the North would not want any such interference by an outside power. In order to verify this rumor, Stevenson, the American minister to England, sounded out Palmerston on the matter. The latter said that Mexico had applied indirectly for mediation, but that
England would not interfere. His government also approved the neutral attitude of the United States. Thus, even though this rumor seemed to be without fact, it still had its effect on the American public and the administration.  

President Jackson, in the center of the controversy, was deluged by reasons for and against the recognition of Texas. Individuals, as well as national groups, made their feelings known. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in Tennessee, for example, wrote to President Jackson, stating that if the war between Mexico and Texas continued, many American volunteers would go to Texas to fight and would probably move right into Mexico itself. Then Mexico might appeal to England, who, pursuing somewhat the same policy as in India, might gain control of Mexico, the Gulf, and the mouth of the Mississippi. This, he felt, was a reason for recognizing Texas immediately.

At first, in spite of these pressures, Jackson did not want to recognize Texan independence. But when on March 1, 1837, the Senate resolved that Texas should be recognized, he was in favor of it. Fears of British interference had convinced Jackson that if the Texans were put off much longer, they might turn to some other foreign nation. Perhaps it would be England, perhaps it would not, but England would have to be regarded as the principal enemy as far as Texas was concerned. Jackson felt that Texas might have to yield its exclusive

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1Samuel Flagg Bemis (ed.), The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy (New York, 1928), IV, 324.

2Catron to Jackson, June 8, 1836, Library of Congress, Jackson Papers, noted in Justin H. Smith, The Annexation of Texas (New York, 1941), pp. 53-54.
commercial concessions to Great Britain, primarily in the field of cotton, and Texas might become so entangled in her foreign relations that she would not be suitable for annexation at a later date. The recognition was complete when a chargé d'affaires was sent to Texas on March 7, 1837.

The Texans had now made their first move in being recognized as a nation of the world. They did not stop here, however, for most Texans still hoped that their nation would be annexed to the United States. In fact, the Texan representative in Washington soon set about a plan for this annexation when he moved that Texas be annexed in August, 1837. This proposal was turned down.

The arguments against annexation of Texas to the United States were similar to those against the recognition of Texas. Many people feared that annexation would provoke a war with Mexico. The Northern states were still against any type of annexation that would increase the strength of the South. The abolitionists, of course, still kept up the cry that Texas was a slave state and, therefore, could not be admitted to the Union. The leader of the abolitionist movement against the annexation of Texas was John Quincy Adams, who had previously voiced his disapproval of the recognition of Texas. The American Anti-Slavery Society, realizing that the question of annexation would probably be raised by Texas, went ahead in June, 1837, and circulated petitions against annexation, inviting signatures, mostly throughout the North. On September 20, 1837, Adams presented to the House of Representatives twelve petitions and remonstrations against the admission

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*S. F. Bemis, *Diplomatic History*, p. 225.*
of Texas into the Union, and on January 15, 1838, nearly fifty additional petitions were presented on this same matter. Small wonder that the Secretary of State John Forsyth refused any action on annexation at this time.

The Texans, now that they had received recognition by the United States, set about to gain recognition from other world powers. The European power that they most desired recognition from at this time was Great Britain. To achieve this recognition, General Pickney Henderson was sent to Great Britain in June, 1837. On October 13, 1837, he approached Palmerston, the British Foreign Secretary, and asked him to put the recognition of Texas before Parliament. Though doubtful of passage, Palmerston put the question before Parliament, where it failed to pass. Henderson stated the probable reasons for the failure of Parliament to recognize Texas at this time. In the first place, the political situation in Great Britain was precarious for the Melbourne administration. Then, too, English creditors had advanced Mexico a great deal of money since the time that Mexico gained her independence from Spain. It was thought it would be very undesirable at that time to wipe out any friendly relations with Mexico. To them it was more important to favor Mexico than Texas. But the most significant reason for the lack of recognition was the existence of slavery in Texas. Henderson also felt that Palmerston considered it unnecessary to recognize the independence of Texas since the Texans were probably soon to voluntarily surrender their independence. No doubt he referred to the

probable annexation to the United States. Furthermore he felt at that time that by recognizing Texas he would remove an obstacle to the annexation of Texas to the United States; this annexation he did not desire.\(^3\)

After the failure of his mission to receive recognition in Great Britain, Henderson embarked to France. There, in 1839, he secured her recognition of Texas, so that his mission was not a complete failure.

After the failure to gain the recognition of Great Britain in 1838, the Texan government seemed to put it aside during the year 1839. However, in Mexico, the British Minister Richard Pakenham was used by Texas to mediate with Mexico for recognition of Texas. In spite of Pakenham's efforts, Mexico refused to cooperate. Mexico, due to national pride, would not listen to any plan submitted by the Texan emissaries who used Pakenham as a go-between. Pakenham showed that he was in favor of Mexican recognition of Texas even though his own government was against it. He saw that due to the unstable government in Mexico, which was at this time having trouble staying in power, Mexico would never have any chance of reconquering the Texas Republic. All in all, it seemed that in the years 1836-1839 Great Britain was without any large interest in Texas. Her primary concern seemed to be with Mexico.

The next effort of the Texans to secure recognition of their nation by Great Britain came in December, 1839. At this time James Hamilton was chosen for the task. His job in Great Britain was to try

and secure both treaties of recognition and commercial treaties. His mission, like Henderson's, was two-fold. If he failed in Great Britain he would go on to other powers like Belgium and France to secure financial help there. Hamilton made his mission known to Palmerston and then proceeded on to the continent where he attempted to gain commercial backing for Texas.

On October 11, Hamilton wrote to Palmerston that he was authorized to sign a treaty of commerce and navigation if Great Britain would recognize Texan independence. In this letter he put forth many arguments as to why Great Britain should recognize Texas. He stressed the commercial value that Texas could be to Great Britain as a cotton producer. Great Britain's recognition might also induce Mexico to recognize the independence of Texas, and a peace favorable to all would be established. Hamilton also advanced some consequences if Great Britain failed to recognize Texas. Duties on Texan imports and exports would go up, and Texas would have to look elsewhere for help, perhaps indicating the United States.9

On October 18, Palmerston wrote to Hamilton that Great Britain was willing to negotiate their treaty if Texas would at the same time sign a slave trade treaty giving Great Britain the right of search. He stated that this treaty would have to go along with the other treaties required for British recognition of Texas. On November 13, the first treaty of commerce and navigation was signed. On November 14, Palmerston and Hamilton signed the treaty allowing mediation by

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9 Ephraim Adams, British Interests and Activities in Texas (Baltimore, 1910), pp. 52-53.
Great Britain between Mexico and Texas wherein Texas promised to pay one million pounds sterling of the Mexican foreign debt. This would principally go to the English bondholders of Mexican bonds in payment for their loss. The third treaty, signed on November 16, dealt with the suppression of the African slave trade. This provided for a mutual right of search. These treaties were to be ratified within six months, and upon ratification, the British would recognize the independence of the Texas Republic.  

Great Britain was now willing to recognize Texas because she was sure that Mexico could not regain Texas. The main reason, however, was perhaps found in the third treaty, providing for suppression of the African slave trade. Although the anti-slavery feeling in Great Britain had not been running too high since 1835, it had a rebirth in 1840. Because of the anti-slavery feeling, Palmerston felt that he could not offer to grant recognition to Texas unless some concession was made in the matter of slavery. It was also thought that signing such a treaty would help to get the United States to sign a similar slave treaty. This had been a goal of British abolitionists for many years.

Great Britain's recognition of Texas now seemed assured. However, a new issue arose that held up recognition even longer. Hamilton had not been authorized by Texas to grant any concessions as far as the slave trade treaty was concerned. Because of this, he sought a device by which he could get around it. The two treaties concerning

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10 E. Adams, British Interests, p. 59.

commerce and mediation were sent to Texas for ratification by one messenger. The one on slave trade was sent by another. The two treaties (commerce and mediation) were received in Texas and ratified almost immediately. However, the slave trade treaty did not reach Texas until after the Texas Congress had adjourned for that year. Hamilton later claimed that his messenger had gotten sick in New York and therefore was late in reaching Texas. This, then, held up the ratification of all three treaties. Without the ratification of all the treaties, Texas independence would not be recognized by Great Britain.

A great deal of time lapsed before such recognition would take place. During this time lapse, there was a change of government in Great Britain. On August 30, 1841, the Melbourne ministry fell, and the Peel government came to power. Palmerston was replaced by Lord Aberdeen. The leaders of the Peel ministry let things stand as far as Texas was concerned. They let it be known that they would honor the treaties that were signed by the Melbourne ministry, in spite of strong opposition by some members of Parliament. Their objection was that Texas was a slave nation. They feared if free colored people were not permitted to live there, British colored subjects would be endangered if they entered.

It was not until January 22, 1842, that the Texan Congress finally approved the slave trade treaty. With recognition depending on it, the Texans probably felt that they had no choice at this time.

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12E. Adams, British Interests, p. 68.
13Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, LVI (1841), 346.
Hamilton, however, was discredited and told to come home. On June 28, 1842, the treaties became effective and Great Britain finally recognized the independence of the Texas Republic. Captain Charles Elliot was sent to Texas as the chargé d'affaires.

Texas had now been formally recognized by both the United States and Great Britain. Thus far, in spite of strong differences in opinion, a diplomatic conflict between these two nations had not yet erupted. The question of Texan annexation to the United States was to bring these differences in the matter into sharper focus. Great Britain definitely did not want to see Texas become a part of the United States, whereas the United States, though somewhat split on the issue, would seek, and eventually gain, the goal of annexation.
CHAPTER III

BRITISH REASONS FOR KEEPING TEXAS INDEPENDENT
A student of American history might be surprised to find that the British took so much interest in the annexation of Texas. He might wonder to himself why the British concerned themselves with this province of Mexico that had revolted in 1836. After all, Texas was a land far from the British Isles with no British subjects and few economic interests. Many a Briton must have asked, "Where is Texas? To whom does it belong? What value is it?", just as today many Americans did not know the whereabouts and significance of South Viet Nam until the fight against communism there was brought to their attention. Just as Americans may wonder what interests the United States has in South Viet Nam, so the general public in Great Britain probably wondered what interests they had in Texas in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

In 1836 Great Britain was the leading world power. The title "The British Empire" suggested the strength enjoyed by the British. Great Britain had colonies in every hemisphere; a British flag stood on every continent; the Union Jack was evident on every ocean and major sea. Because of this might, Great Britain could not isolate herself from world problems, even those in the remote corners of the globe. She was either directly or indirectly involved, and often had to take sides in most disputes. Most world powers in history have faced similar responsibilities.

Because she had become a great trading nation, Britain was interested in most of the world's markets. During the Napoleonic Wars, Spain had fallen to France in 1808, resulting in the revolt of the
Spanish colonies in the New World. England was quick to take advantage of the trade possibilities offered by these new Latin American countries. To add to her stature, Great Britain had become the financial center of the world; she was quick to lend customers the money needed for commercial growth, which, in turn, increased her trading potentialities. Through this financial help, these countries soon found themselves dependent upon the British. Britain usually enjoyed a great deal of influence in these countries, and she was assured that the bulk of trade offered by them would be handled by British merchants.

Great Britain, a world power, was definitely involved in Latin America. But what did the individual Briton feel? In what way was he personally involved or interested? The British people naturally took different views about the revolt of Texas. These views resulted from a variety of factors such as occupations, religion, politics, economics, etc. The general public of Great Britain probably expressed very little interest at the time of the revolt. After all, what would a revolt in far-away Mexico have to do with them? The business men who were the bondholders of Mexican debt, however, felt a great financial interest in the revolt. The abolitionists of Great Britain, such as the Clapham Sect, undoubtedly wondered what effect this revolt would have upon slavery and the slave trade in Mexico and Texas. As time elapsed and trade with Mexico began to fall off, primarily due to the expense of trying to regain Texas, the groups involved in the trade between Mexico and Great Britain became increasingly concerned. The one factor the

1All trade with foreign countries previous to this time had been restricted by Spain's colonial policy.
majority of the people had in common was a sense of national pride. When it became evident that Texas might be annexed by the United States they wondered what effect this would have on Great Britain's status as a world power. The British reasons against annexation were thus grouped into four major categories: financial interests in Mexico (English bondholders); fear of United States expansion (national pride); commercial interests (trade); and slavery (humanitarian).

