

The University of North Carolina at Asheville

“The Grey Eyed Man of Destiny” and the American Press: An Analysis of Antebellum
American Media Influence upon the Filibustering Career of William Walker

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by

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We think there is no man who deserves more of the reading public than Walker of Nicaragua. The newspapers should erect him a monument. They are under some obligation . . . to the Emperor of Russia, the Chinese and to Lord Palmerston, but Walker throws all the other heroes and heroines into profound darkness . . . Walker is like the widow's cruse, never gives out . . . He may be designated the Hero of Vicissitudes. One steamer leaves him on the flat of his back; another reports him up again . . . One day he is on the point of starving to death, his men are deserting him in regiments, and he hasn't a cent in his exchequer. The next day he is flush of provisions, men and money. Somebody is always flanking Walker, except when Walker is flanking somebody else.¹

This quote from the (Charlotte) *Western Democrat* illustrates the intimacy of the relationship between the American press and William Walker, a notorious filibuster of the mid nineteenth century. Sensationalism and intense political debate became commonplace in the stories of William Walker and the fate of Nicaragua. This no doubt kept many American newspapers and journals busy turning out articles for a public that demanded knowledge on the latest developments concerning Walker and his prospects. Though both Walker and the American press used each other to further their own interests, ultimately it was the press that played the dominant role, due to its ability to shape public opinion against and finally ignore Walker's crusade to "regenerate" Central America.

A number of scholarly works exist that are very informative about William Walker's life and filibustering career, but most of these sources give emphasis to narrative rather than analysis. Frederick Rosengarten's *Freebooters Must Die!: The Life and Death of William Walker, The Most Notorious Filibuster of the Nineteenth Century*, is the best and most comprehensive biographical work written on Walker's life and filibustering career. Achmed Abdullah and Compton Pakenham co-wrote a work titled,

¹ "The Fortunes of Walker," (Charlotte) *Western Democrat*, 14 April 1857.

Dreamers of Empire, which dedicated one chapter to the life and career of William Walker. Karl Bermann wrote a history of Nicaraguan and United States relations titled, *Under the Big Stick: Nicaragua and the United States since 1848*, in which he dedicated two chapters to Walker and his Nicaraguan campaign. Rudy Wurlitzer's work titled, *Walker*, contains a knowledgeable and comprehensive history of Walker written by Albert Z. Carr. Will Baker, Walt Anderson, Robert T. Cochran, Walter W. Crites, Jon Swan, and Christian F. Brun all wrote informative articles detailing Walker's campaign in Nicaragua. These works about Walker all tend to agree on the events surrounding Walker's life and experiences in Nicaragua and all contribute significantly to the knowledge on Walker for those interested in learning about him.²

A popular aspect of the historiography written about Walker is the investigation of his support base within the United States. Earl W. Fornell has argued that Texans supported the Nicaraguan filibustering campaigns, because they wished to establish autonomous slave-holding states that could be used as local trading posts for purchasing African slaves at lower prices, rather than for U.S. territorial expansion designed to increase Southern representation in Congress. Walker's failure to obtain a solid victory in Nicaragua eventually led to a decline in Texan zeal for his project. Fornell concluded that, above all else, Texans supported Walker only to gain personal wealth in the

² Frederick Rosengarten Jr., *Freebooters Must Die!: The Life and Death of William Walker, the Most Notorious Filibuster of the Nineteenth Century* (Wayne, Pennsylvania: Haverford House, Publishers, 1976), 1-208; Achmed Abdullah and Compton Pakenham, *Dreamers of Empire* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1929), 224-291; Karl Bermann, *Under the Big Stick: Nicaragua and the United States since 1848* (Boston: South End Press, 1986), 51-82; Rudy Wurlitzer, *Walker* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1987), 65-270; Will Baker, "Sourdoughs, Filibusters, and a One-Eared Mule," *Georgia Review* 39 (1985): 273-326; Walt Anderson, "William Walker and His Filibusters," *American History Illustrated* 1, no. 3 (1966): 4-11, 48-50; Robert T. Cochran, "Cold-Eyed Soldier of Fortune Who Became A 'President'," *Smithsonian* 12 (1981): 117-128; Walter W. Crites, "The Gray-Eyed Man of Destiny, William Walker: The First and Only American Ever Elected President of a Foreign Country," *American West* 9, no. 6 (1972): 4-9, 70; Jon Swan, "William Walker's Manifest Destiny," *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History* 13, no. 4 (2001): 38-47; Christian F. Brun, "Walker and the Insurgents in Nicaragua, 1856 & 1860," *Soundings* 17 (19-86): 44-53.

profitable slave trade and to secure cheap labor for the numerous Texas cotton plantations.³

Robert E. May also explored Walker's Southern support base in two chapters of *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire 1854-1861*. May has argued that many prominent Southern politicians of both the Whig and Democratic parties supported Walker primarily for his proslavery stance in regards to the Republic of Nicaragua; but that they were "misguided," because Walker had no intent of promoting a slave empire in Nicaragua. Rather, Walker wanted imperial power in Central America and Mexico all to himself and Walker's pronouncements for the expansion of slavery were only for the sake of gaining southern support. These proslavery pronouncements only worked further to strain relations between the North and South; and May concluded that Walker was able to play a significant role in the sectional divisions that led to the Civil War.⁴

Relatively few historians have sought deeper cultural answers to Walker's support. The most comprehensive and authoritative of these works was written by Robert E. May. May recognized the broader issues of filibusters and filibustering rather than the exploration of one famous filibuster. May argued that filibustering was an American cultural phenomenon during the 1850s, because filibusters intruded on popular culture and language through their popularity in the press. May argued that shared republican ideology, increased disregard for the law, Freemasonry, geographic mobility, high unemployment, and urbanization were among reasons filibustering enticed young

³ Earl W. Fornell, "Texans and Filibusters in the 1850's," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 59 (1956): 411-428.

⁴ Robert E. May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire 1854-1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 77-135.

American males. Above all else, May concluded, young men filibustered for adventure, and were heavily influenced by popular romantic and chivalric literature.⁵

Amy S. Greenburg maintained that a conflict existed between character and appearance in America in the 1850s that led many to join Walker in Nicaragua. The territory gained from the Mexican War created a mobile population in America which valued the outward appearance of prosperity and class as the measure of a person's character rather than masculine actions. Walker seemed to offer an alternative to the cultural crisis by revealing his character through filibustering expeditions. Walker's campaigns in Nicaragua offered men who were financially unsuccessful, thus lacking character, in America a chance to reveal their true character through masculine acts regardless of their external appearances.⁶

Historians have largely ignored William Walker's relationship with the American press. Jeffrey A. Zemler investigated the connection between the Texas press and William Walker by arguing that the Texas press was reluctant to report on Walker's exploits at first; but once he was successful, they united behind his cause. A cohesive pro-Walker press remained in Texas until his defeat by the Central American allies. Afterwards the Texas press was divided. Zemler concluded that by 1858 the Texas press unified once again, this time in their disappointment at Walker's failures in regaining a foothold in Nicaragua.⁷

⁵ Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 83-166; Robert E. May, "Young American Males and Filibustering in the Age of Manifest Destiny: The United States Army as a Cultural Mirror," *Journal of American History* 78 (1991): 857-886.

