Have You Any News?

How America's First Embedded Journalists Envisioned the United States, 1846-1848

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction 3

Historiography: The Mexican-American War and Journalism 9

II. 'The Seat of War': The Embedded Journalists 14

III. Embedded Reporting: On the Front Lines and in Public Perception 22

Creating a Narrative for the Public 31

IV. To the Halls of the Montezumas: Technology and Innovation 38

V. Manifest Destiny and Nation Building 42

VI. Conclusion 55

Images 61

Bibliography 63

Acknowledgments 67

I. Introduction

For three long days in September 1846, the U.S. Army bombarded the old fortress city of Monterey, Mexico.[1] General William J. Worth's troops slowly but surely captured four of the surrounding hills, pointing their artillery at any retreating Mexican soldiers and opening up an entry way for U.S. soldiers to storm inside the city walls. Through the streets, violent hand to hand combat ensued on September 23, and early the next morning Monterey capitulated.

George Wilkins Kendall, thirty-seven years old and a journalist for the *New Orleans Picayune*, had been traveling with General Worth and serving as an aide-de-camp during the campaign. As Kendall hurriedly wrote back to his newspaper, "From the time the Mexican Lancers commenced the attack upon our advance, late on the afternoon of the 20th, up to the final capitulation on the afternoon of the 24th, there was literally no rest to the soles of the feet of any man in Gen. Worth's command."[2] His fellow *Picayune* correspondent, Christopher M. Haile, had also accompanied Worth's military column and quickly threw together a dispatch that Kendall added to the mailbag of his personally hired courier. The news of the victory would surely spread, but Kendall, who had just organized his own Pony Express to speed the news to New Orleans, aimed to get his dispatches to the presses first. He succeeded.

On October 6, the *Picayune* boasted of the success and influence of their correspondents' dispatches.

> If we were able to lay before the citizens of New Orleans and the country at large full particulars of the three glorious days at Monterey in advance of our contemporaries, *it was owing to no happy chance*, but was due entirely to the foresight and prudence of our associate, now with the Army. Appreciating the vast importance of the news, and prompt as he ever is to incur any expense which may contribute to the interest of the columns of the *Picayune*, Mr. Kendall

[1] In this paper, Monterey refers to Monterey, Mexico, rather than Monterey, California. The journalists utilized the spelling of "Monterey" rather than "Monterrey"; for consistency with the primary documents, this paper will follow that spelling.
[2] "Monterey, September 29, 1846," *New Orleans Picayune*.

> determined to forward the despatches of our correspondents by express, cost what it would. Circumstances favored his design, and our packages reached us by private hands in *eight* days from Monterey.[3]

Kendall, with one dramatic effort, had solidified his and his paper's reputations for timeliness and accuracy. His fellow Mexican-American War journalists soon followed his lead, forming their own express routes, utilizing the expansive power of the telegraph to spread their dispatches, and writing books in an effort to reach the public first. These embedded journalists, through the very nature of seeing firsthand the seat of war, established an authority with their readership that they used to promote much more than just the selling of papers, although that was clearly a priority. Most critically, the correspondents shaped the very nature of how the American people saw and consumed the war. These journalists did not just observe the war, but sought to use the conflict to develop the nation into something decidedly new. The correspondents were not simply reporting on the scene — they also engaged in creating and nurturing a vision and narrative of America steeped in innovation, destiny and expansion.

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The Mexican-American War of 1846-1848 culminated in the annexation by the United States of a vast expanse of land — Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and parts of Colorado and Texas. The nation's first foreign war, aggressive in nature, had produced the desired outcome by stretching the United States' power literally from sea to shining sea. While the war's tangible result can be seen clearly by looking at any modern map, what did it mean for the young nation's understanding of its place and its purpose? Who told the stories that would shape the vision of an expansive United States of America?

[3] "Editors," *New Orleans Picayune*, Oct. 6, 1846; italics in the original.

Adventurers, humorists, newspaper editors, soldiers, opportunists, ego-maniacs – the journalists of the Mexican-American War ran the gamut of nineteenth-century characters but shared one common trait: all were passionately pro-expansion. The Mexican-American War correspondent Jane Storm, known as Cora Montgomery to her readers, is credited by some historians with coining the term Manifest Destiny.[4] While a few wrote disparagingly of the military campaign and of the war itself, none questioned the belief that the United States should acquire the southwest. And they would be there to see it.

These reporters certainly fit the current term of "embedded journalists." The expression may be a modern distinction, as Michael S. Sweeney writes in *The Military and the Press: An Uneasy Truce*, but the practice is as old as the Mexican-American War.[5] The dimensions of the military-journalist relationship were quite different than what one sees today in the U.S. military setting, since many writers involved in the U.S.-Mexican War served as military volunteers and fought in the conflict. Several were soldier-correspondents, and this element infused their reporting with an edge of authority to readers. The public trusted them because they were there, and the men wrote with more authority simply because they fought. And it was their inability to serve as dispassionate observers that cemented their clout with the public. These journalists were not just a byline, but celebrities whose credibility was enhanced by their authenticated behaviors and whose dispatches proved defining for the nation's understanding of the war.

The introduction of war correspondents changed the newspaper world. It created a field where timely news from observers directly at the source became a critical element of a

[4] Linda S. Hudson, *Mistress of Manifest Destiny: A Biography of Jane McManus Storm Cazneau, 1807-1878* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2001), 46. While the phrase Manifest Destiny was previously credited to John O'Sullivan, the editor of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, Hudson's analysis of the original article using the term and the grammatical errors therein effectively links the expression to Storm. Using a computer program, she discovered that Storm had 100 percent identical grammar errors to the article, "Annexation," while O'Sullivan had none.

[5] Michael S. Sweeney, *The Military and the Press: An Uneasy Truce* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 17.

newspaper's success and status. These reporters offer a look at how journalism developed, highlighting the newfound emphasis on timeliness and accuracy. Their dispatches were filled with urgency and immediacy, and a clear goal was to print their pieces as soon as possible. This was the age of the telegraph, but at this point the new technology had not reached the battlefields. The telegraph was useful once the reports made it into New Orleans, but the journey from Mexico was hazardous. Sending dispatches home easily, thus, was not possible – technology was not the key reason for war reporters bursting onto the scene at this time. Editors instead developed extensive courier systems, and as historian Robert W. Johannsen writes in *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, "the routes... were infested with guerrillas. George Wilkins Kendall of the New Orleans *Picayune* organized the first efficient courier system - 'Mr. Kendall's Express' - and other correspondents quickly copied it." Kendall hired Mexicans to take his dispatches to Vera Cruz, where they were shipped to New Orleans by sea. At the port, the information would be transferred to a small, swift steamship with typesetting equipment. Once docked, the dispatches were ready to hit the presses.[6] These reporters were the pioneers in the creation of the war correspondent not because technology made it fantastically easy, but because their understanding that being at the scene – and sharing that information quickly with the public – was an essential aspect in the practice of this new type of journalism and in telling the defining story of the nation's first foreign war.

Not only did the role of journalism change through the correspondents' new methods of coverage, but the Mexican-American War certainly felt the impact of the new, onsite reporters. News from the front lines, these reporters and the military discovered for the first time in this conflict, was a weapon of war. Crucial for morale, public opinion and even strategy, these

[6] Robert W. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 18.

journalists parlayed their first-hand information into building arguments in support of the expansionist agenda or into developing challenges to President Polk's handling of the conflict. These individuals proved critical in shaping the public's understanding of the war and what it would mean for the United States' self-definition and future.

The heroes and tales of foreign adventures the public craved emanated from the newspaper reports, and sometimes from the newspapermen themselves. This project details the works of George Wilkins Kendall and C.M. Haile of the *New Orleans Picayune*, Thomas Bangs Thorpe of the *New Orleans Tropic*, James L. Freaner — known as "Mustang" — of the *New Orleans Delta*, and Jane Storm, who wrote under the pseudonym "Montgomery" for the *New York Sun.* These five journalists were the most substantial and active of the ten professional correspondents embedded in Mexico during the war; while there were several others who wrote dispatches for papers back home or the so-called "Anglo-Saxon Press"[7] of Mexico and many soldiers who sent letters to newspapers, the journalists of this study were selected for the variety and availability of their dispatches to those throughout the U.S. at this time, as well as due to their activity during the actual period of fighting. This paper examines newspapers, letters, books and material culture to reveal and explore the impact these correspondents had on the public's perception and understanding of the Mexican-American War, the field of journalism, and the newfound American narrative that these journalists created, developed and promoted.

While some journalists wrote with a more dispassionate image of themselves, others played up their adventurous lifestyles. They cast themselves and their alter-egos – as some wrote

[7] See Robert Louis Bodson, "A description of the United States Occupation of Mexico as reported by American newspapers published in Vera Cruz, Puebla, and Mexico City September 14, 1847, to July 31, 1848" (PhD diss., Ball State University, 1971) and Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas* for discussion of these occupation papers. They typically followed the army, lasted a short period, were printed in both Spanish and English and were for the Army's consumption first and foremost, which is why they are not critical to this project due to their lack of widespread dissemination to the U.S.

under pennames or in character altogether – in the guises of heroic, valiant figures pushing for America to conquer the continent or as bumbling fools navigating a foreign land. Of course, several individuals simply sought to tell it like it was and report the news as quickly as possible to a waiting public. The ways the reporters saw and constructed their innovative new role illuminate the establishment of a major aspect of journalism – the war reporter as both a job and a myth – as well as the definition of the Mexican-American War in the public sphere.

The public's hunger for and response to the stories of the battles show the era's obsession with patriotism, popular newspapers and periodicals, adventure and American expansion. They also highlight the growing tension regarding the slavery question. Yes, America would grow, but would these new territories be free or slave? Indeed, there were virulent anti-war feelings, and the reporters' information about the conflict was used to highlight the protesters' arguments about what they characterized as a war of aggression**.** It was a war of invasion and conquest that spurred dissent in many circles, just as it raised equally passionate beliefs in the notion that the U.S. was divinely ordained to conquer the continent.

But it was a war of information as well. Many people were literate in this era, and inexpensive newspapers were available throughout the states. In fact, the *New Orleans Picayune*'s name came from the Spanish word for the smallest coin in circulation at the time. A picayune was worth about six and a quarter cents.[8] The penny press, which became common in the 1830s, made newspapers widely available, and competition was fierce among publishers to impress and attract a readership. Whatever individuals thought about the moral nature of the war, news was available to the public in an uncensored form, as journalists' reports did not go through

[8] Fayette Copeland, *Kendall of the Picayune* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 22.

military censors.[9] The reporters used their freedom on the battlefield to detail their experiences and to cross the boundary between observer and soldier.

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Historiography: The Mexican-American War and Journalism

These reporters, like the war they covered, have long been forgotten and overlooked. Phillip Knightley, an investigative journalist with the *Sunday Times*, wrote in 1975 what is considered by many the seminal book on war reporting, and he has continually revised it over the years. *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* states in its title the very issue facing the intrepid reporters of 1846-1848. As he writes in the preface rather definitely, "The decision by *The Times* of London in 1854 to send a general reporter to the Crimean War marked an immense leap in the history of journalism."[10] The opening anecdote of the massive study begins in 1854 with the charge of the Light Brigade, thus showing the problem of Knightley's limited, Eurocentric analysis. A fellow journalist, James M. Perry of the *Wall Street Journal*, similarly ignored the precedent-setting nature of the Mexican-American War reporters, declaring that "the modern American journalist emerged for the first time in the Civil War."[11] He associates the Civil War reporters with the birth of modern journalism because he considers the conflict the original "instant-news war" that featured correspondents who produced "deeply distinguished reporting" and "put their lives at risk on the battlefield."[12] This characterization, however, sounds very much like a description of the group of individuals who trekked into Mexico in 1846, starting steamship and pony express routes to send their stories back in the midst of joining in on the action on the battlefield. Certainly, the

[9] Sweeney, *The Military and the Press*, 17
[10] Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004), xi.
[11] James M. Perry, *A Bohemian Brigade: The Civil War Correspondents* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000), x.
[12] Perry, *A Bohemian Brigade,* xi.

Civil War conflict proved monumental in the practice of journalism – 500 reporters turned out to cover the conflict just from the North[13] - as well as in the American experience, but it was not the source for the creation of a separate section in the field. The Mexican-American War, and the journalists who covered it, had already laid the groundwork for war reporting over a decade earlier.