Several of these categories were mentioned shortly after the Texas revolution when the attention of the House of Commons was called to the situation in Texas by some of the friends of Mexico. On June 5, 1836, Mr. Barlow Hoy, a member of the House, brought up the question of slavery and slave trade in Texas. He asked if the government had any intention of interfering to check these evils. Two months later, on August 5, he made a motion in the House instructing the government to take such measures as might be necessary to secure the fulfillment of existing treaties with Mexico. His objective was to prevent slavery and the traffic in slaves in the province of Texas. In this speech he emphasized the essential interests of Great Britain in Mexico: first, the large amount of British money invested in Mexican trade; second, the danger of the annexation of Texas by the United States, in which case Great Britain must consider what commercial advantages the latter would gain over England; and third, the probability that slavery would be permanently established in Texas. He felt that Britain possessed the right to interfere in Texas, and asked that the British navy be commissioned to help recover the province of Texas for Mexico.² No

²E. Adams, British Interests, p. 16.
action was taken on the motion at that time as the situation in Texas was still not clear. It showed, however, that the British interests at that time were expressed very soon after the revolt of Texas occurred.

The British bondholders of the Mexican debt first felt the effects of the situation in Texas. These bondholders held close to fifty million dollars of the debt. They feared that if Texas were not recovered by Mexico, a large amount of their money would not be forthcoming. It was only natural that they hoped for a speedy Mexican reconquest of the Texas province.

The fear expressed by Mr. Hoy concerning the advantages the United States would gain over Britain was a real one indeed. The British for many years had watched the United States grow in size, population and influence. They feared that the international balance of power would be shifted to the United States. "The English people," wrote George Bancroft, minister to Great Britain from 1846 to 1849, "are already well aware of the rapid strides of America towards equality in commerce, manufacturing skill and wealth. They therefore look with dread on the series of events which tend to enlarge the sphere of American industry and possessions." This dread of American expansion led to a national jealousy of the United States on the part of the British. Because of the world power that Great Britain enjoyed in the nineteenth century, she looked with apprehension on any increase

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in power by another nation.

The rapid territorial expansion of the United States gave a basis for the apprehensions felt by the British. The first great expansion, which doubled the size of the United States, occurred in 1803 when she bought the Louisiana Purchase from France. Florida was added to the size of the United States in 1819 when it was purchased from Spain. Spain felt at that time that she would rather sell Florida to the United States than lose her to the Americans by other means. The Louisiana Purchase was responsible in part for the Oregon question in which the British were greatly involved during the 1830's and 40's. This territory had been under dispute since 1815 between the United States and Great Britain as to whom it rightfully belonged. With the Texas revolt in 1836, it was feared that Texas would be the next step in American expansion to the West. Many felt that this expansion had to be stopped, and Texas was the place to stop it.

Attempts to halt American expansion at that time were undoubtedly influenced somewhat by fear for the British colony of Canada. This fear had existed since 1812, when American forces invaded that colony. If the United States were allowed to expand by annexing Texas, what would stop them from having further designs on Canada? In 1837 this fear was magnified when a small revolt took place in Canada and American volunteers went north to help the Canadians fight. The revolt, though brief and limited in scope, was greatly exaggerated; yet the

\[5\] American claims were such that Spain would lose Florida by outright cession or war.

\[6\] Spain and Russia gave up their claims to Oregon in 1819 and 1824, respectively.
fear of American designs was sure to remain in the minds of many British people.

There was no doubt in British thinking that the United States had a great interest in Texas. Years before, the United States had made overtures to Mexico to buy that province from her. The Adams-Onis treaty on Florida in 1819 had definitely set the boundary of the United States and Mexico. John Quincy Adams, who helped formulate the Adams-Onis treaty between the United States and Spain, many times regretted that the boundaries had not been set to include a large part of the Texan province. While Adams was President of the United States (1825–1829) he tried to rectify this by sending Joel R. Poinsett to Mexico with instructions to buy as much of Texas as possible. Mexico, however, did not want to sell Texas, and the proposal was rejected. When he became President in 1829, Andrew Jackson expressed interest in buying Texas. As his emissary to Mexico, he sent Anthony Butler who did no better than Poinsett. All efforts of the United States to purchase Texas had failed.7

The British watched these attempts at expansion by the United States very closely. H. G. Ward, who regarded American expansion as a menace to British interests in the Caribbean, welcomed fears of this expansion. In 1823, on Ward's advice, Mier y Terán was sent to Texas on an inspection. He recommended that the growth of American influence be checked.8

The British looked upon Mexico not only as a trading nation and

7S. F. Bemis, Diplomatic History, pp. 219-220.
an outlet for their goods, but also as a possible barrier against further American expansion. In 1825, Canning supported this policy of treating Mexico as a buffer nation. This policy was carried on by succeeding foreign ministers. Palmerston, however, began to regard Texas, in lieu of Mexico, as the buffer against American designs to the West, especially after it became evident that Mexico could not reconquer Texas. 9 He believed that the balance of power should be a principle to regulate the affairs of the New World as it already did those of the Old World. 10

The British, after extending recognition to Texas, deemed it advantageous to help Texas grow and become a power that could counteract the influence of the United States. "British policy, therefore, so far as it concerned itself with Texas at all, sought to build up a strong republic--independent alike of Mexico and the United States." 11 This would effectively stop any United States expansion further to the West.

There were important commercial reasons why Great Britain would rather see Texas remain an independent nation. The British textile industry, very dependent upon cotton, was at the mercy of the Southern states; the latter, one of the most important cotton producers in the world, set their own price on raw cotton. The Lancashire industries, consequently, had to pay a high price for the cotton upon which their


11 G. L. Rives, "Mexican Diplomacy on the Eve of War With the United States," American Historical Review, XVIII (1913), 276...
business depended. As an independent cotton producing nation, Texas would be a serious competitor to the producers of that product in the United States. Another thorn in the side of the British business men was the high tariff that the United States imposed on all imported goods. They hoped an independent Texas would facilitate transporting their goods into the United States. If they could maintain Texas as a low tariff or free-trade market, little could stop British goods from coming into Texas by way of Galveston, and then being smuggled into the United States over the long boundary that existed between those two countries.

Taking the broader outlook, the merchants of Great Britain were worried about their entire Latin American market. If Texas were annexed to the United States, the United States would have an even greater hold on the Gulf of Mexico. This would be a definite detriment to British commercial interests in not only the countries that were on the Gulf of Mexico, but in all of Latin America. In the event the United States were to gain this control, they would have the upper hand in the markets of the countries concerned.

It was, nevertheless, the slavery question that attracted the most attention. We have seen how Great Britain had gone to great lengths to abolish slave trade, and wherever possible, slavery, throughout the world. Little wonder, then, that one of the fears that Mr. Hoy expressed in the House of Commons in June, 1836, concerned slavery. Mexico had a slave trade treaty with Great Britain and had abolished slavery in her country in 1829. With the revolt of Texas, however, it was questionable whether these treaties would be honored by the new Republic of Texas. The British abolitionists feared that Texas would
conceivably become a new slave nation. Although nothing was done about Mr. Hoy's motion in the House, one of the conditions for Texan recognition by Great Britain was the slave trade treaty that Hamilton and Palmerston had agreed upon.

When the fear of annexation became prevalent in England, the abolitionists strengthened their arguments against Texas ever becoming part of the United States. They contended that annexation to the United States would involve the perpetuation of slavery and that slavery would eventually return to Mexico and someday spread into all of Latin America. The work that Great Britain had accomplished in abolishing the slave trade in many of the Latin American countries would have been in vain. It was of great importance, therefore, that the abolitionists encourage their country in supporting any movements that they might have against annexation.

If a strong independent Texas and the balance of power principle would restrain the spread of slavery or stop it altogether, the abolitionists would be satisfied and would support these goals. Great Britain had, by this time, accomplished one of these goals by the signing of the slave trade treaty. The next step was to induce Texas to abolish slavery altogether. Leading statesmen in Great Britain at this time were strongly against any type of slavery in Texas. "I can conceive," wrote Buxton, "no calamity to Africa greater than that Texas should be added to the number of slave trading states." Later, in August, 1843, Lord Brougham spoke in Parliament about Texas being a dumping ground for surplus slaves and how abolishing slavery in Texas

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might lead to the abolition of slavery in the southern United States. This seemed to be an impossible goal to attain. However, to the abolitionists in England, even a slight hope in this direction would be well worth the effort to achieve it. Even though annexation might come later on, they hoped to stamp out slavery there and eventually in the rest of the South.

The interests of the West Indian planters and business men coincided with the abolitionists on the point of slavery. Because of the abolition of slavery by Great Britain, the British West Indies lost their slave labor in 1833. It remained to be seen if the free labor of the British West Indies would be able to compete with the slave labor in the southern United States and also in Texas. It was feared by these men that free labor would have little chance of competing. It would be in the interests of the business men and tradesmen, then, to seek the abolition of slavery in Texas and the United States. Ashbel Smith, the Texan representative to Great Britain, later reported that the commercial interests in Great Britain were willing to go to virtually any lengths to abolish slavery in the Texas Republic.

The courses of action by Great Britain were determined to a large extent by the predominant interests that her people felt in regard to Texas. The arguments and fears expressed by the British people over Texas, whether they were those of a businessman, abolitionist, planter,

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13 S. F. Bemis (ed.), American Secretaries of State, IV, 112.
or, for that matter, a common laborer were taken into consideration by the government. The amount of concern varied quite naturally according to the interests of the various groups. However slight or intense, the important point was that many British people had an interest in an independent Texas. Their interests became manifest when the clash between their interests and those of the United States came face to face. What then, were the opposing interests of the United States? What was their side of the conflict when "... it assumed, in fact, the dignity of a world problem."16

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CHAPTER IV

AMERICAN REASONS FOR ANNEXING TEXAS
American interests in Texas were complicated when compared to those held by the British. While the British interests manifested a variety of viewpoints, all of them had one thing in common—a united front in opposition to the annexation of Texas to the United States. The Americans, on the other hand, presented a front that was torn by dissension. Their interests, like those of the British, varied according to the occupation, economy, and political and religious beliefs held by the people. Unlike the British, however, the Americans did not have a common objective, but were split into two opposing camps: those in favor of annexation and those against. This split was caused primarily by sectional differences that pitted one part of the country against the other. The major antagonists in the struggle were the North and South; however, the West also made itself heard in the controversial question. The struggle over slavery between the two main sections began early in the history of the United States. In 1836 the differences had grown in magnitude and were even more bitterly contested. To further complicate the issue, it must be realized that the Americans were much closer geographically to Texas than were the British, which resulted in closer personal interests.

Because the American front was so diversified and unstable, it is impossible to group their interests as categorically as the British. For the purposes of analysis, the viewpoints of the Americans will be grouped into two major areas: First, those concerned with local or national interests; and, secondly, those concerned with international interests.
After hearing of the Texas Revolution, many Americans reacted as they did because of kinship and nationality ties. Many had relatives and friends among the people of Texas, the majority of them former Americans, and therefore, wanted very much to help them in their hour of danger and need. Some went so far as to shoulder their guns, cross the frontier, and join in the Texan fight for independence. Others stayed home and aided the fight by sending money and supplies. Later, many agitated for recognition and then annexation of the new republic, seeking a means to bring their relatives and friends back into the Union. Yet even Americans who lacked these ties of friendship and blood could identify themselves with these people. The Texans were still regarded as Americans with the same origins and beliefs. After all, had not the Texans proved themselves good Americans when they established a democratic government and a constitution similar to that of the United States?