⁶ Amy S. Greenburg, "A Gray-Eyed Man: Character, Appearance, and Filibustering," *Journal of the Early Republic* 20 (2000): 673-699.

⁷ Jeffrey A. Zemler, "The Texas Press and William Walker in Nicaragua," *East Texas Historical Journal* 24 (1986): 27-38.

The following article seeks to explain further the effects of the American press upon Walker's filibustering foray into Central America. The American press not only encompassed popular newspapers, but also included contemporary journals, plays and magazines. The press played a determining role in Walker's initial success in Nicaragua, in his demise as a popular hero, and in his failure as a filibuster.

To understand the extent of the media's influence upon Walker's Nicaraguan filibuster campaigns, it is vital to comprehend how the press operated in antebellum America and why Walker's story became so popular. Several different phenomena worked in unison to change the way the press operated between 1833 and 1860. The advent of the penny paper added the poorer classes of the population to the crowd of newspaper readers and introduced modern aspects of the news concept meant to appeal to a mass audience. These stories focused the news on the activities of ordinary people, were written in a clear and understandable style, and were geared toward sensation so as to interest the mass audience. Also, cheaper newspapers meant that more could be circulated. Some of the larger papers in the 1850s claimed to have between forty and fifty thousand readers daily. Within the United States there were three times as many newspapers as in England or France. The fact that these developments were aided by the new speed of communication provided by the correspondent, the telegraph, the steamship, the railroad, and the rotary printing press "produced nothing less than a revolution in the news."⁸

⁸ Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years, 1690-1940* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), 215, 216, 241-242, 243-244, 248-250; William E. Huntzicker, *The Popular Press: 1833-1865* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), 163, 166. Even journals and magazines, published weekly, monthly or quarterly, benefited from the technological revolution in communication. They multiplied from a few hundred in 1833 to over a thousand by 1860. See Mott, *American Journalism*, 216. To explore further the influence of the telegraph

Although penny papers encouraged trends toward objectivity, they were far from revolutionary in terms of shifting the social order. Political partisanship dominated American journalism during this period. The 1850 census cited only five percent of American newspapers as being neutral or independent. Elected officials arranged alliances between themselves and the papers, which commonly involved financial aid and patronage. These affiliations were considered essential to an official's success in the political realm. Local advertisers and members of the clergy also played important roles in determining the political position of a newspaper.⁹

The term "filibuster" does not have the same meaning today as it had in antebellum America. Its original meaning was derived from the Dutch term *vrijbuitter*, or in English "freebooter." In the seventeenth century "filibustering" was applied to English pirates who roamed the Caribbean looting Spanish ships. American filibustering began as early as 1797 when Tennessee senator William Blount planned to invade territory beyond United States borders during the administration of President John Adams. By the late 1840s and into the 1850s the term filibustering came to mean the planning of, or involvement in private military expeditions of adventurers who embarked from the United States to invade nations with which the United States was friendly. Each of these filibusters had different and multiple motives for their intervention in the domestic affairs of a foreign country, which included the desire for glory, conquest, riches and the expansion of slavery. The United States government did not openly sanction these expeditions because they violated the federal Neutrality Act of 1818, passed in part from American leaders' fear of retaliatory attacks from filibuster-invaded territories. Though

on the American press see Menahem Blondheim, *News Over the Wires: The Telegraph and the Flow of Public Information in America, 1844-1897* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994).

⁹ Mott, *American Journalism*, 215-216, 253; Huntzicker, *The Popular Press*, 169.

American leaders approved this legislation, not all of them shared a firm commitment to stop the expeditions because many were devoted territorial expansionists. In any case, except for Texas, before the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848 filibustering was not widespread in America. It was the years following the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) and continuing up until the United States Civil War that filibustering became a common occurrence in the United States. Americans in this period took it to a degree never before seen in world history. During this time period filibusters targeted Hawaii, Formosa, Canada, Northwestern Mexico, Venezuela, Cuba, Ecuador and Nicaragua.¹⁰

Since sensational stories sold newspapers and appealed to mass audiences, it is no surprise that William Walker's story frequently captured headlines and filled newspaper columns between 1855 and 1860. Walker was the most successful filibuster in antebellum America.¹¹ A Tennessean by birth, he had been a doctor, lawyer and journalist before he took up filibustering. Walker's first filibustering expedition to southwest Mexico (1853-1854) failed miserably, but his campaign to Nicaragua (1855-1857) was the most successful filibustering expedition in that decade. After he and fifty-six Americans under his command interfered in the Nicaraguan civil war by aiding one side to victory, Walker was elected president of that republic. Walker was hailed as a hero all over the United States from the beginning of his campaign, and recruits for his filibuster army left in droves from American ports. In September of 1856, Walker overturned, by presidential decree, the 1838 Act of the Constituent Assembly of the

¹⁰ Tom Chaffin, "'Sons of Washington': Narciso Lopez, Filibustering and U.S. Nationalism, 1848-1851," *Journal of the Early Republic* 15 (1995): 81; Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, 4-9, 14, 65.

¹¹ The correct usage of the term is: he was a *filibuster*, and he engaged in *filibustering*.

Republic of Nicaragua that had abolished slavery in that country. But in 1857 an allied army of Central American nations, funded in part by Cornelius Vanderbilt, ousted Walker and his army from power. Subsequently, Walker and his comrades returned to the United States, under the protection of the U.S. Navy. There Walker's immense popularity as the "Gray-eyed Man of Destiny" allowed his supporters to raise enough funds and recruits to aid him in three more attempts to retake Nicaragua, but none were successful.¹²

Questions remain today whether the Pierce and Buchanan administrations actually supported or combated Walker's designs on Nicaragua. Towards the end of Walker's career many Americans had grown wary of his exploits, and those from the Northern states were suspicious of his motives concerning Nicaragua and slavery. The British navy captured Walker during his last expedition, and later turned him over to Honduran authorities. On September 12, 1860 a Honduran firing squad executed Walker.¹³

William Walker's first expedition to Nicaragua garnered a considerable amount of support from the largely pro-expansionist American press which often reported his military triumphs and subsequent formation of a stable government in that country. Walker had worked as a journalist in New Orleans and San Francisco before embarking on his filibustering foray into Nicaragua; he realized the importance of utilizing his own press. In October of 1855 Walker published his pro-American weekly newspaper known as *El Nicaraguense*. This paper was printed mostly in English, but it also integrated some Spanish articles and advertisements. It regularly printed accounts of Walker's

¹² Frederic Rosengarten, Jr., *Freebooters Must Die!: The Life and Death of William Walker, the Most Notorious Filibuster of the Nineteenth Century* (Wayne, Pennsylvania: Haverford House, Publishers, 1976), 1-9, 37-56, 76-208.

