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Bonaparte's Dream: Napoleon and the Rhetoric of American Expansion, 1800-1850

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BONAPARTE'S DREAM: NAPOLEON AND THE RHETORIC OF AMERICAN
EXPANSION, 1800-1850

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University
and Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

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DEDICATION

For Leigh. Who read every word. Twice.

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Like any writer of history, I owe much to many people. First and foremost, I must thank Nancy Isenberg for her critical eye and patience with my project as it developed over the years. As any advisor knows, it is difficult enough to supervise the projects of a graduate student while continuing to teach and conduct your own research. This is exponentially more difficult when your advisee lives almost 1000 miles away and works full time. Professor Isenberg did this and more without batting an eye. The other readers on my committee—Andrew Burstein, Charles Shindo and Leonard Ray deserve thanks as well. Their advice was unfailingly helpful and undoubtedly made this a better project.

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ABSTRACT

Between 1800 and 1850, the United States built a continental empire that stretched from the Atlantic seaboard to the Pacific Ocean. As scholars have come to realize over the past three decades, this expansion was not a peaceful movement of American settlers into virgin wilderness. Instead, it involved the conquest and subjugation of diverse peoples in Louisiana, Florida and the northern provinces of Mexico, and forced the United States to interact aggressively with the European empires of Great Britain, France, Spain, and eventually Mexico. My work helps to explain how Americans in the early republic reconciled this militant expansion with their professed democratic and republican values. By studying the rhetoric of American expansion, I found their justifications rooted in the unexpected person of Napoleon Bonaparte. Americans often saw similarities between continental expansion in the old and new worlds. Both the United States and Bonaparte's France started as republics, and both actively expanded beyond their borders during the first decades of the nineteenth-century. Even after the expansion of Bonaparte's France was halted prematurely after the battle of Waterloo in 1815, Americans continued to use him debate the merits of an imperial republic. In other words, they asked if a nation could retain its republican principles and still engage in continental conquest. In the early era of American expansion—between about 1800 and 1820, Napoleon served as a bogeyman, a negative example, which first expansionists and then anti-expansionists both used to justify their positions. But by the 1820s, as more sympathetic material flooded American print culture, his image changed. By the end of the Mexican American War in 1848, Bonaparte had been elevated into the perfect prototype for Americans to follow in their quest for continental domination. Bonaparte had largely become a positive symbol of military and national greatness.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: THE AMERICAN PROTEUS

In 1797, the most popular article regarding the new republican hero of France was the extract of a letter that ran in newspapers from New Hampshire to Georgia. Though we cannot be certain, it was probably read by tens of thousands of Americans anxious for news from war-torn Europe. In this article, a “gentleman” in Paris identified only as “C” wrote excitedly to his friend in Philadelphia. “C” explained that he had enclosed two copies of the latest portrait of General Napoleon Bonaparte and then provided what he knew was stunning, and what he hoped was joyful news. Napoleon was not, as first reported, from the French held island of Corsica. No, said “C,” the promising general was, in fact, an American from Middletown, Connecticut! Bonaparte was an assumed name; his given family name was Shaler.¹

The Philadelphia newspaper where this story first appeared added that this was “doubtful.” Regardless, the story was reprinted up and down the eastern seaboard and according to at least one newspaper, it produced, “no small degree of curiosity.” Only several months later did a few retractions start to appear. These, however, never came close to rivaling the number of times the story had been printed. Even the retractions that did make it into print were disappointed rather than apologetic in tone. *The New Jersey Journal* took an entire column to carefully explain that while the original letter from Paris had been authentic, Americans unfortunately could not, in fact, “claim the honor of having produced the great Buonaparte.”²

¹ “Buonaparte,” *The Argus* (New York, NY), December 29, 1796; also see titles of the same headline in, *The Philadelphia Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), December 31, 1796; *The Federal Gazette* (Baltimore, MD), January 3, 1796; *The Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, NJ), January 4, 1797; *The New Jersey Journal* (Elizabethtown, NJ), January 4, 1797; *The Connecticut Courant* (Hartford, CT), January 9, 1797; *The Connecticut Journal* (New Haven, CT), January 11, 1797; *The Political Gazette* (Newburyport, MA), January 13, 1797; *Woods Newark Gazette* (Newark, NJ), January 18, 1797; other commentary on the letter can be found in, *Loudon’s Register* (New York, NY), February 1, 1797.

² Ibid; “Buonaparte from the Albany Register,” *The New Jersey Journal* (Elizabethtown, NJ), February 8, 1797, similar edited articles were printed in *The Argus* (New York, NY), February 3, 1797; and *The Weekly Oracle* (New London, CT), February 18, 1797.

As this story shows, even early in Napoleon's career, Americans could make the general turned consul turned emperor into whatever they wanted him to be—even an American from Connecticut. And they did. Napoleon's name—which Americans could not even agree how to spell—and his image appeared in paintings, books, cartoons, wax museums, speeches, toasts, busts, pillows, cake decorations, and hundreds of other items from the late 1790s to his death in 1821.³ Even after his death, Bonaparte lived on. Some of this was simple hero worship; some was that morbid fascination with the lives of the rich and famous which continues in our own day. Often enough, Napoleon was used consciously as rhetorical device to define certain American qualities, which may sound odd to modern Americans who think of our identity as inherently unique. Napoleon was equally a symbol of military genius and political tyranny, depending on how politically-motivated Americans appropriated his image to address a wide range of issues during the antebellum period.

In this work, I am going to explain how Americans refashioned Napoleon to fit their ideas about national expansion and empire between about 1800 and 1850. In a simplistic way, Americans often saw similarities between continental expansion in the old and new worlds. Both the United States and Bonaparte's France were republics (or at least started that way), and both actively expanded beyond their borders during the first decades of the nineteenth-century. Even after the expansion of Bonaparte's France was halted prematurely after the battle of Waterloo in 1815, Americans continued to use him debate the merits of an imperial republic. In other words, they asked if a nation could retain its republican principles and still engage in

³ This was not entirely their fault. The original Corsican version of the name was Napoleone Buonaparte, but once the general attached himself to the French Revolution he Frenchified the name to Napoleon Bonaparte. Then, after he took the title of emperor, he (like most monarchs) began to refer to himself by only the first name. All three versions of the name were used by Americans well into the 1820s. For simplicity, in my work I will use either Napoleon or Bonaparte.

continental conquest. In the early era of American expansion—between about 1800 and 1820, Napoleon served as a bogeyman, a negative example, which first expansionists and then anti-expansionists both used to justify their positions. But by the 1820s, as more sympathetic material flooded American print culture, his image changed. By the end of the Mexican American War in 1848, as Americans acquired what would become the states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, parts of Colorado and Wyoming, Americans had elevated Bonaparte into the perfect prototype for Americans to follow in their quest for continental domination. Remarkably, Bonaparte had largely become a positive symbol of military and national greatness.

Few modern scholars have noticed, let alone carefully analyzed the significance of Bonaparte's symbolism. Scholars have probably dismissed the pervasive use of his imagery as so obvious that they have dismissed it as empty rhetoric. There are, however, a new generation of historians who have begun to address this gaping chasm in the scholarship. The work and methodology of Rachel Hope Cleves is probably closest to my own. In her *The Reign of Terror in America*, she tied the violent American imagery and rhetoric of the French Revolutionary Terror to the emergence of anti-slavery rhetoric in New England during the 1820s. Cleves's work provides an excellent example of how key word searches in electronic databases can produce impressive results. My own work builds on her methodology but shifts the focus thematically and chronologically. Where Cleves looked at violence done to individuals—the violence done to slaves by their owners, for example—my own work looks at the role of collective national violence, or the threat of it, aimed at other nation states.⁴

⁴ Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Anti-Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

It has almost become cliché for historians to tell their readers that their topic is understudied. I have no such luxury. Trying to explain how the Americans of the early republic reconciled aggressive geographic expansion with their professed beliefs in republicanism and democracy has occupied historians for over a century.⁵ In general, historians have focused on two main causes. The first was ideological. Historians have adopted the term, “manifest destiny” to describe a peculiar American sense of quasi-religious duty to spread liberal democracy across the continent—and, depending on whom you asked, across the world. Traditionally, historians dated this concept to the Jacksonian period, but in the 1990s, historians like Frank Owsley and Gene Smith began to argue that the roots of this ideology could be found in the actions of the Jefferson administration. Anders Stephanson even argued that an American sense of “chosenness” linked to expansion could be found as far back as the Puritan migration to the North America in the seventeenth century. Whenever it started, the key element is that manifest destiny is an inherently aggressive offensive ideology.⁶

Other historians see expansion as motivated less by ideology and more by fear stemming from national security concerns. They suggest that American expansion is best seen as a defensive measure designed to protect liberal democracy. In *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood*, for example, James Lewis suggests that as the Spanish empire in the new world collapsed, Americans justified their expansion into the chaotic borderlands between

⁵ A good introduction to the topic is Mary Ann Heiss, “The Evolution of the Imperial Idea and the U.S. National Identity,” *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 4 (Fall, 2002), 511-540.

⁶ Manifest Destiny as a historical concept first appeared in Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalistic Expansion in American History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935); and Weinberg’s conclusions were largely corroborated by Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963); Frank Owsley and Gene Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny 1800-1821* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1997); Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995); for another “long view” of ideology in American foreign policy see Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

1783 and 1829 by defining it as a national security interest. Similarly, Thomas Hietala argued that American fears over domestic and economic instability stimulated the aggressive expansion of the late Jacksonian period. Another example of this is Richard Anderson's explanation of the long history of American foreign policy in *Empire for Liberty*. Like Anders Stephanson, Immerman argued that the roots of American expansion could be traced back to its colonial beginnings, but where Stephanson saw Americans acting out of an aggressive, *offensive* ideology, Immerman saw Americans acting aggressively, and often unwisely, to *defend* an ever expanding geographic area from perceived threats to "liberty."⁷

Two problems continue to hamper our understanding of early American expansion. First is compartmentalization. In 2007, Sandra Gustafson lamented what she saw as the split between historians of the Jeffersonian period and those of the Jacksonian period and suggested that the split hid important connections between American democracy and American Imperialism. A quick glance at works on early American expansion shows that historians have indeed missed the importance of continuity by focusing on distinct historical periods instead of taking a longer view of the antebellum era. Many scholars have exaggerated the meaning of the *peaceful* acquisition of Louisiana in 1803 as the defining moment of Jeffersonian diplomacy and expansion, while using the Mexican American War to paint the Jacksonian era as a period of greater military aggression. What is missing here is the continuation of ideology that bridged the two periods that drew heavily on European ideas and practices of empire-building.⁸

⁷ James E. Lewis Jr., *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Thomas Hietala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire*, revised ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); Richard H. Immerman, *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁸ Sandra Gustafson "Democracy and Empire," *American Quarterly* 59 no.1 (March, 2007), 107-133.

The second problem is one of focus. The last forty years have seen an odd divergence in early expansionist studies. On one hand, some historians continue to focus heavily on presidents and policymakers at the highest levels of government. This is understandable since many of those most interested in American imperialism are diplomatic historians who traditionally deal with treaties and national strategy. On the other hand, since the 1980s, an increasing number of historians have focused their efforts on giving voice and agency to those in the borderlands whose lives were most changed by national policy: native peoples, Spanish creoles, local officials, African slaves, and Mexican citizens, for example. This new emphasis is a necessary corrective. Men and women living in these contested areas were not merely pawns in the diplomatic gamesmanship of policymakers in Madrid, Paris, or Washington. What is also needed is greater attention to how public opinion was shaped—and played a crucial role in both defending and criticizing expansionist policies. For example, why did Americans rally around President Polk’s war policy which necessitated the invasion of a sovereign republic? Polk needed an army of volunteers, which meant that support for conquest already was widely accepted in the American public. How that imperialist ideology was framed in newspapers and print culture is a vital part of process of expansion.⁹

⁹ For examples of good recent bio-diplomatic histories of American expansion see Peter Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2000); Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); J.C.A. Stagg, *Borderlines in Borderlands: James Madison and the Spanish-American Frontier* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); Charles Edell, *Nation Builder: John Quincy Adams and the Grand Strategy of the Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); and Robert Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs: James K. Polk, the Mexican War, and the Conquest of the American Continent* (New York: Simon and Schuster 2010); for relevant examples of the work that highlights the agency of those on the borders see, Anne Hyde, *Empires, Nations and Families: A New History of the North American West, 1800-1860* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011); Peter J. Kastor, “‘Motives of Particular Urgency’: Local Diplomacy in Louisiana,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (October 2001), 819-848; Julien Vernet, *Strangers on their Native Soil: Opposition to United States Governance in Louisiana’s New Orleans Territory* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2013); Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2010); Timothy Henderson, *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007).

Study of the anti-expansionist currents in American society is a more recent phenomenon and thus less developed. Unfortunately, it is somewhat hampered by the same periodization and lens foci that make histories of early American expansion less than complete. Those historians who study anti-imperialism generally focus on it as a reactionary anti-war movement and not as a deeply rooted ideology. Thus, while we have historical snapshots of Whig anti-war movements during the Mexican War and Federalist anti-war movements during the War of 1812, there is no study that links the ideology of these two movements together or that connects them to the anti-expansionist ideas that surrounded the Louisiana Purchase.¹⁰

This is why the symbolism and rhetoric attached to Napoleon is so important. His shifting image revealed how average Americans thought about expansion and ties the two periods of early American expansion together. As a trope of military expansion, he forced commentators to more carefully define the principles of republicanism, the legitimacy of using military force, and the concentration of power in the executive branch. Using Napoleon made public critics clarify the distinctions between wars for conquest and defensive wars and to think more clearly about expansion based on treaties, natural limits (territorial or continental boundaries), and national security concerns. It also bears noting that the individuals who comprised the American reading public were not automatons who mindlessly opposed or supported every policy of Jefferson, Madison, or Polk, either out of spite or partisan loyalties.

¹⁰ The best modern work on anti-Imperialism is Ian Tyrrell and Jay Sexton, *Empire's Twin: U.S. Anti-Imperialism from the Founding Era to the Age of Terrorism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), though this collection of essays includes only one chapter that covers the antebellum period; several good monographs exist on anti-imperialism after 1898, but one of the problems of developing coherent theories of early anti-imperialism is that the comprehensive works tend to be collections of independent essays, see for example, Samuel Eliot Ellison, Frederick Merk and Frederick Freidel, *Dissent in Three American Wars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970); also see John Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War: American Opposition and Dissent* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973); Michael Morrison, "New Territory vs. No Territory: The Whig Party and the Politics of Western Expansion," *Western Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (February, 1992), 25-51; Amy S. Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2012).

Then, as now, their knowledge was always limited and their opinions were never totally objective. It was quite common for elected officials to write for the newspapers during the early republic, and often disguise themselves by using pseudonyms. The word of print was fractious and never a level playing field. But writing for the reading public required a different pose than arguing in halls of Congress. It did create a forum for rational debate, even if this was imperfectly achieved.

The chief benefit of my own work is in its ability to project a much-needed sense of thematic and chronological continuity into debates over American expansion between the Louisiana Purchase and the end of Mexican War. I demonstrate that there was both continuity and change in the American understanding of expansion during the first half of the nineteenth century. In part, I demonstrate that the artificial division between expansion to 1820 and after 1820 has merit. Pro and anti-expansionist arguments based on national security that proven quite effective during the Louisiana Purchase and the War of 1812 lost much of their power after 1815. I suggest that a large reason for this was that after 1815, the chief symbol upon which this rhetoric was built—Napoleon—could no longer be made into a viable national security threat. Yet, Napoleon’s symbolic place in the American rhetoric of expansion continued through 1850, albeit in a different form and with different results.

The other value of my work is that it brings into focus the expansionist (and anti-expansionist) views of a surprisingly neglected group: middle-class Americans from the core of the United States. As a decentralized democratic republic with a laughably small military, American national policy had to correspond to the will of the white, male electorate to be effective. The editor of the *New Hampshire Patriot* perceptively wrote of expansion in 1832, “no *physical* force can carry [the government’s] mandates into effect, for if the people approve

them they will be obeyed.” However, if the American public did not approve of their government’s actions, “they will not fight against their own consciences, their own convictions of right, to enforce what they deem unjust.” American military commanders confronted this democratic and local resistance during the War of 1812 when militia sometimes refused to cross the Canadian border. In fact, the process of debating in the newspapers both contributed to the growth of nationalism and exposed its fragile reach across a country where state and regional identification was often more important to average citizens.¹¹

I also show that the traditional “anti-war” label for anti-expansionists needs greater nuance. A few of those who I study could fit the traditional “anti-war” model and opposed all war for its human and economic waste as well as for what they saw as the inevitable immoral (or unwise) geographic expansion that went with it. However, this was a rare position. Others were vigorously opposed to offensive wars of “conquest” while supporting “defensive” wars and the means to fight them. Another subgroup was genuinely opposed to all expansion beyond the “natural limits” of the United States no matter the means. There were even those who opposed expansion via treaty and who saw military conquest as the only legitimate means of expansion. Of course, there was much gray area within each of these positions as well. It also bears noting that these men and women did not mindlessly oppose every policy of Jefferson, Madison, or Polk out of spite. They were reasonable citizens who had genuine concerns about the actions of their nation.

To explain how I do this, a short introduction to my methodology is in order. Anyone who takes the time to scan my bibliography will note that I have used published sources almost exclusively and this deserves some explanation. Americans were a remarkably literate society

¹¹ *New Hampshire Patriot* (Concord, NH), March 19, 1832.

by 1800 and became increasingly so as the nineteenth century wore on. Pamphlets, newspapers, books and magazines circulated widely and I work from the assumption that these both accurately reflected and helped to shape public opinion.¹² Americans used these printed sources to learn everything they could about Napoleon. On the Niagara frontier during the first decade of the nineteenth century, young Eber Howe remembered the excitement generated by the postman bringing the local paper and “with what avidity the family circle would gather round to hear my father read the wonderful doings of that great human butcher, [Napoleon Bonaparte].” By 1830 even modest families living on the fringes of American settlement usually owned a bible, a hymnbook, an almanac and biographies of Washington and Bonaparte. Families that could not afford books accessed the life of Napoleon through libraries. According to literary historian Scott Casper, Americans checked-out biographies of the French general more than any other type of book during the mid-nineteenth century.¹³

Because of the American print obsession with Napoleon, researching his impact on American discourse is more like a feast than a famine. For example, running the name “Bonaparte” through the Readex *America’s Historical Newspapers* database between 1800 and 1850 will return over 3,000,000 hits; and these results only cover the newspapers!¹⁴ In order to turn these results into usable data, I was forced use rely on keyword proximity searches. For example, asking the database to only retrieve results that include both “Bonaparte” AND “Louisiana” brings the total number of hits down to a somewhat more manageable level. In

¹² I make this unsurprising assumption based primarily on the work of, Jeffrey Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2002); and Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

¹³ Quoted in Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 100; Scott Casper, *Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 27, 81-82.

¹⁴ By way of comparison, Rachel Hope Cleves noted 50,451 hits in the same database doing similar work on the impact of the French Revolutionary Terror in the American mind—see Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America*, 283.

general, I searched for Napoleon’s names and the geographic areas that Americans were interested in annexing. However, as I continued my research, I was able to include important “code words” that virtually all Americans associated with Napoleon—“sister republics,” “usurper,” and “ambition” among others. Using this approach probably does mean that a few pieces of data slipped through the cracks, but after analyzing over 1,000,000 newspaper articles in conjunction with dozens of biographies, pamphlets and other printed material, I am reasonably certain that I understand the structure of how Americans used Napoleon in their debates over expansion.

A final note on my methodology: critics have been suspicious about the usefulness of symbols and rhetoric in reconstructing the past for many years. Public rhetoric, in particular, seems particularly difficult to take at face value. In his monograph, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, historian Michael Hunt addressed this issue. “The cynical,” he wrote, “would contend that carefully staged public appeals are occasions not for frank and nuanced expression, but for cant intended to fool the gullible and mask true intentions.” Yet, he pointed out, for public rhetoric to be effective at all, it must appeal to “values and concerns widely shared and easily understood by its audience.” In my work, I have done my best to ensure that the printed material I use had a wide circulation, or at least reflects larger trends in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century print culture. Rhetoric needs to be taken seriously as a source for defining the boundaries of American discourse on expansion. It was the glue that bound Americans together as a nation, because rhetoric provides a common vocabulary for defining national identity. Ultimately, this is the fundamental truth that undergirds my entire work.¹⁵

¹⁵ This paragraph is heavily paraphrased from Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, reprint ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 15-16.

Americans first became aware of the Corsican-born general around mid-1796 in the wake of his appointment to command the Republican Army of Italy. Within weeks, newspapers were full of his exciting dispatches from the front lines. By the end of the year, one Federalist newspaper from Baltimore noted with some concern the degree to which “the public mind in America is wrought up to a high state of anxiety” over Napoleon’s series of stunning victories against the Austrian empire in Italy.¹⁶

The victorious general almost immediately became a political football in American debates about the just conduct of republics. Jeffersonian Republicans—who tended to be sympathetic the principles if not always the means of the French Revolution—hailed Napoleon as a brilliant general whose victories spread the promise of liberty to those oppressed by despotic European monarchies. As part of the traditional Independence Day toasts made by the New York Democratic society in 1797, twenty-two cheers were made in support of “Gen. Buonaparte and the brave officers and soldiers of the French armies,” who were engaged in “securing the liberty, peace and happiness of mankind.” Tellingly, in the same series of toasts, the memory of the July 4, 1776 only received six cheers.¹⁷

While Republicans cheered as newspapers brought new reports of Bonaparte’s victories in Italy, the opposing party in power, the Federalists, urged caution. They were never comfortable with the violent social anarchy caused by the revolution in France and liked it even less when it spilled over the French borders. One Federalist newspaper sarcastically asked what the difference between the Goths and Napoleon’s Army of Italy was. The editor provided the answer using italics to emphasize his point: “The ancient conquerors were *despotic princes*—the

¹⁶ “November 11,” *The Federal Gazette* (Baltimore, MD), November 16, 1796.

¹⁷ *The Diary or Loudon’s Register* (New York, NY), July 6, 1797; Andrew Burstein and Nancy Isenberg, *Madison and Jefferson* (New York: Random House, 2010), 253-257; also see Joseph Shulim, “Jefferson views Napoleon,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 60, no. 2 (April, 1952), 288-304.

modern conquerors of Italy are *despotic republicans*.” At the heart of the Federalist unease was concern over whether it was legitimate for republics to conquer their neighbors, even in the name of liberty. In many ways, this question has been at the heart of American foreign policy ever since.¹⁸

In 1798, Bonaparte and his army were ordered to pacify Egypt to prepare the way for an eventual invasion of British India. Commentators then and now have suggested that the real reason the French Directory—the five-man executive council that ended the Terror and ran Revolutionary France with some semblance of order from 1795-1799—sent Bonaparte to the fringes of the Ottoman Empire was to get the increasingly popular (and thus increasingly dangerous) general away from France. The campaign was only marginally successful from a military perspective, but it did help Napoleon in at least one way. It meant that his American reputation was not tarnished by the souring of Franco-American relations that occurred in the wake of the XYZ Affair and the Quasi-War (1798-1800).¹⁹ American public anger at the French demand for tribute and the ensuing naval skirmish was overwhelmingly aimed at the French Directory and central government instead of Bonaparte.

Thus, for many Americans, it came as a relief when Napoleon abandoned his army in Egypt, returned to France, and engineered a coup that toppled the hated Directory. In its place, Bonaparte established a government of three consuls with himself as First Consul. Shortly after assuming office, Napoleon adopted a more conciliatory diplomatic stance toward the United

¹⁸ “Republicanism: The Latest Fashion,” *The Federal Gazette* (Baltimore, MD), September 9, 1796; Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 311-314.

¹⁹ Americans were deeply outraged by French government officials’ (identified in the American newspapers as agents X, Y, and Z) demand for a bribe to begin negotiations over American and a non-declared naval war ensued with both sides seizing each other’s merchant and naval ships. See William Stinchcombe, *The XYZ Affair* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); and Alexander DeConde, *The Quasi-War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War with France, 1797-1801* (New York: Scribner, 1966); Joseph Shulim, *The Old Dominion and Napoleon Bonaparte: A Study in American Opinion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 47-75.

States, which led to the Convention of 1800 that ended the naval war in September of that year. Yet, even with the war over, maritime disputes between the two nations continued for the next fifteen years. More troubling to at least some Americans though was the nagging sense that with the ascension of Bonaparte, France had become a Republic in name only. While some diehard Jeffersonians continued to hope that Bonaparte's near dictatorial powers would be only temporary, most Americans expressed relief that they were separated from the First Consul by the Atlantic Ocean and wondered where his ambition would take him next.²⁰

Though Americans did not know his plans yet, Napoleon did. He had his sights on Louisiana—a territory roughly defined as the area dominated by Mississippi River and its tributaries west to the Rocky Mountains. Louisiana was no stranger to the byzantine world of imperial politics by the time the Bonaparte turned his gaze there at the end of the eighteenth century. Spanish *conquistadores* were the first Europeans to traverse the gulf coasts of Florida and Louisiana. Several disastrous expeditions in search of gold—most famously by Hernando DeSoto in 1541—led the Spanish government to lose interest in Louisiana and focus their attentions on the fabulously wealthy silver mines of New Mexico. The Spanish, however, did maintain a tenuous hold on Florida, which, by their reckoning, ran the length of the gulf coast to the Mississippi. They did this mainly to keep other covetous empires out of the area in order to protect Spanish shipping. Meanwhile, the French moved into the Mississippi valley from their possessions in Canada. In 1682, the French adventurer Robert Cavelier, sieur de La Salle officially claimed (and named) the territory for Louis XIV, but the colony never prospered. For almost a century it struggled. With far more prosperous islands in the Caribbean attracting most

²⁰ Convention of 1800, September 16, 1800, The Avalon Project online, (<http://avalon.law.yale.edu>); Shulim, *The Old Dominion and Napoleon Bonaparte*, 76-90; Peter Hill, *Napoleon's Troublesome Americans: Franco-American Relations, 1804-1815* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005).

of the willing French settlers, only a handful of disgruntled “undesirable” persons from France made Louisiana their home—usually they had no choice in the matter. In addition, their existence was constantly threatened by hostile relations with vastly more numerous native peoples that actively courted the African slave population as allies. In the end, the French did manage to fortify the mouth of the Mississippi River at New Orleans and set up numerous fur trading posts around the junction of the Ohio and the Mississippi rivers.²¹

The first half of the eighteenth century saw a series of imperial wars between France and England that continued with only short pauses until 1765. In the last of these wars, known in Europe as the Seven Years War, Louisiana again became an imperial football. As the tide of the war turned against the French, they sought the support of the neutral Spanish by promising to cede the territory of Louisiana. Spain, concerned about the possibility of an energetic Anglo-American empire bordering their wealthy provinces in Mexico, took the bait and entered the war on behalf of the French. However, Spain proved to be a less than valuable ally and France was soon forced to sue for peace. The final settlement of the Treaty of Paris (1763) redefined the imperial map of the Americas. France lost all of her possessions in continental North America—Canada to Great Britain, and Louisiana went (as promised) to Spain. For her part in supporting the French, Spain lost East and West Florida to the British.²²

²¹ The best current treatment of French Louisiana is Bradley Bond ed., *French Colonial Louisiana and the Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); also see, Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Penguin, 2001) 382-394; and Gilbert Din, “Empires too Far: The Demographic Limitations of Three Imperial Powers in Louisiana,” *Louisiana History* 50, no. 3 (Summer 2009), 263-270.

²² Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years War and the Fate of the British Empire in North America* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2010), 483-485, 505; Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500-2000* (New York: Viking Press, 2005), 125-126, 135-138; Alexander DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana* (New York, Scribner, 1976), 26-30; Treaty of Paris, February 10, 1763, The Avalon Project online, (<http://avalon.law.yale.edu>);

Yet, the imperial roulette game was not yet over. Within a dozen years of the Treaty of Paris, the British imperial bureaucracy pushed her thirteen original mainland North American colonies into open revolt. Seeking allies, the infant American republic sought recognition and support from Britain's old enemies of France and Spain. Looking to avenge their embarrassment at the hands of the British during the Seven Years War, both powers eventually entered the war on the side of the Americans, though Spain was particularly cautious about overtly supporting a nation that they realized would be their major rival in North America. Looking to their own interests, Spain took advantage of weakened British power in the gulf coast region to reassert their control of the Floridas and, most importantly, New Orleans. Another Treaty of Paris (1783) ended this civil war which had expanded into an international conflict with the British colonies achieving their independence. The treaty defined the new nation's boundaries as all territory west to the middle of the Mississippi River, south of Canada and north of Florida, though the exact northern boundary of Spanish Florida was left unclear.²³

The Mississippi River and its tributaries loomed large in the minds of the newly independent Americans. In an age when the only way to transport goods to market economically was via water routes, Americans living west of the Appalachian Mountains depended upon the free flow of cargo down the Ohio to the Mississippi then through New Orleans to the Gulf of Mexico. Realizing this, the Spanish exerted economic pressure on the western regions of the United States by closing the port of New Orleans shortly after the conclusion of the American Revolution. They also quietly supported the occasional separatist movements that sprang up among the western territories by holding out the promise of free navigation along the Mississippi

²³ The Treaty of Paris and Associated Documents, 1783, The Avalon Project online, (<http://avalon.law.yale.edu>); DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana*, 34-39.

to any areas willing to submit to Spanish authority. The American Confederation government sought a diplomatic solution to the problem, but failure to secure the basic right of frontiersmen to use the port of New Orleans caused enough outrage amongst southerners and westerners to derail ratification of Jay-Gardoqui Treaty (and almost the Constitution) in 1786. The two powers continued to warily eye each other as American settlers swarmed into territory claimed by Spain as northern Florida.²⁴

Ten years later, however, the situation changed with the outbreak of the French Revolutionary Wars in Europe. Perceiving that the United States was growing closer to Great Britain under Federalist Party rule, Spain, as an ally of revolutionary France, came to the bargaining table. Westerners rejoiced when the United States finally concluded Pinckney's Treaty with Spain in 1795. This treaty, also known as the Treaty of San Lorenzo, clarified the boundary between the United States and Florida as the 31st parallel of latitude—which essentially acknowledged the fact that the United States had *de facto* control of the northern parts of what the Spanish claimed as Florida. Both nations agreed to allow each other unimpeded access to the Mississippi. The treaty also provided Americans a “right of deposit” in New Orleans, which allowed Americans to transport and store their goods in New Orleans without having to pay a duty to the Spanish empire.²⁵

Though the French gave up Louisiana at the end of the Seven Years War, they never lost sight of their imperial ambitions. In 1793, the French ambassador, Citizen Genêt, received instructions from the Girondin government to “germinate the principles of liberty and

²⁴ DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana*, 41-55; Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood*, 15-17; Stagg, *Borderlines in Borderlands*, 31-33; see also Din, “Empires too Far,” 273-289.

²⁵ Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation: America's Place in the World from its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2006), 76-81; Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood*, 22-23; Stagg, *Borderlines in Borderlands*, 37-38.

independence” in Louisiana and then find a way to transfer the independent territory to France. Genêt took this to mean that his government wanted him to wage a war of liberation and began recruiting an army of western Americans to do the job. This scheme fell apart when Genêt fell afoul of the American government and was recalled to France. The Directory, laid plans to reestablish France’s hold on Louisiana through more diplomatic means. They quietly opened negotiations with Spain for the retrocession of Louisiana, but for several years the Spanish government proved remarkably intractable on the issue. As we will see, however, Bonaparte would not be dissuaded so easily.²⁶

What follows is broken into four chapters aligned geographically around a very broadly defined Louisiana. In chapter one, I cover how Napoleon entered the American lexicon of expansion during Mississippi Crisis of 1802-03, which resulted in the Louisiana Purchase. I show that the American public saw Bonaparte as negative symbol, in which both pro and anti-expansionists used to define their own positions and attack their opponents’ positions. At this time, all parties agreed on one point: Napoleon’s approach to expansion was one best not followed by an independent republic. Chapter two discusses how Americans used the rhetoric of Napoleon in the aftermath of the Louisiana Purchase, which in its early years was treated as colonial possession.

Chapter three illustrates how Federalists used Napoleon to create an effective, nationwide anti-expansionist (though not anti-war) argument by linking aggressive expansion in East and West Florida to the War of 1812. Lastly, in my final chapter, I demonstrate how Americans both celebrated Napoleon as a democratic military genius while claiming to despise his ambitious politics. The Janus-faced image was solidified by the avalanche of Napoleonic printed material

²⁶ DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana*, 75-89.

that appeared in the United States beginning in the 1820s. And, as I contend, helped to lay popular support for the Mexican-American War, which was the most aggressive display of imperial expansion in the antebellum period. I conclude with some cursory observations of why the highly-charged rhetoric about Napoleon fell off steeply during the Civil War.

CHAPTER 2 ANCIENT LIMITS AND NATURAL BOUNDARIES: THE MISSISSIPPI CRISIS

During the first few months of 1803, an anonymous author published a long pamphlet sporting the delightfully grandiose title, “An Address to the Government of the United States on the Cession of the Louisiana Territory to the French and on the Late Breach of Treaty by the Spaniards, including the Translation of a Memorial on the War of St. Domingo, and the Cessation of the Mississippi to France.” The author—who was the novelist Charles Brockden Brown—claimed to have translated a secret memorandum from a “French Counsellor of State” to the First Consul of the Republic, Napoleon Bonaparte. In the “translated” document, the supposed diplomat argued persuasively that Bonaparte ought to immediately occupy the Louisiana Territory, which had recently been begrudgingly ceded to him by his Spanish allies. Translation of the “memorandum” completed, Brown made an appeal to his own government. With French military occupation of the territory apparently inevitable, he argued for an American military occupation of Louisiana before the French could officially take possession of the area. Yes, he admitted, this would mean a foreign war waged against Spain under dubious pretexts, and it would eventually require that the inhabitants of the conquered territory to be held in a state of vassalage. Yet, he argued, the danger of allowing Bonaparte to militarize the western boundary of the United States was worth all these consequences. Brown had to know that his means would have sounded downright Napoleoneque to his readers, indeed, he practically demanded the comparison. Incredibly enough, however, Brown was only one of many voices calling for a preemptive military invasion of Louisiana.²⁷

²⁷ Charles Brockden Brown, *An Address to the Government of the United States on the Cession of Louisiana to the French and the Late Breach of Treaty by the Spanish* (Philadelphia, PA: Joseph Conrad, 1803).

Every story has a beginning. In the case of American expansion this beginning was Louisiana—a territory loosely defined by the Mississippi River and its tributaries that stretched west to the Rocky Mountains. When through a remarkable set of international circumstances Napoleon Bonaparte sought to sell the Louisiana Territory to the United States in 1803, it was the first opportunity for the embryonic nation to burst through the boundaries defined by the Treaty of Paris in 1783. Yet, the road to what most Americans remember as the greatest land deal in United States history was not a simple one. It involved fear and hyper-partisan political bickering that almost developed into America’s first foreign war involving land forces. This chapter closely examines the emergence of Napoleonic rhetoric—specifically the idea of ancient limits and natural borders—during the Mississippi Crisis of 1800-1803.

Compared to the Louisiana Purchase that followed, the Mississippi Crisis has received scant attention from historians. For most of the twentieth century, the diplomatic and political historians who gave it any serious thought used the episode as a barometer for judging the Jefferson administration’s foreign policy acumen. More recently, however, a few historians have placed the Mississippi Crisis into the larger context of early American expansion in the Spanish borderlands. Two schools of thought have emerged. One argues that American policy in the region stemmed from an ideology of what Frank Owsley and Gene Smith called “proto-manifest destiny” in their 1997 book, *Filibusters and Expansionists*. According to this interpretation, the American government regularly acted in a deliberate and aggressive manner toward its Spanish neighbors and the Mississippi Crisis was simply a precursor to more aggressive action in the region later. “The entire episode,” they write, “demonstrated that Jefferson strongly supported westward expansion and that he understood the Mississippi River’s importance to its development.” Such militant acts, say these historians, fit comfortably into what later

generations would call the ideology of Manifest Destiny—the unashamed conquest of territory from a neighbor unable to resist.²⁸

Other historians have argued that it is anachronistic to see the Mississippi Crisis in terms of Manifest Destiny. Instead, these historians argue that American policy was actually dictated by national security concerns and thus ultimately defensive in nature. In James Lewis's 1998 work, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood*, for example, Lewis argues that the American response to the Mississippi Crisis, "always reflected a concern with the effect on French control over the river on the integrity of the union." Even more recently, Donald Heidenreich completed a detailed political examination of the crisis in which he concluded that, it should be understood primarily as "a young republic's quest for national security." Heidenreich took Lewis's argument one step further and argued that the national security concern was so prevalent in the politics of early American expansion that Jeffersonians and Federalists put aside their party differences and reached a "consensus" on the necessity of possessing Louisiana.²⁹

While the basic story of the Mississippi Crisis is well established, by placing the rhetoric of Napoleon into the crisis, my own work complicates the existing narrative. First, it clearly shows that a portion of the American public—if perhaps not the Jefferson administration—saw the crisis as a referendum on the just application of military power and not solely as a diplomatic event. Second, it demonstrates that while the Lewis, Heidenreich interpretation of seeing the crisis in terms of a national security issue is correct it is ultimately too simple. In the first case,

²⁸ Gene Smith and Frank Owsley Jr., *Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny 1800-1821* (Tusacloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 19-21.

²⁹ James Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 25-28; Donald Heidenreich, "U.S. National Security and Party Politics: the Consensus on Louisiana," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 62 no. 4 (Winter, 2003), 370.

the rhetoric aggressive expansionists used changed over time and reflected the American public's discomfort with militant expansion. In the second place, while there was a general agreement between most Americans of all political stripes that the United States needed possession of at least a part of Louisiana to protect its national security, there was no consensus on how this was to be accomplished, what portion of Louisiana was a vital national security interest, or even where the boundaries of Louisiana lay.

The Mississippi Crisis introduced Bonaparte as a negative symbol in American debates over expansion. Pro-expansionists argued that the military threat of a Napoleonic Louisiana justified a preemptive strike that would expand the United States to its natural boundaries—or at least prevent France from returning to her ancient limits. To be in favor of aggressive expansion, Americans had to believe that French control of the Mississippi River was a legitimate national security concern. At the same time, an ideological anti-expansionist argument began to form around the idea that military expansion would make the United States no better than imperial France. Anti-expansionist rhetoric was most effective when authors demonstrated the uncomfortable similarities between the military expansion of the United States and that of Napoleon. Fundamentally, both groups shared the assumption that aggressive militant expansion in the mode of Bonaparte was illegitimate. This common understanding forced pro-expansionists to explain why their own views were based on national security interests and not simply overt and unprovoked military expansion.

When Napoleon overthrew the Directory in 1799 and established the three-man Consulate government with himself as First Consul, he inherited a long-established French desire to rebuild their western empire. As early as 1793 the Girondin government attempted to destabilize Spanish Louisiana by subterfuge through the machinations of Citizen Genêt. A few

years later, the Directory opened diplomatic talks with Spain with the goal of convincing the Bourbon government to return Louisiana. The Spanish proved intractable and the Directory government fell before anything came of the negotiations. When Napoleon came to power, he quietly redoubled pressure on his ally Spain to retrocede Louisiana to France in exchange for territory in Italy. Under enormous political and military pressure, Spain backed down. Not unhappy to be rid of the financial drain on their economy and happy to use France as a buffer between New Mexico and the United States, the Spanish government secretly acceded to Napoleon's demands in October 1800 after securing a verbal agreement that the French consul would allow no third party to possess Louisiana. Well aware of the firestorm that the retrocession would cause in the United States, both powers attempted to keep the deal secret until Bonaparte had the ability to solidify his control of the province.³⁰

Eager to realize his dream of recreating a North American empire, Napoleon concluded his wars in Europe—at least temporarily. The Peace of Lunéville pacified Austria in February 1801; then, eight months later, he ended hostilities with the British in the Peace of Amiens. The result of these treaties was a much enlarged French state—mostly at the expense of Austria. It also freed France from fear of the British navy. In January 1802, Americans read that a large French expeditionary force under the command of Napoleon's brother in law, Charles Leclerc, was on its way to North America to assert the First Consul's control over his western empire. This action confirmed the worst fears of many Americans—especially the more Franco-phobic Federalists. Rumors of the Spanish retrocession of Louisiana to France had been circulating in diplomatic circles since the end of March and in the American press since at least June, but the

³⁰ Treaty of San Ildefonso, October 1, 1800, The Avalon Project online, (<http://avalon.law.yale.edu>); Alexander DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana* (New York, Scribner, 1976) 91-96.

sailing of the French fleet for the Americas left no doubt in the mind of the American public that they would have a new neighbor on their western border.³¹

Even before Bonaparte's fleet sailed, the Jefferson administration was working to resolve the developing crisis. Thomas Jefferson and his followers embraced a transcontinental American empire of connected republics.³² While the decaying Spanish empire held Louisiana, most assumed that their imperial holdings in North America would, in the course of time, simply fall into the lap of the United States as Americans settlers moved farther west and either imparted republican values to the inhabitants or came to dominate the area simply through sheer numbers. Bonaparte's increasingly autocratic and powerful France threatened that vision by re-inserting the most militant nation in Europe onto the American continent. The administration reacted with hostility when rumors of the retrocession were all but confirmed by their European diplomats in May 1801. When questioned, however, the French *chargé de affairs* in Washington coyly refused to acknowledge that any transfer had taken place. Besides, he told the administration, even if it had, it would not concern the United States—unless, of course, she intended to expand past the boundaries established by the Treaty of Paris.³³

³¹ DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana*, 100-101; Steven Englund, *Napoleon: A Political Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 254-255; Phillipe Giard, "The Ugly Duckling: The French Navy and the Saint-Domingue Expedition, 1801-1803," *International Journal of Naval History* 7 (December, 2008), 1-25; Probably the most reprinted article about the North American expedition was, "The Fete at Paris," *The Daily Advertiser* (Baltimore, MD), January 27, 1802; also see *Newburyport Herald* (Newburyport, MA), December 29 1801.

³² Close readers will note that I shy away from using "Republican" and "Federalist" and substitute "expansionist" and "anti-expansionist." I do this in recognition of the fact that what historians have called the "first party system" was amorphous and not a party system that we would recognize today. There were many shades of Republicans—and not all shared Jefferson's vision of continental expansion. Just so, there were many Federalists who were militant expansionists. See James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 8-9.

³³ DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana*, 107-110; For the Jeffersonian vision of empire see, Peter Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 45; and Andrew Burstein and Nancy Isenberg, *Madison and Jefferson* (New York: Random House, 2010), 391.

Stymied, Secretary of State James Madison sent a long set of instructions to the new Minister to France, Robert Livingston in September. The president, he said, wanted Livingston to confirm if the retrocession had taken place, and if so, what the extent of it was. Specifically, the president wanted to know if Florida was included in the deal. Furthermore, he added, if the French were in possession of Louisiana and Florida, Livingston was instructed to persuade the French to sell New Orleans and the Floridas—and if they were not, then convince the French to pressure their Spanish allies to sell those strategic points. The delicate diplomatic negotiations that followed took over a year and have been well chronicled in other places. Jefferson was willing to wait—at least for a while—but not all of his countrymen were so patient.³⁴

By 1801, the Federalist Party was a minority party in most places in the nation, but they were still an extremely vocal opposition. Many were outraged by news of the retrocession and demanded a strong response from Jefferson's administration. In general, Federalists were less concerned about the ideological empire of republicanism that animated Jefferson. Where Republicans looked west to what Jefferson called an "Empire of Liberty," Federalists looked east to protect a commercial empire of merchants and bankers. They were focused on building a nation state that would be taken seriously by European powers. The Genêt mission, the XYZ Affair and the raiding of American commerce showed the Federalists exactly how little the belligerents thought of a divided and militarily weak nation that hugged the eastern seaboard of North America. The major theme of early Federalist opposition to the retrocession was outrage

³⁴ Madison to Livingston, September 28, 1801 in *State Papers and Correspondence Bearing upon the Purchase of the Territory of Louisiana* (Washington D.C., 1903) 6-8; While Jefferson was willing to wait for diplomacy to work, he was not, as his opponents insinuated, a pacifist. As he waited for news from France, he sent a sizable portion of the tiny American army to the Louisiana border and requested funds for a military reconnaissance disguised as a "scientific expedition" up the Missouri River (this became what Americans know as the Lewis and Clark expedition). Perhaps most surprising of all, however, the notoriously Anglophobic Jefferson ordered the American Minister to Great Britain to inquire as to the possibility of a military alliance. See Robert Tucker and David Henderickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 108-124.

that the French sought to check American expansion—essentially an affront to American honor and greatness.³⁵

In June, several Federalist papers announced that France had, “exerted her diplomatic skill to seize Louisiana, Florida and Canada, and enlisted her GENETS to enlist men in our backcountry to occupy them.” To the American reader at all familiar with geography, French control of those three key territories would make further American expansion impossible. This was nothing new, the article explained to its readers. As early as 1783 the paper noted, France was, “adverse to our aggrandizement.” While this article explicitly tied France to the future of American expansion, it stopped short of directly employing Napoleonic rhetoric to make its points, instead choosing to use the specter of Citizen Genêt. This began to change as Americans began to discuss the ramifications of the Peace of Amiens and place their own empire within the context of the Napoleonic one.³⁶

When considering the American perception of the French Revolution’s ideological undertones most historians have focused on the Federalist fear of radical Jacobin ideas infecting the United States from within rather than on French territorial ambitions. Rachel Hope Cleves in *The Reign of Terror in America*, writes that the Revolution’s “pervasive and persistent images of bloodshed deeply affected American beliefs about the legitimacy of violence within American politics and society,” and she credits these images with encouraging American abhorrence to violence in domestic issues like slavery. In *The Age of Federalism*, Stanley Elkins and Erik McKittrick contended that “the real drama of the French Revolution in America...was one not of foreign policy but of domestic partisanship.” Emphasizing partisan divisions obscures where

³⁵ Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 20, 303-373, 377-378, 396-400.