The political situation in 1836 exemplified the sectional differences that existed between North and South. One of the arguments against recognition was that if Texas were annexed, the North would lose her legislative majority in Congress. The North had every reason to believe this, when from the South "... boasts were made that Northern domination would come to end, were that extension of the national area secured." These boasts helped to make Northern politicians hostile to Texan annexation. On the other hand, many Americans, including many Northerners, wanted annexation because they feared an independent Texas on their southwestern border. To the expansionist, such a

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situation would block any further extension of American boundaries in this direction. These people believed that western lands belonged to those who acquired them from the Indians and developed them for the use of man. The expansionist believed this was enough reason for adding Texas, then California, and finally, Oregon.²

The business men of the United States were concerned for economic reasons. Many speculators had purchased certificates of Texan debt and also scrip worth Texan lands. They saw that if annexation were realized, these certificates and scrip would increase in value. Business men involved in trade with the new republic feared that an independent Texas, with her own commercial treaties with other nations, would endanger their trade. Their fears increased when the commercial North's trade with Texas decreased from $1,500,000 in 1839 to $190,000 in 1843.³

The greatest apprehension evinced for annexation was that the South, unable to compete with a strong, independent, free-trade nation, would, as a matter of salvation, join with Texas. Such a possibility was less remote than it might seem today because the South had closer cultural and economic ties with Texas than those she had with the industrial North. Most of the immigrants to Texas had come from the South. Moreover, because of similar climate, they were involved in the same agricultural pursuits. The plantation system, which also prevailed in Texas, would probably eliminate any friction on the subject of slavery. Added to this, the South very likely saw this affiliation as a means

²R. A. Billington, The Far Western Frontier, p. 145.
to escape the high tariff imposed on them by the legislative majority of the North.

A large number of Americans, consequently, believed Texas must be annexed to prevent the growth of a formidable and dangerous rival on the southwestern frontier. They feared that Texas "might seize all northern Mexico, drain the South of its slaves, outstrip the United States in the production of cotton, injure American commerce and manufacturers, and involve the United States in difficulties with foreign powers."¹

The question of Texan annexation became a matter of international interest shortly after the Texas revolution when Andrew Jackson was urged to recognize Texas because of the "probable" British interference in the affairs of the new republic. There was no foundation for such a belief, but a rumor was circulated throughout the United States that Mexico was about to sell Texas to Great Britain to satisfy British bondholders of Mexican debt. Other foreign powers, such as France, also had to be considered, but of the potential rivals, the most dreaded was Great Britain.²

Why did the mention of "Great Britain" in connection with Texan annexation cause tempers to rise and indignation to boil in the United States? The comparatively short history of the United States served well to answer this question. Many senior citizens of the United States who had been born and bred before the Declaration of Independence possessed a deep-seated distrust toward and understandable fear of Great

²R. A. Billington, The Far Western Frontier, p. 145.
Britain. The causes which led to the American Revolution and the war itself furnished a basis for the apprehensions felt by Americans. The War of 1812, the invasion by the hated Redcoats, the burning of the Capitol and the inconclusive peace—all of these increased the hostility between the two nations. The jealousy of the two nations deepened as they sparred for the right of leadership and controlling influence in hemisphere affairs. The two powers were locked in controversy over the Oregon boundary question; the disputed aid to Canada in the revolt of 1837; the Maine and New Brunswick boundary dispute; and finally, British criticism of Americans who repudiated debts after the panic of 1837.

Our main area of interest, however, lies in the Anglo-American diplomacy concerned with Hispanic America. The major diplomatic action taken by the United States in this region was the proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823. This was an attempt to stop European influence and interference in the new world. The British were interested in the countries of Latin America and had worked hard to build their trade and influence there. Canning, the British Foreign Secretary, was in accord with much of the Monroe Doctrine, which he hoped would put a stop to armed intervention by other European powers in Latin America. Two other ideas were added, however, that he strenuously opposed. These were the prevention of future colonization in America by European powers and the view that America and Europe were separate worlds. These ideas Canning would accept "... neither in their commercial nor in their political implications, and during the remainder of his life (1823-1827) his vigorous effort to counteract them increased
distrust of England in the United States."

During the years following the Monroe Doctrine the mutual suspicion and rivalry of the United States and Great Britain over Latin America revealed itself many times. The struggle most apropos to the Texas question, and which probably showed the rivalry at its height, occurred in Mexico. Both nations had sent agents to Mexico to counteract the influence of the other. As an example of their activities, Joel R. Poinsett, in addition to his attempt to buy Texas, was instructed to show the Mexicans the workings of a federal republican system. While in Mexico, Poinsett found that British influence was very strong and their influence was directed toward the establishment of an aristocratic or monarchial government in Mexico. This was not surprising because Henry G. Ward, the British agent, as his instructions stated, was "... tactfully to encourage the establishment of a monarchy in case they found Mexican leaders favorably disposed."

The rivalry in Mexico continued until the successful revolt of the Texans and the advent of the annexation question. The history of this rivalry and jealousy therefore explained the dread felt by Americans when "Great Britain" was mentioned in connection with Texas as early as 1836. Americans were afraid of British interference in Texas for many reasons, the most important reasons being defense, commerce and slavery.

The United States had every reason to be wary of the British

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7 J. F. Rippy, *Hispanic America*, p. 375.
influence in Texas. After all, with British Canada to the north and the undecided Oregon boundaries to the northwest, it appeared that the United States might well be circumvented by British lands. The apprehensiveness caused by the rumor that Mexico would sell Texas to Great Britain was confirmed by Henry Wise of Virginia. He inferred that annexation would be a means of checkmating British policy in North America. English newspapers, he noted, openly stated that Britain should make insolvent nations pay their debts with territory: Mexico with California and Texas, and Spain with Cuba. He feared that if Great Britain obtained Cuba and California, she would command the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi, and the Pacific trade. If such a design ever became a reality, the United States would be in a very vulnerable position if a war with Great Britain were to ever occur. Many Americans remembered the War of 1812 in such a light.

To some, an independent Texas under British influence would be just as unfavorable. Jackson fully believed that if Texas were to remain independent she would be a province of Great Britain within six years and she would become involved in a war with the United States. He, like Wise, believed that annexation provided the means of checkmating English policy. They were sure that Great Britain would at least acquire an offensive and defensive treaty with Texas.

Commercially, the United States had a great deal to lose with Texas under the control of Great Britain, whether it be complete or only partial control. The trade with not only Texas but all of Latin

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America would suffer as a consequence. This, of course, was exactly what Great Britain wanted: a strong, independent Texas that would act as a buffer, not only against American expansion, but also against trade. There could be little doubt that this scheme was realized by the Americans.

By far the most important aspect of the commercial interests concerned the cotton trade. As previously shown, this was an important consideration of the British for stopping the annexation of Texas; conversely, it was equally important to the United States, particularly the South, to carry annexation through. The South's viewpoint was that Great Britain's desire for cotton would lead her to dominate Texas; after that, she would try to draw the Southern states into her economic— if not actually her political— web. A monopoly of the cotton trade was dear to both the Southerner and the Englishman. If Great Britain gained control of the commercial interests in Texas she could play one set of cotton producers against the other, which would result in lower prices for the commodity. Calhoun, champion of Southern rights, wrote to Secretary of State Upshur in August, 1843, "If she can carry out her schemes in Texas and through them her designs against the Southern States, it would prove the profoundest and most successful stroke of policy she ever made; and," continued Calhoun, "would go far toward giving her exclusive control of the cotton trade, by far, of modern commerce. This she sees and is prepared to exert every nerve to accomplish it."10 The only salvation for the cotton producer then was to

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10 John C. Calhoun to Abel Upshur, August 27, 1843, Department of State, Miscellaneous Letters, reprinted from S. F. Bemis (ed.), The American Secretaries of State, V, 142.
seek annexation to prevent this possibility.

Unquestionably slavery attracted the most attention in the United States over the question of annexation; because of its inclusive character, it also became the most importunate. Slavery would be commingled with commercial, political, economic and defensive arguments brought forth in favor of annexation. Due to the close relationship of slavery to the production of cotton which all Southerners believed was essential to the South's livelihood, the South would raise the loudest cry for the annexation of Texas. The argument of slavery made its appearance early in the question of annexation. "There were powerful reasons why Texas should be a part of this Union," Calhoun stated. "The Southern States, owning a slave population, were deeply interested in preventing that country [Texas] from having the power to annoy them."\(^\text{11}\) Calhoun said this in a speech delivered before the Senate on May 16, 1836, when he advocated immediate recognition and annexation for Texas. In reply to arguments advanced by those who were against immediate recognition, Calhoun connected the name of Great Britain with the issue. To him, annexation was a question of life and death. He firmly believed that Northern opposition to it stemmed from the fact that the North had not sufficiently weighed the consequences of British policy or considered the obligation of all sections to defend the South from the effects of British greed.\(^\text{12}\)

The South and her leading statesmen knew only too well the


\(^{12}\) George Lockhard Rives, The United States and Mexico, 1821-1848 (New York, 1913), I, 603.
position of Great Britain as the self-appointed champion of world abolition. The designs of the British, as a result, profoundly influenced American opinion, especially in the South. In 1839, Prince Albert became the president of a society devoted to abolishing slavery. That same year, a British author, James S. Buckingham, who visited America in 1839, reported the American reaction caused by British anti-slavery beliefs and Prince Albert's new position. "I well remember," wrote Buckingham, "the deep impression which the news of that event created on the other side of the Atlantic. It was believed by many that the moral influence of England, thus represented and embodied, would do more to advance the cause of Emancipation in America than any agency that had yet been put into operation." That the South needed further evidence than this that slavery in Texas was in danger was questionable.

The Southerners emphatically believed that Texas, if not annexed, would succumb to British influence and that this, in turn, would lead to the abolition of slavery. Their fears were further confirmed in 1842, when Britain demanded as a price of formal recognition of Texas, the ratification of the slave trade treaty with its right of visit and search. The Southerners feared that the next step might well be total abolition of slavery in Texas. If this occurred, they were sure that their whole way of life would be in jeopardy. A free state on their western frontier would mean they would face problems identical to those already presented by the North. A free Texas would provide an additional refuge for slaves and, many Southerners feared, a base from

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which slave rebellions could be organized. The Mississippi legislature showed this concern for the South when it declared, "The annexation of Texas to this Republic is essential to the future safety and repose of the Southern States."¹⁴

Many Americans questioned Great Britain's humanitarian reasons as the sole purpose of their interference in Texas; they felt, rather, that Britain wanted a rival to the South's growing monopoly on cotton production. Cotton was as essential to Britain's economy as it was to the South—or even more—for Britain had more machines to keep running and more mouths to feed. "The general impression in the American press," after annexation had been refused in 1837, "was that Texas, in despair of ever entering the Union, was ready to deliver herself, bound hand and foot, to Great Britain; that Great Britain would insist on abolition; and that the real reason for British interest in the subject was that she hoped to raise up a great cotton-growing country which should prove a rival to the United States."¹⁵ In support of this theory, Americans knew the British West Indies, with no slave labor, could not compete with the slave-grown products of the United States. Therefore, if Texas were to abolish slavery, Great Britain hoped she would be a natural competitor to the Southern states, resulting then in lower cotton prices for English manufacturers. This theme will be amplified in the following chapter.

As a result of these national and international interests, many

¹⁴R. A. Billington, Western Frontier, p. 116.