¹³ For further explanation of U.S. presidential administrations' filibustering policies see Robert E. May, "The Slave Power Conspiracy Revisited: United States Presidents and Filibustering, 1848-1861, In *Union and Emancipation: Essays on Politics and Race in the Civil War Era*, ed. David W. Blight and Brooks D. Simpson (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1997), 7-28.

“heroic” military victories, plans to “regenerate” Nicaragua, and political greatness, while it often ignored his military and political difficulties with the other Central American states. It was not uncommon for one to read articles deifying Walker or comparing him to past American heroes such as George Washington or Lafayette. One article in *El Nicaraguense* reported on an attack on the city of Granada by Costa Rican forces and called Walker’s return to the city to defend it his “second coming.” Another article elevated Walker as “the Washington of Nicaragua.”¹⁴

El Nicaraguense was Walker’s primary propaganda machine and served the distinct purpose of gaining sympathy and recruits from the United States. Copies of *El Nicaraguense* commonly made their way to newspaper editors in the United States, which allowed his propaganda to reach the American public with few or no changes by those who were opposed to his operations. The American Minister in Nicaragua regularly supplied a Raleigh newspaper with copies of *El Nicaraguense*. The *Raleigh Weekly Register* wrote, “We are indebted to the politeness of the Hon. John H. Wheeler, United States Minister at Granada, Nicaragua, for a copy of “El Nicaraguense” of the 10th of November, and for an extra of the same sheet of the 13th . . . we will . . . give also, from the sheet before us, some information as to the condition of affairs in Nicaragua.” The phrase “From the *Nicaraguense*” commonly appeared under large, bold headlines titled, “From Nicaragua,” “The Future of Nicaragua,” and “Walker’s Plans.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Rosengarten, *Freebooters Must Die*, 108; *El Nicaraguense*, 18 October 1856, “Callender I. Fayssoux Collection of William Walker Papers”, Folder 174, Box , Tulane University Latin American Library Manuscript Department, New Orleans, Louisiana; (Raleigh) *Weekly Standard*, 19 December 1855.

¹⁵ “Nicaragua,” (Raleigh) *Weekly Register*, 5 December 1855; “Highly Important From Nicaragua,” *New York Daily Times*, 15 July 1856, <<<http://0-proquest.umi.com.wncln.wncln.org>> (1 August 2004).; “Very Interesting From Nicaragua,” *New York Daily Times*, 1 September 1856; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, no date, Folder 160A, “Fayssoux Collection”; “Walker’s Plans in Central America,” (Raleigh) *Weekly Standard*, 12 December 1855; “From Nicaragua,” (Raleigh) *Weekly Standard*, 27 February 1856.

Some newspapers assigned correspondents to Nicaragua, in order to provide their readers with superior coverage on the events surrounding Walker and his filibusters. A reporter for the *New Orleans Daily Creole*, for example, revealed that the ship he traveled on to Nicaragua also transported “a number of the reporters of the different papers in New Orleans.” Upon his arrival in Nicaragua the same reporter observed that he had seen a mule throw a journalist from a New York paper near the town of Masaya. These correspondents generally favored Walker’s actions and plan and were by no sense of the word objective. A writer for *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* reporting from Granada proclaimed:

In a word he [Walker] is the ‘man of the time’ -he seems possessed of precisely those elements of quiet force which fit him for the position of conqueror as well as pacificator of these semi-civilized States . . . It is certainly a grand destiny to which this man seems to have been called, for it certainly seems to include nothing short of the entire regeneration and upbuilding of this republic, the introducing into the family of enlightened and civilized nations a new sister . . . ah yes, it is a glorious destiny, and may he live to consummate its term!¹⁶

Another correspondent reported that the native Indians of Nicaragua religiously believed a long-standing prophecy that a man, whom they would recognize by his grey eyes, would come to deliver them from tyranny and oppression. According to this writer, the natives believed that the prophecy had been fulfilled with Walker’s arrival. Thus, Walker soon became known throughout the media as the “Grey-eyed Man of Destiny.” Some of the correspondents for American newspapers were filibuster soldiers or served some

¹⁶ “Central America,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, 12 April 1856.

capacity in Walker's administration. Walker's customs collector at Granada, Charles Callahan, also served as a correspondent for the *New Orleans Daily Picayune*.¹⁷

Many of Walker's soldiers sent propaganda letters home, meant for publication in newspapers, which described the richness of the land, opportunities for speculation, and prospects for mercantile wealth. One soldier romantically described Lake Nicaragua, near the city of Granada, and the bay islands "each one of which . . . is in a short time destined to be full of houses, stores and commercial ware rooms, and where vessels of considerable tonnage can move from one depot to another" with relative ease. Walker's agents in the United States also wrote open letters to be published in newspapers or took out cards in the advertisement sections of newspapers for the purpose of luring emigrants to Nicaragua. These letters and cards often promoted Walker's policy of giving large grants of land and free passage via steamship to Nicaragua. In return claimants had to make improvements on the plots. In some cases Walker gave out land titles for service in the filibuster army. *El Nicaraguense* printed stories meant for circulation in the United States about the relative ease at which even the poorest people could make a fortune off the land in Walker's Nicaragua.¹⁸

Numerous mass media sources soon realized Walker's growing popularity and competed to satisfy the public's interest about "the Grey-eyed Man of Destiny."

Harper's Weekly featured a piece all about "The Nicaraguan Leaders," which contained

¹⁷ *New Orleans Daily Creole*, 30 August, 12 December 1856; "Reception Room of Gen. Walker in the President's House, City of Granada," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 15 March 1856; William Walker, *The War in Nicaragua* (Mobile: S.H. Goetzel and Company, 1860), 283.

¹⁸ "The Future of Nicaragua," *Wilmington Journal*, 14 November 1856; "Register Book: New Orleans Agency of Nicaraguan Emigration Company," Folder 93, Box 2, "Fayssoux Collection"; "Offers to Nicaraguan Emigrants," newspaper article, no date, Folder 160A, "Fayssoux Collection"; Advertisement for the Agency of Nicaragua, duplicated in Rosengarten, *Freebooters Must Die*, 128; May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, 195-196; "Diamonds in Nicaragua," *El Nicaraguense*, 25 January 1856, Folder 174, "Fayssoux Collection".

biographies and sketches of Walker and his top officers. In another issue the paper declared, “We have again and again called Walker a hero. We shall not take it back.” Playhouses across the country featured theatrical productions about Walker. In July of 1856, Purdy’s National Theatre in New York featured a musical comedy titled, “Nicaragua, or, General Walker’s Victories.” The musical was composed of three acts and featured “a new medley filibuster overture,” including songs such as “The Star Spangled Banner,” and “Yankee Doodle.” An advertisement in the *New York Daily Times* stated that the drama turned out to be a “great hit.” The following year, theatres in Sacramento and San Francisco presented their audiences with “The Siege of Grenada, or, Walker and His Men.” William Wells, one of Walker’s agents, published a book about Walker’s life and filibustering campaigns that was hastily “written, published and put in circulation in twenty days . . . at the request of numerous persons . . . desirous of obtaining the correct details of the extraordinary series of events . . . in Central America.”¹⁹