³⁶ “Phocian IX,” *Massachusetts Mercury* (Boston, MA), June 2, 1801.

two parties were in agreement: both feared French territorial aspirations in North America, especially after Napoleon's successes in the wars of the First and Second Coalitions demonstrated that the French armies not only could win battles, but win wars, and occupy foreign territory.³⁷

Americans greeted the outbreak of European peace in 1802 with mixed feelings. Many were thankful that the end of war would allow the free flow of American goods to their favored trading partners. Some idealistically welcomed the end of bloodshed and anarchy. Others were more wary. In a widely reprinted series of articles titled, "Reflections on the Peace," the author attempted to explain how peace would affect the nation. He concluded with what he saw as the most dangerous part of the peace, the European acceptance of the retrocession of Louisiana to France. "If this key to our western country should be placed in the keeping of so powerful, so enterprising, so adroit a nation" the author warned, Americans should "anticipate evils of enormous magnitude, and of the most mischievous tendency." This article shows a gradual shift toward the rhetorical use of Bonaparte in discussions of American expansion. Though the article uses the word "nation," the words used to describe the French nation were ones generally associated with Bonaparte by the end of 1802. One newspaper described Napoleon as "*powerful* as any sovereign in Europe." Another claimed that he was "active, enterprising, [and] able."³⁸

As the First Consul consolidated his power, Americans increasingly associated his personal character with the character of France. The American Minister to France, Robert Livingston, for example, complained that in France, "One man is everything." It is worth noting

³⁷ Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America*, 9; Stanley Elkins and Erik McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 355; an intriguing exception to this rule is Paul Douglas Newman, "The Federalists' Cold War: The Fries Rebellion, National Security and the State," *Pennsylvania History* 67 no.1 (Winter 2000) 63-104.

³⁸ "Reflections on the Peace," *New York Evening Post* (New York, NY), November 30, 1801; *The Federal Gazette* (Baltimore, MD), December 19, 1801; "The Character of Bonaparte," *The New Hampshire Gazette* (Portsmouth, NH), June 9, 1801.

that in the political cartoons of the day, the United States is usually represented as the female figure, Columbia, Great Britain the rotund character, John Bull, while France is Bonaparte himself. Thus, when the author of “Reflections on the Peace” worried about a “powerful,” “enterprising” and “adroit” nation on the western border of the United States, he was really casting American expansion in terms of Napoleon. This trend accelerated and become more explicit as Americans grappled with difficult questions raised by the Peace of Amiens.³⁹

Peace in Europe began a new chapter in American discussion over territorial expansion. In a second article, the author of “Reflections on the Peace” commented on the extension of the French state. If Bonaparte were to establish a legitimate constitution, “adapted to the character and circumstances of the nation...[his] acquisitions would form the basis of substantial and durable greatness.” Otherwise, the author concluded, the new territories would “flit away like the painted forms on a magic lantern.” A permanent and stable form of national expansion was only possible as long as a just government prevailed. The author failed to comment on whether this would also be true in the case of a French Louisiana—perhaps he was even hoping that Louisiana would “flit” away from the clutches of an unjust Bonaparte.⁴⁰

The Treaty of Lunéville and Peace of Amiens also brought the idea of “natural boundaries” to the front of American discourse about expansion. The enlightenment concept of national borders being defined by reason and nature (mountain ranges, oceans, and rivers for example) became part of the French discourse during the halcyon days of Louis XIV, though French military reverses during the eighteenth century called the idea into question. As early as

³⁹ Quoted in DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana*, 116; the grandfather of scholarship on Napoleonic caricature is the venerable A.M. Broadly, *Napoleon in Caricature 1795-1821* (New York: The John Lane Company, 1911); also see Tamera Hunt, *Defining John Bull: Political Caricature and National Identity in Late Georgian England* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2005); and Ian Haywood, *Romanticism and Caricature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁴⁰ “Reflections on the Peace no. II,” *New York Evening Post* (New York, NY), December 2, 1801.

1793, the French revolutionary leader Danton revived the idea. It was Napoleon Bonaparte, however, who finally made these limits a reality through his dramatic victories over the Austrians in the Wars of the First and Second Coalitions (1792-98 and 1799-1802). The Treaty of Lunéville extended the borders of France to the Rhine, and created French client states in Northern Italy, Holland, and Switzerland.⁴¹

These were not new concepts to Americans. They lived in a world system governed by the system of international law envisioned by Emmerich Vattel—a Swiss political philosopher who published his immensely influential diplomatic treatise, *The Law of Nations* in 1758. Vattel argued that peaceful relations between nations relied on maintaining a balance of relative power between theoretically equal independent states as a response to the threat of a naturally despotic “universal monarchy.” Writing in the mid-eighteenth century, when Vattel wrote of a “Universal Monarchy,” he was thinking of the Charles V or the Louis XIV. After 1800, Americans increasingly associated the threat of “universal monarchy” with Napoleon. Daniel Lang and Peter and Nicholas Onuf have demonstrated convincingly that the American political class took Vattel’s balance of power theories to heart. Indeed, they contend that virtually all of their major political and diplomatic decisions between at least 1776 and 1815 reflected the Vattelian worldview.⁴²

Yet, the popular expansionist rhetoric that developed during the Mississippi Crisis demonstrates that the while the middling classes of American society might not have understood the intricacies of Vattel, they understood his basic premises. One problem with Vattel’s

⁴¹ For the best explanation of natural boundaries within a French context, see Peter Sahlins, “Natural Frontiers Revisited: France’s Boundaries since the Seventeenth Century,” *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 5 (December 1990): 1423-1451; Mike Rapport, *The Napoleonic Wars: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 22-37.

⁴² Peter and Nicholas Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolutions* (Madison WI: Madison House Publishers, 1993); Daniel Lang, *Foreign Policy in the Early Republic* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 7, 15-21; also see Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, 71-81.

worldview, however, was that he never explained how to measure state power. This led to Americans of all classes and political stripes disagreeing on exactly what constituted a natural boundary. The Peace of Amiens and the rise of Napoleon showed a new threat to the European balance of power and provided Americans with a new development that fleshing out the limits of legitimate expansion.

Americans took note of the new, extended, French borders, but reactions were mixed. An editorial from South Carolina happily commented that Bonaparte had no further cause for war as France had reached her “natural limits.” The author (and the French government) defined these limits as that territory bounded by “the Rhine, the Pyrenese [Pyrenees], the Alps, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic.” For this author, peace was contingent on a nation extending to its natural boundaries—a clear nod to the Vattelian worldview. It was good and natural for an empire to extend to the boundaries defined by nature because once accomplished, this would prevent the need for further conflict by preserving the appropriate balance of power.⁴³

Other Americans were not so sure. One wrote a satirical commentary on the peace negotiations. The author likened the carving up of Europe to a family dinner and painted a vivid word picture of the scene that ensued. Bonaparte, as the most successful power broker, sat at the head of the table and ate first. The whole European family knew him as a “monstrous pie eater.” After all, at the “banquet of Campo Formio, whole Italian fricassees and all the Flanders’ bacon liked not to have satisfied him.”⁴⁴ His enormous appetite was compounded by his apparent fasting of late in Egypt. The author warned the Russian emperor, who sat across from the First Consul, to keep a wary eye, lest Bonaparte “claim a little more than his share.” This observer

⁴³ *Charleston City Gazette and Advertiser* (Charleston, SC), November 21, 1801.

⁴⁴ Here the author was referring to the negotiations with Austria in the wake of Bonaparte’s first Italian campaign (1796-98) which laid the groundwork for the Treaty of Lunéville.

raised the issue of “appetites,” something that might not be contained by natural boundaries. Nations might be greedy, driven by other impulses, beyond the enlightened principle of balance of power. In this way, Bonaparte (as a symbol) seemed to giving the logic behind expansion a more human psychology.⁴⁵

As early as 1802, pro-expansionists were invoking the name of Napoleon and the idea of natural boundaries within the context of Louisiana. One of the first and most eloquent arguments was made by David Humphreys (1752-1818).⁴⁶ In many ways it should come as no surprise that Humphreys introduced these tropes to the American discourse on expansion. In 1802, Humphreys was fifty-two and had amassed an impressive and long record of public service. Born in Connecticut, he graduated from Yale with distinguished honors at the age of nineteen. During the War for Independence he proved an able soldier, rose to the rank of colonel, and became one of George Washington’s most trusted aides. After the war, the Confederation Congress appointed Humphreys to serve on a delegation sent to broker commercial treaties in Europe in France and Great Britain. Intent on shaping public opinion, he attempted to write a biography of George Washington. This project was cut short by his appointment as the American minister to Portugal in 1791 and then Spain in 1796. Humphreys was on hand in Europe to witness the dramatic expansion of France and the crumbling of Spanish power at the hands of Napoleon. His military and diplomatic experiences made him sensitive to the emerging geopolitical developments on the continent. Thinking about the role of Washington in the

⁴⁵ “Political Pie,” *The Oracle of Dauphin* (Harrisburg, PA), January 19, 1801.

⁴⁶ Though I think the evidence is overwhelming that Humphreys is the author, it bears noting that some historians have suggested that President John Adams’s son in law, William Stephens Smith, was Coriolanus.

American Revolution probably led Humphries to measure major historical developments through the lens of “great men” and their opposite, dangerous dictators.⁴⁷

After witnessing the opening of the Napoleonic Wars, Humphreys returned to New England to raise merino sheep. Yet, the old soldier still found time to write. In January 1802, he penned an incredibly popular article which ran in several widely-read New York and New England papers under the pseudonym Coriolanus. Coriolanus warned his readers that with the accession of Bonaparte the geopolitical situation had dramatically changed. All of the First Consul’s military and diplomatic maneuvering demonstrated a policy of expanding France to its “ancient limits.” In other words, said Coriolanus, Napoleon intended to repossess all of the territories lost by the French monarchy in previous wars. As evidence, Coriolanus pointed to the French repossession of Guiana with “expanded and almost limitless boundaries.” He also noted French occupation of the Rhine valley and the transalpine regions of Italy. Humphries demonstrates a subtle shift in American thought on expansion with this essay. Instead of leading France to her divinely appointed and thus legitimate “natural” boundaries, Napoleon was ambitiously expanding beyond this sphere to France’s “ancient” boundaries. With this established, he then turned his attention to Louisiana.⁴⁸

“In the possession of Spain,” he observed, “Louisiana was a clearly defined territory.” Under the “all grasping hand” of the First Consul, however, “its limits are undefined.” A survey of history, he argued, showed that if Napoleon continued his policy of extending France to its “ancient limits” then he would apply the same principle to North America. Humphries predicted

⁴⁷ Remarkably, the only significant biography of Humphreys is Frank Landon Humphreys, *The Life and Times of David Humphreys* 2 vols. (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1917); but also see Edward M. Cifelli, *David Humphreys* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982); for the completed portion of Humphrey’s biography of Washington see, Rosemarie Zagari ed., *David Humphreys’ “Life of George Washington” with George Washington’s “Remarks”* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1991); his published papers—although interestingly not the Coriolanus essay are found in, *The Miscellaneous Works of David Humphreys* (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1804).

⁴⁸ “Communication,” *The Genius of Liberty* (Morristown, NJ), January 7, 1802.

that with control of these areas, Napoleon would soon detach the trans-Appalachian region from the union by promising the western settlers free passage along the Mississippi. After painting this dire picture, Humphries provided the remedy. He recommended that a force of western militia move down the Mississippi to preemptively seize a Spanish territory along the river before Napoleon could officially take control of it. This, would demonstrate to Napoleon and the world that if the “conqueror of Europe” sought to interfere with “just career of a free and enlightened people,” Americans would assert their rights. Exactly what “rights” Napoleon was infringing upon Humphries hinted at in the last part of the article.⁴⁹

Coriolanus ended his bellicose essay with a strident defense of American-led imperialism. “All empire,” he noted, “is traveling from east to west.” Thus, he postulated, empire would achieve its greatest height in the United States. There would soon come a time, he continued, when America would include vast peoples and lands west of the Mississippi. That river, he contended, was “never designed as the western boundary of the union.” God had never intended the “best part of his earth” to be populated by subjects of a French “usurper.” America, in other words, had no natural boundaries such as those of France. God himself had designed the American nation to be different than Napoleon’s France. In time, Coriolanus predicted, all European held dominions in the Americas would become part of an immense, “free and sovereign empire.” An American empire, he imagined, that would “unfold the doors of liberty” to millions yet unborn. His decidedly pro-expansionist position defied natural and ancient boundaries, instead relying on divine Providence to justify the United States imperial ambitions.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The classical name, Coriolanus, also invoked Bonapartian overtones that the nineteenth century audience would have recognized immediately. In both Plutarch's biography and the Shakespearean play, the tragic character of Coriolanus is a brave and successful republican general who becomes embroiled in Roman politics. When he opposes democratic reforms in the Roman Senate, he is tried by the plebeian rabble and exiled from Rome. Angered and overwhelmed by pride he joins forces with the barbarian enemies of the republic and leads them in a successful military campaign to the gates of Rome. He is dissuaded from sacking the city by tearful entreaties from his wife and his mother. In some versions of the story, he is eventually assassinated.⁵¹

Two things about this story would have stood out to an American reader in 1802. First, they would have recognized the story of Coriolanus as a cautionary tale against the excesses of democracy. This was a powerful message to broadcast at a time when Federalists felt that they had been thrown out of power by Jefferson's democratic mob of Jacobins. Second, they would have seen the story as a warning against the dangers of ambitious pride. Certainly they would have noticed the similarities between Coriolanus and Bonaparte. Both men proved successful republican generals and were extraordinarily ambitious politicians. On the surface, both men appeared principled, but not far beneath the surface lurked bloodthirsty ambition. In essence, simply by choosing the pseudonym, Coriolanus, the author was asking his audience to consider the dangerous consequences of Bonaparte's overreaching ambition in Louisiana.

On the surface, Coriolanus's essay clearly supports the arguments of those historians like Frank Owsley and Gene Smith who suggest that that an aggressive Manifest Destiny ideology guided American expansion from the very beginning. The essay has obvious overtones of an

⁵¹Alan Lehman, "The Coriolanus Story in Antiquity," *The Classical Journal* 47, no. 8 (May, 1952), 329-336.

irresistible, divinely sanctioned, westward movement of Americans across the continent at the expense of those too weak to resist. The Coriolanus essay still must be read in the context of the other arguments circulating in 1802 and 1803. Popular though it may have been, the Coriolanus argument was an easy target for anti-expansionists, and those in favor of boundless expansion found that they had to refine their arguments to make them more palatable to the American public.⁵²

Concerns about Louisiana increased during 1802. What had changed was a new French military presence in the Caribbean. In January, the army that left Europe in the wake of the Peace of Amiens suddenly landed in the French Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue, considered the jewel of the old French colonial system in North America. It produced that most valuable commodity of sugar and the price of this luxury was an oppressive slave system. A bloody slave uprising began in 1791, which toppled the white regime; after several chaotic years of civil war, the rebels established a new power structure under the charismatic leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture.

At first, the Federalist Adams administration continued to trade with island as a way to economically punish France during the Quasi-War. This included shipments of firearms and ammunition—a fact not lost on the French government or Napoleon. But, fearful that the revolutionary ideology of the slave rebellion might travel to the United States, the Jefferson administration refused to recognize the Haitian government. At first, Jefferson and his secretary of state James Madison wanted England, France, and the United State to work together to overturn the new Haitian state. They were even willing to tolerate France's efforts to use

⁵² Frank Owsley and Gene Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1997); also see Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).

military force to bring Saint-Domingue back into the French orbit. Such cooperation quickly evaporated as Americans worried that Napoleon would move next into Louisiana. Bringing Saint-Domingue back into the French orbit was the key to the reestablishment of Bonaparte's empire. In fact, Napoleon largely saw Louisiana simply as a granary for his far more precious Caribbean colony. At first, things seemed to go quite well. Taking advantage of internal divisions amongst the black leadership, the French commander (and Napoleon's brother in law) Charles Leclerc made steady progress in the reconquest of the island. By the end of May 1802, he had crushed what resistance did develop and arrested L'Ouverture. With Saint-Domingue seemingly back under French control, most Americans anticipated that French expeditionary force's next move would be north to New Orleans.⁵³

Also troubling to pro-expansionists was the publication and wide circulation of an article from Bonaparte mouthpiece, *Gazette de France* in June. According to the article, "the idea of re-attaching Louisiana to the domain of France is perhaps, of all political conceptions, the wisest and most important." Noting the rapid population and economic growth of the American republic the *Gazette* asserted that a European barrier was needed to prevent the expansion of a people "whom nature has promised the empire of half the world." If unchecked, the author opined, Americans would soon spread from "the North to the South, cover Mexico, the West-Indies [and] Canada." Spain was too weak to prevent Americans from spilling over of their "present limits." Here, the article stated unequivocally that a French colony that could provide an effective barrier to American expansion.⁵⁴

⁵³ The best current English-language history of the Santo-Domingo revolt is, Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); but also see Thomas Ott, *The Haitian Revolution, 1789-1804* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973); For the ambiguous American response see Donald Hickey, "America's Response to the Slave Revolt in Haiti: 1791-1806" *Journal of the Early Republic* 2, no.4 (Winter, 1982) 361-379; and Tim Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy: Haitian-American Relations during the Early Republic* (Westport, CT: Praeger Press, 2003).

⁵⁴ "From the Gazette De France," *The Times* (New York), June 6, 1802.

Read within the context of American assumptions about natural borders, the torrent of bellicose editorials that followed the publication of this article should come as no surprise. Most Americans would have agreed with the *Gazette's* dim assessment about the ability of Spain to hem in American expansion. That was the point, of course. Under Spain, the colony was sparsely populated and weakly held—James Madison likened Spanish rule to that of an old woman. Under the Jeffersonian theory of natural expansion, private American citizens would simply move in to fill the vacuum left by the decrepit and effeminate Spain and come to dominate the area through natural increase. For those Americans of a Jeffersonian persuasion, this had the twin attraction of being “peaceful” expansion—as opposed to conquest, and not expanding the power of the national government. To many Americans, the *Gazette* (presumably with the nod of Napoleon) was suggesting that France impede the legitimate, peaceful process of American expansion to its natural boundaries. This threat of a barrier was also interpreted as a challenge, raising the possibility of a war with France.⁵⁵

The words in the *Gazette* article combined with the presence of a French army only a few hundred miles from New Orleans in Saint-Domingue made Bonaparte's threat to American expansion very real. Then in October 1802, the headstrong Spanish Intendant of New Orleans exacerbated an already tense situation when he revoked the American right of deposit promised by the Pinckney Treaty of 1795.⁵⁶ With western commerce chocked off, easterners began to wonder how long residents of Kentucky and Tennessee would remain in a union if their navigational and economic rights were endangered. Suspicious Americans immediately (but incorrectly) saw the nefarious hand of Bonaparte behind the port closure and a plot to detach the

⁵⁵ See, Nancy Isenberg, *Fallen Founder: The Life of Aaron Burr* (New York: Viking, 2007), 285-286; and Peter Onuf, “Jefferson, Louisiana and American Nationhood” in *Empires of the Imagination: Transatlantic Histories of the Louisiana Purchase*, 23-33.

⁵⁶ Historians are still not sure whether or not he did this with the support of the Spanish government.

frontier states from the eastern seaboard. Though Bonaparte had nothing to do with the port closure, the fears of these Americans were not entirely without merit. In early 1803, for example, Francis Flournoy, a Kentucky farmer writing under the penname “A Western American,” suggested ominously that “the interests of France, Spain and Western America would go hand in hand.” When Americans looked west, they increasingly saw Bonaparte and his legions not only preventing the expansion of their empire, but dismembering it.⁵⁷

The furiousness of the debate over American expansion that occurred in the wake of the publication of the *Gazette de France* article and the closure of New Orleans was astonishing. In December, the original Coriolanus letter was reprinted in various newspapers across New England. It was soon followed by two others that were so popular the editor of New York’s *Morning Chronicle* had to make excuses when he could not publish them fast enough to keep up with demand. By mid-January 1803, eager readers were buying a pamphlet of the collected letters of Coriolanus for 50 cents at their local bookstore.⁵⁸

At this point, the anti-expansionists finally entered the public debate. Taking aim directly at Coriolanus, one anti-expansionist fired back in explicitly Bonapartian terms in the January 13 edition of *The American Citizen*: The author began by commending Coriolanus for his “fine painting of the universal domination at which the first Consul aspires.” He applauded Coriolanus’s harsh rebuke of Napoleon’s “aggrandizement” at the expense of “independent empires.” Coriolanus was no doubt correct, the author continued, when he claimed that the peace and prosperity of nations depended on their ability to “remain satisfied within their limits.”

⁵⁷ “For the Guardian of Freedom,” *The Guardian of Freedom* (Frankfort, KY), March 2, 1803; it took less than a month for the letter to appear in the *New York Daily Advertiser*, March 25, 1803.

⁵⁸ “Communication,” *The Chronicle Express* (New York, NY), December 20, 1802; “Communication,” *The Chronicle Express* (New York, NY), December 23, 1802; “Communication,” *The Chronicle Express* (New York, NY), December 27, 1802; *The Morning Chronicle* (New York, NY), January 8, 1803; *The Morning Chronicle* (New York, NY), January 18, 1803.

However, the author continued, it was just as important for the United States to constrain its expansion to the natural boundary provided by the Mississippi as it was for France to remain on the south of the Rhine.⁵⁹

Coriolanus had “marked out a path for the United States,” wrote the *American Citizen*, “which he censures when trodden by the First Consul.” After all, when Coriolanus described the American empire as containing “millions of souls *west of the Mississippi*,” asked the author, what was he contemplating other than a war of conquest in the manner of the Bonaparte? The author was particularly disturbed by Coriolanus’s justification for such a war. First was Coriolanus vague notion that since all empire traveled from East to West, the seat of the greatest empire would undoubtedly be in the United States. What was this, asked the author, other than a Bonapartian ploy to justify American seizure of New Orleans and the Floridas? More concerning, to the *American Citizen*, however, was Coriolanus’s suggestion that the God of nature had never intended the Mississippi to be the western boundary of the United States. How was this different, he asked, than the French insistence that the Rhine, and then the Netherlands was their own divinely appointed boundary? The author then turned his gaze back to the Americas. Where exactly, he wondered, did Coriolanus see the boundaries of the United States? The mines of Mexico? The Isthmus of Panama? Cape Horn? The author finished his essay with a final biting comparison. The Coriolanus essay had envisioned the empire of the United States throwing open the “doors of liberty” to those whom it conquered. The *American Citizen* concluded sarcastically, “Just so, Bonaparte went to Egypt to *unfold the doors of liberty and happiness* to the Turk; and, if we believe him, his benign incursion was perfectly in conformity to the *God of nature*.” The *American Citizen* article demonstrated just how flexible Bonapartian

⁵⁹ “President’s Message VIII,” *The American Citizen* (New York, NY), January 13, 1803.

language was in the hands of a skilled author and unsheathed a potent rhetorical weapon in the arsenal of anti-expansionists.⁶⁰

Despite the sentiments expressed in the *American Citizen*, many Americans were gravely concerned about the prospect of French influence in Louisiana. To them, it appeared that America would be subjected to the same ravages that Europe had endured during the Wars of the French Revolution. Based on the *Gazette de France* article, many expected Napoleon to use his soldiers in Saint-Domingue to eventually set up a military colony in Louisiana as a buffer to American expansion. Few, however, believed that the restless veterans would remain content in the “bogs and marshes of the seaboard.” One Massachusetts writer in *The American Oracle* used history as a guide. French conduct over the past thirteen years, he suggested, indicated that it would only be a matter of time before Bonaparte would find some excuse to encroach on American territory. “What pretense,” asked the writer rhetorically, had Bonaparte to “destroy several free republics” in Europe?⁶¹

Others worried less about open warfare and more about the economic and political pressure that Napoleon could bring to bear when in possession of Louisiana. An article first published in the ubiquitous *American Citizen* worried that by shutting down trade on the Mississippi, Napoleon could pursue a “subtle policy” by which he could induce westerners to “shake off their allegiance and become subjects of the ‘Great Nation.’” Like the Coriolanus essay, this article was originally published in mid-1802, but was republished in heated rhetoric of early 1803. This author did not fear open warfare with Bonaparte, but he did fear the proximity of a nation so “dreaded for its subtle intrigues.” In some ways, this pro-expansionist rhetoric was a subtle change from the writings of Coriolanus. For Coriolanus, the United States had been

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ “Louisiana,” *The United States Oracle* (Portsmouth, NH), July 31, 1802.

exceptional—a nation uniquely free from the boundaries that constrained the politics of Europe. The expansionist rhetoric that developed over the spring of 1803, on the other hand, painted the American republic as fragile and subject to the same dangers that Europe had endured at the hands of Bonaparte.⁶²

With this rhetoric of fear came new concerns about how the French interpreted their “natural” boundaries in the Americas. Prior to the Louisiana retrocession, Americans had largely assumed that it was beneficial for empires to spread to their limits. Coriolanus had expressed concern about Bonaparte’s policy of expanding France to its “ancient” limits, but that, after all, was a deviation from what was natural. In the winter and spring of 1803, newspapers began running articles that highlighted this fear. For example, several widely circulated pieces reprinted an old article from a 1797 edition of the *New York Journal* in which the author had expressed the belief that it was “the right of Republics to correct the errors of their former Kings.” The 1797 author had made this comment within the context of French expansion in Europe. With the French poised to occupy Louisiana, however, the article was used as a cudgel. “I have no French maps,” an author identifying himself as “Sidney” wrote sarcastically, “nor can I, at this moment, precisely ascertain the limits of the former claims of the French Kings.” However, Sidney continued, he was certain that those claims “included nearly one half the present territory of the United States.” After reading the same 1797 article and noting that the original author believed that France had been unjustly deprived of Canada, A.B.C. wondered

⁶² “Louisiana,” *The American Citizen* (New York, NY), June 16, 1802; Like so much else published by the *American Citizen*, this piece also had hints of an anti-Burr message; see Isenberg, *Fallen Founder*, 224, 243, 254-255.

“how far the United States would be affected, if the First Consul of the French Republic should apply a prompt corrective of the procedure.”⁶³

With undefined boundaries in the Americas, an article published in a London paper attracted extensive comment from the editor of the *Virginia Gazette*. The London article purported to quote from a French travel narrative in which the author maintained that, “the natural limits of *Louisiana* extend to the sources of the *Mississippi* and *Missouri*.” Understandably, this caused the editor a great deal of consternation since describing the natural limits of Louisiana in this manner indicated that Kentucky and Tennessee were both part of Bonaparte’s claim to Louisiana. According to the *Gazette*, the London article then suggested that Bonaparte would undoubtedly interpret the Spanish retrocession as including the “utmost extent of [Louisiana’s] natural limits.” These articles grew out the new concern that Bonaparte was bringing the problems of Europe to the shores of North America and caused many Americans to demand a forceful response.⁶⁴

The meeting of the seventh Congress in late 1802 brought vigorous debates about expansion—American and French—to the American capitol. The American public followed many of these debates through their newspapers. Federalist pro-expansionists demanded military action to resolve the Mississippi crisis that echoed ideas already simmering in many parts of the country. One of the first of the outspoken critics was forty-one-year-old Senator James Ross of Pennsylvania. By February 1803, the former lawyer had served in congress for almost a decade, and had served as President pro-tempore of the Senate during the fifth Congress. In what would be one of his last acts as a public official, Ross introduced resolutions that authorized the

⁶³ “For the Washington Federalist,” *The Washington Federalist* (Washington, DC), February 11, 1803; “For the Balance,” *The Balance or Columbian Register* (Hudson, NY), February 15, 1803.

⁶⁴ *Alexandria Advertiser and Commercial Intelligencer* (Alexandria, VA), April 12, 1803.

President to call out as many as 50,000 militia from Mississippi and neighboring territories to seize New Orleans from the Spanish; he also called for the appropriation of five million dollars to finance this military expedition. Ross defended his measures as a defensive necessity brought about by Bonaparte. He warned that after negotiation with the First Consul inevitably failed, westerners would never forget who allowed such a “powerful and ambitious” despot to take control of the West and would likely strike the best deal they could with Napoleon at the expense of their eastern brothers. Perhaps, he continued, they might even seize the territory themselves and then establish a separate nation.⁶⁵

Ross was not only thinking about the present. He was also concerned about the future of the United States. In his mind, nations had to have defensible frontiers and the Spanish had provided the United States a golden opportunity to legitimately seize what had been denied her. “The possession of the country on the east bank of the Mississippi,” he told his colleagues, “will give a compactness, an irresistible strength to the United States.” Owning this real estate would render the nation dreaded in “all future wars,” and force European governments to treat the United States with more respect than ever before. It is interesting to note that the word “natural” does not appear in Ross’s speech—or at least in the newspaper versions that remain today. For Ross, expansion was a simply a matter of military expediency and pragmatism.⁶⁶

New York Senator Gouverneur Morris advocated adoption of the Ross resolutions in a popular speech that made its way into numerous newspapers. Morris was no light-weight in politics and when he spoke, his constituents listened. He had served in the New York provincial congress, the Continental Congress, briefly as an officer in the New York militia and drafted the

⁶⁵ “Mr. Ross’s Speech,” *The Morning Gazette* (New York, NY), March 1, 1803; *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, “Ross, James (1762-1847),” accessed July 26, 2015, <http://bioguide.congress.gov>.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

preamble to the Constitution. He had also served as minister to France during the initial chaos of the French Revolution. Morris was less concerned with future wars and more with what he saw as current political reality. Dealing with Bonaparte, he argued, required strong action. As a usurper, Bonaparte's legitimacy was tied to military success. "Impelled by imperious circumstances, he rules in Europe," Morris explained, "and he will rule here also unless you set a bound[ary] to his power." Bonaparte's France had to expand or wither, he argued. Bonaparte had nowhere left to expand in Europe, therefore he had to expand in the Americas. French control of strategic coastal locations like New Orleans and Florida was "dangerous to other nations, but fatal to us." Thus, for Morris, American expansion was a pragmatic response to the future threats to national security.⁶⁷

Yet, like Coriolanus had before him, Morris conceived of Florida and New Orleans as a "natural and necessary part of our Empire." With this established, Morris turned back to the means of obtaining them. Morris wondered at Jefferson's attempt at diplomatically resolving the crisis. "On what grounds do you mean to treat?" he asked his colleagues rhetorically. Napoleon, he pointed out to the Congress, "wants power. You have no power. He wants dominion. You have no dominion." No, he argued, when dealing with such men as Napoleon, the only question worth asking was, "how many battalions have they?" Despite the "pacific nature" of the United States, expansion to Morris was a defensive necessity driven by the character of Napoleon.⁶⁸

Pro-expansionist Americans repeated the basic argument of pragmatic, militaristic expansion throughout the spring and into the summer of 1803. One particularly popular piece

⁶⁷ "Speech of Mr. Morris," *The New England Palladium* (Boston, MA), April 8, 1803; there are several good biographies of Morris, but particularly useful for my own purposes has been Melanie Randolph Miller, *Envoy to the Terror: Gouverneur Morris and the French Revolution* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

purported to be an extract of a letter from a “gentleman at Natchez.” He bristled at what he saw as the disrespect the “reptile Spaniards” showed toward Americans in New Orleans and denounced the president’s insistence on going through all the “ceremonies and etiquette of the courts of...Bonaparte.” He, like Morris, saw expansion in pragmatic means justified by the very real military danger of Napoleon. “I say start and [drive] them with the spring flood, and then negotiate” he wrote. “We can now get the whole province without the loss of one drop of blood.” “Let the French get here,” he warned, “’twill be otherwise.” Not only did this “gentlemen” took a pragmatic view of expansion, but he also provided a pragmatic view military of the relative military balance between the French, the Spanish, and the Americans.⁶⁹

In another article, and author writing as “Pericles” warned that because Bonaparte sought to expand France to its “ancient limits,” his policy demonstrated a “manifest and great danger” to the union. “Pericles” was almost certainly the head of the Federalist party, Alexander Hamilton. The Pericles article is particularly instructive. Hamilton, unlike most Federalists, had once been sympathetic to Napoleon. As late as April 1801 he gave a widely reprinted speech in which he eloquently defended Bonaparte’s coup by arguing that the radical excesses of the Jacobins could only be held in check by the strong arm of the First Consul. But that was 1801, and by 1803 the times and the geopolitical landscape had changed. He, like Morris and the “gentleman” from Natchez counseled seizing Florida and New Orleans in order to negotiate with Bonaparte from a position of strength. He warned that Bonaparte would never negotiate to sell New Orleans or Florida, and therefore Americans would have to fight for it in any case. Taking New Orleans from the Spanish before Bonaparte’s veterans arrived from Saint-Domingue and fortified the place only made sense. In the end, according to many pro-expansionist Americans, a

⁶⁹ “Extract of a Letter,” *New York Gazette* (New York, NY), March 4, 1803.

preemptive, defensive strike in the name of empire would cost less American blood, treasure and honor in the long run.⁷⁰

There were differences between what these militant expansionists saw as the ultimate goal of a military strike on Louisiana. Ross, for example—the ultimate pragmatist—only wanted to fight for New Orleans and the east bank of the Mississippi. Pericles and Morris, on the other hand, saw all of Florida as within the natural boundaries of the United States. Underlying all their arguments was a fear that Bonaparte’s occupation of Louisiana would bring the intrigue and warfare of Napoleonic Europe to the Americas. During the Wars of the French Revolution, alliances shifted with dizzyingly regularity and secret deals (such as that which led to the Louisiana retrocession) were frighteningly commonplace. In addition, 1802-3 saw Napoleon completely redraw the map of Europe for the first of several times during his reign. Americans watched nervously as the Piedmont was unceremoniously annexed to France so that Napoleon’s Great Republic could control the vital passes through the Swiss Alps. Farther north, the ancient Holy Roman Empire was broken up and reorganized in a manner that supported Bonaparte’s national aims. With such breathtaking changes occurring to the borders of Europe, it seems little wonder that Federalist expansionists tended to worry that having Bonaparte as a western neighbor would break up the American union entirely.⁷¹

Few Americans made this fear as explicitly plain as an author purporting to speak for “Ten Thousand Freemen of Connecticut,” in March of 1803.⁷² Let Bonaparte set up a military

⁷⁰ “From the New York Herald,” *The Connecticut Centinel* (Norwich, CT), February 22, 1803; *The Daily Advertiser* (New York, NY), April 13, 1801.

⁷¹ James Lewis noted Federalist concern over the dismemberment of the union in *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood*, but failed to connect this fear to the Napoleonic Wars, see Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood*, 29-30; Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon’s Wars: An International History* (New York: Penguin, 2007) 132-139.

⁷² It is worth noting that this letter to the editor was published next to the Sidney article in which the author discussed the fluidity of the France’s ancient limits.

colony in Louisiana, he warned, “and one of two things must invariably take place.” In one case, under economic and military pressure from Bonaparte, the western states would shift their allegiance from the eastern United States and become mere colonies of France. Eventually an economic rivalry would lead to an “interminable war with the eastern states.” If this first scenario did not come to pass, then the author expected the west to seize New Orleans without the sanction of the United States government and thus drag the United States into a war with France that it was ill-prepared for. The threat from Bonaparte’s navy would compel the United States into an alliance with Great Britain and thus trigger a Napoleonic war of cataclysmic proportions on the North American continent. The reason the threat of Bonaparte held so much power over so many Americans in 1803 was that they were familiar with the results of a decade of revolutionary warfare and intrigue in Europe.⁷³

Such pragmatic concerns illustrate that anti-expansionists had forced pro-expansionists to refine their arguments by 1803. Coriolanus had argued for aggressive military expansion backed by a divine mandate to spread republicanism across the continent. Pericles and Ross took a different approach, arguing that American expansion was a national security concern. This does endorse one theme in the existing scholarship. James Lewis and Donald Heidenreich have concluded that the Mississippi Crisis must be understood primarily as “a young republic’s quest for national security.” Federalists, too, put aside party politics and reached a “consensus” on the necessity of possessing Louisiana.⁷⁴

⁷³ Letter to the Editor, *The Patriot* (Utica, NY), March 7, 1803.

⁷⁴ James Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 25-28; Donald Heidenreich, “U.S. National Security and Party Politics: the Consensus on Louisiana,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 62 no. 4 (Winter, 2003), 370.

The formulation of a bipartisan “consensus” in response to the crisis is too simple, however. In general, Americans did agree on the necessity of obtaining New Orleans, though not necessarily all of Louisiana. The public debate in the newspapers revealed that crucial issues were not settled. Not only was the amount of territory in question, but many disagreed over what the natural boundaries of the United States actually were.

Administration allies valiantly attempted to push back against these fears, but the rhetoric of Bonaparte was a slippery and often unconvincing symbol in the hands of Jeffersonians. An author writing under the name “De Witt” penned a piece that originally appeared in the Kentucky *Guardian of Freedom*, but was picked up in several other eastern papers. The United States had little to fear from Bonaparte’s control of Louisiana he argued. After all, the value of Louisiana was in its commerce, and therefore “attempts then on the part of France to interrupt the peace of this country would be attended with the destruction of that commerce to promote which is the object of Louisiana.” In other words, out of self-interest Bonaparte could be expected to maintain good relations with the United States.⁷⁵

In any case, continued De Witt, it was folly to look to the French Revolutionary Wars for examples of what to expect from Bonaparte. Instead, Americans ought to look to their own history. During the War for Independence, he explained, Americans had prevailed without a head of state, a currency, or a central government that could establish either. Now that the United States had these things, any attempt by Bonaparte to subjugate America would certainly end in disaster De Witt concluded. A French army that chose to attack along the Mississippi would have its supplies cut off. It would be subjected to attacks by small bands of Americans who would cause havoc then quickly melt away into the wilds of the western forests. In

⁷⁵ *Genius of Liberty* (Morristown, NJ), October 15, 1802.

describing this hypothetical conflict, De Witt was actually not far off from the wars that did ultimately undo Napoleon in Spain and Russia, however, in 1802, few agreed that a conflict with Napoleon could devolve into such a state.⁷⁶

This was simply too easy of a target to pass up. The retired, but still feisty Federalist Fisher Ames took De Witt to task for his complacent attitude. The former Massachusetts representative sneered at the naïve suggestion that United States could expect any special treatment from Bonaparte because we were a “sister republic.” Not long ago, Ames wrote, “Europe had many free republics,” but “alas! they are no more.” War had turned them all into slaves of Bonaparte. In fact, he suggested that since Bonaparte had come to power, it seemed that France had been paying special attention to republics. “She has considered them, not as associates, but as victims.” Ames went down the sad list, “Venice she has sold to the emperor. Holland she taxed openly for her own wants...From Switzerland she drained her youth to be food for gunpowder.” No, Ames said, the United States had to be ready to defend itself against its “sister republic.” America’s French sister was more of an assassin than a loving relative. Under Bonaparte rule, to “depress, plunder, and destroy republics, has been the sure and experienced consequence of French domination.”⁷⁷

Perhaps no one put all these fears together as coherently and creatively as Charles Brockden Brown. Later regarded as one of America’s first great novelists, in 1803, Brown was a marginally successful author and editor of two literary magazines. At the height of the Mississippi Crisis, he anonymously authored a pamphlet on the crisis that was successful enough to be republished in several editions throughout the United States. This pamphlet, sporting the wonderfully long title, *An Address to the Government of the United States on the Cession of*

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Fisher Ames, *The Works of Fisher Ames* (Boston, MA: T.B. Wait, 1809) 264-265.

Louisiana to the French and on the Late Breach of Treaty by the Spanish explicitly used the specter of Bonaparte to discuss the problem of American expansion. Brown ingeniously restated most of the points that pro-expansionists had made before, but he also assigned value judgments to a “Napoleonic” vision of expansion, which gave the essay greater significance in developing a subtler understanding of the influence of international politics on the American continent.⁷⁸

Most of the lengthy pamphlet purported to be the translation of a confidential communiqué from a minor French diplomat to Napoleon on the subject of Louisiana. Brown gave this letter a fake pedigree and set it within a fictionalized story of a stolen letter smuggled into the United States by concerned citizens in Paris. It began with the assumption that Europe would soon be dominated by Bonaparte and that it was time to consider the enlargement of Bonaparte’s power in other places around the globe. The diplomat professed to be an enthusiastic supporter of the empire, yet he was concerned about the means of extending French influence. He was particularly distressed at what he saw as the wasting of valuable French lives and treasure on costly military incursions. The conquest of Saint-Domingue was a case in point. Was it prudent, he asked, for a nation to continue wasting valuable lives and money on the conquest of a “fortified rock” containing a well disciplined and numerous populace that had sworn to defend it to the death, when it had the opportunity to secure a wealthy province containing a compliant population virtually unopposed? By framing the debate like this, Brown tapped into an already well established perception that Americans had of Bonaparte—that he carelessly threw away lives in his battlefield victories.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Robert Levine, “Race and Nation in Brown’s Louisiana Writings of 1803,” in *Revising Charles Brockden Brown: Culture, Politics and Sexuality in the Early Republic*, ed. Phillip Barnard, Mark Kamrath and Stephen Shapiro (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2004) 332-353.

⁷⁹ Charles Brockden Brown, *An Address to the Government of the United States on the Cession of Louisiana to the French and the Late Breach of Treaty by the Spanish* (Philadelphia, PA: Joseph Conrad, 1803) 10-12.

One of the most common American critiques of Bonaparte in his early career was the number of casualties he incurred. In 1798, the *Otsego Herald* identified Napoleon as that “infamous general, commonly called *The Butcher*.” In 1801, the *Virginia Argus* noted of Bonaparte’s wars, “the quantity of property and blood which have been expended...would have been sufficient for founding a colony more populous and powerful than the United States collectively.” The editor of the *Argus* made it plain that colonial expansion was preferable to the bloody warfare of conquest. Thus, even though Napoleon won victories, Americans like Brown argued that cost in blood that Napoleon was willing to pay for the expansion of France was unworthy of a republic. Monarchs and despots threw away the lives of their subjects in vain wars of ambition, but the free men of a republic deserved better.⁸⁰

Brown’s diplomat spent a great deal of time on the cost of conquest. Indeed, he spent several pages explaining to the First Consul that the reason France had lost the initial race for colonization to the British was because Louis XIV had spent too much blood and treasure on European continental wars instead of on colonizing North America. According to the diplomat, France’s “stupid rage of ambition could see nothing desirable but what our neighbors already possessed.” “Imagine, then,” he encouraged Bonaparte, “that the thousands sent to perish under the walls of a German fortress, the arms, the amunition [sic], the tools, the various apparatus provided for such an expedition, had been sent to America.” The diplomat went on in words strikingly similar to those of the *Virginia Argus*: “Had the minister Richlieu⁸¹ applied one year’s subsidy of Gustavus, or the treasures expended in one siege or one campaign in Flanders, in

⁸⁰ *Otsego Herald* (Cooperstown, NY), December 27, 1798; *Virginia Argus* (Richmond, VA), November 24, 1801.

