

Transcendentalist- Abolitionist-Anti- Imperialist: Opposition to the U.S. War against Mexico

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For my students.

“We distinguish between *mexicanos del otro lado* and *mexicanos de este lado*. Deep in our hearts we believe that being Mexican has nothing to do with which country one lives in. Being Mexican is a state of soul – not one of mind, not one of citizenship. Neither eagle nor serpent, but both. And like the ocean, neither animal respects borders.”

– Gloria Anzaldúa¹

In 1848 the U.S. lithographer Nathaniel Currier produced an anti-war political cartoon that condemned the grossly opportunistic search by the Whig Party for an “available candidate” in that year’s presidential campaign.² The candidate depicted, perched upon a pyramid of skulls and holding a blood-dipped sword, is either General Zachary Taylor or General Winfield Scott, both of whom had achieved widespread popularity through their leading roles in the recently victorious U.S. War against Mexico.³ Although the figure has traditionally been identified as Taylor, it is more in keeping with popular depictions of Scott. As it turned out, Taylor won the Whig nomination and the national election.



Michael Walzer’s classic text on *Just and Unjust Wars* is replete with “historical illustrations.”⁴ Curiously, though, Walzer makes no reference to the 1846-1848 war pursued by the United States against Mexico – a war in which a young Lieutenant Ulysses S. Grant not only fought but decades later recalled was “one of the most unjust wars ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation.”⁵ Indeed, not only was this war that massively enlarged the territory of the United States, expanded slavery, and set in motion the path toward Civil War; it was a war that relied on the narrative of “Manifest Destiny” and massive ideological distortion to caricature Mexican heritage and culture in order to rally the U.S. population in a way that would point the way forward for ruling-class campaigns to win over hearts and minds for future wars, up to the present.⁶ As we shall see, even Friedrich Engels was not immune to the barrage of such racializing propaganda.

Equally curious is the scant attention to protest against the U.S. invasion and occupation of Mexico paid by Holly Jackson in her outstanding book *American Radicals*.⁷ Although this protest was quite broad, especially as the war dragged on, my concern in what follows is specifically with individuals who were part of a Transcendentalist-Abolitionist resistance grounded its opposition to the war from the start through appeal to a “higher law” of moral conscience and by upholding the equal freedom of all humanity.⁸ I shall concentrate on anti-war arguments advanced by Theodore Parker and Margaret Fuller, whose ideas and arguments remain less critically assessed than those of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.⁹

Yet, as Lawrence Buell has argued, the philosophical-political orientation of Transcendentalism was from the start a “contradictory” one.¹⁰ Emerson, for example, wondered, on the one hand,

what is a man born for but to be a Reformer, a Remaker of what man has made: a renouncer of lies; a restorer of truth and good, imitating that great Nature which embosoms us all, and which sleeps no moment on an old past, but every hour repairs herself, yielding us every morning a new day, and with every pulsation a new life?¹¹

He then proposed that

the power, which is at once spring and regulator in all efforts of reform, is the conviction that there is an infinite worthiness in man which will appear at the call of worth, and that all particular reforms are the removing of some impediment..¹²

On the other hand, Emerson – and other Transcendentalist thinkers – often failed adequately to recognize that the conditions of possibility for reform in the United States were impeded by the dispossession and exclusion of others, beginning with indigenous and enslaved peoples, whose “infinite worthiness” was left unrecognized. Indeed, we could say that the Transcendentalists *were not transcendentalist enough*. Emerson himself seems to recognize this discrepancy in his 1846 “Ode” to the radical unitarian clergyman William Henry Channing, who had sharply criticized Emerson’s privatism.¹³ In response, Emerson admits that he prefers the quiet of his own study to political engagement (“your true quarrel is with the state of Man”¹⁴), but he nonetheless guiltily laments,

But who is he that prates

Of the culture of mankind,
 Of better arts and life?
 Go, blindworm, go,
 Behold the famous States
 Harrying Mexico
 With rifle and with knife!¹⁵

As Lawrence Buell elaborates, “the poem can scarcely contain itself, so galling are its competing aversions: toward the Mexican War as an instrument of slavery, toward being hectored into wasting energy denouncing it.”¹⁶ In the end, though, Emerson foresaw in a journal entry from May-June 1846 that “the United States will conquer Mexico, but it will be as the man swallows the arsenic, which brings him down in turn. Mexico will poison us.”¹⁷

Emerson’s growing sympathy for abolitionism and strong opposition to the war prompted him to speak at an Abolitionist July Fourth celebration, sponsored by the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, at Harrison Grove in Dedham, Massachusetts.¹⁸ In his address he disparages what he calls

the war-party, a ferocious minority which no civilization has yet caused to disappear in any country; that mob, which every nation holds within it, of young and violent person craving strong drink, craving blood, craving coarse animal excitement, at any cost.¹⁹

Regrettably, in the face of this “war-party,” the majority of the population, “the sincere opposition,” found itself “paralyzed.”²⁰ Instead of a “revolutionary committee,” New England “resolves itself into ... a debating society.”²¹ Emerson goes on to implicate hypocritical “peace-loving States” and bellicose U.S. newspapers in pursuit of increased sales:

If France, and England, and America, are forced, by a keener self-interest, to keep the peace with each other, that does not hinder that some poor Algerines, Sikhs, Seminoles, or Mexicans, should be devoured by these peace-loving States at the same moment. This war-party, this section of rowdy boys, older or younger, ever ready to throw up their caps at any prospect of a fight, are stimulated and trumpeted on by that needy band of profligate editors and orators, who find their selfish account in encouraging this brutal instinct.²²

By the following year, despite a succession of U.S. army victories, Emerson had not altered his negative assessment of the war. In an editors' address to the inaugural issue of a new literary journal, *The Massachusetts Quarterly Review*,²³ he decries the state of the nation:

We have a bad war, many victories, each of which converts the country into an immense chanticleer, – and a very insincere political opposition. The country needs to be extricated from its delirium at once. Public affairs are chained in the same law with private: the retributions of armed states are not less sure and signal than those which come to private felons. The facility of majorities is no protection from the natural consequence of their own acts. Men reason badly, but nature and destiny are logical.²⁴

Despite its historical limitations, then, the Transcendentalist movement set into motion a philosophical-political trajectory whose “pulse of freedom”²⁵ regularly collided with the dominant discourses of “American exceptionalism” and “Manifest Destiny.” We can see that collision especially well regarding the U.S. War against Mexico, even though its representative men and women were as unsuccessful as the rest of anti-war dissenters to halt the invasion, let alone to prevent casualties, atrocities, and land seizure.

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The War against Mexico (1846-1848) can, in the last analysis, best be understood in terms of the desire – and even the economic imperative²⁶ – to extend the boundaries of the United States from its eastern coast all the way to California. By the war's culmination in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (signed on February 2, 1848), the United States had increased in size by 25 percent through forcible – but nominally “compensated”²⁷ – acquisition of territories from Mexico that included what would ultimately become the states of California, Nevada, Utah, most of New Mexico and Arizona, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming.

The war's proximate cause was the annexation of Texas by the United States in December 1845.²⁸ Open hostilities began in April 1846 when Mexican soldiers ambushed and killed American troops, who were led by General Zachary Taylor and, on President James K. Polk's orders, had provocatively crossed into a disputed area – settled almost entirely by Mexicans – that extended south from the Nueces River, which Mexico regarded as border of Texas, to the Rio Grande River, where the

United States drew the line. As Lieutenant Colonel Ethan Allen Hitchcock, the commander of the 3rd Infantry Regiment, wrote in his diary at the time,

Our force is altogether too small for the accomplishment of its errand. It looks as if the government sent a small force on purpose to bring on a war, so as to have a pretext for taking California and as much of this country as it chooses; for, whatever becomes of this army, there is no doubt of a war between the United States and Mexico..²⁹

Soon after this clash, on May 11, 1846, President Polk sent a message, drafted in the form of a legal brief, to Congress that sought to justify retaliatory actions against Mexico. Polk falsely claimed that Mexico

has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon American soil. She has proclaimed that hostilities have commenced, and that the two nations are now at war. As war exists, and, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of Mexico herself, we are called upon by every consideration of duty and patriotism to vindicate with decision the honor, the rights, and the interests of our country..³⁰

Within two days, both the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate overwhelmingly authorized President Polk to go to war against Mexico..³¹

Apparently, Polk believed that he could obtain significant concessions from Mexico through a bold display of military force. It is unlikely, though, that he expected subsequent Mexican intransigence and a protracted war to follow. Notable features of this war were the significant casualties suffered, and atrocities committed, by the U.S. army;³² the role of Mexican partisans and guerilla fighters;³³ and the rampant anti-Catholicism among troops that led a significant number to desert³⁴ and, remarkably, to form the San Patricio Battalion, which fought on the side of Mexico..³⁵

Although the war furthered the "Southern dream of a transcontinental empire" rooted in slavery³⁶ and helped to ensure that the United States "emerged ... much enlarged geographically and stronger financially and economically,"³⁷ it generated a broad spectrum of opposition that extended well beyond the "loyal" kind expressed by congressional Whigs, whose criticisms did not prevent them from voting for war appropriations. For instance, a meeting organized by New York workers was held in May 1846, to reject the war. According to Philip Foner, this meeting branded the war as a scheme of the slave owners and their allies who lived "in such luxurious

idleness on the products of the workingmen.” They demanded of President Polk that further hostilities be avoided by withdrawing American troops “to some undisputed land belonging to the United States.”³⁸

Likewise, a year later, on June 10, 1847, the Second Industrial Congress met in New York City and passed the following resolution:

That this Congress do[es] hereby recommend to national and all other labor reformers throughout the nation to nominate no candidate for congressional or legislative office who is not pledged to use the influence of his station, if elected to withhold supplies from the United States Army now in Mexico, and to cause said army to be withdrawn as soon as possible.³⁹

In the last instance, although opposition to it was largely unsuccessful, the U.S. War against Mexico fractured and fundamentally transformed the U.S. party system by hastening the “breaking” of the Constitution.⁴⁰ Tragically, General Grant later reflected, it paved the way for the Civil War to follow. In his vivid words,

the Southern rebellion was largely the outgrowth of the Mexican war. Nations, like individuals, are punished for their transgressions. We got our punishment in the most sanguinary and expensive war of modern times.⁴¹

It is worth stressing that the war did not arise and unfold simply between two republics. Rather, as Pekka Hämäläinen, has emphasized,

On the eve of the war, much of northern Mexico was already in ruins: U.S. troops had marched south in the footsteps of the Comanches, Kiowas, and Apaches, who had turned vast segments of Mexico’s heartland into an economically feeble, politically fragmented, and psychologically shattered world that was ripe for conquest. U.S. officers in the field had consulted Comanche soldiers who were still raiding in Mexico, mining their expertise on how to subjugate and kill Mexicans. However distinct the two empires were, in northern Mexico U.S. expansion was the direct heir to Comanche power.⁴²

Yet the decisive U.S. victory was a mixed blessing for indigenous peoples. As Hämäläinen concludes, “the United States expansionist burst – mightily boosted by

rising capitalism – was a dark moment for many Native Americans in the West,” with the advent of “unhindered access” from New Mexico to California.⁴³

