

Rhetoric Awaiting Realization: Mexican Nation State Formation, 1821-1836

By James E. Cypher

I have never seen this country in a more unsettled and desperate state. I think nothing can save it from a most violent civil war.

James Smith Wilcocks
United States Consul in Mexico City
May 2, 1832 <1>

I much regret to learn that her government is still thought to be unsettled, and that the germs of further revolution appear to exist. How I deplore her situation, and wish to see her settle down with a good representative government, which will give her peace and prosperity.

President Andrew Jackson on Mexico
February 14, 1833 <2>

Early Republican History of Mexico

The protracted course of Mexico's independence movement yielded, after following an ideologically confusing path, a sovereign state in 1821. Rejection of Augustin Iturbide's notion of empire in 1823, left the nascent nation opportunities to construct a society and government suitable to Mexico's varying influences. Despite Mexico's ostensibly homogenous character as overwhelmingly Catholic, mestizo and Spanish speaking, successive governments failed to unify the populace in an inclusive national political system. The memory of colonialism remained nostalgic to the very individuals responsible for the formation of the Mexican Republic. The ensuing debate on constitutionalism, federalism and centralism produced initially a surprisingly inclusive program, considering the course of Mexican political development in the following decades leading to *La Reforma* of Benito Juarez.

The federalism adopted by the first government of the Mexican Republic and embodied in the Constitution of 1824 communicated democratic, egalitarian and pluralistic principles. Suffrage, for example, extended to the Indian peasant, making the condition wider in Mexico than in Great Britain and the United States. <3> President Guadalupe Victoria's administration governed the unsettled nation in a peaceful atmosphere conducive and tolerant of political discourse--perhaps the only such period in the nationalist era. Critics of the Constitution of 1824 identified American federalism as haphazardly embraced and applied to Mexico without consideration for her disparate cultural development. <4> But it was the devastating economic consequences of the

schism with Spain, though, that doomed Mexico to political failure rather than the adoption of a faulty model.

Mexico's geography coupled with an inadequate transportation system influenced economic development in the nineteenth century by contributing, in part, to the state's lack of unity. Mountainous terrain made travel expensive, and a dearth of capital prevented internal investment in an era predating railroads. In the nationalist era, then, foreign banking houses provided the only means of finance, as the fiscal system failed to fill the treasury or reduce deficits. Foreign loans, in particular British ones, established an economic dependency from the republic's appearance as commercially sovereign.

Mexico's elite, miners and hacendados, liberated from their obligations to the crown, asserted their unwillingness to forfeit revenue to the state in the form of tax-income, property or otherwise. The only recourse left to the government remained customhouses and taxes imposed on foreign trade. Amounts collected on tariffs failed to finance the government in whole or part, fueling the invariable political instability of the early republic. <5> An unsound fiscal system plagued the policies of centralists and federalists alike, a practical cause to instability in a political atmosphere defined by ideological rhetoric.

British loans served initially as a substitute for an inherently faulty tax structure. So long as the loans satisfied governmental expenditures, Mexico experienced relative peace, such as the years associated with the administration of Victoria. One expected an economic recovery and a gradual and steady flow of revenue into the treasury, releasing Mexico from further obligations to foreign debts. By 1828, Mexico continued to wait for an economic revival. Exhaustion of the British loans and the perpetually empty treasury provoked an expected resurgence in factionalism. <6> Reliance on foreign trade indicated a level of economic development conducive to international competition. Mexico's colonial dependency, though, frustrated the natural course of competitive capitalism.

The first challenge to the republic's political system arose with the presidential election of 1828. Joel Poinsett, President James Monroe's emissary to Augustin Iturbide and the first American minister to the Republic, played an integral part in the election's outcome, a role subsequently unappreciated by Mexicans of any political bent. Rather than form politically through a party, Mexicans choose instead the Masonic lodge and clandestine alliance, fueled in part by Poinsett and his opponent, the British representative Henry George Ward. The *Yorquinos*, York Rite Masons, favored federalism, while the *Escoseses* or Scottish Rite opted for centralism. Soon the rivalry turned bloody, as Vice-President Nicolas Bravo with Escosese support initiated a revolt against his chief, Victoria.