⁸¹ Here Brown referred to the infamous foreign minister of Louis XIV.

founding a settlement on the Delaware or Chesapeake all that part world which is now English, would have been French.”⁸²

Ultimately, that was the rub. Not only had bloody, ambitious conquest frittered away valuable lives, it had cost the French most of their empire to the hated English in the end. Brown’s diplomat bravely suggested to Napoleon that the British mode of expansion was worth considering. How had they built their empire? Put simply, they had done nothing. They sent “poor fugitives” into the empty wilderness of North America and left them alone. Left to their own devices, according to Brown’s diplomat, these original English settlers had multiplied of necessity and become a “numerous, civilized and powerful people.” The lesson in all this was clear enough, “These miracles were not wrought by the sword. It was not wars and victories that have added five millions of civilized men to the human race and the English name.” Wars and victories he continued, “may rob millions of their happiness and independence; millions they may easily destroy; but they cannot call into existence; they cannot compel to change their language, manners, or religion.” War—or at least foolish, arbitrary conquest—was not an effective means of expansion according to Brown’s diplomat.⁸³

While Brown’s diplomat spent pages providing abstract arguments for legitimate expansion, his main concern was providing practical solutions for the extension of the French empire. His first piece of advice to the First Consul was to call off the conquest of Saint-Domingue. Far better, he argued, to give up dreams of a military conquest of the “fortified rock” and draw the island into a profitable economic relationship with France. The former slaves would be happy to ally with the society which had provided for their freedom, and would be drawn into the French economic orbit, thus allowing France to reap the benefits of conquest

⁸² Brown, *An Address to the Government of the United States*, 13-15.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 12-13.

without the cost. “We shall gain their gratitude, their friendship, and every benefit which one nation can confer upon another,” the diplomat wrote to Bonaparte. “The products of the island, the fruits of commerce, the luxury of millions, and the industry and subsistence of thousands of our countrymen, we shall gain.” Echoing the theories of Thomas Paine, Brown’s diplomat argued that economic alliance with a lesser power was a legitimate form of national expansion.⁸⁴

The diplomat’s second piece of advice to Bonaparte was the one that Brown hoped would do the most to arouse his American audience. The diplomat suggested that the resources saved from the conquest of Saint-Domingue should be spent on obtaining and re-colonizing Louisiana. Of course, as the diplomat pointed out. It would not even really be “re-colonizing.” Louisiana was already established and doing reasonably well with a population that was only one generation removed from being French. The Spanish could pose little resistance. The weak he Spanish militia and compliant population would make for an easy and profitable conquest. Indeed, the diplomat suggested coyly, Louisiana would likely be a jumping off point for further expansion in North America. The road to California and the mines of Mexico was “easy and direct,” he insisted. “They are wholly defenseless. The frontier has neither forts, nor loyal subjects. A detachment of a few thousands would find faithful guides, practicable roads, and no opposition between the banks of the Mississippi and the gates of Mexico.” For the diplomat, this final argument was crucial: expansion through conquest was legitimate only if it was done in the national interest and increased rather decreased the wealth and power of the empire.⁸⁵

At this point, Brown broke back into his story. Lest anyone think that the diplomat’s musings on the legitimacy of expansion through conquest and coercion were simply “French”

⁸⁴ Ibid, 9-11; Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash: The Four Hundred Year Untold History of Class in America* (New York: Viking, 2016), 77-84.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 18-19, 28.

militarism, Brown noted that, “It is evident that the author is a military enthusiast, but a passion for arms does not blind him to the peaceable means of distinction; and his schemes of enlarging power, by the multiplication of people, and by territories won from the waste[land], are not unworthy of praise.” In other words, Brown was saying that the diplomat was not entirely wrong in his assessment of the legitimate means of national expansion. Actually, there was not much difference between Brown himself and his invented diplomat. The last pages of the pamphlet Brown’s rousing call to action in his own voice.⁸⁶

“We have a *right* to the possession,” Brown told his readers bluntly. “The interests of the human race demand from us the exertion of this right.” Brown was convinced that the national government had for too long “looked on in apathy while European powers toss[ed] about amongst themselves the property which God and nature have made ours.” “America is ours...therefore Louisiana is ours.” Natural right to possession and national security went hand-in-hand for Brown. The United States in control of the territory meant peace whereas French control meant war and the evils that attended armed conflict. To introduce a violent neighbor like the French—a people who “measured their success on the ruin of their neighbors”—onto the continent would invariably lead to an “insuperable mound” to American progress as well as sow the seeds of “faction and rebellion.” It was as simple as that for Brown. He felt this so obvious that he did not see the need to elaborate greatly on it.⁸⁷

With the stakes so high, what should be the response of the United States? Brown admitted that under normal circumstances the United States would expand gradually by “erecting new communities as fast as the increase of the increase of those settlements requires it, and sheltering them all under the pacific wing of a Federal government.” These were not normal

⁸⁶ Ibid, 4.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 49, 52.

times. “Far be it from me to sanctify the claim of conquest,” he wrote, but that was exactly what he demanded. Yes, he admitted, to dislodge Bonaparte from Louisiana would cost Americans “some anxiety, some treasure, some lives.” In fact, he admitted that Americans would probably not even be welcomed as liberators. Peace and national security demanded a rapid military occupation of Louisiana, even if that meant having to “treat its present inhabitants as vassals.” He argued that eventually the population of Louisiana would see American interests aligned with their own and then, presumably, they could be integrated fully into the United States. This was perhaps the most explicit defense of a Bonaparte-like conquest, occupation, and colonization of a neighboring territory that any American was willing to proffer in 1803.⁸⁸

Writing in the winter and spring of 1803, Brown and other militant pro-expansionists could not have known how radically the geopolitical situation had changed by April. For months, Livingston had no luck in achieving Jefferson’s goals of obtaining New Orleans and Florida for the United States. As Senator Morris had correctly assessed, the American government possessed very little that interested the First Consul and American military might was no match when compared to the French. What no one had counted on, however, was the stunning reversal of fortune that beset the French expeditionary force in Saint-Domingue during the second half of 1802. When the black and mulatto population found that Napoleon had given secret orders to reestablish the old power structures (including slavery) on the island, they rose up against the French occupiers in the summer of 1802. In the guerrilla war that followed both sides seemed eager to outdo each other in terms of ghastly cruelty. Even more deadly than the insurgency was the yellow fever epidemic that decimated the French army during the fall and winter months. Despite the belated arrival of reinforcements in early 1803, it became

⁸⁸ Ibid.

increasingly clear that the survivors would not be able to bring the island back under French control.⁸⁹

As Bonaparte received the disastrous reports out of Saint-Domingue, he is supposed to have growled, “Damn sugar, damn coffee, damn colonies.” Even if the quote is apocryphal, the attitude it conveyed was not. Saint-Domingue was a lost cause and with it died Bonaparte’s American dream. Though he was clearly disappointed, he quickly sought to turn the situation to his favor. After all, Napoleon was nothing if not a pragmatist. Bonaparte knew that Americans were already dominating the economic life in New Orleans and violently hostile to the idea of a French neighbor.⁹⁰ Bonaparte also had European concerns on his mind. He knew that another war was imminent in Europe and that he needed quick cash more than he needed sugar. Furthermore, Bonaparte reasoned that when war erupted in Europe the British navy would make French control of North American colonies impossible, and that neutral American control of Louisiana would be far better than surrendering the province to his British enemies. Offering Louisiana to the United States had the benefit of drawing the Americans into the French orbit—or at least away from Great Britain in the coming war. In early April, Bonaparte notified his foreign minister and his closest advisors that he planned to sell the entire territory of Louisiana to the United States.⁹¹

Between 1801 and 1803, the Mississippi Crisis introduced Napoleon into the American debate over the legitimate means and limits of national expansion. His reshaping the borders of Europe through the Treaty of Lunéville encouraged a discussion of natural boundaries in the United States. His threatened occupation of Louisiana drove these debates into high gear.

⁸⁹ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 280-292.

⁹⁰ Livingston had, in fact, presented the French government a copy of the debates surrounding the Ross resolutions in an attempt to convince the First Consul that war with America was the likely result of his possession of Louisiana.

⁹¹ DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana*, 154-156.

Jeffersonian expansionists worried that a powerful French presence would prevent the peaceful expansion through natural increase. Federalist expansionists, on the other hand, were most concerned that introducing the diplomatic intrigues of Europe into North America would cause the breakdown of the union. Some expansionists sought a military solution to the crisis, but others warned that a preemptive strike on New Orleans made the United States no better than the increasingly despotic Bonaparte. The debates also demonstrated a reluctance on the part of Americans to accept an unquestioned “Manifest Destiny” approach to expansion. Early calls for a military response to the crisis were easily and effectively answered by anti-expansionists, forcing pro-expansionists to make the crisis into a national security issue. Napoleon’s decision to sell Louisiana in the spring of 1803 did not bring an end to the debate. It only made Bonaparte a more entrenched symbol in American public discourse on continental expansion.

CHAPTER 3 THE COSTS OF PEACEFUL EXPANSION: THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE

On June 30, 1803, the *Boston Independent Chronicle* broke the news. Within a week, reports had reached Charleston and by the end of July even those in the far reaches of Kentucky knew. The First Consul of France had agreed to cede not only New Orleans, but the entire territory of Louisiana to the United States. “This is a proud day for our nation,” gushed the editor of one Federalist-leaning newspaper, “Louisiana is ours!” Yet, the treaty still had to be ratified by the Senate and money for the purchase allocated by the House of Representatives. Changing his tone dramatically, the editor urged caution on the part of the policy makers in Washington. “Let them not be too hasty,” he warned. “Let us see with what stipulations the cession of that country is clogged.” In particular, the editor wanted to know exactly what price Bonaparte had extracted for his North American empire, and, just as important, how the cession agreement would affect American foreign policy with regards to Europe. Certainly this was a fair question in mid-1803. Printed next to this column was another that proclaimed the renewal of war between Great Britain and Napoleon’s France.⁹²

The occupation of Louisiana was neither easy nor uncontroversial. It raised a host of basic questions about American expansion and administration of empire that the fledging government of the United States was not immediately prepared to answer. In attempting to find solutions to these problems, Americans continued to turn to the most ambitious imperialist they knew: Napoleon Bonaparte. After Napoleon crowned himself emperor in December 1804, few Americans were willing to openly express support for him (though there were still a few). Yet they could not escape how successful he appeared to be at empire building. Between 1803 and

⁹² *Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), June 30, 1803; *Republican or Anti-Democrat* (Baltimore, MD), July 4, 1803.

1806, Napoleon steadily strengthened his imperial grip on Europe through a complex system of direct rule, alliances and friendly proxy states.⁹³

Americans of all political stripes castigated Napoleon for his immoral imperial aggrandizement while simultaneously trying to replicate his successes and learn from his failures. By the end of 1806, Americans had largely accepted Napoleonic aggrandizement as the moral and ideological stick by which to measure their own decisions about expansion. Based on the example provided by Bonaparte, they agreed that military governments were unsavory and that military occupation was undesirable. Even so, an increasing number of pro-expansion Americans were willing to accept such aggressive imperial measures by their own government despite the opposition characterizing such actions as Bonapartism. At first, the pro-treaty faction responded to these attacks, but once the treaty passed, instead of continuing to counter attacks point by point, pro-expansionists appropriated the language of Bonaparte and pointed to the Louisiana Purchase as an example of how the allegedly peaceful, diplomatic expansion of the United States into Louisiana was unlike the military expansion of Napoleon. In essence, Americans became increasingly comfortable with their own ideology of military expansion and administration when it was contrasted with that of Bonaparte.

The historiography of the Louisiana Purchase can perhaps best be seen as a tug-of-war between eastward and westward looking historians. One side argues that it ought to be seen from the perspective of the East—meaning a diplomatic and political struggle between the United States and Europe. Those on the other side argue that it should be seen primarily from a

⁹³ While numerous books have discussed Napoleon as a builder and an administrator of empire, the best current works are Steven Englund, *Napoleon: a Political Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); and Michael Broers, *The Napoleonic Empire in Italy, 1796-1814: Cultural Imperialism in a European Context* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005); also see Geoffrey Ellis, *The Napoleonic Empire* 2nd ed. (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003); Stuart Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1991); and Owen Connelly, *Napoleon's Satellite Kingdoms* (New York: The Free Press, 1965).

Western viewpoint—in other words a process by which the United States either altered or was altered by conditions in Louisiana. Like most other events of the early republic, the first histories of the Louisiana Purchase were exclusively diplomatic and nationalistic in nature. Henry Adams, great grandson of one president and grandson of another, penned the first narrative history of the Purchase in his mammoth *History of the United States during the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison*. In so doing, he set a standard that stood until the late twentieth century. His analysis generated a basic political and diplomatic narrative that has yet to be significantly revised. He also used the event as a measure of the Jefferson administration's diplomatic acumen—a technique that many historians of Jefferson have used since. Finally, he argued that the political debate over the Purchase treaty fundamentally altered the American understanding of the Constitution, by allowing for the creation of a much stronger central government. This basic assertion has also been echoed by many scholars in various forms down to the present.⁹⁴

While Adams wrote of the Purchase from the perspective of the East, two of the early twentieth century's great historians, Frederick Jackson Turner and Eugene Bolton, saw the Purchase as a phenomenon of the West. Turner saw American expansion in terms of settlers filling an “empty” western frontier and touted this as the defining characteristic of American

⁹⁴ Henry Adams, *History of the United States during the First Administration of Thomas Jefferson* 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909); for more recent diplomatic histories see Alexander DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1976); and Jon Kukla, *A Wilderness so Immense: The Louisiana Purchase and the Destiny of America* (New York: Knopf, 2003); for other historians who have used the Louisiana Purchase as diplomatic gauge of the Jefferson Administration see Robert Tucker and David Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Peter Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2000); a updated version of Adam's basic contention about Louisiana being a pivot in the American understanding of the Constitution is Jerry Sanson, “Scouring at the Mortar of the Constitution’: Louisiana and the Fundamental Law of the United States,” *Louisiana History* 48 no. 1 (Winter, 2007), 5-24; a particularly helpful introduction to the historiography of the Louisiana Purchase can be found in Jacques Portes and Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, “Celebration and History: The Case of the Louisiana Purchase,” in *Empires of the Imagination: Transatlantic Histories of the Louisiana Purchase*, ed. Peter Kastor and François Weil (Charlottesville, VA: The University of Virginia Press, 2009) 327-364.

democracy. While Turner did not make the connection between Louisiana and the frontier explicit, his disciples did. As late as the mid-1970s, John Keat and Marshall Sprague placed the Purchase into a blatantly Turnerian teleological model that heralded the opening of the west as the catalyst of American democracy. Turner had his critics, though. Most important of which was Eugene Bolton. Bolton argued that American engagement with the Spanish borderlands was a more accurate description of western expansion rather than Turner's empty frontier thesis. Historians at least partially influenced by Bolton have gained the upper hand in more recent years. Diplomatic historians James Lewis and J.C.A. Stagg, for example, both placed the Louisiana Purchase within the troublesome context of Spanish American relations between 1780 and 1830. Their work, as does mine, sees the purchase as part of a larger diplomatic narrative that included East and West Florida as well as Texas. It is important to note, however, that while they disagreed on fundamental points, both the Turnerians and Boltonians saw Louisiana as an event best described in terms of the West.⁹⁵

While the diplomatic and high-political stories of the Purchase continue to attract their share of historians, the most innovative recent work has been done by historians like Peter Kastor and Julien Vernet and tends to focus on how the incorporation of Louisiana into the union altered the American nation. These historians also argue for a more western approach to Louisiana. They suggest that our understanding of the Purchase cannot be limited to diplomatic negotiations between Madrid, Paris and Washington. Louisiana was not simply an imperial football, they suggest, but an amorphous geographic and demographic zone of contact and conflict between

⁹⁵ For a good introduction to the Turner-Bolton debate see, David Weber, "Turner, Bolton and the Borderlands," *The American Historical Review* 91 no. 1 (February 1986), 66-81; John Keats, *Eminent Domain: The Louisiana Purchase and the Making of America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974); Marshall Sprague, *So Vast, So Beautiful a Land: Louisiana and the Purchase* (New York: Charterhouse, 1973); James Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); J.C.A. Stagg, *Borderlines in Borderlands: James Madison and the Spanish American Frontier, 1776-1821* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

indigenous peoples, Anglo-Americans, French, Spanish, Africans and mulattos. All of these groups struggled to take advantage of the new social and political reality as the American government attempted to establish their claim on the territory. Thus, the peoples of Louisiana were far from passive receptors of imperial edicts coming out of national capitals. They did what they could to exert control over their own affairs and in some ways changed their imperial rulers as much as those rulers attempted to change them. In *The Nation's Crucible*, for example, Peter Kastor argues that incorporating the diverse peoples of Louisiana into the United States transformed and redefined what it meant to be an American citizen.⁹⁶

This chapter builds on the ideas that Kastor developed in *The Nation's Crucible*. Where he focused on the idea of citizenship and nationhood in the republic, I focus on how the purchase and occupation of Louisiana changed the American ideology of military expansion. Ironically, for someone claiming intellectual decent from Kastor, I do this by refocusing the lens of the Louisiana Purchase back eastward rather than westward. Not because the stories of the American and French political elite need another retelling, but because the overwhelming majority of Americans of all political persuasions and socio-economic groups were absorbed by the cataclysmic duel of European empires across the Atlantic Ocean. They worked what they saw (or rather read) into their ideology of expansion and empire. Thus, I contend that to fully understand what the Louisiana Purchase, and ultimately expansion itself, meant to Americans—especially those not directly on the Louisiana frontier, we have to understand the ideological framework they developed by looking east to Napoleon's empire.

⁹⁶ Peter Kastor, *The Nation's Crucible: The Louisiana Purchase and the Making of America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Julien Vernet, *Strangers on their Native Soil: Opposition to United States' Governance in Louisiana's Orleans Territory* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013); Peter Kastor "Motives of Particular Urgency": Local Diplomacy in Louisiana," *William and Mary Quarterly* 58 no.4 (October 2001) 819-848; also see Paul Gelpi, "Mr. Jefferson's Creoles: The Battalion d'Oléans and the Americanization of Creole Louisiana," *Louisiana History* 48, no. 3 (Summer 2007), 295-316.

It is critical to remember that the American military occupation of Louisiana took place within the context of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe. As the article quoted in the first paragraph showed, Americans followed both events with equally great interest. Following the Peace of Amiens in 1802, the French position in Europe was formidable. The extended French republic stretched from the Rhine River in the north, through the annexed territories of Luxemburg, Belgium and the Rhineland and across the Alps into Nice, Savoy and Piedmont. Beyond this, Bonaparte dominated the foreign and domestic policies of a chain of “sister republics,” which included the Netherlands and Switzerland, as well as the Italian, Ligurian (Genoese), and Cisalpine Republics. Bonaparte could also count on Spain as an ally (if a somewhat unwilling one) as well as friendly relations with some of the powerful states in the eastern Holy Roman Empire, most notably Bavaria.⁹⁷

While Napoleon strengthened his hand in Europe, his arch-rival Great Britain worked to rally the anti-Bonapartist empires on the continent. The War of the Third Coalition (1803-1806) broke out in May 1803 when Bonaparte aggressively backed Britain into an impossible diplomatic position. Yet, while the Royal Navy ruled the seas, the British needed continental alliances to be successful against the French *Grande Armée*. To paraphrase the memorable words of Charles Esdaile: the British whale had gone to war with the French elephant. For most of first the two years of the war, the two powers glowered at each other from opposite sides of the English Channel. However, by mid-1805 the British—thanks largely to heavy-handed foreign policy of Bonaparte—had cobbled together an anti-French alliance that included Austria, Naples, Sweden, and, most surprisingly, Russia. The international stage was thus set for the

⁹⁷ Mike Rapport, *The Napoleonic Wars*, 38-43.

opening round of a titanic clash of empires that would last with only short interruptions until 1815.⁹⁸

While the great powers dueled for supremacy in Europe, the United States witnessed the climax of their own bitter ideological struggle that had begun with the French Revolution in 1793. While Americans overwhelmingly shared an assumption that society should be based on a basic Lockean liberal view of individual natural rights, they disagreed vehemently on exactly what this meant and how society ought to implement this vision. Federalists generally looked east toward Europe and sought to fashion the United States into a great commercial and economic empire that would be respected by the world. They saw Great Britain as the best example of a liberal imperial system that the world had yet seen—one that championed the economic freedom of its citizens but had enough checks in the system to prevent it from becoming a tyrannical despotism. When it came to expansion, Federalists envisioned a stable central government that could efficiently administer its imperial holdings. For most Federalists, physical expansion was part of an ideology of economic expansion—land simply for the sake of it was useless, and could even be dangerous to the political unity of a republic. There had to be a commercial purpose for the expansion. This explains why many were adamantly in favor of possessing New Orleans, but either apathetic or hostile about possessing the entire Louisiana territory.⁹⁹

The violent social disorder occasioned by the revolution in France was anathema to the Federalists. A popularly elected government that executed its citizens on a whim and deprived

⁹⁸ Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars: An International History* (New York: Penguin, 2007) 154-208.

⁹⁹ Incredibly little has been written about the Federalist ideology of expansion. My own views were influenced by John Lauritz Larson, "Wisdom Enough to Improve Them: Government, Liberty and Inland Waterways in the Rising American Empire," in *Launching the Extended Republic: The Federalist Era*, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter Albert (Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1996) 223-248; also useful is Andrew Cayton, "Radicals in the Western World: The Federalist Conquest of Trans-Appalachia," in *Federalists Reconsidered*, ed. Doron Ben-Atar and Barbra Oberg (Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1998) 77-96.

them of their property at will was merely despotism of the democratic mob—just as bad, if not worse than the despotism of a monarch. Federalists were particularly troubled when the French Revolutionary government made it explicit policy to spread the revolution—a policy never disavowed by Napoleon. They looked askance at Americans congregating in Jacobin clubs all over the new nation cheering every bloody success of Bonaparte. In every boatload of immigrants that arrived in Philadelphia they imagined subversive French agents disembarking to infect the American people with plots overthrow the central government that could only end in disunion and the establishment of a revolutionary despotism. In response to these fears, a Federalist controlled Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798 which made it illegal to print items judged to be of a seditious nature against the Federal government and gave the President broad discretionary power to deport suspicious foreigners. This proved a gross overreach of Federal authority, however, and cost the Federalists enough popular support to lose the presidential election of 1800.¹⁰⁰

At the other end of the American political spectrum were the Jeffersonians. Just as the Federalists, the Jeffersonians had no “party platform” as we would recognize it today. They did have a set of ideological principles on expansion that set them in clear opposition to their political rivals. They envisioned a sprawling agricultural empire of large and small commercial farmers who tilled the fertile American soil far from the money and corruption of large cities. The availability of cheap land and cheap labor in the form of slavery was absolutely critical to this vision for the American future. Control of the Mississippi River was also vital to export valuable agricultural products like tobacco and cotton to Europe. The preferred method of expansion would be through peaceful conquest. In their imagination, American settlers simply

¹⁰⁰ See Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America*; and Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 691-754.

would move into the vacuum left by a decaying empire—Spain usually—and through demographic increase eventually come to dominate the region. Many Jeffersonians were not even terribly concerned about the possibility of acquiring territory so quickly that it outpaced the ability of the Federal government to effectively administer it. If the Trans-Appalachian region eventually found that its interests were not being represented by the federal government, they argued, let the population there form their own nation. After all, the new country would share economic and kinship ties, an American form of government and a common language with the United States. It seemed inconceivable that republics with so much in common could ever become enemies.¹⁰¹

The other governing principle of the Jeffersonians was the fear of centralized economic and political power—which they associated with the corrupting influence of cities. In Great Britain, they saw everything they hated: large metropolises containing a corrupt, moneyed elite and a strong centralized bureaucracy. Better by far, they argued, was the popular—if chronically unstable—French revolutionary government. Where Federalists mourned the loss of social stabilizers such as the Catholic Church and the Bourbon Monarchy, Jeffersonians cheered the abolition of what they saw as corrupt institutions that facilitated the concentration of wealth and political power. Most tempered their enthusiasm somewhat when the revolution devolved into the Terror; even so, many Jeffersonians saw France as less of an ideological threat than Britain. After all, they argued, it seemed far more likely that the corruptions of the British system would infect the United States through pro-British trade policies made by the Federalists such as the Jay Treaty (1794) than through France—especially once she was removed from Louisiana.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ See Peter Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire*; and Nancy Isenberg and Andrew Burstein, *Madison and Jefferson*, 387-396.

¹⁰² See Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978).

As much as some might have wished it during the Napoleonic Wars, Americans found that they could not avoid Europe. The Federalist vision for the future required Americans to become enmeshed in a highly profitable world of Atlantic trade whereas the Jeffersonian vision had Americans literally bumping up against the still expansive, if decaying, European colonies in the Americas—especially along the Gulf Coast and the lower Mississippi River. Every foreign policy choice that the first four presidential administrations made was interpreted to benefit either one or the other of the major belligerents. Ultimately, the question that faced the first generation of Americans was whether the revolutionary disorder of France or the aristocratic order Great Britain was more of an ideological threat to the infant United States. On this answer would hang the future of American expansion during the first fifteen years of the nineteenth-century.¹⁰³

It is vital to recall that in 1803, Americans had no guide to establishing a successful republican empire. When they opened their history books, they found that republics (especially large ones) invariably became corrupt and degenerated into despotism. Madison's famous Federalist No. 10 tried to assure readers that an expansive republic was critical to maintaining political balance in society. In 1803, however, this was simply theory, and there seemed to be plenty of evidence to the contrary. After 1792, Americans had exactly one contemporary republic to which they could compare themselves: France. There, with the rise of Bonaparte, many saw confirmation of their worst fears about the sustainability of large republics. Before it seemed possible (at least to the Jeffersonians) that France and the United States could stand as twin bastions of liberalism, but by 1804, France seemed far more likely to infect those with

¹⁰³ The most complete treatment of this ideological divide is found in James Sharp's *American Politics in the Early Republic*; but the best explanation of how ideological differences informed foreign policy is Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, 104-112.

whom she interacted with the contagion of despotism. When the opposition—both Federalists and splinter factions of Jeffersonians—denounced the actions of their ideological enemies as supporting Napoleon’s France, they were not simply using hyperbole to score political points. They were arguing over, as one historian has put it eloquently, “the soul of the republic.”¹⁰⁴

By 1803, the Federalists were a divided and decidedly minority party. However, from their urban strongholds in New England they provided an extremely vocal opposition to what they saw as (borrowing a phrase usually associated with Napoleon in 1803) the Jeffersonian “usurpation” of the national government. Per the terms of the Louisiana treaty, both governments had to ratify the document within six months of receiving it. Though Congress was out of session and not set to reconvene until November, Jefferson called for a special session scheduled for October 17, 1803 to debate the treaty and allocate the money required to actually purchase the territory. Though the odds were long against them, the anti-treaty Federalists determined to not simply roll over. Through the summer and into the fall of 1803, they turned their rhetorical guns on the Louisiana treaty through the newspapers. They used a wide variety of arguments to protest adoption of the treaty, but as diverse as these arguments were, they all ultimately revolved around ideological objections to how the United States dealt with Napoleon Bonaparte.¹⁰⁵

Probably the most common critique of the treaty was its cost. Anti-treaty Federalists immediately expressed concern over the amount of money required to purchase Louisiana. The price agreed upon was \$15 million. This was astronomical sum for the fledgling United States,

¹⁰⁴ Reginald Horsman, “The Dimensions of an Empire of Liberty: Expansion and Republicanism,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 9 no. 1 (Spring 1989), 1-20; Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, 105.

¹⁰⁵ Treaty between the United States of America and the French Republic, October 17, 1803 in *State Papers and Correspondence Bearing upon the Purchase of the Territory of Louisiana*, 253-256; DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana*, 181; also see Julien Vernet, *Strangers on their own Land: Opposition to the United States Governance in Louisiana’s Orleans Territory, 1803-1809* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2013).

which, though in the midst of an economic boom thanks to the French Revolutionary Wars, had only just emerged from under the debt previously owed to France for their assistance during the American War for Independence. The hefty price-tag itself was not the anti-treaty faction's main complaint, though. Those who focused on the monetary aspects of the deal generally appeared far more concerned with the ideological implications of the spending the money than on the sum itself.

The best example of this position ran in a series of five widely reprinted articles originally published in Boston's *Columbian Centinel* by an author writing under the pseudonym, Fabricius. In his essays, Fabricius expressed disbelief that the United States would pay an exorbitant sum for what he saw as a vindication of American rights. He professed to have no problem paying to protect the economic interests of westerners. "Let us cheerfully spend our blood and money for them," he wrote. "It is right that we should do it when necessary, without inquiring or regarding HOW MUCH." It did not follow that the Louisiana Purchase "was a fit end or a right mean to be chosen" when protecting American national security. After all, he continued, Americans had been wronged by the Spanish violations of the Pinckney Treaty. "It is a glorious thing," he wrote sarcastically, "for a nation to suffer injuries and then *buy* redress—to be kicked and then pay damages." How the United States responded to such a threat would have long standing diplomatic ramifications.¹⁰⁶

New Orleans could have, and should have been obtained by military force, Fabricius insisted. Like the new kid on the school playground, the United States had to stand up to the bully (France) that would take its lunch money. The Kentucky militia—80,000 of them—had been ready to move, Fabricius sighed wistfully. They could have made short work of the New

¹⁰⁶ *The Spectator* (New York, NY), July 20, 1803; *The Patriot* (Stonington, CT), August 22, 1803.

Orleans garrison and vindicated American rights to the world. Fabricius could only think of one reason why New Orleans had not been seized immediately, and that was the Jefferson administration's servile fear of the despot Bonaparte. He was thoroughly disgusted by the idea of a free republic engaged in diplomatic negotiation with the likes of Napoleon and drew a vivid picture of Ambassador James Monroe "crawling like a reptile at the First Consul's feet." Any American who was not ashamed by this image, he suggested, ought to "send to Algiers or Botany Bay, and ask the honor of an act of citizenship." Paying a great deal of money for a territory that the United States could have had for nothing, argued Fabricius was nothing more than "tribute" and brought the United States into "common cause" with the French empire just as they were going to war with Great Britain. Likening of the United States to a tributary state of Napoleonic France proved a rhetorical device that gained increasing power as the decade continued.¹⁰⁷

Others against the treaty were a bit easier on the Jeffersonian administration. Instead of seeing Jefferson kowtowing in servile fear of Bonaparte, they saw a naïve philosopher president hopelessly outwitted by the hardnosed political and military scheming of the First Consul. Ideological opponents had long cast Jefferson as an idealist whose policies sounded good, but could not work in the real world. Until he was president, however, these attributes had been more amusing than dangerous. In a series of essays that ran in a wide variety of papers from June to October 1803, an author writing under the appropriate pseudonym "Calculator," laid out the case against the purchase in economic terms that painted the administration as being hopelessly outclassed by Napoleon at the negotiating table.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Calculator's first objection to the Purchase was the type of land that Napoleon had sold the United States, sight unseen. Quoting heavily from a document that American ambassador Robert Livingston had presented to Bonaparte on the folly of maintaining a colony in Louisiana, Calculator described Louisiana as a vast "western wilderness." It contained no "mines of gold or silver" and would take years and untold amounts of money to make profitable. Why, Calculator asked, should the United States pay an exorbitant sum for a piece of property that our own ambassadors had just told Bonaparte was worthless? This was a common critique of the treaty. Fabricius, who had an acerbic comment for nearly every aspect of Louisiana, memorably called the territory an "untrodden waste for owls to hoot and wolves to howl in." It was, he continued, the "realm of alligators and catamounts." Another anti-treaty writer guffawed at wondrous tales of a mountain of salt somewhere in the interior of Louisiana. He sarcastically wondered if Bonaparte would have consented to part with the territory if only he had known how rich it was in salt and rocks.¹⁰⁸

For Calculator, the timing of the Purchase also demonstrated the naiveté of Jefferson and his followers when confronted by Napoleon. They were so blinded by an irrational ideological need for expansion, he argued, that they forgot basic laws of economics and diplomacy. According to Calculator, "it cannot escape notice that the purchase of Louisiana was negotiated at a juncture the most favorable which could possibly happen for obtaining that wilderness on cheap terms." Everyone knew that Bonaparte was planning to renew his war with England, Calculator pointed out, and without an effective navy he could not have long maintained his hold on Louisiana. "The territory he put on sale," wrote Calculator, "he was effectually barred from

¹⁰⁸ "For the Balance, no. 2," *The Balance and Columbian Repository* (Hudson, NY), August 23, 1803; *The Patriot* (Stonington, CT), August 15, 1803; "Indian Tradition," *The United States Chronicle* (Providence, RI), December 12, 1803; also see David Dzurec, "Of Salt Mountains, Prairie Dogs and Horned Frogs: The Louisiana Purchase and the Evolution of Federalist Satire, 1803-1812," *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2015) 79-108.

possessing; and was also in the utmost danger of losing.” Thus, Calculator concluded, “This circumstance tends to increase the public astonishment at the enormous price which has been pledged.” In other words, Bonaparte had sold on a buyer’s market and the ambassadors should have taken advantage of that fact in their negotiations. Instead, they had allowed Bonaparte to hoodwink the administration by playing to their naïve Jeffersonian ideology of expansion at any cost.¹⁰⁹

The discussion of natural borders which had played such an important role during the Mississippi crisis the year before did not disappear entirely from the American conversation during this period, but it did take a back seat to other arguments. For example, Calculator saved his commentary on natural borders for his last article. Even then it only occupied a small part of his larger argument. Louisiana, he suggested, was a foreign territory because it lay beyond the, “the vast body of water which till very lately has been considered as the ultimate limits of the United States.” Why then, he asked, should Americans transgress this clear “ordination of nature.” Indeed, for Calculator, the Mississippi River appeared to be the very voice of the Divine, “which has seemingly said, ‘Hitherto ye shall come, and no further.’” This supernatural argument probably still had some power in Congregationalist New England, but by 1804 most Americans had moved to a position that sought a more worldly understanding of borders.¹¹⁰

The more secular concern was that breaking the boundary of the Mississippi would shatter the wall which held Americans to their natural boundaries. Only nations keeping to their natural limits could restore order in the chaotic world created by Bonaparte. In many ways, this was a fall back to the American formulation of natural borders discussed in the first chapter which argued that national expansion to natural frontiers (and no farther) was good because it

¹⁰⁹ “For the Balance, no. 2,” *The Balance and Columbian Repository* (Hudson, NY), August 23, 1803.

¹¹⁰ “For the Balance, no. 6,” *The Balance and Columbian Repository* (Hudson, NY), September 27, 1803.

preserved peace. In the fall of 1804, numerous Federalist papers reprinted an article originally from London. The author suggested that before the Purchase, the Mississippi had provided an “unequivocal boundary” to both Spain and the United States, but with that natural border transgressed, only an “imaginary” boundary remained. Lured by the riches of Mexico and Peru with no natural border to arrest their movement, what would stop aggressive American expansion into those places? The article suspected that the selling of Louisiana would ultimately lead to the “total loss of Spain of its South American dominion.” Even worse, the article continued, the nations of Europe could not sit idly by and watch this happen. Unchecked expansion by the United States, the article concluded, would thus also probably lead United States into war eventually with Great Britain, France, or both.¹¹¹

The pro-treaty faction, on the other hand, celebrated America’s freedom from the natural borders which had constrained her in the past. In an “Address to All Monarchists,” an author writing under the pseudonym “The Old Soldier” roundly condemned the Federalists for their opposition to the Purchase Treaty. In his closing he brought up the idea of boundaries by extolling the virtues of the new, sprawling American empire:

when I consider the almost boundless extent of the United States, including the all important acquisition of Louisiana, a territory stretching from sea to sea, or from the great river, Mississippi, to the ends of the earth, and from near the tropic of cancer...to the polar circle; when I consider the sublime grandeur, magnificence and potency of a monarch commanding such an unbridled kingdom, and sole sovereign of such an immense territory, in comparison of who the emperor of China and the Great Lama of Tibet dwindle into subalterns, Bonaparte and the Kings of Europe are very little things...

¹¹¹*The New England Palladium* (Boston, MA), September 11, 1804.

The contrast between these two positions is instructive. For many Federalists, crossing the natural boundary of the Mississippi would lead to the United States becoming enmeshed in an endless series of border disputes with European powers—an odd line of argument for a party who claimed that they wanted to see the United States within a European context. For the Old Soldier, however, the extent of America’s boundless empire proved its greatness in comparison to the rest of the world. In the end, arguments about borders became less important once the treaty was actually received by the Congress. Shifting the argument away from natural boundaries seems to indicate that Americans largely agreed that their nation should expand. The question became how this expansion ought to take place.¹¹²

Even if most Americans had made peace with the idea of expansion, the pro-treaty faction had difficulty responding to the other criticisms leveled by their opponents. The fact that they felt the need to respond at all is illustrative of how effective the rhetorical assaults from the Federalists actually were. In this case, what the pro-treaty faction did not say about the document is just as instructive as what they did say. When they responded, most conspicuously avoided using the words “Bonaparte” or “Napoleon” and opted for less polarizing words like “France.” Clearly they understood the uncomfortable optics of dealing in real estate with the likes of Bonaparte and realized how powerful of a symbol he had become to the American populace. Even so, some did attempt to weave the rhetoric, if not the name, of Bonaparte into their defense because he was such an effective symbol.

When treaty advocates did use the rhetoric, if not the name, of Bonaparte to support the purchase, it usually took the form of a commentary on what they saw as hypocritical war-mongering on the part of the Federalists. For example, “Curtius” pointed out the hypocrisy of

¹¹² “An Address to all the Monarchists,” *The Political Observatory* (Walpole, NH), August 8, 1804.

Federalists who had demanded war to seize New Orleans over the winter of 1802-03 but now criticized a treaty in which territory was gained through peaceful negotiation. Federalists, he wrote, had been prepared for the “sacrifice of our national character upon the shrine of ambition,” during the Mississippi crisis. He sincerely hoped that the Federalists would not fool themselves into thinking that their “*warlike* and *bloody* resolutions” had frightened Bonaparte into selling Louisiana. The fact that Curtius felt the need to highlight those words indicates that he chose them—and the word “ambition”—for their rhetorical power. In this case, he knew full well that Americans would associate those words with everything they found distasteful about Napoleon.¹¹³

The force of Curtius’s argument came from his appeal to a deep seeded American paranoia about the ambitious accumulation of power. There was nothing particularly new in an appeal of this sort—Americans had been using “ambition” in their rhetoric since before the War for Independence. What was innovative was that by 1803, when Americans like Curtius used words like “warlike” and “ambition” were no longer simply describing the abstractions of Locke or Plutarch’s long dead Julius Caesar.¹¹⁴

Starting after his coup in 1800, an overwhelming majority of Americans began to associate these words with Napoleon. In December 1802, for example, a typical article in the *New York Morning Chronicle* warned that “*Universal* domination appears to be the object of [Bonaparte’s] all grasping *ambition*.” The author continued by explaining that the First Consul had at his command one of the, “most *warlike* nations of the earth.” Bonaparte thus became the

¹¹³ “A Vindication of the Purchase of Louisiana,” *The Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), September 14, 1803; a lovely list common of epithets for Napoleon can be found in, *The Patriot* (Utica, NY), November 7, 1803. An incomplete list includes, “military despot,” “ambitious tyrant,” and “Corsican usurper.”

¹¹⁴ For American rhetoric about “ambition” and its links to the American Revolution see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) 344-347, 368-69.

living, breathing embodiment of bellicose ambition. In April 1803, the *New York Morning Herald* reported, “we perceive no bounds to the ambition of Bonaparte.” Using a simple keyword search in the Readex *America’s Historical Newspapers* database, a startling trend emerges. Between 1800 and the end of 1803, the word “ambition” appeared in the major newspapers of the United States 9,154 times. Of these times, the word was linked to Napoleon in almost twenty-five percent of the articles. As Bonaparte consolidated his power, his name became synonymous with “ambition.” This was even more so once he established himself as hereditary “Emperor of the Gauls” in December 1804. By using words like “ambition,” Curtius could link Federalist policy to Napoleon without even using his name.¹¹⁵

In September and October, the Spanish minister in Washington attempted to protest the treaty on the grounds that French troops still occupied the Italian province promised to Spain as part of the original retrocession. In other words, Napoleon had sold the territory under false pretenses. The Jefferson administration ignored the petition, but this almost became a serious hiccup in the process of taking possession. Federalists in the House of Representatives briefly attempted to hold up further votes until copies of the Treaty of San Ildefonso could be obtained to verify that Napoleon did, indeed, have a legitimate title to Louisiana. Apparently even administration supporters in Congress had qualms, for the resolution requiring the copies of the treaty was voted down by only two votes even though Jeffersonians enjoyed a 3-1 majority in the House. Based on the newspaper accounts, the public did not get wind of these events until

¹¹⁵ *The Olio* (Georgetown, District of Columbia), December 30, 1802; *New York Herald* (New York, NY), April 3, 1803; for this quantitative analysis, I did proximity searches for “ambition” AND “Bonaparte,” “Buonaparte,” “Consul,” and “Napoleon.” To account for articles that used more than one of the words I discounted ten percent of the total hits. Admittedly this method is not entirely scientific, but, I believe that the general principle is valid.

November when Federalist congressmen started write home to their constituents, but when they did, it resulted in another rhetorical salvo from the anti-treaty faction.¹¹⁶

Some interpreted the episode as further evidence of the Jefferson administration's naiveté in dealing with Bonaparte. For example, an anti-treaty writer identifying himself only as "N" wrote a satirical piece in a New Hampshire paper that criticized the Jefferson administration's lack of forethought when it came to imperial matters. The national debt might well be a "mortal canker" on the young country "N" opined, but, a great deal was a great deal when it came to western real estate. It was a shame that the United States had such "shortsighted rulers," he wrote sardonically. For "a few trifling millions more, Bonaparte would have added...the exhaustless mines of Peru and Potosi, and with them a tract of the country, in value above all price." Now was the time to buy, "N" pointed out, since once all of Europe was at the foot of Bonaparte, he might not be willing to make such excellent bargains. The point of the piece, of course, was that Bonaparte would be happy to sell anything (no matter who actually owned the legal title) to the starry-eyed Jeffersonians.¹¹⁷

For "N" the American response to the Spanish objection showed more about Jefferson's naïve willingness to blindly follow his expansionist ideology, but for other writers it showed just how corrupt the United States had become in dealing with Bonaparte. One furious letter posted in a New England paper called Napoleon the "arch-swindler" who had stolen Louisiana from his Spanish allies. "I view," he went on, "the U. States as no better than confederates with a gang of thieves—and as receivers of stolen goods." Another widely circulated letter made a similar point. "The Spanish minister's remonstrance," the anonymous author wrote, "is treated with as

¹¹⁶ *Annals of Congress*, 8th Cong., 1st Session, 1803, vol. 13, 385-418; William Plumer, *William Plumer's Memorandum of the Proceedings in the United States Senate, 1803-1807*, ed. Everett Brown (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 3-5; DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana*, 189-90.

¹¹⁷ DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana*, 199; "Louisiana Title," *The Courier of New Hampshire*, November 23, 1803.

much contempt as Bonaparte would treat a remonstrance from the Landamman of Switzerland.” The anti-treaty faction had struck a chord—though not quite hard enough to derail American expansion. By directly linking American expansionist policy to the morally ambiguous imperial policies Bonaparte, suddenly the Louisiana Purchase did not look like such a triumphant affair. The event shows just how flexible the rhetoric of Napoleon had already become by 1804—even amongst similarly minded factions.¹¹⁸

Pro-treaty partisans felt like they needed to respond to this accusation. They bypassed the moral ambiguousness of the deal, and focused directly on the legal aspects. The editor of the *Charleston Courier* put it in simple terms for his readers, “What then has the government of the United States, a *bona fide* purchaser, to do with conditions on which the province was sold to France?” He continued by making an analogy that his readers would be familiar with. “If I buy a horse from Titus, which Caius had sold and delivered to him, taking his bond or note as a security for the payment of the stipulated price, what should we say, if Caius, finding his security to be worthless, should come to me and beg of me not to buy the horse?” The legal answer was simple, if perhaps hard on poor Caius. “We should be apt to tell him that he had now nothing to do with the horse and that if he was displeased with his bargain, he had only to upbraid his own folly in giving credit to whom he ought to have known better than to trust.” Translated to Louisiana, the author was saying that it was Spain’s own fault for doing business with an unsavory character like Bonaparte. Understandably, the author neglected to explain the wisdom or the ethics of the United States doing business with the same questionable character.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ *New England Repertory* (Boston, NY), December 11, 1803; *New Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene, NH), November 12, 1803.

¹¹⁹ *Charleston Courier* (Charleston, SC), November 8, 1803.

There were also rumblings from anti-treaty types about the legal ramifications of making real estate deals with Bonaparte's government. Most of these revolved around the question of the Consulship's legitimacy. Since Bonaparte had come to power in a coup some anti-treaty authors asked, was his government really the legitimate government of France? If it was not, did the treaty hold any legal standing? The easiest answer to these questions was provided by Senator James Jackson. Jackson was a long serving English-born senator and one-time governor of Georgia. In a speech that was reprinted in Jeffersonian papers from his home in Georgia to Vermont Jackson explained the consulate was, indeed, the legal government of France. Jackson argued that no matter what misgivings he had personally of the French government, "Bonaparte by the consent of the nation is placed at its head." Jackson here referred to the mostly legitimate plebiscite that had named Bonaparte "First Consul for life" in August of 1802. "No nation," Jackson continued, "had the right to interfere with rule or police of another." The acts of Bonaparte, then, were the genuine acts of the nation of France. Jackson, like other pro-treaty advocates, thus simply ignored the question of whether Americans should deal with Bonaparte by simply saying that they could deal with him.¹²⁰

Other Americans, however, disagreed with Jackson's assessment of Bonaparte's legitimacy. This, then, led to the uncomfortable question of whether the government of the United States could, or should, make legitimate treaties with his government. As before, expansionists tended to quietly side-step the second half of the question and focus simply on the legal reality of the situation. One congressional speech that made its way into the *Aurora*—probably the mostly widely read American newspaper of the time—was that of Representative James Elliot. Elliot was a first term congressman from the politically divided state of Vermont

¹²⁰ *Middlebury Mercury* (Middlebury, VT), January 11, 1804.

and he attempted to thread the needle of legality when it came to Bonaparte. “I believe,” he began, “there is not within these walls an admirer of the present government of France.” But, he continued, “we all know the distinction between a king or government *de jure* and *de facto*. If Bonaparte be not the rightful ruler of the French republic, he is the present possessor of the powers of government, and can bind the nation by treaties.” This meant, he argued, that even if Bonaparte died before the ratified treaty made it back to France, it would still be binding upon the French people. Americans would continue to use the difference between *de facto* and *de jure* governments to their advantage as they expanded later in the century.¹²¹

Despite the heated rhetorical battle in the press, the final outcome was hardly in doubt. Congress reflected the growing Jeffersonian influence in the nation and the Louisiana vote showed it. With remarkably little debate on the floor, the Senate voted to accept the treaty a mere two days after receiving it by a margin of twenty-four to seven. One New Hampshire Federalist griped, “the Senate have taken less time to deliberate on this great treaty than they allowed themselves on the most trivial Indian contract.” Only one Federalist—Jonathon Dayton of New Jersey—crossed the aisle.¹²²

Despite the lopsided result, the heated debate reveals some important insights into the ideological thought behind American expansion and anti-expansion during the first decade of the nineteenth century. Arguments over expansion was a genuine ideological battle even when it did not directly involve military force. Over the years, historians have suggested a wide variety of explanations for Federalist opposition to the treaty. The traditional explanation is that the opposition was motivated by political sour grapes. For example, according to Thomas Farnham,

¹²¹ *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), November 15, 1803.

¹²² Plumer, *William Plumer's Memorandum*, 13-14.

Federalists represented a minority northern sectional faction by 1803 and their opposition was an attempt to block southern expansion because it would presumably expand the Jeffersonian voting bloc. Linda Kerber argued that Federalists saw the acquisition of Louisiana as a national security issue as the new territory would undoubtedly contain a large percentage of slaves. Many other historians have simply dismissed the opposition all together as insignificant when compared to the larger sweep of American expansion.¹²³

Those who opposed the treaty and their arguments ought to be taken seriously. While they lost the debate, their arguments established a rhetoric of anti-imperialism that, in the words of Alexander DeConde, “would be echoed later in the century by a new breed of anti-imperialists.” The underlying focus of the opposition’s most lasting arguments were not based on political partisanship or on national security. More often than not, the opposition presented genuine and principled ideological concerns about a free republic dealing with the likes of Napoleon. The fact that the pro-treaty faction felt that they had to respond at all demonstrates that linking Bonaparte to American expansion retained much of its rhetorical and ideological power.¹²⁴

Accepting the Louisiana Treaty, however, was only the first step on the American road to empire. On October 26, the Senate passed the legislation which allowed for the formal occupation and administration of Louisiana. Two days later the House of Representatives followed suit and forwarded a bill to the Senate allocating the funds needed to purchase the territory. With that, the question of whether or not the United States would be an empire was settled for good, but this only opened up new questions about the administration of that empire.