Finally, and most importantly, although the United States had been founded and expanded through the dispossession of indigenous lands and the enslavement of African peoples,⁴⁴ the War against Mexico proved to be a defining historical moment. No longer could the fiction of an American republic uniquely dedicated to freedom and equality be easily maintained. Through this war of “territorial aggrandizement,” the United States became just one more “empire among empires.”⁴⁵

The economist Joseph Schumpeter once famously argued that “a purely capitalist world ... can offer no fertile soil to imperialist impulses.”⁴⁶ Moreover, because the United States was “least burdened with precapitalist elements, survivals, and power factors,” it supposedly exhibited “the weakest imperialist trend.”⁴⁷ In support of his argument, Schumpeter recalled the War against Mexico:

In the course of the nineteenth century, the United States had numerous occasions for war, including instances that were well calculated to test its patience. It made almost no use of such occasions. Leading industrial and financial circles in the United States had and still have an evident interest in incorporating Mexico into the Union. There was more than enough opportunity for such annexation – but Mexico remained unconquered.⁴⁸

One scarcely knows how to respond to such a wildly wrong-headed analysis of imperialism in general and, specifically, of the U.S. War against Mexico as an act of aggression. Schumpeter utterly failed to comprehend the inherent tendency of capitalist economies periodically to undergo profitability crises. Nor did he grasp that a significant “counteracting factor” exists for nations to try to resolve such crises by expanding foreign trade and investment. As Michael Roberts succinctly puts it:

This could cheapen the cost of raw materials extracted from the colonies and raise the rate of exploitation of the labour force by using the plentiful supplies of cheap labour (an untapped “reserve army”) in the colonial territories. The profit created by that labour could be transferred to the imperialist economies and thus raise the rate of profit at the centre.⁴⁹

But leaving aside this glaring theoretical problem,⁵⁰ how should one respond to Schumpeter's practical failure to mention the genocidal wars of dispossession of indigenous peoples in the decades leading up to the War against Mexico – especially directed in the deep South, for example, against the Cherokee and Seminole peoples?⁵¹ As it turned out, the ultimate decision by the Polk administration not to press for the incorporation of *all* of Mexico was hardly because of his moral aversion to conquest.⁵² On the contrary, he sought a way to appease political opposition. As Theodore Parker vividly put it in a retrospective article on the Polk administration,

The moral portion of both political parties – likewise a small portion, and an obscure, not numbering a single eminent name – opposed the war, and the government trembled. ... Those who had the instinct for justice would not be still; no, nor will not; never. The slaveholders themselves began to tremble – and hence the easy conditions on which Mexico was let off."⁵³

Polk also acknowledged the inability to recruit enough soldiers to occupy the entire country and expressed a desire to seize the northern and western regions that were less populated and, hence, could more likely be controlled and exploited.

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Although it is beyond the scope of this article to address in depth, let us at least acknowledge that by any well-considered reckoning with the rules of war,⁵⁴ the U.S. forcible acquisition of Mexican territory (and, in its aftermath, the dispossession of indigenous lands) was *unjust*. Just war theory is comprised of three broad categories:⁵⁵

- *Jus ad bellum* – the justification for going to war;⁵⁶
- *Jus in bello* – the conduct of a war with respect to targets and methods;⁵⁷
- *Jus ex bello* – the way in which a war is concluded.⁵⁸

If we were to apply these categories to the U.S. War against Mexico, we would find, first of all, that a key feature of *jus ad bellum*, namely, fighting in self-defense, was grievously breached by the Polk Administration. Lieutenant Colonel Hitchcock –

a philosophically astute officer – even wrote in his diary that he regarded the imminent invasion as “monstrous and abominable”:⁵⁹

I have said from the first, that the United States are the aggressors. We have outraged the Mexican government and people by an arrogance and presumption that deserve to be punished. ... My heart is not in this business; I am against it from the bottom of my soul as a most unholy and unrighteous proceeding; but, as a military man, I am bound to execute orders. ... Philosophy seems to be forgotten, yet it is not out of mind. I think of more than I note, but I chiefly *feel*/how perfectly in contrast with my position are my wishes. I despise, *abhor*, the authors of this war and yet am compelled to be employed in it.⁶⁰

Almost a year into the war, Hitchcock was stationed aboard the *Massachusetts* – a ship anchored offshore awaiting the order to launch a massive amphibious assault on Veracruz, Mexico. He sent a letter to Theodore Parker in which he elaborated on his moral qualms and agreed with the latter’s passionately anti-war stance (which we shall soon consider):

I take this occasion ... to say that I coincide with you in your views of this abominable war in which our country is engaged with Mexico. From my own observations in the country and from knowledge derived from reliable sources I could, if I had time, give you much that might be new to you and go to confirm your opinions as you have publicly expressed them. I confess, humble as I am, I wish not to fall a victim to this war without entering my protest against the war itself as unjust on our part and needlessly and wickedly brought about against the plain intentions of the constitution giving certain powers to Congress. I am here, not from choice, but because, being in the Army, it is my duty to obey the orders of the constituted authorities of the government until the people see fit to change these authorities. Our government, as a government, can only exist by admitting this principle. As an individual, I condemn, I abominate this war – as a member of the government I must go with it until it shall be brought back to a sense of justice, though I think I shall feel this obligation less if I can conduct [myself] well in some fair field. You will readily see that this last sentence refers to my obligations to my profession rather than to my government or country.⁶¹

What is striking in these lines is Hitchcock's commitment to popular sovereignty. Each individual, he stresses, has the right to dissent; but as a soldier he must follow policies enacted by the people themselves (and their elected representatives) regarding whether to continue the war or end it.⁶²

It may be true, as David Clary has put it, that "Polk did not start a fight because he was consumed by visions of conquest ... and wanted to meet his territorial goals without war and actually thought that each additional provocation would force the Mexican side to the bargaining table." But, Clary continues, "he was wrong":

Polk started the war not because he was evil but because he was ignorant and pigheaded. Failure to understand the other side characterized the whole Anglo conduct of the conflict. ... The biggest mistake on the northern side was the failure to understand that people do not like to be invaded.⁶³

Moreover, the way the war was waged seriously violated the key feature of the second category, namely, the prohibition of harming noncombatants. Clary ventures that

the behavior of the United States Army in Mexico matched that of the mercenary armies of the late Middle Ages more than what was expected of a modern army in the 1840s. Anglo historians have tended to downplay the overwhelming record. Atrocities occur because either the troops are undisciplined or disaffected (as in Vietnam, with its draftee army under poor leadership) or the command adopts tactics that cause civilians to fight back (as happened in Iraq, with ransacking of homes and humiliation of fathers). Both problems arose in Mexico, the first mostly with the volunteers, the second with command decisions to target civilians.⁶⁴

Finally, the war hardly concluded in a just and lasting peace. Although the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo formally ended the conflict and granted U.S. citizenship to Mexican residents, its violent reverberations persisted in the West for decades to come:

From Texas to California and beyond, thousands of ethnic Mexicans were lynched by vigilantes and mobs from 1848 to 1928, the date of the last recorded instance of an extralegal execution of a Mexican

American. The mob violence, Ranger atrocities, and Mexican American retaliatory strikes suggested the unsettled character of the region. Borders divided people and drew them together. Blood flowed as powerful men tried to etch and enforce lines of difference and inequality in a borderland that fused the destinies of the humans living along its many seams.⁶⁵

Indeed, even Nicolas Trist, Polk's initially appointed – and subsequently fired but defiant – negotiator with Mexico,⁶⁶ later confided many years later to his wife Virginia what had happened on the day the treaty was signed:

Just as they were about to sign the treaty, one of the Mexicans, Don Bernardo Couto, remarked to him: "This must be a proud moment for you – no less proud for you than it is humiliating for us. To this Mr. Trist replied, "We are making peace, let that be our only thought." But – said he to us in relating it – "Could those Mexicans have seen into my heart at that moment, they would have known that my feeling of shame as an American was far stronger than theirs could be."⁶⁷

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In an article entitled "Movements of 1847," published on January 23, 1848 in the *Deutsche-Brüsseler-Zeitung*, a young Friedrich Engels offered the following assessment of the U.S. invasion of Mexico:

In *America* we have witnessed the conquest of Mexico and have rejoiced at it. It is also an advance when a country which has hitherto been exclusively wrapped up in its own affairs, perpetually rent with civil wars, and completely hindered in its development, a country whose best prospect had been to become industrially subject to Britain – when such a country is forcibly drawn into the historical process. It is to the interest of its own development that Mexico will in future be placed under the tutelage of the United States. The evolution of the whole of America will profit by the fact that the United States, by the possession of California, obtains command of the Pacific. But again we ask: "Who is going to profit immediately by the war?" The bourgeoisie alone. The North Americans acquire new regions in California and New Mexico for the creation of fresh capital, that is, for calling new bourgeois into being, and enriching those already in existence; for all capital created today

flows into the hands of the bourgeoisie. And what about the proposed cut through the Tehuantepec isthmus? Who is likely to gain by that? Who else but the American shipping owners? Rule over the Pacific, who will gain by that but these same shipping owners? The new customers for the products of industry, customers who will come into being in the newly acquired territories – who will supply their needs? None other than the American manufacturers.

Thus also in America the bourgeoisie has made great advances, and if its representatives now oppose the war, that only proves that they fear that these advances have in some ways been bought too dear.⁶⁸

By February of the following year, Engels had not changed his view. In an article on "Democratic Pan-Slavism," he acknowledged that "the United States and Mexico are two republics, in both of which the people is sovereign." But he went on to raise a fundamental political question:

How did it happen that over Texas a war broke out between these two republics, which, according to the *moral theory*, ought to have been "fraternally united" and "federated", and that, owing to "geographical, commercial and strategical necessities", the "sovereign will" of the American people, supported by the bravery of the American volunteers, shifted the boundaries drawn by nature some hundreds of miles further south? And will Bakunin accuse the Americans of a "war of conquest", which, although it deals with a severe blow to his theory based on "justice and humanity", was nevertheless waged wholly and solely in the interest of civilization? Or is it perhaps unfortunate that splendid California has been taken away from the lazy Mexicans, who could not do anything with it? That the energetic Yankees by rapid exploitation of the California gold mines will increase the means of circulation, in a few years will concentrate a dense population and extensive trade at the most suitable places on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, create large cities, open up communications by steamship, construct a railway from New York to San Francisco, for the first time really open the Pacific Ocean to civilization, and for the third time in history give the world trade a new direction? The "independence" of a few Spanish Californians and Texans may suffer because of it, in some places "justice" and other moral principles may be violated; but what does that matter to such facts of world-historic significance?⁶⁹

Of course, these passages hardly represent Engels's finest moments as a political commentator, let alone as a defender of the ethical-political norm of "self-emancipation" of the working class and other oppressed groups. But the lapse is hardly surprising, since, as Richard Seymour has recognized, "both Marx and Engels, at different points, accepted more or less wholesale the prejudices of their day."⁷⁰