Americans demanded the annexation of Texas. It has already been pointed out, however, that all Americans were not in favor of annexation and some bitterly fought the movement. The main opposition centered around John Quincy Adams and the anti-slavery societies of the North. Even though Adams had favored the purchase of Texas in 1825 during his administration, he was now tenaciously opposed to annexation; the primary reason for his opposition was slavery. He carried out this fight as a member of the House of Representatives, where in February, 1843, he went so far as to put forward a resolution demanding, "... that any attempt by act of Congress or by treaty to annex the republic of Texas to this Union would be a violation of the constitution, null and void, and to which the free states of the Union, and their people ought not to submit."\(^{16}\) Because of his stand, Adams was subject to much abuse and was accused of being in league with British abolitionists. Nevertheless, Adams remained the leader of the opposition to the annexation of Texas as Calhoun remained the leader of the advocates. Both men would be prominent in the international conflict that would wage during the period 1842-1846.

It can hardly be said, because of this complexity of interests, that the United States possessed a united front to put up against the solid front of Great Britain. How then did the United States stand a chance of gaining victory in such a conflict? Were the interests of either nation so critical as to cause even the slightest conflict? To some, the interests may seem minor and greatly exaggerated, but to an individual like Calhoun it presented a question of monumental importance.

\(^{16}\) A. Nevins (ed.), The Diary of John Quincy Adams, p. 516.
He emphasized this in a personal letter to his daughter. "I regard annexation to be a vital question," he wrote. "If lost now, it will be forever lost; and if that, the South will be lost. It is the all absorbing question. . . . It is, indeed, under circumstances, the most important question, both for the South and the Union, ever agitated since the adoption of the Constitution."17

17 John C. Calhoun to Mrs. Clemson, May 10, 1844, quoted from G. Rives, United States and Mexico, p. 630.
CHAPTER V

THE CRUX OF THE CONFLICT
The year 1842 witnessed the beginning of the conflict that was to erupt between the United States and Great Britain over the question of annexation. Both nations had recognized the new republic of Texas and were interested in her future. The United States, after recognizing Texas in March 1837, turned down a Texan bid for annexation in 1838, fearing that annexation at that time was too unpopular with factions in the United States and, of course, Mexico. Because of the sensitivity of the issue, the Van Buren administration declined to offer any hope in this direction and the question of annexation was all but forgotten. Great Britain, meanwhile, held out hope in 1837 and 1838 that Texas would be reconquered by Mexico, the nation England's interests were concerned with. Therefore, Great Britain refused to recognize Texas until she saw that Mexico had little chance of recovering her lost province. Even then, Great Britain consented to recognize Texas only on certain conditions, one of which involved a slave trade treaty. This recognition was granted by England in June, 1842. Texas was now recognized by all interested nations with the exception of Mexico, the former sovereign of Texas.

Because Texas and Mexico were still at war, the condition of Texas at this time was serious indeed. Houston, who became President of Texas again in December, 1841, found his nation deeply in debt, virtually bankrupt, and with little credit. To make matters worse, Mexico had revived her efforts to reconquer Texas and it appeared she might be successful. These problems and their solution fell squarely on the shoulders of Houston. Would he solve them by seeking annexation
once again or would he have to turn to a foreign power for help?

John Tyler, who became President of the United States following the death of Benjamin Harrison (April 4, 1841), wanted to revive the annexation issue. He was scarcely settled in the White House when Henry A. Wise advised him to obtain Texas as quickly as possible. Tyler, quick to take the advice, approached the Secretary of State Daniel Webster on the advisability of annexation. He knew, however, that due to the opposition and lack of public interest, he must have a good reason. He was soon to have help. In 1842 public interest was revived when it appeared that Mexico might well reconquer Texas. It was rumored, moreover, that their invasion was to be financed by British funds. This seemed logical as a reconquered Texas would settle the question of slavery and the slave trade in Texas. The signing of the slave trade treaty between Texas and Great Britain in June may also have raised fears that Great Britain was forcing her ideas of slavery onto the new republic. Though there was very little proof to verify these fears of British intentions at the time, the situation did assist Tyler in his desire to revive the issue.

After Great Britain recognized Texas, the Peel ministry sent Charles Elliot as their chargé d'affaires to Texas. Upon arriving in Texas in August, 1842, he immediately began to cultivate friends and gain influence with Texan officials. Elliott, an ardent abolitionist, firmly believed that slavery was a corroding evil and that it constituted

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1 J. Smith, The Annexation of Texas, p. 103.

2 Two warships were being built in Great Britain for Mexico at this time. Funds for these ships were largely financed by the bondholders of Mexican debt and by British abolitionists.
the chief obstacle to a great and independent Texas. After a few short months in Texas, Elliot wrote to Addington, a personal friend of his in the British foreign office, outlining a plan to compensate the slave holders of Texas with British money in return for abolition and free trade. Elliot was sure that this plan would work, but felt that the time was inappropriate to send the plan to Aberdeen. He stated that it was his own plan, and that officially and publicly he would, of course, take the grounds that although England was against slavery, she had no desire to interfere with it in other countries. Elliot also stated, "I cannot help thinking that money lent to put an end to slavery in the South West direction in America and to give a place and position to the coloured races, would render as profitable returns as money spent in fortresses and military works on the Northern frontier of the United States." This, the first British official expression as far as abolition was concerned in Texas, also demonstrated the British fear of American expansion not only into Texas, but also in Canada.

Presumably, Elliot had been inspired by Houston to advance this plan and he (Houston) was entirely in accord with it.

In December, Elliot again wrote to Addington, stressing his plan more emphatically because he was concerned over annexation rumors that he had heard. His fears were based on the fact that Texas, weak and disorganized, had again turned to the United States. Early in 1842, James Reily, Texan charge at Washington, was instructed to study the

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3F. O. Texas, 4, quoted from E. Adams, British Interests and Activities in Texas, p. 115.

4E. Adams, British Interest and Activities in Texas, p. 113.
sentiment of Congress as to the probability of successful annexation negotiations. He reported that he found little evidence that the United States was ready to approach the subject. Houston, later that fall, sent Isaac Van Zandt to replace Reily. Van Zandt brought the subject before Tyler and found that the President and most of his cabinet were in favor of annexation, but that the idea was too impractical at that time to be assured of success. The impracticality was probably due to Congressional opposition. The government's attention was focused on the Webster-Asburton treaty at this time. In addition to this, relations between the United States and Mexico were not at their best and annexation could only make them worse.

Texas left no stone unturned in her effort to better her condition in 1842. It must be recalled that one of the recognition treaties signed between Texas and Great Britain called for an attempt by Great Britain to mediate a peace between Mexico and Texas. Aberdeen, who made this attempt, was convinced that it was hopeless at the time and informed the Texan charge to that effect. Texas then asked for a triple interposition by England, France, and the United States. This proposal, put forward to the two European powers in August, was acceded to by France but was turned down by Great Britain. Great Britain had already tried to mediate, Aberdeen contended, and if they, with their strong influence in Mexico, could not bring it about, it would have even less chance with France and the United States.

After Van Zandt's offer of annexation was turned down by the United States and the triple interposition turned down by Great Britain,

\[\text{Supra, pp. 21-22.}\]
Houston approached Elliot and again asked for British aid. He let it be known that he desired peace with Mexico and trusted to the good offices of Great Britain to help bring it about. This made Elliot enthusiastic and led him to write a letter to Percy Doyle, British charge to Mexico, urging him to approach the Mexican government about the possibility of peace plans.

During 1843 the question of slavery in the annexation issue came alive and caused a great deal of concern in all countries involved. The events gave Tyler and the advocates of slavery every cause to believe that Great Britain was interfering in Texas, especially in the abolition of slavery in that nation. Southerners did not really become concerned over annexation until this time and then they became insistent only when they saw the defeat of annexation as a victory for the abolitionists and for Great Britain. Even then the South was not united on the issue, for some felt that annexation would be harmful to the old slave states, due to a migration of a great number of slave holders to the great lands of Texas. On the other hand, Great Britain saw an opportunity to establish the free and independent Texas that they desired.

On January 23, 1843, the annexation issue was revived when Thomas Gilmer, a Representative from Virginia, published a letter in the Madisonian stating that Texas must be annexed before the British abolished slavery there and before they acquired an overwhelming influence which would result in the termination of the Texans' present

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6 Chauncey Boucher, "In Re That Aggressive Slavocracy," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, VIII (1921), 24.
inclination to join the Union. This letter, seemingly totally unexpected, caused a great deal of comment in Washington. "This letter," wrote Thomas Hart Benton, "was a clap of thunder in a clear sky. There was nothing in the political horizon to announce or portend it. Great Britain had given no symptom of any disposition to war upon us, or to excite insurrection among our slaves." Benton, of course, had no knowledge of Elliot's dream for emancipation in Texas.

Another letter, written by Ashbel Smith, chargé of Texas to Great Britain, caused even more alarm in the United States. On January 25, he wrote a confidential letter to Van Zandt, stating his belief that people in Great Britain were seeking abolition of slavery in Texas and that Britain would guarantee Texan independence. This letter was made known to Tyler and his cabinet. "The establishment of a free state," he wrote, "on the territory of Texas is a darling wish of England for which scarcely any price would be regarded as too great. The bargain once struck, what remedy remains to the South?" Such a statement caused added concern and accelerated a move toward the annexation of Texas. Smith sincerely believed that Great Britain could have told Mexico at any time that Texas must be recognized, but refrained from doing so because they wanted Texas weary enough of the struggle with Mexico so that they would yield to the point of abolition in return for

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8Thomas Benton, Thirty Years View (New York, 1856), II, 581.

9Smith to Van Zandt, January 25, 1843, reprinted from G. Rives, The United States and Mexico, p. 561.
British guarantees for their independence. Smith undoubtedly believed that his letter to Van Zandt would arouse an increased desire for annexation in the United States to counteract the British designs.

A new development occurred in February when the Robinson Plan was made known. Santa Anna advanced this plan to Texas which would give Mexico a limited sovereignty over that republic. It would mean, too, that Mexico's law forbidding slavery would be in effect. Santa Anna made use of the British representatives in both Mexico and Texas to encourage Houston to accept the terms of the plan. Both Elliot and Doyle, eager to help, saw a chance of gaining abolition. Houston saw the plan more in the light of gaining an armistice which would be to the advantage of Texas.

In Washington, meanwhile, Van Zandt did his best to arouse the jealousy of the United States so that added support would be gained for Texan annexation. In a letter to Anson Jones, the Texan Secretary of State, he stated that he had talked to President Tyler and informed him of the arguments put forth by Smith's letter of January 25. He also stated that he would continue to bring up the subject of annexation to Tyler and his cabinet whenever he had the opportunity to do so.

The renewed interest in annexation did not go unnoticed by the opposition at this time. John Quincy Adams was active in his objections,

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10 J. Smith, The Annexation of Texas, p. 84.