By acting secretly, the urban and elitist coalitions rejected open national debate. Consequently, hopes for a legitimate transfer of power in 1827 and 1828 diminished, inadvertently inviting established social sectors, namely the army, to assume a heavy hand in maintaining order and protecting privileges. Often members of the small secret

organizations, while vigorous in their opposition, proved wholly inadequate for governance once in power, provoking *pronunciamentos* from regional military strongmen. <7> The Masonic lodges, then, remained less influential or powerful than the national army or state militias, but in contesting the legitimacy of Victoria's government and its successor, the Mexico City based clubs contributed irrefutability to the growing instability engulfing the nation in 1827. <8> The national debate focused on politics rather than the fiscal crisis, augmenting factionalism and setting aside the real causal influences of Mexico's deterioration.

Amidst growing domestic turmoil and renewed threats from Spain, the presidential election of 1828 favored the conservative Manuel Gomez Pedraza, Victoria's Secretary of War. Championing a revolution of sorts to contest the election, an alliance of liberals, including Vicente Guerrero, Juan Alvarez and Lorenzo de Zavala, enlisted the aid of Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. <9> The constitutional and legitimate government of Gomez Pedraza, facing a hopeless coup, stepped down. Congress moved, then, to annul the election, installing instead, Guerrero as president. <10> In the hopes, it would seem, of pacifying divisions, the conservative Anastasio Bustamante assumed the vice-presidency.

By the end of 1829, the conservative elite led by Vice President Bustamante and Lucas Alaman ousted President Guerrero in a successful coup. Following an abortive invasion by the Spanish, Guerrero as president refused to relinquish "near dictatorial powers." <11> Guerrero's peasant sympathies coupled with his monopolization of power threatened elite interests, namely protection of property and privileges. Thus factionalism persisted, disregarding constitutional succession and legitimate dialogue. The election of 1828 and its immediate aftermath dictated the course of Mexican national politics:

The Mexican political system proved unequal to the task of transferring power from one constitutionally chosen executive to another. One of the two factions disputing power was both unwilling to accept defeat and powerful enough to overthrow the government, and its example paved the way for the next forty years of Mexican political history. <12>

Factional disputes evolved into a formal ideological rift ostensibly between federalists, liberals mainly from the provinces, and centralist conservatives, led by the Mexico City elite.

The centralist plan, a brainchild of Foreign Minister Lucas Alaman, identified the preceding colonial system as a model. While embracing, for the moment, the virtues of republicanism, conservatives demanded, rather retrogressively, the perpetuation of a strong army. A Church-State alliance, Alaman argued, would buttress social order, as government assistance fueled economic expansion. <13> The base, thus, of Bustamante's power, and subsequently Santa Anna's, remains the properly labeled army-clerical-aristocratic coalition.

The conservative coalition rejected the federalist liberal program as empowering rural peasants and Indians at the expense of elite, *id est* national, interests. Furthermore, federalism stymied national development by providing an outlet for state governments to protest national policy. <14> Interest articulation occurred in the provinces at the municipal level, composed primarily of peasants and Indians. That kind of populism, conservatives concluded, constituted a threat to national stability. "[En] Mejico," Alaman flouted,

donde no hay opinion formada en el pueblo...el sistema representativo no es una mereficción,...sino una verdadera ironía...de donde provienen las frecuentes disoluciones de congresos, a que la nación se manifiesta indiferente, como que se trata de cuerpos que no le pertenecen. <15>

Alaman's disregard for pluralism manifested as well in his countenance of censorship. Many newspapers, including *El Tribuno del Pueblo Mexicano* and *El Fenix de la Libertad*, openly attacked the Bustamante regime and its clandestine backers in the Mexico City committees. Bustamante responded to the "legal opposition" by dispatching soldiers to assault dissident editors, including among them a ranking senator. <16> Despite Alaman's condescension and Bustamante's suppressions, a federalist program developed with peasant influence at the provincial level.

Often, the peasants interpreted centralism as a renewed curtailment of nascent liberties granted by independence and the federalist constitution. The prevailing chaos in the capital, though, and the central government's lack of practical authority coupled with its questionable legitimacy granted the municipalities an opportunity to manipulate laws through implementation. <17> Municipalities, too, solidified peasant discontent, translating dissension into support for the various regional strongmen vying for national control. Thus, the stage was set again for national revolt.

Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna--the hero of Tampico against the Spanish in 1829 and quasi defender of Mexican liberalism--intoxicated with success, deposed the despicable Bustamante regime in 1832. The following year, Santa Anna swept the presidential election with the distinguished liberal Valentin Gomez Farias as vice-president. For the first time, president and vice-president agreed ideologically, at least for the moment. Liberals anticipated that the new president would expedite reform. The general, though, proved unwilling to compromise his popularity with a controversial liberal agenda, and the day-to-day affairs of governance simply bored him. <18> Santa Anna, then, returned to his estate, Mango de Clavo, leaving the presidency to Gomez Farias. Power, it seemed, required too much energy, and liberalism threatened to tarnish the hero's inflated stature.

The federalist program, now associated with liberalism, survived Bustamante's short tenure, to be implemented anew with Gomez Farias and his supporters. Before leaving for Veracruz, Santa Anna instructed his vice-president to reform the national fiscal system. Economic recovery, though, evaded the country, as the elite continued in their refusal to pay taxes. <19> State confiscation of Church wealth, Gomez Farias deduced,

remained the only outlet for state revenue. The first blow struck in an invariable dispute between church and state occurred, then, under Santa Anna's indirect watch -- a responsibility he quickly moved to rectify.

Gomez Farias' initiatives failed, not as a result of a whim from the Veracruz caudillo, but rather the continued consolidation of centralist interests. By purging centralists from positions of power, the Gomez Farias government hoped to smash the old guard and inaugurate an era of agrarian and federalist reform. Lorenzo de Zavala, then governor of Mexico, took advantage of the new atmosphere in Mexico City to strengthen that state's militia and expedite land reform. <20> Opponents of liberalism, military men among them, identified Gomez Farias' actions in the capital and the execution of federalism--governors and legislatures acting in their states' best interest -- as provoking a class war.

Since at the outset of his administration Gomez Farias exercised leniency towards the defeated centralists, these elite figures or *hombres de bien* lived to fight another day. <21> In 1834, members of the army-clerical-aristocratic coalition appealed to Santa Anna, "protector of the Church to fulfill his role and revoke all anticlerical decrees," and he did so in the Plan de Jalapa. <22> The former defender of Mexican liberalism retrogressed, not surprisingly, into the protector of class privilege. Ousting his own vice-president in an effortless coup, Santa Anna assumed his latent presidency after disbanding Congress. Although the radicals, or liberals, projected a populist program, they failed to receive national support. The unsubstantiated fallacy espoused by centralists of a class war provoked and sponsored by liberals reflected elite fears of a return to the class conflicts of the independence movement. Thus the influence of federalism, and by extension liberalism and peasant representation in national policy, ended in Mexico until the 1850s with *la Reforma* of President Benito Juarez.

In 1834, the goals of the disgraced Bustamante regime (1830-32) became the basis for a government led by Santa Anna and were legitimized two years later with a new constitution. <23> Immediately, Santa Anna sent troops to confiscate revenues from state treasuries if that state reneged on previous national obligations. Zavala's efforts to bolster state militias proved sagacious as federal troops under Santa Anna marched to the periphery to challenge states' rights. Revolts in Zacatecas and Texas during the spring of 1835 pitted the central army against state militias in an outright civil war. The Zacatecas militia, in particular, matched Santa Anna's forces, and only after several months was the rebellion put down. Success in Texas, of course, alluded the "Napoleon of the West."

Santa Anna drew support from other officers, bureaucrats, hacendados particularly from his home state of Veracruz and the Mexico City bourgeoisie and financiers. <24> *The Pronunciamento de Cuernavaca*, 1834, in part reflected popular disaffection with the liberal program. Regardless, the *pronunciamento* shrouded personal ambitions with a cloak of legitimacy by evoking images of liberator, much to Santa Anna's satisfaction. The *pronunciamento*, then, became the means for which the army defended its interests. Army caudillos continued to dominate the Mexican presidency throughout the nineteenth century. Once Santa Anna left the political arena permanently, brief civilian rule ensued to be supplanted once again by yet another military hero, this time Porfirio Diaz from

Oaxaca, whose long rule (1876-1911) set the stage for Mexico's great social revolution of 1910.