Interestingly, in 1948 the Ukrainian Marxist Roman Rosdolsky sharply criticized Engels: "It is evident," Rosdolsky writes,

that here Engels goes too far. In order to refute the "moral theory," which derived the principle of the self-determination of peoples from "eternal human rights," he also denies *this principle as such*, he denies the necessity of borders "which the will of the peoples itself prescribes," and he finds it necessary even to justify annexations in so far as they take place "in the interests of civilization. Moreover, the province of Texas, the object of contention in the war between the United States and Mexico, was of enormous size. But in 1836, when it broke away from Mexico, Texas only had about 38,000 (white) inhabitants, most of whom were immigrants from the United States. It was, therefore, a colonial region in the strictest sense of the word. As for California, which was taken from the "lazy Mexicans" in consequence of the war, there were barely 15,000 Mexicans in this whole immense territory in 1846; these were not the sort of conditions that allowed one to speak either of "the right of self-determination" or of the violation of that right. This example was even less cogent as far as the argument about "civilization" was concerned. The immigrants from the United States who rose against Mexico in 1836 were *planters, owners of Negro slaves*, and their main reason for revolting was that *slavery had been abolished in Mexico in 1829*. (The slavery question also prevented the American Congress from approving the annexation of Texas until 1845.) These features of the Mexican-American conflict show how inappropriate, in fact, perverse, was Engels' illustration."⁷¹

Engels's main argument in both of the passages quoted above is essentially that it is progressive for less economically developed countries to be "forcibly drawn into the historical process." Capitalism even appears to him as a "civilizing" force in the sense that in the long run, despite human suffering, it hastens its own demise as the condition for proletarian revolution is accelerated as pre-capitalist social relations

are drawn in and their contradictions are heightened. As Robert Brenner has argued, though, this “neo-Smithian” conception of “stages” of historical development was later abandoned by Marx and Engels.⁷² Indeed, some years later, Marx acknowledged in his article “The North American Civil War” that the U.S. War on Mexico had been fought, at least in part, to extend slavery.⁷³

However, in the second passage Engels also argues that abstract moral theory about “eternal human rights” or “self-determination” is detrimental to political analysis and that what is required is not normative focus on the violation of principles of justice – presumably including the rules of war – but only on descriptive focus on the “facts of world-historic significance.” There is a certain plausibility to Engels’s position. As Clary cautions,

The conflict between the United States and Mexico has tended, more than most wars, to be wrapped up in questions of guilt or injustice. That is the present imposing its values onto the past. Landscapes all over the world have been conquered by one invader after another; and that is true of North America as of any other patch of dirt. Western civilization in the nineteenth century accepted that. The United States forcibly took lands from Mexico, another chapter in an old story. No North American now proposes to return the cessation to Mexico, nor does any Mexican demand that.⁷⁴

But why the bifurcation of “ought and is” regarding national borders? Why not try to understand war *not only* in terms of its “world-historic significance” *but also* in terms of whether it is morally justifiable? One must be able to understand not just why a particular conflict has occurred or how it will change the world; one must be able to give good normative reasons to support or oppose it. In the absence of these reasons, a war will by default simply be allowed to continue, notwithstanding the calamitous harms to human wellbeing that are incurred. Arguably, the weakening and eventual abolition of national borders would contribute to a more just and peaceful world.⁷⁵

Nor is this simply a case of “the present imposing its values onto the past.” As we have already seen, at least some U.S. soldiers *at the time* condemned the war. More to my point in what follows, though: Transcendentalists like Emerson, Parker, Thoreau, and Fuller *at the time* thundered their disapproval. Why not examine the basis for their opposition, then, and see if it sheds light on present or future conflicts?

It is not as though Transcendentalist objectors were oblivious to, or uninterested in, the Polk Administration’s “world-historic” aims and ambitions in

waging the war (e.g., stimulating a faltering economy by expanding slavery); it is rather that they thought that the war was *wrong* and should be *opposed*. At any rate, my concern is to deepen a Marxist attitude to war that reflects critically on the Transcendentalist critique of the U.S. War against Mexico.

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Transcendentalism can be appreciated as a philosophical-political movement that defended “absolute freedom from traditional authority” – whether religious or political – and sought to grasp “the spiritual unity of all things.”⁷⁶ The movement arose in large part from the infusion of German idealism into the United States, especially in New England.⁷⁷

In “large part,” but not exclusively. As Robert Gross has compellingly argued in a definitive book, *New England Transcendentalism* was launched by a second generation of those in Boston and Concord who sought to keep faith with the American Revolution by extending, deepening, and enlarging its perceived key values of liberty, equality, and self-rule.⁷⁸ “Perceived” values: one need not insist that the American Revolution was a series of unqualified good events. The revolution doubtless unfolded on a foundation of “settler colonialism” that cannot be ignored or wished away.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, one could argue – as many Transcendentalists themselves did – that, in their exclusion, the very values of liberty, equality, and self-rule continued to apply to those persons and peoples who were denied their enjoyment, not least of all through the dispossession of their lands. To this extent, those Transcendentalists who did not completely succumb to what Andrew Wildermuth has provocatively called “transcendental settlerism”⁸⁰ found themselves in agreement with Lieutenant Colonel Hitchcock when the latter wrote in his diary on the eve of war: “I see ... the United States of America, as a people, are undergoing changes in character, and the real status and principles for which our forefathers fought are fast being lost sight of.”⁸¹ How that status and those principles might be restored was a matter of ethical-political urgency. Let us begin with Theodore Parker.

Parker was a radical abolitionist and unitarian minister who had become so popular as a preacher that he resigned his position at a small church in West Roxbury, a suburb of Boston, became the minister of the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society, and began to speak regularly on Sundays at the Boston Music Hall to thousands of attendees. As we shall see, Parker was hardly a pacifist. Indeed, he became a secret supporter of the abolitionist John Brown’s 1859 (failed) attempt to launch a slave insurrection. Consequently, Parker opposed the U.S. War

against Mexico not because all wars were wrong, but because this particular war was “aggressive” and so unjust.

On June 4, 1846 Parker was the featured speaker at the New England Anti-Slavery Convention at Faneuil Hall in Boston. Here is how his speech was recounted in the *Liberator*, edited by William Lloyd Garrison and a leading abolitionist newspaper:

His sarcastic allusions to the temporizing proceedings of the government with regard to Oregon, where it had to contend with the mightiest power of the earth, compared with its grasping stretch upon Texas, where we have only to contend with a weaker nation, touched the raw of some of his audience, and he was greeted with an outpouring of hisses. He continued with upbraiding the North for making money out of slavery, and said the creed of the trinity here was – I believe in the golden eagle; I believe in the silver dollar; I believe in the copper cent. Turning to a prominent hisser in the gallery, he said, -- I have given you your belief in my own language, and you have echoed it back to in yours. The effect was electric. His whole remarks were in the same stringent and sarcastic style. “Will any Democrat ... march to Mexico, to extend the area of slavery?” “Yes,” was replied from the gallery. “Then go,” said the speaker, and the applause which followed, drowned all reply.⁸²

On the following Sunday, June 7, at the Melodeon concert hall, Parker gave “A Sermon of War,”⁸³ which opens with a stark contrast between the ancient Israelite metaphor of God as a warrior and the later Christian precept that “God is love.”⁸⁴ In keeping with his longstanding distinction between what is “permanent” and what is “transitory” in religion,⁸⁵ he contends that

war is inseparable from a low stage of civilization; so is polygamy, slavery, cannibalism. I will not deny that it has helped forward the civilization of the race, for God often makes the folly and the sin of men contribute to the progress of mankind. It is none the less a folly or a sin. In a civilized nation like ourselves, it is far more heinous than in the Ojibeways or the Comanches.⁸⁶

As a result, he insists that

war is in utter violation of Christianity. If war be right, then Christianity is wrong, false, a lie. But if Christianity be true, if reason, conscience, the religious sense, the highest faculties of man, are to be trusted, then war is wrong, the falsehood, the lie. I maintain that aggressive war is a sin; that it is national infidelity, a denial of Christianity and of God..⁸⁷

Parker considered the U.S. War on Mexico precisely to be an “aggressive war,” and so he turns next in his sermon to the “evils” of that specific war, dispute the deafening silence of others:

No voice of indignation goes forth from the eight hundred thousand souls of Massachusetts; of the seventeen million freeman of the land how few complain; only a man here and there! The Press is well-nigh silent. And the Church, so far from protesting against this infidelity in the name of Christ, is little better than dead..⁸⁸

There are three main reasons he offers for his opposition to war:

- It is “a waste of property”⁸⁹ and a “most expensive folly”;⁹⁰
- It is “a waste of life,”⁹¹ in which “the burden of battle falls mainly on the humble class”;⁹²
- It is a sin that serves as “a corruption of the public morals”⁹³ during which time “laws are suspended” and “violence and cunning rule everywhere.”⁹⁴

Parker indicts the false glory associated with war and the delusion that purports to be heroism:

Military glory is the poorest kind of distinction, but the most dangerous passion. It is an honor to man to be able to mould iron; to be skillful art working in cloth, wood, clay, leather. It is man’s vocation to subdue the rebellious fibre of cotton and convert it into beautiful robes, full of comfort for the body. They are the heroes of the race who abridge the time of human toil and multiply its results; they who win great truths from God, and send them to a people’s heart; they who balance the many and the one into harmonious action, so that all are united and yet each left free. But the glory which comes of epaulets and feathers; that strutting glory which is dyed in blood – what shall we say of it? In this day it is not heroism; it is an imitation of barbarism long ago passed by.

