

that had produced the evils of which everyone complained. Using a variety of printed sources, Carrera Damas goes on to describe how Bolívar became the touchstone of all aspects of Venezuelan thought and discusses the manipulation of his cult by political groups, beginning with the repatriation of his remains in 1842.

J. L. Salcedo-Bastardo, a veteran student of the Liberator, agrees that Bolívar has been exploited for political reasons, but otherwise his *Bolívar: Un continente y un destino*, which does not list *El culto a Bolívar* in its bibliography, might serve as an illustration of Carrera Damas's text. Winner of an OAS contest in honor of the 150th anniversary of Bolívar's campaigns, Salcedo-Bastardo's book is devoted mainly to a depiction of the Liberator as a genuinely revolutionary figure whose aims were continental in scope and relevance, and who was firmly committed to political democracy, economic reform, and equality, as well as to the unity of the Spanish-speaking nations. According to the author, Bolívar's enlightened programs were frustrated by caudillos and oligarchic elites, who used localism to preserve their own privileges. The result for Venezuela (and the other Spanish-American nations) was a century of counterrevolution characterized by autocracy and militarism, moral corruption, and oppression of the masses, while the region was balkanized into squabbling republics that were an easy prey to imperialism. Because of the way in which Salcedo-Bastardo has organized his book—the exposition of Bolívar's aspirations is followed by the account of their “negation”—he has spared himself the task of providing a detailed consideration of the subject, which, however, might have lent greater authority to his assertions.

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NATIONAL PERIOD

The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War.

By DAVID M. PLETCHER. Columbia, 1973. University of Missouri Press. Maps. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xiii, 656. Cloth. \$20.00.

Pletcher opens his long, detailed study with three propositions: 1) “the duty of those who determine or carry out foreign policy is to secure their *country's best interests* in the most efficient and the safest manner available to them—by peaceful means if at all possible, . . . but by war if it cannot be avoided” (p. 4, italics added); 2) “the Mexican War, Texas, and Oregon . . . formed a truly international question of first importance” (p. 5); and 3) the war “was a turning

point, not only in the internal history of the United States and in its relations with Latin America," but also in promoting "the nation from a third-rate power to a second-rate power that would have to be reckoned with in its own neighborhood" (p. 5).

The first section, covering the years 1815-1842, treats Mexico as "The Sick Man of North America." Given the flourishing state of slavery in the United States, there is more than a bit of irony there, intended or otherwise, but let that pass. Spain's policies—crude economic exploitation and dividing Mexicans against themselves—made it extremely difficult for even the best and most well-intentioned Mexicans to organize the new nation as a coherent political system capable of embarking upon a program of economic development and cultural integration.

As a result, foreigners moved in: the British dominated loans to the government and controlled the mines. Internal and foreign trade was a scramble among the British, French, Germans, Spanish, and Americans. The latter were primarily interested in territorial expansion, and the mistakes and weaknesses of the Mexican government exposed the border provinces of Texas and California to increasing danger.

In explaining the Texas Revolution, Pletcher discounts the existence of a plot involving President Andrew Jackson, Sam Houston, and others, but he makes it clear that various individuals and groups quickly launched a movement for annexation. Opposition rallied around the issues of morality, slavery, war, and the depression, and the question remained moot until 1840 when the pro-annexationists mounted a new campaign.

By that time, the Mexican government had lost control of California: lost control, that is, given the avarice of various foreigners. American operators established themselves at key points along the coast and then, at the end of the 1830s, began moving into the interior. Jackson began to explore the possibility of buying part or all of the province before he left office.

Jackson was not then so involved with Oregon, but others like Representative John Ford of Virginia kept the issue alive, until at the end of the 1830s economic conditions in the trans-Appalachian west combined with missionary activity to bring the issue to the fore—and to attract support from southern and eastern expansionists.

Three thoughts come to mind at the end of Pletcher's prologue: he has not offered any discussion of the country's best interests; there was no serious plan among European powers to conquer Texas or Mexico; and hence, despite Mexico's illness, American expansionism

was the necessary, the sufficient, and the precipitate cause of the international confrontation that began with John Tyler's accession to the presidency.

Opening his second section (1843-1845), Pletcher describes Tyler as "the obvious person to lead American expansionists in the Texas question" (p. 114); then, near the end of his discussion, he observes that "it is safe to say that without John Quincy Adams and his abolitionist cohorts the United States would have annexed Texas earlier and more peaceably" (p. 205). There is nothing in his account of the actions of England, France, or Spain to suggest that any of them proposed anything that posed a serious danger to the strategic security of the United States as it existed prior to the annexation of Texas. Their *maximum* objective was an independent Texas recognized by Mexico, with a guarantee for all negotiated boundaries. And none seriously considered going to war over annexation.

That brings us back to the issue of "the country's best interests."

1) To argue that John Quincy Adams and his abolitionist cohorts made annexation less peaceable must mean that their agitation was crucial in encouraging the Mexicans to resist; that Mexico would have accepted annexation without war sometime before 1845. Pletcher offers no evidence to support that argument.