Centralization of power attracted the Church and the *hombres de bien* to the army's nationalist program, *id est* individual advancement and graft. <25> During the late colonial period, the Crown moved to strengthen native recruitment by granting the military special privileges in a *fuero*. <26> The Church, long under Crown patronage, acted under ecclesiastical courts and a *fuero* of her own. Needless to say, these judicial and governmental privileges conflicted with basic republican and democratic notions. Oblivious to such arguments, the Church and army in their obstinate embrace of the colonial system became political bedfellows, stymieing reform.

Divisions within the conservative coalition, though, soon materialized. The alliance with the military, the Church discovered, exacted nearly the same costs outlined by the liberals. To finance the ensuing war against federalism, including Texan ambitions, Santa Anna's government demanded revenue, loans and property from the Church. <27> Relations with the *hombres de bien* reflected as well conflicting interpretations of Church autonomy. Although the elite identified the Church as the authority on moral matters and preserver of social order and values, church-state relations generated criticisms. Alaman speaking for many conservatives, sought state influence in Church governance, a model based on the colonial system. <28> Nonetheless, the army-clerical-aristocratic coalition persevered for many decades to come.

General Santa Anna's multiple rises to power in the 1830s and throughout the mid-nineteenth century delineated Mexico's need for a hero, an untouchable personality above the various sources of conflict. But Jaime Rodriguez, in assessing Santa Anna's ascendancy, rejects the Great Man Theory. Machinations of the Mexico City political clubs permitted the Veracruz general's smooth entry into the capital. Economic stagnation and perennial, too often bloody, power shifts demanded order, an atmosphere conducive to hero worship. Santa Anna's leadership witnessed first the loss of Texas followed by an enormous territorial cession to the United States. To most Mexicans, Santa Anna remains a treacherous villain. "Santa Anna," Donald Stevens writes, "has been the principal scapegoat for the trials of the young nation. One man's flawed character has been blamed for Mexico's problems, as if Santa Anna's personal weaknesses infected the entire nation." <29> Scholars differ on the real imminent causes of Mexico's invariable instability in the nationalist era, but all agree that the colonial legacy failed to prepare Mexico for the transition to a democratic republic abruptly severed from her economic, political and social patron of nearly three hundred years.

The United States' Experience in Nation-State Formation and the Clash with Mexico

The United States' colonial legacy, on the other hand, prepared Americans for political and economic independence. A pluralistic tradition founded with the *Magna Carta* coupled with a geo-economic climate conducive to internal growth favored American development. Utopia, though, alluded the United States as well, and many of the issues

confronted by leaders there remain analogous to Mexican birth pains. An extensive treatment of the United States' experience is unnecessary, but a brief overview of the federalist-centralist clash seems in order. The Jacksonian period, contemporary with the Mexican experience, is especially illustrative.

Indicative of the issues plaguing American policy throughout the nineteenth century, tariff reform, a central bank and states' rights remained unresolved when Andrew Jackson left office in 1837. The great antebellum statesmen, chief among them John C. Calhoun and Daniel Webster, characterized the greater problem engulfing the nation in the 1830s, namely states rights (a loose formal federalism), represented by the former, versus national or popular sovereignty, the latter.

The United States relied on protective tariffs to shelter nascent industries and provide governmental revenue. Like Mexico, the tariff stifled economic growth by raising the costs of manufactured goods. Restricted access to American markets through tariffs meant fewer dollars circulated to foreign traders, in particular France and Great Britain, which reduced their consumption of American cotton, the economic staple of the South. <30> Jackson supported the tariff as the tariff supplied the national treasury with its principle source of revenue. Often, federal revenue surpassed governmental expenditures. During Jackson's first term, the national debt approached zero, further undermining the dependence on tariffs for governmental revenue. <31> Despite Jackson's sympathies with the South and West, his pillars of support in 1828, opposition to Washington persisted from antebellum statesmen such as John Calhoun of SouthCypher. Championing states' rights and nullification, South Carolina resisted federal initiatives, which clashed with Jackson's nationalism. In this respect, Calhoun and South Carolina parallel Mexico's Zavala and Zacatecas. The Doctrine of Nullification sanctioned state acceptance or rejection of laws passed down from Washington. Nullification, Daniel Webster of Massachusetts argued, threatened to reduce Union authority to a "rope of sand." <32> Fired by Webster's centralist rhetoric, Congress passed the Force Bill of 1833, coined as "Bloody Bill" by South Carolinians, authorizing the president to dispatch federal regulars to in-compliant states. By threatening or using force, the United States and Mexico squashed federalist agendas in much the same way. Whereas the United States shrouded the conflict in legalistic formulas in the vain hope of projecting legitimacy, Mexico simply marched the central army on the rebellious periphery. Unlike Mexico, the nationalists and the "Nullies" negotiated a compromise over tariffs and the Force Bill in the Verplanck Bill and Compromise Tariff, both of 1833. The compromise called for a tariff reduction of fifty percent, determined mostly by political rather than economic considerations. <33>