Yet, in the academic literatures of journalism and the 1840s, there is only one work that focuses entirely on Mexican-American War correspondents. Thomas Reilly's 1975 doctoral thesis, "American reporters in the Mexican War, 1846-1848," is the only comprehensive academic work on the subject. Reilly, a journalism professor at Cal State Northridge, had been preparing a manuscript for publication at the time of his death in 2002.[14] In his dissertation, Reilly concentrates on collecting information on those involved in reporting the conflict and discussing the technological and procedural aspects of producing news at the time. Anyone who writes on this topic and can locate this dissertation owes an immense debt to the expansive research first comprehensively done by Reilly, but his emphasis in his 1975 draft was on compilation and documentation as opposed to historical analysis.[15]

Even when later historians acknowledge these journalists, most books on the history of journalism dedicate but few paragraphs to their efforts. Sweeney's *The Military and the Press* does state unequivocally that "the Mexican-American War was the first war covered by professional war correspondents," but that statement constitutes the extent of the interest in this topic by journalism historians.[16] In similar fashion, *The Historical Dictionary of War Journalism*

[13] Knightley, *The First Casualty*, 17.
[14] Manley Witten, "On foreign soil: American reporters in the Mexican-American War, 1846-1848," (MA project, CSUN, 2004), 39. Witten's MA project was to prepare the manuscript for publication. As of now, I have been unable to get in touch with Witten to learn about the current state of the project, despite efforts to do so.
[15] Thomas Reilly, "American reporters in the Mexican War, 1846-1848" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1975).
[16] Sweeney, *The Military and the Press*, 17.

offers excellent encyclopedia entries on the reporters, but as its title suggests, offers no analysis.[17]

Much like its journalists, the Mexican-American War itself has often been disregarded. This war certainly does not make it into most popular understandings of the historical development of the United States, despite the fact that it resulted in a huge expansion of the country's territory, among other outcomes. While several academic works were released a few years after the war, including popular histories such as Kendall's 1851 *The War Between the United States and Mexico, Illustrated*, there is a surprising shortage of literature on the subject for a war that was so critical to the American experience of a foreign war and in the upcoming crisis of the union. However, there have been certain bursts of interest in the conflict that have often coincided with other wars. In 1919, Justin H. Smith wrote *The War with Mexico,* one of the major foundational studies of the war. Smith, a historian and Dartmouth professor, spoke reverentially about the American cause and dismissed the Mexicans as an uncivilized people, writing "of all conquerors, we were perhaps the most excusable, the most reasonable, the most beneficent. The Mexicans had come far short of their duty to the world. Being what they were, they had forfeited a large share of their national rights."[18] With Vietnam came one of the most influential books on the subject, Jack Bauer's 1974 *The Mexican War, 1846-1848*. Yet his comparison with the war he knew is blatant and perhaps skewed, as Bauer writes in his preface that "the story of the application of that force by James K. Polk, like that of America's recent experience in Vietnam, depicts the dangers inherent in the application of graduated force."[19] While this does not negate Bauer's historical analysis, it does suggest the influences and

[17] *Historical Dictionary of War Journalism*, 1st ed. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997).
[18] Justin H. Smith, *The War with Mexico* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1919), 322, http://books.google.com (accessed November 27, 2009).
[19]Jack Bauer, *The Mexican War, 1846-1848* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), xxv, http://books.google.com (accessed November 27, 2009).

preconceptions he held toward the Vietnam War were unfairly and inaccurately placed on a much different conflict.

In 1973, historian John H. Schroeder published his analysis of antiwar sentiment during the war, focusing particularly on the newspapers that challenged the conflict in *Mr. Polk's War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848.* His work suggests the high level of antiwar activism and writing during the crisis, which is frequently ignored by other historians working in this framework.[20] Certainly the high level of antiwar activism during the Vietnam War also inspired Schroeder's analysis, but it does not permeate his entire thinking on the conflict as it does for Bauer. By contrast, John S. D. Eisenhower's *So Far From God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848,* published in 1989, centers solely on the U.S. military.[21] While it offers excellent accounts of the battles and major army figures, the book does not tackle any other topics and thus offers only a limited view of an expansive conflict. At the other end of the spectrum is historian Robert W. Johannssen's 1985 book, *To the Halls of the Montezumas,* which tackles the war from the angle of the popular American imagination. As he takes a different perspective than the military analysis of the war, he creates a much fuller image and understanding of the conflict, vividly bringing to life the spirit of the age. Johannsen analyzes newspaper dispatches, military and travel accounts, images and poetry to convey the mood of the period. He presents an America infatuated with the ideals of chivalry and heroic values and passionately inspired by patriotism and Manifest Destiny. As he writes, "no event in the nation's history had been so widely reported or become so well known to the people. The war was

[20] John H. Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973).
[21] John S. D. Eisenhower, *So Far From God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000).

brought into American homes as no other episode ever had."[22] Johannsen's argument centers on how and why the war specifically captured the American imagination, detailing the obsession with soldiers, adventure, travel and technology.

Additionally, Johannsen's book discusses the role of war reporters, emphasizing just how wide the coverage of the war was. Newspapers, books and magazines "continued unabated for the rest of the conflict."[23] Soldiers sent letters to their hometown papers, authors wrote about heroes and for the first time war correspondents were on the front lines, all providing readers with what Johannsen declares they wanted – travel and adventure. This work is an important part of the literature of the Mexican-American War, particularly since it does not focus on military history but instead provides a cultural, social look at the war and mid-nineteenth-century Americans. It tackles the time period from multiple angles – including the press, personal accounts and popular culture – rather than focusing specifically on military history or on individual soldiers or armies, to which many works on the subject do restrict themselves. It does not, however, emphasize the critical role that the embedded journalists played in expressing the ideas of the time.

With the onset of the Iraq war, the nineteenth-century conflict has experienced a resurgence of interest. In 2007, Joseph Wheelan, a popular historian and longtime journalist, released *Invading Mexico: America's Continental Dream and the Mexican War, 1846-1848.* This work envisioned the war directly in light of the Iraq conflict, highlighting the possible parallels of the Mexican-American War with Iraq, particularly in the cases of the wars' beginnings, initial debates in Congress, attacks on dissenters and extensive executive control.[24] Its inability to see

[22] Johannsen, *To the Halls,* 204.
[23] Johannsen, *To the Halls,* 113.
[24] Joseph Wheelan, *Invading Mexico: America's Continental Dream and the Mexican War, 1846-1848* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2007).

the war independently, as well as its lack of academic analysis, makes this book suitable only for the general public rather than serious readers. The most recent work, released in 2009, is historian David A. Clary's *Eagles and Empire: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle for a Continent,* which draws together both political and military stories, and offers analysis from both the Mexican and American sides of the conflict.[25] Typically books on the subject take one particular side, making this history by Clary an excellent addition to the literature. Additionally, his observations into the relationship of the military and the press are of particular use for this study.

While past scholarship has at times recognized the war correspondents of this conflict, this study aims to fully establish the Mexican-American War journalist as the first real precursor of the modern correspondent, to analyze the role and perception of the reporters both to themselves and in the public eye, and to further detail the historical impact of their work in terms of their influence on journalism and the war itself. If journalism is indeed the first draft of history, then it is time to recognize the important historical contribution of these reporters and the oft-forgotten conflict they covered.

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II. 'The Seat of War': The Embedded Journalists

Kendall set out to cover the war from the front lines immediately. His own paper discovered the news of his travels to Mexico after he had left, reporting on May 22, 1846 "that upon hearing of the commencement of hostilities on the Rio Grande, our confrere's fondness for adventure took a military turn, and he started for Matamoros."[26] Kendall traveled through Texas and joined up with the army stationed at Point Isabel on June 6, 1846, arriving in Matamoros on

[25] David A. Clary, *Eagles and Empire: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle for a Continent* (New York: Bantam Books, 2009).
[26] *New Orleans Picayune,* May 22, 1846.

June 12, 1846.[27] After a few dispatches reflecting on the state of the city, Kendall set off to see action with the Texas Rangers under Capt. Ben McCulloch, telling his readers that he was "on a scout into the interior."[28] Kendall also served with General Worth as an aide-de-camp. In 1847, Worth wrote to Kendall commending his military exploits, telling him that "I cannot part with you without an expression of my high and grateful appreciation of the value of your services on my staff in several of the principle [sic] conflicts with the enemy in this Campaign."[29] The blurring of the lines between soldier and journalist was not seen as problematic by Kendall or his readership. The credibility he achieved from his time on the battlefield was a critical aspect of his success and fame as a journalist.

From Tacubaya on September 8, 1847, Kendall detailed his observations of the Battle of El Molino del Rey, one of the bloodiest of the war, to the *Picayune*. "I have just returned from a battlefield," Kendall wrote, "Gen. Worth commenced the attack at early day-light, and in less than two hours every point was carried, all the cannon of the enemy were in our possession, an immense quantity of ammunition captured, and nearly 1,000, among them fifty-three officers, taken prisoners."[30] Kendall, who had witnessed much of the fighting of the war, knew immediately that it stood apart in terms of bloodshed. "For more than an hour the battle raged with a violence not surpassed since the Mexican war commenced, and so great the odds opposed that for some time the result was doubtful," he told his readers.[31] Kendall's vision of the

[27] "Point Isabel, June 7, 1846," *New Orleans Picayune,* June 14, 1846.
[28] "Matamoros, June 15, 1846," *New Orleans Picayune,* June 24, 1846.
[29] Letter from Major General W.J. Worth to George Wilkins Kendall, Oct. 29, 1847, Dr. Fayette Copeland Collection, Box 2, Folder 5, Western History Collections, The University of Oklahoma. I would like to thank Graduate Research Assistant Devon Yost for copying and mailing me documents from this collection.
[30] Letter to the *New Orleans Picayune,* Sept. 8, 1847, Kendall Family Papers, AR376, Box 1, Page 32, Special Collections Division, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.
[31] Letter to the *New Orleans Picayune,* Sept. 8, 1847, Kendall Family Papers, AR376, Box 1, Page 32, Special Collections Division, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.

American victory is one of a small, passionate force triumphing against a superior Mexican army. He shaped ideas of American glory and heroism through his eyewitness reports. Kendall's time on the battlefield added to the authenticity of his writing for the public. The *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette* called Kendall **"**the Warrior Historian… No one can write the history of a war so well as one who was in its midst – a sharer of its dangers and a witness of its triumphs,"[32] and the *Niles Register* told its readers that war reporters, witnesses at the seat of war, were "better qualified to furnish correct accounts of what transpired."[33]

However, while covering the Battle of Mexico City and serving as an aide to Worth, Kendall was reportedly wounded. *The Cleveland Herald* told its readers that "George W. Kendall of the N.O. Picayune, whose name appears among the wounded in the battle before the city of Mexico, was hit in the knee by a musket ball. The wound was slight and Kendall makes no mention of the circumstance in his correspondence."[34] The paper received its information from the official army statement, which lists Kendall as "volunteer, A.D.C.; slightly [wounded]."[35] Kendall never mentioned this in his dispatches to the *Picayune*, but his own newspaper played it up in a piece on "The Army Correspondents," writing that "[Kendall] has shown himself a brave man, and we honor his courage; twice he has been wounded in fighting battles of his country, and his countrymen applaud his gallantry and will reward it."[36] Kendall's display of manliness and courage on the front lines was well known and added a level of authenticity to his widely read dispatches.

[32] *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette* (Natchez, MS), March 18, 1848.
[33] *Niles' Register*, Sept. 25, 1847.
[34] *The Cleveland Herald*, Oct. 28, 1847.
[35] "U.S. Casualties of the Battles of Chapultepec and the City of Mexico, Sept. 13-14, 1847," *Descendants of Mexican War Veterans,* http://www.dmwv.org/honoring/chapmex.htm (Accessed Jan. 19, 2010).
[36] "The Army Correspondents," *New Orleans Picayune*, Nov. 2, 1847.

C.M. Haile, known to the *Picayune*'s readers as "Pardon Jones," his bumbling humor character, was hired as fulltime correspondent for the paper in May 1846. As a former West Point cadet, he knew several of the commanders in the field, including William Tecumseh Sherman, Paul Octave Herbert and Richard S. Ewell.[37] With Haile hired as chief correspondent for the *Picayune*, other papers took notice. The *New Orleans Delta* declared that the paper had "George Wilkins Kendall to do the fighting, and H. to do the writing," and observed that "H., the correspondent of the *Picayune*, has '*actually*' gone to Matamoras."[38] The emphasis in the *Delta*'s reporting of its rival's development reflects the very newness of and innovation in the idea of the professional war reporter at the seat of war. Yet Haile would not stay in this position. In March 1847, he was appointed first lieutenant and by early June had been made captain and given command of a company.[39]

While a fulltime writer, however, Haile dedicated himself to sending over a hundred letters to the *Picayune* as "H." His popular "Pardon Jones" letters took the backseat to his more serious reports during the period of 1846-1847, but he still included elements of his humor in observations of life about the army and the Mexican people. As for his coverage of the battlefield, he is notable for his inclusion of wounded and dead lists, as discussed above, and his dedication to firsthand observation. In one of his earliest dispatches, after visiting Palo Alto's battleground, he wrote that he "counted some thirty dead bodies... some had been nearly severed in two by cannon balls; others had lost a part of the head, both legs, a shoulder, or the whole stomach. Of many of them nothing but the bones, encased in uniform, was left."[40] He did not merely seek to give the public a look at warfare, but also at the foreign elements in Mexican

[37] C.M. Haile, *C.M. Haile's "Pardon Jones" Letters: Old Southwest Humor from Antebellum Louisiana*, ed. Ed Piacentino (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 20.
[38] *New Orleans Delta*, July 22, 1846.
[39] Haile, *C.M. Haile's "Pardon Jones" Letters*, 24.
[40] "Point Isabel, Fort Polk, June 2, 1846," *New Orleans Picayune*, June 15, 1846.

culture, typically tinged with his particular brand of humor. In his piece "Minor Morals of the Mexicans," Haile described being found by Mexican women as he was bathing in the San Juan River. He wrote that he "raised my head suddenly above the barrel, hoping to frighten them away, but to my surprise the fair senorita, instead of being startled, very politely bid me '*buenos dias*."[41] Then, "forgetting everything like gallantry, I sang out, '*vamos! Vamos!'* at them, but they only laughed at my poor effort at Spanish."[42] Haile's writing offers comedic stories that showcase the bumbling American encountering an exotic culture, as well as detailed and in-depth accounts of warfare.