Yet it is marvelous how many men are taken with a red coat! You expect it in Europe, a land of soldiers and blood. You are disappointed to find that here the champions of force should be held in honor, and that even the lowest should voluntarily enroll themselves as butchers of men!⁹⁵

However, he does not “censure all the men who serve,” since many of them fell prey to unthinking acceptance of their supposed “duty to obey the Government without thinking if that Government be right or wrong.” As a result, neither does he deny “the noble, manly character of many a soldier, his heroism, self-denial and personal sacrifice.”⁹⁶

Unfortunately, toward the end of his sermon, Parker invokes what has not surprisingly appeared to many contemporary readers as a crude caricature of Mexico and the Mexican people. It is not the case, as Howard Zinn has charged, that Parker was simply a “racist.”⁹⁷ However, he certainly uses loaded language:

We are waging a most iniquitous war – so it seems to me. I know I may be wrong, but I am no partisan, and if I err, it is not willfully, not rashly. I know the Mexican people are a wretched people; wretched in their origin, history, and character. I know but two good things of them as a people – they abolished negro slavery not long ago; they do not covet the lands of their neighbors. True, they have not paid all their debts, but it is scarcely decent in a nation, with any repudiating States, to throw the first stone at Mexico for that!⁹⁸

It is worth stressing that in Parker’s estimation, Mexico, despite its supposed “wretchedness,” had accomplished what the supposedly more advanced United States had not: the abolition of slavery and respect for borders! Arguably, in these lines Parker is playing a game of reversal of his audience’s own racist expectations. Which nation, after all, he wonders, is truly a free republic and which, in fact, is an unfree republic?⁹⁹

Equally alarming, though, is Parker’s deployment of “Anglo-Saxonist” rhetoric.¹⁰⁰

I know the Mexicans cannot stand before this terrible Anglo-Saxon race, the most formidable and powerful the world ever saw; a race which has never turned back; which, though it number less than forty millions, yet holds the Indies, almost the whole of North America; which rules the commerce of the world; clutches at New Holland, China, New Zealand,

Borneo, and seizes island after island in the furthest seas; the race which invented steam as its awful type. The poor, wretched Mexicans can never stand before us. How they perished in battle! They must melt away as the Indians before the white man. Considering how we acquired Louisiana, Florida, Oregon, I cannot forbear thinking that this people will possess the whole of the continent before many years; perhaps before the century ends..¹⁰¹

Even so, Parker's makes contradictory use of Anglo-Saxonism, for he does not justify the violent dispossession of land but only the persuasive force of putting one's own ethical-political house in order: by making real the "Idea of America" at home first. It is possible, he continues, for the United States to engage in a more just form of expansion:

Is it not better to acquire it by the school-master than the cannon; by peddling cloth, tin, and anything rather than bullets? ... It would be a gain to mankind if we could spread over that country [Mexico] the Idea of America – that all men are born free and equal in rights, and establish there political, social, and individual freedom. But to do that, we must first make real these ideas at home..¹⁰²

This is paternalism on Parker's part, to be sure – and just as dangerous in its own way as a form of "soft" power as opposed to the "hard" power of invasion and occupation – but it compares favorably with Engels's own unsettlingly triumphalist account of the War against Mexico as only the latest stage in the "world-historic" advance of capitalism.

Finally, Parker calls upon his audience to take up the practical task of anti-war organizing:

But why talk for ever? What shall we do In regard to this present war, we can refuse to take any part in it; we can encourage others to do the same; we can aid men, if need be, who suffer because they refuse..¹⁰³

Parker urges public meetings, mass education, and tax refusal. "Now," he implores his audience,

is the time to push and be active. War itself gives weight to words of peace. There will never be a better time till we make the times better. It

is not a day for cowardice, but for heroism. ... Let us bear our testimony like men, not fearing to be called traitors, infidels; fearing only to be such..¹⁰⁴

The stakes could not be higher for the future of the United States as a nation. Although war will eventually end, Parker insists that the present moment requires a courageous response arising from each individual's "voice of conscience":¹⁰⁵

war, horrid as it is, is not the worst calamity which ever befalls a people. It is far worse for a people to lose all reverence for right, for truth, all respect for man and God; to care more for the freedom of trade than the freedom of men; more for a tariff than millions of souls, This calamity came upon us gradually, long before the present war, and will last long after that has died away. Like people like ruler, is a true word. Look at your own rulers, representatives, and see our own likeness! ... [T]he voice of conscience speaks to you and me, and all of us: the right shall prosper; the wicked States shall die, and History responds her long amen..¹⁰⁶

As we shall see, this was not the last time that Parker would condemn the war. Indeed, as his early editor Samuel A. Eliot noted, "the ignominy and shame of the war with Mexico appeared in practically all of Parker's discourses of this period."¹⁰⁷ For example, as soon as August 30, 1846, Parker preached another fiery sermon at the Melodeon, this time on the topic of "The Perishing Classes," in which he linked war with economic exploitation:

The nation sets the poor an example of fraud, by making them pay highest on all local taxes; of theft, by levying the national revenue on persons, not property. Our navy and army set them the lesson of violence; and, to complete their schooling, at this very moment we are robbing another people of cities and lands, stealing, burning, and murdering, for lust of power and gold. Everybody knows that the political action of a nation is the mightiest educational influence in that nation. But such is the doctrine the State preaches to them, a constant lesson of fraud, theft, violence, and crime..¹⁰⁸

At any rate, Parker's eloquent "Sermon of War" was published as a pamphlet during the summer of 1846 and quickly reviewed in the Brook Farm utopian socialist

community's publication, *The Harbinger*, by Charles A. Dana, who had been a member of Brook Farm (1841-46) and later served as the managing editor of the *New York Daily Tribune* (1849-62).¹⁰⁹ In his review Dana issued "a call to action," while he maintained that Parker's "empty rhetoric ... would not extirpate social evils" that required "concrete remedies" not reducible to "moral regeneration."¹¹⁰

Dana begins his review by agreeing with Parker's focus on the "pecuniary" aspect of war, "reckoning that most intelligible to a city whose most popular idol is Mammon, whose God is Gold, whose Trinity is the Trinity of Coin."¹¹¹ He also endorses Parker's "forcible" condemnation of "the moral evils of war."¹¹² Finally, though, Dana poses a series of questions in response to Parker's professed desire to spread to Mexico what he calls the "Ideas of America" – e.g., political, social, and individual freedom – by making these ideas real "at home."

How are the ideals of social, political, and individual freedom to become real here and elsewhere? Has any considerable approach to that been made even in the most enlightened and Christian community? And yet these are questions of most pressing and inevitable importance.¹¹³

Dana commends Parker's

noble words [that] ... stir the hearts of those whose hear them and of those who speak; they ought to made true, but How! Can Mr. Parker or any man who knows that social and individual freedom are things to which God has entitled every human being, answer that question?¹¹⁴

War, Dana readily agrees, is an

infernal evil as Mr. Parker has shown, but will those who condemn war overlook the war which never ceases to go on in their own streets, to which they themselves may be parties, and of which their own neighbors are the victims! Shall we cry out with indignation at a war with Mexico but hold our peace over the warfare of Competitive Labor? Alas! Hardly any eloquent clergyman has wakened the hearts of men to that; hardly any either has seen the fact that the war with Mexico is only one branch of an all-embracing system of wrong, and that the principles that condemn one evil condemn the whole, and, much more than all, the system from which they spring.¹¹⁵

The upshot is, as Jesse Stellato has noted, that Parker's sermon represents "his understanding of the war as a symptom of a cultural disease much larger than the war itself."¹¹⁶ But such a diagnosis doesn't not go far enough – an alternative is needed. This is precisely why Dana concludes his review by proposing his own (Fourierist) socialist vision:

What is the first, the indispensable condition of social and individual freedom? We answer "Attractive Industry;" without this there is no freedom. Have our friends ever thought of that? If they have not we commend it to their reflection. It is an idea not easy to be exhausted.¹¹⁷

It is not known whether or not Parker ever read Dana's review. What is clear, though, is that Parker continued publicly to express his voice of conscience as the war dragged on longer than anyone had expected – and opposition to it gradually mounted.

On February 4, 1847, Parker spoke at another anti-war meeting that took place at Faneuil Hall in Boston,¹¹⁸ at which a number of "soldiers with bayonets" were present and tried to interrupt him. Nonetheless, as Parker's first biographer noted, "he had all the courage and good-humour which pilots an obnoxious speaker safely through the most threatening demonstrations of a mob."¹¹⁹ At various points the threat against Parker by some in the audience is palpable. For instance, as the transcription vividly indicates:

This is a war for slavery, a mean and infamous war; an aristocratic war, a war against the best interests of mankind, If God please, we will die a thousand times, but never draw blade in this wicked war. (Cries of "Throw him over," etc.) Throw him over, what good would that do? What would you do next, after you have thrown him over? ("Drag you out of the Hall!") What good would that do? It would not wipe off he infamy of this war! would not make it less wicked!¹²⁰

Not long after, there was another exchange:

... I blame not so much the volunteers as the famous men who deceive the nation! (Cries of "Throw him over, kill him, kill him," and a flourish of bayonets.) Throw him over! You will not throw him over. Kill him! I shall walk home unarmed and unattended, and not a man of you will hurt one hair of my head.¹²¹

Parker's main concern in his speech is to rouse the people of Massachusetts to

instruct their servants in Congress to oppose this war; to refuse all supplies for it; to ask for the recall of the army into our own land. It is time for us to tell them that not one inch of slave territory shall ever be added to the realm. Let us remonstrate; let us petition; let us command. If any class of men have hitherto been remiss, let them come forward now and give us their names – the merchants, the manufacturer, the whigs and the democrats. If men love their country better than their party or their purse, now let them show it.¹²²

In the face of Polk's accusations of treason against those opposing the war,¹²³ he counters,

Your President tells us it is treason to talk so! Treason is it? Treason to discuss a war which the government made, and which the people are to pay for? ... If my country is in the wrong, and I know it, and hold my peace, then I am guilty of treason, moral treason. Why, a wrong, – it is only the threshold of ruin. I would not have my country take the next step. Treason is it, to show that this war is wrong and wicked!¹²⁴

As it turned out, though, Parker's impassioned call to action largely went unheeded. For a variety of reasons, the anti-war movement he envisioned never materialized.¹²⁵

Later in 1847, in the inaugural issue of *The Massachusetts Quarterly Review*, Parker anonymously published a lengthy article, which demolished the Polk Administration's justifications for the Mexican War.¹²⁶ He begins with an account of the evolution of warfare, which may once have served as a spur to human progress; however, "every war in this age retards the progress of mankind."¹²⁷

In particular he opposes aggressive wars fought not in the name of self-defense but of conquest. It is, he writes,

a great wrong for a powerful and civilized people to attack a nation that is barbarous and feeble. The indignation of honest statesmen is justly aroused against France for her conduct towards Algiers. Doubtless she had her provocations, but between the Weak and the Strong everybody

knows where the provocation commonly begins. The old fable of the wolf and the lamb is not likely to be forgotten. The conduct of England towards the various nations in India, towards China, towards Ireland – fills the world with indignation. The history of her achievements in Asia is the history of her shame.¹²⁸

This is precisely why Parker opposes “the present war against Mexico” as a case of a “strong nation ... at war with the weak.”¹²⁹ The bulk of the article meticulously builds a case against President Polk’s claim that “the Mexicans began the war, and we acted only on the defensive.”¹³⁰ After careful investigation of the public record, Parker concludes the following:

The President may declare that “war exists by an act of Mexico,” the Congress may vote it to be true; that changes nothing. They cannot create a fact by a vote. It was the American government that made the war; unconstitutionally made a war which is unjust, mean, cowardly, and wicked even amongst wars.¹³¹

The “real cause,” of the war, Parker emphasizes, is

a power behind the constitution, but greater than the constitution itself, rising above and projecting beyond it; yes, greater than Congress – overshadowing the “unalienable rights” of man; we mean the institution of domestic slavery.

Indeed, Parker continues, “slavery is the idol of America. Men of ablest intellect – who differ on most other matters of national concern – agree in defence of this.”¹³² But there is an even worse problem. The idol of slavery is “popular” and “to refuse its worship is found dangerous; to oppose it is ‘fanaticism;’ but to be on its side, to feed it with money and blood, is ‘honorable,’ ‘patriotic,’ ‘popular.’”¹³³

Parker concludes his article with the following premonition:

The South has its wish, the North its reward. The Nation laments the violation of her constitution, the debasement of her great men, – it was violated by slavery, and to that her sons have bowed the neck; she beholds the betrayal of her honor, – it was betrayed. By slavery; she mourns for thousands of her children slain, – they were murdered by

slavery – which clamors still for more. Behold the beginning of the end – which is not the end itself.¹³⁴

Tragically, Parker died in 1860, and so would not himself live to see the end he envisioned. Two decades later, slavery would continue unabated, even reinvigorated, by the unjust outcome of an unjust war.