¹²³ Thomas Farnham, “The Federal, State Issue and the Louisiana Purchase,” *Louisiana History* 6 no. 1 (Winter, 1965), 5-25; Linda Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* reprint (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 41-45.

¹²⁴ DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana*, 186.

The language of the bill allowing for the formal occupation of Louisiana resulted in a vigorous debate amongst Americans about what their new empire should look like. How Louisiana was administered would be key to the future of American expansion. As one Senator put it succinctly, “the U.S. in time will have many colonies—therefore precedents are important.” In the debate that followed, the opposition used Napoleon’s empire to engage the Jeffersonian plans for occupation.¹²⁵

Both Federalists and Jeffersonians had some doubts about how the Purchase Treaty would shape the occupation of Louisiana. The clause in question was in the third article of the treaty—allegedly written by Bonaparte himself—which proclaimed that, “The inhabitants of the ceded territory shall be incorporated in the Union of the United States, and admitted as soon as possible...to the enjoyment of all the rights, advantages, and immunities, of citizens of the United States.” Some Americans smelled a rat. The always cantankerous Senator William Plumer wondered, “What could induce Bonaparte to insist on this people’s [sic] being incorporated into the Union? He has never discovered a strong attachment to the rights of any nation, or to that of any individual.” Historians of the Purchase are only recently starting to realize how fundamental qualms over the people of Louisiana were to native born Americans. It was not until 2004, that Peter Kastor observed laconically that, “it was the *demographic* expansion, rather than the *geographic* expansion [of the United States] that was the subject of so much concern.” Even these demographic worries, however, had their roots in perceptions of Bonaparte.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ *Annals of Congress*, 8th Cong., 1st Sess., 1803, vol. 13, 27; Plumer, *William Plumer’s Memorandum*, 145.

¹²⁶ Treaty between the United States of America and the French Republic, October 17, 1803 in *State Papers and Correspondence Bearing upon the Purchase of the Territory of Louisiana*, 254; Plumer, *William Plumer’s Memorandum*, 7; Kastor, *The Nation’s Crucible*, 4.

Read literally, the treaty appeared to require that *all* inhabitants of Louisiana become citizens of the United States. This caused many Americans, both Jeffersonian and Federalists, grave concern. Part of the problem was that less than half of the inhabitants were of European decent. The rest were, as one newspaper put it, an amalgamation of, “red-white, black, [and] black and white.” Would they also become citizens? The terms of the treaty seemed to suggest that they would. Though simple racism was a partial factor here, the critique was more sophisticated (and conspiratorial) than that. “Can it be conceived then,” asked one writer, “that these people, bred in [French] despotism, will suddenly be fitted for self government and republicanism?” This author was just as worried about the ability of “white” Louisianans to become American citizens as he was concerned about the other members of Louisiana society.¹²⁷

Many wondered if Napoleon had once again fooled the naïve Jefferson administration. One writer complained that, allowing “people of different nations, distinguished by dissimilar manners, various habits, strong prejudices, and fixed sentiments of attachments to several countries,” to enjoy the benefits of citizenship, “must soon produce a dissolution of the union.” This, as some writers pointed out, would only help Bonaparte in the long run by providing a ready ally for him in the western hemisphere. Others wondered if Napoleon had deliberately inserted the third article knowing that the United States could not fulfill this part of the document and thus giving France a reason to “justly abrogate the whole treaty,” and reclaim Louisiana without paying back the \$15 million. Nothing seemed impossible to the wily Napoleon in 1804.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ *The Repertory* (Boston, MA), February 25, 1806; *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), October 31, 1803.

¹²⁸ *Kennebec Gazette* (Augusta, ME), November 11, 1804.

Other writers were not quite so conspiratorial. After all, as one historian has pointed out, “nationhood as a concept was in its infancy,” in 1803. Over thirty years ago, James Kettner showed that Americans came from an English tradition of citizenship which did not allow for a subject to truly change their allegiance. In other words, once one was a citizen of the “Great Republic” of France, one was always French. Louisiana, then, which changed hands on a regular basis, presented a particularly troubling case for Americans. The inhabitants had been French subjects; therefore they would always be—at their core—French. This line of reasoning was a stretch in a post-revolutionary world where so many British colonists had voluntarily thrown off their own allegiance to the British monarch, but, as Peter Kastor has recently demonstrated, the argument still had real power when it came to the bewildering variety of seemingly strange peoples in Louisiana. After all, some of the older ones had been French, British, and Spanish subjects at various times in their lives—and this was only counting those who would have identified themselves as of European decent. Few spoke English as a first language—and many balked when their first governor, William Claiborne spoke no French. Members of the opposition had legitimate reason to question where the allegiance of Louisianans truly lay.¹²⁹

Even Bonaparte himself—or at least his minions—made this charge more believable. In the widely published farewell to the people of Louisiana, the French commissioner in New Orleans, Pierre Laussat, proudly announced that the First Consul congratulated the people of the territory on their “peaceful emancipation.” Bonaparte, he said, would always think on the inhabitants of Louisiana as his brothers. “Your children will become our children,” he

¹²⁹ James Kettner, *The Development of American Citizenship, 1607-1870* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1978); Ketter, however pays very little attention to the problems of citizenship in Louisiana. This void has been filled largely by Peter Kastor, “‘They are all Frenchmen’: Background and Nation in an Age of Transformation,” in *Empires of the Imagination: Transatlantic Histories of the Louisiana Purchase*, ed. Peter Kastor and François Weil (Charlottesville: VA: The University of Virginia Press, 2009) 239-267.

explained, “and our children will become yours.” Bonaparte, Laussat continued, wished to “perpetuate the ties which unite the French of Louisiana with the Frenchmen of Europe,” and he hoped that that sight of the French flag would, “never cease to gladden [their] hearts.” More than that, however, Laussat repeatedly reminded the inhabitants of Louisiana of Bonaparte’s insistence that they be incorporated into the union as soon as possible in order that their liberty, property and religion be protected.¹³⁰

Words like these greatly worried an author in *The Repertory*. “In the face of the World,” he wrote, Bonaparte had officially encouraged the Louisianans to remember their “common origin” as Frenchmen. According to the First Consul, the author continued, “The people of Louisiana... will always be attached to the interests of France.” Thus, “A band of Frenchmen is to be incorporated into our Union, and to remain, after incorporation, still Frenchmen, still attached to the interest of France.” Yet, the author marveled, “this threatened danger stirs no fear, the insult stirs no anger.” Another disgusted author wrote that Napoleon was obviously counting on the “cameleon [sic] inhabitants of Louisiana” to gain a “preponderance” of influence at “the national councils.” The fear was that Bonaparte knew that they would always maintain their “eternal love and gratitude” for France. Thus, as new states were carved out of Louisiana and gained congressional representation, eventually the emperor would have a nation of allies ready to do his bidding. Interestingly enough, Julien Vernet’s recent work on the transfer of Louisiana to the United States shows that, prior to the official handover, Laussat did indeed deliberately set up a pro-French municipal council in New Orleans in an attempt to maintain French influence in the region. Sometimes, rhetoric is reality.¹³¹

¹³⁰ *The Morning Chronicle* (New York, NY), January 3, 1804; but extremely widely reprinted throughout the nation.

¹³¹ *The Repertory* (New York, NY), March 16, 1804 and March 23, 1804; Julien Vernet, “More than Symbolic: Pierre Clement de Laussat’s Municipal Council and Louisianan Protest against American Territorial Government,” *French Colonial History* 4 (2003), 133-144.

What then was to be done with the “cameleon” inhabitants of Louisiana? More than a few Americans proposed solutions that sounded more like what Napoleon would impose on one of his “sister republics” than an “empire of liberty.” “I have always thought,” mused Federalist Gouverneur Morris (who had been of the loudest advocates for a preemptive military strike on New Orleans) “that when we should acquire Canada and Louisiana, it would be proper to govern them as provinces, and allow them no voice in our councils.” Senator George Campbell of Tennessee explained to his congressional colleagues that he considered the Louisianans as standing in, “nearly the relation to us as if they were a conquered country.” In the legal terms of the nineteenth-century, this meant that the United States would have had virtually unlimited power over their fate. Then, of course, there was the novelist and militant expansionist, Charles Brockden Brown, who fully expected that the United States would have to treat Louisiana’s “present inhabitants as vassals.” Presumably this would be the case until settlers from the United States moved into the area and supplanted the degenerate French and mixed-race population. Of course, these men carefully did not use any kind of reference to that ambitious despot, Napoleon. Clearly, there was clearly some cognitive dissonance at work here which the opposition was quick to point out.¹³²

Ultimately, the overwhelmingly pro-administration Congress agreed—at least to a certain extent—with those who agitated for a less than republican solution for Louisiana. Both the act authorizing the occupation of Louisiana and the act creating the territorial government gave the executive branch sweeping authority to administer the new region and severely limited any popular participation in government. According to the occupation document, the President was

¹³² Morris to Henry Livingston, December 4, 1803, in *The Life of Gouverneur Morris with Selections from his Correspondence* ed. Jared Sparks, 3 vols., (Boston, MA: Gray and Bowen, 1832) III, 192; *Annals of Congress*, 8th Cong., 1st Sess., 1803, vol. 13, 1058-59; Brown, *An Address to the Government of the United States*, 52.

authorized to “employ any part of the army and navy of the United States,” as well as the militia to enforce the transfer. Presidential supporters saw this threat of force as particularly important given that Spain had threatened to contest the occupation and they still occupied the territory even though it had been (in theory at least) ceded to France. Then, of course, there was no guarantee that “cameleon” inhabitants of Louisiana had any interest in becoming part of the United States. The act also gave the President the unilateral authority to exercise all “military, civil and judicial powers,” in Louisiana until such time as Congress could make other arrangements.¹³³

Five months later the Congress passed the statute creating the territorial government of Louisiana. They created a governor, who would be appointed by the President and serve at his pleasure. The governor would be assisted by a council of the thirteen “most fit and discreet persons of the territory.” These too would be appointed by the President, as would the judges who would see to the judicial needs of the territory, and the officers of the territorial militia. In fact, every virtually civil, military, and judicial officer of the new territory would be appointed by the President of the United States. Significantly, there would be no legislature. Why the Congress set up a government with so much power invested in the president is a matter of conjecture. It does however, seem quite surprising given the Americans’ familiarity with British colonial rule. Not everyone was happy with the outcome, of course. One Federalist Senator glowered, “this is a Colonial system of government.” He was not being complementary.¹³⁴

¹³³ “An Act to Enable the President of the United States to take Possession of the Territories ceded by France,” *Statutes at Large of the United States of America, 1789-1873* vol. 2, 8th Cong., 1st Sess, (October 31, 1803), 245.

¹³⁴ See James Scanlon, “A Sudden Conceit: Jefferson and the Louisiana Government Bill of 1804,” *Louisiana History* 9 no. 2 (Spring, 1968): 139-162; “An Act Erecting Louisiana into Two Territories and Providing for the Government Thereof,” *Statutes at Large of the United States of America, 1789-1873* vol. 2, 8th Cong., 1st Sess, (March 26, 1804), 283-289; Plumer, *William Plumer’s Memorandum*, 145.

The opposition launched a counterattack that tied the American occupation of Louisiana directly to Bonaparte. In March of 1804, the editor of Boston's *Repertory* vented at what he saw as the potential for tyranny contained in act creating the territorial government. "*IT IS A DESPOTISM*" he wrote using all capitals and italics to emphasize his point. "Never, before, have we seen a system of government, constructed by any association of men, among whom *there was not of the people to be governed!*" The editor then tied the imperial occupation directly to the best imperialist he knew. "Without the least levity of allusion, we may truly say, this is a transaction worth the school of Bonaparte." For emphasis he explained exactly what he meant by this.

A country is partly bought, and partly conquered; for thousands of troops were in readiness to overpower any symptom of resistance which might appear, and which the order for the organization of those troops proves was expected. The American flag was hoisted under the protection of American arms. The purchasers of the country without the slightest reference to the opinions of its inhabitants, form a constitution for them, to which they must submit.

To the nineteenth-century reader, this all sounded suspiciously like how Bonaparte had treated his conquests during the Italian campaigns.¹³⁵

In 1796, for example, *The Minerva* had brought up several issues that Americans found themselves facing less than a decade later in the occupation of Louisiana. Confronted by Bonaparte's successful campaigns in Italy, *The Minerva* lamented that this conquest was done in the name of republicanism. Calling attention to an order of Bonaparte's which threatened to burn the homes of any Italians who did not submit to his "republican" rule, the editor groaned, "this is the gentle language of republicanism." In another article the editor bewailed Bonaparte's monetary exploitation of the Italian republics. He could understand the abuse of the native population as an unfortunate side effect of war, but, "to give these operations an air of honor and

¹³⁵ *The Repertory* (Boston, MA), March 6, 1804.

generosity,” Bonaparte had played the hypocrite and pretended “to *conquer* the people into *freedom*.” This maligning of republicanism was the worst tragedy of the conflict, according to the *Minerva*. Eight years later, Americans faced the some of these same issues as they debated how to treat the potentially hostile population of Louisiana.¹³⁶

Returning to *The Repertory*, the editor had saved his most biting remarks for Thomas Jefferson himself. The act creating the new government in Louisiana gave the President virtually unlimited power, the editor fumed. “Have we got an angel in the shape of Thomas Jefferson,” he asked sarcastically, “that a territory of this boasted extent, bordering on a country not the most friendly to us, and peopled by inhabitants who will be very difficult to govern, should be solely entrusted to him?” Or, he added ominously, is Jefferson, “as Bonaparte announced himself, the delegate of heaven, commissioned to regulate the destines of men?” The editor of *The Repertory* was not alone in his assessment, though he perhaps was the most vocal.¹³⁷

Writing in the *Washington Federalist*, “A.B.” made similar accusations. “When Bonaparte took possession by violence of the government of France,” he wrote in February 1804, “the democrats, who till that event had been in the habit of extolling him as the purest and best of republicans, immediately denounced him, as a usurper, and a traitor because, forsooth, he had undertaken to rule a people without previously obtaining their consent.” Was this any different then what Jefferson had just done in the Louisiana territory he asked rhetorically. “He is surely as much of a usurper, as Bonaparte—for he has become their master, and is in the exercise of the most despotic and absolute authority without having consulted them on the subject.” A.B. thought the presidential supporters hypocritical for, “instead of applying to Jefferson, the angry and harsh epithets with which, but a short time since, they loaded Buonaparte [sic], they hail him

¹³⁶ *The Minerva* (Dedham, MA), September 10 and September 14, 1796.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

as the best of men and patriots.” They would probably continue to do so, A.B. sneered, even if, Jefferson, like Bonaparte, “were to enslave, and by fraud or violence, reduce one half of Europe under his dominion.” While Jefferson was certainly the first American president whose accumulation of political power would be likened to Bonaparte, he would not be the last.¹³⁸

The inhabitants of Louisiana were also concerned about the rather un-republican system with which their new imperial rulers had saddled them. In a remarkable document presented to Congress in the winter of 1804-05, Louisianans questioned the legitimacy of the American occupation. The document, titled, “A Remonstrance of the People of Louisiana against the Political System Adopted by Congress for Them,” appealed to the history of the United States to support their inclusion into the American system of liberal government. They briefly referenced Article III of the Purchase treaty, but, realizing its controversial nature, carefully framed most of their argument on the inalienable rights of mankind implied in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The Louisianans concluded by hoping that the nation which had been formed on the principle that “governors were intended for the governed and not the governed for the governors,” would not be “deaf to their just complaints.”¹³⁹

Many native-born Americans scoffed at the Remonstrance. *The Republican Watchtower* printed a particularly vicious response to the document which linked the Louisianan identity to Bonaparte rather than to the United States. In the article, the author posed as a Louisiana Creole and composed a satirical mockery of the Remonstrance. In the original document the authors had conspicuously avoided unnecessary references to Article III and made no reference at all to Bonaparte, but in the mock one, the Consul entered the argument in the first paragraph. “You

¹³⁸ “Democratic Consistency,” *The Washington Federalist* (Washington, DC), February 17, 1804.

¹³⁹ *Annals of Congress*, 8th Cong., 2nd Session, 1805, vol. 13, 1608-1621; Kastor, *The Nation's Crucible*, 57-61; Vernet, *Strangers on their Native Soil*, 68-74.

promise de citizen Bonaparte dat you shall take us into one state” the “Creole” wrote. This was a subtle jab at the Jefferson administration which had, after all, promised to incorporate these people into the United States as soon as possible in the Purchase Treaty. It also demonstrated a childish misunderstanding of the American political system. Of course, the “Creole” continued, it was not the Louisianans who had actually wanted to leave the French Empire; it was the Americans who “give fifteen million dollar for his [Bonaparte’s] permission for dat.” These comments demonstrated the “Creole’s” filial attachment to his French master. By starting the piece in this way, the author cleverly tapped into already established doubts that many Americans had about the administration of their new empire.¹⁴⁰

The debate over the occupation of Louisiana shows how elastic the rhetoric of Bonaparte could be in the hands of Americans by 1805. Where one group expressed concern that the Purchase Treaty required the inhabitants of Louisiana to *become* members of the American body politic, the other voiced concern about the *lack* of popular participation in the Louisiana government. Both groups ultimately tied their arguments to Napoleon Bonaparte. The popular debates over the occupation of Louisiana also lend credence to the arguments of recent historians like Jay Sexton and Ian Tyrrell who argue in *Empire’s Twin* that anti-imperialism was an “important shaper of imperialism.” This became even more evident in the pro-imperial arguments that developed over the next several months as Jeffersonians found themselves forced to appropriate the very language of their opponents to justify national expansion to the American public.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ *The Republican Watchtower* (New York, NY), September 5, 1804.

¹⁴¹ Ian Tyrrell and Jay Sexton, “Introduction” in *Empire’s Twin: US Anti-Imperialism from the Founding Era to the Age of Terrorism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 7.

As they celebrated the addition of Louisiana to the United States, pro-expansionists found that they could not help but compare the new empire of the United States to that of Bonaparte's France. As they did, they turned the potent anti-expansionist Bonaparte rhetoric of their opponents into a positive, pro-imperial argument. Even before the ink was dry on the treaty, the Jeffersonian senator from Kentucky, John Breckinridge, cheered the acquisition of, "an empire of perhaps have the extent of the one we possessed." Just as important to this old revolutionary was that this American empire had been won "from the most powerful and warlike nation on earth, without bloodshed, without the oppression of a single individual...through the peaceful forms of negotiation." To Breckinridge, the Louisiana Purchase showed just how different the peaceful conquests of United States were in comparison to the bloody wars of Bonaparte. Indeed, it even showed that peaceful conquest could overpower even the mighty Napoleon. Ironically, within weeks of making this speech Breckinridge would be introducing the legislation for the military occupation of the Louisiana territory.¹⁴²

When David Ramsay spoke, people listened, which, perhaps says something about the nature of the United States at the turn of the nineteenth-century. Though he had served as a doctor during the War for Independence and completed multiple terms as a member of the South Carolina legislature and in the Continental Congress, he was probably best known to Americans as a historian. His two-volume *History of the Revolution in South Carolina* was the first book to receive an American copyright. Amongst a host of other historical writings, he published several volumes on George Washington, as well as the first comprehensive history of the American Revolution. So, on May 12, 1804, when David Ramsay gave a stirring speech to "a very large audience" at St. Michael's Church in Charleston, South Carolina celebrating the Louisiana

¹⁴² *Annals of Congress*, 8th Cong., 1st Sess., 1803, vol. 13, 60; Scanlon, "A Sudden Conceit," 140-145.

“cession,” it was reprinted all over the nation. Within the month, anxious readers all over the nation could buy a printed copy for twenty-five cents at their local shop.¹⁴³

Ramsay’s message was similar to that of Breckinridge. He began with a geographer’s introduction to the new territory which painted a territory of “prairies or natural meadows of inexhaustible fertility” and forests that abounded “with excellent timber.” It did not take long, however, for the historian in Ramsay to think about the Louisiana “cession” within a geopolitical context. “In other countries, and under the direction of other governments,” he pointed out, “the energies of nations have been called forth—thousands of lives have been sacrificed—seas have been crimsoned with human blood in the attack or defense of a few acres or of barren rocks.” In 1804, no one would have had any doubt which “other government Ramsay had in mind. In case his audience was not already thinking about any number of Bonaparte’s bloody victories, Ramsay provided Malta as an example. For his audience, this would have immediately called to mind Napoleon’s attack on the island in 1798.¹⁴⁴

Not so for American expansion, Ramsay claimed. “We have gained this invaluable territory,” he continued, “without the imposition of any new taxes; and at the same time with the consent of the inhabitants, and without giving offense to any of the powers in Europe.” With these words Ramsay simply brushed aside Federalist concerns about the lack of popular participation in the new territorial government or the lingering doubts about Spanish title to the territory. He also countered Federalist apprehension about paying \$15 million to support Bonaparte’s wars in Europe by insisting on calling the Purchase a “cession.” This choice of

¹⁴³ Peter Messer, “From a Revolutionary History to a History of Revolution: David Ramsay and the American Revolution,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 22 no. 2 (Summer 2002) 205-233; for a rhetorical take on the speech, see Michael Hostetler, “David Ramsay and Louisiana: Time and Space in the Adolescent Rhetoric of America,” *Western Journal of Communication* 70 no.2 (April 2006) 134-146; *Carolina Gazette* (Charleston, SC), May 18, 1804; *The Times* (Alexandria, VA), May 25, 1804.

¹⁴⁴ *The Republican Watchtower*, June 16, 1804.

words linguistically turned the tables on Federalists who had railed against Jefferson's naivety in dealing with Bonaparte by suggesting that it was actually Jefferson's hardnosed negotiations which had gotten the best of the First Consul.¹⁴⁵

With the minds of his audience already on Napoleon, Ramsay doggedly stayed on the theme. He asked the audience to consider what would have happened if Louisiana had stayed "in the hands of that wonderful man, who presides over France." He imagined that Bonaparte would have used New Orleans as the "fulcrum of an immense lever by which he would have elevated or depressed our western country in subserviency to his gigantic projects." He would have turned Kentucky and Tennessee into virtual colonies and eventually this would have inevitably led to between east and west. Thus, for Ramsay, Bonaparte's expansion generated war and bloodshed, but the exact same action taken by Americans produced peace.¹⁴⁶

In many ways, this reflected a question over whether the United States was something new—a nation freed from the history of Europe. For the Federalists, the answer had been "no." They saw the United States as a nation that would have to play by Europe's rules, which is why they so strongly argued for seizing Louisiana by force before the transfer to Napoleon took place during the Mississippi Crisis. On the other hand, for Ramsay and his fellow Jeffersonians, the bloodless acquisition of Louisiana through negotiation seemed to prove that the United States was truly different than Bonaparte, Europe, and the rest of the world. In a newspaper retrospective of 1804, one proud expansionist explained the difference between the United States and France. "Looking on America," he began, "we see an extensive empire, enlarging her territory...at peace with the world and rising with happy celerity to that rank in the scale of

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

nations, to which her character, her institutions, her privileges, her pursuits give a title.” On the other hand, across the Atlantic, one saw Bonaparte, “actively employed in equipping numerous armaments to make a decent on England, and at the same time squabbling with all the rest of Europe.” Like Ramsay, this author highlighted American exceptionalism by seeing expansion by the United States as establishing peace in North America while simultaneously viewing French expansion as conquest.¹⁴⁷

The overwhelming passage of the Louisiana Purchase Treaty showed that Americans had largely accepted that their nation would expand—at least into Louisiana. The raucous debate surrounding the treaty and the terms of occupation demonstrates that Americans still virulently disagreed over how the nation ought to expand, how the empire ought to be administered, and what American expansion meant for the rest of the rest of the world. As they contested these important questions, Napoleon increasingly became the standard by which Americans measured their decisions over expansion and the administration of their new empire. Yet, as many had foreseen, Louisiana would not be the last place Americans coveted for their own. In fact, even where the boundaries of Louisiana were was a perplexing question that the Purchase Treaty had not settled. Over the next four decades Americans sought to work out exactly what their “empire of liberty” actually was and how they ought to approach it. As they did, the ideas and rhetoric of Napoleon continued to occupy an important place in their debates.

¹⁴⁷ *The Daily Advertiser* (New York, NY), January 1, 1805.

CHAPTER 4 ALLIES AND ANNEXATIONISTS: FLORIDA AND THE WAR OF 1812

Readers of the *Federal Republican* were in for a treat as they opened their papers on the morning of April 7, 1813. Inside, they found an article titled, “Short Answers to Short Questions.” The article was a response to another article that had appeared in the *Richmond Enquirer*—a Jeffersonian paper—earlier that year and took the form of a series of questions and answers on the War of 1812 that read very much like a catechism. In one question, for example, the Federalist faithful read, “Q. Was it ambition which declared [the war]?” To which the answer was, “Yes. Low, sordid, despicable ambition. The ambition to be dignified by the title of Ally to Imperial France.” Shortly thereafter, the readers came to this question regarding the motives for war. “Q. Is it the thirst for dominion? A. Not content with Louisiana and West Florida, the declared object of the war was the conquest of Canada...and the occupation of her territories.” Near the end of the article, the reader came across a similar question with a similar answer. “Q. Is [the war] for the unjust plunder of a poorer neighbor? A. Let the Indians, Canadians, and Floridians answer.” As this article demonstrates, by the War of 1812, the links between aggressive American expansion and the imperialism Napoleon’s France were solidified to the point where they were literally part of the Federalist catechism.¹⁴⁸

Historians have known that the borderlands were central to the War of 1812 since Julius Pratt published *Expansionists of 1812* in 1925. However, the “borderlands” idea remains rather nebulous. Many recent historians of the war have taken “the borderlands” to mean that our geographic and demographic understanding of the war is too limited. These historians have incorporated a much broader view of the war along these lines. In 1981, Frank Owsley Jr. argued that the Creek War of 1813-14 should be seen as part of a bigger campaign for the South.

¹⁴⁸ “Short Answers to Short Questions,” *Federal Republican* (Baltimore, MD), April 7, 1813.

More recently, James Cusick suggested that the Patriot War in Spanish East Florida, which lasted in fits and starts from 1811 to 1814 should also be seen as part of a broader war narrative that emphasizes the regional nature of the conflict. Jeremy Black also expanded our view of the war in the other direction by tying its military and strategic aspects back into the Atlantic context of the Napoleonic Wars. Implicitly, all these historians suggested that we rethink the War of 1812 as a war of American conquest, rather than as a tiny republic fighting desperately for survival against the British empire.¹⁴⁹

This chapter builds on all of this new research into the military history of the War of 1812 by suggesting that to understand how Americans—in particular Federalists—came to terms with the war’s expansionist aims we must first understand the rhetoric behind their debate over aggression in Florida. There is, of necessity, a military component to any work that deals with armed expansion and aggressive diplomacy, but, this is not a military history in the strictest sense. Instead, this chapter explores how Americans—especially the American public—vigorously debated how to come to terms with their own expansion through the midpoint of the War of 1812. Americans struggled with the language to explain their republican expansion, though elites drew extensively on the theory of Emmerich Vattel. To make their case to the American public, however, both Jeffersonians and Federalists returned to the person and concepts with whom their constituents best identified as imperialism personified: Napoleon Bonaparte. Americans found that they could best explain and understand their own expansion

¹⁴⁹ By near unanimous acclaim, the best general work on the War of 1812 remains Donald Hickey, *The Forgotten War of 1812* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Julius Pratt, *Expansionists of 1812* (New York, 1925); Frank L. Owsley Jr., *The Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands: The Creek War and the War of 1812* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1981); James Cusick, *The Other War of 1812: The Patriot War and the Invasion of East Florida* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003); Jeremy Black, *The War of 1812 in the Age of Napoleon* (Norman, OK: The University of Oklahoma Press, 2009); Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2009).

into Florida by looking across the Atlantic to France, and applying what they saw to their own unique context.

The decade between the Louisiana Purchase and the beginning of the War of 1812 were characterized by increasingly acrimonious and hyper-partisan debates over the future of American foreign policy. Though clearly the minority, Federalists and disgruntled Jeffersonians managed to hold the upper hand for the remainder of Jefferson's time in office. They derailed administration plans to force a sale of Spanish Florida in 1806, and then managed to turn the Burr Conspiracy into a referendum on Jeffersonian expansion policy in 1807. Elected in 1808, the new Jeffersonian president, James Madison, turned the tables on the opposition. In 1811, he took advantage of a popular revolt in West Florida to seize that province from under the nose of the Spanish despite fierce opposition from Federalists. Finally, in 1812, Madison was able to secure the necessary votes for America's first declared war despite vigorous opposition from his Federalist opponents.

After losing the debates over the Louisiana Purchase, anti-expansionists—now becoming more and more identifiable as the Federalist party—spent most of 1805 regrouping and waiting for an opening through which to launch a rhetorical counterattack. In 1806, they got their chance when expansionists made a colossal tactical blunder in their pursuit of Florida. Americans had long seen Florida as a natural part of their economic and physical security. As discussed in the first chapter, not a few militant expansionists had suggested seizing Florida along with New Orleans to protect American interests during the Mississippi crisis. In particular, West Florida, which referred to that part of Florida which lay west of the Perdido River, captivated the imagination of many Americans. In the hand of the United States, the numerous rivers of area would provide a rich commercial outlet for the burgeoning American settlements in what would

become Mississippi and Alabama. The Spanish, however, saw this same strip of land as their last piece of leverage against the monstrous territorial ambitions of the United States.¹⁵⁰

Unfortunately, in their haste to snap up Louisiana from Bonaparte in 1803, American negotiators had failed to pin the French down on the exact limits of the territory. This was almost certainly a deliberate ploy of the First Consul. With the borders between the United States and Spain left open to interpretation, only he could act as ultimate arbiter of the Purchase treaty—an extremely useful bargaining chip with war looming. As Bonaparte intended, the nebulous boundaries immediately led to friction between the United States and Spain with both nations appealing to Napoleon for support. In the dreams of American expansionists (including the Jefferson administration) Louisiana included both east and west Florida, most of Texas and even Oregon. Meanwhile, the Spanish insisted, correctly as a matter of fact, that neither Florida nor Texas had been part of the original retrocession to France and thus could not have been part of the French sale to the United States. In typical Bonaparte fashion, the emperor played both sides of the issue for as long as he could. Eventually, however, war forced him to publicly support the Spanish claims. Spain, after all, had proven itself as one of Bonaparte's more reliable, if reluctant, wartime allies. Even more importantly, it possessed a large fleet with which Napoleon could challenge British naval supremacy.¹⁵¹

Along the contested border of West Florida, matters quickly spiraled out of Bonaparte's control. In June 1804, two American brothers named Kemper and a gang of toughs marched on

¹⁵⁰ The first, and most comprehensive treatment of U.S.-Florida relations is Isaac J. Cox, *The West Florida Controversy: A Study in American Diplomacy 1790-1813* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1918); also see Wanjohi Waciuma, *Intervention in the Spanish Floridas: A Study in Jeffersonian Foreign Policy* (Boston: Branden Press, 1976).

¹⁵¹ Robert Tucker and David Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford, 1990) 137-156; DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana*, 169-174, 215-216, 221-225; also see, Clifford Egan "The United States, France and West Florida," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (January, 1969) 227-252; Egan argues that Napoleon bungled his Florida policy at least as much as Jefferson did, but, more recent scholarship has shown that Bonaparte was the real winner in Florida.

the West Florida capital of Baton Rouge in an attempt to convince the local population to declare their independence from Spain. Theirs were mostly local grievances, however, and the majority of Floridians were generally happy with Spanish rule. When support for their rebellion failed to materialize, the filibusters fled into Mississippi. Understandably, the Spanish believed that the American government had something to do with the plot, but the territorial governor of Louisiana, William Claiborne, refused to extradite the two conspirators, and the wary Spanish began shifting troops into the disputed area. In response, the President dispatched a sizeable portion of the tiny American army to the region. Another series of coups by disaffected Americans in West Florida fizzled in mid-1805 and caused both sides to edge even closer to a war-footing. In December, Jefferson sent a State of the Union message to the new congress that sounded a remarkably bellicose tone. “Our citizens have been seized, and their property plundered...by the regular officers and soldiers” of the government of Spain he warned ominously. These depredations, he added, had taken place on territory claimed by the United States as Louisiana. A few days later, Congress went into a secret closed-door session. War seemed but a matter of time.¹⁵²

When Congress emerged in early February, most Americans were stunned at the result. Instead of the expected vote for war, Congress had instead passed “An Act Making Provision for Defraying any Extraordinary Expenses Attending the Intercourse between the United States and Foreign Nations.” This vaguely worded act, popularly referred to as the “Two Million Dollar Act,” authorized the President to spend up to \$2 million to negotiate for Florida. To Americans who viewed West Florida as having been part of the original Louisiana Purchase, this seemed

¹⁵² Andrew McMichael, *Atlantic Loyalties: Americans in Spanish West Florida* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2008), 76-79, 84-101; *Journal of the United States Senate*, 9th Cong., 1st sess., 3 December, 1805, 4-8.

like paying for the same real estate twice. Others were uncomfortable with what looked suspiciously like bribe money.¹⁵³ Horrified at what one prominent Jeffersonian—the Virginian John Randolph—saw as a “base prostration of national character,” the congressional opposition began launching devastating rhetorical salvos at the Jeffersonian plan almost as soon as the prohibition on releasing details of the secret proceedings was lifted at the end of March. As before with the Louisiana Purchase, the vast majority of the opposition was in favor of expansion, but argued that the manner of expansion was just as important as the physical expansion itself. As they went on the offensive, the French Emperor and his empire figured prominently in the argument against expansion at all moral and economic costs.¹⁵⁴

Without knowing the full details of Jefferson’s gambit for West Florida, virtually all of the opposition saw the President prostrating American interests at the feet of Bonaparte instead

¹⁵³ This was actually not far from the truth. Indeed, had the opposition known the President’s decidedly unrepublican plan for the money they probably would have been even more concerned for the national character. In a secret note to Congress on December 6, 1805, Jefferson merely asked Congress for the authority to use \$2 million to take advantage of the present situation in Europe and negotiate for Florida from a position of advantage. Jefferson’s actual plan for the negotiations, however, was breathtaking in its Machiavellian intrigue. The full details were known only to a few close confidants and to this day remain difficult to piece together with complete certainty, but the basic facts seem to be as follows. In August of 1805, Jefferson’s minister to France had been approached by an agent from the French government. The unnamed agent suggested that despite his Emperor’s public support for Spain, the cash strapped Bonaparte would be quite willing to ensure that Florida went to the Americans and would even acknowledge a generous helping of Texas as part of Louisiana—for the right price. The evidence strongly suggests that Jefferson planned on taking the Emperor up on his clandestine offer. According to the scheme—which could hardly be described as anything other than money laundering—Bonaparte would pressure his ally to cede Florida to Americans, and, in return, the Americans would provide \$2 million directly to France in “payment” of some dubious debts that France claimed of Spain as well as forgive \$3 million worth of questionable claims that the U.S. had against Spain for their actions in suppressing the West Florida filibusters. For more of the sordid details, see the following: *The Complete Anas of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Franklin Sawvel (New York: The Roundtable Press, 1903) 232-234; also see notes exchanged between Jefferson and Albert Gallatin in the Thomas Jefferson Papers housed within the National Archives *Founders Online* database: “From Albert Gallatin to Thomas Jefferson, 3 December 1805” and “From Thomas Jefferson to Albert Gallatin, 4 December 1805,” *Founders Online*, National Archives; as well as a letter “From Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 23 October 1805,” *Founders Online*, National Archives; the best secondary sources for this affair are Clifford Eagan, “The United States, France, and West Florida: 1803-1807,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 47 no. 3 (January 1969): 227-52; also see shorter versions in J.C.A. Stagg, *Borderlines in Borderlands: James Madison and the Spanish American Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: Yale University Press, 2009) 45-47; and DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana*, 215-216.

¹⁵⁴ *Annals of Congress*, 9th Cong., 1st Session, 1805-06, vol. 15, p.18-19, 946-993, 1117-1144. “An Act Making Provision for Defraying any Extraordinary Expenses Attending the Intercourse between the United States and Foreign Nations,” *Statutes at Large of the United States of America, 1789-1873* vol. 2, 9th Cong., 1st Sess., (February 13, 1806), 349-350.

of Machiavellian intrigue on the part of the President. One typically bellicose Federalist, for example, was extremely disappointed to hear that Congress's secret session had not been called for the raising of, "ships, troops and taxes" for a war with Spain, but instead for voting "TRIBUTE to Bonaparte!" He found it unconscionable that the United States should pay for Louisiana a second time. This was, he fumed, nothing more than "servile condescension to the French tyrant" who demanded "*Tribute, Tribute, Tribute.*" Federalists had long seen Jefferson and his party as kowtowing to the French empire, but the emphasis on the United States becoming a full-fledged tributary to the French Republic was a new device which owed its sting to what Americans saw as the ill-treatment of Napoleon's "sister republics" in Europe.¹⁵⁵

The idea of tribute was a powerful one in early America because it implied dependence. Dependence on anyone or anything was dangerous because it robbed an actor of their freedom to act in the best interest of the community. Americans understood this freedom to act independently as the characteristic that made classical republicanism possible. Without it, an actor was little better than a slave. The actor might be an individual, but it could also be a community or even a nation. Napoleonic Europe furnished perfect models of this dependence in the semi-autonomous "sister republics" of France. As the Napoleonic wars dragged on, Americans saw these dependent satellites being milked for money and men to supply the ravenous needs of the French war machine.¹⁵⁶

Americans were not shy about using these examples in their everyday discourse. For example, when one New England author complained that while New England states provided the Federal government with the overwhelming majority of its tax revenue, it was the southern slave

¹⁵⁵ *The Repertory* (Boston, MA), April 15, 1806.

¹⁵⁶ Linda Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), 185-86.

states that received the majority of federal post-office funds, he used a classic Napoleonic illustration. “Does not the enlightened government of the French Republic,” he asked, “in a like manner receive tribute from Spain, Portugal, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, Hanover, and the numerous dependent principalities of Germany?” He concluded sarcastically, “Are not our proceedings equal and correct according to the model of our sister republic, and will they not very speedily have the same desirable and happy issue, with respect to our equality, liberty and independence?”¹⁵⁷

Because it was so effective, other opposition writers quickly took up the refrain of “tribute” to Bonaparte in the wake of the Two Million Dollar Act. Many publicly questioned whether the United States was truly the master of its own foreign policy—the hallmark of national independence. One author, for example, cringed at “giving *Two Millions* of dollars to France, to have Bonaparte’s permission to treat with Spain.” The author had no faith in the Jeffersonian members of Congress to protect American interests or independence. “If Jefferson & Co. should pass a law to transfer the independence and liberties of this country to the Emperor Napoleon,” he snarled, “a majority of these exclusive patriots would be found to justify the measure.”¹⁵⁸

Others used the same message, but presented a more dejected rather than angry tone. For example, “Col. Cent” who wrote under a headline that cleverly reversed the famous rallying cry of the XYZ Affair from “Millions for Defense, not a Cent for Tribute” to “Millions for Tribute, not a Cent for Defense.” Col. Cent sadly suggested that, “the word Independence be stricken from our records and the declaration thereof sent off with the tribute money.” Another

¹⁵⁷ Even the term “enlightened government” was a Napoleonic blow at Jefferson, who, in his announcement of the Louisiana Purchase treaty, had made the mistake of praising the “enlightened” policy of the government of France; *The Post Boy* (Windsor, VT), April 2, 1805.

¹⁵⁸ *The Portland Gazette and Maine Advertiser* (Portland, ME), April 21, 1806.

(misinformed) opposition author sadly concluded that that since sixty tons of silver had set sail for France as a “peace offering to Bonaparte” even before the Congress had lifted the veil of secrecy from its disgraceful proceedings, “these states, once free, sovereign and independent, [have] become a humble tributary to France.”¹⁵⁹

Not every member of the opposition was quite so maudlin, however. The West Florida fiasco provided a marvelous opportunity for Federalists to sharpen their satiric wit. Several newspapers offered a reworked version of Yankee Doodle that they saw as more appropriate for the times. It featured the rousing chorus,

Yankee Doodle keep it up!

Yankee Doodle dandy!

A word or two from *Bonaparte*

goes down like sugar candy.

The ditty closed with the biting verse,

Our State Machine is mov'd about,

Some say on slippery rollers;

We've sent a *Hornet's Nest* to *France*

To sting the French with *dollars*

To make them feel our desp'rate power,

So secret was the doing,

That few e'er thought, at *Bona's* nod,

A *tribute* was a brewing.

¹⁵⁹ “Bonaparte’s Money,” *The Post Boy* (Windsor, VT), April 22, 1806; *The Hampshire Federalist* (Springfield, MA), April 29, 1806.

The core message of the song was essentially the same as in the other pieces. However, by appropriating a popular song of the revolution, the opposition portrayed the Jefferson's actions not only as fundamentally weak and laughable, but also as betraying the nation itself. The song also shows that the opposition made efforts to reach an audience beyond than the Federalist elite of New England.¹⁶⁰

Another, similarly irreverent format that the opposition began to use was the satirical cartoon. In response to Jefferson's West Florida woes, cartoonist James Akin produced a popular cartoon titled "The Prairie Dog Sickened at the Sting of the Hornet" (figure 1). The cartoon was only produced as a stand-alone print, but it was reproduced widely enough to justify satirical commentary in two of the most important Federalist newspapers of the period. In the cartoon, Jefferson is portrayed with the body of a prairie dog—undoubtedly a reference to the "wilderness" of Louisiana. He is in the act of vomiting up \$2 million while a French diplomat teases him with maps of East and West Florida. Napoleon appears as a hornet that has just stung the prairie dog, thus, in the words of the *New York Gazette*, "acting as a violent emetic on the terror-struck spaniel." Though Bonaparte is the smallest figure in the drawing, the cartoon is clearly a commentary on his inordinate power over Jefferson. The title of the cartoon itself indicates the diplomatic connection between the prairie dog and the hornet and offers a clear indication of which man Akin thought was in control of the relationship.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ *The Hampshire Federalist* (Springfield, MA), April 29, 1806.

¹⁶¹ James Akin, "The Prairie Dog Sickened at the Sting of the Hornet," 1806, Library of Congress, Online <<http://lccn.loc.gov/2002708977>>; Dzurec, "Of Salt Mountains, Prairie Dogs and Horned Frogs," 99-102; Maureen O'Brien Quimby, "The Political Art of James Akin," *Winterthur Portfolio* 7 (1972), 59-112; *New York Gazette*, May 12, 1806; the reference to the hornet was also deliberate, as it was (inaccurately) rumored that \$2 million worth of silver had sailed to France onboard the sloop *USS Hornet* as part of Jefferson's negotiations for Florida. The careful reader will note the reference to the "*Hornet's Nest*" in the Yankee Doodle parody described in the previous paragraph.



Figure 1. James Akin, “The Prairie Dog Sickened at the Sting of the Hornet,” 1806

In case anyone missed the point of the cartoon, the Federalist newspapers quickly published a satirical explanation that highlighted the new role of Bonaparte in directing American foreign policy. The cartoon was, the article insisted, was a “historical” piece of art and not a caricature—as suggested by some “ill-natured folks.” Indeed, said the article, it was such a masterpiece that it now hung in the halls of the Bonaparte’s Palace, where it was greatly enjoyed by the emperor himself. With great attention to historical detail, the article continued, the painting depicted Bonaparte administering a new purgative to a unique species of North American dog which caused him to “disgorge *Two Millions of Dollars* at the feet of a certain little Marquis.” The “dreadful operation” of this medicine was already well known in “Holland, Spain, Italy, and most parts of the Continent of Europe, by the name of the Napoleon physic.”

Like the parody of Yankee Doodle, Akins's cartoon and the satirical commentary that went with it demonstrate a turn toward the satirical in the use of Napoleon in rhetoric over expansion, and show that Bonaparte had become a cultural symbol with whom Americans regardless of class could identify.¹⁶²

For one of the rare times in American history, the opposition rhetoric was so effective that it completely derailed plans for expansion. Stunned at the furor he had created and at the defection of many in his own party, Jefferson dropped all ideas of using the French Emperor as a mediator for West Florida. After a fresh round of negotiations with Madrid failed miserably in 1806, he quietly let the matter drop. The damage had been done, however, and despite their fervent insistence otherwise, Jefferson's allies could never quite shake the accusation that they were the toadies of Bonaparte.

After the decisive French victory at Austerlitz in 1806, the third coalition broke apart leaving Britain to carry on the struggle against Bonaparte alone. A fourth coalition went to war again later in the year, but was crushed by the end of 1807. Buoyed by his unbroken string of success, Bonaparte looked to reshape the map of Europe once again. In 1806, he reorganized the ancient Holy Roman Empire and formed the Confederation of Rhine in its place. Next, he established the Kingdom of Holland in the place of the Batavian Republic. In 1807, he organized the Grand Duchy of Warsaw (Poland) as a counterbalance to Russia, and, through the Decrees of Berlin and Milan, established the Continental System to put economic pressure on Great Britain. The Continental System proclaimed a blockade and closed all European ports to British ships—or neutral ships that had traded with Great Britain. By the start of 1808, Napoleon

¹⁶² *New York Gazette* (New York, NY), May 12, 1806; the same article was also printed in *The Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), May 19, 1806.

was quickly reaching the height of his power and even his opponents marveled at his ability to use Machiavellian tactics to remake political systems at will.