Like Haile, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, thirty-one years old in 1846, was a famous humorist prior to the Mexican-American War. Thorpe, who wrote for the *New Orleans Tropic* while covering the war from May-June 1846 with General Zachary Taylor's troops, was best known by his pen name Tom Owen, the Bee-Hunter. Thorpe had established himself as a popular writer prior to the war, selling various humorous sketches of life in the southwest to newspapers and story collections. He had also worked on a series of sporting newspapers before joining the *Tropic*,[43] and he certainly thought of himself as a professional writer. His first collection of sketches, *Mysteries of the Backwoods*, was released in December 1845, and he became co-owner of the *Tropic* in April 1846 after a string of other newspaper jobs.[44] Just a month later, he went down to the frontlines of Mexico to serve as the paper's correspondent. While he spent only a short time covering the Mexican-American War, he wrote three books on the subject from 1846-1848, turning his firsthand observations into books for a public excited for news from someone who had been at the front lines.

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[41] "Minor Morals of the Mexicans," *New Orleans Picayune*, Sept. 8, 1846.
[42] "Minor Morals of the Mexicans," *New Orleans Picayune*, Sept. 8, 1846.
[43] Thomas Bangs Thorpe, *A New Collection of Thomas Bangs Thorpe's Sketches of the Old Southwest*, ed. David C. Estes (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 27-36.
[44] Estes, ed., *A New Collection of Thomas Bang Thorpe's Sketches*, 6.

James Freaner of the *New Orleans Delta* became well-known under his pseudonym of Mustang. As J. Maginnis, the business editor of his paper, wrote to him in March 1848, "I must say that the reputation of Mustang as a soldier or traveler on the lightening principle should stand out boldly."[45] While most sources relate that he received his nickname following the Battle of Monterey after killing a Mexican lancer officer and capturing his horse, journalism historian Tom Reilly wrote that he actually settled on his name in June 1846 — several months prior to the battle in September. Reilly states that Freaner never mentioned the incident in his correspondence, and the first time it ever appeared was in an anecdote related in the *Delta* on November 6, 1847.[46] His first letters to the *Delta* are from as early as May 20, 1846, but he reported most extensively in 1847, as General Winfield Scott's army moved from Vera Cruz to Mexico City to the end of the war.[47] In addition to reporting, Freaner accompanied a New Orleans regiment to the Rio Grande at the start of the war and then joined a Texas Ranger company. He was also deeply involved in the political dealings in Mexico. In February 1848, American diplomat Nicholas P. Trist entrusted Freaner with bringing the Peace Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo — which ended the war and resulted in more than 500,000 square miles of territory transferring to U.S. power — to Washington, D.C.[48] While Kendall beat him to the presses with the treaty news, Freaner still received credit for delivering the treaty to the President that would end the war, as unpopular as the treaty might have been to some.

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[45] J. Maginnis to James L. Freaner, March 30, 1848, Box 1, Folder 8, James L. Freaner Letters and Other Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. I would like to thank Librarian Karen Nangle for her help in copying and sending me Freaner's papers.

[46] Thomas Reilly in Manley Witten's "On foreign soil: American reporters in the Mexican-American War, 1846-1848," 64.

[47] Reilly, "American reporters in the Mexican War," 124.

[48] See Robert W. Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs: James K. Polk, the Mexican War and the Conquest of the American Continent* (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 400, among other books. Also confirmed in a letter from James Spencer to James L. Freaner, March 2, 1848, Box 1, Folder 4, James L. Freaner Letters and Other Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, which recounted that "The disappointment would indeed be great if peace is not concluded on the basis of the treaty brought by you."

Freaner was certainly one of the most famous war correspondents, well known at home and in Mexico. The editor of the Mexican paper *La Patria* even provided a letter of introduction for Freaner to General Diaz de la Vega, calling him his friend and highly recommending him to the General. The editor also commented on Freaner's profession as a newspaper editor and informed Diaz de la Vega of Freaner's traveling in the country and his subsequent interest in learning about Mexico's history and traditions.[49] Moreover, Freaner was also frequently reprinted in numerous papers, and he was recognized as one of the premiere correspondents of the war along with Kendall.

Meanwhile, the war also witnessed one female correspondent: Jane Storm. Storm, writing under the pseudonym "Montgomery," best understood and interacted with the Mexican people out of all the journalists. Her personal story — including an alleged affair with Aaron Burr when she was twenty-six and he seventy-six — did not come into play during her dispatches; she was well-known to her readers simply as Montgomery. Prior to going to Mexico, she advocated initially for a Republic of the Rio Grande under the United States' influence and wanted a peaceful solution to the war. In April 1846, she wrote to the *Sun* that "this republic should teach the world that it will owe nothing to the sword."[50] She also spoke out against the war and campaigned for Mexican revolutionaries seeking a republican government of their own. On July 17 of that year, Montgomery wrote to the *Sun*, "the President may make war…. He may kill the inhabitants, plunder the churches and desolate the towns of the friendly States of the Rio Grande,... [but he cannot] call a republic into being."[51] In January 1847, Storm, at age forty-seven, went with Moses Beach of the *Sun* — who was formally acting as a secret agent to

[49] E.J. Gomez, Editor of *La Patria*, to General Diaz de la Vega, April 26, 1847, Box 1, Folder 1, James L. Freaner Letters and Other Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, translated from Spanish.
[50] Jane Storm "Montgomery" in Hudson, *Mistress of Manifest Destiny*, 71.
[51] Jane Storm "Montgomery" in Hudson, *Mistress of Manifest Destiny*, 75.

attempt to make peace — on a peace mission to Mexico, serving as his interpreter and guide.[52] Once there, she focused her commentary on the three major political outcomes she envisioned for Mexico: that individual republics could form; that U.S. troops could occupy Mexico until a stable government could come into power; or, that President Polk and the U.S. must take over the territory and the U.S. control all of Mexico.[53] In the *Sun* of April 15, 1847, a column by Montgomery detailed internal strife in Mexico City and stated that "when and how this will end is uncertain… but it is not at all uncertain that this civil war will leave Mexico defenceless and more than ready to receive American government."[54] Storm believed in American republican values, and the potential economic gains that could emerge from good relations with the border lands, and she used her writing to support her political views.

Storm, always more interested in government affairs than in discussing troops or the military except in terms of her political message, warned American citizens in the *Sun* of May 24, 1847 that "this war lays a deep and nervous responsibility on the American nation. They decide the fate of Mexico."[55] Instead of operating within the bounds of the military, as her fellow journalists did, Storm worked within the political sphere and often clashed with the military. Storm reported from Mexico from January to the beginning of May, returning to the U.S. with a sustained passion for a Republic of the Rio Grande.[56] Historian Linda S. Hudson estimates that as many as 400,000 people could have read Montgomery's Mexican-American War columns.[57] While Storm focused much less on military affairs than her counterparts, her experience as the

[52] Hudson, *Mistress of Manifest Destiny*, 77.
[53] Hudson, *Mistress of Manifest Destiny*, 86.
[54] Montgomery, *The Semi-Weekly Natchez Courier*, April 30, 1847.
[55] Jane Storm "Montgomery" in Hudson, *Mistress of Manifest Destiny*, 86.
[56] Hudson, *Mistress of Manifest Destiny*, 87. Hudson declares that Storm was driven by a fervent belief in republicanism as well as financial interests on the border for both herself and friends.
[57] Hudson, *Mistress of Manifest Destiny*, 1.

only correspondent behind enemy lines marks her time at the seat of war with a decidedly vivid political point of view.

III. Embedded Reporting: On the Front Lines and in Public Perception

The concept of "embedded reporting" may be new, but the journalists of the Mexican-American War inaugurated the practice. Just under a decade after the war, newspapers recognized the innovation that these journalists created in 1846. "During the Mexican War… [Kendall] was, what Russell lately became in the Crimean war, the chronicler of the campaign; and history will tell how well he performed the task," *The Rambler* of Lockhart, Texas, wrote on July 8, 1859.[58] Embedded journalism, at its essence, demands more than simply chronicling a war, however. It demands living and traveling with military units, and the Mexican-American War reporters were the first to adopt this practice. Kendall joined General Worth as an aide-de-camp and followed the Texas Rangers; C.M. Haile accompanied General Taylor's army and eventually joined the military as a lieutenant and captain; Freaner traveled with General Winfield Scott's army; T.B. Thorpe also followed Taylor; and Storm went on a peace mission to Mexico, taking her behind enemy lines. These journalists were out in the field witnessing and experiencing the war, not simply compiling information behind a desk. While this mode of reporting is *de rigueur* in today's practice of journalism, this was an innovation by the reporters of 1846.

A war correspondent's task is quite specific. He or she must be on the front and able to transmit intelligence and information from the campground or battlefield to the newspapers at home. A reporter must also develop credibility and authority as a source. While the partisan

[58] *The Rambler*, July 8, 1859, Kendall Family Papers, AR376, Box 14, Folder 1, Special Collections Division, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries. Sir William Howard Russell covered the Crimean War for the *Times* in 1854 and many other conflicts throughout his career. See Alan Hankinson, *Man of Wars: William Howard Russell of the "Times,"* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1982).

press served to further the interests of the political party the paper championed, the Mexican-American War correspondents' dispatches offer a look into the emerging ideas of objectivity, such as attention to facts, balance and independence.[59] These concepts were in no way fully formed by the penny press era and the embedded reporters sought to praise the United States and its expansionist mission, but this period represents an evolution in the direction of emphasizing the ideals of balanced reporting. While some journalism historians declare that for newspapers prior to the Civil War, "news was not stuff that was gathered with deliberation by people who were paid for that purpose; rather it was stuff that *came in*,"[60] clearly this viewpoint disregards the enterprising moment in American journalism that witnessed a number of dedicated reporters in Mexico covering a war. Kendall, Haile, Thorpe, Freaner and Storm were not simply compilers of news, but creators of it.

Haile acknowledged his mission to be viewed as a reliable source of news. For example, he wrote to his readers in the *Picayune* in June, 1846 that "the officers… are becoming disgusted and discouraged with the thousand ridiculous and injurious reports that have emanated from irresponsible sources."[61] He highlighted the fact that, in his and the military's view, inaccurate accounts of the conflict were emerging from sources not to be trusted. Instead, he not so subtly implies, he and his paper were the ones upon whom the public should depend. At the same time, he made no pretense of writing entirely without a bias, declaring that "our officers and men have acted nobly in this war... and the press should be ready on all occasions to defend them against any imputations that could arise from the idle tattle of busy-bodies."[62] Haile set himself apart

[59] Hazel Dicken-Garcia, "The Transition from the Partisan to the Penny Press," in *Fair and Balanced: A History of Journalistic Objectivity*, ed. Steven Knowlton and Karen Freeman (Northport, Alabama: Vision Press, 2005), 90.
[60] Andie Tucher, "Reporting for Duty: The Bohemian Brigade, the Civil War, and the Social Construction of the Reporter," *Book History* 9 (2006): 4.
[61] "Point Isabel, Fort Polk, June 2, 1846," *New Orleans Picayune*, June 14, 1846.
[62] "Point Isabel, Fort Polk, June 2, 1846," *New Orleans Picayune*, June 14, 1846.

from the "busy-bodies" and "irresponsible sources" by presenting his reporting as enterprising and accurate when, he claimed, others' work was not. As the *Picayune* boasted a few months later, Haile's dispatches "possess the best qualities of such a correspondence – unpretending simplicity of detail and studious accuracy. He is ever most solicitous to correct the slightest error into which he may have been led."[63] The newspaper's emphasis on at least appearing to adhere to accuracy marks a decided change from the previous journalistic era in which partisan preferences were boldly stated and acceptable. Haile's own distancing of himself from other writers reflects a sensibility regarding his role as a first-hand observer and a mediator of information about the war between the battlefield and the home front. Haile defined a journalist's role in a new and distinct way.

Haile set out to establish himself as a source of direct knowledge. In one of his first dispatches on May 29, 1846, he wrote about his personal experiences in the field, telling his readers that "I had the pleasure of riding over the battlefield of the 9th... I have already picked up a number of interesting incidents connected with the two battles… which can be relied on for its correctness."[64] The other war correspondents also worked within the same bounds to establish credibility and authority with their readers on the basis of trustworthy reporting. The horrors of warfare were not ignored, and Haile often included lists of dead and missing in action.[65] The dependability of the *Picayune*'s coverage of the war dead over the government's information was acknowledged in the foreign press as well. Several English papers published reports on December 5, 1846 telling their readers that "despatches had been received from Gen. Taylor to the 13th October, but that they contained no official lists of the killed and wounded. The *New*

[63] *New Orleans Picayune*, Oct. 6, 1846.
[64] "Matamoros, May 29, 1846," *New Orleans Picayune*, June 16, 1846.
[65] The earliest example of Haile's list is from Monterrey, *New Orleans Picayune*, Oct. 4, 1846, extra section. Kendall also gave a detailed list in his dispatch to the *New Orleans Picayune*, Sept. 17, 1847; although Kendall himself was wounded at the battle of Mexico City, it should be noted that he did not include his status in the listing.