Near the conclusion of the war, on June 25, 1848, Parker gave yet another sermon at the Melodeon in Boston.¹³⁵ He begins the sermon by calling attention to the “two remarkable things about this war”: how it began and how it ended.¹³⁶ The focus of the sermon is the threefold cost of the war:

- Its financial cost;
- Its cost in human lives;
- Its moral cost.

Parker considers not just the effect of the war regarding “the American loss.” He equally mourns “the loss of the Mexicans,” which is harder to determine.¹³⁷ Then in lines that drip with sarcasm, he proposes that this “has not been a very cruel war,” for “it has been conducted with as much gentleness as a war of invasion can be.”¹³⁸ “There is,” Parker admits,

no agreeable way of butchering men. You cannot make it a pastime. The Americans have always been a brave people; they were never cruel. They always treated their prisoners kindly – in the Revolutionary war, in the late war [of 1812] with England. True, they have seized the Mexican ports, taken military possession of the customs-houses, and collected such duties as they saw fit; true, they sometimes made the army of invasion self-subsisting, and to that end have levied contributions on the towns they have taken; true, they have seized provisions which were private property, snatching them out of the hands of men who needed them; true, they have robbed the rich and the poor; true, they have burned and bombarded towns, have murdered men and women. All this must of course take place in any war. ... You cannot take the most idle, ignorant, drunken, and vicious men out of the low population in our cities and large towns, get them drunk enough to enlist, train them to violence, theft, robbery, murder, and then stop the man from exercising his rage or lust on his own private account.¹³⁹

Parker later adds that “the numerous desertions and the readiness with which the soldiers joined the ‘foe’ show plainly the moral character of the men, and the degree of ‘patriotism’ and ‘humanity’ that animated them in going to war.”¹⁴⁰

Parker considers “the effect of this war on the morals of the nation.”¹⁴¹ In his view, the war

was unjust at its beginning; mean in its motives, a war without honorable cause; a war for plunder; a quarrel between a great boy and a little puny weakling who could not walk alone, and could hardly stand. We have treated Mexico as the three Northern powers treated Poland in the last century – stooped to conquer. Nay, our contest has been like the English seizure of Ireland. All the justice was on one side, the force, skill, and wealth on the other.¹⁴²

Perhaps with Lieutenant Colonel Hitchcock in mind, Parker returns to a distinction between honorable regular soldiers and opportunistic volunteers:

I know that there are men in the army, honorable and high-minded, Christian men, who dislike war in general, and this war in special, but such is their view of official duty, that they obeyed the summons of battle, though with pain and reluctance. They knew not how to avoid obedience. I am willing to believe there are many such. But with volunteers who, of their own accord, came forth to enlist, men not blinded by ignorance, not driven by poverty to the field, but only by hope of reward – what shall be said of them? Much may be said to excuse the rank and file, ignorant men, many of them in want – but to the leaders, what can be said? Had I a brother who in the day of the nation's extremity, came forward with a good conscience, and periled his life on the battle field, and lost it “in the sacred cause of God and his country,” I would honor the man, and when the dust came home, I would lay it away with his fathers'; with sorrow indeed, but with thankfulness of heart, that for conscience' sake he was ready even to die. But had I a brother who, merely for his pay, or hope of fame, had voluntarily gone down to fight innocent men, to plunder their territory, and lost his life in that felonious essay – in sorrow and in silence, and in secrecy would I lay down his body in the grave; I would not court display, nor mark it with a single stone.¹⁴³

Finally, Parker publicly apologizes to the Mexican people for the damage done to their republic:

Pardon me, thou prostrate Mexico, robbed of more than half thy soil, that America may have more slaves; thy cities burned, thy children slain, the streets of thy capital trodden by the alien foot, but still smoking with thy children's blood; pardon me if I seem to have forgotten thee!¹⁴⁴

"It was not the people," he insists, "who made this war." On the contrary, "it was they who led the people; it was demagogues that did it."¹⁴⁵ Notwithstanding the war's injustice, though, Parker concludes in his sermon that it still has "two things" to teach us: "Everlasting hostility to slavery; everlasting love of Justice and of its Eternal Right."¹⁴⁶

A decade later, Parker had not forgotten the war when he gave a sermon in which he issued an invitation to a "Revival of Religion Which We Need."¹⁴⁷ In this sermon he identifies "five great evils of mankind to-day," namely, "war, wicked government, slavery, selfish antagonism in society, the degradation of woman."¹⁴⁸ Resolutely committed to moral progress, Parker adds that

history, it is not a retreat backwards, it is progress forth, upwards, on. These things are not a finality; they are to man's attainable condition what stumbling is to walking stammering to speech, the boy's clumsy, mistaken scrawl to the clear current writing of the man.¹⁴⁹

Religion in general, and Christianity in specific, Parker concludes, should focus not on creeds but on deeds:

Then daily work shall be a gospel, life our continual transfiguration to a nobler growth. We shall bless our town, our nation, our age, our race. When we die, we shall leave the world better because we have lived, with more Welfare now, fitter for Progress hereafter. We shall bear away with us the triumphant result of every trial, every duty, every effort, every tear, every prayer, every suffering, nay, of each longing after excellence.¹⁵⁰

One could scarcely imagine a better assessment of Parker's own life, which ended only two years later in Italy, after a futile search for a cure for his worsening tuberculosis. Moreover, it is no accident that, when Frederick Douglass toured

Europe in 1887, he arranged to arrive by train in Florence on the anniversary of Parker's death (May 10). After departing the overnight train from Rome, he wrote, "our first move outward after coffee was to visit the Grave of Theodore Parker." Douglass further admitted in a letter he wrote to Theodore Stanton,¹⁵¹ who had cautioned him about Parker's modest grave, "I am not an advocate of costly monuments over the decaying bodies of the dead, but ... the stone at such a man's grave should be a sermon."¹⁵²

* * * *

Let us now consider Margaret Fuller's opposition to the U.S. War against Mexico. Fuller was a key Transcendentalist thinker and organizer, who famously led consciousness-raising "conversations" in Boston from 1839 to 1844 in which participants discussed a wide range of philosophical, religious, cultural, and political issues. Fuller's 1845 *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* was a widely read book that helped to inspire the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, which brought together key reformers like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and Frederick Douglass, and resulted in the publication of a historic *Declaration of Sentiments* that galvanized the struggle for women's rights.

Fuller was the editor of the *Dial*, the leading Transcendentalist journal she founded with Emerson. She was hired by Horace Greeley first as a journalist for the *New-York Daily Tribune* covering local and national news and then as its first foreign correspondent, a role in which she spent time reporting on – and helping to make – political revolution in Italy from 1848-1850. She tragically drowned in a shipwreck off the coast of Fire Island, near New York City, in 1850 along with her Italian husband (and fellow revolutionary) Giovanni Angelo, Marchese d'Ossoli and her young son Giovanni.

As Margaret Vanderhaar Allen has maintained regarding Fuller, in the mid-1840s three facts of national life seemed to her clear evidence of the nation's betrayal of its fundamental principles: the spread of slavery, the crass and shameless pursuit of material wealth, and imperialistic expansion.

In this light, it is not surprising, then, as Allen elaborates, that Fuller maintained moral consistency, as she

condemned the imperialism of the United States in Mexico, and her global awareness led her to condemn it wherever it was practiced, whether by Napoleon in Europe, Cromwell in Ireland, or England in India.¹⁵³

Unlike Parker, Fuller gave expression to her own voice of conscience not as a preacher or public speaker but as a journalist. As she wrote from Italy in a letter that was published in the *New York Daily Tribune* on January 1, 1848, as the U.S. War against Mexico was winding down,

Must I not confess in my country to a boundless lust of gain? Must I not confess to the weakest vanity, which bristles and blusters at each foolish taunt of the foreign press; and must I not admit that the men who make these undignified rejoinders seek and find popularity so? Must I not confess that there is as yet no antidote cordially adopted that will defend even that great, rich country against the evils that have grown out of the commercial system in the old world? Can I say our social laws are generally better, or show a nobler insight into the wants of man and woman? I do, indeed, say what I believe, that voluntary association for improvement in these particulars will be the grand means for my nation to grow and give a nobler harmony to the coming age. But it is only of a small minority that I can say they as yet seriously take to heart these things; that they earnestly meditate on what is wanted for their country, – for mankind, – for our cause is, indeed, the cause of all mankind at present. Could we succeed, really succeed, combine a deep religious love with practical development, the achievements of Genius with the happiness of the multitude, we might believe Man had now reached a commanding point in his ascent, and would stumble and faint no more. Then there is this horrible cancer of Slavery, and this wicked War, that has grown out of it.? How dare I speak of these things here? I listen to the same arguments against the emancipation of Italy, that are used against the emancipation of our blacks; the same arguments in favor of the spoliation of Poland as for the conquest of Mexico. I find the cause of tyranny and wrong everywhere the same – and lo! my Country the darkest offender, because with the least excuse, foresworn to the high calling with which she was called, – no champion of the rights of men, but a robber and a jailer; the scourge hid behind her banner; her eyes fixed, not on the stars, but on the possessions of other men..¹⁵⁴

With a characteristic shift in emotive register, however, Fuller would soon enough reassert the prospect of hope. In a dispatch from Rome, dated April 19, 1848, she insisted that the future remained open and unwritten:

All lies in the Future; and our best hope must be that the Power which has begun so great a work will find due means to end it, and make the year 1850 a year of true jubilee to Italy; a year not merely of pomps and tributes, but of recognized rights and intelligent joys; a year of real peace: peace, founded not on compromise and the lying etiquettes of diplomacy, but on Truth and Justice. ... Hoping this era, I remain at present here. – Should my hopes be dashed to the ground, it will not change my faith, but the struggle for its manifestation is to me of vital interest. My friends write to urge my return; they talk of our country as the land of the Future. It is so, but that spirit which made it all it is of value in my eyes, which gave all of hope with which I can sympathize for that Future, is more alive here at present than in America. My country is at present spoiled by prosperity, stupid with the lust of gain, soiled by crime in its willing perpetuation of Slavery, shamed by an unjust war, noble sentiment much forgotten even by individuals, the aims of politicians selfish or petty, the literature frivolous and venal. In Europe, amid the teachings of adversity a nobler spirit is struggling – a spirit which cheers and animates mine. I hear earnest words of pure faith and love. I see deeds of brotherhood. This is what makes my America. I do not deeply distrust my country. She is not dead, but in my time she sleepeth, and the spirit of our fathers flames no more, but lies hid beneath the ashes. It will not be so long; bodies cannot live when the soul gets too overgrown with gluttony and falsehood. But it is not the making a President out of the Mexican War that would make me wish to come back. Here things are before my eyes worth recording, and, if I cannot help this work, I would gladly be its historian..¹⁵⁵