Walker’s name and story showed up in the media so often that even businesses exploited his popularity in order to sell their products through advertisements. A boot and shoe maker in North Carolina, for example, used the bold, large print headline, “Walker Expedition,” to draw readers to his advertisement which contained no other mention of Walker in the print. A general store in Tampa, Florida reminded readers that

¹⁹ “The Nicaraguan Leaders,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 23 May 1857, <<http://app.harpweek.com>>, (1 August 2004); “Walker and Nicaragua,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 1 January 1857, <<http://app.harpweek.com>>, (1 August 2004); “Walker the Filibuster,” (Raleigh) *Weekly Standard*, 5 December 1855; “Purdy’s National Theatre,” *New York Daily Times*, 25 July 1856; Playbills for “Nicaragua; or, General Walker’s Victories,” and “The Siege of Granada; or, Walker and His Men,” duplicated in Rosengarten, *Freebooters Must Die*, 145; William V. Wells, *Walker’s Expedition to Nicaragua: A History of the Central American War; and the Sonora and Kinney expeditions, Including All the Recent Diplomatic Correspondence, Together With a New and Accurate Map of Central America, and a Memoir and Portrait of General William Walker* (New York: Stringer and Townsend, 1856), iii-iv, 11-14; Advertisement for William V. Wells Book, *New York Daily Times*, 4 June 1856.

while people celebrated Walker's victories in Nicaragua, they should keep shopping for their everyday needs at W.G. Ferris & Son. A pill company in New York observed that had Walker's men used its product, "his army would have not disappeared beneath yellow, Panama and putrid fevers," and "The ravages of cholera and dysentery would have been stayed and the lives of two thousand soldiers saved."²⁰

During the height of Walker's popularity in the media, more often than not, newspapers printed material that assisted emigrants and recruits in traveling to the new filibuster republic. Notifications for steamers bound for Nicaragua frequently appeared in newspapers, as well as letters from Walker's agents at American ports encouraging people interested in the Americanization of Nicaragua to call on them. One writer for a New York paper opined that he wished Walker's recruiters in that city success since it would be a great way to rid the city of "restless vagabonds," so they could be put to a "good cause."²¹

The pro-expansionist press in the United States aided Walker and his promoters, at least for a while, in convincing numbers of Americans to join or support Walker in his "regeneration" of Nicaragua. At the Democratic Convention in Cincinnati in June of 1856 Democratic politicians created a platform on foreign relations, adopted without a dissenting vote, which resolved that the people of the United States "cannot but sympathize" with Walker. People from all over the United States joined Walker's exclusively American filibuster army. Emigrants and adventurers, numbering in the thousands, left American ports during Walker's tenure in Nicaragua. On one trip alone, 715 people emigrated from the port of New Orleans to Nicaragua aboard the steamer

²⁰ (Charlotte) *Western Democrat*, 12 January 1858; (Tampa) *Florida Peninsular*, 15 November 1856; *New York Daily Times*, 12 May 1857.

²¹ May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, 70, 196-197; Rosengarten, *Freebooters Must Die*, 113.

Texas. A New York newspaper reported seeing 600 emigrants, including “a great many enterprising young men,” leaving for Nicaragua, which they now referred to as “the promised land.”²²

In 1856 reports appeared in the American press that contradicted the pro-Walker propaganda and exposed the weaknesses of Walker’s military and political positions despite the tight censorship Walker maintained over any correspondence leaving Nicaragua. However, when Costa Rica and the other neighboring states declared war it became harder for Walker to censor unfavorable reports. This was due primarily to the fact that deserters and prisoners of war were no longer under his watchful eye. Reports surfaced about the filibusters’ high casualty rate in their battles with the Central Americans. Joseph Hall, a private in Walker’s filibuster army, in a letter to family members that was printed in the *New York Daily Times* explained, “The last battle we fought was in Granada and ten of my company was killed and nine wounded.” One of Walker’s agents unconsciously exposed Walker’s high casualty rates to the press in August of 1856, while attempting to discredit a newspaper report that forty-two of Walker’s original fifty-six filibusters had died. He pointed out that thirty-nine of the fifty-six were still living, but the agent’s account also revealed to the readers of the *San Francisco Daily Herald* that thirty percent of those filibusters in question had died in just over one year of fighting.²³

²² “Register Book: New Orleans Agency of Nicaraguan Emigration Company,” Folder 93, Box 2, “Fayssoux Collection”; “Register of the Army of the Republic of Nicaragua,” Folder 120, Box 4, “Fayssoux Collection”; “Departure of Nicaragua Emigrants,” *New York News*, quoted in (Raleigh) *Weekly Standard*, 24 September 1856; Democratic Party Platform, *Wilmington Journal*, 13 June 1856; May, *Manifest Destiny’s Underworld*, 199-200.

²³ “Gen. Walker Once More,” *New York Daily Times*, 3 June 1857; “The Voice of a Private-Secretary Marcy Cannot Help Walker’s Men,” *New York Daily Times*, 27 February 1857; William Frank Stewart, *Last of the Fillibusters* [sic], or, *Recollections of the Siege of Rivas* (Sacramento: Henry Shipley,

Readily apparent to Americans reading news accounts of affairs in Nicaragua was the fact that filibuster soldiers in Walker's army suffered most from deprivation and diseases such as yellow fever, malaria, and cholera, rather than from battle. A Philadelphia paper, for example, observed in July of 1856 that there was a general "scarcity of provisions," including clothing and medicines in Walker's army. Deserters from the filibuster army were a main source for newspapers reporting on the sufferings in Nicaragua. The *New York Daily Times* interviewed a fifteen-year-old drummer boy who had escaped from Walker's army in December of 1856. The columnist noted that the boy's "flesh was wasted, and his countenance cadaverous and haggard from disease and want, and his wardrobe altogether too scanty for the rigors of the season." The story later quoted the boy as saying that nearly his entire company had died from "chills and fever" after only three months in Nicaragua. Another deserter from Walker's army detailed the inadequate medical care for the sick at Walker's headquarters in Granada by charging, "there is certainly no more miserable life than that led by a patient in a hospital in Nicaragua," due to the unclean conditions of the wards and the "drunken doctors, or quacks I should rather call them." One of Walker's officers confessed he could not accurately describe the "unutterable woes of that accursed hell-den, without sickening his own soul with the filthy recital" when referring to the make-shift hospital at Rivas, where Walker and his men lay under siege by Central American forces.²⁴

1857), 20-23; "Affairs in Nicaragua," (Philadelphia) *Saturday Evening Post*, 12 July 1856; May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, 200.