While civil war persisted in Mexico, the Jacksonian Era set the stage for a war over states' rights in the United States. Confronting the same developmental blocks, though, failed to unify the countries. Cultural, linguistic and ideological differences aroused suspicions based wholly on ignorance and unsubstantiated images.

Early United States-Mexico Relations

Jackson's predecessor, John Quincy Adams, initiated formal relations with the Mexican Republic through the United States' first minister to that country--Joel Poinsett. Eventually expelled, Poinsett set an unfavorable precedent for future American plenipotentiaries and U.S.-Mexican relations in general, coined by Mexicans as *Poinsettismo*.

Upon revelation of Poinsett's embarrassing involvement in the presidential election of 1828, the Mexican government requested of the recently elected American president, Jackson, new representation in Mexico City. Despite his dubious machinations, Poinsett had negotiated a commercial and border treaty, both of which remained unsigned. Jackson, then, hoped to complete Poinsett's legitimate work by appointing a former aide during the War of 1812 who remained the president's friend, Colonel Anthony Butler. The years immediately following the presidential election of 1828 and before Texan independence, 1829-1836, initiated for Mexico an era of continued instability, a crisis aggravated by rebellion in the periphery. Jackson recognized the danger of Mexico's situation, and sought through Butler a policy of guarded expansion. Mexico's failure to implement a viable national political system and the United States' expansionist impulse doomed relations between the neighbors to impasse and future conflict.

The president, eager to distribute government positions to allies through the infamous spoils system, haphazardly appointed Butler, apparently disregarding the latter's vested interest in Texas. Jackson attributed honesty and frankness to Butler, and expected the colonel to represent nobly his country fitting a ranking military officer. Although among the charge's objectives included the purchase of Texas, Butler stood to gain financially from Texas secession.

Through an agent named James Prentiss, Butler defended his land speculations in Texas and communicated with the American immigrant community based loosely around Washington City. Prentiss encouraged Butler's mission by promising five hundred thousand acres and five thousand dollars on successful completion of a treaty transferring Texan territory and sovereignty to the United States. <34> Perhaps these properties are the same adumbrated in a previous personal letter mentioning Butler as a partner in extensive tracts, half a million acres, in Texas and Arkansas. <35> In 1846, Butler complained of forfeiting over a hundred thousand dollars in lost investments by accepting governmental duties in Mexico. <36> Interestingly, Butler cited his Texan partner as Mr. Zavala, more than likely the ex-governor of the State of Mexico and vice-president of the Texan Republic. Butler's Texan interests tainted his capacities to deal fairly with Mexico.

Aside from the typical responsibilities entrusted to a foreign emissary, protection of nationals and advancement of commercial interests, Butler's mission included negotiation of commercial and boundary treaties and the purchase of Texas--each having been unsuccessfully secured by Poinsett. Butler discovered upon assuming responsibilities as United States *Charge d' affairs* in Mexico City (late 1829) that his predecessor fostered "sentiments of inextinguishable dislike" among the present administration. <37> Therefore the difficulties Butler encountered in concluding a commercial treaty, he

quickly attributed to Poinsett's encumbering legacy. His Mexican opposite too, in this case Minister of Foreign Affairs Lucas Alaman, played dirty tricks on him. Alaman insisted on submitting the Treaty of Commerce to Congress, whose members remained loyal to General Guerrero. Rejection of the treaty seemed likely, Butler anticipated, since the deputies welcomed opportunities to embarrass the Bustamante government. <38> By spring of 1831, though, a favorable trade agreement came into force abolishing discriminatory duties and guaranteeing neutral rights in time of war. <39>

Remembering the problems arising with Spanish Florida, Jackson pushed Butler to settle the boundary between Louisiana and Texas. The president, mindful of strategic matters, directed his concerns to Butler:

Our future peace with Mexico depends upon extending our boundary further west. ... [T]he Government possessing the Mississippi must at some day possess all its tributary streams. ... [T]he citizens of the U States [sic] will never be contented until this boundary is acquired. ... <40>

American ambitions extended beyond the westernmost fork of the Sabine River.