Americans too watched Bonaparte with a mixture of wonder and concern. To understand why Bonaparte's moves in Europe played perfectly into the fears of Americans who were already concerned about events on their southern border, we must leave Florida for the moment and take a digression into the murky world of the Burr conspiracy. Even after 200 years, historians have a difficult time explaining exactly what took place during the Burr conspiracy and separating the fact from the newspaper frenzy that resulted. Many modern historians have accepted the traditional account of Burr the national traitor. Put very briefly, this version account runs as follows. After killing the Federalist darling, Alexander Hamilton, in the famous duel at Weehawken, NJ, the Vice President emerged a marked man. Ostracized by his political friends and shunned by the President, he concocted a plot to recruit an army of secessionist westerners and, with help from Britain and Spain, establish a new empire in the states and territories west of the Alleghenies. Once this task was complete, he expected to lead his victorious army into Mexico, Spanish Florida and, possibly, march to Washington itself to unseat Jefferson.¹⁶³

More recent research, however, suggests that Burr probably only planned to take advantage of the war scare on the Texas/Louisiana border and lead a filibustering expedition into Spanish Mexico with the assistance of the British navy. Filibustering was a privately backed military invasion intended to topple a government by encouraging residents to "liberate" themselves from alleged tyranny. It had also been an integral part of the Jeffersonian strategy of

¹⁶³ This paragraph is heavily paraphrased from Nancy Isenberg, *Fallen Founder: The Life of Aaron Burr* (New York: Penguin, 2007) 272; For a modern account that portrays Burr as a traitor, see Buckner Melton, *Aaron Burr: Conspiracy to Treason* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2002).

peaceful expansion for many years. Interestingly enough, Burr was so ambiguous as to his plans that even those he attempted to recruit were somewhat mystified as to his ultimate intentions. One he attempted to sway was Andrew Jackson, who was at that time a Major General in the Tennessee militia. When Jackson reported on his odd meeting with Burr to his superior, he cautiously wondered if Burr's actions were occasioned by a desire to prevent Louisiana from being snatched up by "the rapacious hands of Bonapart," who, according to Jackson, "might be a troublesome neighbour to the united States."¹⁶⁴

Burr's filibustering plans fell into disarray during the fall of 1806. His chief co-conspirator, the slippery General James Wilkinson (who had been on the Spanish pay-roll for decades as a double agent) turned on his erstwhile confederate. Alleging that 20,000 Burrite freebooters were traveling south to attack New Orleans, Wilkinson fired off letters to Washington warning of the grave danger. Meanwhile, he set about preparing a defense of the Crescent City and purging the town of Burr's associates. In actuality, no such invasion force existed and Wilkinson was merely covering for his own long list of misdeeds. Once Burr realized Wilkinson's betrayal, he briefly attempted to flee. After only two weeks on the run, however, the former Vice President, along with about 100 cold and hungry supporters surrendered to authorities in Mississippi on January 12, 1807.¹⁶⁵

Such were the facts. What the nation's newspapers reported, however, was quite different. Burr had accumulated many political enemies in his life and now all of them sensed blood in the water. Accusations of treachery were made even more sensational when the subject was portrayed as the American Napoleon. Burr's ambitious character had been associated with

¹⁶⁴ Isenberg, *Fallen Founder*, 282-310; "Andrew Jackson to Daniel Smith, November 12, 1806," *The Papers of Andrew Jackson Digital Edition*, Daniel Feller, editor, Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2015.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 311-316.

that of Bonaparte since at least his presidential run in 1800, but his treason trial breathed new life to this old accusation. Early reports of Burr's activities noted the similarity between the ambitions of Burr and those of the French emperor. For example, the *Richmond Enquirer* suggested that the object of Burr's mission appeared to be establishing a western empire and that such a territory could only be run by an emperor "bearing a resemblance to *Bonaparte*." Many papers linked the two men through use of the word "emperor." Almost immediately, Burr was styled the "Emperor of the Quids" by the highly influential Jeffersonian paper, *The Aurora* in an attempt to distance Burr (himself a Jeffersonian) from the presidential wing of the party. Other papers called him "the little emperor." Thanks to the such actions, Americans of the Early Republic easily made a link between the characters of former vice president and the Napoleon.¹⁶⁶

For the Federalists, the Burr affair symbolized everything that was wrong with uncontrolled Jeffersonian expansion beyond the Mississippi. For as long as they could remember, the dark, foreboding western regions of country had seemed to breed discontent and threats of disunion. To them, Burr's alleged conspiracy demonstrated the weakness of the Federal government in the West and they focused on the threat to union highlighted by the imagined plot. The timing of the conspiracy also seemed suspicious to Federalists. For several years, Bonaparte's armies had been occupied in Europe, but with Napoleon's dramatic destruction of the Third and Fourth Coalitions, many thought they saw the ambitious and treacherous hand of Bonaparte behind the insidious machinations of Burr.

¹⁶⁶ For examples of early Napoleonic accusations against Burr see, *The Kennebec Gazette* (Augusta, ME), February 13, 1801; and *The Hampshire Gazette* (Northampton, MA), January 14, 1801; *The Enquirer* (Richmond, VA), December 11, 1806; *The Aurora* (Philadelphia, PA), December 12, 1806; The term Quid is derived from the Latin *Tertian Quid* (third thing) and in this context refers to the wing of the Jeffersonian party who opposed the administration. The best explanation of the movement is in Nobel Cunningham, "Who Were the Quids?" *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 50, no. 2 (September 1963), 252-263; *Suffolk Gazette* (Sag Harbor, NY), December 12, 1807.

On January 1, 1807, the Federalist *New York Gazette* reported with certainty that muskets of “new and of *French* manufacture” had been seized from the conspirators. Also, it was reported, among Burr’s associates, there were two “foreign gentlemen...who spoke the *French* language.” This could only indicate one thing according to the editors of the *Gazette*: Burr’s actions had been “conducted under the auspices of Napoleon.” A week later *The Western World* warned its readers that if the rumored destruction of the Prussian army at Jena-Auerstedt were true, it would clear the way for Bonaparte’s restless ambition to turn its gaze westward once again. The author warily concluded that, “since the late operations of col. Burr,” he suspected anyone who suggested that Bonaparte was not still interested in the conquest of North America of trying to “lull us into security, the more easily to conquer us.” Even after his acquittal, the perceived treachery of Burr remained linked to Bonaparte for many years to come. In mid-1810, with West Florida descending into chaos, Baltimore’s *Federal Republican* warned that Louisiana “contained a mass of excitable matter, every way fitted for the conjoint projects of Burr and Bonaparte.” This of course, was a throwback to Federalist demographic concerns of 1803 in which they had warned that that the citizens of Louisiana maintained their original allegiance to Bonaparte.¹⁶⁷

Even well after Burr’s acquittal, most of his countrymen continued to see him as the American Napoleon—and thus a powerful symbol of treacherous ambition. In 1808, the *Universal Gazette* printed a letter originally from the *National Intelligencer*. “We have enemies within our walls, inexorable, vigilant and powerful,” warned the anonymous author. “The same inordinate love of power which has raised Napoleon to his lofty eminence, impels them; and if they do not pursue the same means to attain their ends, it is because we are vigilant and

¹⁶⁷ *The New York Gazette* (New York, NY), January 1, 1807; *The Western World* (Frankfort, KY), January 8, 1807; *Federal Republican* (Baltimore, MD), May 31, 1810.

powerful.” It was worth remembering, concluded the author, that such treacherous enemies would have made Aaron Burr president, “and who doubts but that either he would have been another Napoleon or that our fields would have been crimsoned with blood.” Ultimately it was this linking of Burr to Bonaparte in the American mind which turned a filibustering expedition into treason.¹⁶⁸

The threats of internal dissention and international intrigue to the young republic that undergirded both the Federalist response to the Burr conspiracy were not new but they took on a new fervor due to popular renderings of Bonaparte in the American press. The first best-selling Bonaparte book in the United States was *A Secret History of the Court and Cabinet of St. Cloud*, which was already on its fourth printing in the United States by 1807. This lengthy work purported to be a series of letters written in 1805 from a “gentleman” in Paris to his confidant in London. Many of the anecdotes contained in the book found their way into the daily papers and later Napoleon biographies. The book portrayed the “wily Corsican” and his cronies as petty, cruel, conniving, self-serving, amateur aristocrats who did not play by the accepted rules of international diplomacy. Instead the Bonapartist regime relied on subterfuge and illegitimate force to achieve their foreign policy ends. Interestingly, the American-printed 1807 version of the book included a series of miscellaneous sketches at the end, one of which—the sketch of Swiss folk heroine Martha Glar—undoubtedly interested American readers a great deal as it included a direct warning to the people of the United States.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ *Universal Gazette* (Washington, DC), June 23, 1808; so ingrained in American lore was this connection between Burr and Napoleon that in 1846 several American newspapers sincerely hoped that someone might find plans that Burr had supposedly drawn up and presented to Napoleon for the conquest of Mexico during Burr’s exile in Europe after his acquittal. The newspapers wanted American army to have the benefit of Burr’s Napoleonic plans for the ongoing Mexican War; see for example, *Alexandria Gazette* (Alexandria, VA), October 16, 1846.

¹⁶⁹ *A Secret History of the Court and Cabinet of St. Cloud*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Brisban and Brisban, 1807), 345-352.

In the first sentence, the sketch emphasized to Americans that the conquest of the, “virtuous, peaceful, and happy little Republic of Switzerland,” had been accomplished by the, “intrigues...more than by the arms of France.” What followed was a dismal tale of “horrid outrages” perpetrated by the French and their treacherous collaborators on the poor people of Switzerland and the tragic death of Martha Glar. In 1797, the patriotic speech of this sixty-four-year-old grandmother, had roused the peasants of her village to resist the French invasion of republican Switzerland. Stirred by her call to arms, men, women, and children marched out to defend their homes, but after fighting valiantly most were butchered by the French army at the battle of Frauenbrun. Among the dead numbered Glar herself, her husband, her father, two of her sons, both of her daughters, her brother and three of her grand-daughters. Such stories of desperate female martial valor in defense of freedom easily recalled to the American mind the Revolutionary War images of Molly Corbin and Jane McCrea and Glar’s story tapped into an already established trope of American popular culture.¹⁷⁰

The author saved his most important point for last. The sketch ended with words of warning to his American audience. “May the sad fate of the simple, virtuous, and unoffending Swiss republics,” the author wrote, “be a solemn warning to all other states and kingdoms.” They must be ever on guard against the “perfidious machinations of the French.” In case the point was not clear enough, however, the author continued. It was inevitable that “the free, happy, and prosperous republic of the United States of America, shall...in the course of a very short time, be exposed to the threats of Gallic tyranny.” The author feared it might already be too late for Americans to open their eyes to the dangers of French duplicity. “God grant,” he

¹⁷⁰ Ibid; Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 54-55; Carol Belkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America’s Independence* (New York: Vintage Press, 2006), 138-139, 179.

prayed, “this sad prediction not be verified; God grant that we be guarded in time against French *intrigues* and *arms*, and that *at least* the present generation may not be witness to the ruin of their country.”¹⁷¹

Americans heard similar words of warning against treacherous Bonapartian foreign policy from other sources. In 1807, Thomas Branagan published *Political and Theological Disquisitions on the Signs of the Times Relative to the Present Conquests of France*. Branagan’s was a remarkable career. Irish by birth, he worked on slave ships and as a foreman on a plantation in the British slave colony of Antigua before having a Methodist conversation experience and embracing abolitionism. With his newfound faith he moved to first to London and eventually to New York and began writing against slavery. In *Disquisitions* he found a way to yoke his favorite subject to the looming threat of Bonaparte.¹⁷²

Branagan started by warning Americans that the dangers to the republic came in two interconnected forms: first, internal threats which he defined as, “domestic factions, foreign spies, and at least 900,000 mortal enemies who are continually gnawing the vitals of the body politic.” By the last, he meant the enslaved portion of the United States who might very well rise in revolt if given the opportunity by a treacherous foreign power like Bonaparte. After the chaos and violence of the successful slave revolt against the French in St. Domingue, American slave owners were already on edge about what might happen if their own slaves rose up against them. The idea that Napoleon might actually encourage such racial violence was carefully calculated to clearly illustrate how treacherous and opportunistic the emperor could be. The second threat was the large number of French emigrants who, according to Branagan, secretly maintained their

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 351-352.

¹⁷² Lewis Leary, “Thomas Branagan: Republican Rhetoric and Romanticism in America,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 77 no. 3 (July, 1953) 332-352.

allegiance to Bonaparte. He expected that unless Americans realized these dangers quickly, it would only be a matter of time before Bonaparte's agents raised a fifth column element in the United States made up of French immigrants, domestic "partizans" of Napoleon, and slaves. Once that was done, Bonaparte's crack troops could easily complete what "secret artifice and intrigue" of his agents had started.¹⁷³

Lest Americans think this an unrealistic scenario Branagan reminded his countrymen of the fates of Europe. "What was it that ruined Switzerland?" he asked, "I answer French diplomatic artifice." "What annihilated the Batavian Republic?" he continued, "I answer French fraternizing violence." Furthermore, he warned, there was no reason to think that Napoleon would be content with his European empire. "The quibbling policy of the court and cabinet of St. Cloud respecting the boundary of Louisiana," he pointed out, "should be sufficient evidence of the hostile intentions of France." "Be assured," said Branagan, it was ultimately Bonaparte who was "at the bottom" the Spanish "insolence" on the West Florida issue as well as the Burr conspiracy. For Branagan, these events showed clearly that Bonaparte was preparing the North American continent for subjection into his universal empire.¹⁷⁴

Branagan's basic theme of Napoleonic intrigue in foreign policy was echoed in the newspapers, Federalist as well as Jeffersonian, especially after Bonaparte ousted the Bourbon monarchy of his ally Spain in mid-1808. Napoleon had been justifiably suspicious of his Spanish ally after they considered joining Prussia against the French in the Fourth Coalition of 1806. The catastrophic Prussian defeat at Jena-Auerstaedt, however, convinced the Spanish to reconsider their moves, but they continued to greatly resent their domination by France,

¹⁷³ Thomas Branagan, *Political and Theological Disquisitions on the Signs of the Times* (Trenton, NJ, 1807), 34-35; Burstein and Isenberg, *Madison and Jefferson*, 374, 396-398.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 90-91, 123-126.

especially after they were forced to acquiesce to the French Continental System. The Continental System was Bonaparte's answer to the British blockade of Europe and closed all European ports to British goods in 1807.¹⁷⁵

With the Spanish unable to prevent British influence in British-allied Portugal, Napoleon sent almost 100,000 French troops into Spain to assist. This move proved extremely unpopular with the Spanish people and led to a military coup that forced the abdication of the ailing Charles IV in favor of his son. The older Bourbon monarch appealed to Bonaparte to act as an arbiter in the dynastic dispute. Always the opportunist, Napoleon forced both father and son to cede their throne to Bonaparte's brother Joseph in March 1808. Within months, however, a nationalistic Spanish resistance movement developed in the rural areas and set up an opposition government known as the Cádiz Regency. The country rapidly devolved into a brutal guerilla war in which both sides seemed willing to outdo each other in terms of ghastly cruelty.¹⁷⁶

Americans watched events in Spain very closely, and it seemed to play directly into their notions of Bonaparte that the popular press had been fomenting since at least 1805. Many, especially Federalists, applied the events of Spain to their own nation. When they connected the usurpation of the Spanish throne to the popular perceptions of Bonaparte in the media, the result was something like what appeared in the *North American and Mercantile Advertiser* in September 1808. In this letter to the editor, "A Ploughman" wrote that he had fallen asleep while reading reports of the brutal French occupation of Spain and had a dream. In this dream, "a little Frenchman" stood before him and handed him a copy of the Jeffersonian newspaper, *The Aurora* which contained a series of eleven edicts that mirrored French policies in Spain. Among other draconian policies, the edicts named his imperial majesty Joseph Bonaparte "King of the

¹⁷⁵ Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars*, 301-345.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Continent of North America,” forbade prints of Washington and Hamilton, and threatened to shoot any who kept weapons in their homes or gathered in groups of more than eight (children could gather in groups of up to twelve).¹⁷⁷

The aspect of this dream that would have stood out the most to the nineteenth century reader century was the complicity of other Americans in these usurpations of their own liberties. After all, it was not by accident that these edicts were being issued through the Jeffersonian papers and that one of the edicts authorized William Duane, the firebrand editor of *The Aurora*, to “arrest all printers who have published aught disrespectful to the Emperor and see that their bodies are pierced and stung on a pole.” Conspiratorial stories of Napoleon’s imperial treachery in Switzerland, Holland, and Spain created a volatile environment of suspicion in American politics perhaps only rivaled by the Red Scares of the twentieth century and forced Americans to reconsider their own place and role in the world.¹⁷⁸

The portrayal of Bonaparte’s perfidious and violent means of expansion in Europe, especially in Spain, and the seemingly very real threat of his subterfuge undermining the American republic during the Burr conspiracy led at least some Americans to conclude that the means of their nation’s own expansion in North America really did matter. For other Americans it reinvigorated a belief that foreign empires—especially that of Bonaparte—on the North American continent were dangerous to American national security. How to react to these threats though, provoked debate, even amongst political allies. These themes played an increasingly important role as Americans considered the ramifications of the overthrow of the Bourbon monarchy in Spain and their contemplation of war with Great Britain in 1812 to the persistent problem of Florida.

¹⁷⁷ *North American and Mercantile Advertiser* (Baltimore, MD), September 14, 1808.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Even before it was clear that Bonaparte would overthrow the Bourbons in Spain rumors were already flying about how the decaying situation in the Iberian Peninsula would alter American territorial ambitions. In late 1807 and early 1808, an extract of a letter from a well-placed source in Washington D.C. appeared in many papers. The author reported that rumors in the “most respectable circles” claimed Bonaparte would soon issue a proclamation in which he would no longer acknowledge American shipping neutrality—a reasonably accurate explanation of Bonaparte’s Milan Decree. Furthermore, and less accurately, it hinted that Napoleon would guarantee the United States Canada and Nova Scotia for American entry into a war against Great Britain.¹⁷⁹

This article touched off a brief firestorm. Federalists assumed that the Jefferson administration would take the bait and draw the United States into a military conflict with Great Britain for the misguided purposes of territorial aggrandizement. On January 5, 1808, the *Boston Repertory* published a “Dream.” In the dream, the author traveled to New York in May, but instead of finding a prosperous port, he found ships laid up, soldiers patrolling the streets, and fortifications being built along the East River. “The Genius of Bonaparte prevailed,” wailed the dreamer. “His imperial fiat: his imperious command, have been heard...and his voice was obeyed in terror on our shores.” The author cursed his “deluded leaders” for their ambition and warned his fellow countrymen. “Think not...that the wily Corsican will better keep his word with you than with the exhausted Republic of Holland,” he began. “Think not that you will be left peaceably to occupy the provinces of Canada or Nova Scotia when conquered by your allied forces...think not the mighty Bonaparte will generously yield up the boon of the Floridas.” Such were the miseries, he concluded, that flowed from “an ambition of territorial aggrandizement.”

¹⁷⁹ For one of many examples, see *The Republican Watchtower* (New York, NY), December 25, 1807.

The Federalist suggestion of a military alliance between France and the United States was a relatively new rhetorical tool that gained power as time went on. At this early date, however, it was not particularly effective since the Jefferson administration confined itself to economic warfare and harsh language against the British.¹⁸⁰

Other Federalists also decried any military action in support of France. An author identifying himself only as AB wrote an article that ran in several newspapers, including page one of the *New York Spectator*. He asked the administration if they really believed that Bonaparte would allow any nation to rival his own empire. Did they truly think that Bonaparte would actually allow the United States to “remain as it is now, ONE VAST OR RATHER BOUNDLESS STATE?” This was an interesting line of attack. In effect, AB imagined a bipolar world dominated in the west by the United States, and in the east by Napoleon. Such a world might seem reasonable to the starry-eyed Jeffersonians, but not to Bonaparte. Would the emperor, asked AB rhetorically, allow the United States “to cross in any direction, his gigantic march toward universal dominion?” The answer, was, of course, a negative one.¹⁸¹

Another gloomy take was offered by an author writing under the pseudonym “Peace.” In a widely reprinted article titled, “War Unnecessary and Ruinous,” he decried any war against Great Britain because it would do nothing but eventually draw the United States into a unwinnable war with Napoleon. Like AB, “Peace” could not imagine a world in which Bonaparte could allow the United States to remain the dominate power in the Americas. There were no limits to French ambition he wrote, and it was useless to trust in patriotic American unity in case of war against the French. Almost quoting verbatim from *A Secret History of the Court and Cabinet of St. Cloud*, he wrote, “France has done more by her intrigues than her

¹⁸⁰ *The Repertory* (Boston, MA), January 5, 1808.

¹⁸¹ *The New York Spectator* (New York, NY), March 5, 1808.

arms,” and, he reminded his readers, “are there not Burrs and Wilkinsons in our country?” “My fears for the independence of my country,” he stated flatly, “are founded on the character of Bonaparte.” It was the height of foolishness, he wrote, to trust any territorial promises made by the Emperor. In what was becoming standard Federalist rhetoric by 1808, he asked, “where are the nations who have negotiated with Bonaparte...and what has become of his guarantees?”¹⁸²

“Peace” then questioned the entire idea of expansion from a national security standpoint. “As to possessing Canada and the Floridas—of what use would they be to us—of what use is Louisiana to us, unless to hatch treasons.” Canada was a country of Frenchmen, he continued, echoing arguments made about the population of Louisiana five years earlier, “and Frenchmen are always Frenchmen.” With the British defeated using American help, what then? With both Canada and Louisiana full of French sympathizers, the United States would be hemmed in territorially and fall easy prey to Bonaparte’s treachery. “I tremble for the independence of my country,” he concluded, “when it must rest on the faith or humanity of a conqueror.” It is important to note that the real power in all of these arguments came not in questioning the means of American expansion per se, but rather in the dangers of expansion to national security, especially when expansion required trusting in the good will of the treacherous Napoleon.¹⁸³

Federalists who breathed a sigh of relief when the Jefferson administration did not actually plunge the United States into an ill-conceived war for Napoleon in 1808, still could not escape two uncomfortable and interrelated facts. The first was that the decaying Spanish empire—nominally under the control of Joseph Bonaparte—still laid claim to large swaths of the Americas including both of the Floridas as well as Mexico and Cuba. Under the Bourbons, Spain had continued to dispute the validity of the entire Louisiana Purchase. No one in the

¹⁸² *New York Commercial Advertiser* (New York, NY), April 4, 1808.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

United States was quite sure whether a Bonaparte on the throne would change that policy. Second, despite spending \$15 million and nearly going to war to prevent Napoleon from becoming their western neighbor in 1803, there was once again a Bonaparte on their borders. As one Federalist newspaper editor groaned forlornly, “thus ends the miserable policy of attempting to attain security by purchasing the ground that a suspecting and meddling tenant might occupy.” Another lamented, “Has not Bonaparte one foot in Spain, and another in South America? Are not East and West Florida his own? Let him but raise a standard there and we shall soon see, furnished from our own bowels, thirty thousand men glittering in arms.”¹⁸⁴

Not all Americans were such pessimists, however. Some saw a golden opportunity to start history anew in North America. Stories of burgeoning independence movements in some parts of the Spanish American empire encouraged some in the United States to consider the nature of their own expansion. Often they did this in terms they derived from Bonaparte’s expansion in Europe. The most eloquent and thoughtful example of this type of thinking occurred in a series of five articles first published in the *Virginia Patriot*, but later printed throughout the east coast under the pseudonym Rusticus during the fall of 1810.¹⁸⁵

Rusticus began his articles by stating that the world was changing before his eyes. “We see mighty empires reduced to dependence,” he wrote, “and states long deemed unimportant become formidable to their neighbors.” He acknowledged that, at least in this age, much of this was due to Napoleon, but he reminded his readers that the rise and fall of empires had been going on since the dawn of time. With the rise of independence movements in Spanish colonies he continued, it appeared that the tide of empire was shifting inexorably west to the Americas

¹⁸⁴ *The Repertory* (Boston, MA), January 1, 1808; *The North American* (Baltimore, MD), August 19, 1808.

¹⁸⁵ *Virginia Patriot* (Richmond, VA), August 7 and August 17, 1810; *Hagerstown Gazette* (Hagerstown, MD), September 25, October 2 and October 9, 1810; also see, *The Sun* (Pittsfield, MA), August 18, 1810.

where new nations would rise from the ruins of the Spanish colonial empire. This was, of course, of paramount interest to the United States as it would give the nation “formidable neighbors who will be able to manage their own affairs.” “The Atlantic,” he wrote, “will no longer roll between the U. States and the mighty potentates of the earth. They will border upon us to a great extent and touch us at points particularly vulnerable.”¹⁸⁶

Rusticus then tried to explain how he believed the United States ought to react to this new geopolitical reality. Put simply, Americans would need to tread with great caution. According to Rusticus, there were two outstanding issues that needed to be resolved to preserve the economic and political security of the United States in this new world order. First was the acquisition of the Floridas, which would provide settlers in Alabama and Mississippi the water routes they needed for the transportation of goods to Mobile and the Gulf of Mexico. Possessing Florida would also prevent these same settlers from being influenced by powers—obviously he had only one in mind—hostile to the United States. The second issue was the frustratingly vague boundary between the United States and Mexico, which would, he wrote, cause no end to enmity between the two powers when Mexico became a “distinct power.” Resolving these disputes without “employing the sword” would undoubtedly be a difficult proposition that would “take a great deal of moderation and of mutual good will,” according to Rusticus. Making things even more difficult was the dubious circumstances by which the United States had acquired Louisiana. As Rusticus pointed out, these had been deliberately calculated by Bonaparte to “make impressions unfavorable to that friendship which it is in the interest of neighbors to cultivate with each other.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ *Alexandria Daily Gazette* (Alexandria, VA), August 11, 1810.

¹⁸⁷ *Virginia Patriot* (Richmond, VA), August 7, 1810.

With the groundwork laid, Rusticus moved into the heart of his argument. In doing so, he tied American conduct directly to Bonaparte. French claims in the Spanish colonial possessions, he wrote, were those of an “ambitious despot.” According to Rusticus, Bonaparte’s expansion came through “sinning against heaven and earth...violating the most sacred laws divine and human, betraying friends who trusted implicitly in him.” Thus Bonaparte had “robbed an ancient and high minded people of their sovereignty, and on atrocious deeds founds his whole claim to dominions over their American brethren.” Yet, Rusticus continued, “the right given by force and fraud can only be coextensive with the means which gave it.” In other words, expansion done through deceit and unlawful force could only be maintained through the same means. Rusticus thus maintained that it would be near impossible for Bonaparte to maintain his grasp on the distant American colonies because his rule could only be enforced directly through coercion and deceit.¹⁸⁸

So much for the cruel and treacherous expansion along the Napoleonic model. But, insisted Rusticus, there was another way when it came to extending an empire. If the United States considered the “abstract right” and the “great, unalterable principles of justice” it would set the conditions for a permanent friendship with the newly formed governments of the Americas. “The Floridas may be seized,” Rusticus wrote, “under various pretexts.” But obtaining this critical piece of territory through “force or intrigue would make a deep and lasting impact on Spanish America.” “A generous mind,” he went on, “cannot view without extreme disgust a nation boasting its justice and moderation and liberty lying in wait for the distress of its neighbors and seizing the moment when they are struggling for existence...to wrest or seduce from them an extremely valuable portion of their territory.” Put simply, if the United States were

¹⁸⁸ *Hagerstown Gazette* (Hagerstown, MD), September 25, October 2 and October 9.

to expand through Napoleonic means, it would set the stage for perpetual animosity and war in the Americas, but if she expanded through just and magnanimous principles, it would create an environment of peace and prosperity for generations.¹⁸⁹

In his final article, Rusticus explained explicitly how to apply these principles of just expansion to the situation facing the United States. First, the nation had to support these nascent American independence movements to prevent French control of Florida and Mexico. This was critical to American national security and economic prosperity. Second, to ensure perpetual friendship among the new empires emerging in the Americas, the United States should give up the half of Louisiana west of the Mississippi to an independent Mexico in return for the Floridas. Mexico resented the loss of its northern territories, he explained, and these territories were full of strange peoples who could never be assimilated into the United States and the vague boundaries would invariably cause problems between the two nations. Florida, on the other hand was a knife poised at the heart of the United States, but was disconnected from and therefore useless to Mexico. Ultimately, claimed Rusticus, this trade would have the happy benefit of divesting each nation of, “a territory of no value to the owner, but of immediate importance to the opposite party.” Just as important, it would set a tone of cooperation and peace in the Americas.¹⁹⁰

Rusticus represents the way that at least some idealistic Americans sought to understand the new world that Bonaparte’s own cruelty and deceit had made possible within ideas that they appropriated from the expansion of the Napoleonic empire. He imagined a peaceful and rational expansion to America’s natural limits in contrast to the cruel and treacherous expansion of Bonaparte. He also represents an almost purely Vattelán worldview. For Rusticus and others familiar with the Swiss political theorist, Napoleon’s European empire had overturned the

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ *Hagerstown Gazette* (Hagerstown, MD), October 9, 1810.

delicate balance of power that was the best safeguard against a “universal monarchy.” States had an obligation to protect each other to maintain the balance of power and the nations of Europe had failed in their basic Vattelian obligation to protect the sovereignty of their brother nations. In the New World, it fell to the United States to help establish a new, peaceful balance of power of mutually supportive, sovereign nations. Rusticus never, of course, mentioned this directly. His popular audience hardly cared about the intricacies of dead Swiss theorists. Still, the fingerprints of Vattel were clearly evident in the work of Rusticus. Despite Rusticus’s eloquent appeals for a peaceful balance of the power in the Americas, however, most Americans were far less magnanimous. They also used the rhetoric of Bonaparte to frame their arguments.¹⁹¹

One group that Rusticus was writing against were Federalists who called for an immediate military solution to the Florida problem. “If Napoleon obtains a footing on this continent we are undone,” stated one in an article in the *American Citizen*. Like Rusticus, this author was preoccupied by the Spanish colonies in the Americas. “Spain, I fear is conquered,” the author continued, “the colonies of Spain, if they do not become *Independent*, will follow the fate of Spain.” Unlike Rusticus, however, he saw little that cheered him in these independence movements. South America was unprepared to be a republic, he complained, and would likely become an independent monarchy. Cuba, with its valuable plantations and strategic position in the Caribbean, would probably be seized by the British. The Floridas, however, did not have the population to become an independent republic and had no strategic value to the British. Thus they would probably fall “under the dominion of the grand despot.” Yet, the author wrote, almost petulantly, “they should *belong to us*.” In fact, he continued, “all Europe should be excluded from them.” “They must be purchased or conquered,” he declared, and it seemed

¹⁹¹ Lang, *Foreign Policy in the Early Republic*, 13-66.

inconceivable that Bonaparte would part with a colony with which he could exert influence on the United States. There was but one alternative he concluded: “we must *take* them.”

Fortunately, the author reasoned, “very little fighting will be necessary.” Without a navy, he argued, Napoleon was, for the present at least, unable to oppose the designs United States in the Americas. Thus, when the moment for action came, Americans had an excellent chance to defy Bonaparte if Americans remained, “faithful to ourselves, faithful to our interest [and] faithful to our safety.”¹⁹²

This rhetoric for war to prevent Bonaparte’s gaining a foothold on the North American continent sounded very similar to the debates over the use of military force during the Mississippi Crisis of 1803. Yet, there was at least one major difference. During the Mississippi Crisis, those in favor of an attack on New Orleans had justified their calls for war through Spanish abrogation of Pickney’s Treaty. It was a flimsy excuse, to be sure, but one that held up legally in a Vattelian world. In this case, however, there was no such legal justification. Bonaparte’s influence was so dangerous to the sovereignty of the United States, that an openly offensive, preemptive war was preferable to it. The article did not even present the façade of rendering assistance to a struggling neighbor. More than a few Federalists perceived Napoleon to be so dangerous to the very existence of the United States that they were prepared to turn Vattel on his head.

Still other Americans looked with cynical satisfaction on the Napoleonic usurpation of the Bourbon monarchy as finally marking an end to the political fiction that Spain was actually in control of her own foreign policy. For example, in July 1808, an editorial in *The Monitor* wrote that the United States had little to fear from a Bonaparte on the throne of the Spain.

¹⁹² *The American Citizen* (New York, NY), July 10, 1809.

Indeed, the editorial argued that it had the potential to be an excellent real estate opportunity for the nation. Like Louisiana in 1803, reasoned the author, Florida was little more than a target for the Royal Navy and thus Napoleon would likely be interested in divesting himself of the vulnerable property as soon as possible. The article ended with cynical optimism. At last there would now be no more “baffling responses from Madrid to Paris and Paris to Madrid, but the avowed and responsible authority will be found in the person of Bonaparte.” This fact, the author concluded, “will certainly be an advantage to all nations.” Enough Americans agreed (or at least seemed to) with this sentiment for a Federalist author in the *Newburyport Herald* to explode in rage over Jeffersonians who would rather see “every man woman and child in Spain, spitted on the bayonets of Bonaparte’s war dogs, than lose their fifteen millions.”¹⁹³

In the flurry of ideas flying through the press about national security and expansion, few Americans apparently considered that the West Floridians might have something to say about their own future. In the aftermath of the failed rebellions of 1804 and 1805, three factions gradually developed in West Florida. The most numerous composed of those settlers who were content with *laissez faire* Spanish rule—or at least those who owed their land grants and positions of authority to the Imperial government. Another, smaller group supported an American annexation of the territory, and a third faction sought to set up an independent republic of West Florida. The overthrow of the monarchy in Spain and crumbling authority of the Spanish governor, however, led to the fatal weakening of the loyalist faction.¹⁹⁴

Taking advantage of the situation, pro-independence residents of the four parishes west of the Perdido River called for a convention in late July, 1810. The convention delegates

¹⁹³ *The Monitor* (Washington, DC), July 28, 1808; *The Newburyport Herald* (Newburyport, MA), December 30, 1808.

¹⁹⁴ For the best modern explanation of American loyalties in West Florida see, Andrew McMichael, *Atlantic Loyalties: Americans in Spanish West Florida* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2008).

carefully avoided any overt talk of rebellion but drafted a document pledging nominal support for the Cádiz Regency and to offering to “assist” the governor by taking over most of his executive duties. This was a thinly veiled attempt at direct rule, but with only twenty-eight Spanish soldiers at his disposal the governor had little choice but to cooperate with the convention. Quietly, though, the governor attempted to send secret messages to Spanish officials in Pensacola requesting aid to reestablish his authority. Learning that messages had been sent to Pensacola and fearing harsh reprisals, the convention deposed the governor as “unworthy of their confidence,” and quickly mustered a force of pro-independence militia. This force easily overran the tiny Spanish garrison at Baton Rouge on September 23, 1810, and the convention declared the Republic of West Florida an independent nation shortly thereafter. On October 10, the newly independent Republic of West Florida warned that their independence was threatened by the “partizans” of Bonaparte and formally requested admittance to the United States.¹⁹⁵

The request of West Florida to join the union created something of a foreign policy crisis in the Madison administration. Based on the Vattel’s law of nations, Madison could not recognize the independent West Florida government, even to accept it into the Union, without effectively renouncing the American claim that West Florida had been bought and paid for with the original Louisiana Purchase. This would allow both the Cádiz Regency and Napoleonic Spain to legitimately claim West Florida as a rebellious province and view any American interference there as an act of war—and also a violation of Vattel’s principle of non-interference with other nation’s sovereignty. The British might also view any American meddling with West

¹⁹⁵ William Davis, *The Rouge Republic: How would be Patriots Waged the Shortest Revolution in American History* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2011); David Bice, *The Original Lone Star Republic: Scoundrels, Statesmen and Schemers of the 1810 West Florida Rebellion* (Clanton, AL: Heritage Publishing Consultants, 2004); also see J.C.A. Stagg, *Borderlines in Borderlands: James Madison and the Spanish-American Frontier* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 52-86; and Cody Scallions, “The Rise and Fall of the Original Lone Star State: Infant American Imperialism Ascendant in West Florida” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 90, no. 2 (Fall 2011), 193-220.

Florida as an attack on their new ally, Bourbon Spain. Time was working against Madison as well. He knew that the British had already quashed an independence movement in Venezuela in support of Spain earlier in the year and there were reports that runaway slaves and Indians were being stirred up by Spanish agents along the border with East Florida. It would be all too easy for the British navy to step in on behalf of their ally in the name of restoring order to the chaotic situation.¹⁹⁶

With this bewildering variety of factors in mind, Madison moved quickly and attempted to thread the needle of foreign diplomacy. Without waiting for Congress to reconvene in December, Madison decided to ignore the West Florida government altogether so as not to jeopardize American claims to the area. Instead, in a carefully worded proclamation on October 27, he announced that the United States would occupy the region pursuant to the title conferred by the Louisiana Purchase in order to preserve the “tranquility and security of our adjoining territories.” In separate instructions, Madison ordered the governor of the Orleans Territory, William Claiborne, to immediately incorporate West Florida into his own jurisdiction and authorized him to use the Army, navy gunboats, as well as militia from Louisiana and Mississippi to quell any resistance from the government of West Florida. Even though most inhabitants of the area did hope to become part of the United States, they wanted to do it on their own terms and many resented the heavy-handed methods of the American government. Despite some initial protests and threats to resist an American invasion, however, it was abundantly clear that Claiborne had overwhelming military force at his disposal. After seventy-four days as an independent republic, the nation of West Florida quietly fell under the jurisdiction of the United States at the point of a bayonet. Even this occupation did not entirely solve the Florida issue,

¹⁹⁶ Stagg, *Borderlines in Borderlands*, 74-76.

however. The key cities of Mobile and Pensacola remained under Spanish control as did the rest of the Florida Peninsula.¹⁹⁷

Despite Madison's legalistic, if harsh, approach, Federalist newspapers were apoplectic at his handling of the West Florida affair. They vented their rage through the Napoleonic rhetoric that was already second nature to them. After a decade as an opposition, cracks were beginning to show in the Federalist camp and the party had a difficult time coordinating their responses to the Florida affair without seeming hypocritical. By the end of the crisis, the most effective attacks were those that argued the United States had become a willing tool of Napoleonic France. No matter which approach they used, however, the Federalist appeals to the American people used the rhetoric of Bonaparte.

Even before the crisis reached forced Madison to act the Federalist newspapers began their attacks. In August, the editor of the *Boston Gazette* wrote a scathing editorial in which he warned his readers that the Madison administration would likely not take advantage of the golden opportunities that the chaos in Florida provided to the nation. Like many others before him, the editor pointed out the important advantages of American possession of the Floridas. West Florida, he noted, contained Mobile, "an outlet essential to the convenience of a large district of the western country." East Florida, in the hands of Americans, would prove "an invaluable security and a powerful means to annoy our enemies." In the hands of others, however, it would be a "scourge to chastise and vex us." The United States, he insisted, would be justified in "gaining them at considerable expense." Yet, as the region was populated mostly by

¹⁹⁷ Ibid; The proclamation of annexation was widely reprinted throughout the United States. The first printing was in the quasi-official Madison mouthpiece, *The National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), December 6, 1810 and by December 12, 1810 newspapers in Boston were printing and commenting on not only the President's proclamation, but also his occupation orders to Claiborne, for example see *The Repertory* (Boston, MA), December 14, 1810; for the army's role in occupying the territory see, Samuel Watson, "Conquerors, Peacekeepers or Both?: The U.S. Army and West Florida" *Florida Historical Quarterly* (Summer 2013) 69-105.

Americans, the editor continued, that it was likely that they would soon make an “offer of associating with our union.” Yet, in this offer, “they will likely be disappointed.”¹⁹⁸

Madison would not dare to receive this western “Gibraltar” into the union even at little cost to the United States because such a step would “involve him with Bonaparte.” Even if the British and the Spanish renounced their claims on the territory the editor argued, Madison would never move against the French Emperor’s wishes. “Mr. Jefferson used to say,” the editor concluded, “that the Floridas would fall into our hands without effort, as a ripe cherry would fall into the hands of him, who waited with patience for the proper season.” The current administration, however, would rather allow the cherry to fall to the ground and rot. “To them it is forbidden fruit—bidden by Napoleon.” For this editor and those who thought like him, the whole basis of Jeffersonian expansion was dictated by fear of Bonaparte. This was not unlike how Federalists had portrayed Jefferson as a starry-eyed idealist during the Louisiana Purchase debates. By 1810, however, the global circumstances had changed. Bonaparte was the undisputed master of Europe and Federalists adjusted their rhetoric accordingly. Many suggested that the Madison administration cowered in fear before Napoleon rather than simply being naively hoodwinked by his empty promises.¹⁹⁹

Most Federalists were probably surprised when they read about Madison’s military annexation plan for West Florida, but they quickly revised their lines of attack to correspond to the new reality. Of course, Bonaparte was still central to their rhetoric. On December 18, the *Boston Repertory* published a long discussion of the President’s proclamation. The *Repertory* acknowledged that the United States had a “clear and unquestionable” title to West Florida. The means of asserting this claim, however, were very important. “Is it consistent with sound policy

¹⁹⁸ *Boston Gazette* (Boston, MA), August 23, 1810.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

and the pacific professions of the United States,” asked the *Repertory*, “to oust the Spaniards at the point of the bayonet?” They found the timing of the territory’s “forcible seizure” extremely questionable. “While Spain was the ally of France, we did not dare assert our rights in arms,” the author noted.²⁰⁰

Yet, in 1810, the situation was reversed. Bourbon Spain was the ally of Britain, struggling for its independence against the Bonaparte regime, and it was at this point that Madison chose to forcefully assert American claims in West Florida at the risk of starting a war with Great Britain. Small wonder the *Repertory* believed there was more to the policy than met the eye. Why, asked the author, had Madison suddenly become a “military man” so interested in “offending Great Britain and patriotic Spain?” For the editor of the *Repertory*, the bottom line was simple: “he serves Bonaparte.” “We think it a just speculation,” concluded the *Repertory* article, “that West Florida has been seized, not only with the consent of France, but with her special insistence, and is probably to be held in *secret trust* for Napoleon until the fate of Spain is decided.” In contrast to the earlier *Boston Gazette* article, the *Repertory*’s analysis of Madison’s expansionist policies shows a shift to a much darker rhetoric. In the eyes of the *Repertory*, by committing military forces to Florida, Madison was not simply reacting in fear to Bonaparte, but was actively working as an agent of his foreign policy in the Americas.²⁰¹

Accusations of the administration’s complicity with Bonaparte in foreign affairs quickly became commonplace. There had been occasional suggestions of this in earlier times, but, before the West Florida revolt the debate had been in the abstract. The actual use of ground forces to enforce the American claims in West Florida by military fiat was so distasteful to many

²⁰⁰ *The Repertory* (Boston, MA), December 18, 1810; large portions of the article were reprinted in other papers. For example, see the *Hampshire Federalist* (Springfield, MA), December 20, 1810.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Federalists that it led to an unmistakable ratcheting up of this rhetoric. For example, a typical article making the rounds of the Federalist presses in early 1811 wondered that the United States was, “actually and openly” taking part in Bonaparte’s “unnatural war against commerce and civilization.” The author warned his readers that nation’s military was now arrayed against the interests of the American people and ready “to carry the projects of the Emperor into execution.” Another characteristic article in the *Federal Republican* accused the United States of being “an instrument of Bonaparte’s aggrandizement.”²⁰²

In the wake of the furor over the annexation of West Florida, Jeffersonians fought back harder than they had done in years against Federalist attacks on their expansionists policies. Recognizing the power of Napoleonic language in mobilizing public support, they too framed their arguments using Bonaparte. On December 14, 1810, while the rest of Boston was reading biting commentaries on the administration’s military occupation of Florida, the Jeffersonian readers of the *Old Colony Gazette* were treated to a front page, seven-year retrospective on the benefits of the Louisiana Purchase. “The cession of Louisiana to the United States was an event,” the article began, “the importance of which does not appear to have been duly appreciated.” The article singled out one group in particular who did not seem to understand the value of Louisiana: “Those whose distempered imaginations discover in every passing cloud a squadron of French balloons, with an invading army of exterminating jacobins.” This, of course, was a jab at the Federalists, who always seemed too ready to believe the incredible stories they read about the duplicity of the Emperor.²⁰³

²⁰² *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), February 2, 1811.

²⁰³ *The Old Colony Gazette* (New Bedford, MA), December 14, 1810; for an example of what the rest of Boston was reading see, *The Repertory* (Boston, MA), December 14, 1810.