²⁴ "Condition of Gen. Walker," *Wilmington Journal*, 13 March 1857; "Affairs in Nicaragua," (Philadelphia) *Saturday Evening Post*, 12 July 1856; Rosengarten, *Freebooters Must Die*, 162-163; "Trials of A Filibuster," *Harper's Weekly*, 10 January 1857, <<http://app.harperweek.com>> (01 August 2004); Stewart, *Last of the Fillibusters* [sic], 24-25, 30.

An article in *Harper's Weekly* chronicling the phases of "filibusterism" supposed that had the Nicaraguan Transit company known "that they were about to fill the boat of Charon--the old ferryman of Hades . . . by inviting their own countrymen to a poisoned banquet," they would have used their steamships for a more righteous purpose. News of sickness and death from disease in Walker's army was so widespread that the *New York Daily Times* reported on New Year's Day that "No life insurance company will accept a risk on a Nicaragua emigrant."²⁵

The American press also relayed information obtained from former filibuster soldiers who claimed that most of Walker's soldiers never received the compensation promised to them. In his letter to his mother and uncle printed in the *New York Daily Times*, Private Joseph Hall asserted "we don't get no pay nor half n nuff [sic] to eat." Henry Bartow, another soldier in Walker's army, corroborated Private Hall's charge, when he told the *New York Daily Tribune* he had not received wages for his service in the filibuster army. Another of Walker's disgruntled soldiers charged that it had always been General Walker's practice "to discharge his soldiers' wages with scrip of no cash value whatever, or so little that many neglected to draw it when due to them."²⁶

Furthermore, there were reports in the media that it was Walker's custom to force unwary American males, who had been lured to Nicaragua by the offer of free land, into military service upon their arrival as a desperate attempt to sustain his army with fresh soldiers. Passports issued by Walker were the only means of attaining a return ticket

²⁵ "The Barrack and the Hospital in Nicaragua," *Harper's Weekly*, 14 March 1857, <<http://app.harpweek.com>> (01 August 2004); "Recruits for Walker," *New York Daily Times*, 1 January 1857; [Deadrick, David], "The Experience of Samuel Absalom, Filibuster," *Atlantic Monthly* 4 (December 1859): 654, 665, <<http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/cgi-idx?notisid=ABK2934-0004-104>> (1 August 2004).

²⁶ "The Voice of a Private," *New York Daily Times*, 27 February 1857; "More of Walker's Filibusters [sic]," *New York Daily Tribune*, 2 July 1857; [Deadrick], "The Experience of Samuel Absalom, Filibuster," 559-660.

from the Nicaragua Transit Company. Thus, if his “emigrants” or soldiers wanted to leave they had to desert Walker’s army. If caught, the punishment for desertion was death, a threat that did not stop mass desertions from the filibuster army. One of Walker’s officers describing the fate of his company revealed, “that with the exception of a few wounded, a few sick and a handful under Lieutenant Tucker, they were all ‘gone over’ to Costa Rica--or to the Devil!”²⁷

All the bad publicity Walker accumulated in the media certainly had a negative effect on his cause. Walker, himself, even went so far as to blame the American press, and not the Costa Ricans, for his defeat in Nicaragua. On one occasion a number of “emigrants for Nicaragua” from New York aboard the steamer *Tennessee* deserted the ship when it stopped in Norfolk due to damage to its shaft. The remaining passengers had to be transferred to another steamer. One recruit changed his mind after he had already boarded the new ship and decided to cast himself overboard rather than continue on to Nicaragua.²⁸

Walker and his agents attempted to counter these unfavorable reports. His loyal officers and agents released letters to the press in order to censure “the enemies of Nicaragua.” A commonly-used argument was that the individuals who brought those unfavorable reports to the press were exiled criminals from Nicaragua who were “vindictively using the freedom of the American Press, to present the policy and condition” of Walker’s government “in the most false and odious colors.” In a letter to

²⁷ “Recruits for Walker,” *New York Daily Times*, 1 January 1857; “Gen. Walker’s Prospects,” (Charlotte) *Western Democrat*, 7 April 1857; “Gen. Walker Once More,” *New York Daily Times*, 3 June 1857; “A Curious Document,” *New York Daily Times*, 16 August 1856; “Condition of Gen. Walker,” *Wilmington Journal*, 13 March 1857; “Affairs in Nicaragua,” (Philadelphia) *Saturday Evening Post*, 12 July 1856; Morning Muster Reports of Walker’s army stationed at Rivas January 2-April 28, 1857, Folder 108, Box 3, “Fayssoux Collection”; Stewart, *Last of the Fillibusters* [sic], 35.

²⁸ (Tampa) *Florida Peninsular*, 20 June 1857; “The Tennessee in Norfolk,” *New York Daily Times*, 3 January 1857.

the *New Orleans Daily Creole* one of Walker's generals asserted that Walker employed a "Board of Surgeons" who admitted only qualified doctors to work in the hospitals in Nicaragua. In another letter to the press an officer in Walker's army maintained that sick filibuster soldiers were given "the best attention from experienced physicians." Walker's agents in the United States, on more than one occasion, even attacked newspaper editors who wrote unfavorable stories about Walker's Nicaragua. In New York, a captain in Walker's army went to an editor's office and beat him with whip for printing a critical report in the *Courier*, and in Washington D.C. Walker's American diplomat, John Heiss, caned the anti-Walker editor of the *Washington Evening Star*.²⁹

Walker issued his presidential decree of 22 September 1856, which allowed for the reintroduction of African slavery to Nicaragua, as an attempt to counteract his diminished influence elsewhere in the country by reinvigorating Southern interests in the "regeneration" of Central America. Consequently, it also worked to alienate him further from much of the Northern press. Walker's first year in Nicaragua did not oblige those Southern newspaper editors who wished, from the beginning, that he would work to expand slavery to Central America. The (Austin) *Texas State Gazette* communicated in early 1856 that the "only drawback" in Walker's filibuster republic was its "want of slaves." Still, much of the antislavery Northern press was not convinced that Walker's motives were pure concerning the slavery question. In May of 1856, even before Walker's election to the Nicaraguan presidency, the (Washington) *National Era* declared:

We entertain no objections to any properly conducted enterprise for the extension of our institutions and our national influence over Central America; but . . . Nicaragua is acquired principally with the view to . . .

²⁹ "Nicaraguan Affairs," *New York Daily Times*, 1 December 1856; May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, 201; "Police Intelligence," *New York Daily Times*, 6 May 1856; May, *Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, 105.

pave the way for future accessions to domains of the Slave Oligarchy in this country, we do not think that the interests or the honor of our country will suffer in any way from the defeat of Walker's undertaking.³⁰

Walker became the hero of the South once he decreed that slavery would be allowed in Nicaragua, and he used his proslavery position to gain every possible advantage. Southerners already involved in his operation quickly sent out letters to the Southern press notifying them of the proclamation. One Southern journal declared, "The most important news from Nicaragua . . . is the statement that 'Gen. Walker had revoked the decree abolishing slavery.'" An Alabama paper printed a letter from Nicaragua that urged its readers to send men and money to Nicaragua, because the filibuster "now offers [Nicaragua] to you and your slaves." Americans dedicated to the expansion of slavery poured into Nicaragua from every Southern state. A North Carolinian interested in joining Walker's cause explained that he was attracted to Nicaragua as "a Southern Man, strictly of Southern feelings" and alluded to the obligation the slave states now had to aid Walker and his filibusters. Even Henry Theodore Titus, the infamous proslavery partisan fighter in Kansas, took around 125 of his "Border Ruffians" out of "Bleeding Kansas" to fight in Walker's army.³¹

The appearance of the remnants of Walker's defeated army in New York and other cities across America in the summer of 1857, however, laid to rest any questions

³⁰ May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, 263; "Nicaraguan Troubles," *New York Daily Times*, 6 May 1856; "The Battle of Santa Rosa—Walker's Doings and Prospects," (Washington) *National Era*, 8 May 1856.