Jackson sought Texas for a number of reasons, chief among them the threat posed by a renegade Texas, like Florida, to American national security. Texan insurrection by American immigrants, whom Jackson labeled negatively as "adventurers," would be wrongly interpreted by Mexico City as an expansionist ploy of the United States. The president wanted to unburden Mexico of these rebellious Texans, not to mention the belligerent Comanche nation, through a generous purchase. <41> Convincing Mexico of the United States' good intentions remained a concern of Jackson, who recognized the short term inevitability of American governance over the disaffected, and therefore precarious, region.

Mexico, Jackson understood, did not possess the resources to put down a Texan rebellion. It must be remembered that Santa Anna's army put down revolt in Zacatecas only after considerable difficulty, and Texas' substantial distance from El Bajio, or central, Mexico complicated logistics and moral. Furthermore, Jackson revealed a strategic ambition for Texas as a "guard for our western frontier and the protection of New Orleans...." <42> The American purchase of Texas, then, seemed to the president in the best interests of both countries.

Poinsett's failure in securing Texas must serve as a guide for Butler's cautious action, Jackson instructed. Authorized to offer Mexico between four and five million dollars, Butler propositioned Alaman in full confidence of speedy success. An added half a million dollars for San Francisco Bay would complete, for the moment, Jackson's territorial aspirations. Alaman's clever machinations prevented American acquisition of either region during Jackson's presidency aborting the last peaceful diplomatic proposition for western expansion at the expense of Mexican territorial integrity.

In confidential diplomatic correspondence, Jackson articulated his interest in Mexican politics, expressing hope for political stability and a peaceful resolution to Texan disquietude. Considering the relative unimportance attached to diplomatic missions by succeeding presidents, Mexico City received regular dispatches from Jackson and Secretaries of State Van Buren, Livingston, McLane and Forsyth. Regarding Texas, in particular, Jackson communicated to Butler his interest in preventing insurrection, in doing so, assuring Mexico of the United States' good will during her neighbor's moment of weakness.

Mexican relations with the United States extended beyond simple postponement of a Texan purchase. Spain, as late as 1829, executed plans to reconquer Mexico. Initially, the Guerrero government sought American assistance to drive the Spanish from Cuba, a launching pad for assaults on Veracruz and Tampico. Guerrero proposed inciting a slave revolt in Cuba, whereby the United States would step in and establish a protectorate. Jackson ordered Butler to protest the action, but Guerrero's government was by then defunct. <43> Equally apprehensive, Bustamante's government requested direct American aid in the event of Spanish invasion, again citing Cuba and the possibility of exerting American influence. <44> The renewed Spanish threat never materialized, thereby obviating United States-Mexico cooperation.

Aside from the wrongful arrest of several American citizens and the disappearance of some State Department dispatches, treaty negotiations occupied Butler's mission, with one major exception--the blockade of the port of Veracruz by both Mexican and American ships of war. The Secretary of the Navy ordered the West Indies Squadron under the command of Commodore Jesse Elliot to steam to Veracruz in the spring of 1832. <45> General Santa Anna's capture of the city threatened American commerce. By September, tensions escalated when a ship under Elliot's command seized a Mexican vessel--the Montezuma. <46>

The military commander of Veracruz, no doubt a crony of Santa Anna's if not the general himself, ordered a blockade of American ships. Butler instructed Elliot, on debatable authority to, "take instant measures for releasing all our vessels detained in that port, and employing for that purpose all the means at your disposal...because the very act of Embargo if not repudiated by the Mexican government is at once an act of War..." <47> The Charge's almost spontaneous belligerency transferred as well to Texas. Events in Texas assured both the United States and Mexico of future headaches. Highlights include the abolition of slavery, Stephen Austin's arrest in Mexico City and the pouring in of Americans, particularly in 1835, the year before independence. Naturally inclined towards a loose federalist system, Texans received no quarter from Mexico City. Butler openly favored American military intervention in Texas as early as 1832, a factor surely hampering his already sensitive and difficult negotiations. <48> Mexico implemented an inherently flawed plan in regard to Texan colonization. As the British quickly recognized, Texas served as a buffer for American expansion. Populating the nearly empty expanse with Americans, even disgruntled ones, gravitated the state north rather than south.