Orleans Picayune gives a list."[66] Haile's reporting filled the hole left by the government reports' lack of information about soldiers. The addition of these lists to his reports clearly gave his writing credence within the public sphere.

The ability to showcase the reality of war provided an effective way to attain credibility, even as reports were clearly skewed with a nod to the heroic. One of Kendall's dispatches from Vera Cruz began with the violent death of Capt. Alburtis, a "brave but unfortunate captain" who "was sitting at the foot of a tree at the time he was struck. The ball carried away almost his entire head, took off the arm of a drummer boy & wounded a corporal besides."[67] While on the scene, Kendall did not shy away from telling his readers about the grittier aspects of the war. He also adopted Haile's policy of including lists of wounded and dead, noting that for the battle of Churubusco (August 20, 1847) that "I have spent not a little time in endeavoring to collect a list of the killed and wounded officers in the great battles of the 20th, not a difficult matter inasmuch as the different divisions are quartered in villages several miles apart."[68] He often interacted with Haile and was well aware of the work of his paper's special correspondent. Kendall also included lists in several other dispatches, most notably in his letter following the bloodiest engagement he witnessed, the Battle of Molino del Rey (September 8, 1847). Nearly a quarter of General Worth's command — the company Kendall accompanied — was killed, with 800 casualties and 116 killed.[69] As he wrote on September 8, 1847 (published October 14), "I have been endeavoring to obtain a full list of the killed and wounded officers… Knowing the deep anxiety felt in the United States by the families of all, this shall be my first care."[70] Clearly, Kendall

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[66] *The Leeds Mercury*, Dec. 5, 1846; *The Preston Guardian etc*, Dec. 5, 1846.; See also *The Northern Star and National Trades' Journal*, Dec. 5, 1846, which summarized the information.
[67] *New Orleans Picayune*, March 12, 1847, Kendall Family Papers, AR376, Box 1, Folder 1, Special Collections Division, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.
[68] "Tacubaya, Aug. 24, 1847," *New Orleans Picayune*, Sept. 9, 1847.
[69] "Tacubaya, Sept. 9, 1847," *New Orleans Picayune*, Oct. 14, 1847.
[70] "Tacubaya, Sept. 8, 1847," *New Orleans Picayune*, Oct. 14, 1847

knew his audience and sought to satisfy those at home, realizing what would be of interest to anyone despite political leanings. He established a relationship with his readership and cultivated it through detailed reports with information that would be appreciated throughout the country. Kendall and the other war reporters sought to deliver a new product to their readership, one defined by established, embedded reporters and, critically, they delivered this new product with speed. Credibility stemmed from the writer making an explicit effort to share with the reader the authentic sense of 'being there,' as well as from the timeliness of the reports.

The journalists of the Mexican-American War emphasized these new values in the journalism world. Timeliness and speed were vital, and money was frequently spent to ensure that the journalist's dispatches would hit the presses first. In 1848, the *Picayune* glorified its biggest scoop of the war – publishing news of the peace treaty with Mexico before it arrived in Washington in February of that year. In a piece entitled "Newspaper Enterprise," the paper detailed the difficulties in the quest to release the peace treaty news first. The steamship organized by Kendall to speed the news out of Mexico, the *New Orleans*, had been detained by the government for two days in order that Freaner, a journalist and the government's designated bearer of the treaty who was traveling on a different ship, "should reach Washington in advance."[71] The two ships, however, reached New Orleans on the same day, and the *Picayune* published the news the next morning. Even after that scoop was published, the *Picayune* was still in a race against Freaner and ended up beating him to Washington when the "ponies overtook the special messenger on this route… Full details were laid before the public from the Picayune by the Baltimore papers of the morning of the 21st. We are gratified at this triumph of newspaper

[71] "Newspaper Enterprise," *New Orleans Picayune*, March 6, 1848.

enterprise."[72] The ability to detail such critical information prior to the government's spin marks the power of the press to shape public consciousness.

Not only was this instance an example of enterprising reporting, it was also one that displays the entrepreneurial spirit that defined both these journalists and antebellum America. According to the 50th anniversary edition of the *Picayune*, which included a history of the paper, the peace treaty scoop was accomplished "at a cost of $5000, enabling the *Pic* not only to distance all competitors, but to beat the government dispatch boats also; all of which goes to show that journalists of forty years ago were quite as enterprising in their way as at present."[73] The money spent on covering the war offers a new way to look at the world of mid nineteenth-century journalism. The goal was no longer for papers to simply gather information and publish it whenever it became available, but to actively and at cost acquire the news themselves.

While many of the reporters at the front lines were editors of their papers, this war also included journalists hired specifically to cover the campaign. In May 1846, C.M. Haile had been hired by the *Picayune* as, Kendall wrote, the paper's "regular correspondent."[74] This specialized assignment marks the formation of the concept of the war correspondent, an individual with the particular task of covering a war from the front lines. Haile's personal experience as a former West Point cadet offered an understanding of the military as well as providing him with connections with many of the officers. The effort needed to establish reporters in the combat zone and to create a system to convey their reports as quickly as possible back to the papers defines this stage in the formation of the war correspondent.

[72] "Newspaper Enterprise," *New Orleans Picayune*, March 6, 1848.
[73] *New Orleans Picayune*, Jan. 25, 1897, Kendall Family Papers, AR376, Box 227, Folder 1, Special Collections Division, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.
[74] "Point Isabel, June 7, 1846," *New Orleans Picayune*, June 14, 1846.

The war in the public sphere, particularly the experience of the battlefield and interactions with Mexicans, was specialized and even homogeneous within the press due to the fact that only a handful of correspondents reported on the front lines. While there were many military correspondents who sent letters to the press, there were only about ten full-time reporters based in Mexico, and most represented New Orleans papers.[75] These dispatches were widely published, as the *American Star* of Jalapa, Mexico, one of the papers founded in Mexico during the war, acknowledged that "[Kendall's] letters... have been copied into almost every journal in the Union."[76] Indeed, the letters of the New Orleans press were widely reprinted[77] and the *New Orleans Picayune*'s news was even picked up by a Mexican broadside.[78] The news published by the *Picayune* was picked up by papers as varied as the *New York Herald*[79] and *The National Era*,[80] an African-American newspaper based in Washington, D.C., as well as *The Times* of London.[81] Thus, the dissemination of war news from the front lines emanated from a narrow pool of chroniclers. With just a few individuals expressing a view of the battlefield, these journalists provided readers with the first exposure to this foreign war, serving as the powerful voices to the public at this moment of America's nation building. This was expressed in the visual culture of the period as well, most notably in Richard Caton Woodville's painting *War News from Mexico*, which features a diverse group of listeners — white men, an old woman, a black man and a child — listening to the main figure announce the shocking war news of the

[75] *Historical Dictionary of War Journalism*, 1st ed. 1997, s.v. "Mexican War."
[76] *American Star*, Oct. 28, 1847.
[77] See Johannsen, *To the Halls*, 17.
[78] "Noticia importante. Por el interes que ofrecen las siguientes noticias traducidas y estractadas del Picayune de Neuva Orleans…" Mexican War Collection, GA60, Special Collections Division, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.
[79] See Randall Patnode and Donald L. Shaw, "Objectivity and the Mexican War," in *Fair and Balanced: A History of Journalistic Objectivity*, 100-106, which offers an analysis of the *Herald*'s telegraphed stories that were based on *Picayune* reports.
[80] *The National Era*, April 15, 1847, May 6, 1847, May 20, 1847, Sept. 23, 1847, Nov. 18, 1847.
[81] *The Times*, May 7, 1847, Sept. 30, 1847.

capture of Mexico City on the steps of the "American Hotel" (Figure 1).[82] In this image, the idea of American citizenship, including the figures of the woman and African Americans who were then outside its bound just as they were excluded from the hotel porch, is tied up in what was a defining moment for both national identity and the very shape of the nation. In Woodville's painting, the entire American community, no matter the race or gender, is invested in the story both for what it envisions for the United States as a community and for the very real political repercussions of the addition of land that could end up either free or slave. This painting, which proved popular enough for engraving, symbolizes the way newspapers — inexpensive, widespread and with the new ability to share stories thanks to the telegraph — developed and expressed the American experience in this period.

The widespread dissemination of the dispatches was achieved through the reprinting of the reports in various newspapers, despite geographic or political bounds. Kendall was easily the most well known journalist of the war. Newspapers from across the nation picked up or summarized his dispatches from the Battle for Mexico City; no fewer than seven papers other than the *Picayune* reprinted his letters from the battle in full.[83] The dissemination of Kendall's reporting — with, it must be noted, his attribution, which points to the legitimacy and fame he had acquired — meant that for many Americans his words were the first moment of contact with the experience of the war with Mexico. Kendall was not the only reporter with such an impact, but the frequency with which his letters were reprinted with attribution sets him apart from other

[82] See Fig. 1: Richard Caton Woodville, *War News from Mexico*, 1848. Oil on canvas, 27 x 25 in. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas.
[83] *The Cleveland Herald*, Oct. 26, 1847; *The Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH), Oct. 27, 1847; *The Fayetteville Observer* (Fayetteville, NC), Oct. 26, 1847, Nov. 23, 1847; *The Weekly Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Gazette*, Oct. 27, 1847.; *The Daily Sentinel and Gazette* (Milwaukee, WI), Oct. 29, 1847; *The Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), Nov. 18, 1847, Nov. 24, 1847; *The Semi-Weekly Natchez Courier* (Natchez, MS), Nov. 23, 1847. The original dispatches were published in the *Picayune*, Oct. 14-16.

correspondents. Haile's dispatches also appeared in a few other publications,[84] and several of his "Pardon Jones" humor columns were reprinted by the New York *Spirit of the Times*.[85] The respect and authority that readers gave to the well-known war correspondents was national in scope.

James Freaner of the *New Orleans Delta*, one of the papers in fervent competition with the *Picayune*, was also an important and popular correspondent. At least eight papers reprinted his dispatches from mid-1847 to late 1848,[86] and *The National Era* described him as an "excellent correspondent."[87] Overall, the New Orleans press had the most reproduced coverage; Jane Storm, writing as "Montgomery" for the *New York Sun*, did not have the same expansive impact,[88] but the *Sun* "reported that its circulation rose from 45,000 to 55,000, which would have made it the most widely read newspaper in the country."[89] In January 1848, the *Picayune* boasted that "Our circulation has been constantly increasing, both city and country, and we have reason to believe that it will continue to do so."[90] While editors might well exaggerate their circulation as a way to gain credibility, attract more readers, and drive up advertising prices, the papers did have wide readerships and the dispatches were reprinted across the nation.

Thus, many Americans clearly shared a common experience in reading about the war from the personal perspective of these innovative war correspondents. The war reporters served a

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[84] See *The Boston Daily Atlas*, Sept. 11, 1846, Sept. 24, 1846; *The Weekly Flag & Advertiser* (Montgomery, AL), March 11, 1847; *New-Hampshire Sentinel*, Oct. 21, 1846, Nov. 18, 1846.
[85] See *Spirit of the Times*, Sept. 19, 1846, Sept. 26, 1846.
[86] See *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), Nov. 23, 1847; *The Semi-Weekly Natchez Courier* (Natchez, MS), July 13, 1847; *Arkansas State Democrat* (Little Rock, AR), July 23, 1847, April 28, 1848, Oct. 19, 1847, Dec. 28, 1847; *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), April 22, 1848, May 13, 1848, June 13, 1848, July 1, 1848; *Greenville Mountaineer* (Greenville, SC), April 28, 1848; *The Boston Daily Atlas*, May 8, 1848; *The National Era* (Washington, D.C.), Jan. 6, 1848, Jan. 27, 1848.
[87] *The National Era*, Jan. 6, 1848.
[88] Dispatches from "Montgomery" did make it into several newspapers other than the *Sun*, however. See *The Semi-Weekly Natchez Courier*, April 30, 1847, although the paper believed "Montgomery" was Miles Beach, the editor of the *Sun*.
[89] Thomas Reilly, "Jane McManus Storms: Letters from the Mexican War, 1846-1848," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 85 (1981): 24.
[90] "Ourselves," *New Orleans Picayune*, Jan. 25, 1848.

critical role by mediating between the battlefield and the home front and, ultimately, creating the narrative of the war. These journalists described and defined the war's aims for the public, and through the extensive reach of their dispatches across the United States, they ushered in ideas about foreigners, expansionism and war to the public consciousness.

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Creating a Narrative for the Public

The war offered these enterprising journalists a new and profitable opportunity. As historian Robert Johannsen describes, "it was a civilian war from the outset, clothed with all the romance of a conflict that touched the popular imagination."[91] These newspaper reporters recognized the popular appeal early on, making a point of joining the conflict with the aim of future financial gain as well as a chance to experience the romance and adventure of a foreign war.