³¹ John L. Richmond to Charles S. Morehead, printed in "Fillibustering [sic]," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science, and Art* 9 (April 1857): 431-432, <<http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/moa/sgml/moa-idx?notisid=ABK9283-0009-103>> (1 August 2004); "Nicaragua," *DeBow's Review* 22 (January 1857): 105-109, <<http://www.hti.umich.edu/m/moajrnl/browse.journals/debo.html>> (6 September 2004); May, *Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, 106-109; In 1857 Walker's army listed 333 members from Southern States, see "Register of the Army of the Republic of Nicaragua," Folder 120, Box 4 "Fayssoux Collection,"; May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, 266, 273; Walker, *The War in Nicaragua*, 357-360.

about the true state of affairs in Walker's filibuster republic. Approximately six hundred refugees from Walker's filibuster army arrived in New York harbor, many of whom were sick, mutilated, penniless, lacking in proper clothing and without family or friends. Many of those who were refused assistance by the city's almshouse and Out-Door Poor Department ended up at City Hall Park, where they made speeches denouncing Walker and begged for donations from passers-by. The city's newspapers sent correspondents to the park in order to put their pitiful stories into circulation. Eventually, the city purged itself of the poor ex-filibusters. Public figures were able to raise money for the refugees at filibuster aid rallies, private citizens helped transport some of them home, and the city's almshouse decided to finance a large-scale filibuster migration from the city back to their home states.³²

The stories of the filibuster survivors made their way into many newspapers across the United States, and many media outlets that previously supported Walker's cause now denounced it. One North Carolina paper asserted, "The blood of thousands of gallant youths is upon the head of such papers as the *New York Herald*, and such speculators as might be named." *Harper's Weekly*, which had earlier called Walker a hero, declared, "Let William Walker, then, be visited with the hatred and contempt which are the meed [sic] of the conquered. Let his name be a warning to all enterprising youths to respect the territory of their neighbors." Some editors felt Walker showed ingratitude to Commander Davis of the U.S. Navy, who had saved Walker from the siege of Rivas

³² "The Survivors of Walker's Army," (Charlotte) *Western Democrat*, 7 July 1857; "Arrival of the Tennessee," *New York Daily Tribune*, 19 August 1857; "Walker's Deserters Yesterday," *New York Daily Times*, 21 August 1857; "William Walker's Deserters in Town," *New York Daily Times*, 20 August 1857; "Walker's Deserters in the Park Again-Another Aid Meeting," *New York Daily Times*, 22 August 1857; "Arrival of the Tennessee," *New York Daily Times*, 19 August 1857; "Arrival of the Illinois," *New York Daily Times*, 4 September 1857; May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, 183-185.

by allowing Walker to surrender his army to an American naval officer instead of the Costa Ricans, by complaining of Davis' actions to the President of the United States. The *New York Daily Times* suggested that the President should "send him [Walker] back and place him exactly where Commander Davis found him."³³

The impact of Walker's slavery decree upon the South and the Southern press, however, became more evident after his return from Nicaragua. Walker promoted his proslavery image at every stop when he traveled through the Southern states. His speeches in Southern cities frequently contained calls for Southerners to rally to his cause, and charges that abolitionism was the main instrument used to defeat him. In a speech to a crowd in New Orleans, for example, he sarcastically declared, "It is perhaps fortunate that I was born on Southern soil; it may be unfortunate that I cannot consider slavery a moral or political wrong." In his autobiographical work, *The War in Nicaragua*, Walker also dedicated an entire chapter to his defense of slavery. He recalled that his slavery decree was "the act by which the whole policy of the administration revolved."³⁴

Walker's cultivation of his proslavery image earned him praises and support from much of the South, especially from the press. In January of 1858, the *Memphis Evening Ledger* declared, "We are Walker, Nicaragua, pro-slavery men." After noting that "large sums" of money had been collected for Walker's cause in the Gulf Coast states, a Richmond paper predicted "the 'gray-eyed man of destiny' will wake up ere long in

³³ Walker, *The War in Nicaragua*, 263, 266, 278; "What is to Become of Nicaragua," *Harper's Weekly*, 6 June 1857, <<http://app.harperweek.com>>, (1 August 2004); "Filibustering Don't Pay," (Charlotte) *Western Democrat*, 19 May 1857; "Ingratitude," (Charlotte) *Western Democrat*, 23 June 1857; "General Walker's Ingratitude," *New York Daily Times*, 18 June 1857.

³⁴ "Speech of Gen. Wm. Walker," (Tampa) *Florida Peninsular*, 13 June 1857; "Ingratitude," (Charlotte) *Western Democrat*, 23 June 1857; May, *Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, 109; May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, 265; Walker, *The War in Nicaragua*, 254-280.

[Nicaragua] with an ample supply of men and money at his command.” In Virginia, several influential people of Richmond, including the editors of the *Richmond South* and the *Richmond Whig*, gave Walker a public dinner at the American Hotel. Delegates attending the Southern Convention in Knoxville in the summer of 1857 approved of Walker’s slave policy and resolved to “recommend his enterprise to the serious and earnest considerations of the Southern States of this Confederacy.” Organizers of another Southern Convention, held in Mobile in 1858, granted Walker a seat at the convention where he gave a speech in front of twenty delegates.³⁵

Of course, the more Walker pushed his proslavery image across the South, the more disgusted the Northern press became with him. William Lloyd Garrison’s (Boston) *Liberator* censured Walker as the “great scoundrel,” and charged that it was the “natural mode of action of a Government [sic] chosen by, and voluntarily upholding, the Slave Power” to ignore illegal expeditions leaving American ports bound for Nicaragua. The antislavery press frequently asserted that Walker was nothing more than an agent of the “Slave Oligarchy.” *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine* alleged that Walker’s ultimate intention behind his expedition was to “ask for annexation and admittance into the Union, care having been taken from the beginning, that no ‘psalm-singing Yankees,’ but good Christian slaveholders, should have control of the elections and the state constitution.”³⁶

³⁵ May, *Manifest Destiny’s Underworld*, 266; “The Walker Expedition, 1855,” *DeBow’s Review* 24 (February 1858): 150-151, <<http://www.hti.umich.edu/m/moajrnl/browse.journals/debo.html>> (6 September 2004); “Aid for General Walker,” *Richmond Whig*, quoted in (Charlotte) *Western Democrat*, 29 September 1857; “Misgivings About Extension of Slavery—Interesting Suggestions,” *New York Daily Times*, 25 January 1858; *New Orleans Delta*, quoted in (Boston) *Liberator*, 27 February 1857; “Dinner to Gen. Walker in Richmond,” (Raleigh) *Weekly Standard*, 20 January 1858; “Southern Convention at Knoxville,” *DeBow’s Review* 23 (September 1857): 312, <<http://www.hti.umich.edu/m/moajrnl/browse.journals/debo.html>> (6 September 2004); May, *Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, 126.