2) Pletcher must also establish that Texas annexed prior to 1844 would have ended the drive for Santa Fe and California. He does not do this, and I doubt that he or anyone else can turn that trick.

3) In any event, he must deal with the "country's best interests," defined as acquiescing in the extension of slavery, on the probability that such a course would avoid a war of conquest. Or else, say simply that the country's best interests would have been better served by putting its own house in order—even if that meant learning to live without the entire continent. Pletcher is exhaustive in research and is impressive in reconstruction, but he is much too timid in confronting the questions he chooses to raise.

The next section begins with a crystal of a sentence: "Long before the success of United States' policy in Texas was widely apparent, the new [Polk] administration in Washington had begun to plan for expansion toward the Pacific" (p. 229). The argument about whether or not Polk plotted for war with Mexico is essentially irrelevant: Polk meant to get all he could without war with Britain, but if necessary with war with Mexico. (Given Polk's arrogant confidence in American power, and his contempt for Mexicans, Pletcher is mistaken to make an issue of why he did not prepare for war with those he considered incompetent.)

British leaders, with the aid of American moderates, faced him down over $54^{\circ} 40'$. So he settled for 100 percent more of Oregon than the United States could legitimately claim, and for 50 percent more of Mexico.

Which brings us to the issue of how one defines leadership and strong presidents. If one defines leadership as getting what one wants, or as what is wanted by oneself and like-minded supporters, then Polk was a strong and effective leader—albeit frustrated by not getting exactly *all*. But if one views leadership and strength in terms of serious thought about how a society already established for 150 years is to honor its essential principles, then we are in a different discussion. We are talking about stating and explaining a deeply considered position, doing one's best to persuade the always determinative plurality to agree, and being strong enough to accept defeat on those terms. Polk was not that kind of a strong leader.

In Part IV, "The Winning of the West, 1846-48," Pletcher offers an exhaustive review of the final negotiations with Britain over Oregon, the subversion and conquest of California, the war and peace settlement with Mexico, and the last expansionist spasms involving Yucatan and Cuba. Here, as with much of the rest of the book, there is no need for anyone again to reconstruct the essential history. His major conclusion is that Polk might well have gone along with a sustained expansionist drive for more territory; but, when that did not develop, he accepted the treaty negotiated by Nicholas P. Trist—which secured what he initially wanted.

In conclusion, Pletcher offers these major judgments. One: "Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War hastened and intensified trends that might have led to the same results eventually. But insofar as these annexations inflated American arrogance and spread hemispheric and national disunity, they exacted a heavy price" (p. 581). Two: both Oregon and Texas could have been acquired with much less fuss and furor, and certainly without war. Three: even California could very probably have been integrated without war. Four: Polk's behavior is best understood as a product of his classic self-centeredness, his suspicion of foreigners, his especial contempt for Mexicans, his aggressive nationalism and expansionism, and "his shallow, unenlightened" (p. 606) understanding of the explosive mixture created by adding expansionism to slavery. Five: one "might reasonably complain that he served his country ill by paying an unnecessarily high price in money, in lives, and in national disunity" (p. 611).

Pletcher has written the best modern study of the subject. I have a list of criticisms (such as his overestimation of foreign dangers, and

his cavalier handling of John Quincy Adams and others), but my main caveat is that it will not do to analyze American diplomacy around the theme of "the country's best interests" without a clear and explicit discussion of those best interests.

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Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico. By WILLIAM SEATON HENRY. New York, 1973. (1847). Arno Press. Maps. Illustrations. Pp. 331. Cloth.

The Mexican War: A Lithographic Record. By RONNIE C. TYLER. Introduction by STANLEY R. ROSS. Austin, 1973. Texas State Historical Association. Illustrations. Index. Pp. xii, 90. Cloth. \$10.00.

The recent moderate resurgence of interest in the Mexican War has produced several volumes of peripheral or specialized significance—such as these two. *Campaign Sketches* is a reprint of a book written during the war by an American captain who joined Zachary Taylor's army before it had entered Texas and who remained with it until after the capture of Monterrey. He gives an eyewitness account of Taylor's early marches and battles and adds a brief narrative covering the Battle of Buena Vista and a few other events based on official dispatches.

The book is part of a series, "The Far Western Frontier," comprising reprints of early guides, journals, and other descriptions of the West. For its occasionally poetic depiction of Mexican scenes and for details on the actions of small units under fire, this one may have some value to readers interested in the war. It contains also an abundance of the amazing trivia so beloved of folklorists—for example, a man who survived being shot with five arrows, the horrible mutilations produced by a steamboat explosion, and the last-minute reprieve of a deserter from the firing squad. Captain Henry gives us an evocative reconstruction of the abortive Texan raid on Mier (1842) as he strolls through the nearly deserted streets of the city after its capture by the Americans. But no one should place much reliance on the military judgment of a man who can proclaim with a straight face that "history does not furnish a more striking battle than 'Resaca de la Palma'" (p. 99).

There is considerably more justification in offering war buffs a collection of lithographs such as Tyler has brought together, although one may doubt that most of them give a more accurate overall picture