Thorpe, who wrote for the *New Orleans Tropic* while covering the war for just two months, immediately recognized the potential success of a book on the war. "That the book will sell I cannot think there is a doubt, the exciting news from Monteray [sic] will no doubt excite public attention," Thorpe wrote to his potential publisher, Carey Hart of Philadelphia.[92] Thorpe ended up writing three books between 1846 and 1848 about the war – *Our Army on the Monterey, Our Army on the Rio Grande* and *The Taylor Anecdote Book: Anecdotes of Zachary Taylor, and the Mexican War*. The last work, however, was written under his pseudonym Tom Owen, The Bee Hunter, a name with which he had gained widespread popularity in humor writing prior to the war.

[91] Johannsen, *To the Halls*, 18.
[92] T.B. Thorpe Letter written to Carey Hart, publisher, Oct. 14, 1846, Mexican War Collection, GA43, Series I, Box 1, Number 7, Special Collections, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.

Thorpe presented his books as both histories of the conflict and as travel literature, assuming a sense of authenticity due to his firsthand experience of the war. He considered himself a professional writer as well as an adventurer and used these conceptions of himself throughout his reporting. He took a decidedly romantic view of the war, declaring in his preface to *Our Army on the Rio Grande* that,

> The author was among those who were deeply excited by the stirring incidents connected with our little army on the Rio Grande, in the months of April and May, 1846, and he was on the battle fields, and among the heroes, almost immediately after the occurrences that have rendered them immortal in the history of the country. The idea of writing the following little volume, was suggested by the accumulation of materials, collected for the transient purpose of varying the columns of a daily paper, and urged on by honorable wish to record some of the noble deeds of our soldiers, that might otherwise be forgotten.[93]

Thorpe's words brought to the American public what they wanted — stories about American soldiers fighting in a foreign land, filled with glory, humor and exoticism. In his *Taylor Anecdote Book*, Thorpe emphasized his notion of credibility due to firsthand knowledge by letting his readers know of his personal experience covering the battles — "A portion of the incidents here recorded came under the personal observation of the author, or were related to him in conversation with prominent actors in the scenes of which he treats, and were originally given to the world by him."[94] Thorpe acknowledged his primary purpose of his time on the battlefield, writing that "the author of this little work, being aware of this principle of human nature, and having great faculties for accomplishing his purpose, determined to gather up such anecdotes and incidents of the campaign as were most worthy of preservation."[95] Thorpe focused on the romantic and off-beat moments of the conflict in an effort to attract readers of all social, political

[93] Thomas Bangs Thorpe, *Our Army on the Rio Grande* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1846), preface.
[94] Tom Owen, The Bee Hunter (T.B. Thorpe), *The Taylor Anecdote Book: Anecdotes of Zachary Taylor, and the Mexican War* (New York: Appleton & Company, 1848), preface.
[95] Tom Owen, The Bee Hunter (T.B. Thorpe), *The Taylor Anecdote Book*, preface.

and economic levels. With the subtext of travel literature, Thorpe was able to serve many layers of audience needs.

Kendall, always the entrepreneur, sought to capitalize on the war in literary and artistic means in addition to his journalistic pursuit. His literary fame had been established in 1844 with the publication of his first book, *Narrative of the Texan Santa Fé Expedition*, an account of his seven months in captivity in Mexico from 1841-1842.[96] On July 25, 1846, the *New York Herald* wrote of Kendall that "If no other advantage to the country is derived from his enlistment in this most just and holy war, literature will receive a valuable addition, and K. will write a book."[97] A month after the capture of Mexico City, in 1847, Kendall made arrangements with German artist Carl Nebel to paint images for his planned work on the war, signing a formal business agreement on the joint venture in 1850.[98] In 1851, Kendall's *The War between the United States and Mexico Illustrated* was published.[99] The work contained a short history of the conflict, written by Kendall, as well as twelve hand-colored lithographs based on Nebel's paintings. Kendall completely financed the book, arranging for coloring of the prints himself.[100] Upon publication, the book received excellent reviews, although just 500 copies were produced. In *The Daily Gazette* of Louisville, the editors wrote that

> We had the pleasure of glancing over the portfolio edition of the magnificent colored lithographs of the principal battles in Mexico… Who would not rather ornament his walls with these magnificent pictures of Kendall's – each one alive

[96] George Wilkins Kendall, *Narrative of the Texan Santa Fé Expedition* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844). The book was a bestseller.
[97] *New York Herald*, July 25, 1846.
[98] Business Agreement with Carl Nebel, 1850, Dr. Fayette Copeland Collection, Box 2, Folder 5, Western History Collections, The University of Oklahoma.
[99] George Wilkins Kendall, *The War between the United States and Mexico Illustrated* (New York & Philadelphia: Plon Brothers of Paris for D. Appleton & Co. and George S. Appleton, 1851).
[100] Business Agreement with F.Rosenberg, Oct. 7, 1850, Dr. Fayette Copeland Collection, Box 2, Folder 5, Western History Collections, The University of Oklahoma. The letter states that "all custom-house and transportation dues will be paid by the said Kendall, the said Rosenberg being at no expense for any item save that of coloring."

> with glorious memories, - rather than with unmeaning sketches or colored views, with which are connected no dear recollections?[101]

With his direct control over the art in his work, Kendall further mediated the experience of war for the public in terms of visual, material culture. Nebel's paintings, reproduced as color lithographs, show battle scenes from the U.S. Army's perspective rather than that of a general or powerful figure that was the traditional focus in history painting. In Kendall's and Nebel's envisioning, the visual culture surrounding the Mexican-American War would be focused on the accuracy of the landscape, portrayed as open for conquest, and the victorious U.S. battle scenes.[102] Kendall emphasized to his audience his concerted effort to attempt to provide accurate, realistic depictions, writing in the preface "The greater number [of images] were drawn on the spot by the artist. So far as regards the general configuration of the ground, fidelity of the landscape, and the correctness of the works and buildings introduced, they may be strictly relied upon."[103] The *New Orleans Crescent* commented that the lithographs

> are the first battle pieces we ever saw, which had individuality. Usually, they look as if made to order, and would suit one battle just as well as another… The artist has, with true independence, declined to make Taylor or Scott the prominent figure in each picture… The Portfolio is not a laudation of the leaders, but a faithful and spirited series of actual scenes and actions.[104]

These paintings presented a narrative view of the conflict as one dominated by the American victories on the region. When Mexicans are imagined on the landscape, as they are portrayed in Nebel's painting of *Gen. Scott's Entrance into Mexico City* (Fig. 3),[105] they are visually marginalized and pushed to the outskirts of the painting, looking to the victorious U.S.

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[101] *The Daily Gazette* (Louisville, KY), April 11, 1851, Kendall Family Papers, AR376, Box 14, Folder 1, Scrapbook, Special Collections Division, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.
[102] See Fig. 2 and 3 two examples of Nebel's paintings.
[103] Kendall, *The War between the United States and Mexico Illustrated*, iii.
[104] *New Orleans Crescent*, undated clipping, Kendall Family Papers, AR376, Box 14, Folder 1, Scrapbook, Special Collections Division, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.
[105] See Fig. 3: Carl Nebel, *Gen. Scott's Entrance into Mexico City*, 1851. Lithograph, Kendall, *The War between the United States and Mexico Illustrated.*

troops for guidance and order. The narrative of conquest, destiny and American superiority was not lost on viewers of the day. In a letter to Kendall, a man who purchased the book wrote that "Suffice it that I shall leave… [the book] to my children as a memento! that their Country, having achieved her independence should have to maintain it and to teach surrounding monarchies and bastard Republics that they must not tread upon her corns."[106] The narrative of a new nation emerging from the seeds of independence to span a continent was a critical point of Kendall's narrative, and one he sought to enforce through producing literary and artistic accounts of the war. The editors of *The Daily Gazette* concluded their review of Kendall's book by writing that "We most highly approve of every effort to cultivate a national spirit, and the contemplation of such scenes as these, will greatly aid in achieving it."[107] Kendall's effort to define and control the narrative of the war in a specific way — "to cultivate a national spirit" — went beyond newspapers and into the realms of art and history.

Haile, too, recognized that his experience as a war correspondent could serve as inspiration for writing other than dispatches. Haile published ten "Pardon Jones" letters in the *Picayune* during the course of the war, using his experiences as a reporter to provide his popular brand of humor to his New Orleans audience.[108] The *Picayune* had rapturously declared that "We are sure Pardon is the most popular man of his generation" in 1842,[109] and his humor columns were popular enough to make the front page, typically reserved for advertisements, on several occasions.[110] Pardon Jones was well known and a popular sell, and Haile clearly recognized the popularity of his character by taking time out of his fulltime correspondent job to write as

[106] Letter written by James H. to George Wilkins Kendall, undated, Kendall Family Papers, AR376, Box 14, Folder 1, Scrapbook, Special Collections Division, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.
[107] *The Daily Gazette* (Louisville, KY), April 11, 1851, Kendall Family Papers, AR376, Box 14, Folder 1, Scrapbook, Special Collections Division, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.
[108] See C.M. Haile, *C.M. Haile's "Pardon Jones" Letters.*
[109] *New Orleans Picayune*, April 14, 1842.
[110] See *New Orleans Picayune*, July 16, 1846 and Aug. 30, 1846 for two examples.

"Curnul Pardon Jones." Through his humor columns, the *Picayune* and its readers had originally become aware of him and trusted in his voice. Thus, he traded on his pre-existing cult of celebrity to gain respect and popularity with readers through both his humor and news correspondence. Through his subversive brand of Southern humor, Haile was also able to take a decidedly mocking stance on government and military affairs that was absent in his news correspondence. He particularly took the opportunity to mock volunteers, using his characters as a way of poking fun at the notion of cultural superiority many held over the Mexican people. In his July 6, 1846 column, "Pardon Jones on the Rio Grande," Haile describes Jones and his rag-tag bunch of fellow volunteers arriving for duty. When one of his fellow officers, Capt. Nathan Potter, announces himself, he tells the camp commander,

> Sir… we're a *host* in ourselves; we didn't come here to obey nobody's rules and regulations, and articles of war—we come tu fite the battles of our free and enlitened country, and sir, we'll *du* it, or perish in the 'tempt. We don't belong to nobody's corpse 'cept our own, and shan't jine the regular army of volunteers; if we get tired of service, we'll go hum when we get reddy, and if Gineral Taylor won't let us stay 'long with him, we'll march back threw Texas and kill some buffaloes![111]

Haile, who had attended West Point, relished the opportunity to poke fun at the volunteers in the American army. In that same letter, Pardon Jones recounts a ridiculous chain of events in which a group of Mexican farmers are mistaken for soldiers. "Pretty soon a hull lot of Mexicans come down the road, drivin ten ox carts, with sharpened sticks. Think I, 'Curnel Joneses' time is come now,' and I riz up."[112] Of course, the "hull lot of Mexicans" are simply farmers who offer him a drink of water and a place to rest until Potter comes "streakin it along

[111] "Pardon Jones on the Rio Grande," *New Orleans Picayune*, July 6, 1848. Emphasis in the original.
[112] "Pardon Jones on the Rio Grande," *New Orleans Picayune*, July 6, 1848.

arter us with his sword drawn."[113] Haile's humor writing offers an intriguing look at the way American-Mexican relations were seen and mediated from the front lines in a fictional manner.

As the products of both a journalist and a humorist, Haile's writings suggest the ways that he aimed to create a narrative based upon his own personal experience, available for public consumption in two different genres. In this way, Haile certainly reached a broad reading public through both humor and news writing. The war offered Haile the personal opportunity to gain employment for journalism as well as to continue to gain fame for his fiction writing, and to offer his readers a look at the intersection of American and Mexican culture. He capitalized on being embedded in order to write about another culture and sought to create a narrative in his humor writing that emphasized the exotic Mexican "other," something that no other antebellum southern humorist did.[114] Haile's humor writing suggests the many ways in which the journalists of the Mexican-American War utilized their front lines knowledge to create and foster a narrative of the conflict for the American public.

The writing emanating from the journalists' experiences embedded with the U.S. Army created a new kind of war literature and developed an idea of 'Americanness' by contact with the foreign 'other.' Mexico and the Southwest loomed large in the American imagination — Texas had recently been brought into the Union and further expansion was recognized by some, particularly these journalists, as the right path for the future of the U.S. The foreignness of Mexico, a Catholic nation with a distinct culture, had an air of mystery and the sublime that attracted the general public. As Haile wrote to the *Picayune*, "Our army is in a *foreign* land, sure enough."[115] The correspondents did not simply write about battles and the American troops, but

[113] "Pardon Jones on the Rio Grande," *New Orleans Picayune*, July 6, 1848.
[114] Piacentino, *C.M. Haile's "Pardon Jones" Letters*, 29.
[115] "Matamoros, June 21, 1846," *New Orleans Picayune,* July 8, 1846.

also about their contact with the Mexicans. The war was not just about battle formations and the mythologizing of officers, but about the everyday fascinations of the 'other.'

Kendall, Thorpe, Haile, Storm and Freaner created more than simply the chronicle of the war, but the narrative of the conflict. They sought ways to package their firsthand knowledge for widespread consumption, offering it to the masses through newspapers, books and humor writing. Through these journalists' dominance on war news in U.S. newspapers as well as their concerted efforts to control the narrative through historical books and fictional accounts, they played a critical role in defining the war and America's future in the national psyche. America's first war correspondents created a coherent culture out of this defining political event of antebellum America, independently emphasizing notions of innovation, nationalism, expansion and Manifest Destiny.

