

Origins of the War with Mexico. The Polk-Stockton Intrigue. By GLENN W. PRICE. Austin, 1967. University of Texas Press. Illustrations. Maps. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. x, 189. \$5.00.

"I then said, smiling, 'So, gentlemen, the Commodore, on the part of the United States, wishes me to *manufacture a war* for them'; to which they replied affirmatively." The first person singular was Anson Jones, president of Texas. The "Commodore" was Robert F. Stockton, a U.S. naval officer. "Them" refers to the United States. The "gentlemen" were John H. Wright and Sidney Sherman. Time of the reported conversation: May 1845. Place: Texas.

If space allowed, much more might be quoted from Jones' account. The essence of the remainder, as paraphrased by Jones, is that, according to Dr. Wright, the man in the White House—James K. Polk—"wished Texas to place herself in an attitude of active hostility towards Mexico, so that, when Texas was finally brought into the Union, *she might bring a war with her.*" The "scheme" was a "confidential and secret one," Wright explained to Jones according to Jones. "It was undertaken under the sanction of the United States government," and Polk "did not wish to be known in the matter, but approved Commodore Stockton's plan."

There is nothing new about the Jones statement, and Price neither says nor implies that there is anything new about it. Published in 1859 after Jones' death, it has long been known to scholars. Nor is Price the first twentieth-century historian to present a case that Polk (in Price's words) "sought to initiate a war by proxy." What Price has done is to relate the Jones account to a number of 1845 documents—by no means all of them obscure or hitherto forgotten—in what this reviewer regards as a generally fresh and interesting way. In Price's opinion, those documents show that "the conspiracy" was a "plot in which President Polk was using Stockton."

The author does not strengthen his case by reminding the reader that the U.S. House of Representatives pronounced the Mexican War to have been "unnecessarily and unconstitutionally" begun, or that Thomas Corwin, Philip Hone, Abraham Lincoln, and Alexander H. Stephens held Polk in low esteem or disapproved of his record. Corwin, Hone, Lincoln, Stephens, and numerous other critics were Whigs and hostile partisans. Similarly the House had a Whig majority. Nor is it relevant to assert and repeat that "Polk was not a popular President." More to the point are comments of Sam Houston and Thomas H. Benton. A valuable feature of the study is the tracing of

historians' words and silences respecting the "plot," "conspiracy," "intrigue," or whatever one decides to call it.

The reviewer is convinced that Stockton was indeed involved in some sort of "intrigue." Concerning Polk, however, the case is far from complete. Price criticizes historians on various counts—for rating Polk "near great" or "great"; for being "humorless" in their evaluations of "sober little . . . pretentious . . . men"; and especially for investigative deficiencies. Price himself appears to have searched long and hard. Still, there are wide gaps separating most documents' contents from the author's conclusions affecting his principal thesis. More evidence is needed.

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Fool's Gold. The Decline and Fall of Captain John Sutter of California. By RICHARD DILLON. New York, 1967. Coward-McCann. Illustrations. Maps. Bibliography. Index. Pp. 380. \$6.95.

The time has come for another biography of John Sutter of California. With the possible exception of James P. Zollinger's *Sutter* (1939), this is the best. Dillon has obviously plowed through the published literature related to the Swiss adventurer, and has made extensive use of widely scattered manuscripts. The result is a fairly detailed, yet readable biography. It is not documented, and serious students of the period will wish that at least some footnote references were given to support controversial statements rather than being contemptuously discarded as "the stigmata of formalized scholarship."

Dillon has given space to all phases of Sutter's amazing life, but the work lacks judicious balance. The book shares with its predecessors a disappointingly brief account (a scant seven pages) of the first thirty-one years of Sutter's life, spent for the most part in his native Switzerland. The account of Sutter's wanderings on the American frontier and in Hawaii appears adequate. The main thrust of the book is Sutter's entire California experience and not at all what the subtitle indicates: Sutter's decline and fall. Even though the author pictures his subject as repeatedly skating on thin ice, it is not until the near-end of the book that one reads: "Sutter's career was in decline" (p. 294).

The book possesses a readable and pleasing style, but certain portions of it seem to lack clarity—probably because of Sutter's financially involved, politically entangled, and psychologically mixed-up life. There are places in the book where the reader is left confused about the movements of people, about business transactions,