³⁶ “Political Aspects of the Slavery Question,” and “Progress of Slavery,” (Boston) *Liberator*, 27 February 1857; “Walker the Filibuster,” (Boston) *Liberator*, 3 July 1857; “Fillibustering” [sic], *Putnam’s*

The consequences of Walker's second attempt to "regenerate" Nicaragua in December of 1857 further polarized the press, and intensified the sectional debates concerning slavery and legal issues surrounding Walker's arrest. Walker and 270 filibusters departed from Mobile Bay aboard the steamer *Fashion* in November of 1857. They landed on Nicaraguan soil, but their stay in that country was brief. Commodore Hiram Paulding of the United States Navy used Marines and his ship's cannon, on the grounds that Walker was violating the U.S. neutrality laws, to compel Walker to surrender his command. The U.S. Navy then transported Walker and his men back to the United States, where Secretary of State Lewis Cass dismissed them from prosecution. Though President Buchanan defended Paulding's seizure of Walker as "actuated by patriotic motives," the act put him in a delicate position. Paulding's arrest of Walker was of questionable legality, since he landed American forces on foreign soil to capture "Nicaraguan" citizens outside of American jurisdiction.³⁷

Paulding's actions, President Buchanan's failure to censure the Commodore and the Administration's refusal to compensate Walker sparked indignation in the Southern press. Most Southern papers referred to Paulding's decision as a "high handed outrage," and a "usurpation of power." The *Richmond South* called Paulding an "imp of fame," who regarded his own actions as "the crowning epoch of the nineteenth century, destined to . . . recollect new luster upon the American Navy, in general, and Commodore H. Paulding in particular." The editors of the *Raleigh Weekly Standard* proclaimed that they were "tempted to believe that Walker is indeed the 'grey eyed man of destiny,' and that Com. Paulding was selected, by the decrees of fate, to consummate that destiny, and

Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science, and Art 9 (April 1857): 433; May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld*, 270-272.

³⁷ May, *Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, 113-114.

place him in power; just as Providence overrules the acts of the wicked and turns them into good.” In a letter to the editor in the same issue a North Carolinian wrote that he felt Paulding was a Black Republican and took such actions against Walker in order to take power away from the Democrats. After President Buchanan publicly defended Paulding’s actions, the *Wilmington Journal* suggested that rather than see Central America diplomatically secured for the abolitionists, the South “ought to turn out en masse and put Walker back in Nicaragua . . . and sustain him there against all forces whatsoever.” Citizens attending a mass meeting in Mobile, Alabama sent an open letter to the Secretary of the Navy that laid out specific charges and demanded that the government put Paulding on trial for misconduct. The letter also stated that any jury hearing the case must contain equal numbers of Southern and Northern men, since an all-Northern jury could never be expected to deliver justice “without prejudice to this section.”³⁸

While the Southern press severely chastised Paulding and the Buchanan Administration for their interference in Nicaragua, the Northern press congratulated the Commodore on a job well done. The *New York Daily Times* asserted that Paulding deserved praise from his fellow Americans for “freeing their good name from the foul stain of fillibusterism [sic], which has so long disgraced it in the eyes of the whole world.” Another Northern journal justified Paulding’s seizure of Walker, arguing that the British would have arrested Walker had Paulding not done so. The article concluded

³⁸ “The Administration and Gen. Walker,” (Emporia) *Kansas* [sic] *News*, 16 January 1858, <www.kcckc.edu/territorial_news> (1 August 2004); (Charleston) *Mercury*, 1 January 1858; “The Arrest of Gen. Walker,” (Natchez) *Daily Courier*, 31 December 1857; “Nicaragua,” (Raleigh) *Weekly Standard*, 13 January 1858; “Paulding’s Bulletin,” (Richmond) *South*, quoted in (Raleigh) *Weekly Standard*, 6 January 1858; “Paulding and Walker,” (Raleigh) *Weekly Standard*, 13 January 1858; “More Anon to the Editors,” (Raleigh) *Weekly Standard*, 13 January 1858; *Wilmington Journal*, 22 January 1858; “Letter to the Secretary of the Navy,” *Mobile Register*, quoted in *Wilmington Journal*, 12 February 1858.

necessary steps to preserve order in the Americas “should be taken by American officers, under the American flag.” Even Democratic Party organs in the North were cautious about chastising Paulding. The *New York Herald* chose to wait until further investigation could be made into the matter before determining whether or not Paulding was justified in arresting Walker, pleading that Paulding’s instructions from Washington were “general in their nature.”³⁹

Furthermore, all the attention given to the Walker-Paulding affair in the press reverberated in an intense Congressional debate that was closely followed by the press. This political sparring revealed the effect of Walker’s proslavery position on American politics and contributed to sectionalizing the Democratic Party further on the issue of the expansion of slavery. A dispute over the legality of Paulding’s seizure of Walker erupted in the Senate, which proved that Gulf-state senators from Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas fervently supported Walker’s claim as the rightful president of Nicaragua. On the other hand, Republicans in the Senate supported Buchanan’s defense of Paulding and condemnation of Walker. James Doolittle, a Republican from Wisconsin, even introduced a joint resolution proposing that Commodore Paulding be awarded a medal for stopping the “piratical” Walker.⁴⁰

In the House of Representatives, however, sectionally-themed speeches overshadowed the legal issues within the debate. Congressman A. R. Wright of Georgia complained that Buchanan was “using the *power of the Government* to take ‘*slave labor*’

³⁹ “Arrival of the Northern Light,” *New York Daily Times*, 28 December 1857; *New York Journal of Commerce*, quoted in “Commodore Paulding,” (Charlotte) *Western Democrat*, 12 January 1858; *New York Daily Herald*, quoted in “The Arrest of Gen. Walker,” (Raleigh) *Weekly Register*, 6 January 1858.