It ought not be forgotten, the article continued, that there was at one time a very real threat to the United States from Bonaparte. At the very moment the Purchase was worked out, “the terrible Napoleon was on the point of sending out a formidable expedition of French troops, for the very purpose of colonizing the country under consideration.” According to the article, it was only through the shrewd diplomacy of Jefferson that the horrors of a Napoleonic colony as a neighbor had not come to pass. In case the audience had forgotten, the article was happy to remind them what the terrible consequences might have come to pass. For this, they reached back to America’s favorite historian, David Ramsey and quoted at length from his Charleston speech celebrating the Purchase. In particular, they highlighted the point where he argued that a French military colony would have checked the expansion of the United States or led to its dismemberment through to French economic pressure. To Ramsey’s analysis, they added one more comment of their own. “No people,” the article wrote of the French, “are so well qualified for acquiring an ascendancy over the savage mind.” There was no telling what mischief the “wily Napoleon” could have made on the western frontier with the help of thousands of native Indian allies.²⁰⁴

“I think,” the article concluded, “we cannot too highly applaud the wisdom of that policy...which so happily exempted the nation from the inconvenience and danger of a formidable and restless neighbor.” Though it was cleverly disguised, the underlying message of this article was not hard to discern when given the context. The Jefferson administration had done whatever it took—including overlooking some his most cherished constitutional principles—to prevent Bonaparte from gaining an American colony. In doing so, he had saved

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

the nation from great danger. At the end of 1810, with the prospect of Bonaparte gaining control of the Floridas, it was vital for the Madison administration to do the same.²⁰⁵

Another way Jeffersonians defended Madison's actions in Florida was by attacking Federalist hypocrisy on the subject of Napoleon. On the first day of 1811, an article in the *New Hampshire Patriot* went on the offensive against what it called the "uncandid and inconsistent conduct of the Federalist faction in regard to taking possession of this territory." The editor asked his readers to recall that only five years ago, the same Federalists who now claimed Madison's actions as an act of war against a foreign power, had recoiled at the prospect of paying \$2 million for territory that we had already bought in the original Louisiana Purchase. Quoting from prominent Federalist papers, the article went on. In 1805, the Federalists had called Jefferson "cowardly" and "under fear of Napoleon," for not daring to "take possession of what was indisputably our own." These same men now claimed that Madison was acting out of "fear or love of Napoleon" for doing exactly what they had counseled before. No, the article continued, Madison's policy actually demonstrated that the course of the United States would be charted in spite of Napoleon's bluster and not because of it. In the end though, the author doubted his logic would change any minds. "Each and every thing is condemned," he complained. "The President and Congress is stigmatized and abused—one is called a 'French President,' and the other declared to be guided by the 'secret hand of Napoleon.'"²⁰⁶

Without a doubt, the most damaging attack on the Madison's expansionist policies in West Florida had been the accusation that the United States had finally become an active participant in Napoleonic expansion. This rhetorical weapon gained its potency because of the assumptions Americans made about the purpose of military alliances. As Daniel Lang shows in

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ *The New Hampshire Patriot* (Concord, NH), January 1, 1811.

Foreign Policy in the Early Republic, military alliances held an important role in the world of Emmerich Vattel. In a perfect world, said Vattel, each nation state would have approximately the same power and thus balance each other out. States became dangerous when they were not balanced out by their neighbors. Alliances were an unfortunate necessity in an imperfect world. They allowed smaller, less powerful states to preserve their sovereignty by collectively counterbalancing their more powerful neighbors and allowed neighbors to band together to check a state which attempted to upset the balance of power and create a “universal monarchy” by subverting the sovereignty of other states.²⁰⁷

Bonaparte threatened to upend the whole Vattelian understanding of the proper role of alliances because his alliances only reinforced his dreams of “universal monarchy.” This is why the *Richmond Enquirer* was so struck by the remaking of Europe after the French victories of 1806. The *Enquirer* marveled at the ability of Bonaparte to create new kingdoms with a snap of his fingers and then weave them into the fabric of his empire through a complex system of alliances to suit his ambitious needs. “If his success should warrant an exorbitant extension of his power,” the article explained, he could then “reduce Holland, Italy, and even Wittenburg and Bavaria, into humble provinces of his empire.” On the other hand, “if the situation of Europe did not favor his ambition,” he could simply “consider them like the Swiss Cantons, as simply connected by alliance to his kingdom, but not subjected to his control.” In this way, he did not have to actually govern another state directly; he could obtain just as satisfactory result by entangling his neighbors in webs of deceitful alliances.²⁰⁸

Thus, when Federalists accused their political opponents of making a military alliance with Bonaparte, they were no longer simply suggesting that the Jeffersonians were naively

²⁰⁷ Lang, *Foreign Policy in the Early Republic*, 27-28, 34-36, 56.

²⁰⁸ *Richmond Enquirer* (Richmond, VA), May 27, 1806

making a bad deal for a worthless piece of real estate in the west. Instead, the Federalists suggested that the Madison administration and its followers were actively scheming to pervert the entire world order as envisioned by Vattel. Not only were they allying with a power that sought to establish a universal monarchy through a system of complex alliances, but also they were putting the nation's very sovereignty at risk since an alliance with the emperor would only be good as long as it suited the needs of Bonaparte. When it was within his power, the United States would be reduced to a "humble province," of the French empire, just like Holland and Italy.

In January 1811, the Jeffersonian dominated Congress attempted to clarify the situation in Florida by passing a resolution that provided for the "temporary occupation" of West Florida, warned Spain that it would not tolerate the transfer of Florida to any "other foreign power." It also gave the President power to "take possession of, and occupy" any parts of Spanish Florida east of the Perdido River that the "local authorities" in the area might be willing to "deliver up" to the United States or that might be threatened by a third power. When Spain still refused to give up Mobile and Pensacola, Madison attempted a more aggressive solution to the issue of Florida. Seeking to duplicate the success of the West Florida revolution, American officials quietly armed and organized a coup of American-born Floridians along the Georgia border with the understanding that these "local authorities" would be more amenable to American annexation than the Spanish officials. Backed by U.S. gunboats anchored menacingly offshore and promises of U.S. military support, the rebels quickly took Amelia Island and forced the Spanish south to St. Augustine.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ Although Rembert W. Patrick, *Florida Fiasco: Rampant Rebels on the Georgia-Florida Border*, reprint ed. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010) is still very useful, the most current full treatment of the Patriot War is James Cusick, *The Other War of 1812*; for good, shorter treatments also see Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*, 61-81; J.C.A. Stagg, *Borderlines in Borderlands*, 87-133.

At St. Augustine, however, the rebels ran into stiff resistance and the fighting devolved first into a stalemate, and then into a nasty guerilla war. A bill that would have explicitly allowed the handful of American military forces already in Spanish Florida to occupy the territory failed to pass an increasingly disgruntled congress in June of 1812 and forced Madison to reconsider his policies on the southern border. Realizing that such aggressive expansion in Florida would further exacerbate a divided nation already at war with Great Britain, Madison withdrew U.S. military support for the East Florida Republic. A second bill that authorizing the use of force to prevent the British from using Florida as a base of operations failed in February 1814. However, a modified version did authorize the administration to seize the Mobile region and this was done in short order. Devoid of American support, the rebellion collapsed and by mid 1814, the last of the rebels had surrendered or fled the territory.²¹⁰

Preoccupied with an increasingly likely war with Great Britain on their northern borders, Federalists—concentrated in the urban strongholds of the northeast—did not comment much on the East Florida fiasco. Perhaps they missed an opportunity in doing so. In 1980, the historians Ronald Hatzenbuehler and Robert Ivie argued through a complicated word analysis model that it was the persuasive Jeffersonian rhetoric of “recolonization” by Great Britain which finally led the congress to declare war on Great Britain. Still, the Federalists regrouped quite quickly and solidified their anti-expansionist rhetoric around the connected themes of Bonaparte and Florida.²¹¹

The best example was an article initially published in the *Alexandria Gazette*, but later reprinted in numerous Federalist papers. It pointed out the uncomfortable connections between

²¹⁰ Cusick, *The Other War of 1812*; J.C.A Stagg, *Borderlines in Borderlands*, 124-133; Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*, 80-81.

²¹¹ Ronald Hatzenbuehler and Robert Ivie, “Justifying the War of 1812: Toward a Model of Congressional Behavior in Early War Crises,” *Social Science History* 4, no. 4 (Autumn, 1980), 453-477.

Madison's actions in Florida and Bonaparte's actions in Europe. "Madison did not pretend to have any claim of right to this territory, but urged its conquest upon the plea of mere *expediency*, to prevent it from falling into the hands of the British" the author pointed out. "This was," he continued, "precisely the reason given by Bonaparte for the conquest of Switzerland, of Holland, of Italy and the neighboring republics and his present efforts to subdue Spain and Portugal; to prevent the influence of the British in the affairs on the continent." The author also found timing of American involvement suspicious. "During the time that Bonaparte was a friend and ally of Spain, and England her enemy, *expedience* never suggested to our administration that East Florida might be conquered by Great Britain." The author had one final complaint as he concluded. "The farce of receiving a province from a handful of insurgents...is disgraceful in the extreme. If Florida must be ours, let the arms of the United States take it, and not receive it at second hand."²¹²

In the *Alexandria Gazette* article, the author artfully combined multiple pieces of anti-expansionist rhetoric around Bonaparte to create an effective public argument. First, he equated the questionable moral justifications of American involvement with Florida to Bonaparte's previous expansion in Europe. Second, he directly tied American imperial expansion to Bonaparte's concurrent conflict with Great Britain, thus indirectly accusing the United States of either forming a military alliance with France or demonstrating cowardly subservice to the Emperor. Third, and perhaps most interestingly, the author indirectly accused the United States of expansion through treachery with the comment in which he suggested that if Florida was truly critical to the United States, the United States ought to seize it outright rather than foment rebellion. Though he did not say it directly, any reader of the *Gazette* would have immediately

²¹² *Alexandria Gazette* (Alexandria, VA), April 4, 1812.

equated such expansion through duplicity to the “wily Corsican.” Here again, expansion itself was not the issue, it was the means of expansion that the Federalists found troubling. The doors of the debate over the bill to allow American occupation of Florida were closed, so we do not know how the representatives made their arguments. However, it does seem likely that many of their arguments were made along lines similar to this article. If so, arguments against expansion by tying American actions to Bonaparte proved highly successful once again.

As the United States drifted toward the War of 1812, Federalists throughout the United States proved adept at retooling their Bonapartist rhetoric for the coming conflict with Great Britain. Historians continue to paint Federalist reaction to the conflict as hysterically, even treasonously, anti-war. This is a misconception. In “Party Unity and the War of 1812,” David Hickey demonstrated that while Federalists were quite prepared to back defensive military measures, like harbor defenses and the navy, they refused to endorse measures they deemed of an “offensive” nature. Despite his excellent analysis, however, Hickey failed to provide a good explanation for why the Federalists from South Carolina to Vermont were able to rally behind a defensive war, but not an offensive one. Examining public Federalist reaction to the War of 1812 through the lens of the Bonapartist rhetoric they developed over the last seven years fighting against aggressive expansion in Florida provides this missing link.²¹³

As in Florida, much early opposition to the impending war was based on the perceived danger of entangling the United States with a treacherous military despot. A large number of Federalists based their arguments on a widely reprinted article from the Bonapartist propaganda

²¹³ For examples of such negative interpretations of Federalists, see J.C.A. Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983) 231-232; Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 692-693; Donald Hickey, “Party Unity and the War of 1812,” *Journal of American Studies* 12, no. 1 (April, 1978) 22-39.

organ, *Le Montieur*. According to this article, the Emperor had allegedly proclaimed to a delegation from Ionia that, “In India, in America, in the Mediterranean, *everything that is and has been French shall always be so*. Conquered by the enemy, by the vicissitudes of war, they shall return into the empire by the other events of the war, or by the stipulations of the peace.”²¹⁴

One representative article that based their argument off this piece began its life in the *Connecticut Current*, but was printed as far south as *Alexandria Daily Gazette*. In the first part of the article, the author made some of the same points about Florida that many had made before him, but tied them to the new proclamation from the Emperor. He warned his countrymen that Bonaparte’s claim to everything that had been French was no idle boast, and that this had immense ramifications for the foreign policy of the United States. “West Florida as far as the Perdido River, was owned and occupied by the French,” he noted, and the American government had “employed some very extraordinary measures” to conquer it. Yet, he continued, “whether they got it by purchase, or by the sword, Bonaparte declares that it will be his at last.” Therefore, tying American foreign policy to the character of Napoleon was a highly dangerous prospect.²¹⁵

From there, the author artfully tied his concerns over American intervention in Florida into his current opposition to a war with Great Britain. “Nova Scotia and Canada were owned by the French,” he pointed out, and “now...there is a plan afoot for conquering Canada.” This was too much for the author. “Is not, ‘the hand of Bonaparte’ in this thing?” Knowing the difficulty of a cross-ocean invasion, the author surmised, Napoleon intended to make the United States an unwitting tool of his own imperial aggrandizement. Yet, it went even deeper than that. “Over and above all this,” he reminded his readers, “a very large part of the United States has been

²¹⁴ The first printing of this proclamation seems to have been in, *The Federal Gazette* (Baltimore, MD), October 10, 1811.

²¹⁵ *Alexandria Daily Gazette* (Alexandria, VA), December 19, 1811.

heretofore claimed by France.” Ultimately, the author concluded, Bonaparte’s imperial dream included the entire western half of the North American continent as well as Florida and Canada, and an ill-advised war with Great Britain would only help the treacherous Bonaparte realize his immoral dream of “universal monarchy.”²¹⁶

The arguments above did not directly accuse the United States of creating a military alliance with France, instead the author was content to simply point out the danger of trusting a treacherous military despot. Many others commentators, however, did raise the damning accusation of a military alliance with Bonaparte. Historian Lawrence Kaplan centered most of an essay on this accusation, and concluded, unsurprisingly, that Madison did not, in fact, intend to make any kind of military alliance with France. That is almost certainly true, however, Kaplan misses the point. Perception is almost always more important than reality, and after at least five years of seemingly pro-French foreign policy in Florida, the charges seemed uncomfortably accurate to many Federalists.

A widely reprinted author writing under the pseudonym Nestor made this charge quite forcefully. In one of several articles, he claimed that he had been accused of using imprecise language by suggesting the relationship between the United States and France was one of alliance. He shrugged off such concerns. “I presume that I was correct in using the term alliance, for though we may, in pure finesse, abstain from signing a formal treaty offensive and defense, our conduct will include all the necessary parts of the treaty.” “I presume,” he continued sarcastically, “that no instance will be produced of two nations aiding one another by making war on a third nation without being called allies.” Later in the war, another author linked this point directly to American policy in Florida. As the magnitude of Bonaparte’s disaster in

²¹⁶ Ibid.

Russian became known, his fate became increasingly clear. The Boston's *Repertory* printed its own take on what they presumed would be a new world order led by Great Britain. They had little good to say. "In the general restoration which will take place," the *Repertory* asked gloomily, "how will the voluntary allies of the humbled despot, the projectors of expeditions into Canada and East Florida, as diversions in his favor, appear?"²¹⁷

Nestor was a prolific writer. In another article, he cleverly combined several of the older Federalist arguments against expansion and turned them into a case against a war with Great Britain. He began by playing on Federalist fears about Bonaparte's deposition of the Spanish monarchy by warning that the Iberian Peninsula was only the means to a sprawling overseas empire. Nestor accused the United States of playing an "auxiliary" to Bonaparte's imperial dream since war with Great Britain would force her to divert troops from Spain to Canada and Nova Scotia. Britain would soon be brought to the bargaining table. Yet, the Spanish empire was only the start of Bonaparte's overseas ambitions. He would claim "Maurilius, Bourbon, the Cape of Good Hope, Martinique, Guadalupe, Demerara, and Suriname" as having once been part of the French Empire—a reference back to Napoleon's supposed response to the Ionian delegation.²¹⁸

Nestor elaborated: "[Bonaparte] will then tend to his American provinces that were given him by Spain." East and West Florida would soon have "French settlers and French garrisons." With the French in Pensacola, Nestor went on, he did not need to remind his readers "what a submissive and tractable set of people our new French citizens in New Orleans are likely to prove." "Their revolt," he growled, "is absolutely certain for they know that we should not

²¹⁷ "Nestor no. III," *New York Spectator* (New York, NY), January 25, 1812; *The Repertory* (Boston, MA), January 22, 1814.

²¹⁸ "Nestor no. IV," *New York Commercial Advertiser* (New York, NY), January 23, 1812.

venture to reduce them by force.” Nestor left his audience with a final jarring question. Having helped Napoleon to “conquer peace,” how long did they think it would be before he “picked a quarrel with the United States?”²¹⁹

In this remarkable article, Nestor built on multiple anti-expansionist arguments that had been in place for nearly a decade. In the first place, he depicted American expansion as an auxiliary to Bonaparte. This was a deliberate choice of words, since Nestor had used the word “ally” in his last article. Nestor chose “auxiliary” as a classical term that denoted a military force working with another nation’s military but that was clearly subordinate to the other nation in terms of strategy and foreign policy. This was an obvious downgrade from an “ally” who at least retained their free will in foreign policy. It is important to note that Nestor was not anti-expansionist. After all, he indirectly claimed that the United States did not have the courage to impose martial law in New Orleans. His concern was that American expansion appeared to be only for the dreams of Bonaparte.

Nestor then tied American subservience to Bonaparte to his own imperial designs in the Americas. He did this by using American fears over his disposition of the Spanish monarchy and turning them into a clear concern for American national security. He did this by blending concerns over the duplicity of the Emperor with the demographic concerns that Federalists had raised a decade earlier when discussing how to assimilate the peoples of Louisiana into the American union. With Bonaparte kept out of North America, the peoples of Louisiana would—hopefully—eventually assimilate to American political and social norms, but with the treacherous Napoleon reintroduced to North America through his Spanish colonies or restored French colonies, it would only be a matter of time before the west devolved into chaos and

²¹⁹ Ibid.

bloodshed. With his well crafted arguments that built on years of Napoleon fears, it is little wonder that this was one of the most re-published articles in the United States during the first half of 1812.

By June of 1812, the calls for action from the western-aligned “war hawk” wing of the Jeffersonian party had become too loud to ignore any longer and Madison reluctantly asked Congress for a declaration of war. After eighteen days of debate, Congress acceded to the President’s request by the slimmest margin in American history. Though he had been able to scrape up enough votes for war, Madison was not able to unite the nation behind his foreign policy. Federalists vigorously opposed the War of 1812 using the anti-expansionist rhetoric inherited from the Florida fiasco. The inconclusive nature of the conflict during its first two years only emboldened the Federalists in their efforts to oppose what they saw as an immoral war waged on behalf of Napoleon.²²⁰

The war went badly from the start. Despite confident Jeffersonian assurances that with the British occupied by Napoleon, conquering Canada would be a “mere matter of marching,” American invasions in 1812-13 were stymied by a surprisingly tenacious Canadian defense, American military incompetence, and the refusal of many American militiamen to cross an international border and engage in an “offensive war.” Farther west at Fort Detroit, an ill-prepared American force surrendered to a smaller British army partly because the American forces had not yet received news that war had been declared. At sea, the Royal Navy easily outmatched their undersized American foe and established a crippling blockade. About the only good news was that the British were unable to capitalize on their advantages since Napoleon still occupied their attention in Europe.²²¹

²²⁰ Burstein and Isenberg, *Madison and Jefferson*, 499-513; Stagg, *Mr. Madison’s War*, 48-119.

²²¹ Stagg, *Mr. Madison’s War*, 177-269.

In 1814, the already dim American fortunes took a further turn for the worse. An Anglo-Russian coalition defeated Napoleon, forced the emperor to abdicate and sent him into exile. This allowed the British to concentrate their forces and take the offensive in the American theater. The British raided the Chesapeake, easily brushed aside American resistance, and burned the national capital. Only a stubborn defense of Baltimore forced the British to withdraw from the region. Farther south, the British assembled a large invasion force in the Caribbean for the purpose of conquering New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. Opposing them was a handful of troops under the command of Major General Andrew Jackson. A few months earlier, Jackson's troops had inflicted a crushing defeat on the pro-British faction of the Creek nation at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. While this victory forced the tribe to surrender virtually all of its remaining territory to the United States, few Americans thought it likely that such a small force could repel the impending British invasion. With the American war effort at a nadir, Federalist anti-war rhetoric reached its height in the fall of 1814.²²²

Almost as soon as the war began, a familiar trope took form when Federalists questioned the very morality of American military conquest through comparisons with Napoleon. In 1803, some Federalists had argued that the occupation of Louisiana was an unjust and immoral military rule in the method of Bonaparte. Then in 1810, Federalists had strongly opposed American military expansion into West Florida as immoral. Just before the commencement of hostilities, an article in the *Poulson Daily Advertiser* reminded Jeffersonians that in 1802, their own papers had warned that Bonaparte's elevation to First Consul had demonstrated the importance of avoiding wars that were not "purely defensive." Yet in 1812, the article pointed out, all the Jeffersonians talked of was "foreign conquests—invading Canada, [and] taking possession of

²²² Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War*, 387-418; Owsley, *The Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands: The Creek War and the War of 1812*.

Florida.” In reporting the declaration of war, the New York *Commercial Advertiser* wrote that the bill for war included a provision that allowed the President to issue a proclamation, “in the Bonapartian style, inviting the Canadians to revolt,” while also providing the executive the power to “march troops into Canada and to conquer it.”²²³

Heated debates over the expansion of the regular army dripped in Bonapartist rhetoric. One of the most powerful arguments was made by Elijah Bringham, a long-time congressman from Massachusetts. Ultimately it made its way into numerous newspapers. He dismissed the new army as one raised only for offensive purposes. What right, he asked pointedly, did the United States have to Halifax, Nova Scotia, the Canadas or East Florida? What right did the United States have to “invade and break into a foreign territory, and there establish a slaughter house for the sons of America...destroy cities, demolish houses and plunder the inhabitants?” He answered his own question, “There is no right but a Napoleon right, and that is power.” A year later, Massachusetts governor Caleb Strong announced in a widely reprinted speech that the American invasion of East Florida “annulled the distinction between power and right and authorizes a government and its subjects, whenever they are able, to subdue and destroy the neighboring state.” “It seems,” he continued, “impossible not to see the hand and realize the morals of Bonaparte marking our destinies.”²²⁴

Federalists outside New England echoed the rhetoric of their brethren. In March, 1813, the *Alexandria Daily Gazette* carried a letter by an “Old Virginia Farmer.” The “Farmer” commented extensively on Madison’s second inaugural address, but focused on the unjustness nature of the war. In his inaugural address, Madison had announced that the war had been carried on in a “just and honorable” manner. The “Farmer” ripped apart this claim by reminding

²²³ *Poulson’s Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), April 16, 1812.

²²⁴ *The National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), January 5, 1813.

his audience of the proclamation that General William Hull had issued upon his invasion of Canada in July of 1812. Hull had warned the inhabitants of Canada not to resist his soldiers, lest he turn their land into an “indiscriminate scene of desolation.” This proclamation, the “Farmer” argued, showed the hollowness of Madison’s claim of just war. The “Farmer” illustrated his point by examining what he thought was an analogous situation with which all his readers would be familiar. As Napoleon’s army retreated out of Russia harassed by the Cossacks, villagers in the Duchy of Warsaw begged Napoleon to allow them to commence a guerrilla war against the pursuing Russians. Yet, the “Farmer” wrote, “Bonaparte, great as were his extremities in Russia, and intreated as he was by the villagers...turned pale with horror at their proposal.” In other words, not even Napoleon could countenance such a proclamation “so repugnant to ‘justice and honor.’”²²⁵

The Bonapartist rhetoric had an undeniable impact on at least the Federalist population of the United States. In public, group denunciations of the war, Federalist men and women reverted back to the same rhetoric they had heard from their leaders for over a decade. In the Providence Resolves, published in the *Newport Mercury* in April 1811, Federalists of Rhode Island asked their fellow countrymen if they were willing to see their sons drafted “like French conscripts” engage in a war on behalf of “Bonaparte, who has destroyed the liberties and subjected every Republic on the Continent of Europe; witness Holland, Switzerland, Venice, Lucca, Genoa, whose citizens like Slaves, are exercised under the iron rod of Bonaparte.” The resolves warned that by support for the war would end with the citizens of the United States “reduced to the same state.” The public of Essex County in Massachusetts also publicly tied the war to Bonaparte. They ascribed all the boundary disputes of the United States to the “intrigues of France,” and

²²⁵ *Alexandria Daily Gazette* (Alexandria, VA), March 9, 1813.

accusing the administration of conducting an ill-conceived war at the behest of a French regime that would immediately demand the cession of Canada, Louisiana, and Florida at the conclusion of hostiles.²²⁶

The primacy of Federalist Bonapartist rhetoric during the War of 1812 complicates our view of the war in two aspects. First, it confirms the usefulness of the recent trend among historians to expand our lens of the conflict geographically. The common language of the rhetoric of Bonaparte shows that Federalists, at least, saw American policy into Florida and War with Great Britain within the same Napoleonic lens. They easily shifted their rhetoric from one conflict to the other because Napoleon allowed them to see both as immoral imperial aggrandizement. Second, it demonstrates that while the Jeffersonians might have actually waged the war in a regional way, as historians like J.C.A. Stagg and James Cusick have suggested, this is not the whole picture. As Donald Hickey demonstrated in “Party Unity and the War of 1812,” the Federalists displayed remarkable geographic unity throughout the war as they supported “defensive” war measures while opposing “offensive” ones.²²⁷

They were able to do this because of the common language of Bonaparte they developed over past decade as they fought against aggressive Jeffersonian expansion in Florida. Federalists did not oppose expansion *per se*, but they deeply cared about the means by which it was accomplished. They viewed the conflict as a war of conquest that placed the United States into a *de facto*, if not an actual military alliance with a violent and treacherous military despot bent on creating a “universal monarchy.” As the War of 1812 grew increasingly likely, they transferred the successful rhetoric of Bonaparte that they had honed in Florida to the war with Great Britain.

²²⁶ *Newport Mercury* (Newport, RI), April 11, 1812; *Rhode Island American* (Providence, RI), August 11, 1812.

²²⁷ J.C.A. Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War*, xii; James Cusick, *The Other War of 1812*, 301-302; Donald Hickey, “Party Unity and the War of 1812,” *Journal of American Studies* 12, no. 1 (April, 1978) 22-39.

So successful was this rhetoric with the public, that they were able to successfully partially derail Jeffersonian dreams of expansion into both Florida and Canada.

Even before the ink was dry on the Louisiana Purchase treaty, Americans of all political stripes looked covetously south toward Spanish Florida. Yet, for those seven years, the success of American imperial success in the Floridas was greatly in doubt. Opponents of aggressive expansion were remarkably successful in developing a language centered on Napoleon that helped derail the Jefferson administration's plans for duplicitous diplomacy in the \$2 Million Act of 1805. In the wake of Bonaparte's redrawing of Europe, and especially his disposition of the Bourbon monarchy in Spain, Federalists refined and honed their rhetorical attacks against aggressive expansion. The successful American intervention in West Florida led to a further refinement of rhetorical attacks against militant expansion that helped to stymie Madison's questionable policies in East Florida. They then easily transferred this rhetoric to opposing the offensive nature of the War of 1812.

This rhetoric was not necessarily anti-expansionist in nature. By 1805, virtually all Americans agreed that the United States would and should expand into Florida. Yet, for Federalists, the means of expansion were incredibly important. Many of them argued that American expansion should be done in a moral and logical manner—a manner that clearly differentiated the United States from Bonaparte's France. Another group argued that the American expansion had to be based on a rational national security concerns. These Federalists viewed Bonaparte as the most dangerous threat to the United States, both as an external threat—such as when he threatened to take control of the Spanish possessions in the Americas, but also as a treacherous ally who would likely turn on an unwitting United States that was foolish enough to ally themselves with him. In both cases, the effectiveness of the rhetoric focused on

the person and character of Napoleon Bonaparte. What the Federalists did not, and could not know was that Bonaparte's days on the throne of France were drawing to a close, and that the effectiveness of their rhetoric would be challenged severely when Americans no longer saw him as a threat.

CHAPTER 5 SEIZING BONAPARTE'S DREAM: THE MEXICAN AMERICAN WAR

Americans in the early republic simply could not get enough of Napoleon. Their voracious appetite for reading anything they could find about the Bonaparte resulted in countless biographies, military histories, pamphlets, broadsides, religious tracts, and even song books published about the French emperor. Yet, as familiar as they were with Bonaparte, Americans could not agree on who he was or what his image represented. Between 1815 and 1850, several very different images of Napoleon developed in the United States. A hand-colored lithograph produced in Connecticut by the E.B. and E.C. Kellogg firm near the end of this period neatly illustrates the final result of what I call the American bifurcation of Bonaparte (figure 2). In the image, three Bonapartes are presented to the viewer. The topmost depicts a young Bonaparte in the uniform of a French lieutenant of artillery in 1794. To the subaltern's lower right is a handsome First Consul Bonaparte in a republican general's uniform. To the left of both of these the artist portrayed a garlanded Emperor Napoleon adorned in a splendid ermine-trimmed imperial robe. To the American viewer was left the decision as to which Bonaparte was the most representative one.²²⁸

Even before he left power, and especially after he was overthrown in 1815, Americans began to view Napoleon through the bifurcated lenses indicated by the Kellogg lithograph. Many Americans, especially those who identified themselves as Whigs continued to see Napoleon as an aggressive and ambitious military despot. Yet, as new democratic currents swept through the nation, Americans increasingly admired Bonaparte as both the ultimate democratic success story and as a courageous republican military genius. Indeed, some Americans found it entirely possible to hold both views concurrently.

²²⁸ E.B. and E.C. Kellogg, *Napoleon*, 1842-1848, American Antiquarian Society, reference no. 392765.

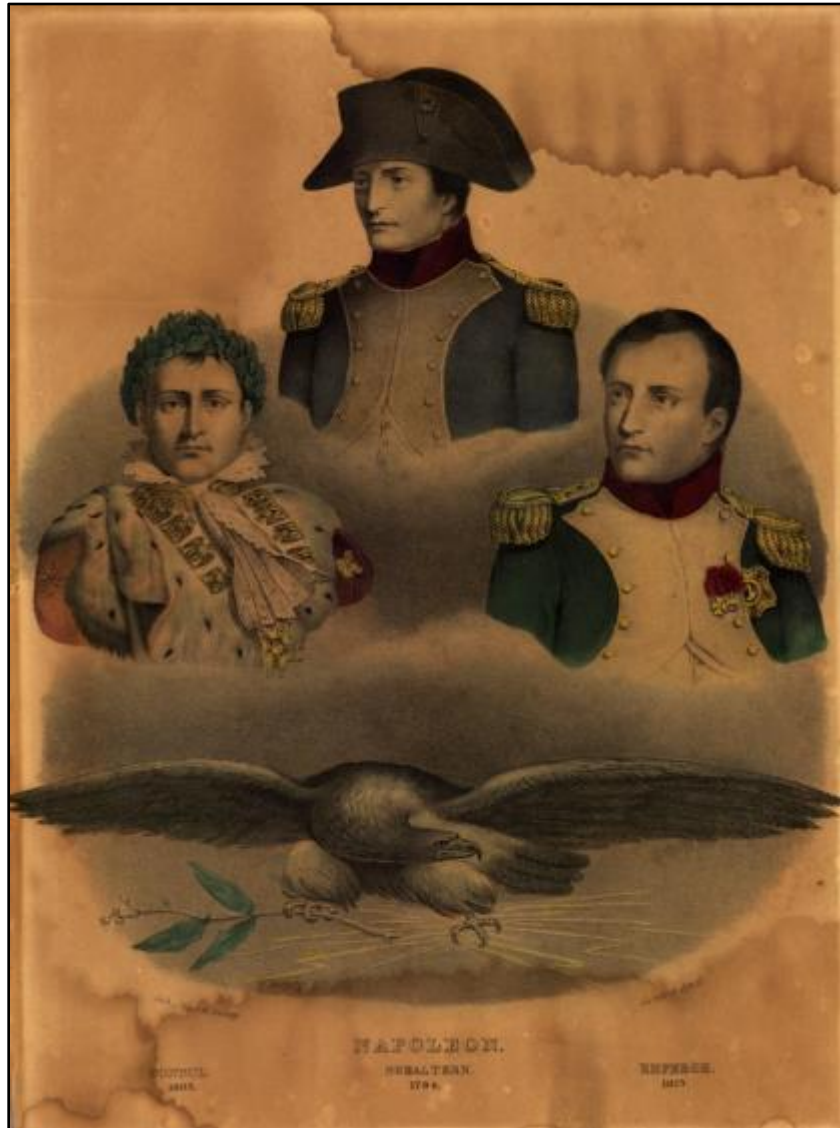


Figure 2, E.B. and E.C. Kellog, "Napoleon," 1842-1848.

These twin images were reinforced by the flood of printed material on Napoleon that appeared in the United States between his death in 1821 and the start of the American Civil War in 1861 and greatly shaped how Americans faced their own expansion into the Spanish, and later Mexican, borderlands. Using Bonaparte to contest American expansion was, of course, not new.

Napoleon had been integrated into the arguments of both pro and anti-expansionists since the Louisiana Purchase, and had proved particularly useful to the Federalists in opposing the aggressive elements of the War of 1812. Yet, by the start of the Mexican American War in

1846, the more sympathetic, military image of Napoleon had become ingrained in the mind of much of the American public and robbed the old anti-expansionist rhetoric of its power. The loss of this rhetorical device helped lay the groundwork for the most aggressive expansion yet in the young republic's history.

For almost a century and a half after its conclusion, historians of the Mexican War spent their time and ink assigning blame for the war—largely fighting the same battles that Americans fought in the 1840s. It was not until the 1980s that any historians began looking seriously beyond this debate. Social and cultural historians were some of the first to open new avenues of investigation. These historians largely focused their attention on whether war did more to unify or divide the young republic. Robert Johannsen's *To the Halls of the Montezumas* fired the first shot. By looking at mostly printed materials to gauge public reaction to the war, he argued that whatever the causes of the conflict, the American public perceived the war a unifying national event. Ten years later Johannsen's ideas were bolstered by James McCaffrey's *Army of Manifest Destiny*. McCaffrey extended Johannsen's thesis to the American army by suggesting that the war was not long or bloody enough to force American soldiers to alter the starry-eyed democratic ideals they brought with them to the battlefield. More recent scholarship, however, has challenged these assertions. In *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair*, Paul Foos looked at the same soldiers McCaffrey did and found evidence of widespread disillusionment as well as class and racial conflict. Most recently, Amy Greenberg's *A Wicked War* found widespread and deep division in American society as a whole over the conflict which she credited with spawning the first national anti-war movement.²²⁹

²²⁹ Robert W. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: the Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); James M. McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny: The American Soldier in the Mexican War* (New York: NYU Press, 1994); Paul Foos, *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social*

It seems almost incredible that such polar opposite views could be found in looking at the same source material. In this chapter, using a similar methodological approach as Johannsen, I offer at least a partial solution to this problem. By looking at a single symbol—Napoleon—in which virtually every American could and did find meaning we find that it is far too simple to only say that the Mexican American War was “unifying” or “divisive.” It was both. Before and during the war, Americans of all types used common, presumably unifying, symbols like Napoleon to debate their expansion, yet, they increasingly found to their frustration that this symbol meant radically different things even to people who claimed a common history and language. Ironically, it was by using what they thought was a unifying reference to make their arguments for and against aggressive expansion into Mexico, Americans discovered exactly how divided their nation was.

Federalist anti-expansionist rhetoric reached a highpoint during the War of 1812. Their message, which centered on the national security threat posed by Napoleon, allowed the anti-expansionists to present a remarkably unified front in opposition to the aggressive aspects of the war. Using such rhetoric, they managed to hold off the Jefferson and Madison administrations’ attempts to aggressively annex Florida. Their rhetoric was also probably at least partially responsible for the collapse of American invasions of Canada when militia refused orders to march across the American border, and for the New England unity displayed in the Hartford Convention.

The success of this rhetoric was largely due to a generally common American understanding of who Napoleon Bonaparte was, and what he represented. In *The Old Dominion and Napoleon*, Joseph Shulim demonstrated that while initial reaction to Bonaparte was mixed,

Conflict During the Mexican American War (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Amy S. Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2012).

once Bonaparte had himself crowned Emperor in 1804, most of his overt support in the United States evaporated. The image of the ambitious, treacherous, military despot replaced that of the courageous, republican, military genius. Supporters of Bonaparte could still be found within the United States, of course. In the August 14, 1806 edition of Boston's *Independent Chronicle*, for example, one brave writer cautiously suggested that the influence of Bonaparte had been good for nationalistic groups in Hungary and Poland, and that he had always retained a "pacific disposition" toward the United States. Such opinions, however, were quickly demolished by vicious counter articles. One article directed at the *Chronicle* author quoted above decried those American "jacobins" who excused Napoleon for the innocent "blood which he has poured in torrents over the continent of Europe." In such a climate, wise Americans kept any pro-Bonaparte thoughts to themselves. By the War of 1812, pro-expansionists were reduced to explaining how their policies would prevent Napoleon's dangerous influence in North America.²³⁰

This common American understanding of Bonaparte, however, collapsed with astonishing speed. One reason for this was that Bonaparte could no longer be portrayed as a legitimate national security threat to the United States. Capitalizing on the disastrous loss of the French Grand Armée in Russia, a sixth anti-Bonaparte coalition formed in the spring of 1813, and, after a year of hard fighting, eventually drove Bonaparte from the throne of France and into exile on the island of Elba. The strongest arguments from both the pro and anti-expansionist camps had always centered on the unacceptable national security risk posed by the French emperor. Many Americans had been willing to go to war to prevent his controlling New Orleans in 1803. The Madison administration had claimed that they occupied West Florida by fiat and

²³⁰ Joseph Shulim, *The Old Dominion and Napoleon* (New York: AMS Press, 1968); *Boston Independent Chronicle* (Boston, MA), August 14, 1809; *Boston Gazette* (Boston, MA), September 4, 1809.

engineered a coup in East Florida for the same reason. In large part, Federalists had opposed co-belligerency with France against Britain during the War of 1812 to prevent France from claiming its old empire in North America at the end of the conflict.²³¹

To a certain extent, the British stepped into the role of America's national security bogeyman. For example, an editorial in the *Republican Farmer* worried that with the defeat of Bonaparte, "America will now be nearly surrounded by the English or their red allies." Yet, most Americans never seemed to fear the British influence in North America as much as they had Bonaparte's. Indeed, one article from Georgia that found itself reprinted in multiple places went so far as to claim, "If Bonaparte is hurled from the throne of France, and the war continues with England, the occupancy of the Floridas by the United States would, at least secure our Southern and Western territory against any exterior force that could be brought against it." In other words, the national security of the United States had actually been contingent on Napoleon keeping British ambitions in North America at bay. With Bonaparte gone, the United States would need to seize the strategic peninsula to prevent the British from laying claim to it.²³²

Another reason for the rapid change was that Americans had begun to compartmentalize their views of Bonaparte even before he was forced from power. In 1808, Hume Robinson—who billed himself as a former American military officer living in Paris—published a self-styled "American" account of Bonaparte's rise to power. Within the first pages of the book, Hume's audience read that, "it must be remembered that Bonaparte assumes different characters as policy dictates." "When a General many of his actions were distinguished as being mild and humane,"

²³¹ For an overview of the American press reaction to these events see, Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny "The American Press and the Fall of Napoleon in 1814," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 98, no. 5 (October, 1954) 337-376.

²³² *Republican Farmer* (Bridgeport, CT), November 29, 1815; *Washington Gazette* (Washington, DC), June 15, 1814.

he continued, but “when a Consul, he began to exercise that overbearing tyranny that power so often engenders.” Finally, however, “when we behold him on the imperial throne and arrived at the summit of his conquering ambition we see him degenerated into a bloody tyrant.” Hume meant that Bonaparte’s very character changed as time went on and could be understood on different levels at different times in his career. In essence, this gave Hume’s readers permission to indulge their fascination with the brave general, but still hate the treacherous despot.²³³

Within weeks of learning of Napoleon’s exile to Elba, articles began to appear in American newspapers that marveled at Napoleon’s military prowess while quietly skirting around political aspects of his reign. Examples of good American generalship were rare enough during the first few years of the War of 1812, and, of course, British military skill was a non-starter, so the newspaper editors looked to France. Reporting on Andrew Jackson’s little army gathering at New Orleans, the *Baltimore Patriot* opined that they expected to hear good news from that locale soon, since, “General Jackson appears to possess that wonderful talent which rendered Bonaparte so successful, that of making good soldiers of the most incongruous material.” They did not have long to wait. Jackson, in fact, had already won a major victory over the British at New Orleans earlier that month.²³⁴

As might be expected for a war weary public, Americans made a great deal out of this last-minute victory. Historians have often dismissed the importance of the battle, but Frank Owsley makes a convincing case that the Battle of New Orleans finally cemented American claims to Louisiana. The Spanish, he points out—a key British ally—still viewed Louisiana as having been cheated from them by Bonaparte and considered West Florida as a province in revolt. Without Jackson’s victory, Owsley contends, it was likely that the British would have

²³³ Hume Robinson, *An Impartial History of the Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* (Philadelphia, 1808), iii.

²³⁴ *Patriot and Evening Advertiser* (Baltimore, MD), January 31, 1815.

backed Spanish claims to Louisiana and West Florida at the bargaining table in Ghent. Ultimately, it had to be decisive military victory that established indisputable United States claims in the Spanish borderlands. Americans knew this, but they added an additional component to their celebrations of the battle: more often than not, they used it as an opportunity to claim a military victory over Napoleon by proxy.²³⁵

As much as the Federalists might have wished it, the United States did not embroil itself in a war with Napoleon. The victory at New Orleans, however, gave Americans the next best thing. As the commemorated their victory over the British, many transformed into a virtual victory over Napoleon at the same time. One widely reprinted article informed its readers, “It ought also to be remembered that Jackson's troops were 'backwoods militia,' who had never before smelt gunpowder, and Pakenham's were the 'choicest veterans of the Peninsula,' the conquerors of the legions of Bonaparte.” A popular ditty held a similar theme,

Ten thousand men they landed
as Pakenham demanded!
The hero who commanded New Orleans to destroy
all men of valiant heart who had *beaten Bonaparte*
But what was that to Jackson?

In both the article and the song the British were clearly identified as the soldiers who had beaten Napoleon. The logic, then, ran as follows: if the British forces at New Orleans had bested Napoleon, and Americans had bested the British forces, then the Americans must have been more than a match for Napoleon himself.²³⁶

Even in exile, Bonaparte remained ingrained in the minds of Americans when they looked to their southern borders. Americans had almost gone to war with him in 1803 to prevent him from controlling New Orleans and then had seized West Florida from Spain in 1811 to

²³⁵ Frank Owsley, *The Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*, 178-180.

²³⁶ *Rhode Island Republican* (Newport, RI), April 12, 1815; *The True American* (Bedford, PA), May 4, 1815.

prevent his influence there. It was his questionable title to Louisiana and deliberately murky boundaries which had caused over a decade of frustrating political conflict with the Spanish empire. While it is impossible to prove with certainty, this proxy military victory over Bonaparte probably helped some Americans finally make peace with their questionable claims to both Louisiana and West Florida.

The year 1815 was a remarkable one. So remarkable, in fact, that the events occurring during that fateful year allowed many Americans to make peace with at least some of the political aspects of Napoleon's rule. Following hard on the heels of the victory at New Orleans and the Treaty of Ghent, which finally ended the War of 1812, Americans learned that Napoleon had slipped off of Elba and returned to France. Americans waited breathlessly for news from Europe—no doubt cursing the slowness of the mail ships. Soon they learned that the royal French military units sent to prevent Napoleon's approach had defected and returned him to the throne in Paris. Yet another anti-Bonaparte coalition formed and finally faced down the French at the Belgian village of Waterloo in June.

Napoleon lost the battle at Waterloo, but it was not clear what would happen next. Rumors abounded. Some said that Bonaparte had been arrested by his own troops and beheaded. Others reported that he had been taken prisoner by the British. Still others said that Bonaparte was attempting to flee to the United States and seek asylum. In actuality, both of the last rumors were true. Bonaparte had indeed seriously considered going into exile in the United States, as had many of his officers and family members. Instead, Bonaparte surrendered himself to the British. The British, unsure of what to do with their arch antagonist, sent him into exile again. This time under guard and to the remote South Atlantic island rock of St. Helena. With Napoleon gone, the Congress of Vienna, convened by the victors, reestablished the balance of

power in Europe and restored the Bourbons to the throne of France in the uninspiring person of Louis XVIII.²³⁷

Americans read about all these events with absolute fascination, and it triggered a softening towards Napoleon's politics because when compared to Louis XVIII, Napoleon appeared to have democratic legitimacy. Most Americans learned of Bonaparte's return by reading the official French versions of the event that their local papers simply translated and printed. These accounts, of course, painted Napoleon's return in strikingly sympathetic and even democratic tones. For example, in the account that most Americans read, when Napoleon first encounters the French troops come to arrest him, Bonaparte dismounts, announces himself, and tells them, "The first soldier who chooses to kill your emperor may do so." According to the article, the unanimous reaction from the humbled soldiers was to tear the white Bourbon cockade from their caps and replace it with the Napoleonic tri-color as they cry, "Long Live the Emperor!" A few paragraphs later, the Emperor returns to Paris to the wild shouts of, "down with the Bourbons! Down with the enemies of the people! Long live the Emperor and a government of our choice!"²³⁸

Americans keyed into the contrasts in democratic legitimacy between Napoleon and Louis XVIII illustrated in the Paris articles. In a letter to a friend, Andrew Jackson wrote that, "The *wonderfull revolution* in France fills every body and *nation* with astonishment." As a popular military leader himself, Andrew Jackson noted one part of the article in particular. "the tricoloured cockade being found in the bottom of each soldiers knapsack tells to all europe that Naepoleon reigns in the affections of the soldiers that were to oppose him, and their dislike to the Bourbons." At first glance, it might seem odd that Jackson would see the army as a democratic

²³⁷ Charles Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars*, 460-531.

²³⁸ *National Advocate* (New York, NY), April 27, 1815.

element in French society. Two elements were probably at work here. First, Jackson himself was well aware of Napoleon's conscription system which had created a truly "peoples" army in France. Second, Jackson, like many other Americans was likely adapting his own experience to what he read about Napoleon. Most of the soldiers he had led in the past were militiamen, who had to be led, rather than coerced—though Jackson did attempt to coerce obedience at times, usually with disastrous results. In popular recitations of Napoleon's return, Jackson noticed that Bonaparte had given his soldiers the democratic choice to shoot him or to join him. This Jackson must have understood and admired.²³⁹

The second exile of Napoleon also allowed Americans to juxtapose the bloody restoration of the Bourbons and Bonaparte's peaceful, and somewhat democratic return from Elba. One example of this was an article originally published in the Boston Gazette, titled "The 'Usurper' and the 'Legitimate.'" In the article, the author reminded his readers that, "When the *sanguinary* Napoleon returned to Paris from Elba, not a single drop of blood sullied the glory of his career." Yet, the article went on, dripping with sarcasm, when the "*Legitimate* Louis" returned, supporters of the Napoleonic regime were "barbarously arraigned and most inhumanly executed." After describing one of the executions in heartrending detail the author left his readers with little doubt which of the two—Napoleon and Louis—was the usurper, and which was the legitimate sovereign.²⁴⁰

Even Americans less inclined to read received the same message. A print distributed by the Philadelphia firm of William Charles in 1815 provided a humorous commentary on the chaotic nature of French politics after the Bourbon restoration (figure 3). In it, a portly Louis

²³⁹ "Andrew Jackson to Edward Livingston, May 17, 1815," *The Papers of Andrew Jackson Digital Edition*, Daniel Feller, ed., Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2015-.