Although in and out of Mexican politics from the 1820s to the 1850s, Lucas Alaman dictated relations with the United States as foreign minister to President Bustamante. In 1829, Alaman briefly served as president in an unusual interim triumvirate. <49> He subsequently headed the Ministry of Industry, establishing in that capacity the developmental *Banco de Avio*. With the liberal regime of Gomez Farias, Alaman fled the government and Mexico, asking, rather ironically, Colonel Butler to protect his property in the city. "I," Alaman wrote to Butler presumably towards the end of the former's service, "have always considered you as one of my best friends." <50> These statements reflect the actions of a disparate man, who in his official capacities stymied nearly all initiatives presented to him by Butler.

During his years as foreign minister, Alaman actively addressed the Texas issue. First he condemned the bank established in New York to sell Texan property. He, then, moved to restrict anglo colonization. Lastly, he favored a string of fortifications garrisoned by soldiers under General Teran's command to, "contener a los colonos ya establecidos...." <51> The preexisting presidios redirected their mission from Indian attacks to anglo Texan watchdogs. Twenty years later, Alaman blamed the loss of Texas on his removal from power.

For his part, Butler disregarded Jackson's warnings and tactlessly affronted his Mexican counterparts. The Charge proceeded with an inflated sense of optimism, fueled in part by his own arrogance and partly by Alaman. Professor Belahlavek argues that Washington strictly ordered Butler not to bribe or engage in corrupt activity in his mission to purchase Texas, but an isolated letter from Jackson to Butler indicates otherwise:

I scarcely ever knew a Spaniard who was not the slave of avarice, and it is not improbable that this weakness may be worth a great deal to us in this case [sic]. <52>

The manner in which Butler executed his tasks stemmed not from Washington, but rather from the Charge's rather dubious character.

As often happens, appointees generate animosity among career diplomats, whose competence and knowledge invariably exceeds their superior's. The hostility bred between the United States Legation, led by Butler, and the United States Consul in Mexico City, represented by James Wilcocks, resulted from not only Butler's incompetence, but his immorality as well, embodied chiefly by the Charge's various deceptions. Butler, who was married, attempted flagrantly to seduce a young daughter of a respectable Mexican through affectations and promises of marriage. Other personal vices included gambling, debt incursion and usurious loaning. Addressing Secretary of State Livingston, James Wilcocks, American Consul in Mexico City, described Butler as, "...totally unfit to represent our nation...being as rough and unpolished a brute. ... His avarice is unsatiated and to gratify it, he would sacrifice the best friend he has on Earth." <53> Strong words indeed to remark publicly on one's direct superior. Not alone, Poinsett and Secretary of State Forsyth joined Wilcocks in the Consul's enmity towards Butler. So long as Butler and the president remained friends, though, little action could be taken, even by the Secretary of State. Butler's dismissal succeeded an attempt by the

Charge to publish his correspondence with President Jackson, a gross violation of diplomatic integrity.

Conclusions

Mexico lost Texas in 1836, further aggravating an already dangerously insecure political system. Military spending on the Texan campaign depleted the treasury. Politically, the centralist program ended with Santa Anna's disgrace. On a positive note, Santa Anna's treacherous deal at San Jacinto prevented his elevation to monarch. Texas served as a unifying force, perhaps the only one, among Mexicans-all political factions championed reconquest. Although the United States played no explicit part in Texan independence, Mexico viewed her northern neighbor as an expansionist aggressor supplanting Spain as the principle threat to national security.

Far from unified, the United States projected strength in foreign policy through the continuity of Jackson's two terms. During the corresponding period, Mexico experienced at least nine separate governments. Although inept and offensive, Butler's influence on the outcome of United States-Mexico relations remains minimal. Mexico, seemingly, would not have parted peacefully with any portion of her territory, and the United States, regardless of events in Mexico City, would have exerted influence over Texas. The one program that might have saved Mexico from perennial civil war remains adoption of a true federalist system, granting each state the means to pursue their unique developments. Stephen Austin requested this of Mexico and served time in prison for it. A year later he assumed the office of the Republic of Texas' Secretariat of State. The stage was set for complete deterioration of diplomatic relations, the Mexican-American War.