By any reasonable assessment, as we have seen, the U.S. War against Mexico *was not just*. it failed to satisfy moral criteria concerning *jus ad bellum*, *jus in bello*, and *jus ex bello*. But *even if it had been just*, this war was no cause for celebration. As Cian O'Driscoll has argued, just wars, “even if they satisfy every principle and tick-box criterion that theorists can conjure,” remain

a source of human suffering and, as such, a wretched thing. Contra the facile acceptance of war as a force for good in the world, this approach supposes that just wars should never be viewed as something to be celebrated, or even as an adequate means of righting a wrong. Rather,

they should be viewed as miserable affairs that both issue from and compound the prior failure of politics and hope, such that even when they are right, they are wrong. Lowering our expectations of just war in this way will encourage and assist us to approach just war thinking, not as a framework that will enable us to bend war to justice, but as a way of reconciling ourselves to the futile necessity of this task.¹⁵⁶

Interestingly, Fuller expressed a similar perspective in a brief notice entitled "Victory," which was published in the *New-York Daily Tribune* on May 21, 1846,¹⁵⁷ shortly after the U.S. army of occupation led by General Zachary Taylor had won its first major battles against the Mexican "Army of the North," led by General Mariano Arista: Palo Alto (May 8) and Resaca de la Palma (May 9).¹⁵⁸ These victories forced Mexican soldiers out of the disputed area between Texas and Mexico. But in the face of such "victories" (celebrated around the United States and especially in New York City¹⁵⁹), Fuller excoriated the United States for its act of aggression: "It was a famous victory," sighs the songster.¹⁶⁰ after abashing and affrighting the unsophisticated mind of his hearer with details of the horrors of a battle.

We, too, are called to rejoice over bloodshed and burning, and these in vindication of a most unrighteous act. Vain have been the hopes that the victories of this nation would be over wrong and ignorance, not mere conquest of the bodies of other men to obtain their possessions or guard our own. Our Stars have lighted us only to the ancient heathen – the vulgar path of national aggrandizement; and our Eagle, like the Roman, loves better to snatch its prey from the field than to soar to the purer regions near the source of light.¹⁶¹

The ode performed last night – Schiller's Ode to Joy – where occur the grand lines (misprinted in yesterday's Tribune,)

"Be embraced Millions,

This kiss to the whole world,"¹⁶²

and his other poem where he says –

"Honor in the king the service of a king.

Honor in the subject the service of a subject,"

seemed prophecies of what might so easily be effected in this country, which all omens marked out as the dominion where the hopes of the Prince of Peace might be realized.¹⁶³ But aversion to his precepts and disbelief in his mission died not with the contemporaries of Pilate. A Church is to be dedicated to-day.¹⁶⁴ But the flames of burning towns rise

higher than those of the altar, and tell to the departed Friend of Man, that at the end of eighteen centuries, his simple precepts “Love one another,” and “Feed my lambs,” are as far as ever from being obeyed. If the lion lies down with the lamb for an hour of slumber, it is only to get an appetite for breakfast, and the wolves of war rage abroad without the slightest excuse from hunger..¹⁶⁵

Fuller condemns in this article the imperial ambitions of the Polk administration as a recapitulation of the worst practices of the Roman Empire (“our Eagle, like the Roman” ...). Moreover, her concluding biblical allusions – “Love one another” (John 13:34-35), “Feed my lambs” (John 21:15), and “the lion lies down with the lamb” (a popular misstatement of Isaiah 11:6-9) – suggest that she was appalled by the “Christian nationalist” groundswell of support for the war..¹⁶⁶

Two months later, Fuller published her review of a new book by Thomas L. McKenney, *Memoirs, Official and Personal*, which she indicated that she had read on July 4 – but certainly not in a celebratory mood..¹⁶⁷ She writes that

... [T]he sweet heavens, conscious of the list of wrongs by which this nation, in its now three score years and ten of independent existence, has abused the boon, veiled themselves in crape and wept. The nation may wrap itself in callousness and stop its ears to every cry except that of profit or loss; it may build its temples of wood and stone, and hope, by formal service of the lips, to make up for that paid to Mammon in the spirit, but God is not mocked; it is all recorded, all known..¹⁶⁸

Fuller then scathingly imagines a Louisiana variation on *La Marseillaise*, the French national anthem, which would proclaim:

*Levez-vous! Fils de l'Amerique,
La patrie invoque vos bras,
Verrez vous le faible Mexique,
Ravager, piller vos Etats!*

[In her translation:
Rise, sons of America,
Your country demands your aid,
Will you see *feeble Mexico*

Ravage, pillage your States!]

As she comments on these bellicose verses,

even in this city [New York] they were not ashamed to pen and sing verses calling on the citizen to fight in defense of "liberty," as if it were not the Mexicans alone, the *feeble* Mexicans, that were fighting in defense of their rights, and we for liberty of our pleasure..¹⁶⁹

What is especially notable about Fuller's review of McKenney's book is that she links injustices like poverty, child labor, and slavery to the forcible removal of indigenous peoples, most recently, the Cherokee and Seminole peoples..¹⁷⁰ These "plague-spots," as she calls them, demand a response in the form of a "burning pain of shame and indignation."¹⁷¹ Yet as much as the book could serve to rouse one's moral consciousness, Fuller ends on a sorrowful note:

We scarcely dare hope that any thing righteous will be done in consequence, for our hopes as to National honor and goodness are almost wearied out, and we feel obliged to turn to the Individual and to the Future for consolation. Yet, oh Father! Might we pray that thou wouldst grant a ray of pure light in this direction, and grant us to help let it in! It were a blessed compensation for many sorrows, many disappointments. At all events, none who have leisure and heart to feel on these subjects may stand excused from bearing open testimony to the truth, whether it avail or no..¹⁷²

Downcast, then, Fuller departed the next month for Europe in order to serve as the *New York Daily Tribune's* foreign correspondent. Although she never returned to the United States, she would soon enough participate in great revolutionary upheavals from 1848-1850, which would rekindle her desire for social transformation.

* * * *

Albert J. von Frank has recently suggested that

it is not clear that Transcendentalism will ever figure consequently in the history of American socialism. Even setting aside the question of whether the social activist impulse is un-Transcendental by definition,

the movement's success in that field is spotty at best, with the sole exception of the impetus provided by Margaret Fuller to the woman's movement, a singular achievement of the imagination that led immediately out and away from the Transcendental orbit.¹⁷³

But von Frank has prematurely decided the question. Marxism, at least, is a critical and open-ended attempt to grasp the nature of capitalism, its origins, and a desirable and feasible alternative: today, call it *ecosocialism*.¹⁷⁴ As a philosophical-political movement of human freedom, Transcendentalism equally expresses an unfinished project that intersects with Marxism regarding the "class politics of nature," insofar as individual conscience supports and sustains class consciousness.¹⁷⁵ What is at stake is not only to reaffirm the long arc of the woman's movement but also to embrace, for example, racial equality, indigenous rights, religious pluralism, ecological sustainability, and, as I have tried to show above, human dignity that exceeds national borders. It is, in Emerson's words, "to reattach the deeds of every day to the holy and mysterious recesses of life."¹⁷⁶

Yet those "recesses of life" bear the dialectic by means of which the historical expropriators of land and lives are themselves expropriated. In a dispatch from England that was published in the *New-York Daily Tribune* on March 22, 1853, Marx investigated "the emigration from England, Scotland, and Ireland to all parts of the world, from Jan. 1, 1847 to June 30, 1852."¹⁷⁷ He argues that this process was far from voluntary; instead, it resulted from "pauperizing the inhabitants of a country" until the point that "there is no more profit to be ground out of them, when they have grown a burden to the revenue, drive them away, and sum up your Net Revenue!"¹⁷⁸

Marx then draws analogies with earlier forms of forced emigration. He first notes that

in the ancient states, in Greece and Rome, compulsory emigration, assuming the shape of the periodical establishment of colonies, formed a regular link in the structure of society. The whole system of those States was founded on certain limits to the numbers of the population, which could not be surpassed without endangering the condition of antique civilization itself. But why was it so? Because the application of science to material production was utterly unknown to them. To remain civilized they were forced to remain few. Otherwise they would have had to submit to the bodily drudgery which transformed the free citizen into a slave. The want of productive power made citizenship dependent

on a certain proportion in numbers not to be disturbed. Forced emigration was the only remedy.¹⁷⁹

Next, he proposes that

it was the same pressure of population on the powers of production. that drove the barbarians from the high plains of Asia to invade the Old World. The same cause acted there, although under a different form. To remain barbarians they were forced to remain few. They were pastoral, hunting, war-waging tribes, whose manners of production required a large space for every individual, as is now the case with the Indian tribes in North-America. By augmenting in numbers they curtailed each other's field of production. Thus the surplus population was forced to undertake those great adventurous migratory movements which laid the foundation of the peoples of ancient and modern Europe.¹⁸⁰

Yet, as Marx, insists, all such historical comparisons are misleading:

With modern compulsory emigration the case stands quite opposite. Here it is not the want of productive. power which creates a surplus population; it is the increase of productive power which demands a diminution of population, and drives away the surplus by famine or emigration. It is not population that presses on productive power; it is productive power that presses on population."¹⁸¹

Marx concludes his article by diagnosing that

society is undergoing a silent revolution, which must be submitted to, and which takes no more notice of the human existences it breaks down than an earthquake regards the houses it subverts. The classes and the races, too weak to master the new conditions of life, must give way.¹⁸²

It is jarring to realize that Emerson had not only read Marx's article, he excerpted into his journal the memorable last line cited above: "The classes and the races, too weak to master the new conditions of life, must give way."¹⁸³ A word of caution is in order, though. Marx's (and Emerson's) point assuredly is not to endorse or excuse forced emigration, whether in the past or present; it is instead to

understand the process as an internal regulatory feature of capitalism that helps to stabilize its relentless pursuit of profit maximization.

This is not the end of the story, however. Marx invokes the specter of a dramatic *reversal* of this historical process:

As the modern changes in the art of production have, according to the Bourgeois Economists themselves, broken down the antiquated system of society and its modes of appropriation. They have *expropriated* the Scotch clansman, the Irish cottier and tenant, the English yeoman, the hand-loom weaver, numberless handicrafts, whole generations of factory children and women; they will expropriate, in due time, the landlord and the cotton lord.¹⁸⁴

Consider at last the implications of such a reversal for the contemporary United States, Mexico, and the indigenous peoples of the Southwest whose land was seized and whose lives were damaged by war during 1846-1848 – and beyond.

*When will their time come due?*¹⁸⁵

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Notes

¹ Anzaldúa 1999, p. 69.

² From the Library of Congress;

<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/90708859/#:~:text=The%20print%20may%20have%20appeared,Taylor%20captured%20the%20Whig%20nomination>. The cartoon first appeared in 1848.

³ I use the term "U.S. War against Mexico" instead of the conventional but misleadingly impartial "Mexican War," "Mexican-American War," or "U.S.-Mexican War." My usage also matches the common Spanish designation: *Guerra de Estados Unidos a México*.