11 The Robinson plan was named after a Texan prisoner of war. He advanced the plan to Santa Anna.

12 Van Zandt to Jones, March 13, 1843, Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1908, II, 135.
and had, as mentioned in the previous chapter, brought resolutions against it in the House. The abolitionists in the United States now received unexpected help from an anti-slavery group at work in Texas. One of the leaders of this group, Stephen P. Andrews, a prominent lawyer and abolitionist, stressed emancipation by compensation to slave holders, with Great Britain furnishing the money for this compensation. Where he got the idea for compensating the slave holders is not definitely known, but it was rumored that Andrews was a close associate of Houston and that Houston had passed on the plan he had received from Elliot. The latter had mentioned this plan, and there is little doubt that Houston not only knew of the plan, but also thought favorably of it. Some newspapers in Texas denounced the plan, but the tone of some seemed to imply that Houston favored it. The Civilian, an administration paper, also pointed out that British mediation had stopped the Montevidean War in South America on the condition that slavery be abolished and suggested that the war between Texas and Mexico offered a similar field. ¹³

The letters of Elliot, Smith and Gilmer, plus the Robinson Plan and the activities of Andrews all inferred that slavery would soon come to an end in Texas. The accumulation of these events raised a great deal of consternation in the United States, particularly when the name of Great Britain was mentioned in connection with each of them. The newspapers of both South and North, greatly aroused by these events, served to alarm the American people. The New York Journal of Commerce on May 19, 1843, claimed that measures were under way to buy Negro

emancipation and that the price amounted to five million dollars—a sum, the editors believed, that would be sufficient to carry abolition. On June 24, the Madisonian threatened: "If Great Britain, as her philanthropists and blustering presses intimate, entertains a design to possess Mexico or Texas, or to interfere in any manner with the slaves of the Southern states, but a few weeks, we fancy, at any time, will suffice to raise the whole American People to arms like one vast nest of hornets. The great Western States, at the call of 'Captain Tyler' would pour their noble sons down the Mississippi Valley by millions." Many Americans, especially President Tyler and his cabinet, were sure of British interference in Texas, but there was still no conclusive proof that could be used against the British, proof that would completely arouse the sentiment of the people for annexation. The proof that the advocates of annexation needed became evident in June when the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society held its annual convention in London. The meeting became the focal point of the controversial slave question in the annexation of Texas. That event, coupled with the Robinson Plan soon to result in an armistice between Mexico and Texas, would bring the conflict to its zenith. The anti-slavery convention was attended by prominent abolitionists from both the United States and Texas. Andrews, the Texan abolitionist, was undoubtedly reponsible for various plans presented to the convention for effecting abolition in Texas. It was resolved to spare no efforts in order to achieve this goal. This was also mentioned as an

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1 Madisonian, June 24, 1843, quoted from J. Smith, The Annexation of Texas, pp. 111 and 115.
"entering wedge" in the large task of eventually bringing about abolition in the United States. Andrews and Lewis Tappan made it known that they had visited John Quincy Adams before coming to England and that Adams, although he offered no advice, told them, "I believe the freedom of this country and of all mankind depends upon the direct, formal, open and avowed interference of Great Britain to accomplish the abolition of slavery in Texas; but I distrust the sincerity of the present British Administration in the anti-slavery cause." When such views from a leading American statesman were made known, one can see why the convention was inspired to make such resolutions on Texas.

The most important event occurred when Andrews, who secured an audience with Aberdeen, suggested that the British guarantee a loan to emancipate the slaves of Texas in return for Texan lands. Aberdeen gave encouragement to the plan, saying that "Her Majesty's Government would employ all legitimate means to attain so great and desirable an object as the abolition of slavery in Texas." This statement was reported to President Tyler and his cabinet by Mr. Duff Green who had been sent to England to sound out the British government on the question of slavery. Needless to say, the statement caused a great deal of concern in both the United States and Texas. Smith, the Texan charge, informed Aberdeen that Andrews was not authorized by the government of

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15 Harriet Smith, "English Abolitionism and the Annexation of Texas," The Southwestern Historical Quarterly, XXXIII (July, 1928, to April, 1929), 191.


17 Smith, No. 41, July 2, 1843, quoted from J. Smith, The Annexation of Texas, pp. 89-90.
Texas to negotiate a loan and that there was no disposition on the part of the people of Texas to see slavery abolished. He also asked Aberdeen to explain his (Aberdeen's) position. In a report to Anson Jones, the Texan Secretary of State, Smith said Aberdeen again admitted that it was desirable, but that, he added, "It is the well known policy and wish of the British Government to abolish slavery everywhere."

However, Aberdeen also stated that there was no wish to interfere improperly on the subject and that they would give the Texan government no cause to complain. Nevertheless, he would not promise that the British government would not grant such a loan. The abolition of slavery was so important, Aberdeen claimed, that a loan might be advised.  

Smith, however, was satisfied that Aberdeen was sincere when he stated that Britain would not interfere improperly as was Edward Everett, the American chargé, when he also questioned Aberdeen on the matter. Tyler and Abel Upshur, who had replaced Webster as Secretary of State in May, were more inclined to believe the reports of Duff Green, since this suited their purposes in arousing sentiment in favor of annexation.

The fact remained that Aberdeen stressed that Great Britain would like to see slavery abolished, not only in Texas, but "everywhere."

During the same period of time, events took place in Texas that further alarmed the advocates of annexation in the United States. The Robinson Plan, thought by most Americans and Texans alike to be an impossibility, had resulted in an armistice when, on June 15, Houston called for a cessation of hostilities. Santa Anna would comply with the plan on July 7. It was well known that the armistice was brought

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about largely by the activities of British agents in Texas and Mexico. Elliot, in a letter to Doyle on June 21, said that he should urge Santa Anna to recognize Texas, which would be a formidable ally against the United States. Correspondence between the two chargés showed also that they contemplated great commercial advantages to Great Britain if abolition could be secured. Regardless of how involved these men were in the negotiations, it was enough to cause concern in the United States. A result of the negotiations was evident when Van Zandt was told, in a dispatch from Anson Jones dated July 6, to cease negotiations for the annexation because of the armistice under the Robinson Plan. Jones also stated that Van Zandt was to turn down any overtures until further informed. In other words, it was now up to the United States to bring up any proposals concerned with the subject of annexation. Gilmer's letter in January proved to be prophetic, for he warned that through British interference, Texas would withdraw any desire for annexation. To the pro-slavery elements, the evidence of British interference appeared to weigh in favor of annexation as each month of 1843 passed on.

In July, Aberdeen decided to take a more direct approach to gain the abolition of slavery in Texas. He knew, of course, of the Robinson Plan and its demands, but apparently did not think it went far enough on the subject of abolition. "It may deserve consideration," he wrote to Doyle, "whether the abolition of slavery in Texas would not be a

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greater triumph, and more honourable to Mexico, than the retention of any sovereignty merely nominal."\(^{21}\) Aberdeen considered that the plan probably held little chance of success if Mexico insisted upon retaining its sovereignty over Texas. Later in the same month, Aberdeen again wrote to Doyle and stressed that Mexico should ask Texas to abolish slavery in return for Mexican recognition. "His Majesty's Government," he wrote in the second letter, "desires that you should press this point earnestly on the attention of the Mexican Government."\(^{22}\) This letter, if nothing else, illustrated the influence that the anti-slavery convention had on Aberdeen. A copy of the second letter was also sent to Elliot in Texas, which undoubtedly caused him to rejoice as it seemed to fulfill the dreams he had for abolition in Texas. Although officials in the United States did not know of these letters written by Aberdeen, they firmly believed this was Aberdeen's wish all along. Upshur, a strong annexationist who had replaced the pro-Northern Webster as Secretary of State, was fully convinced that Texas must be annexed to stop British designs. In order to do this he must convince Texas to open the door once again to annexation. He was frustrated in this respect, since Van Zandt no longer had the authority to negotiate on the subject. His concern was manifested in a letter written to W. S. Murphy, the American charge to Texas, in which he stressed the many disadvantages the United States would suffer in the event of Texan abolition. One of the worst would be the possibility of


\(^{22}\) F. O. Mexico, July 31, 1843, quoted from E. Adams, British Interests, pp. 137-139.
a war with Texas or the breakup of the Union.23

On August 18, Lord Brougham, who was one of the most conspicuous of the British abolitionists, added further cause for American anxiety when he interpellated the ministry in Parliament on the subject of British interests in Texas. He wanted to know what action was being taken and demanded that papers be presented. "The importance of Texas," he stated, "could not be underrated." If slavery were abolished in Texas, he contended, it would eventually lead to the abolition of slavery in the South. He was certain that this goal could be reached if only the Mexican government would recognize the independence of Texas with abolition as one of the terms. Aberdeen, in sympathy with Lord Brougham's views, hinted very strongly that he was negotiating with Texas on the subject, but he declined to present the papers asked for.24

Why did Aberdeen refuse to present the papers asked for? His actions on the question asked by Lord Brougham could have only led to the belief that Great Britain was taking action on the abolition of slavery in Texas.

Alarmed by these recent occurrences, especially the news of the Parliamentary debates of Lord Brougham and Aberdeen, Upshur contacted Van Zandt on October 16 and stressed the need to reopen negotiations on annexation. His views were forwarded immediately to Texan officials by Van Zandt. According to Van Zandt, Upshur said that at no time was annexation more favorable. Van Zandt went on to state why he also thought that the time was favorable to negotiate a treaty of annexation.

23 Abel Upshur to Wm. S. Murphy, August 8, 1843, Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, XII, 45-48.
24 Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, LXXI (1843), 961.
The South was unquestionably in favor, and the West would be in favor if Texas and Oregon were combined to satisfy the expansionist desires of that section. "The possibility of England's securing an undue influence in Texas, and thereby monopolizing her growing trade," he wrote about the North, "seems to have touched the secret springs of interest so fondly cherished by northern manufacturers, and presented the question in a form hitherto unheeded." He therefore encouraged reopening negotiations, as he believed that if this offer were rejected, Texas was not likely to have another opportunity so favorable.²⁵

American advocates of annexation continued to stress the need of immediate action on the question. The news from Texas spurred them on, also, as it looked like the Robinson Plan, which they firmly believed involved abolition, would soon succeed. The Texan administration seemed to be very much under the influence of the British, as proved by the attacks made on Houston policy by the Texans themselves. The editor of the Brazos Planter suggested this when he accused the Republic of acquiring a "monarchical nurse."²⁶

Houston did not accept Upshur's plan to begin negotiations for a new treaty of annexation. The reasons for his refusal were stated by Jones in a dispatch to Van Zandt on December 13. Houston freely admitted that by the mediations of foreign governments friendly to the interests of Texas, a peace with Mexico was about to be obtained. He also stated that if Texas agreed to annexation at that time, the foreign

²⁵Van Zandt to Jones, October 16, 1843, Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1908, II, 221.
²⁶Brazos Planter, November 23, 1843, quoted from S. Siegel, A Political History of the Texas Republic, p. 224.
powers would withdraw their efforts of mediation, and Texas, should
mediation fail, would be alone in their struggle. For various reasons,
he felt such a failure was probable. Furthermore, he stated that the
United States should attempt annexation by resolution and authorize
Tyler to propose such a treaty. In that event, Texas would maybe act
on it.  

The public clamor in the United States over Houston's action,
particularly on slavery, also caused Aberdeen some anxiety. When in­
formed of the great amount of interest and concern he had aroused in
the question of annexation, he thought it best to make an attempt to
remove the cause. He saw that his actions on slavery did more to pro­
mote annexation than hinder it, which of course was not his intent.
Consequently, in a letter dated December 26, addressed to Pakenham, now
British charge in Washington, but subsequently delivered to Upshur, he
disclaimed any actions on the part of the British government to inter­
fere improperly or secretly in Texas, even though it was the wish of
Great Britain to see slavery abolished in Texas as elsewhere. "Her
objects," he also wrote, "are purely commercial, and she has no thought
or intention of seeking to act directly or indirectly in a political
sense, on the United States through Texas."  

In January, 1844, Upshur continued his efforts to open the way
for annexation. In order to overcome the objections of Houston, he
now promised to give Texas military support while the treaty was

27 Jones to Van Zandt, December 13, 1843, Annual Report of the
American Historical Association for the Year 1908, II, 232-233.
28 Earl of Aberdeen to Mr. Pakenham, December 26, 1843, British
Sessional Papers, #52, pp. 125-126.
negotiated. Van Zandt relayed this information to Texas and again stated that he thought the treaty would end in success. On the basis of these assurances, Van Zandt was instructed to go ahead with treaty negotiations. The British now had cause to be concerned. It appeared that Aberdeen's letter of December 26, which had not been delivered at this time, was too late to head off any further annexation proceedings.