Faith in or exercise of popular sovereignty through representative democracy perhaps dictated the two nation-states disparate developments. Mexico instituted popular sovereignty in the generous Constitution of 1824, but the critical feature of belonging making the process valid could not be decreed from the top down. Representative democracy depended, "on the people of particular communities feeling themselves to be a part of one people.... " [54](#) Geographic isolation, in part, thwarted unity. The centralist legacy of the Crown, though, persisted in the Republic's inability to initiate federalism and protect regional rights. In contrast to the United States, which proceeded to centralize slowly upon rejection of the Articles of Confederation, Mexico battled throughout the nationalist era to articulate the interests of the periphery to the capital. President Juarez's reforms, a turning point in liberal policy, perpetuated the centralist model. The liberal Constitution of 1917, although far sweeping socially, centralized power in the "imperial presidency." State rights and by extension municipal interests remained up through to the present poorly represented, if articulated at all. The expanding crisis in Chiapas delineates a consistent cause in republican Mexico--the absence of a nation or belonging reducing popular sovereignty to rhetoric awaiting realization.

Notes

1 James Smith Wilcocks, May 2, 1832, Department of State, *Dispatches from the United States Consuls in Mexico City, Mexico, 1822-1906*, National Archives Microfilm Publications, microfilm copies in Howard-Tilton Library of Tulane University, film 296.

2 President Andrew Jackson to U.S. Minister Anthony Butler, Feb. 14, 1833, *Anthony Butler Papers, 1810-1846*, Barker Texas History Center of the University of Texas at Austin. Hereafter referred to as BTHC.

3 Peter F. Guardino, *Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico's National State: Guerrero, 1800 - 1857* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996) 90.

4 Michael P. Costeloe, *The Central Republic in Mexico, 1835-1846: Hombres de Bien in the Age of Santa Anna* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 58.

5 Barbara A Tenenbaum, *The Politics of Penury: Debts and Taxes in Mexico, 1821-1856* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1986) xii.

6 Tenenbaum, *Debts and Taxes*, 28.

7 A rebellion whose goals were announced to the general public in a published plan or *prominciamiento*. Jaime E. Rodriguez O., "The Origins of the 1832 Rebellion," *Patterns of Contention in Mexican History* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1992) 162.

8 Guardino, 121.

9 Michael C. Meyers and William L. Sherman, *The Course of Mexican History* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991) 329.

10 Rodriguez, 148.

11 Guardino, 130

12 Guardino, 124.

13 Tenenbaum, *Debts and Taxes*, 35.

14 Guardino, 133.

15 "In Mexico where there is no opinion formed by the people... the representative system is not a mere fiction,...but a true irony...where frequent dissolutions of congresses arise, which the nation manifests itself indifferent, as if dealing with bodies that do not belong." Lucas Alaman, *Historia de Mexico desde los Primeros Movimientos que Prepararon su Independencia en el Ano de 1808 hasta la Epoca Presente*. 5 vols. (Mexico: Fondo de CulturaEconomica, 1985) 5: 857.

16 Rodriguez, 151-153

17 Guardino, 81.

18 Meyers and Sherman, 326.

19 Barbara A. Tenenbaum, "They Went Thataway": *The Evolution of the Pronunciamento, 1821-1856*, Patterns of Contention in Mexican History (wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1992) 195.

20 Guardino, 123.

21 Costeleo, 27.

22 Tenenbaum, "Thataway", 198.

23 In total, four separate constitutions, 1824, 1836, 1857 and 1917, governed the Mexican Republic.

24 Tenenbaum, *Debts and Taxes*, 66.

25 Costeleo, 66-7.

26 Tenenbaum, *Debts and Taxes*, 2.

27 Tenenbaum, *Debts and Taxes*, 78.

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41 Belohlavek, 218.

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47 U.S. Minister Anthony Butler to Commodore Jesse Elliot, Sept. 2, 1832, *U.S. Legation in Mexico Papers*, LALTU, box 10.

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51 "...contain the established colonists" Alaman, 5: 874.

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