⁴ Walzer 2015.

⁵ Grant 2017, p. 33. On Grant's experience as an officer during the war, see White 2016, pp. 63-96. For an analysis of the war from the standpoint of evolving "just war" criteria in the antebellum United States, see Witt 2013, pp. 109-32.

⁶ See Johannsen 1985. On the enduring American ideology of Manifest Destiny, see especially Stephanson 1995.

⁷ See Jackson 2019, in which the war is discussed on pp. 162-64. By contrast, see the thorough treatment in Schroeder 1973, whose conjuncture was that of U.S. interventions in Vietnam and throughout Southeast Asia – and the struggle against them. See also Nichols 2004 and Seymour 2012 on the history of anti-imperialist struggles in the United States.

⁸ On the intimate relationship between nineteenth-century Transcendentalism and Abolitionism, see especially Wirzbicki 2021.

⁹ A conceivable objection to this focus on Parker's sermons and Fuller's journalism would be that these are not significant *philosophical* modes of expression. Two responses are in order: Firstly, if that is the case, then so much the worse for the dominant mode of expression used by contemporary academic philosophers: an article organized like a scientific paper. Secondly, though, it is precisely through modes like sermons and journalism that philosophy intervenes and animates personal and political issues. Parker's sermons, for example, were often published and widely read and discussed by the larger public. Fuller's varied reportage was equally influential. It is striking that Transcendentalist writers equally made nonstandard philosophical use of poetry, essays, lectures, reviews, journals, memoirs, letters, travel literature, and nature studies in order to explore a wider variety of topics than an article or book allows; see Myerson, Petruionis, and Walls 2010, pp. 263-437.

¹⁰ Buell 2010. However, instead of Buell's term "moral absolute" to characterize Transcendentalist thinkers like Emerson, Parker, Thoreau, and Fuller, it would be more accurate to characterize their position as "moral universalizing." The primary contradiction, arises, then, between nationalist and cosmopolitan impulses in the Transcendentalist movement.

¹¹ Emerson 2008, p. 110

¹² Emerson 2008, p. 111.

¹³ In his 1842 letter to Emerson, Channing identified in the latter's writings "one radical defect, which, like a wound in the bark, wilts and blights the leaf and bloom and fruit of your faith. *You deny the Human Race*. You stand, or rather seek to stand, a complete Adam. But you cannot do that" (quoted in Frothingham 1886, pp. 464-65. For a fine contextualized approach to Emerson's poem, see Gougeon 1990, pp. 114-17. It is worth noting that Channing's uncle, William Ellery Channing, had fiercely opposed the annexation of Texas as a slave state in an open letter to Senator Henry Clay (Channing 1837).

¹⁴ Emerson 2010, p. 333. In the context of this journal entry, the ambiguous possessive pronoun "your" could refer to Thoreau and the futility of his nonpayment of the poll tax as a way to protest both slavery and the war (Schroeder 1973, p. 117) or – perhaps more likely – to Emerson's own internal dilemma about what to do (Allen 1981, p. 447). However, it is not that the war made Emerson "cynical" (Allen 1981, p. 446); rather, he realized that his own indignation about the war was not shared broadly and deeply enough to generate an effective opposition.

¹⁵ Emerson 2014, p. 686.

¹⁶ Buell 2003, p. 137.

¹⁷ Emerson 2010, p. 326.

¹⁸ On this meeting and Emerson's address, see Ruchames 1957, pp. 425-29. The speech is also included in Emerson 1995, pp. 41-44.

¹⁹ Emerson 1995, p. 42.

²⁰ Emerson 1995, p. 42.

²¹ Emerson 1995, p. 41.

²² Emerson 1995, p. 43.

²³ Emerson 2013, pp. 341-47. Although the address is unattributed, Emerson's authorship has been clearly established by the editors (pp. 701-702).

²⁴ Emerson 2013, p. 344.

²⁵ What Roy Bhaskar says about "dialectic" is equally true of Transcendentalism: it is "the yearning for freedom and the transformative negation of constraints on it." (Bhaskar 2008, p. 352)

²⁶ Roberts 2012, for example, argues that the conflict can be understood as a "proxy war" by the United States and Great Britain to ease the depression that followed the transatlantic Panic of 1837.

²⁷ The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo specified \$15 million "in consideration of the extension acquired by the boundaries of the United States" (Article XII) and agreed to pay U.S. citizen debts owed to them by the Mexican government (Article XIII). The entire treaty is available through the National Archives website: <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/treaty-of-guadalupe-hidalgo/>; see also Griswold del Castillo 1992, pp. 183-99.

²⁸ On the importance of Texas during the 1830s and 1840s and its eventual annexation as a state, see Haynes 2022.

²⁹ Hitchcock 1909, p. 13.

³⁰ Chávez 2008, p. 75.

³¹ The votes were, respectively, 174-14 and 40-2.

³² More than 12,500 U.S. soldiers and at least 25,000 Mexicans died during the war (Greenberg 2012, p. 268). On U.S. war crimes, see Foos 2002 and Guardino 2018, pp. 124-32. Both Foos and Guardino have concluded that these atrocities were committed primarily not by professional soldiers but by volunteer units, especially the Texas Rangers..

³³ Levinson 2005.

³⁴ Anti-Catholicism was a key ideological factor in the U.S. popular perception of Mexicans and offered as a justification for the war as a kind of crusade of republican virtue against Mexican cultural backwardness and moral depravity; see Pinheiro 2014.

³⁵ On army desertion and the formation of the San Patricio Battalion, see Foos 2002, pp. 103-112, and Hogan 2011.

³⁶ Waite 2021.

³⁷ Cummings 2009, p. 166.

³⁸ Foner 1998, p. 278.

³⁹ McNeil 1892, p. 110.

⁴⁰ See Brock 1979 and Feldman 2021, pp. 79-95.

⁴¹ Grant 2017, p. 35.

⁴² Hämäläinen 2022, p. 4311. For a detailed study of such raids, see Delay 2008.

⁴³ Hämäläinen 2022, p. 432.

⁴⁴ See especially Hixson 2013 and Dunbar-Ortiz 2021.

⁴⁵ Bender 2006, p. 203.

⁴⁶ Schumpeter 1951, p. 69.

⁴⁷ Schumpeter 1951, p. 72.

⁴⁸ Schumpeter 1951, p. 73.

⁴⁹ Roberts 2008, p. 118.

⁵⁰ See Michael Doyle's criticisms of Schumpeter's contention that capitalism is somehow less anti-imperialist as it becomes more fully realized by throwing off pre-capitalist militaristic elements (Doyle 1986; 1997, pp. 241-48).

⁵¹ Ostler 2019.

⁵² On the rise and fall of the "Movement for the Acquisition of all Mexico," see Fuller 1936.

⁵³ Parker 1850, p. 153. Parker doubtless exaggerates here the "easy conditions" set forth in the Treaty of Guadalupe! "Easy" at best serves as a relative designation compared, for instance, to the complete annexation of Mexico. What could be called a "non-moral" opposition exerted its own pressure: South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun objected to incorporating Mexican territory with a dense nonwhite population. Moreover, he feared that all Mexico would come into the United States as a free territory and thereby "subject our institutions [meaning slavery] to political death" (Greenberg 2022, p. 247).

⁵⁴ Rules that were taught at the U.S. Military Academy and were especially grounded in an eighteenth-century text *The Law of Nations*, written by the influential Swiss diplomat Emer de Vattel and that greatly influenced Lieutenant Colonel Hitchcock; see Vatter 2008 and Monaco 2014, p. 12.

⁵⁵ On the moral dimensions of war, see, in addition to Walzer 2015, Holmes 1989 and Norman 1995.

⁵⁶ See Norman 1995, pp. 117-58.

⁵⁷ See Norman 1995, pp. 159-206.

⁵⁸ See Moellendorf 2015.

⁵⁹ Hitchcock 1909, p. 203. On Hitchcock's life and philosophical interests, see Versluis 2001, pp. 64-71. Hitchcock had similarly grave misgivings about his participation in the Second Seminole War (1835-1842); see Monaco 2014. As Monaco puts it, "Hitchcock was one of the leading moralists of the day and conceived of Native people as 'part of the great human family' who were worthy of the same rights and privileges as whites – a rare stance indeed" (p. 170).

⁶⁰ Hitchcock 1909, pp. 212, 214, 235. The reference to philosophy in the last quote is not casual: Hitchcock maintained a deep interest in philosophy throughout his life. His diary is especially filled with references to Spinoza. For example, in 1850 Hitchcock traveled to Wiesbaden, Germany in order to regain his war-damaged health (p. 365) and from there wrote that "I am more and more struck with the clearness and calmness of that wonderful man. It is vain for me to hesitate to say that I find myself more in harmony with Spinoza than with any other man, dead or alive, – not that I fully understand or agree with him in all his demonstration in the Ethics, but I understand no other writings better, and there is a spirit in his investigations above all praise." As Hitchcock put it, philosophy was for him "the first and foremost blessing in the world" (p. 368). A fascinating discussion by Hitchcock of "parallels" between Spinoza and the "hermetic philosopher" Emanuel Swedenborg may be found in Hitchcock 1846; 1858, pp. 263-331.

⁶¹ Hitchcock 1847.

⁶² John Edward Weems has argued that later in 1847 Hitchcock changed his anti-war position in response to the U.S. military entry into Mexico City. It is true that he drafted a proclamation that was printed – and widely circulated – in English and Spanish in the newspaper *The Daily American Star*. The proclamation urged the Mexican people not to resist the U.S. occupation because "we have not a particle of ill-will towards you – we treat you with all civility – we are not in fact your enemies; we do not plunder your people or insult your women or your religion ... we are here for no earthly purpose except the hope of obtaining a peace" (Weems 1974, p. 385). One could argue, though, that Hitchcock's motivation in this appeal – in his official capacity as an officer and close adviser to General Winfield Scott – was to minimize any further death and destruction. Even in the midst of a war

considered to be unjust with respect to its cause, one should still strive to reduce casualties until the war has been concluded in a just peace.

⁶³ Clary 2009, pp. 452-53.

⁶⁴ Clary 2009, pp. 453-54. For a description of perhaps the most notorious war crime, namely, the massacre of noncombatants in a mountain cave by an Arkansas volunteer regiment near Agua Nueva, see the memoirs of Private Samuel E. Cunningham, who served as a U.S. cavalryman during the war: "The cave was full of our volunteers yelling like fiends, while on the rocky floor lay over twenty Mexicans, dead and dying in pools of blood. Women and children were clinging to the knees of the murders and shrieking for mercy" (Cunningham 1956, p. 87).

⁶⁵ Hine, Faragher, and Coleman 2017, p. 204. On the "legacy of conflict" generated by the terms, interpretation, and enforcement of the treaty, see Griswold del Castillo 1992.

⁶⁶ On Trist's "peace mission" and complicated relationship with Polk, see Ohrt 1998 and Greenberg 2012, pp. 174-76, 206-207, 218-19, 221-22, 238-40, 256, 258-61.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Christensen and Christensen 1998, p. 218

⁶⁸ Engels 1976, p. 527.