⁴⁰ “Interesting Debate,” (Charlotte) *Western Democrat*, 19 January 1858; *Speech of James R. Doolittle, of Wisconsin Delivered in the United States Senate, January 21st, 1858: Justification of Commodore Paulding’s Arrest of Walker and his Command at Punta Arenas*, Tulane University Latin American Library Manuscript Department, New Orleans, Louisiana; May, *Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, 117-120.

out of Central America.” On the other hand, Missouri free-soiler Francis Preston Blair, Jr. charged that Walker’s expedition was part of a larger slavery expansion plot that planned to unite Walker’s Nicaragua “with the slave States in a southern slave-holding Republic.”⁴¹

On May 4, 1858, Pennsylvania Republican David Ritchie introduced a resolution in the House to extend Congressional thanks to Commodore Paulding; William Barksdale of Mississippi countered with a substitute resolution to condemn Paulding. The vote on Ritchie’s proposal and Barksdale’s substitute proposal, taken almost a year later, revealed that Walker had accomplished his crusade to become a symbol of Southern proslavery expansionism through the American press. The House voted 128 to 56 rejecting Barksdale’s resolution. Slave states represented 52 out of the 56 votes for the resolution condemning Paulding, while the other 4 came from Northern Democrats. Out of the 128 votes against Barksdale’s amendment, only 20 were from Southern representatives. The House approved Ritchie’s resolution to give Congressional thanks to Paulding, however, by a vote of 99 to 85. Slave states represented 73 of the 85 dissenting votes. The other 12 dissenting votes all came from Democrats, while 25 Northern Democrats voted for Ritchie’s resolution. Thus, the Northern Democrats were split on the subject, while the Northern Republicans and Southern Democrats were almost entirely united in their positions concerning Walker.⁴²

During Walker’s final attempts to reclaim power in Central America his support in the press noticeably diminished. Apparently much of the press simply grew tired of Walker. The *Wilmington Journal* reported that “people are tired of Walker,” and “his

⁴¹ May, *Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, 120-124.

⁴² *Ibid*, 121, 124-125.

own Junta are tired of him, and, no doubt, glad to get rid of him.” Another paper wrote that Walker’s cause “has, like the butcher’s calf, ‘kind of gin out,’” and that Walker was “lecturing occasionally in Tennessee, but attracts very little attention.” The *New York Daily Times* referred to Walker’s expeditions as a “fillibustering [sic] flea,” whose “annoying industry and disproportionate agility will never be quenched until [Walker] shall have been firmly caught and nipped between the Presidential thumb and the British forefinger.”⁴³

In fact, Walker kept much of the planning for his final attempts at Nicaragua from the press in an attempt to evade federal authorities. Utilizing Greek letters in place of names, Walker devised a code to be used in letters between himself and the other collaborating parties for a new expedition. Walker also wrote to one of his agents that he planned to get to Nicaragua “by indiscretion” and to keep all their plans and movements a secret. Letters sent to Walker, he ordered, were to be addressed to the alias “Mr. McDonald.” Newspapers that ran stories about Walker resorted to printing only vague rumors of his movements about the country, for want of any other information on him. Thus, when Walker set off on his final expedition, much of the American press and the public simply ignored his attempts to gain their sympathies once again. The *New York Daily Times* opined in September of 1860 that Walker “to use a decided vulgarism, is ‘played out,’ and his own countrymen are heartily sick of his enterprises.” The *Times* was, for the most part, correct in its statement.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Wilmington Journal*, 15 January 1858; “Walker and Nicaragua,” (Charlotte) *Western Democrat*, 9 March 1858; “The Fillibustering [sic] Flea,” *New York Daily Times*, 5 October 1859.

⁴⁴ Walker to ?, 29 September 1859, Folder 78, Box 2, “Fayssoux Collection”; Walker to Fayssoux, 8 July 1859, Folder 69, Box 2, “Fayssoux Collection”; Walker to Fayssoux, 19 April 1859, Folder 67, Box 2, “Fayssoux Collection”; (Charlotte) *Western Democrat*, 2 November 1858; “Comonfort and Gen. Walker,” (Charlotte) *Western Democrat*, 13 April 1858; “The Opening of the Nicaragua Interoceanic Route,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 6 November, 1858; “Used Up,” *New York Daily Times*, 12 September 1860.

The combination of the media's weariness of Walker and his intended secrecy proved to be disastrous to Walker's final expedition. The number of men and the amount of money available to Walker during his final expedition did not compare to that of his previous expeditions. After Walker left for the island of Roatan (his base of operations for the last expedition), Captain Fayssoux, Walker's agent coordinating operations from New Orleans, noted that the filibusters' funds had all been used up and none remained for recruiting advertisements in newspapers. Furthermore, Walker noted the importance of purchasing a printing press that would be capable of printing in English and Spanish to his operations in an earlier letter, but with no funds Fayssoux could not "give the matter the attention it merits." Recruits were even harder for the filibuster agent to locate for Walker's final expedition. Walker hoped that news of his movements in Central America would "draw out the necessary contribution from the Southern people," but Fayssoux wrote that he could only find ten recruits in New Orleans to send down to Walker.⁴⁵

News of Walker's capture by the British, and subsequent death sentence by a Honduran military tribunal, did not even stir the people of the United States to come to his aid. When Mrs. A.A. Henningsen, the wife of Walker's former top general in Nicaragua, heard of Walker's forthcoming death sentence she asked angrily, "Where are all his moneyed and influential friends . . . Will the South stand by and see her most progressive man . . . shot down like a dog? If so let her renounce for-ever her reputation

⁴⁵ Walker to Fayssoux, 3 April 1859, 12 August 1860, and 6 August 1860, Folders 67 and 68, Box 2, "Fayssoux Collection"; Fayssoux to Walker 27 August 1860, 9 September 1860, and 15 September 1860, Folder 23, Box 1, "Fayssoux Collection".

for chivalry, valor, policy, or pride!” Ironically, it was only with the news of Walker’s death that the American press once again gave him their full attention.⁴⁶

It is clear that what was printed and distributed through the American press significantly contributed not only to William Walker’s initial successes but also to his ultimate failure in the filibustering expeditions to Central America. Walker’s most successful periods in gaining emigrants and sympathies from America emerged when the press fervently and consistently embraced his cause, with the aid of unfiltered pro-Walker propaganda. It was only when Walker’s propaganda was exposed as lies, and his decision to ally with the South in the national debate over the expansion of America’s peculiar institution that his crusade to “regenerate” Central America turned ruinous. Furthermore, much of the press, including those who fervently supported Walker, grew tired of Walker’s failures in gaining a foothold in Central America. William Walker’s relationship with the press provides insight into the power the partisan press commanded in antebellum America, and how it was able to shape public opinion dealing with important political matters of the day.

⁴⁶ “The Lounger,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 29 September 1860; Mrs. Henningsen to Fayssoux, 17 September 1860, Folder 31, Box 1, “Fayssoux Collection”; “The Execution of Walker Confirmed,” *Richmond Enquirer*, 2 October 1860; “Gen. Walker’s Fillibuster (sic) Expedition-Louis Napoleon Implicated,” and “Further Particulars in Regard to the Expedition of Walker,” *Richmond Enquirer*, 5 October 1860; “The Late General Walker,” and “Foreign News,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 13 October 1860; “Particulars of the Fate of Walker and Budler,” (Tampa) *Florida Peninsular*, 6 October 1860.

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