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IV. To the Halls of the Montezumas: Technology and Innovation

The journalists, first and foremost, depended on newspapers to disseminate their dispatches in a timely fashion. New technology made it possible to achieve a geographically diverse audience in a very short amount of time, and the journalists recognized this potential by seeking ways to ensure their dispatches would be published in as many newspapers as possible. Furthermore, the very notion of innovation provided fodder for the correspondents' efforts to express an American vision seeped in an idea of progress and expansion.

The technological advances made during the 1840s changed the way news was transmitted. In 1844, Samuel Morse connected Washington, D.C. and Baltimore by wire and sent the first message – "WHAT HATH GOD WROUGHT." He followed with a much more

practical question, "HAVE YOU ANY NEWS."[116] While the telegraph would prove defining for this age in news and have a dramatic effect on the widespread dissemination of journalists' reports, the technology did not stretch from the Mexican lines of the war to New Orleans, the closest major American city to the war's battlefields. Dispatches could and were easily transmitted once they arrived at telegraphic sites, but there was no easy, efficient or inexpensive way to send letters from Mexico to the states. Thus, the invention of the telegraph was not an essential factor in the development of war journalism during this period. It offered the opportunity, instead, for the pervasive influence of the journalists' dispatches in newspapers across the country, allowing them to define the notions of innovation, Manifest Destiny and American values in their quest to build the nation's identity. Without the telegraph and its ability to speed news across the nation, though, the previously unacknowledged influence of the embedded journalists would not have been a possibility.

As soon as shots were fired in Mexico, newspapers began devising pony expresses and using steamboats to get the dispatches to the presses. Yet once the news was published in New Orleans, the telegraph allowed for the dispatches to be spread to any newspaper in the American nation, no matter what its political stance might be. The telegraph permitted and created a public and unifying new way to communicate.

The acknowledgment of the press' role in the public sphere is evident in the origins of the Associated Press in the spring of 1846. Moses Yale Beach, the publisher of the *New York Sun* — the newspaper Storm wrote for — established a pony express to speed news from the Mexican front to the telegraph so his paper would receive news ahead of the mail service. He then offered an interest in the venture to the major New York City dailies and four other press outlets — *The*

[116] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.

Journal of Commerce, *The Courier and Enquirer*, *The New York Herald*, and *The Express* — accepted and agreed to share war news from Mexico.[117] The first dispatches from the front were carried on May 29, 1846, and telegraphic communications between Washington and New York began on June 5th. By the end of that summer, a telegraphic network was in place, with a New York-Boston line, a New York-Albany-Buffalo line, and a line from Philadelphia to Harrisburg. Storm benefited from the new collaboration, which resulted in the frequent republishing of her dispatches across the nation.[118] The purpose of this cooperative newsgathering agreement was to share news and publish stories as they broke, not simply to gather previously published stories, as well as to save money. Beyond that, though, the formation of this organization during the conflict suggests the effort to foster a common, national outlook through the press. The use of the telegraph to share news connected Americans in different areas and of varying political affiliations by providing a common stream of information that emanated from the select group of war correspondents.

The reporters, however, as stated previously, did not have the luxury or ease of telegraphic transmissions from the front lines in Mexico. Instead, each paper developed elaborate express lines to ensure their correspondents' dispatches hit the presses first. According to historian Robert Johannsen, "Kendall organized the first efficient courier system – 'Mr. Kendall's Express' - and other correspondents quickly copied it."[119] Such systems were by no means inexpensive. The business editor of the *New Orleans Delta*, J. Maginnis, wrote to Freaner on April 23, 1848, to inform him that "the last news from you came from Vera Cruz by the Bullish Steamer Avon, touching at Cat Island. We had a person specially engaged to meet the

[117] Associated Press, "1846-1900: The News Cooperative Takes Shape," *AP*, http://www.ap.org/pages/about/history/history_first.html (accessed Feb. 9, 2010).
[118] Hudson, *Mistress of Manifest Destiny*, 68.
[119] Johannsen, *To the Halls* 18.

vessel at considerable expense."[120] Just a few weeks earlier, Maginnis had also nervously discussed the enterprising speed with which the *Picayune* made it to newsstands as he waited for a dispatch from Freaner ("Mustang"). "The *Pic* of yesterday morning, to our great astonishment, had later Mexican news than we had… This to us was a floorer & one there was no way of accounting for. The question was asked by everybody What can be the matter; Where is 'Mustang?'"[121] Clearly, an entrepreneurial and competitive spirit was alive within these newspapermen as they rushed to print the latest news from the war.

With technological advances revolutionizing the transmission of news, the mindset reporters held regarding timeliness, breaking news, and sources also began evolving. There was an interest in being the first to the presses, as seen in terms of the financial extremes to which editors went in order to beat out their rivals, as well as in the audience, which was becoming conditioned to receiving timely news from reliable sources. The necessity for innovation was a newly critical factor for the war correspondents' newspapers' successes. Freaner had established a working relationship between himself and John Peoples of the *New Orleans Crescent* and the *American Star*, an Anglo-Saxon press paper published in Mexico. Maginnis worried that "such a coalition though it may start us ahead of some of the other papers, completely neutralizes the effect of the news on the part of the *Delta.* It not only does that, but at best places you only neck & neck with 'Chapparal' [the pseudonym of Peoples] in pursuit of efficiency & enterprise… It should be 'Mustang' or nothing."[122] It was recognized by both journalists and readers that no longer was simply clipping news from previously published sources acceptable; instead, papers

[120] J. Maginnis to James L. Freaner, April 23, 1848, Box 1, Folder 10, James L. Freaner Letters and Other Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
[121] J. Maginnis to James L. Freaner, April 10, 1848, Box 1, Folder 9, James L. Freaner Letters and Other Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
[122] J. Maginnis to James L. Freaner, March 30, 1848, Box 1, Folder 8, James L. Freaner Letters and Other Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

needed to establish a brand name reporter who would be known as the premiere correspondent in terms of "efficiency & enterprise." In a letter to Freaner from his friend James Spencer, Spencer told him that the citizens of Hagerstown, Maryland "are proud of the perseverance and enterprise you have displayed in Mexico. You richly deserve a handsome reward."[123] The newfound technological innovations set the stage for the approach to news as necessitating timely and accurate reports and led to the public demanding this new form of eyewitness news.

While a belief in innovation and enterprise shaped the journalists, what drove them was the notion of America's greatness, a fervent desire for expansion, and, critically, the way they could shape the nation's future.

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V. Manifest Destiny and Nation Building

The small group of journalists who went to Mexico with the desire to report back to Americans were themselves emblematic of the new America they sought to promote. As individuals deeply interested in capitalist and innovative means — from creating extensive pony express lines to rushing books to the presses — they represented the move to capitalist endeavors over agrarian means of economic life and the embrace of new technology. The journalists actively engaged in efforts to ensure the authority and predominance of their dispatches and books, which can be seen in the pony express systems developed at great cost by Kendall and Freaner, or through the origins of the AP by Storm's editor. Also, critically, Kendall, Freaner, Haile, Thorpe and Storm were unique in a particular sense — they were professional journalists, paid to cover a foreign war. With the ability to spread their dispatches to newspapers beyond their own affiliation as well as the efforts to control the narrative of the war through books and

[123] James Spencer to James L. Freaner, March 2, 1848, Box 1, Folder 4, James L. Freaner Letters and Other Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

other means, these war correspondents built nationalist, imperialist and unifying themes into the American psyche and shaped the way the public viewed and understood the war.

America existed as an entirely new nation in terms of government structure and its very creation. The idea of America as a people sharing not simply a common ancestry, but instead a set of principles and ideals, was shared by the correspondents. Newspapers were one of the main ways to express any kind of unifying voice. While newspapers were typically run based on partisan lines, usually Democrat or Whig, the correspondents' works were reprinted in numerous papers across party lines. These reports were shared and printed regardless of political position due to both the authority that eyewitness accounts from embedded journalists provided and the way technological innovations permitted widespread dissemination of the dispatches.

The newfound idea of Manifest Destiny — that the United States was destined and even divinely ordained to expand its power over the North American continent — reverberated within the dispatches sent back from Mexico. In Camargo, Kendall wrote to the *Picayune* about the problems with Indians in the region. "A few hours after we left Mier yesterday, the Camanches killed and scalped the *alcalde* within a few hundred yards of the outskirts of the place… There is no mistake that a large force of Camanches is on this side the Rio Grande, committing depredations and murdering the inhabitants with impunity," he shared. The Mexicans, Kendall suggested, would indeed welcome the protection of Americans in the face of such horrors.[124]

> The authorities of the place… would doubtless be delighted to see an American force in the Plaza. You may ask, why do not the Mexicans turn out in force – outnumbering, as they do the Indians, ten to one – give them a sound drubbing and drive them out of the country? It is because they are too lazy in the first place,

[124] See Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008) for an in-depth discussion of how this was likely due to continuous raiding by the Comanches in Mexico. Essentially, Hämäläinen argues that the war with Mexico should be reexamined in light of the Comanche destruction that ravaged Mexico prior to the American invasion. The U.S. troops achieved such an easy victory because they were already up against a defeated people, he writes, and these people jumped at the opportunity for the protection that the U.S. Army offered.

> and too timid in the second. So far as I can see, the men here spend one-third of the day sleeping, one-third of the day in bathing, and the other third in doing nothing.[125]

In this way, Kendall and other reporters projected an image of an open landscape that Americans could improve and feel comfortable about potentially conquering. The notion of racial superiority was also explicit in Kendall's reading of the American-Mexican relationship. Only through Americanization, Kendall suggested to his readers, could Mexicans achieve any kind of progress.

The sense that America was not just technologically or politically superior, but morally, reverberated among those in support of the war. As Walt Whitman wrote in an editorial for the *Brooklyn Eagle* on July 7, 1846, "what has miserable, inefficient Mexico - with her superstition, her burlesque upon freedom, her actual tyranny by the few over the many - what has she to do with the great mission of peopling the new world with a noble race? Be it ours, to achieve that mission!"[126] Manifest Destiny was more than simply an ideology; it was a mission with a call to action, and one that the journalists sought to carry out by expressing the power of American might.

Indeed, the journalists also realized what expressing American power would mean for their elevation on the world stage. Manifest Destiny thrived only in an American mindset — that it was the United States alone that was destined and divinely ordained to expand its power over the North American continent. With the British interest in Oregon and the uncertain desires of Russia on the west coast, the United States needed to express its military abilities to European nations who might consider making a play for territorial power. Thorpe, in *Our Army on the Rio Grande*, addressed the effect of the might displayed by the U.S. military in Mexico:

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[125] *New Orleans Picayune*, Aug. 2, 1846.
[126] *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 7, 1846.

> Our country having but a small standing army, and a generation passed away since we have had an opportunity to illustrate our prowess in arms, our military power had been somewhat lost sight of by European nations. It is no doubt true that these two battles, comparatively unimportant in loss of treasure and life, have accomplished a moral effect, that may check interference in American affairs by European powers, that would, if naturally commenced, result in a general war among the civilised nations of the earth.[127]

In this passage, Thorpe also defined the U.S. as a nation connected to but also born anew from the American Revolution. This military endeavor, he wrote, allowed the U.S. to remind the world of its abilities and special qualities. Through the journalists, Europe would hear these stories, and Americans like James Spencer, Freaner's friend, reveled in the belief that "the lesson we have taught Europe of our capabilities for war is worth to us millions."[128]

Even those who disagreed with the war and spoke out against it felt the push for expansion. Ralph Waldo Emerson declared in 1844 that "America is the country of the Future. It is a country of beginnings, of projects, of vast designs and expectations."[129] He also recognized that the U.S. would win the war, but he was convinced that the repercussions due to the potential expansion of slavery would bring ruin. On May 21, 1846, he predicted that "the United States will conquer Mexico, but it will be as the man swallows the arsenic which brings him down in turn. Mexico will poison us."[130] The journalists, however, did not feel that Mexico would poison the U.S. Instead, they developed a worldview that cast Mexico as a critical addition to the U.S., and furthermore, as the only way to save Mexicans from what the journalists saw as the Mexicans' inferior qualities and poor leadership.

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[127] Thorpe, *Our Army on the Rio Grande*, 159.
[128] James Spencer to James L. Freaner, March 2, 1848, Box 1, Folder 4, James L. Freaner Letters and Other Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
[129] Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted in Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, xi.
[130] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson IX*, eds. Ralph Orth and Alfred Ferguson (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), 430-431.

The journalists also sought to create heroes as a way to define the new America of the 1840s. In material culture, this can be seen in Richard Caton Woodville's painting, *Old '76 and Young '48*, which features the narrative of the returning Mexican-American War soldier telling about his military adventures to his grandfather, a revolutionary of 1776 (Figure 4).[131] The Mexican-American War veteran is active and engaged, pointing upwards and engaging his listeners. In this image, the "Young '48" has taken on the role once played by the Revolutionary hero and will, in Woodville's view, point the way to the future of the nation. The journalists similarly used the country's first foreign war to create new heroes for the American public. By the 1830s, most of America's founding fathers were dead and in the 1840s the war heroes of the Revolution and 1812 were dwindling in number. A national conflict, beyond localized Indian wars or the First Barbary War, had not occurred for thirty-four years. And the Mexican-American War was decidedly unique as the United States' first war on foreign soil as well as its first territorially aggressive, rather than defensive, war.