The negotiations were interrupted on February 28, 1841, when Upshur was killed by a cannon explosion on board the warship Princeton. Tyler then searched for a suitable successor as Secretary of State and chose the man most in favor of annexation, John C. Calhoun. With the appointment of Calhoun, the success of the treaty was placed in jeopardy. The treaty was signed on April 12, and was then sent to the Senate on April 22. Along with the treaty went a letter written by Calhoun in reply to Aberdeen's letter of December 26. In this letter Calhoun managed to place the entire annexation treaty as a means of defending slavery. He presented facts and figures purporting to show the ill effects of freedom upon the health, morals and general well-being of the Negro. The treaty, he also argued, would guard against British designs on slavery in Texas.

When Pakenham received Calhoun's letter, he immediately wrote an answer, stating that Aberdeen's letter had been put in a light adverse to its meaning. "Great Britain has also formally disclaimed the desire to establish in Texas any dominant influence, and with respect to slavery," he reiterated, "she is not conscious of having acted in a sense to cause just alarm to the United States." Calhoun, in answer

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29 Mr. Pakenham to Mr. Calhoun, April 19, 1841, British Sessional Papers, #52, p. 129.
to this letter, claimed that the United States had acted within her rights and that Great Britain should stay out of her internal affairs. Pakenham naturally sent these letters to Aberdeen so that he was made aware of the situation.

Calhoun succeeded in placing the question solely on the grounds of British interference with the institution of slavery and presented it as the grand argument in favor of annexation. He undoubtedly thought that this would help the measure pass. It worked in reverse, however, and only strengthened the opposition to it in the North. Men like John Quincy Adams and Thomas H. Benton now increased their efforts to defeat the treaty. Calhoun’s stand and the increased opposition of the North doomed the treaty to failure. On June 8 the treaty was defeated in the Senate by a vote of 35 to 16. Slavery once again blocked annexation rather than precipitated it.

Calhoun’s letters, however, were coldly received by Aberdeen. That he felt indignation and anger at what he thought was an honest attempt to pacify the American public there could be no doubt. It must have appeared to him that, because of his stand on slavery, he had helped the cause of annexation rather than hindered it. He received news that Mexico had resumed hostilities after hearing about the annexation treaty, and this, he feared, would also help hasten annexation. Worse yet, he had come under fire in Parliament over the activities of the Foreign Office. On May 20, Mr. Hume asked for papers to be presented, because it was his belief that the British government was attempting

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Mr. Calhoun to Mr. Pakenham, April 27, 1844, British Sessional Papers, #52, p. 130.
unjust interference in the internal affairs of other nations. Mr. Peel refused the papers in regard to the question. Aberdeen, therefore, was not only criticized by American statesmen, but now found himself under the critical eye of his own countrymen over the affair. He had accomplished the direct opposite of what he had wished. Little wonder that he decided to change tactics, and informed Ashbel Smith that he "... more than once made observation to the effect that he regretted the agitation of the abolition of slavery in Texas ... and that hereafter he would have nothing to say or do in relation to the subject."  

The slavery issue, as far as British diplomacy was concerned, then came to an end. Because of the actions taken by the Americans, particularly Tyler and Calhoun, Aberdeen would renew his efforts to block annexation by other means. Yet, despite Aberdeen's desires, the slavery issue was too much in the center of the annexation proceedings to be simply put aside. Abolition remained the wish of many Englishmen, and the question of slavery was to profoundly influence American actions until the ultimate annexation of Texas.

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31Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, LXXIV (1844), 1330.
32Smith to Jones, June 24, 1844, requoted from G. Rives, United States and Mexico, p. 68.4.
CHAPTER VI

THE END OF THE STRUGGLE--TEXAS ANNEXED
Although he dropped slavery as an issue, Aberdeen was still determined to block annexation. The means he next employed was a diplomatic act involving France, Mexico and Texas. The act, ignoring the subject of slavery, called for Mexico to recognize Texas on the condition that Texas would agree to maintain her independent position and that Great Britain and France would guarantee the boundaries of Mexico. If Mexico would agree to this and France was willing, it would matter little to England what the attitude of the United States would be. It appeared that England, "... should it be necessary, would go to the last extremity in support of her opposition to the annexation." If Mexico did not go along with the plan it would not be put into execution. Aberdeen appeared willing to go to war with the United States, although he never seriously thought it would come about. No nation would risk a war with the combined powers of Great Britain and France.

On June 3, 1844, Aberdeen wrote a long letter to Pakenham to once again allay the irritation of the American people on the subject of slavery. Great Britain would not interfere on slavery, he guaranteed, either through Mexico or by any other means. He went so far as to state that slavery was in America because of the slave trade that was carried on by British merchants years before. He did not, however, promise not to prevent annexation by another means, but wanted to give the impression that all opposition to annexation had ceased.}

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\(^1\) F. O. Mexico, 180, May 28 or 29, reprinted from J. Smith, The Annexation of Texas, pp. 389-390.

\(^2\) F. O. America, 4603, June 3, 1844, reprinted from E. Adams, British Interests, p. 173.

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His proposal was received coldly by the Mexican government, for it was still their intention to reconquer Texas, even though they were warned by the British that reconquest would more than likely result in war with the United States, and in such a war, Great Britain could not possibly render any aid to Mexico. The proposal also suffered a setback when it was refused by Texas. After the United States Senate rejected the annexation treaty, there were cries (even though by a minority of Texans) to once again seek help from Great Britain. Houston, who had doubted that the treaty would pass, heeded these cries and was willing to accept the diplomatic act when it was offered. However, the political situation in Texas had changed by this time. A presidential election had resulted in the election of Anson Jones, the Texas Secretary of State. Even though he was not to take office until 1844, he was not in favor of the diplomatic act and therefore refused to obey Houston's orders to accept it. He was confident that such an act would only lead to war and prevent annexation. "This 'Diplomatic Act' was a straw in a favorable wind," he stated, "but Texas need not clutch at straws. The price--becoming a sort of European protectorate--was too high for Texas to pay for guaranteed independence."3 As a consequence, Great Britain did not receive a reply to the act.

France offered little encouragement to Aberdeen's plan, even though the French first assented to the act. The French did not want to see Texas annexed, and were willing to protest against it; however, they were not willing to go to war to prevent it. King, the American

3Herbert Gambrell, Anson Jones, The Last President of Texas (Garden City, New York, 1948), p. 357.
charge to France, added to this attitude of the French when he was instructed by Calhoun to urge France not to join in the act with Great Britain. Calhoun, in his instructions, reiterated the abolition hopes of Great Britain and maintained this would be contrary to French interests as they would have to pay higher prices for Texan goods if the slaves were freed.\(^4\) With this argument, and the natural inclination of the French to distrust their long-time enemy Great Britain, the act was rejected.

In the United States, news of the diplomatic act spread rapidly, and, as was expected, caused a rising tide of fresh indignation toward Great Britain. It appeared that any British interference, no matter how candid, caused American suspicions to work overtime and to wonder about the intentions of their rival. Every American was well aware by this time that Great Britain wished to prevent the annexation of Texas and would go to the "last extremity" to do so.

Why was Great Britain adverse to American annexation of Texas when so many Americans and, it seemed, the majority of Texans were in favor of it? What right did they have to even question American reasons for wanting Texas as a part of the Union? The New Orleans Picayune disputed the right of Great Britain when it asked a series of questions such as, "Does the United States or Texas attempt to interrupt the British Government in her conquests? Have they remonstrated against the extension of her empire in India, the subjugation of Afghanistan, the seizure of the Sandwich Islands, ... the dismemberment of the Chinese possessions, or the lodgments she has made in every sea and

upon every continent? What would England or the civilized world say if the United States were to protest against the annexation of Pondicherry to the British Crown, if both England and the colony desired it? Would not such interference be considered impertinent?" Perhaps the argument had then taken on the old explanation that it was the "principle involved that counted." Whatever the argument, the diplomatic act succeeded in solidifying American opinion and resulted in additional cries for the annexation of Texas.

Aberdeen felt sure that the United States would not go to war over Texas. His feelings, however, may have changed had he been aware of the new increase in Anglophobia caused by the act. There were Americans willing to go to war with Great Britain over Texas. Henry Wise of Virginia advocated war and expressed the opinion that he would like nothing better. This feeling was not confined only to the South, but was expressed by Northerners, also. Charles Ingersoll, a Democrat from Pennsylvania, supported Wise and the South. He brought out the controversies with Great Britain on the Northeast boundary, the Oregon dispute and the right of visit and search. He also thought that war would not be too bad as it would rid the American people of two hundred million dollars of public debts. Ingersoll also felt that the United States would have the sympathies of France, Prussia, Russia, Sweden, Denmark and every maritime nation in the world.

Aberdeen saw his act rejected by one country after another in

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5Picayune, December 27, 1844, quoted from S. Siegel, History of Texas, p. 250.

6S. F. Bemis, John Quincy Adams, p. 452.
the fall and winter of 1814. What disturbed him more, however, was that he was not sure of the popularity of the act in his own country, especially when it carried the probable threat of war. There were several reasons why Great Britain could not afford a war with the United States. One of these was the great amount of commerce carried on between the United States and Great Britain which would be lost in the event of war. Another, as the Picayune pointed out, the British government could not consistently rationalize open aggression in regard to the United States when they were openly carrying on the same policy in other parts of the world. Furthermore, Aberdeen undoubtedly remembered Mr. Hume questioning his policy in May and would not like to have the episode repeated. As already mentioned, Aberdeen did not believe that war was a possibility and he felt himself safe in using threatening tones when he proposed the diplomatic act. He did not think that the United States dared to oppose the combined efforts of both Great Britain and France and would, as a result, let the annexation issue die. Upon learning of the reactions the act caused in the United States and observing the hesitancy of France to back the act, he became concerned. He realized that it would be an unpopular move on his part to have asked his own country's support of the act. "Englishmen," wrote one author, "in the forties were not only disinclined to fight their trans-Atlantic brothers, but would have dismissed the government that asked it of them." Furthermore, Pakenham advised Aberdeen that the act should not be carried through as it might precipitate annexation rather than stop it; he recommended waiting until after the election.

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of 1844 before any further action was taken. Pakenham believed that
the course of annexation hinged on who would be elected; and it was his
hope that Clay would be the victor as he felt that annexation, under
Clay, would receive more calm consideration. Aberdeen finally decided
to put the diplomatic act aside and wait until the election was over to
see if it were still necessary.

The election of 1844 became an important factor in the question
of annexation. The results were awaited eagerly by both America and
Great Britain. It is disputed as to how much the question of Texan
annexation had to do with the outcome of the election; but it would be
described by many as one of the three American elections turning on a
question of foreign affairs, the other two being 1796 and 1920. The
Whig Party nominated Henry Clay even though he had come out against
the annexation of Texas; his reason was the threatened war with Mexico
if Texas were annexed. Van Buren was the choice of most Democrats, but
his nomination was turned down when he also declined annexation for the
same reasons as Clay. Many believed Clay and Van Buren were less moti-
vated by the fear of a Mexican war than by the fear of reopening the
dangerous discussion of slavery. Because of the stand taken by Van
Buren, he was politically unacceptable to the Democrats, and a candi-
date was sought who would be in favor of annexation. James K. Polk, a
former governor of Tennessee, was selected as a compromise candidate
because he did favor annexation, and he was consequently nominated for

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8E. Adams, British Interests, pp. 178-180.


10G. Rives, The United States and Mexico, p. 627.
the presidency. Polk went on to win by a narrow margin and his election was hailed as a victory for Texan annexation. Tyler and his cabinet immediately construed the victory as an indication that the American people were wholeheartedly in favor of annexation. The following month Tyler proposed to Congress that Texas be annexed by joint resolution. In his address, while stressing that the United States had the right to annexation, he was careful not to base the need for annexation on slavery as Calhoun had done.\textsuperscript{11} He probably felt that the feelings of mistrust and fear of English interference in other areas was enough to depend on without the slavery issue. To all intents and purposes, it looked as if the joint resolution would be successful.