²⁴⁰ "The 'Usurper' and the 'Legitimate,'" *Vermont Republican* (Windsor, VT), November 11, 1815.

XVIII struggles up a greased pole towards a crown symbolizing imperial legitimacy. “Support me or I shall fall” he cries. To help his endeavors, Louis stands on the backs of squabbling figures representing the army, the Catholic church and various foreign powers. Noticeably absent from his support are the people of France. In the background, but still prominent, is Napoleon on the rock of St. Helena carefully guarded by British cannon. Watching with a hint of amusement, the Napoleon figure comments, “I climbed up twice without any help.” Whether they read the original reports of Napoleon’s return from Elba or saw the commentary that followed, many Americans drew the similar conclusions: even though Napoleon was an emperor, he was at least a popular and democratic one.²⁴¹

While the events of 1814-1815 did soften the image of Bonaparte considerably in the eyes of many Americans, this image was not unopposed. Federalists continued to use the anti-Napoleon imagery that they had used for so long with such success. A great many Americans were genuinely glad when Bonaparte was forced out of power in 1814, and public gatherings were full of orations praising his downfall. At least some of commentators used the occasion to remind Americans of the unfortunate consequences of territorial ambition through association with Bonaparte.

On July 4, 1814, the respected physician Charles Caldwell addressed the Washington Benevolent Society of Pennsylvania. Caldwell began with a brief account of the rise and fall of Napoleon using the trope of the bloody, treacherous tyrant. Then he discussed what he saw as the unfortunate American dealings with Napoleon. During our own revolutionary struggles, he pointed out, Spain and Holland were “sincerely attached to our interests.”

²⁴¹ William Charles, *Louis XVIII climbing the Mât de Cocagne*, 1815, American Antiquarian Society, reference no. 152935.

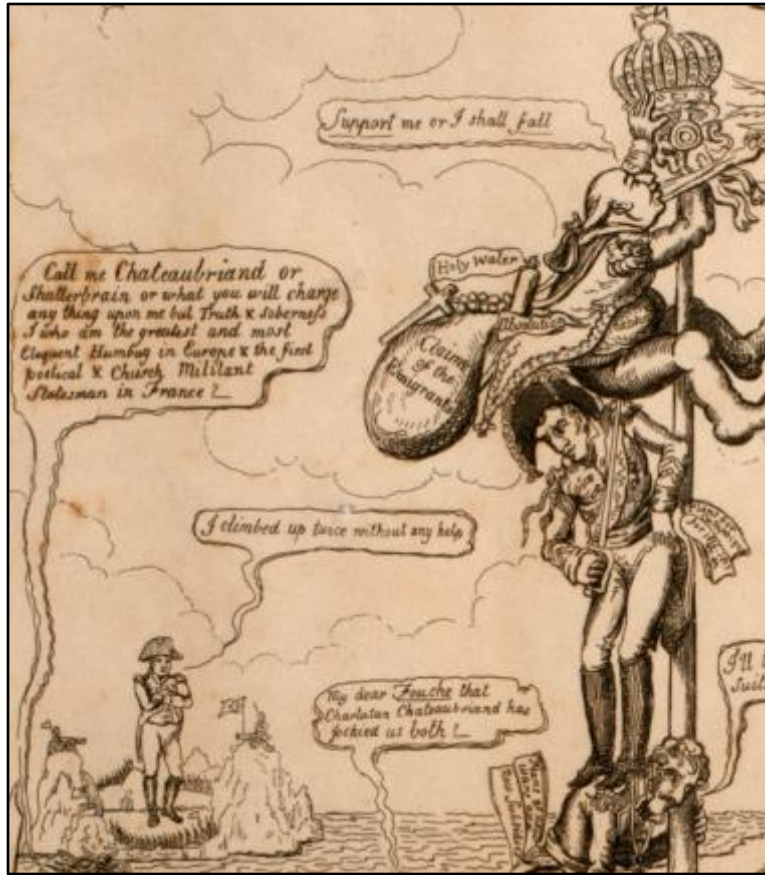


Figure 3, William Charles, “Louis XVIII climbing the Mât de Cocagne” (Detail), 1815.

Yet, in the last few years, the United States had shamefully yoked itself to “him who carried carnage and mourning into both Holland and Spain.” This was, of course, disgraceful said Caldwell, but the actions that had followed were even worse. In reference to West Florida, he thundered Americans had acted “in an equal violation of magnanimity and right” to Bonaparte when they “invaded a defenseless province.”²⁴²

As Caldwell’s speech shows, with Napoleon no longer a national security threat, most Federalists reverted to their other effective argument against unscrupulous expansion: critique by example. A scathingly sarcastic commentary on the British-American peace talks in Ghent, for

²⁴² Charles Caldwell, *An Oration Commemorative of American Independence Delivered Before the Washington Benevolent Society of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1814) 54-55.

example, contained this passage that compared American territorial ambitions to Napoleon's own,

The commissioners in the name of the United States, indeed, disavow all projects of aggrandizement whatsoever; and acts of theirs having a contrary appearance, are all accounted for by particular circumstances; and so were all aggrandizements of Bonaparte; it was his enemies that forced him to extend the power of France from the Rhine to the Elbe, from the Elbe to the Vistula. It was mere friendship for the royal family of Spain, that made him place his brother on the throne of that kingdom; so it was Spain that made it necessary for the United States to acquire Louisiana; it was Spain that compelled them to seize the Floridas, and Great Britain that prompted them, at an unlucky hour, to seize the Canadas.

Messages that condemned opportunistic, territorial aggrandizement by comparing it to that of Napoleon still held power in a sizable, but shrinking section of the American people.²⁴³

Even after Bonaparte lost at Waterloo, Federalists continued to remind Americans of their unfortunate co-belligerency with Bonaparte during the War of 1812. For example, when one Federalist editor was told that Napoleon intended to seek asylum in the United States following the loss at Waterloo he hoped it was true. If it was, he snidely opined, the emperor ought to be held by the government and exhibited for money until all the debts incurred by the War of 1812 had been paid off. After all, the editor reasoned, reverting to the rhetoric that had served his party so well, the Madison administration had waged the war on Napoleon's behalf. The sheer number of these arguments show that they still held some power, but reactions to the American invasion of East Florida in 1818 demonstrated that numbers of people who could be reached by such arguments were shrinking.²⁴⁴

The harsh Treaty of Fort Jackson, which ended the Creek War in 1814, left the Creek people divided and dispossessed of their Georgian and Alabamian homelands. Despite clauses in the Treaty of Ghent which promised to restore their territory, the defeat at New Orleans forced

²⁴³ *New York Courier* (New York, NY), January 16, 1815.

²⁴⁴ *Hampshire Gazette* (Northampton, MA), August 23, 1815.

the British to renege on their promises to support their erstwhile Indian allies. Desperate and abandoned, many Creeks moved south into Florida where they joined bands of Seminole Indians and runaway slaves. Over the next few years, land pressures there led to increasingly violent tit-for-tat raids between American settlers and Seminole war bands, who used the ill-defined international border between East and West Florida as a sanctuary. In March of 1818 tensions boiled over. With vague orders to protect American interests and citizens in Florida, the senior army commander in the region, Major General Andrew Jackson, launched a full-scale invasion of Spanish East Florida with nearly 4,000 soldiers, militia, and friendly Creek allies claiming that he was pursuing enemy Seminole war parties.²⁴⁵

Through a combination of bluster, ruthlessness, good fortune, skill, and Spanish unpreparedness, Jackson's army quickly overran not only most of the Seminole villages in the territory, but also all of the major Spanish garrisons. During the campaign, his army captured two British nationals: Alexander George Arbuthnot, a Scottish trader, and Robert Ambrister, a former Royal Marine. Jackson accused the men of providing firearms to the Seminoles (which they probably did) and of inciting them to make war on American settlers (which they probably did not). Never one to bother much with the international implications of his actions, Jackson convened a courts martial, which, unsurprisingly, found both men guilty, and then had them executed.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ The best full length treatment of the conflict is, John and Mary Lou Missal, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2004); but shorter treatments can be found in John K. Mahon, "The First Seminole War," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 77 no. 1 (Summer 1998), 62-67; Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 341-365; and Frank L. Owsley and Gene Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*, 141-163.

²⁴⁶ Ibid; also see Jackson's official report on the campaign to the Secretary of War, "Andrew Jackson to John C. Calhoun, May 5, 1818," *The Papers of Andrew Jackson Digital Edition*, Daniel Feller, ed., Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2015-.

Foreign reaction to the Seminole War was quite negative. Britain protested the summary execution of its citizens. The men were unfortunate noncombatants in the wrong place at the wrong time, they said. Spain, of course, vehemently objected to the invasion and occupation of her territory. Neither country, however, was in a place to make good on its complaints. Britain did not wish to endanger relations with her best trading partner and eventually let the matter drop after a suitable period of righteous indignation. Spain was more difficult. Jackson's invasion endangered ongoing negotiations between Spain and the United States for the cession Florida. In the end, however, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams took advantage of the situation and issued a letter blaming the whole war on the British, the Seminoles, and the Spanish. In fact, the whole episode actually strengthened Adams's diplomatic hand in the long run. Once negotiations resumed, he demanded that Spain either control her Indian subjects in Florida, or cede the territory to someone who could.²⁴⁷

However, just because he had avoided the international consequences of his actions did not mean that he had completely escaped punishment. He still had some powerful enemies in Congress, and they refused to let an opportunity like this go to waste. In early 1819, the House Military Affairs Committee issued a report condemning Jackson's actions in Florida. Based on their recommendations, the House of Representatives readied itself to debate a series of bills that would have disavowed the aggressive expansionism of Jackson. There was no guarantee that such bills would fail. After all, on at least three separate occasions before, Congress had derailed aggressive expansion in Florida. The ensuing debate took almost a month, which, at that time,

²⁴⁷ Charles N. Edel, *Nation Builder: John Quincy Adams and the Grand Strategy of the Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 147-154; Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood*, 121-24; Kagen, *Dangerous Nation*, 136-138.

was the longest ever spent debating one issue, and was carefully followed in the papers by the American public.²⁴⁸

Despite the obvious similarities, surprisingly few of those in the anti-expansion camp took the opportunity to draw parallels between Jackson's actions and those of Bonaparte. Even the most eloquent orator in the House of Representatives, Kentucky's Henry Clay, shied away from bringing too many references to Bonaparte into his anti-Jackson speech. Born in 1777 and a lawyer and hemp plantation owner by trade, Clay spent virtually his entire adult life representing Kentucky in Congress. He rose to prominence in Congress as a leader of the so-called "War-Hawks" during the War of 1812 who pushed for American entry into the conflict. He had built a reputation, however, for moderation in expansion and fostering good relations with the Latin American republics. When, as Speaker of the House of Representatives, stood to address the House and a packed gallery, on January 12, 1819, he knew that he was speaking to the American people and not just his congressional colleagues. If they expected a long harangue tying Jackson's treatment of the Creeks and Seminoles to Bonaparte's treatment of Italy, or Holland, or Prussia, or half a dozen other places in Europe, however, they would have been greatly disappointed.²⁴⁹

While Clay did denounce the Treaty of Fort Jackson as unreasonable and found nothing in international law which could sanction Jackson's invasion of a foreign country, he tied neither of these episodes to Bonaparte. Instead of linking Jackson to illegal national expansion through Napoleon, Clay saved his Bonaparte references for what he saw as Jackson's overly aggressive and ambitious character. Clay's strongest attack came in his condemnation of Jackson's

²⁴⁸ Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire*, 369-374.

²⁴⁹ The best current biography of Clay is David and Jeanne Heidler, *Henry Clay: The Essential American* (New York: Random House, 2011); *Annals of Congress*, 15th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1818, vol. 13, 631-655.

execution of Arbuthnot. Jackson's best biographer, Robert Remini, characterized Clay's allusion to Bonaparte here as "subtle." It was not. Considering the execution, Clay claimed could think of only one analogous incident, that of the arrest and execution of the Duc D'Enghein. Here, Clay referred to, and described in detail, an infamous incident in which Bonaparte had a French royalist seized by his military from the neutral state of Baden, arrayed on trumped up charges and quickly executed. It was this incident, and, thus by implication, not Bonaparte's expansionism, which according to Clay, "had brought more odium than almost any other incident on the unhappy Emperor of France." This was truly a momentous shift in rhetorical strategy, and though Clay's speech was widely reprinted, no one seemed to have noticed.²⁵⁰

Napoleon appeared one other time in the Clay's remarks, and he was used once again not to contest expansion, but as a warning against the character of military heroes. Near his conclusion, the Speaker warned that aggressive, expansionist warfare had the tendency to erode the liberties of free societies. Wars resulted in glory-covered heroes, and such men had a habit of swaying the democratic crowds to do their will, no matter how injurious to liberty. Of course, Bonaparte was the obvious example of this. Clay was quick to point out that he did not think Jackson to be another Napoleon, but lest anyone doubt that such things could happen in the United States, Clay warned that Bonaparte had proven the dangers of "military chieftains" to unwitting societies. Quoting from a well-known biography of Napoleon by Madam De Staël, Clay pointed out that well regarded Frenchmen had insisted that they would never again see monarchy in the very month that "Bonaparte with his grenadiers had entered the palace at St.

²⁵⁰ *Annals of Congress*, 15th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1818, vol. 13, 647; Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire*, 371-374.

Cloud...and laid the foundations for that vast fabric of despotism which overshadowed all Europe.”²⁵¹

Most of the anti-expansionist camp followed the lead of the Speaker, appealing to Bonaparte only as a reflection of his treacherous political character, not to his expansionist tendencies. They were not foolishly missing a golden rhetorical opportunity. Instead, they were recognizing how Bonaparte’s reputation had changed in the years since his deposition, and changing their rhetoric to reflect what they imagined was the new reality which was an American public that increasingly found aggressive expansion in the manner of Bonaparte acceptable. As the bifurcated image of Napoleon became more prominent, Americans became more comfortable with military expansion. Clay understood this, and hoped that they still might be swayed by appeals to the political despot image of Napoleon. However, as he would do so many times in his political career, Clay miscalculated. Parts of the American public were probably moved by his oration, but many more had accepted the softer image of the democratic emperor produced by the momentous events of 1815. Despite this, Clay did lay a rhetorical groundwork on which anti-expansionists would build over the next two decades.

Surprisingly, at least in a few cases, Napoleon was also used by the pro-expansionists. Representative Ballard Smith of Virginia spoke after Clay, and used much of his speech to refute the Speaker. In the middle of his lengthy speech, he spent what must have been several minutes discussing the ultimate justification of American expansion. “The gentleman,” he began, “asks what would be said to our unreasonable demands were the Treaty of Fort Jackson to be seen by the powers of Europe. And I ask who would presume to find fault with them.” It certainly could not be France, he sneered, “who so recently demanded Spain, Portugal, Italy, Holland and

²⁵¹ *Annals of Congress*, 15th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1818, vol. 13, 653-655; a good introduction to the de Staël book can be found in Pieter Geyl, *Napoleon: For and Against*, reprint ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 21-24.

Germany.” In essence, Ballard was suggesting that Napoleon’s imperialism had overturned the old Vattelian world and replaced it with a realpolitik system in which nations could expand as far as their means and ambition could take them. This was an extraordinarily bold move by Ballard in a country where so much of the rhetoric of expansion had been built on *not* being like Napoleon, but it seems at least not to have hurt the final result. Indeed, the final result probably had more to do with the pro-expansionists carefully not using Napoleon rather than through their use of him. Not only was Jackson completely exonerated, but by a vote of 42 to 112, the House refused to pass a more general bill to prohibit the invasion of a foreign country without the express authorization of Congress.²⁵²

With the Jackson’s army firmly ensconced in Florida with the approval of both the executive and legislative branches of government, the Spanish came to the bargaining table. In the resulting Adams-Onis Treaty, the Spanish ceded East Florida to the United States in return for the United States renouncing its claims on Texas—another offshoot of the murky borders of Louisiana that would have profound consequences a few decades later. The immediate effects of the use of Napoleon by the pro-expansionists is difficult to assess. The use of Bonaparte as a positive was certainly hesitant and not at all commonplace. Indeed, they may have score more political points by not mentioning him at all. Either way, they seem to have been more more successful than their opponents in reading the effect of the events of 1815 on the American public. Whether it was from a careful use of Napoleon, or from not using Napoleon, the results were undeniable. Jackson’s aggressive expansionism was completely condoned and after sixteen years of political and military posturing the United States finally acquired Florida through aggressive military diplomacy.

²⁵² *Annals of Congress*, 15th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1818, vol. 13, 697-698.

Jackson's pro-expansionists should also be credited with laying the groundwork for a new use of Napoleon that began in earnest shortly after the Florida treaty was signed. This line of argument posited Napoleon as an example—not of moral goodness, but of greatness. As William Weeks demonstrated in his analysis of John Quincy Adams's rhetorical defense of Jackson's invasion, this type of argument tapped into a deep desire of the post-revolutionary generation for their actions to be rooted in the myths of virtue, mission, and destiny. In these “neo-greatness” arguments, the system and practice of empire building of the United States was compared favorably to that of the Napoleonic Empire. This was not entirely new of course. David Ramsey had used this line of argument in his valedictory on the Louisiana Purchase, but awkward questions about aggressive expansion posed by the Federalists during the long War of 1812 drove these arguments out of fashion. Once the war was successfully terminated, however, and the image of Bonaparte softened sufficiently thanks to the events of 1815, these arguments once again gained favor.²⁵³

One of the first of this “neo-greatness” argument came almost as soon as news of the Florida Treaty became known. Perusing the reaction to the cession from Europe, a triumphant editor of the *Providence Patriot* was hard pressed to contain his glee. “The gigantic schemes and comet-like progress of Bonaparte dazzled and confounded the vision [of Europe],” he wrote, “but the steady inevitable march of Columbia to unparalleled greatness arrests the attention and commands the admiration of every intelligent observer.” Europe, he continued, had contrived to halt the progress of Bonaparte, but, “it is in vain that the governments of the old world would

²⁵³ William Weeks, “John Quincy Adams's ‘Great Gun’ and the Rhetoric of American Empire,” *Diplomatic History* 14, no. 1 (Winter, 1990): 25-42, see especially 41-42.

strive to check the rising glory of the new.” In other words, Napoleon’s empire might have been great, but the rising American empire would be even greater.²⁵⁴

Bonaparte’s premature death on St. Helena in 1821 occurred conveniently as the last of the revolutionary generation in the United States was passing away. In many ways, this added fuel to the neo-greatness arguments, since death humanized and rendered Bonaparte even more harmless in the minds of most Americans. In one telling example, the editor of the *Easton Gazette* discussed the elaborate funeral observances for Bonaparte taking place in New Orleans. For over two decades, many Americans had suspected that the Louisianans maintained their Napoleonic allegiance and had justified their aggressive actions in the area based on this assumption that Bonaparte’s influence in the territory would lead to insurrection. Yet, after the death of Napoleon, such overt support for Bonaparte by Louisianans seemed harmless. According to the *Easton Gazette*, it ought not surprise Americans that the “old French feelings still exist” in the hearts of Louisianans. Yet, he continued with a rhetorical shrug, “there is now as little danger to us now in paying honors to Napoleon as there is to Nero or Caligula.”²⁵⁵

The best example of the neo-greatness argument occurred in 1826. In a charming article titled “Napoleon and Franklin” one author imagined a dialogue between the dead French Emperor and that quintessential dead American, Benjamin Franklin. Bonaparte starts the conversation by pointing out the weakness of the American grasp on North America. “Why do you not take Mexico and Cuba?” Bonaparte asks, “And why do you let the Russians keep a foot on your continent?” Franklin patiently explains that Americans have no need to conquer such places and points out that “the peaceful possession of all the really valuable part of [Europe],” would have been more effective in fulfilling Napoleon’s European ambitions. To this, Napoleon

²⁵⁴ “Cession of Florida,” *Providence Patriot* (Providence, RI), July 28, 1819.

²⁵⁵ “Funeral Honors to Bonaparte,” *Easton Gazette* (Easton, MD), November 24, 1821.

scoffs and explains that Franklin underestimates how global his ambitions truly were. Analyzing this new information, the ever-wise Franklin doubts that such a far-flung empire built on one man's talents could possibly have survived the death of great Napoleon. The system of expansion practiced in the United States, Franklin continues, is of a more lasting kind. The Americans, "have founded an empire destined to be wider than the Roman," according to Franklin, and that through "peaceful colonization and expansion" the language of liberty has already been spread, "through vast regions." Americans thus have no need to impose their empire on conquered people as Bonaparte did with his "iron legions on Europe." Even the brilliant Napoleon struggles for words to contradict the wisdom of the American sage, and finally grumbles, "Enough, Doctor, this philosophizing is worse than Moscow."²⁵⁶

The bifurcated images of Bonaparte that appeared in wake of his abdication were both intensified and solidified by the tidal wave of printed material about the emperor that appeared in the United States following his death. The vast majority of this material painted Napoleon as the great, democratic, military genius and left those who focused on Napoleon the bloody tyrant increasingly on the defensive. It is important to remember that this printed material did not occur in an American vacuum. The single most important change of the decades between 1815 and 1850 was the expansion of American democracy. The societal changes wrought by market revolution emphasized the ability (true or not) of the individual to work his way up in a system of individualistic capitalism. This led to demands by the middling and working classes for the rapid expansion of the voting franchise, which, by 1850, had been extended to virtually all white

²⁵⁶ "Napoleon and Franklin" *U.S. Literary Gazette* 3 no. 9 (February 1, 1826): 339-344.

men. It was within this expansion of the democratic system that Americans read and internalized their printed materials about Bonaparte.²⁵⁷

According to the leading historian of American biography, biographies written in the nineteenth-century United States were written for two basic reasons: to promote nationalism and encourage character formation. In many ways, these twin goals were intertwined, for the national character was only as great as the collective character of men and women who formed it. Biographies and histories of great men were particularly useful to these purposes because they held the mantels of truth and attainability, whereas characters in a novel were invented and thus seen as unattainable ideals. Problems, of course, arose, when Americans could not agree on exactly what character meant. Yet, American readers of biography and history also read them for a different reason: for entertainment. In a world without reality television or streaming movies, Americans found escape in exciting biographies. Publicly, at least, most biographers and historians would have sniffed at such a suggestion. The low-brow genre of the novel was for entertainment. But, especially when it came to military subjects, it is difficult to believe that young men did not find biographies as a means of escaping the stresses of daily life. Napoleon's life neatly fit the bill for all of these purposes.²⁵⁸

American consumers of Napoleonic printed material could not have helped but notice the democratic character of the French Emperor. The overwhelming majority of Bonaparte biographies portrayed his rise as an incredible "rags-to-riches" elevation and highlighted his industrious character. Almost every biography had some comment like the following one from

²⁵⁷ Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005); for an alternative view that nevertheless still emphasizes the role of democracy, see Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁵⁸ Scott E. Caspar, *Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture and Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

the introduction to a popular biography: “In his rise and in his career of prosperity and glory, [Bonaparte] greatly surpassed...the heroes of antiquity.” The author explained that while Alexander and Caesar came from noble families and had powerful friends to assist them, “the early advancement of Bonaparte was without any such powerful aids, and at the same time more rapid.” Even young American children imbibed this characterization of Bonaparte. One grammar school reader noted that, “Napoleon Bonaparte was one of the greatest warriors who ever lived. He won many battles and rose, by his skill and courage from a poor Corsican boy to be an emperor, and the most powerful sovereign in Europe.” The message was clear enough for readers of all ages—if you would rise in the world, model your character and habits after that of Bonaparte.²⁵⁹

If Napoleon’s rise was incredible, however, it was not simply a matter of chance. Biographies regularly described his calm, calculating demeanor, seemingly inexhaustible energy and attention to the tiniest of details. A passage from the very popular, five-volume set titled, *The Napoleon Anecdotes* reported a popular story from Bonaparte’s early military career illustrates the general idea. Not long before daybreak, one of Bonaparte’s friends cautiously opened his apartment door and was surprised to find the young officer fully dressed, and surrounded by reports and maps. “What!” the friend exclaimed, “Not yet in bed?” Napoleon scoffs and replies, “In bed? I have already risen. Two or three hours are enough for any man to sleep.” Another anecdote described Bonaparte as the consummate planner. “No human precaution, which it was possible to adopt, was ever...neglected or forgotten by Napoleon.” Napoleonic biographies were full of this type of character analysis. In the uncertain world of the

²⁵⁹ Anonymous, *Memoirs of the Political and Military Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* (Hartford, CT, 1822), 17; Increase Tarbox, *The Mocking Bird and Other Stories* (New York: Leavitt and Allen, 1855), 63.

market revolution, this was the type of character advice that would serve a young, ambitious American man just as well as the future emperor of France.²⁶⁰

Perhaps even more important than his own democratic rise was the perception that Napoleon had presided over the creation of a true meritocracy in France and supported the democratic rise of others. The two ideas were certainly linked in the eyes of many Americans. In the most popular of all the Napoleon biographies, Sir Walter Scott's mammoth, nine-volume *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte*, the author of *Ivanhoe* wrote that, the emperor, "lay the foundation of his throne on the democratic principle which had opened his own career." Thus, because of his own democratic rise, Napoleon threw "open to merit...the road to success in every department of the state." Scott's egalitarian Napoleon clearly affected the thinking of young Americans like feminist leader Margret Fuller. In 1847, she mimicked Scott's words almost verbatim when she wrote to *The New York Daily Tribune*. "Through Napoleon," she declared, "career had really been open to talent."²⁶¹

It is important to note just how men got ahead in the world of the democratic emperor. There were a few stories that highlighted elevation of intelligent youths, such as the tale of the thirteen-year-old Milanese boy who impressed Bonaparte so much with his discernment that the general ordered his father to see after his son's education, for "he will be no common man some day or other." These, however, were the exception. The vast majority of stories that featured advancement under Napoleon were tales of meritorious military promotion. In one story, Napoleon is refused passage on a certain road by a watchful French sentinel who has orders to

²⁶⁰ William H. Ireland ed., *The Napoleon Anecdotes: Illustrating the mental energies of the late Emperor of France* vol. 2 (London, 1823), 120-121; though the version I used was a British edition, newspaper advertisements show that the set was being sold in the United States as early as 1823.

²⁶¹ Scott's work was conveniently made available to Americans in a variety of condensed editions, of which the most useful is Walter Scott, *The Life of Napoleon* (Philadelphia: EL Carey and Hart, 1839), 665-666; Margret Fuller, *These Sad But Glorious Days: Dispatches from Europe 1846-1850* ed. Larry Reynolds and Susan Belaco Smith (Yale University Press: New Haven, CT, 1991), 120.

not let anyone pass by. The soldier is later called to headquarters and made an officer for his discipline. In another case, a young Lieutenant bravely steps out of ranks at a review to calm the Emperor's horse and is promoted on the spot to a Captain in the elite guards battalion. In perhaps the most well-known tale, the young general Napoleon promotes a brave sergeant at the siege of Toulon for coolness under fire. At the end of the anecdote, the reader discovers that this valiant soldier was none other than the future General Junot. These tales of rapid military advancement based on merit convinced many American youths that gallant military service during wartime was an excellent avenue for their own rapid social advancement.²⁶²

The military advancement of so many young men was contingent on nearly constant warfare in the Napoleonic empire. Traditionally, war—especially aggressive, offensive warfare—was seen by Americans as a dangerous proposition and the bane of republics. In fact, anti-expansionists had held up Bonaparte for almost two decades as the example, *par excellence*, of the dangers of military aggression to republics and humanity. Yet, this view rapidly lost ground in the two decades after Napoleon's death. The challenge came most strongly from the memoirs of Barry O'Meara, the Irish physician who attended Bonaparte on St. Helena. His sympathetic *Napoleon in Exile* captivated millions of Americans. Even in the midst of his first presidential campaign, Andrew Jackson found time to converse with a friend about the book. "I am happy you have read O'Meara's works," he wrote. "The world generally has taken up false ideas of Napoleon—much prejudice had been raised against him [but] I never had a doubt but he was a great & good man." Since O'Meara purported to record the conversations he had with Bonaparte during the last years of his life, the statements within the book were regarded as the

²⁶² *Memoirs of the Political and Military Life of Napoleon Bonaparte*, 150; William Ireland ed., *The Napoleon Anecdotes*, 58-59; Scott, *The Life of Napoleon*, 149.

closest thing available to Napoleon's memoirs and treated as a truthful account of the great man's opinions.²⁶³

In O'Meara's hands, Bonaparte's wars became honorable, brilliant campaigns that defended the natural boundaries of France against aggressive European monarchs and spread democratic values throughout Europe. This became the dominant understanding of Bonaparte through the 1850s. O'Meara even managed to work in the democratic trope into the idea of Napoleonic warfare. According to him, even as emperor, Napoleon saw his empire as a "kind of republic," whose maxim was "the career open to talents without distinction to birth or fortune." American histories of Bonaparte continued to use this trope of positive expansion for decades. For example, John Abbott's widely successful *History of Napoleon Bonaparte* actually compared Napoleon's expansion favorably to that of the United States in an astonishing passage that deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

It was the plea of Napoleon that he was not going to make an unjust war on the unoffending nations of the East, but that he was the ally of the oppressed people, drawing the sword against their common enemy, and that he was striving to emancipate them from their powerful usurpers and to confer upon them the most precious privileges of freedom. He marched to Egypt not to desolate but to ennoble; not to enslave but to enfranchise; not to enrich himself with the treasures of the east, but to transfer to those shores the opulence and the high civilization of the West. Never was an ambitious conqueror furnished with a more plausible plea. England, as she looks at India and China must be silent. America, as she listens to the dying wail of the Red Man, driven from the forests of his childhood and the the graves of his fathers, can throw no stone. Napoleon was surely not exempt from the infirmities of humanity. But it is not becoming an English or an American historian to breath the prayer, "We thank Thee, oh God, that we are not like this Bonaparte."

²⁶³ Barry O'Meara, *Napoleon in Exile, or A Voice from St. Helena*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1822); "Andrew Jackson to William Fulton, December 21, 1823," *The Papers of Andrew Jackson Digital Edition*, Daniel Feller, ed., Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2015-.

O'Meara's book and the ones that followed gave Americans permission to begin seeing warfare as a positive method of spreading democracy and freedom.²⁶⁴

Printed material on Napoleon not only helped reshape American thinking on the legitimate ends of warfare, but also shaped how many thought about the physical nature of combat and military service in general. For this, Sir Walter Scott was the chief culprit. His *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* was a runaway American best seller. A check of library holdings from the 1830s-1850s shows that every library for which the American Antiquarian Society has records had at least one edition of Scott's work. Scott's take on Napoleon was actually mildly negative. While he admired Napoleon's military and administrative skill, he found fault with Napoleon's habit of hubristically confusing his will with that of the French people. Even this was too much for many Americans. In fact, his work spawned a cottage industry of American biographies defending Napoleon from the British author. One American newspaper reviewer commented accurately, "The people of this country have ever looked upon Sir Walter Scott with suspicion since the production of this biography." Despite being castigated by Americans as an unfair, negative, portrayal of the great man, Scott actually painted a Napoleon who was ambitious, yet egalitarian. As discussed earlier, this fit nicely into the democratic American imagination.²⁶⁵

In her 1990 essay, "Romancing the Empire," historian Amy Kaplan showed that the romantic novels of the 1890s offered an explanation for American overseas empire building at the turn of the twentieth century. This was not a new phenomenon. Scott's views on Napoleon's political life were almost certainly not what most young, male Americans took from his work.

²⁶⁴ Barry O'Meara, *Napoleon in Exile*, vol. 1, 228, 261-262, 316-317; John Abbot, *A History of Napoleon Bonaparte*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper Brothers, 1855), 175.

²⁶⁵ *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), June 10, 1831.

He, was, above all, a romantic novelist, and he wrote his history using the literary devices which had served him so well in *Ivanhoe* and *Waverly*. Of the battle of Austerlitz, Scott reported, “Such were the preparations for this decisive battle, where three Emperors, each at the head of his own army strove to decide the destiny of Europe.” The idea that a single titanic battle could decide the fate of three great empires was heady stuff by itself, but Scott went even further. On that fateful morning, “The sun rose with unclouded brilliancy,” he wrote. “As its first beams rose across the horizon, Bonaparte appeared in front of his army surrounded by his marshals, to whom he issued his last directions, and they departed at full gallop to their different posts.” Imagining such a magnificent sight could hardly have failed to stir the hearts of young Americans.²⁶⁶

American commenters marveled at Scott’s ability to evoke martial emotion in his work on Napoleon. The *Barre Gazette*, for example, printed the part of the biography in which Scott described Napoleon’s crossing the Alps during the Italian Wars, and gushed that it was “one of the most graphic accounts of the feat which has ever been written.” The *Salem Gazette* concurred with this assessment. In an editorial on Scott, the author admirably wrote of his work on Napoleon: “the depictions of the battles are clear and graphic. All other men’s descriptions are confused compared to his. They have fine words—he has fine images. They have plenty of smoke—he is all fire.” Ultimately, that was the rub. Whatever their concerns were with Scott’s analysis of Napoleon as a person, a large majority of Americans—especially young men—were enthralled by his brilliant martial prose that made military service seem like a grand, memorable adventure. This worried many anti-expansionists.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Amy Kaplan, “Romancing the Empire: The Embodiment of American Masculinity in the Historical Novel of the 1890s,” *American Literary History* 2 no. 4 (Winter, 1990), 659-690; Scott, *The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte*, 314.

²⁶⁷ *The Barre Gazette* (Barre, MA), October 21, 1842; *Salem Gazette* (Salem, MA), December 14, 1832.

It is notoriously difficult to measure the influence of printed material. One crude way to measure its influence is by seeing how well the materials sold, but a more effective way is to gauge the reaction of the opposition. By the latter measure, the pro-Napoleon mania that swept the United States was astonishingly effective. The shrinking circle of who continued to see as Bonaparte as a bloody, treacherous tyrant saw the tidal wave of pro-Bonaparte literature as a grave threat to the moral and political character of the nation and reacted to it as such. Between 1820 and 1850, these Americans—mostly concentrated in the old Federalist (now Whig) strongholds of the northeast—were increasingly put on the defensive, but they managed to mount a respectable rear guard action that culminated during the Mexican War.

By far, the most popular anti-Bonaparte tract in the United States was William Ellery Channing's *Remarks on the Character of Napoleon Bonaparte Occasioned by the Publication of Scott's Life of Napoleon*. Channing (1780-1842), was one of Unitarianism's leading lights by the time he published his work in The Boston-based *Christian Examiner* in 1827. The work was so popular, however, that it was printed as a separate pamphlet almost immediately after its initial publication. It proved most influential among the New-England elite. For example, the son of President John Quincy Adams, Charles Francis Adams, wrote highly of the essay in his diary and noted discussing it over dinner with friends and arguing its merits in debating society. The young lawyer and future Supreme Court Chief Justice, Salmon P. Chase also wrote favorably of Channing's essay in his diary, "Undazzled by the blaze of military and civil glory which has surrounded the Hero, he has deeply penetrated and faithfully exposed his real character."²⁶⁸

²⁶⁸ William E. Channing, *Remarks on the Character of Napoleon Bonaparte Occasioned by the Publication of Scott's Life of Napoleon* (New York: G.F. Hopkins, 1831); Charles Francis Adams, *Diary of Charles Francis Adams* vol. 2 ed. Aida DiPace Donald and David Donald (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 182, 188, 343; Salmon P. Chase, *The Salmon P. Chase Papers* vol. 1 ed. John Niven (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1993), 10.

After reading Scott's work, Channing had grave concerns, but they were not those of Americans who thought the author had been too hard on the emperor. Instead, Channing worried that Scott's sympathetic view of his subject would affect the moral character of the Americans. Channing admitted that, like Scott, he could not deny Napoleon's military greatness. He was old enough to remember with what "rapturous admiration" he first read of Bonaparte's Italian campaigns in the newspapers, and wrote that he could not read Scott's brilliant rendition of his military exploits "without a quickened movement in the veins." Yet, with the wisdom of age, Channing had come to understand that while military genius was a form of greatness, it was its lowest form. There was no question, Channing wrote, that Napoleon had been a military genius, but he lacked the intellectual and moral greatness which were far superior.²⁶⁹

Indeed, according to Channing, it was the presence of Napoleon's military genius without the restraint of moral and intellectual greatness which was responsible for the "unprincipled and open aggressions" that characterized Bonaparte's wars. Military success had bred the dangerous notion in Napoleon's mind that an "empire of the world" was the "fulfillment of his destiny." Channing's choice of the word "destiny" was a deliberate swipe at Scott's writing. In Scott's saga, Destiny (always capitalized) was a nearly physical character. "She" was literally at Bonaparte's side "leading him by the hand, and at the same time protecting him with her shield." Napoleon was, according to Scott, "the man of Destiny." For Channing, this was dangerous, self-aggrandizing nonsense that would corrupt the minds of impressionable young Americans. Ultimately, Channing argued, it was Bonaparte's misguided sense of "destiny" had led to the corruption of the entire French nation, who "in her madness and folly had placed her happiness in conquest [and] felt that the glory of her arms was only safe in the hands of the First Consul."

²⁶⁹ Channing, *Remarks on the Character of Napoleon Bonaparte*, 6-7.

For Channing, it was a sad commentary on the state of the French people that they had allowed their national character to be usurped and corrupted by one man.²⁷⁰

All this led Channing to his final paragraphs in which he commented on the nature of war itself. As a rule, Channing was far more interested in the conduct of individuals than of nations. His chief concern with Scott's sympathetic portrayal of Napoleon's character was in its ability to convince the minds of impressionable young men that military genius and a sense of destiny were the chief ends in life. Yet, he felt obligated to lodge a brief commentary on warfare in general. War was, in his opinion, a very great evil—especially when it was conducted for the fulfillment of some misguided sense of personal destiny. “Wearied with violence and blood,” Americans should pray that God “subvert oppressive governments by the gentle, yet awful power of truth and virtue.” Yet, if this was impossible, war could be necessary. Its most harmful effects, he continued, could be muted if those who engaged in it “took to the sword with awe,” and remember that they served one whose “dearest attribute was mercy.” In practice this meant that individual soldiers should “not stain their sacred cause by one cruel deed, by the infliction of one needless pang, [or] by shedding without cause one drop of human blood.” For Channing, the lesson of Bonaparte was ultimately that war and national expansion was a reflection of individual human character.²⁷¹

A decade after the publication of Channing's *Remarks*, another book was published that addressed similar concerns in a slightly different way while still keeping Napoleon central to the message. Its author was one of the most remarkable, and yet unknown, men in the history of the early republic. William Ladd was born into a wealthy New Hampshire merchant family only

²⁷⁰ Channing, *Remarks on the Character of Napoleon Bonaparte*, 14, 22-25, 33-36; Scott, *The Life of Napoleon*, 355.

²⁷¹ Channing, *Remarks on the Character of Napoleon Bonaparte*, 50-51.

two years after the United States declared their independence from Great Britain. After graduating from Harvard and serving for a time as a sailor on one of his father's merchant vessels, Ladd decided to change the world. Luckily for him, he was able to ride a growing tide of Christian humanitarian reform that swept through in the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century. After a brief attempt to undermine African slavery by setting up a cotton plantation in Florida using paid immigrant laborers failed miserably, Ladd listlessly moved from humanitarian cause to humanitarian cause before finally discovering on the international peace movement in the early 1820s.²⁷²

Ladd began his crusade for peace in 1823 by starting local peace society in his home of Minot, ME. Over the remaining seventeen years of his life, Ladd worked diligently for his new cause. He successfully unified the disparate peace organizations across the United States into the American Peace Society, and had some success in enlisting support for his cause from other humanitarian organizations. He had considerably less success, however, in realizing his dream of creating an international Congress of Nations to hear and arbitrate transnational disputes—a plan that presaged the modern United Nations. Ladd also devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to combating the growing tide of militarism that he saw emerging in the youth of America. He vocally opposed the creation of the Bunker Hill memorial, calling it a “monument to barbarism and anti-Christian spirit” and wrote numerous books aimed at American youths which advocated Christian pacifism. One of the last books that Ladd wrote was published

²⁷² Sadly, for such a remarkable individual, no scholarly work has been done on Ladd since the cursory treatment in, Martin Watkins, “William Ladd: Peacemaker,” *World Affairs* 114, no. 4 (Winter, 1951), 112-114; thankfully, the Maine Historical Society and the Minot Historical Society websites both have short biographies of Ladd, which I used to help write these paragraphs, see < <https://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/833/page/1243/display> > and < <https://minotmainehistoricalociety.wordpress.com/minot-history/william-ladd/>>.

pseudonymously in 1838 and explicitly tied Napoleonic literature to the militarism that he believed was corrupting the youth of America.²⁷³

Written under the pseudonym Philanthropos, *Howard and Napoleon Contrasted* was aimed at older children and featured eight chapters, or dialogs, between two school boys named William and Henry. The former was an idealized model of Christian virtue, while the latter was a representation of the young American everyman. Henry is a truly remarkable character. He has read all the latest Napoleon biographies and gripes about the British bias of Scott's *Life* and the *Secret History of St. Cloud*. He grew up surrounded by pictures of Napoleon and his marshals. Additionally, a cadre of adults—including his father, his school master, and his minister—who taught him that the chief end of life is making a great name for oneself in this world. Unsurprisingly, Henry virtually worships at the altar of military glory and the its chief saint—Napoleon. He loves the martial spectacle of the local militia musters and longs to finish his education at a military academy, and become a military officer of great renown.²⁷⁴

Surrounded as he is by the new American martial culture perpetuated by Napoleon-mania, Henry is quite shocked—even outraged—when his best friend, William, questions his life's goals. William, however, is undeterred and attempts to reason with his friend along two parallel lines of attack. The first line of attack was reminiscent of Channing, though certainly more accessible to children. William asks Henry to compare the actions and objectives of his idol with those of a nondescript Christian merchant. Though Henry finds the biographies of such lowbrow men “flat and uninteresting,” William patiently coaches him to a new understanding of humanity. When pressed by William's keen logic, Henry finds to his surprise that there is a vast

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ William Ladd, *Howard and Napoleon Compared in Eight Dialogues* (Hallowell, NH: Glazier, Masters and Smith, 1838).

difference between greatness and goodness, and that Napoleon had the former without the latter which made him cruel and unjust. Even the French nationalism which Scott held up as Bonaparte's chief virtue William reduces to simple selfishness for it demands that he love only a small portion of humanity at the expense of all others.

William's other line of attack was one to which Channing briefly alluded but never fully engaged. This was the dangerous "War Spirit" fostered by the celebration of Napoleon. Henry loves the spectacle of the local militia musters. "Oh how I love a sham fight!" he sighs while perusing Scott's *Life of Napoleon*, "and to hear the cannons roar, and the muskets rattle, and the drums beat, and the horses neigh, and feel the ground tremble." In words directly reminiscent of Scott, Henry comments on how he loves to see the bright glint of the sunlight off the bayonets and swords of the militia. "Oh! It is the most glorious sight in the world," he says to William. "If a sham fight is so glorious, what must a real fight be like?" With such magnificent spectacles, it is no wonder that Henry finds the biographies of Christian merchants so boring. Ladd here made a damning comment on how Napoleonic literature had finally developed into a new social culture that celebrated martial glory at the expense of Christian charity. Luckily for Henry, his friend has no illusions about the real nature of war.²⁷⁵

William makes his case in an innovative style. Instead of relying on the Bible as he did in his initial arguments, he goes to one of the most famous of Bonaparte military histories, the General Philippe-Paul Comte de Ségur's *History of the Expedition to Russia*. First published in English in 1825, this French history of the disastrous 1812 campaign remains in print. An 1841 introduction to an American edition noted that, "nothing can more effectively dissipate every illusion of military glory than the perusal of this dreadful narrative." So hoped William. Ségur's

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 12-13.

history in hand, he quotes lengthy, graphic descriptions of hungry and half-frozen French soldiers hacked to death by marauding Cossacks, blown to bits by Russian shells, or even committing suicide. When Henry points out that this was a campaign lost, William describes the spread of disease that killed so many American soldiers following their victory at New Orleans. Ultimately, William concludes, “the life of the modern soldier is ill-reported by heroic fiction,” and that if Henry persists in his dream of becoming an officer, it is likely that he will perish in “hopeless misery” languishing in a disease riddled camp or a prison ship far from loved ones.²⁷⁶

Williams stark description of the soldier life finally has the desired effect, and Henry resolves to give up his dreams of earthly glory and focus his life on Christ rather than on Napoleon. Paradoxically, Ladd had to fight Bonaparte with Bonaparte, and though he probably did not intend it, it was actually the Comte de Ségur and not the Bible that managed to sway Henry away from the dangerous influence of Scott’s Napoleon. This literary device was not far from the reality, and it informed the rhetoric of anti-expansionists for the next decade and a half. If they wanted to make an effective argument, they would need to work within the image of Bonaparte as the American military authority and standard of national greatness.

In many ways, Americans saw their debate over national expansion between 1836 and 1848 as a contest waged over the image of Bonaparte. Many saw the outcome of these debates as providing the United States a legitimate national claim to the greatness of the Napoleonic Empire. For other Americans, the problem was that the greatness of the Napoleonic empire could only come at the expense of American goodness. It was almost as if the argument between Henry and William in the last section had become a national argument waged by millions of Americans. Over the course of these years, Americans picked up many of the threads of the

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 79-68; Philippe-Paul Comte de Ségur, *History of the Expedition of Russia Undertaken by the Emperor Napoleon in 1812*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper Brothers, 1858), iii-iv.