Yet in the shadows of Woodville's painting of American heroes are black servants, listening to the man's stories. In this vision, the omnipresent question of slavery and particularly its connection with the newly acquired territory is suggested, albeit on the margins. In this image, the servants may be on the outside, but they are invested in the story both for what it envisions for the United States as a community and for the very real political repercussions of the young soldier's military escapade. How did the journalists deal with questions of race and slavery? On the issue of race, the interplay between Mexicans and Americans was certainly addressed within the dispatches, as will be discussed later. However, the critical concern that many expressed with the war — the fact that new territories would upset the balance of free vs. slave states — is left

[131] See Fig. 4: Richard Caton Woodville, *Old '76 and Young '48*. Oil on canvas. 21 x 26 7/8 in. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

decidedly unaddressed. Of course, the journalists engaged in various ways with African Americans and racial questions. In a letter to Freaner in 1848, Maginnis recounted a story of an African American man complimenting "Mustang":

> A very high compliment was paid you the other day by a Negro. You may laugh at the idea, but I consider it as great a compliment as you have yet received, merely from the disinterestedness. The Negro though as black as the [illegible] of Hell, is a man of intelligence & education & very rich… He told my friend that he buys the *Delta* every morning, & that he has every line you ever wrote in the *Delta* carefully made up in a book, & there is not money enough in New Orleans to buy it from him… He said… he believed you the greatest man in the United States. Now, Sir, I don't know what you may think, but I'll be dam'd if, in my humble opinion, a higher compliment ever was paid you than that by a Negro.[132]

While Freaner's correspondence touched on this interesting element in antebellum racial relations, the dispatches, however, do not engage in racial debates or any discussion over the possibility of slave states. From records, it is known that Kendall and Haile were slave owners, while Storm was politically active in a campaign to enforce gradual emancipation and emigration of free blacks to South America and the tropics.[133] While all the journalists except Storm reported to newspapers in New Orleans, North America's largest slave market, it is clear that a concern of the reporters was to present a national narrative that appealed across political bounds, and this likely led to a silence on the ramifications of expansion in terms of slavery. The focus, for these journalists, was not on the issue of slavery, but on developing a notion of the United States' citizens' superiority over other races without fully engaging with or even acknowledging the racial repercussions.

[132] J. Maginnis to James L. Freaner, March 13, 1848, Box 1, Folder 5, James L. Freaner Letters and Other Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
[133] Copeland, *Kendall of the Picayune*, 145; Piacentino, *C.M. Haile's "Pardon Jones" Letters*, 16; Hudson, *Mistress of Manifest Destiny*, 115.

A war is a defining experience for a nation, and the journalists presented the Mexican-American War as the shaping conflict of adolescent America. As the *Picayune* wrote in an editorial on July 4, 1846:

> Recent events impart new interest to the festivities with which this year we celebrate the day. A new impulse has been given to the energies of our people, which is carrying forward to the distant shores of the Pacific the fruits of civilization... The world has been taught that the fortitude and valor which achieved our liberties in the Revolution, and preserved them during a second war with Great Britain, are still resplendent in the army of the Republic. The controversy in which we are engaged is one which promises to extend yet further the 'area of freedom,' and to teach to the sons of a sister Republic that they have mistaken the names and forms of liberty - that military rule leads but to licentiousness... In the wine which we pour this day, let us drink, then, to the success of the army on the Rio Grande.[134]

The journalists ensured that Manifest Destiny would be a critical part of the vocabulary of American thinking in the 1840s. In 1851, the Louisville *Daily Gazette* reflected on the publication of Kendall's book about the war, commenting that "what American, with an American heart, does not love to dwell on those scenes, where our countrymen covered our arms with glory, and won for themselves immortal fame?"[135] The war correspondents pushed for a public discourse that would place the Mexican-American War as a defining and critical aspect of American history. They aimed to recast America as a nation with the potential for unity, despite uneasy and ongoing strife at home about the war, slavery and the very idea of territorial expansion. What would unify the nation, as they wrote, were tales of heroism that would match and thus replace in American mythology any classical or chivalric tales of individuals and the great quest they embarked on as they fought to make Manifest Destiny a reality. Thorpe's three books about the Mexican-American War are rife with stories embracing this idea, such as "Hard to Whip":

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[134] *New Orleans Picayune*, July 4, 1846.
[135] *Daily Gazette*, April 18, 1851, Kendall Family Papers, AR376, Box 14, Folder 1, Scrapbook, Special Collections Division, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.

> Early in the action of the 8th, a private of the Eighth regiment was severely wounded by a grapeshot to the head… The soldier stole out of the hospital, picked up a musket, and started off to re-enter the engagement. He was arrested, and sent back to the hospital, where he became so enraged at being thus deprived of his 'sacred rights,' that it became necessary to tie him hand and foot.[136]

This unnamed man was one of many heroes the journalists created out of the war. The noble, always ready to fight soldier was a common motif, and the correspondents also offered generals and military officers as subjects for hero worship. As Kendall and Haile both traveled with General Worth and General Winfield Scott, they each became a particular subject for praise in the *Picayune,* while General Taylor, known as "Old Rough and Ready," was a favorite of Thorpe. The journalists imbued their writings with patriotic, imperialist ideas in an effort to create a national identity for an America with an admittedly uncertain future.

America as a nation in the 1840s was in an uncertain period. In the context of a dearth of new heroes and the ever-present, even if left unsaid, question of slavery, the correspondents used the notion implicit in Manifest Destiny to provide a sense of meaning for the future of America with a vision of the great landscape of the continent under the control of the United States.

In June of 1846, just a month after the war officially began, Kendall sent a dispatch back about the future of Matamoros, a Mexican town along the Rio Grande. While he began by describing the death of a Mexican officer – "a brave little fellow"[137] – he quickly moved into a discussion of the Americanization of the city. "Matamoros is to be decidedly an American city… The Americans have got in here, now, have opened stores, coffee-houses, restaurants, billiard-rooms, hotels, and the like, have introduced ice and mint-juleps – a long step toward civilization," he told his readers in New Orleans. "Well, it's all for the best," he concluded, "the Mexicans would never have made anything out of the country in the neighborhood more than a

[136] Thorpe, *Our Army on the Rio Grande,* 162.
[137] "Matamoros," *New Orleans Picayune,* June 24, 1846.

living."[138] Kendall's pro-expansionist attitude – and his view of the Mexicans as possessing an inferior culture – fully enforces the power that the very idea of Manifest Destiny raised in many American citizens of the era as providing a way to improve what they considered other, lesser societies. Kendall embodied the adventuresome spirit of the age, and articulated the mindset that compelled many Americans to seek control of the continent.

Kendall also expressed the notion of Americanization as a financial enterprise that was decidedly commercial. As a Whig, he adhered to the belief that an economic system with its basis in education, commerce and industrialization, rather than an agrarian economy, and he detailed this stance to his readership. He detailed the opening of various stores — which he deemed "a long step toward civilization" — and cast it as a collective experience for the Americans in the town. Haile shared Kendall's view of Matamoros, writing on May 29, 1846 that "since our army have taken possession of the place its streets have been cleaned and much better order established than was ever maintained by the Mexicans themselves."[139] Beyond just reporting the conditions of the area, Kendall and Haile used their letters to express the benefits they saw from the force of Manifest Destiny, and the progress from what they deemed as a decidedly American economic mindset.

After the army conquered Mexico City in 1847, Kendall reflected on the achievement of the small American force. "The whole seems like a dream, even to those who have taken part in the hard conflicts — yet here in Mexico we are, & masters," he wrote.[140] Kendall asserted that the Americans were 'masters,' a word with connotations of the master/slave relationship that defined Southern antebellum racial relationships. Yet Kendall did not merely view the Mexicans

[138] "Matamoros," *New Orleans Picayune,* June 24, 1846.
[139] "Matamoros, May 29, 1846," *New Orleans Picayune,* June 16, 1846.
[140] *New Orleans Picayune,* Oct. 3, 1847, Kendall Family Papers, AR376, Box 1, page 38, Special Collections Division, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.

as a weak people, he saw them militarily as an "immensely superior force," although that could be credited to a desire to boost the perception of the U.S. victory at home.[141] Overall, Kendall aimed to place the victory in Mexico as a critical historical moment in the history of Anglo-Saxon civilization.

> Here, amid the 'Halls of the Montezumas,' the numerically insignificant band of Anglo-Saxons has found a partial rest from its toils & its dangers, a breathing place after its innumerable trials & perils. Nor the chronicles of ancient wars, nor the prowess of modern achievements, furnish a parallel to the second conquest of Mexico, which the lustre which hung round the name of the Cortes & his hardy adventurers, burnished by the glowing descriptions of Prescott, becomes dimmed by the deeds of these later days.[142]

With the capture of Mexico City, the capital city of the Mexican people had been crushed and the U.S. Army was in a period of flux. Would the Mexicans continue fighting and force further battles? Or would attempts to make a peace begin? In his dispatch printed October 15, 1847, Kendall offered the view of a man on the ground in the aftermath of a crucial win. He began the report with a discussion of the current situation within the city and the Americans' position. "All our wounded have been brought in from Mixocac… Chapultepec is still held by our troops," he wrote to the *Picayune*.[143] Kendall maintained a steadfast belief in the rightness of the American cause and the propriety of the war. "Speaking of sending men and means to Mexico," Kendall wrote, "do the people of the United States know the real force which has achieved the recent glorious triumphs here in the valley of this proud Republic?"[144] There is no sense of detachment here, but instead a connection to the events he has witnessed. He was not

[141] *New Orleans Picayune*, Oct. 3, 1847, Kendall Family Papers, AR376, Box 1, page 38, Special Collections Division, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.
[142] *New Orleans Picayune*, Oct. 3, 1847, Kendall Family Papers, AR376, Box 1, page 38, Special Collections Division, The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries.
[143] "City of Mexico, September 20, 1847," *New Orleans Picayune*, Oct. 15, 1847.
[144] "City of Mexico, September 20, 1847," *New Orleans Picayune*, Oct. 15, 1847.

merely reporting the events of the scene, but imparting a vision of American glory to readers back home in line with the cause of Manifest Destiny.

Kendall's last words in this piece to his audience characterized the way American life had crept into Mexico since the victory over Mexico City. He discussed the introduction of newspapers to the area, including the *American Star* and the *North American.* His naming of these papers suggests not simply a personal interest in journalism, but also a sense that his readership back in the U.S. would want to hear about the spread of American life in a foreign land. Indeed, he then wrote "the city is rapidly becoming Americanized" and described a series of "kindred notices to the passer-by as to where he can be served on home principles."[145] He ended his piece with a simple statement – "We are a great people."[146] This was not just a war to conquer foreigners and then move on, but a war to spread the American way of life. Kendall's writings aimed to express the notions of expansion, racial superiority and innovation to readers who wondered what would happen to the empty landscapes they imagined in exotic Mexico. In this piece, he allowed Americans to envision a land in the Southwest that could easily become Americanized, and that deserved such salvation, as he deemed it, as well.

Each of the other major Mexican-American War journalists independently sought to promote the same notions to his or her readership. Freaner's mission to share his vision of Manifest Destiny with the public is embodied in the letter he received from his friend James Spencer of Hagerstown. Spencer wrote to Freaner after Freaner brought the peace treaty to Washington, writing that "the eliviation [elevation] of our national character is an ample compensation for all our hopes, and the extension of our territory is pregnant with great results to

[145] "City of Mexico, September 20, 1847," *New Orleans Picayune*, Oct. 15, 1847.
[146] "City of Mexico, September 20, 1847," *New Orleans Picayune*, Oct. 15, 1847.

the world."[147] Freaner had been writing dispatches for almost two years at this point, and clearly at least one member of his audience understood Freaner's worldview well enough to highlight it in a personal letter. Spencer continued, writing that "the sun of civilization and religious liberty will rise on the shores of California, to illuminate the dark corner of Asia, and this U. States… will probably revolutionize the trades of the world. The lesson we have taught Europe of our capabilities for war is worth to us in millions."[148] Spencer's language expressed an image of a commercial society, focused on trade and financial terms, but his language serves most to illuminate the common mode of thought driving individuals interested in expansionism through the Mexican-American War. As he perceived the war, it forced Europe to acknowledge the U.S.'s military power, but, more importantly, it allowed "the sun of civilization and religious liberty" — the U.S. itself, an image of liberty guiding the people — to move across the American continent. The vision of Manifest Destiny, and the nation it would build, reverberated for many Americans reading the words of these journalists who had themselves seen the land and faced the people in battle that America, to their eyes, was destined to conquer.

Yet despite their overarching nationalist discourse, these correspondents also provided a new way of looking at the idea of the "other" that moved beyond the bounds of a solidly imperialist worldview in which there is no opportunity for the "other" to exist.