When Aberdeen learned the results of the American election in November, the time for decision had arrived. He was still not sure that France intended to back him in the diplomatic act. He did not have long to wait, however, as he was notified by the minister of Louis Philippe that France would refuse to recognize the annexation of Texas, but would not go to war with the United States in order to prevent it.\textsuperscript{12} The diplomatic act, Aberdeen decided, was too risky for Great Britain to undertake alone and was, therefore, given up as a lost cause. This put Aberdeen in an awkward position, and forced him to blame its failure on Mexico.

By the end of 1844, it appeared that Aberdeen was ready to capitulate. He was sure that the United States would take further action towards annexation; he, of course, had not heard of Tyler's joint

\textsuperscript{11}J. Reeves, \textit{American Diplomacy Under Tyler and Polk}, p. 177.

\textsuperscript{12}J. Smith, \textit{The Annexation of Texas}, p. 404.
resolution and still wanted to block annexation, but was confused as to what action to take. All of his efforts appeared to have been fruitless and he ended by regretting his actions. The policy he decided to follow next was a passive one. He still wanted to urge upon Mexico that it was to her best interests that she recognize Texas, but stressed that there would be no involvement or active campaign on the part of Great Britain to support her.

This policy did not last long, as Aberdeen was informed in January, 1845, that, because of a new revolution in Mexico, Santa Anna was prepared to recognize Texas. He was also informed that Texan officials, suffering from the defeat of the annexation treaty in the United States Senate, were still open to offers of British mediation in their behalf. The joint resolution had not been heard of in Texas as yet.

As a result of this news, Aberdeen wrote new instructions to Elliot on January 23, in which he urged Elliot to again offer the mediation of Great Britain and France concerning Texan recognition by Mexico. He stressed again the need to avoid all unnecessary mention of their government in the negotiations. Aberdeen approached France and was assured that France would help in the mediation, but gave no promises on guarantees or war. They would accept no responsibility other than mediation. France also consented to send the same instructions to their charge in Mexico, thus making it a joint endeavor.

Meanwhile, the joint resolution, after much discussion and modification in Congress, was passed by the Senate on February 28 and

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13F. O. Texas, 21, January 23, 1845, requoted from E. Adams, British Interests, pp. 198-199.
was signed by Tyler March 1. The United States consented then, after almost nine years, to admit the Republic of Texas to its ranks. It remained now for the people of Texas to accept it. The news was forwarded immediately to Texas, and by the twentieth of March, the Texans knew of the offer.

Elliot received Aberdeen's letter of January 23 at about the same time in March, and with the French charge, decided to make one last effort to forestall annexation. They brought the news of the Mexican offer to Anson Jones, now President, and received from him the assurance that the Mexican treaty would be put before the Texan Congress if it could be received in time. With this assurance, Elliot decided to take the treaty to Mexico himself, and put it before the Mexican government. Because of Aberdeen's instructions to avoid involvement, Elliot made the trip to Mexico in secret. After waiting almost two weeks before the treaty was signed, Elliot return to Texas in time to place it before the Texan Congress at the same time the joint resolution was presented. On June 18, the joint resolution was adopted unanimously and a convention was called for July 4, the purpose of which was to vote for annexation and to work out the methods of union with the United States. At the same time, the projected treaty with Mexico was rejected by the Texas Senate. The annexation controversy was all but over. Formal acceptance into the Union would not be consummated until February, 1846, but it was a foregone conclusion that annexation had succeeded.

The conflict over Texan annexation between the United States and Great Britain came to a close in the summer of 1845. The event was hailed by both Americans and Texans as a great victory for a variety
of causes. To the supporters of slavery it was a victory over the abolitionists; to the expansionists it was a victory for manifest destiny; to the business men it was a victory for the American economy; to almost all Americans it was a grand diplomatic victory over the old and hated rival, Great Britain, who had done everything short of war to block the annexation of Texas.

Great Britain has been accused of trying to block annexation, which she readily admitted, and of interfering in the internal affairs of the United States and Texas, which she explicitly denied. The crucial question then seems to be: Was Great Britain guilty of interference in the internal affairs of either the United States of Texas? If guilty, to what degree was she guilty?
CHAPTER VII

THE EXTENT AND NATURE OF GREAT BRITAIN’S INTERVENTION: A CONCLUSION
The propriety of Great Britain's interference in the affairs of Texas and the United States in the annexation issue has been debated for over a century. To properly resolve the question of intervention, one must emphasize the fact that three parties were involved in the controversy. Too many authors, looking at the question with only Great Britain and the United States in mind, have excluded Texas, probably because they regarded Texas as already a part of the United States. Texas, however, was an independent nation. She conducted her own diplomacy and was formally recognized as a sovereign state. Therefore, she must be regarded as having the same international status as Great Britain and the United States. With this in mind, the question of interference by Great Britain must be answered affirmatively in regard to Texas, but negatively in regard to the United States.

There has been a controversy among historians which centered on the question of whether slavery hastened or impeded annexation.\(^1\) Whether it did hasten or impede annexation is important, but the point to be made is that slavery was a focal point of the conflict between the countries involved. Another controversy that has arisen from this is the amount of blame that should be placed on the countries and individuals, particularly England and her statesmen, involved in the conflict over slavery.

\(^1\)Jesse Reeves, Chauncey Boucher, and George P. Garrison believed the slavery question blocked rather than hastened annexation, while Harriet Smither believed that English abolitionism was responsible for annexation being accomplished.
British diplomacy, in regard to Texas, was without doubt aimed at the abolition of slavery and designed to prevent the annexation of that nation to the United States. Ample proof of this was Aberdeen's diplomacy and the activities carried on by the British agents in Texas and Mexico. We saw in the previous chapter that Elliot, British charge to Texas, openly admitted his desire to have slavery abolished in Texas and went so far as to advance a plan to achieve this goal to a member of the British Foreign Office. He, along with Doyle, British charge to Mexico, was also instrumental in the negotiations of the Robinson Plan, which called for the abolition of slavery. Aberdeen, of course, openly committed Great Britain when he wrote to Doyle twice during the summer of 1843 and stressed the desirability of Mexico making abolition a requisite for their acknowledgement of Texan independence. As further proof of his involvement, in 1844, he wrote to Ashbel Smith that he regretted ever mentioning slavery in connection with Texas. These facts can leave little doubt that Great Britain and her statesmen tried by diplomatic means to abolish slavery in Texas. Even Ephraim Adams, who rose to the defense of Great Britain's diplomacy, wrote, "that this belief in British interest and proposed interference existed there can be no doubt. . . ."²

Even though the proof of British interference over slavery in Texas was readily admitted, some authors are reluctant to condemn Great Britain too harshly for her actions. There have been considerable differences of opinion over Great Britain's role in the slavery issue. It is firmly believed by many that Texan statesmen used and encouraged

²E. Adams, British Interests, p. 13.
British intervention to arouse annexation sentiment in the United States. If such were the case, Texas should then share in the blame of undue interference.

The first real indication that the British desired to gain abolition in Texas came to light after Elliot reached Texas in August of 1842. It is believed that Elliot and Houston became closely associated, and that during this association, Houston admitted to Elliot that slavery was a deplorable institution. Shortly after, in November, Elliot wrote his first letter to Addington which suggested the plan of securing the abolition of slavery in Texas by compensating the slave holders with British money. Until this time no British official in authority had suggested that slavery be abolished, nor had there been any suggestions up to that time that Mexico make the abolition of slavery a condition of recognition. These circumstances have led some to believe that Houston inspired Elliot's plan on abolition. To Ephraim Adams, Elliot's plan, because it originated after Elliot came in contact with Houston, was "... conclusive evidence of Houston's desire to make a tool of England." Adams was in accord with the theory held by another author, Jesse S. Reeves; later, R. B. Mowat supported this same theory in his writings.

Houston was also accused of using the Robinson Plan to arouse support for Texan annexation in the United States. The plan, we know, was negotiated by Elliot in Texas and Doyle in Mexico, but it must be

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3 R. B. Mowat, The Diplomatic Relations of Great Britain and the United States (New York, 1925), p. 120.

4 E. Adams, British Interests, p. 113.
pointed out that the plan did not originate with them, but was advanced by Mexico. Because Texas and Mexico did not have diplomatic relations, the British agents were asked by Houston to negotiate the plan for Texas. Elliot and Doyle were, of course, willing to do this as it seemed to further their goal of abolition. However, the fact remains, the plan was not a British plan; Texas simply asked Great Britain to conduct negotiations on the plan. In order to cause more alarm and jealousy in the United States, Houston made sure that the United States knew of this help given by the British. After the armistice was completed during the summer of 1843, Houston informed Van Zandt in Washington to withdraw from any more attempts at annexation. While this showed that Houston was against annexation, it appeared even more evident when he later turned down Upshur's first attempt to reopen annexation negotiations.

What did Houston want—Independence or annexation? To all intents and purposes, Houston desired an independent Texas and did everything in his power to discourage annexation. This question has caused a separate controversy among historians, but appears to be related to the larger question of British guilt. If Houston was truly in favor of annexation, he and Texas used Great Britain to achieve national ends and should share a large part of that guilt. Many authors seem to believe that Houston was in favor of annexation. According to Reeves, for example, "... the policy determined upon, and carefully worked out, to force the United States to action through fears of British domination, was carried forward another step. Houston's declination of Upshur's overture was not counter to this policy but was strictly
in accord with it.\textsuperscript{5}

Other authors, however, are convinced by Houston's actions that he favored an independent Texas. William C. Binkley, accepting this view, wrote how Houston bragged to Murphy, United States chargé to Texas, how Texas would expand and become a great nation from California to the Columbia River.\textsuperscript{6} Houston, by his diplomatic actions, convinced many prominent statesmen that this was his belief. In addition to Elliot and Aberdeen, he convinced many Americans and Texans. After Houston rejected Upshur's proposal, Van Zandt, in a letter to Anson Jones, mentioned a memorial in favor of annexation, sent to Washington by the Texas Congress. This memorial, signed by all but four of the members of the Texan Congress, showed how much they desired annexation, in spite of Houston's feelings on the matter.\textsuperscript{7} No matter what Houston's desires in the annexation issue were, it appeared he used Great Britain to achieve his goals. Houston's policy of using Great Britain to cause apprehension and jealousy in the United States was also carried out by the Texan ministers in Washington and London. Both Van Zandt and Smith seized every opportunity, as we saw in the previous chapter, to secure their goal of annexation to the United States.

Aberdeen was firmly convinced by Houston and Andrews, the Texan abolitionist, that Texas would willingly go along with abolition of slavery. Therefore, he felt justified in asking Mexico to make abolition

\textsuperscript{5} J. Reeves, \textit{American Diplomacy}, p. 135.

\textsuperscript{6} William Binkley, \textit{The Expansionist Movement in Texas 1836-1850} (Berkeley, California, 1925), p. 121.

\textsuperscript{7} Van Zandt to Jones, February 22, 1844, \textit{Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1908}, II, 255.
a condition for Texan recognition even though he probably knew that it was unwise diplomacy. Great Britain can, therefore, be charged with interference over slavery in Texas, but at the same time Houston must be charged with encouraging such diplomacy.

The question of whether Great Britain was guilty of trying to gain the abolition of slavery in the United States by interference during the controversy over the Texan annexation has given birth to opposing viewpoints. One view was that Great Britain did interfere while the other blamed the slavocracy of the South for the conflict that arose between Great Britain and the United States.

Great Britain's connection with Texas was brought out early by Calhoun, when he tried to gain immediate recognition and annexation for Texas in 1836. As a result, Great Britain, who still hoped that Mexico would reconquer Texas, was accused of designs that her leading statesmen had not yet devised. We know that Calhoun's attempted annexation move failed decisively at that time, but it seemed to mark a trend of "supposed" British interference that would again arise in 1843.