Napoleonic rhetoric they had learned over the previous thirty years and used them to weave new defenses and critiques of national expansionist policy.

The outbreak of the Texas revolution in 1835 set the United States and Mexico on a long, slow, slide towards war. Shortly after gaining its independence, Mexico had attempted to populate its northern state of Coahuila y Tejas in an effort to create a buffer that would keep land hungry Americans and restless Comanche raiders from the core of Mexico. Enticed by promises of cheap land and low taxes, thousands of American families spilled into the area and largely ignored government demands that they become Mexican citizens and abandon slavery. Thus, it was hardly surprising that a rebellion broke out in the marginally loyal Mexican province with abrogation of the 1824 Constitution and the creation of a more centralized state.²⁷⁷

After successfully dealing with similar revolts in the south of Mexico, general and President Antonio López de Santa Anna turned north and led an army into Texas where he quickly defeated Texans at Goliad and San Antonio. A few months later, however, a Texan force under Sam Houston surprised and virtually annihilated the overstretched Mexican army at the Battle of San Jacinto. Santa Anna himself was captured in the aftermath and forced to acknowledge the independent Republic of Texas as a condition of his release. Following their victory over the Mexican army at San Jacinto in 1836, the infant, cash-strapped, Republic of Texas quickly applied for admission into the United States and Mexico warned that any American interference with what they saw as a rebellious province would be viewed as an act of war.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁷ H.W. Brands, *Lone Star Nation: The Epic Story of the Battle for Texas Independence* (New York: Random House, 2005).

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Not only did American expansionists find war to be an acceptable risk, many were positively anxious for a military conflict in which they could take up the military mantle of Napoleon. Texans assured their northern cousins that they could “plant the American Eagle” over the Halls of the Montezumas as easily as “Napoleon replaced his conquering banner on the turrets of Vendome.” Meanwhile, the editor of the *New York Herald* did not fear any war with Mexico. After all, he assured his readers, the United States had a population of twenty million souls who were “as fearless, as brave, and as passionately fond of glory...as the French under Napoleon.” Such an argument could not have been made with any kind of legitimacy before the bifurcation of Bonaparte and the proliferation of Napoleonic literature.²⁷⁹

The other expansionist argument that utilized Bonaparte was more understated but deserves careful examination. It played on the old trope of expansion in the name national security. Without a real Bonaparte, however, expansionists had to invent one. This they did, partly without even trying to. Santa Anna himself laid most of the groundwork for them when he began to accept the moniker, “Napoleon of the West.”²⁸⁰ This was a helpful image, at least at first, for Santa Anna present to Mexican citizens looking for a strong, nationalist leader. Many Americans were even willing to grant him some Napoleonic legitimacy. “He is,” wrote one editor, “unquestionably a man of consummate abilities. He has always heretofore been successful in his enterprises—he subdued a nation to his sway and became the Napoleon of

²⁷⁹ *Houston Telegraph* (Houston, TX), August 12, 1837; *New York Herald* (New York, NY), March 17, 1845.

²⁸⁰ It is unknown when or where this nickname was first applied or by whom, but was well established at least by the time of his elevation to president in 1835. There were numerous variations on this theme that littered the papers. Some of the more common were, “Napoleon of the South,” or “Napoleon of the Americas,” or “the Napoleon of Mexico.”

Mexico.” Once Santa Anna became a threat to Texas in 1835, however, Americans turned this into a weapon.²⁸¹

Expansionist Americans used Santa Anna’s use of Napoleon to justify their expansion in several ways. First, they drew on the political image of Bonaparte to paint Santa Anna as an ambitious, treacherous, blood thirsty despot, while at the same time chipping away at his military claims to the mantle of Bonaparte. A letter written from Vera Cruz on June 22, and published in several American papers, for example, described in graphic detail Santa Anna’s attack on Zacatecas. According to the letter, men, women, and children were butchered in the streets. The sovereignty of the state was destroyed, he continued, and the “torch of rational liberty” extinguished. All this was blamed on that “singular hero of the Americas, the Napoleon of this continent.” The picture painted by this letter showed no glorious military conquest to defeat an enemy army, only the slaughter of civilians, which delegitimized Santa Anna’s claim to the military aspects of Bonaparte. It also highlighted the wanton destruction of civil liberty which emphasized Santa Anna’s similarities to the Emperor Napoleon rather than the General Napoleon.²⁸²

Santa Anna’s failures in the Texas revolt also badly compromised his claims to the military mantle of Napoleon. Not only was his execution of prisoners at Goliad and the Alamo widely publicized and condemned, but the embarrassing rout of his army at San Jacinto was quite un-Napoleonic. Virtually every paper in America printed some variation of Santa Anna’s surrender in which he tells Sam Houston, “The man who conquered the Napoleon of the South was born to no common destiny.” Next to the story, the editor of the *New Bedford Gazette*

²⁸¹ *Saratoga Sentinel* (Saratoga Springs, NY), May 24, 1836; English language biographies of Santa Anna are regrettably rare given his fascinating place in history, the only modern biography is Will Fowler, *Santa Anna of Mexico* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

²⁸² *Nantucket Inquirer* (Nantucket, MA), July 25, 1835.

snidely put into words what many Americans were thinking: “a pretty fellow to call himself a Napoleon who was caught napping...and whose highest pretensions to military fame consisted in having slaughtered unarmed prisoners.”²⁸³

After his embarrassing defeat at the hands of the Texans, the moniker “Napoleon” when applied to Santa Anna by American papers was always preceded by “the so-called” or “the self-styled,” which delegitimized his claims to greatness and made him vulnerable in a military sense. When Santa Anna returned to power in Mexico in 1842, most Americans were probably unsurprised and sympathetic when they read in their papers that the Republic of Texas was strongly considering a preemptive attack to conquer Mexico to the Isthmus of Panama. To justify this course, the Texans called for an “appeal to the God of Battles for a redress of the grievances” given them by the “self-styled Napoleon of the West.” By appropriating Santa Anna’s appropriation of Napoleon, Americans and their Texas cousins not only turned him into a dangerous political threat, but also made him into a counterfeit who had all of Bonaparte’s ambition, but none of his greatness.²⁸⁴

Anti-expansionists—almost all Whigs—drew on years of anti-Bonaparte rhetoric to make their case. Some made arguments that differed little from those made by their fathers against the Louisiana Purchase. For example, one letter to the editor of the *Philadelphia Enquirer* read, “If we embrace Texas for fear she will conquer Mexico and become a powerful rival we shall only act upon a policy which knows no limits and is always fatal to those who undertake it as proved by Alexander and Napoleon.” This was virtually the same argument made by the editor of the *American Citizen* writing against Coriolanus in 1803. Others Whigs adopted well-worn arguments about legitimacy and constitutionality. In a paragraph that could have been lifted

²⁸³ *New Bedford Gazette* (New Bedford, MA), June 13, 1836.

²⁸⁴ *Weekly Herald* (New York, NY), April 30, 1842.

from a paper in 1803, the editor of the *Richmond Whig* argued against annexation by pointing out that there was no provision in the constitution for the incorporation of foreign territory into the union. In fact, he continued, even Jefferson had admitted as much during the purchase of Louisiana, and only made the deal at the “order of Bonaparte, at whose name the whole world grew pale, but none grew so pale as Thomas Jefferson.”²⁸⁵

Yet, at least a few Whigs did try to incorporate aspects the bifurcation of Bonaparte into their rhetoric though sometimes the result probably left even contemporary Americans scratching their heads in wonder. For example, on May 23, 1844, the freshman Senator from New Jersey, Jacob Miller, warned that, “this Texan treaty belongs to the code of Napoleon. Its object is dominion and its only sanction the sword.” He did see one difference, however, between the expansion of the United States and Napoleon which he proceeded to explain. “Napoleon first won the country by open, manly war; whilst we, pursuing a less hazardous course, steal into the country under the cover of a treaty and then having the nine points possession in our favor, make war upon Mexico for our title.” Miller, in attempting to use the acceptable military image of Bonaparte, made “open, manly warfare” preferable to expansion through treaty. This was not entirely new since Federalists had complained about negotiating for New Orleans rather than simply seizing it in 1802. The key difference was that in 1803, Federalists demanded action to protect the United States from Bonaparte, whereas Miller was suggesting that the United States act in imitation of Bonaparte.²⁸⁶

The most cringe-worthy of all the Whig attempts to use the bifurcation of Napoleon, however, occurred in the June 27, 1844 edition of the *Boston Courier*. An author writing under

²⁸⁵ *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), January 1, 1842; *Richmond Whig* (Richmond, VA), May 26, 1845.

²⁸⁶ *National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), June 10, 1844; By describing war as “manly” Miller was also building on notions of gendered expansion which Napoleon also fit neatly into American conceptions of manhood, see Amy Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

the name Franklin argued that while Napoleon conquered kingdoms and empires, he had always “employed the spoils of victory for nobler purposes than piling up dollars and counting them.” He had stimulated the spread of science, established commercial programs that encouraged economic growth for all Europe, and “laid the foundation for the greatest moral reform since that began at Bethlehem.” High praise indeed. “Conquest, in such hands and so used,” Franklin mused, “has something to palliate, if not ennoble it.” On the other hand, he snorted, American conquest “by land jobbers and stock brokers can have no redeeming qualities.” Remarkably, both “Franklin” and Miller argued against the annexation of Texas by arguing that the expansion of the United States was not enough like that of Napoleonic France.²⁸⁷

Polk’s election led to the annexation of Texas in late 1845. War did not come immediately, but the simmering border dispute between the two republics did not dissipate. Mexico considered the Nueces River the southern border of Texas, and the United States maintained that the boundary was 150 miles farther south along the Rio Grande. After failing to secure purchase of the disputed territory—probably on purpose—Polk ordered an army under Zachary Taylor into the area. In April 1846, a border skirmish occurred in which several American soldiers were killed. Polk used this incident to ask for a declaration of war from Congress, which he got on May 13. With war declared, new arguments had to be mustered. War, after all, did not necessarily mean conquest and expansion along a Napoleonic model. Both pro and anti-war advocates attempted to control and describe the conduct of the war using the Napoleonic rhetoric that they had used for so long.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ *Boston Courier* (Boston, MA), June 27, 1844.

²⁸⁸ Steven Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies: America’s Westward Expansion and the Road to the Civil War* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2010), 151-157.

As their armies prepared to invade Mexico, Americans debated the strategic conduct of the United States' first major war of expansion. As they did, they used a method best described as argument by anecdote. Both sides appealed to the military authority of Napoleon through a short story or a saying. These stories usually came from what they had read about Bonaparte in their volumes of anecdote books and from *Napoleon's Maxims of War*, which had conveniently been published in the United States for the first time in 1845. Yet, Americans could not even agree on the military lessons of Bonaparte. For some, the most effective national strategy would limit American objectives and fight an aggressive defensive war within the bounds of Texas. This, said one commentator, was the "humane" method preferred by Napoleon for breaking up a mob: "fire balls first to let the enemy learn our seriousness and feel our power, then burn blank cartridges afterwards, if necessary, to stimulate his haste in retreat."²⁸⁹

Other, more aggressive, armchair generals argued that such a policy was foolish—and frankly un-Napoleonic. Rather than fighting a limited conflict on the frontiers of Texas said an author writing as "St. Mark," the United States ought to "fight with Mexico as Napoleon fought with Europe, by striking at her capitals." Most other commentators agreed with this assessment. One however, added a frightening additional component. An article in the *National Aegis* opened with a quote from Napoleonic biography in which Bonaparte orders his artillery to fire on his Russian and Austrian forces as they flee across a frozen river from the Austerlitz battlefield. The impact of the shots breaks the ice and drowns thousands of enemy soldiers. This anecdote, he claimed, showed that the United States should adopt a harsh military policy in its war with Mexico to terminate the conflict quickly. "War is war, the world over," he concluded

²⁸⁹ *Napoleon's Maxims of War* (New York: James Gregory, 1861); "How Shall We Fight?," *The Baltimore Sun* (Baltimore, MD), August 23, 1845.

darkly. “Napoleon had his way and we have ours for carrying it forward, but ours, no less than his, aims at one simple object—conquest and destruction.”²⁹⁰

Recruiting of citizen soldiers to carry out these strategies was less difficult than agreeing on the methods themselves. During the during the War of 1812, recruitment had been a challenge for the national government especially in New England where anti-Bonapartist sentiment was deepest. The government faced no such problem when it came to recruiting young men to invade Mexico. For example, the state of Tennessee had 30,000 men lined up at the recruiting stations to fill a state quota of 3,000. Pennsylvania and Ohio had to turn away whole companies of men because they could not arm them fast enough. Even anti-expansionist Whigs complained that their young men had been caught up in a Democratic war. Historians of the war have long noted with surprise the incredible enthusiasm of the volunteers and have offered a variety of explanations for it. Most, like Richard Winders, list a sense of patriotism, hope of excitement, and some form of social or material advancement.²⁹¹

It bears remembering how closely each of those reasons for enlistment were tied into the glorious war narratives woven by Scott and other Napoleon biographers during the two decades leading up to the war. Love of nation, for example, was held out by Scott as Bonaparte’s greatest virtue, and American youths had largely gotten their notions of war being an exciting adventure from military histories of Napoleon. Only months before war was declared, Americans were treated to J.T. Headley’s best-selling, *Napoleon and his Marshals*. Headley readily admitted that his critics would "object to books of this kind as fostering the spirit of war

²⁹⁰ *Hartford Times* (Hartford, CT), August 23, 1845; for a similar take see *Barre Gazette* (Barre, MA), May 15, 1846; *National Aegis* (Worcester, MA), May 20, 1846.

²⁹¹ C. Edward Skeen, *Citizen Soldiers in the War of 1812* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 31-36; Richard Winders, *Mr. Polk’s Army: The American Military Experience in the Mexican War* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 1997), 70-71; Steven Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 157; Paul Foss, *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair*, 45-59; Amy Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, 113-115.

by stimulating a love of glory.” But, he shrugged, if history was to be “abjured of battles” it would be very boring indeed.²⁹²

Watching the Massachusetts regiments marching off to the war, the editor of the *Boston Evening Transcript* tried to understand their motivation. Many of them, he concluded, “remember the campaigns of Napoleon, and the honors bestowed upon his brave soldiery, may be expecting promotion according to their fearlessness in the war, their daring exploits, and what might seem to be their dauntless courage in defying death.” “The romantic and chivalrous among them,” the editor went on, are “filled with ideas of glory” and “expect to rise...from rank to rank crowned in each affray with new distinctions—a brilliant rise from a short battle!” The editor was not wrong—he was seeing the results of reading countless Napoleonic biographies and military histories. As they marched off to invade a sovereign republic, the volunteers carried muskets on their shoulders and dreams of Napoleonic greatness in their hearts. The fact that so many of them did so itself was a pro-war argument by enlistment.²⁹³

As the war intensified, the arguments on the home-front that surrounded it shifted their focus to matters of national expansion policy rather than simple military strategy. Both sides

²⁹² J.T. Headley, *Napoleon and his Marshals*, single volume reprint ed. (New York: A.L. Burt, 1847) v-vi; later in the war, the May 20, 1847 edition of the *National Era* (Washington, D.C.) accused the Democrat press of trying to outdo Headley’s *Napoleon and his Marshals* by making heroes out of *Taylor and his Generals*. The editor found this unseemly since there was little Napoleonic glory in winning victories over a “half-breed, mongrel race” of Mexicans.

²⁹³ *Evening Transcript* (Boston, MA), January 14, 1847. The scope of my work precludes examining in detail how the soldiers reacted to the reality of war through the prism of Napoleon, however, there are a few revealing incidents that appeared in the papers. At the end of 1846, one disenchanted soldier wrote home to Maine. His letter was published in the *Portland Advertiser* (Portland, ME) of November 11, 1846. Napoleon, he grumbled, would have “stormed and threatened” Mexico, but he would not have gotten his nation involved in such a war as the United States was now fighting. After quoting some famous lines from Scott’s *Life of Napoleon* about a battle won being nearly as dreadful as a battle lost, he concluded, “where we expected to find a weak enemy, we have met a powerful one, instead of an easy conquest, painful marches, hard fought battles, and difficult victories, especially the last, with all its ‘glory.’” This was a particularly fascinating letter for two reasons. First because the correspondent saw Napoleon’s foreign policy as more reasonable than that of the United States. Second because he directly linked his romantic ideas of “glory” to reading Scott’s *Life of Napoleon*—indeed, he seems to have even had access to Scott’s work in the field. Though they were rarely printed for the public, such complaints seem to back Paul Foos’s contention that volunteer soldiers quickly became disillusioned with the war.

used continued to use the bifurcated Napoleon as their standard for national conduct, and both continued to come to different conclusions about the legacy of Bonaparte and what it meant to the future of the United States. The great debate began shortly after war was declared and was powerfully illustrated by an article in the *New Bedford Mercury*.

On June 5, 1846, the *Mercury* printed a letter to the editor together with the editor's reply. The unnamed correspondent wrote passionately in favor of both the annexation of Texas and the war with Mexico. He briefly cited international law to justify American actions on the border. Yet, he doubted that the editors would take that authority and so he quoted an even higher authority: God—and Bonaparte. “When Napoleon was crowned King of Italy,” he wrote, “upon putting on the iron crown of Charlemagne, he is purported as saying emphatically, ‘God has placed his crown upon my head, and woe to the man that touches it.’” “God,” the correspondent continued, “has given us Texas to the Del Norte, and woe to the foreign nation, prince, or potentate that should interfere with it.”²⁹⁴

The *Mercury's* editor quickly responded. “How unhappy the illustration drawn from Napoleon,” he wrote back, apparently shocked that that his correspondent did not rightly understand the history of Bonaparte. “That iron crown of Lombardy was to him a crown of thorns—it bore him to the ground and crushed him. So will this Texas be a thorn in the side of the union.” The editor continued with a condemnation of invoking God into a debate on national expansion. “Impious and shortsighted man,” he wrote, as if to Bonaparte directly, “how short was the time you wore that crown...you died in exile without crown or hope.” The editor concluded forcefully, “we are told that God has given Texas to the Rio Bravo as he gave Italy to Napoleon! Sad parallel! May it never be carried out.” Both men brought Bonaparte into the

²⁹⁴ *New Bedford Mercury* (New Bedford, MA), June 5, 1846.

debate on expansion expecting the other to acknowledge his authority, yet they could not agree on what the legacy of Napoleon actually meant.²⁹⁵

A similar exchange took place a little over a year later. This time, an anti-expansionist writing as “an Old Farmer” fired the first shots in the *National Intelligencer*. “An Old Farmer” was gravely concerned about the phrase “Manifest Destiny,” which, since 1845, had come to epitomize the ideology of the American expansionist. Even the iconic phrase itself had Napoleonic overtones when one considers how closely “destiny” was associated with Bonaparte through the work of Scott. The Old Farmer admitted that might have been “the 'manifest destiny' of Bonaparte to conquer half of Europe,” however, he continued, “it was also his 'manifest destiny' to die a miserable exile on the rock of St. Helena.” Instead of national delusions, he continued, it would be far better for the United States to adopt the policy of the San Marino. This tiny, ancient republic nestled in the mountains of Italy had, when offered additional territory and artillery by Napoleon, politely accepted the cannons but refused the territory because they did not wish to “engage in the miserable folly of attempting to govern people without their consent.”²⁹⁶

Three days later, a delightfully sarcastic reply by an author only identified as “X” appeared in the *Baltimore Sun*. “We are told,” he began, “Napoleon had a great respect for the Republic of San Marino.” That may have been true, he continued, but this was so only because it was such a small and insignificant place that it probably did not even appear on most French maps. It was really a silly notion, “X” snorted, to expect the United States, a great nation to draw lessons from a republic with an army of “twenty-four soldiers commanded by a Lieutenant, Captain by brevet, and two corporals.” Indeed, “X” concluded, “I have strong doubts whether

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ *National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), August 6, 1847.

the army of San Marino will ever cross the Alps...[as] they were crossed by Napoleon unless they are provided with Austrian or French passports.” In other words, for “X” the lesson of the story of San Marino was to be more like the great Napoleon and less like the insignificant San Marino. Both the “Old Farmer” and “X” took the exact same story of Napoleon and came to completely opposite conclusions about what it meant to American foreign policy.²⁹⁷

While Americans fought each other in the papers, the war dragged on. In September 1846, American forces under Zachary Taylor seized Monterrey. In early 1847, another American army under Winfield Scott took the port of Vera Cruz, and, by June, they had fought their way inland to the outskirts of Mexico City. Despite losing every battle, Santa Anna’s government steadfastly refused to come to the negotiating table. With the end result still in doubt, some anti-expansionist Whigs continued to make their arguments using the political image of Bonaparte. In one particularly amusing example, one wrote dourly, “we might mourn over the violation and destruction of our constitution by a Napoleon whose right hand was destiny—but it would be too much—too much to see it destroyed by a Polk.” Showing their increasing adeptness with Napoleonic rhetoric, however, many others looked for ways to force a conclusion to the war by appealing to the military authority of Bonaparte. Like William Ladd had done ten years earlier, they did this most successfully when they asked their audience to consider the less glorious aspects of Bonaparte’s military career.²⁹⁸

The first such articles appeared in the summer of 1846, but gathered strength in October of that year as Americans learned of the tenacious Mexican resistance in Monterrey. “A war with a Government and a war with a People are two very different things,” warned the editor of

²⁹⁷ *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD), August 9, 1847.

²⁹⁸ John S.D. Eisenhower, *So Far from God: The US War with Mexico* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 254-283, 302-311; *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), December 7, 1847; Steven Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, 235-275.

the *North American*. He cited Bonaparte's early successes in Italy as an example of the former, and his disastrous occupation of Spain as an example of the latter. Six months later, the *National Intelligencer* elaborated on this basic theme. "In Europe, Napoleon conquered other countries because the population made no resistance after the regular army was defeated," the editor explained. "The two hostile armies met as prizefighters, and the country was the stake which belonged to the victors." On the other hand, "an invading army is unable to conquer any nation where all the people are hostile and opposed to them. Spain is a memorable example of this." In America's present war, he wrote grimly, it was important to remember that in the case of Spain, "Napoleon had possession of her capital and all her strongholds, with 300,000 veteran troops, the country compact and not one fifth the extent of what we propose to overrun."²⁹⁹

Some of Napoleon's other campaigns offered similar opportunities for anti-expansionists to score rhetorical points. In a speech to the Lowell Institute, one anti-expansionist asked his audience to consider seriously the "natural difficulties to be overcome in our war against Mexico." It was protected by impenetrable mountains, deadly diseases, and unbearable heat. "Man cannot war against nature," he stated flatly, and not even the greatest general of them all was exempt from this maxim. "Napoleon could scatter the Mamelukes like chaff before the wind, but fled from the burning sands of Egypt and from the desolation of the pestilence" he argued. "Of the 500,000 men who went to war with him against the climate of Russia," he went on, "but 40,000 came staggering back." He left his audience with a sobering thought. "Mexico has the mountains of Switzerland, the snows of Russia, and a sicklier sunshine than ever bathed Napoleon's banners."³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ *National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), October 21, 1846 and March 13, 1847.

³⁰⁰ *Massachusetts Spy* (Worcester, MA), March 3, 1847.

Even the eventual taking of Mexico City in the fall of 1847 did little to mollify the basic anti-expansionist argument. Why should it have? As the anti-expansionists pointed out, Joseph Bonaparte had sat on the Spanish throne in Madrid for years without ending the insurgency. In the most famous anti-expansionist speech of the conflict, a weary and saddened Henry Clay—he had lost a son in the war—pointed out that even Napoleon and his “colossal power,” had been unable to subjugate the Spanish people into a foreign system of rule. Others reminded anyone who would listen that Napoleon, after all, had taken Moscow in 1812 before encountering the Russian winter and the Russian Cossacks. Amy Greenberg argues in her book, *A Wicked War*, that while anti-expansionists were unable to prevent the war, they were ultimately successful in forcing Polk to accept a more moderate peace treaty than he would have liked. If so, it was their appropriation of the military Napoleon that was largely responsible for the victory. If Greenberg is correct, by 1848, anti-expansionists had managed to convince a significant number of Americans that while they had gone to war in search of a glorious Austerlitz victory, they were on the brink of a falling into an interminable, bloody, Spanish insurgency.³⁰¹

On the other hand, claiming victory for the anti-expansionists is probably taking things too far. A look at the evidence shows that anti-expansionists were probably hurt by their own dire rhetoric because none of their grim prophecies came to fruition. The Mexicans did not burn their capital and start a guerilla war, and though some guerilla bands did form they did not prove as effective as the anti-expansionists had led Americans to believe. Disease and desertion did plague the American forces, but in the end, a smaller United States army marched hundreds of miles into Mexico across sun-burned deserts and treacherous mountains to take an enemy capital

³⁰¹ For only a few sample articles see, *The Liberator* (Boston, MA), October 15, 1847; *The Emancipator* (Boston, MA), May 26, 1847; *Boston Recorder* (Boston, MA), December 23, 1847; *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), November 24, 1847; *New York Herald* (New York, NY), October 16, 1847, Amy Greenberg, *A Wicked War*, xvii.

without losing a battle. This almost certainly had as much to do with Mexican political and economic chaos as it did with the prowess of the American soldier, but expansionists did not realize that, nor did they care. After all, the war was not only about territorial expansion. It was also about taking up the mantle of Napoleonic glory. In both cases, the expansionists had much to celebrate. By the closing months of the war, even the anti-expansionists had to appropriate the neo-greatness argument.³⁰²

Thanks to the proliferation of Napoleonic literature in the 1820s and 1830s, a significant number of Americans were in awe of the military exploits of Napoleon and expansionists found that favorably comparing American victories to those of the great hero was an easy way to score rhetorical points. At one 1847 Independence Day gathering in Virginia, an orator gave a speech that was typical of hundreds more given on the same day across the nation. “The daring and impetuous charge at Palo Alto, the dreadful storming of Monterey, and the heady fight along the terrible pass of the Cerro Gordo,” he began, “bring forcibly to mind the desperate valor displayed at Jena, Saragossa, Wagram, and Areola.” “Yet, when the disparity of troops and other disadvantages are considered,” he continued, “the impartial judgment of the world must decide that the fame of the imperial eagles of Napoleon, splendid as it is, must yield to the far reflected luster and dazzling glories of American arms acquired in these memorable and brilliant fields of victory.” Put simply, Napoleon’s legions had passed on the mantle of military greatness on to the United States.³⁰³

Other expansionists celebrated the victory of the United States as a triumph of American military humanitarianism. One correspondent to the *Baltimore Sun* likened the American

³⁰² For a more reserved take on American dissent in the Mexican War see, John Schroeder, *Mr. Polk’s War: American Opposition and Dissent* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973).

³⁰³ *Alexandria Gazette* (Alexandria, VA), July 29, 1847.

invasion to Bonaparte's reorganization of the Holy Roman Empire. Those who decried the American invasion, he wrote, had apparently "never read of the French campaign in Germany, which was a terrible infliction upon the country, but at the same time a means of spreading liberal principles and improvements in every branch of social life." If the Mexico lost half her territory in the war, but gained a republican education from their conquerors, he maintained, "she would have paid a low price of tuition." Another expansionist took a slightly different approach when he asked his audience to contrast the American invasion of Mexico with those of Napoleon thirty years prior. Whereas Bonaparte had turned the continent into a "charnel house," and created an "ocean of blood, rapine, murder and monstrosity from Moscow to Gibraltar," the American invasion of Mexico, "illuminated the minds of her people, long held in military bondage and civil tyranny." Both writers used different images of Bonaparte to come to the same conclusion about the American way of war.³⁰⁴

Perhaps nothing illustrates the success of the neo-greatness argument presented by the expansionists than the fact that even the anti-expansionists finally made an attempted to make it their own. One anti-expansionist pleaded with an "immense gathering" of Whigs in New York. Sounding like countless expansionists, he told the cheering crowd, "our troops have fought bravely—none ever fought better—they have achieved victories that would have conferred honor on Napoleon Bonaparte." He then, however, added an anti-expansionist element by insisting, "we need no more battles to prove the valor of American soldiers." The fact that this speech was made to a crowd of presumably anti-expansionist Whigs is revealing and shows what a difficult position the anti-expansionists were in by the closing months of the war. Even the bulk of anti-

³⁰⁴ *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD), May 26, 1847; *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), October 16, 1847.

expansionists appear to have been comfortable with the United States assuming the military greatness of Napoleon so long as the physical expansion of the nation was constrained.³⁰⁵

On May 30, 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo went into effect. Mexico surrendered her northern provinces, at last giving the United States a claim to having fulfilled Napoleon's dream of building a great North American empire. Anti-expansionists had to admit that they had lost the argument. Perhaps what galled them more than losing was that so many of the people of the United States did not even seem repentant about their aggressive imperialism. In fact, they celebrated it. As the volunteers from the Mexican War returned home, they were feted and honored as the glorious Napoleonic heroes that they had set out to be. It was all too much for a wag in writing in *The Berkshire County Whig* who bitterly tried to find humor in the situation. "The Mexican battles surpass even the famous fights of Napoleon in the opportunities they furnish for the sudden manufacture of fame, to order," he quipped. "If half the swords which have been presented to men who have seen the elephant in Mexico, as a reward for their deeds of prowess shall be beaten into plowshares at the termination of the war, we may look for great things in agriculture."³⁰⁶

Starting in 1815, the common American understanding of Napoleon as a treacherous, ambitious despot broke down. Starting with his abdication and exile in 1814, Americans began to separate the political Bonaparte from the military Bonaparte. The tidal wave of printed material on the Emperor that flooded the American market place solidified this bifurcation of Bonaparte. The result of this separation of the Napoleonic image was that a large portion of American population could celebrate Bonaparte as a brilliant military genius and the ultimate democratic success story, while increasingly ignoring the more unsavory aspects of his reign.

³⁰⁵ *New York Spectator* (New York, NY), December 23, 1847.

³⁰⁶ *Berkshire County Whig* (Pittsfield, MA), March 30, 1848.

The debates over the annexation of Texas and the resulting Mexican American War demonstrated the practical effects of such thinking. Aggressive expansion became increasingly palatable to the American public as attitudes toward warfare and national greatness were “Napoleonized” by the work of Barry O’Meara, Walter Scott, and their American successors. By the time of the Mexican War, even anti-expansionists found that their most effective rhetoric had to focus on accepting Napoleon as the great authority on military expansion and national greatness. That they did this with some limited success was remarkable, but their ultimate failure showed just how far American attitudes about expansion had shifted in just one generation.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION: THE GLORY THAT WAS NAPOLEON

During the 1850s, Bonapartism reached its peak in the United States. After 1855, visitors to American bookshops could purchase John S. Abbott's two-volume *History of Napoleon Bonaparte*. This wildly popular biography written by the Yankee minister turned biographer ended with the revealing sentence, "Napoleon, in death has become the victor over all his foes. Every generous heart now does homage to his lofty character...His noble fame is every day extending." Abbott was only the last of a long tradition of antebellum Bonaparte biographers who had turned the emperor into a popular military hero. Even more, however, Abbott's biography represented Napoleon's final triumph over William Channing. Not only did Abbott hold up Bonaparte as a military hero, but he also held up his "lofty character" as worthy of emulation.³⁰⁷

If they had looked hard enough, a visitor to the shop could also have bought a copy of a little book called the *The Deck and Port Songster*, which was an entire volume of laudatory tunes about the French emperor. Upon opening the book to page sixty-five, they would have found one ditty titled "Napoleon's Dream." The song's narrator described falling asleep and visiting St. Helena where he is welcomed by Napoleon. When he finds that the dreamer is an American, Bonaparte brightens and reminds his visitor of his glorious victories in defense of freedom,

On the plains of Marengo I tyranny hurl'd
And wherever my banner the eagle unfurl'd
Twas the standard of freedom all over the world!

As the dreamer awakens, he hears Bonaparte's final words ringing in his, "Liberty soon ov'r the world shall be seen."

³⁰⁷ John S. Abbott, *History of Napoleon Bonaparte*, 2 vols (New York: Harper Brothers, 1855).

The message of this dream could not have clearer to American readers. Napoleon had passed on his dream of an empire of liberty to the United States.³⁰⁸

Yet, before the United States could expand further, the nation tore itself apart over the issue of slavery. In mid-1862, the biographer Abbott wrote a letter to his publisher with an offer to capitalize on the ongoing military conflict. “At the close of this war there will be a million and a half of young men, who, from their life in the camp, will be particularly interested in Military History,” he told his publisher. “The Life of Napoleon, in that respect, stands preeminent.” Abbott wanted to publish a one-volume edition of his previous work that would be cheaper for young men just home from the war to read. After all, he reminded the publisher, “Napoleon is popular with the masses.”³⁰⁹

Abbott was not wrong. Like their fathers before them, Americans north and south continued to talk about the conquest of the Confederacy in terms of Napoleon. During the first eighteen months of the war, for example, numerous promising officers like P.G.T. Beauregard and George B. McClellan found themselves heralded as the next Napoleon by the media and by their soldiers. Similarly, one officer explained to his local newspaper that the duty of an army officer was to lead from the front. “Napoleon in person was obliged to lead his bravest men over the bridge of Lodi, and again at Arcola, and at Waterloo,” he explained in an argument by anecdote. Furthermore, he claimed, “at the last grand charge of the Old Guard he felt the dire necessity of leading them himself, and he rushed to their head, but his officers seized him and forced him back.” “Had they left him to follow his instinct,” the officer mused, “he might have

³⁰⁸ *The Deck and Port Songster: Being a Choice Collection of Bonaparte and Sea Songs* (New York: Philip Cozens, 1855), 65-66.

³⁰⁹ “John C. Abbott to Henry Bill, November 6, 1862,” American Antiquarian Society, *JCS Abbott Letters, 1833-1867*.

turned the fortune of the day.” At the onset of the war, at least, Civil War soldiers expected their officers to be the Napoleon they had read about in Scott and Abbott’s biographies.³¹⁰

They also expected their Napoleonic campaigns to be like those they had read about in countless military histories. Upon reading about a massive Union army closing on Richmond in early 1862, a Confederate diplomat in Brussels wrote an encouraging letter to his Secretary of State that drew on a familiar figure. “If any of our fellow citizens...should be disposed to entertain anxiety toward the final result,” he began, “let them fresh courage in recalling to mind the disasters incurred at Moscow by the greatest captain of modern times.” His letter went on for another three pages describing in detail the awful calamities that had befallen the French army in Russia, which he had learned from a recently published memoir. Sounding like an anti-expansionist of ten years earlier, he finally concluded, “It is daily becoming more and more evident...that a fate yet more terrible is awaiting the would-be conquerors of the Confederate States, under the burning sun and in the death bringing swamps of the South.”³¹¹

Yet, by mid-point of the war, references to Napoleon had lessened considerably. As Gerald Lindermann has described in his seminal work, *Embattled Courage*, a variety of factors were to blame. Probably the biggest cause was that the romantic ideas about military life that young men had learned from Scott and others did not hold up to the reality they experienced during the war. During the winter of 1864-65, one soldier woke up to eighteen inches of snow and noted in his diary, “Wading through the deep snow reminds me of a picture that I have often

³¹⁰ There were probably dozens of officers that received the sobriquet of Napoleon, and I have only chosen the two most well-known examples. The best biography of Beauregard is still the fortunately titled, T. Harry Williams, *PGT Beauregard: Napoleon in Gray*, reprint ed. (Louisiana State University Press, 1995); the best modern biography of McClellan is also helpfully titled, Steven Sears, *George McClellan: The Young Napoleon* (New York: DeCapro Press, 1999); Lydia Minturn Post ed., *Soldiers Letters from Camp, Battlefield, and Prison* (New York: Bunce and Huntington, 1865), 40.

³¹¹ “A. Dudley Mann to Judah P. Benjamin, July 15, 1862,” U.S. War Department, *The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, ser. II, vol. 3 (Washington, 1880-1902), 456-459.

seen, ‘Napoleon Bonaparte before Moscow.’” Yet, he continued wearily, “duty must be attended to, no matter what the weather may be.” This soldier, and many more like him found that the reality of military life was not as grand as they had been led to believe.³¹²

It was not just camp life that did not live up to expectations. Virtually all of the officers who had been labeled as the new Napoleon fell woefully short of expectations. George McClellan, whose campaign against Richmond in 1862 had occasioned the letter to the Confederate Secretary of State mentioned above, was turned back and he was eventually relieved of his command. Despite initial success at the First Battle of Bull Run, P.T.G Beauregard was defeated nine months later at the Battle of Shiloh, and then personal conflicts with Confederate President Jefferson Davis relegated him to backwater theaters for the remainder of the war. Additionally, the generals who did the most to bring the war to a successful conclusion seemed to have little to do with the popular perceptions of Bonaparte. Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman won their victories through a dogged determination not to lose rather than by a glorious, nation-shattering, Austerlitz-style victory. Indeed, those generals who attempted such things usually ended up simply destroying lives for no good cause. By the end of the war, Americans had created a new pantheon of their own military heroes who had little to do with Bonaparte. Americans had, in a sense, outgrown the need to measure their military greatness against Napoleon.³¹³

The civilians at home, especially in the defeated South, also found a divergence between their Napoleonic rhetoric and the reality of their war. One chaplain from Sherman’s army

³¹² Gerald Lindermann, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1989); Charles Lynch, *The Civil War Diary of Charles Lynch, 18th Connecticut Volunteers* (Hartford, CT: Case Lockard and Brainard Co, 1915), 141.

³¹³ Steven Sears, George B. McClellan, chapters 8-13; T. Harry Williams, *PGT Beauregard*, chapters 5-15; James McPherson *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, reprint ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), chapters 24-27.

explained the disconnect in a letter written shortly after the famous “march to the sea.” “Everybody recollects how summarily General Sherman and his handful of invading Yankees were to be disposed of, after leaving Atlanta,” he wrote. “Trees were to be cut down, bridges were to be burned, all forage for man and beast was to be destroyed, the country was to be desolated and the difficulties that beset Bonaparte on his famous and disastrous visit to Moscow, were to have been repeated in the State of Georgia in the year of grace 1864.” Such, he said, was the program espoused by so many, “Governors, Generals, editors and all.” Yet, none of the dire rhetoric had come to pass. In fact, he concluded, the march had been a quite “agreeable journey.” Overblown Napoleonic rhetoric forced southern civilians to recognize that the reality of Union conquest was much different than what they had read in their books about Napoleon. Despite their rhetoric, Southerners had not proven themselves greater than Bonaparte.³¹⁴

The other reason that the expansionist rhetoric of Bonaparte fell out of favor was that there was no military expansion between 1850 and 1898. The Gadsden Purchase was obtained from Mexico through treaty in 1853 and Alaska bought from the Russians in 1867, but that was no conquest. That was simply a business transaction. From the view point of the twenty-first century, historians now see the destruction of the plains Indian tribes as a conquest, but this was not how nineteenth century Americans looked at it. There was little martial glory in conquering native peoples, unless you lost spectacularly—as George Custer found in 1876. It was not until the Spanish American War of 1898 that another “real” war of conquest broke out which again allowed Americans to prove their valor. By then, however, most young American men

³¹⁴ George S. Bradley, *The Star Corps, or Notes of an Army Chaplain During Sherman's Famous March to the Sea* (Milwaukee, WI: Jermain & Brightman, 1865), 304.

compared their valor to their fathers' fights at Gettysburg and Antietam and not to Napoleon's Italian campaigns.³¹⁵

The curtailment of Napoleonic rhetoric was truly the end of an era for the United States—indeed, in some ways it signaled the end of the first phase of American expansion. Between 1800 and 1850, Napoleon, the ultimate symbol of imperialism, had become a dominant political and social measure of aggressive American expansion. He first entered the lexicon of expansion in 1802 when Americans found that Spain had retroceded their territory of Louisiana to France. Most Americans saw having an aggressive France on their western border as an unacceptable national security risk. They appropriated the language of natural and ancient boundaries, which Napoleon had popularized during his initial campaigns in Italy, to discuss their own national expansion. Many Americans argued that a preemptive military strike on New Orleans was justified to prevent Napoleon from obtaining a geographic position from which he could strangle western commerce or, even worse, use economic persuasion to dismember the union. Other Americans, however, warned that a theory of expansion based on natural borders or a preemptive military campaign would make the United States no better than Bonaparte's France. Congress ultimately passed a bill authorizing President Jefferson to use military force to take New Orleans, but fate intervened in April 1803.

The failure of France to quell the slave revolt on the island of Saint-Domingue and anticipation of another war in Europe led Bonaparte to try and sell the entire territory of Louisiana to the United States. This touched off a new round of debates about the legitimacy of

³¹⁵ John Fraser, *America and the Patterns of Chivalry* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009), 26; also see Amy Kaplan, "Romancing the Empire," *American Literary History* 2, no. 4 (Winter, 1990), 659, 661, 666. There were a few intriguing exceptions to this general rule. For example, in Theodore Roosevelt's famous memoir of his time in the Rough Riders, he described the Spanish in Cuba as cowardly guerrillas, no different from their grandfathers whose armies proved "utterly unable could not stand in the open against those of Napoleon's Marshals." Theodore Roosevelt, *The Rough Riders* (New York: PF Collier, 1899), 166.

republican expansion and military occupation. Anti-expansionists argued that signing a treaty with the ambitious and aggressive Bonaparte was not only unwise and compromising the national integrity, but also probably illegitimate. Despite the anti-expansionist rhetoric, Congress approved treaty by large margins. This, however, led to new questions about how the territory was to be administered. Many Jeffersonians and some Federalists argued that an uncompromising military occupation was justified to alleviate the dangers posed by a hostile Louisiana population still loyal to Bonaparte's France. Federalists pointed out that this type of occupation was no better than how Napoleon treated his "sister republics" in Europe. Once again, the pro-expansionists were successful in their arguments. With the Louisiana question settled, they contented themselves by celebrating the differences between the allegedly peaceful expansion of the United States and the aggressive conquests of Napoleon.

Between 1805 and 1815, the anti-expansionists regrouped and struck back on the unresolved issue of Florida. They found an effective rhetorical tool in painting the Jeffersonians as stooges, or, worse, allies of the Emperor Napoleon. This was particularly effective due to the general American distaste for Napoleon's imperial aggrandizement in Europe, as well as concern over a possible Bonaparte connection to the Aaron Burr conspiracy closer to home. Americans were particularly disturbed by Napoleon's usurpation of the Spanish monarchy in 1808. Using this rhetorical device, anti-expansionists were able to block passage of the \$2 million act in 1805. In 1811, they cast great doubt on the Madison administration's occupation of the West Florida republic and a year later, they forced the administration to call off its attempts to start a coup in Spanish East Florida. Though they were unable to prevent the War of 1812, rhetoric that tied Madison to Bonaparte and aggressive expansion in Florida helped create a unified, national anti-expansionist—though not anti-war—movement which greatly hampered the conduct of the war.

In 1815, Napoleon abdicated and almost immediately Americans began to bifurcate his legacy. They separated the political image of the emperor from the military image of the general. This allowed them to celebrate the democratic, military hero, while claiming to detest the ambitious and treacherous despot. These images were so powerful that anti-expansionists proved unable to mount an effective argument to counter Andrew Jackson's aggressive invasion of Florida in 1818. Following Bonaparte's death in 1821, Americans read a tidal wave of printed materials about the emperor that largely reinforced this bifurcation. Best-selling sympathetic works written by Barry O'Meara and Walter Scott simultaneously softened the emperor's image and turned him into the standard of martial and national greatness. Some Americans, led by William Ellery Channing, responded to these books by calling attention to the difference between greatness and goodness and questioning their romantic image of war, but the tide had clearly shifted. When the questions of Texas annexation and then the Mexican War came to the fore of American expansion debate between 1835 and 1848, anti-expansionists found themselves on the defensive. Ultimately, they were able to put together an argument that may have helped to prevent the conquest of all Mexico. However, they were only able to do this by working within the new framework of Napoleonic greatness established by their opponents. By the end of the war, the image of Napoleon stood triumphant as the accepted American measure of national and military greatness.

In 2003, President George W. Bush ordered the American military to invade Iraq to prevent the government of Iraq from acquiring or using weapons of mass destruction. This so-called "Bush Doctrine" of preemptive war was lambasted by commentators as being a radically new shift in foreign policy. While the wisdom of the policy can certainly be questioned, it was not new. In fact, it was virtually the same rationale given by militant expansionists two-hundred

years earlier for seizing New Orleans before Napoleon could take possession. Even opposition to the war was also virtually the same as it had been in 1803. Some pleaded for time to give diplomacy a chance to work, while others decried the creation of an American empire and asked where such aggressive imperialism would end. In 1803, war had been averted, but the United States was not so lucky in 2003. Four years later, the American military remained engaged in frustrating counterinsurgency operations as they attempted to rebuild a war-torn Iraq amid bitter sectarian violence. In August of 2007, historian Richard Bulliet published an opinion piece of the *New York Times*. In the article, he suggested that the president might take a lesson from one of the great military captains in history and abandon his middle eastern campaign before it proved disastrous. The title of his essay was, “Bush and Napoleon.” Even after two-hundred years, Americans still compared their expansion to that of Napoleon Bonaparte.³¹⁶

³¹⁶ Karl Myer, “America Unlimited,” *World Policy Journal* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2004), 1-13; David Sanger, “Bush’s Doctrine for War,” *The New York Times*, online edition, March 18, 2003, accessed August 5, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/18/international/middleeast/18ASSE.html>; Richard Bulliet, “Bush and Napoleon,” *The New York Times*, online edition, August 2, 2007, accessed April 1, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/02/opinion/02iht-edbulliet.1.6957129.html?_r=0.

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VITA

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