The journalists who covered the war all shared a unique characteristic – they were Northerners who had moved South and adopted Southern sympathies. Storm grew up in New York and in 1832 moved to Texas (then still a part of Mexico). Kendall was born in New Hampshire and moved to Alabama in 1832 and shortly afterward to New Orleans. The New

[147] James Spencer to James L. Freaner, March 2, 1848, Box 1, Folder 4, James L. Freaner Letters and Other Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
[148] James Spencer to James L. Freaner, March 2, 1848, Box 1, Folder 4, James L. Freaner Letters and Other Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Englander Haile made his way to Louisiana in the 1830s as well. Thorpe hailed from Massachusetts and New York, while Freaner moved to New Orleans from Maryland. These individuals — adventurous, unafraid of travel and independent — had already crossed over to a new culture by moving from the very different realm of North to South. This perspective may have allowed them to appreciate — and not simply to fear — cultural differences.

These journalists embraced many of the basic, predictable ideals of Manifest Destiny in terms of racial or cultural superiority, but their writing is at times tinged with something more complex. Thorpe praised the Mexican women he encountered in his book, *Our Army on the Monterey,* describing them as having "shown every disposition to make any sacrifices in the defence of their country… In the whole of Mexico… the women are superior to men, both in body and mind."[149] Thus, Thorpe emphasized that the enemy was not wholly inferior — although by praising the women he naturally used his report to demean the Mexican men in authority — and he predicted that "it seems, however, to be in the order of Providence, that these women, so justly to be admired, are to become wives and mothers of a better race."[150] While these statements are couched in racial and sexist terms, Thorpe attempted to create an image of the Mexican people beyond the simplistic notion that could easily have been presented and consumed by the American people. The notion of potential miscegenation was not lost on Kendall, either, who had written in his *Narrative of the Texan Santa Fé Expedition* of the possibility for Mexicans to become "extinct or amalgamated with Anglo-Saxon stock."[151] Storm, for her part, wrote in support of a Republic of the Rio Grande, a nation in the direct U.S. sphere of influence. Haile, by including humorous tales of interactions between the bumbling volunteers under "Curnel Pardon Jones," offered readers of his stories a look at cultural interactions that no

[149] Thorpe, *Our Army on the Monterey* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1847), 122.
[150] Thorpe, *Our Army on the Monterey*, 123.
[151] Kendall, *Narrative of the Texan Santa Fé Expedition,* 512.

other Southern antebellum humor writer attempted. The notion of Manifest Destiny that these journalists passed to their audiences embraced the potential to include the Mexican people — just as long as they became properly Americanized.

The journalists sought to develop a national identity based on the ideas of innovation, expansion and the superiority of the United States. This, they hoped, would create a strong, unified nation, a nation that would acknowledge their role as the authors of not just the conflict, but of the United States itself.

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VI. Conclusion

Appomattox — April 9, 1865

Just seventeen years after the United States had secured 525,000 square miles of land at the close of the Mexican-American War by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo — effectively stretching the nation from the Atlantic to the Pacific — the generals of a divided union met at Appomattox to determine the surrender of the Confederate forces under Robert E. Lee. Seventeen years earlier, Lee had served in the Mexican-American War as an engineer, and his Northern counterpart, Ulysses S. Grant, had also seen many battles during that conflict as a young lieutenant.

Grant did not expect Lee to remember him; after all, Lee had become chief of staff for General Winfield Scott during the Mexican-American War while Grant, although successful, had not achieved such a high position. In his memoirs, however, Grant reflected on the necessity of his participation in that war: “Besides the many practical lessons it taught, the war brought nearly all of the officers of the regular army together so as to make them personally acquainted… All the older officers, who became conspicuous in the rebellion, I had also served with and known in

Mexico."[152] For Grant, and for many living through the Civil War, the conflict of 1846-1848 had proven defining.

On April 9, 1865, Grant, about to achieve the first step in reunifying a nation torn apart, was uncertain about his meeting with Lee. After several notes exchanged back and forth, the two men met for the formal surrender. As Grant recalled, "we soon fell into conversation about old army times. He remarked that he remembered me very well in the old army… Our conversation grew so pleasant that I almost forgot the object of our meeting. After the conversation had run on in this style for some time, General Lee called my attention to the object of our meeting."[153] At the conclusion of a war of disunity, these two generals reflected on a war that had aimed to create an expansive, unified nation.

Yet the Mexican-American War, while expanding the U.S. by a third, had only envisioned a unified America. The journalists who covered the war sought to create a narrative defining unity, expansion, innovation and the utter righteousness of Manifest Destiny as critical to the United States' self-definition, and the war's tangible results extended further than simply the lines of a map. The newfound territory acquired in 1848 raised questions of slavery's legality in the new lands, pushing Northern and Southern sympathies further apart. Yet what the Mexican-American War journalists imagined — a new nation built on the notion of expansion and the United States' authority — maintained a powerful sway on citizens some twenty years on. In the face of disunity, the concepts promoted by a group of embedded journalists would continue to have a profound impact as the nation, newly reformed, looked back on the war that had brought an expansive territory under one flag.

[152] Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* (New York: Barnes & Noble Publishing, 2003), 109.
[153] Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 658.

On that day in April 1865, the divided nation began the painful attempt to mend itself together, and the first words uttered by the warring generals were on something that drew them, and the pre-Civil War U.S., together: the foreign conflict of 1846-1848.

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A Country of Vast Designs

The Mexican-American War, as expressed by the group of journalists described within this paper, provided an opportunity to define and to create a nation built on expansion, destiny and ideals of progress, innovation and superiority to other cultures. Through their efforts as they sought to speed their dispatches back to their news-hungry public, these journalists embedded on the front lines created a new kind of nation as well as a decidedly modern notion of journalism.

From the newsrooms of New York and New Orleans to the Halls of the Montezumas, the journalists aimed to publish timely, accurate reports about the foreign war in Mexico. While the intricacies of the battles and the information about casualties were critical to their dispatches, these journalists also sought to express their notions of the new nation that could be built out of the war. This nation, as expressed by Kendall, Haile, Thorpe, Freaner and Storm, would be one of expansive U.S. authority with the press serving as the most critical connective factor for the public. Through their utilization of pony expresses and the telegraph, the journalists shared their vision with a public desperate for news from a war that their brothers, fathers and sons had traveled thousands of miles to fight. These journalists' dispatches — rushed to the presses at any expense in order to share the news first — were widely read and disseminated, reprinted in newspapers across the country and even abroad.

Through the journalists' emphasis on timeliness and accuracy, as well as by stressing the notion of simply being there, these journalists established the critical elements for modern war

reporting. As the first embedded journalists, they changed the way people could receive war news, providing something beyond official military reports, which were never quickly disseminated to the press or the public. Instead, they offered the public the writings of professionals specifically tasked with describing a war to people back home. The dispatches, however, morphed into something more extraordinary than simple reports, and instead evolved into descriptive visions about the developing notion of the U.S.'s ability to expand and build a nation out of this two-year conflict.

People across the nation responded, buying newspapers, books and prints detailing the exploits of the military in the Mexican-American War as expressed by the journalists from the front lines. As readers consumed the dispatches, though, they also absorbed the correspondents' developing notions of American progress and expansion. The narrative that the journalists presented — which reached readers before anything else during the war — showcased an America with the potential for unity built on United States values and government authority.

In 1848, after reading the famous Mustang's dispatches for two years about war on foreign soil, James Spencer wrote to Freaner encouraging him to visit and reflecting on the war that had officially concluded just a month earlier via the treaty that Freaner had brought to Washington, D.C.

> The elivation [elevation] of our national character is an ample compensation for all our hopes, and the extension of our territory is pregnant with great results to the world. The sun of civilization and religious liberty will rise on the shores of California, to illuminate the dark corner of Asia, and this U. States, having accomplished a short passage to the indias, will probably revolutionize the trades of the world. The lesson we have taught Europe of our capabilities for war is worth to us millions.[154]

[154] James Spencer to James L. Freaner, March 2, 1848, Box 1, Folder 4, James L. Freaner Letters and Other Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

The notion of Manifest Destiny had successfully permeated the mainstream, and many Americans looked with excitement to the newly acquired territories.

Beyond the news of military victories and stories about life in camp and interactions with the Mexican people, the purpose of the war had been transmitted first to the public by the journalists. “The extension of our territory is pregnant with great results to the world,” Spencer wrote, sharing the same hopes that the journalists had written about as they witnessed the U.S. Army’s movements across Mexican soil. Spencer wrote to Freaner of progress and economic prosperity, of the way the war had confirmed American might and stretched the nation to the “shores of California,” expressly articulating the very idea of the United States that the journalists sought to promote throughout their dispatches.

With the technological innovation of the telegraph, allowing the creation of a national press that shared timely stories as they broke throughout the country, the journalists were able to share their dispatches beyond the limits of their individual cities and influence the public conversation at large. These stories bound U.S. citizens — no matter their political leaning, race, economic background, social status or location, as so vividly depicted in Richard Caton Woodville’s *War News* painting and its widely-reproduced lithograph — in their reading of a common narrative of the Mexican-American War. Stories spark debate and inquiry but ultimately have the potential to also unite people and build communities. These journalists, with their emphasis on speed and direct experience, mediated the experience of the Mexican-American War for readers and constructed a vision of what the conflict could mean for a new nation in its quest for both territory and identity.

These journalists answered the call of the telegraph’s first question, “HAVE YOU ANY NEWS,” shaping the very nature of modern journalism by embedding themselves at the seat of

war and sending back accurate, timely reports. With their dispatches, they spread their firsthand accounts of military victories, political dealings, encounters with a foreign people, and most critically, ideas that sought to create a truly unified United States steeped in innovation, economic progress and expansion. These journalists' dispatches — the first encounter the American public had with any news or analysis of the Mexican-American War and the ideas expressed through the conflict — created and developed a powerful and influential narrative of national identity that permeated the public sphere and defined the United States for years to come.

Images

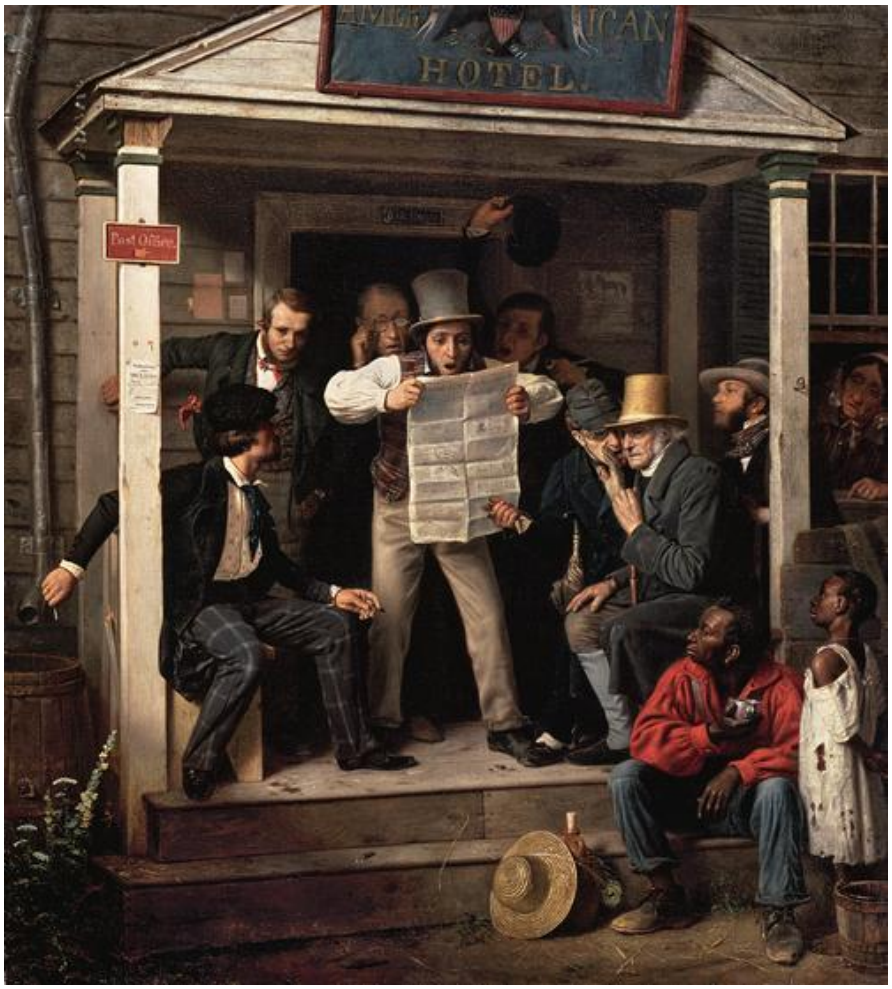

Fig. 1

Richard Caton Woodville, *War News from Mexico*, 1848. Oil on canvas, 27 x 25 in. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas.

Fig. 2
Carl Nebel, *Capture of Monterey*, 1851. Lithograph, Kendall, *The War between the United States and Mexico Illustrated.*

Fig. 3
Carl Nebel, *Gen. Scott's Entrance into Mexico City*, 1851. Lithograph, Kendall, *The War between the United States and Mexico Illustrated.*

Fig. 4

Richard Caton Woodville, *Old '76 and Young '48*. Oil on canvas. 21 x 26 7/8 in. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

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