Gilmer's Madisonian letter followed by Ashbel Smith's letter to Van Zandt early in 1843 again aroused the fear of British designs on slavery in Texas. A great deal was made of the two letters, but here again it was concerned with British designs in Texas and not in the United States, even though the letters gave the impression that American slavery was in jeopardy. Gilmer's letter was described by Benton as a "clap of thunder in a clear sky," and he (Benton) defended Great Britain on the grounds that in his estimation no one in Washington was aware of

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8 Supra, Chapter IV, p. 48.
any such designs on her part. Being a Senator, Benton undoubtedly would have been aware of any proof which pointed to such designs or diplomacy on the part of Great Britain. Why, then, did Gilmer and later Smith imply such accusations? Many believed that Gilmer's letter was inspired by Calhoun with the sole purpose of reawakening the annexation issue; Smith had this same purpose in mind when he wrote. What better way was there to make the American public interested in any issue than to connect the name of Great Britain to it? Randolph Adams expressed this well when he wrote that, "... it was not so much the fact of British interests and activities as it was the interpretation put upon them by Americans that makes all the difference because at this period in American history it was always possible to stir up fervid patriotism by dragging in the bugaboo of Great Britain."

Tyler wanted Great Britain's name to be involved in the issue as he was sure that it would gain support for annexation. He still did not have the proof he wanted, however, to feel safe in directly accusing Great Britain of designs on American slavery. The summer of 1843 served to give Tyler and the annexationists what they needed and considered as proof of British interference. The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society held its convention at that time which subsequently led to Andrew's interview with Aberdeen. The fact that Aberdeen even granted Andrew an interview was a mistake on his part, but to make matters worse, he appeared to be in sympathy with a plan to compensate Texan

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slave holders. Smith, the Texan chargé, we learned, then questioned Aberdeen on the interview and Aberdeen made his statement that, "It is the well known policy and wish of the British government to abolish slavery everywhere." This proved to be another mistake on Aberdeen's part, as this statement was made the most of by Duff Green; even though Aberdeen stated that Great Britain would not interfere improperly on the subject, the damage had been done. George Rives believed that Green did not accurately report on Smith's interview with Aberdeen and that the statements he produced had a great effect on the actions of the United States government.\(^{11}\) Green also reported that he talked to one of the leaders of the British opposition party headed by Palmerston and Lord John Russell. He said Russell had told him that his party would assail the ministry on their American policy. Furthermore, if Palmerston returned to power his party would be in favor of non-interference in the domestic policy of other nations and that they would denounce the attempt to emancipate the slaves of the United States and Texas as unwise interference.\(^{12}\) With such reports as these, it was little wonder that Washington figured the British had definite plans for abolition in Texas and elsewhere.

Upshur seemingly believed these reports, but he asked Edward Everett, the United States minister to Great Britain, to investigate their validity. After asking Aberdeen to elucidate his policy on this matter, Everett informed Upshur that Aberdeen had said that Great Britain would not interfere; that she had done this primarily to satisfy

\(^{11}\)G.Rives, *The United States and Mexico*, p. 569.

the abolitionists; but that she would not go on a crusade with them. At about the same time, Aberdeen also denied any improper interference. Ephraim Adams says that even though Aberdeen disclaimed any interference to Everett and Smith, both explanations were stamped with the hope of abolition in Texas. Because of this, it left little doubt that he and the British people were in favor of it. Therefore, according to Adams, it gave the basis of truth for American suspicions.\textsuperscript{13} Everett, however, believed Aberdeen's explanation and let Upshur know that he was more inclined to believe in Aberdeen than he was in Duff Green.

Because he could gain nothing to arouse fears of British supremacy in Texas from Everett's report, Upshur preferred to believe Duff Green's reports. George Rives and Jesse Reeves both seemed to believe that Upshur had more in mind than just the abolition of slavery in Texas. His worst fear was that Great Britain aimed at the abolition of slavery in all of America. Tyler and Calhoun also preferred to believe Green's word over that of the official minister to Great Britain. It appeared that they were only interested in hearing what they wanted to believe in order to gain added support for annexation.

Further proof was added, as far as the annexationists were concerned, in August, when Lord Brougham advanced his idea to Parliament to get slavery abolished in Texas which would, in turn, react against slavery in the United States. Aberdeen, it must be recalled, refused to present the papers and gave only an evasive answer. This led many to believe that Great Britain was planning some action in the matter. This evasive answer was poor judgment on Aberdeen's part, but again

\textsuperscript{13}E. Adams, \textit{British Interests}, pp. 115-116.
there was only an assumption, but no proof, that Great Britain had designs on slavery in the United States.

Alarmed by the furor in the United States, Aberdeen wrote his letter of December 26, which caused the famed Pakenham-Calhoun correspondence. We saw that in spite of a sincere attempt by Aberdeen to disclaim all interference on slavery in the United States, Calhoun used it to place the right of the United States to annexation entirely on the defense of slavery. Pakenham denied Calhoun’s accusations, claimed that Aberdeen’s letter had been misused, and again reiterated that Great Britain had no designs in the United States. Calhoun persisted, however, and again implied that Great Britain was interfering internally in the United States. Most authors put the blame directly on Calhoun, contending that the letter was intended not for Pakenham, but the American people. "Never were the tools of diplomacy," wrote Reeves, "put to political use with more disastrous results than by Calhoun."¹⁴

The result was that the annexation treaty was defeated and again slavery was not the aid to annexation, but the obstacle. Benton now accused Calhoun of making the annexation issue a political issue in the campaign of 1834. His purpose, Benton said, was to prevent the nomination of Van Buren and the election of Henry Clay.¹⁵ If this were true, Calhoun succeeded in carrying out his purpose, and the supposed interference by Great Britain in the question of slavery over Texan annexation served him well.

In fairness to Calhoun, it must be mentioned that Aberdeen was

¹⁴J. Reeves, American Diplomacy, p. 150.
¹⁵T. Benton, Thirty Years View, II, 590.
not without fault in the matter. He denied that Great Britain was interfering improperly in the abolition of slavery in Texas while he had already taken steps to do just that. His instructions to Doyle, chargé in Mexico, had long been written in which he stressed the importance of Mexico recognizing Texas in return for abolition. But here again, it was for abolition in Texas and not in the United States.

Because of this conflict over slavery, Aberdeen then decided that it would be best to change tactics, and as we have seen, regretted that he had ever mentioned slavery. The controversy over slavery was thus terminated as far as Great Britain was concerned, and Aberdeen would not mention it again.

Did Great Britain then interfere improperly by diplomatic means with slavery in the United States during the controversy over the Texan annexation? There is little proof to substantiate such an interpretation. On the other hand, the theory that Great Britain, her statesmen, and a vast majority of the British people "wished" or "desired" to see abolition in the United States can be agreed with. There is a difference between the two positions, although many have tended to confuse them. We have seen that Great Britain did interfere in Texas, but again it must be remembered that Texas was not yet a part of the United States; therefore, this interference was not directed against the United States and any such claims can be based on only assumptions.

Justin Smith was very emphatic about British guilt in Texas and felt that it was aimed at the United States. "We have seen," he writes, "... that she endeavored to effect the destruction of slavery in Texas, trying to gain the point first as the price of recognition,... and we have seen that she chiefly desired abolition in Texas with a
view to this country." He added that, "... the facts are incontestable that her designs in regard to Texas were deep and persevering; that they were believed in by herself, by the Texan representatives at her court, and by her own representatives in Texas to be very unfavorable to American interests." He does admit that Great Britain had the right to "wish" this, however.

Most of the responsibility for the conflict must be borne by Aberdeen, according to many authors. Aberdeen is accused by George Rives of being unsteady and inconsistent in his conduct of American affairs. He tried hard to shape the future of Texas and keep Mexico at peace, but he abandoned one position after another. He is also accused by Rives as lacking in the ability or strength of character to carry through any policy which seemed to be opposed by the people of the United States. We have seen that Aberdeen made several statements that a person in a high position should have refrained from making. That he lacked diplomatic ability, however, we will leave to conjecture. Aberdeen was defended by Ephraim Adams and Jesse Reeves because they felt that Aberdeen was accused on insufficient grounds. Adams excused Aberdeen on the grounds that criticism of his actions, "... was centered upon his lack of frankness and his unaccustomed use of devious ways." Whatever the faults of Aberdeen as a diplomat, he should not be accused of meddling in the American slavery question because of his own personal wishes or desires. The same can be said for

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British abolitionists such as Lord Brougham when he expressed his personal desire for seeing abolition take place in the United States.

Great Britain should not be condemned or held responsible for the personal ideals of individual citizens or the humanitarian interests of groups such as the abolitionist societies. These ideals and interests cannot, on the other hand, be overlooked in the study of a nation's diplomacy and the course that it may take. Great Britain, after the turn of the century, was in a state of reform of which the anti-slavery movement was only a part. The lower classes of England, due to the industrial revolution and the consequent move from a rural to an urban society, were demanding more representation in government that would favor the common man. Riots were staged in many parts of the nation which, to the leaders of the nation, conjured up the vision of the bloody French Revolution. As a result, the ear of the English government was attuned to the desires and wishes of its citizens. The Anti-Slavery Society of 1823 was a part of this reform movement and was formed for the purpose of gradually abolishing slavery in the British colonies. The leadership of this humanitarian society, as mentioned earlier, was composed of evangelical churchmen. That many of these leaders were influential in the English government there can be little doubt when one learns that the Anti-Slavery Society of 1823 had a Royal Duke as its president with five peers and fourteen members of Parliament as vice-presidents. After the abolition of slavery in 1833 the ideals of the anti-slavery societies would then be taken on by the English government. Consequently, it was an ideological wish on the part of

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Great Britain and her citizens to see slavery abolished everywhere. Such wishes, however, cannot be construed as undue interference by one country on another. If such were the case, the United States today could be accused of ideological diplomacy against Russia, since the vast majority of people in this country certainly wish to see that Communist regime changed.

It is interesting to note that several authors have taken a stand in the defense of the South on the annexation issue. While they do not blame Great Britain for any great degree of intervention on slavery, they contend that it was not a slave holders' conspiracy to advance the extension of slavery. Joseph Schmitz writes that this idea has been generally superseded and that the belief now is that the movement was broader. He says that it grew out of a desire for an empire and that manifest destiny is now believed to have challenged the designs of Great Britain. This interpretation, he believes, is now generally accepted. Other authors such as John Latane, David Wainhouse, and Samuel Bemis seem to support this view. Whether historians blamed Southern slavocracy or the advocates of manifest destiny for the desire to acquire Texas is a separate and distinct controversy. Whether the British can be blamed for interference in the domestic question of slavery is something else. That they cannot be blamed appears to be the only answer to this question.

When it is remembered that the controversy was a three-way conflict with Texas included, and that mere ideals and desires on the part

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individuals and groups are not construed as diplomatic acts, it can be said that Great Britain intervened in Texas with the abolition of slavery. For these same reasons, it can be said that Great Britain did not interfere with slavery in the United States.
PUBLIC DOCUMENTS


Great Britain. Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates. Vols. LVI, LXXI, LXXIV.


U. S. Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States. 1843. Vol. XII.

BOOKS


An outdated but very good account of the British point of view. Mr. Adams’ research of British papers and documents was very valuable to this study.


I regard this as one of our best works on American diplomatic history.


This book gives a good account of a United States Senator’s thoughts at this period of time.


Mr. Buckingham's and Mr. Buxton's books give the reader an idea how some Englishmen felt about slavery at the time of the Texas question.


Reeves, Jesse S. American Diplomacy Under Tyler and Polk. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1907. Mr. Reeves' book contributed a great deal to the study of foreign relations between Great Britain and the United States.


The work of Mr. Smith should be read along with the work of Ephraim Adams. Between the two, they give a good picture of the Texas question of annexation to the United States.


ARTICLES AND PERIODICALS


REPORTS


This source would be a must in the study of the diplomatic correspondence of the Texas government.