⁶⁹ Engels 1977, pp. 365-66.

⁷⁰ Seymour 2008, p.36.

⁷¹ Rosdolsky 1991, p. 160.

⁷² Brenner 1977.

⁷³ Marx and Engels 2016, pp.39-48. See Seymour 2008 on Marx and Engels's revision of "their opinions on imperial conquest" (pp. 38-39).

⁷⁴ Clary 2009, pp. 451-52.

⁷⁵ Bradley and de Noronha 2022.

⁷⁶ Vogel 1955, pp. 162-63.

⁷⁷ In addition to Vogel 1955, see Packer 2007 and Gura 2008. Emerson and Parker, of course, had already drawn attention to this influence as grounded in a critique of British sensationalism/empiricism: Emerson in his lecture "The Transcendentalist" (Emerson 2014, pp. 27) and Parker in his essay "Transcendentalism" (Collins, pp. 49-74).

⁷⁸ Gross 2021.

⁷⁹ One can agree with Lorenzo Veracini that settler colonialism has historically served as "a specific mode of domination" (Veracini 2021, p. 4) – but only insofar as it has acted as a means for capitalism to realize its underlying logic of accumulation. Indeed, capitalism had begun to emerge as a distinct mode of production well before its settler colonial expansion – a process that Veracini calls turning the world "inside out" so as to deflect revolutionary transformation understood as turning the world "upside down" (p. 9).

⁸⁰ Wildermuth 2022.

⁸¹ Hitchcock 1909, p. 203. Arthur Versluis has suggested that "in his view of both Swedenborg and of Hermeticism, Hitchcock is very much aligned with the Emersonian Transcendentalist emphasis ... on the conscience and on human perfection" (Versluis 2001, p. 69).

⁸² *The Liberator*, June 5, 1846, p. 1 (www.fair-use.org/the-liberator/1846/06/05/the-liberator-16-23).

⁸³ Parker 1851, pp. 63-112.

⁸⁴ Parker veers dangerously close to a "supercessionist" theological view that would pit the supposedly barbarous Israelite conception of God as violent against the more civilized Christian conception of God as love. He does admit that in the New Testament the Book of Revelation seems to be an exception (p. 66), but hardly compensates for the theological damage already done. For a

“peaceable reading” of the Book of Revelation, see Grimsrud 2022; and for a subtle historical overview of seven “ideologies” regarding war in the Hebrew Scriptures, see Niditch 1995.

⁸⁵ Parker’s sermon “The Transient and Permanent in Christianity,” delivered in 1841, was a final line of demarcation he drew between himself and mainstream Protestants, including Unitarians; see Parker 1908, pp. 1-39. This line is also the guiding thread of his book, *A Discourse on Matters Pertaining to Religion* (Parker 1842).

⁸⁶ Parker 1851, p. 68.

⁸⁷ Parker 1851, pp. 68-69.

⁸⁸ Parker 1851, p. 70.

⁸⁹ Parker 1851, p. 70.

⁹⁰ Parker 1851, p. 77.

⁹¹ Parker 1851, p. 83.

⁹² Parker 1851, p. 86.

⁹³ Parker 1851, p. 87.

⁹⁴ Parker 1851, p. 88.

⁹⁵ Parker 1851, p. 87. Compare Thoreau’s own critique of heroism, especially in battles like that at Buena Vista, Mexico: “I am affected less by their heroism who stood up for half an hour in the front line at Buena Vista, than by the steady and cheerful valor of the men who inhabit the snow plow for their winter quarters; who have not merely the three-o’clock in the morning courage, which Bonaparte thought was the rarest, but whose courage does not go to rest so early, who go to sleep only when the storm sleeps or the sinews of their iron steed are frozen” (Thoreau 2006, p. 127).

⁹⁶ Parker 1851, pp. 88-89. At this point, one could argue, Parker lapses into an ideology of “heroism” that underlay civilian support for the war: “The heroes of the past called men to pursue battlefield glory in their country’s cause and the rest of the population to praise and support them as they did so” (Hospodor 2007, p. 116).

⁹⁷ Zinn 2015, p. 157. Here I follow Paul C. Taylor’s distinction (in Taylor 2022) between “racialism” – a (false) descriptive view – and “racism” proper – an (unjustifiable) normative position rooted in racialism.

⁹⁸ Parker 1851, p. 99.

⁹⁹ As Alice Baumgartner explains, “Not only had Mexico abolished slavery, but its laws freed the slaves of ‘other countries’ from the moment they set foot upon its soil” (Baumgartner 2020, p. 1). As a result, Michael Doyle’s claim (Doyle 1997, p. 168) that the United States from 1846-1848 was a strong “Liberal state” invading a weak “non-Liberal” Mexico is demonstrably false. Here is a glaring exception to what has sometimes been called “Doyle’s law,” namely, that liberal states do not wage war against each other.

¹⁰⁰ On the prevalence of Anglo-Saxonist ideology during the antebellum United States, see Horsman 1981. Horsman discusses Parker on pp. 178-80. On the tension between Parker’s – and Emerson’s – commitment to both Transcendentalism (with its emphasis on the equality of spirit) and “Anglo-Saxonism” (with its emphasis on embodied racial differences), see Wirzbicki 2021, pp. 194-206. On the one hand, in 1842 Parker would emphasize in his great early book on religion that “human nature is the same in the men of all races, ages, and countries. Man remains always identical, only the differing circumstances of climate, condition, culture, race, nation and individual, modify the manifestations of what is at bottom the same.” (Parker 1842, p. 30). On the other hand, by 1846 he had largely succumbed to racist ideology – yet in a contradictory and evolving way, as Wirzbicki notes,

especially after an “impromptu debate” in 1858 with the black abolitionist lawyer John Rock (pp. 194-97).

¹⁰¹ Parker 1851, pp. 99-100.

¹⁰² Parker 1851, p. 100.

¹⁰³ Parker 1863, pp. 105-106.

¹⁰⁴ Parker 1851, p. 107.

¹⁰⁵ On the centrality of “conscience” in Parker’s political theology, see Teed 2012.

¹⁰⁶ Parker 1851, pp. 108-109, 110.

¹⁰⁷ Parker 1907, p. 340n. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Parker 1907, pp. 155-16.

¹⁰⁹ As a foreign correspondent for the newspaper, on assignment in Europe at the onset of the 1848 Revolutions, Dana also had a “delightful evening” with, and was impressed by, Marx in Cologne, Germany. He later sent to Marx a recently published two-volume work on the war (namely, Ripley 1849); see Borden 1959.

¹¹⁰ Sterling Delano identifies Dana as the author of the anonymous review; see Delano 1981, p. 80.

¹¹¹ Dana 1846, p. 75. Dana is quoting Parker 1863, p. 70.

¹¹² Dana 1846, p. 75.

¹¹³ Dana 1846, p. 76.

¹¹⁴ Dana 1846, p. 76.

¹¹⁵ Dana 1846, p. 76.

¹¹⁶ Stellato 2012, p. 18.

¹¹⁷ Dana 1846, p. 76. On the Fourierist concept of “attractive industry,” see Doherty 1841. In fairness to Parker, Dana ignores – or is simply unaware of – the former’s emphasis on “industrial democracy” (on which see Aaron 1961, pp. 38-47).

¹¹⁸ Parker 1851, pp. 113-26.

¹¹⁹ Weiss 1864, p. 73.

¹²⁰ Parker 1851, p. 118.

¹²¹ Parker 1851, p. 122.

¹²² Parker 1851, pp. 122-23.

¹²³ Greenberg 2012, pp. 175-76.

¹²⁴ Parker 1851, p. 124.

¹²⁵ On the inability of anti-war leaders successfully to undercut pro-war sentiment on the “home front,” see Hospodor 2007.

¹²⁶ Parker’s authorship is asserted in Chadwick 1900, p. 149.

¹²⁷ Parker 1847, p. 10.

¹²⁸ Parker 1847, p. 10.

¹²⁹ Parker 1847, p. 11.

¹³⁰ Parker 1847, p. 12.

¹³¹ Parker 1847, p. 46.

¹³² Parker 1847, pp. 51-52.

¹³³ Parker 1847, p. 53.

¹³⁴ Parker 1847, p. 54.

¹³⁵ Parker 1851, pp. 127-84.

¹³⁶ Parker 1851, p. 127.

¹³⁷ Parker 1851, pp. 144-45.

¹³⁸ Parker 1851, p. 147.

¹³⁹ Parker 1851, pp. 147-48.

¹⁴⁰ Parker 1851, p. 154.

¹⁴¹ Parker 1851, p. 157.

¹⁴² Parker 1851, p. 162.

¹⁴³ Parker 1851, p. 165-66.

¹⁴⁴ Parker 1851, p. 178.

¹⁴⁵ Parker 1851, p. 181.

¹⁴⁶ Parker 1851, p. 184.

¹⁴⁷ Parker 1858.

¹⁴⁸ Parker 1858, p. 6.

¹⁴⁹ Parker 1858, p. 6.

¹⁵⁰ Parker 1858, p. 14.

¹⁵¹ Theodore Stanton was the son of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the leading women's rights activist.

¹⁵² Quoted in Buehrens 2019. In the third version of his autobiography, Douglass offers a moving tribute to Parker and an account of his visit to the latter's grave ("the little mound of earth that covered his dust") in which he also expresses his dismay that "it has lately been attempted to class him with the contemners of the negro. Could that be established, it would convict him of duplicity and hypocrisy of the most revolting kind. But his whole life and character are in direct contradiction to that assumption" (Douglass 1892, pp. 714-15).

¹⁵³ Allen 1979, p. 129.

¹⁵⁴ Fuller 1991, p. 165.

¹⁵⁵ Fuller 1991, p. 230

¹⁵⁶ O'Driscoll 2019, p. 151.

¹⁵⁷ Fuller 2000, pp. 424-25.

¹⁵⁸ The previous day, May 20, was a "dispatch for the Tribune" by "magnetic telegraph" with a boldfaced headline that proclaimed "From the Seat of War! Victory! Victory! Great Battle on the Rio Grande between the American and Mexican Armies!" and informing readers: "700 Mexicans Killed!! Only One American Killed!" The story included a woodcut of a fierce American bald eagle holding an olive branch in the right talon and brandishing a bundle of thirteen arrows in the left (an especially martial variation on the Great Seal of the United States).

¹⁵⁹ On pro-war sentiment especially early in the war, see Hospodor 2007. In the same issue of the *New York Daily Tribune* – printed in the column immediately to the left of Fuller's piece – was a news item that recounted the previous evening's pro-war rally at Central Park – which at its height "appeared to be one complete mass of human beings" – called by Mayor Andrew Mickle (a Jacksonian Democrat) in order to "offer effective assistance in bringing about a speedy, honorable and triumphant termination of the war now existing between the two countries." At the rally's end, a blackface musician entertained the crowd with a song whose lyrics justified the war (Chávez 2008, pp. 1-2).

¹⁶⁰ Robert Southey, "The Battle of Blenheim." Southey's 1796 anti-war poem refers to a battle fought in a Bavarian village on August 13, 1704 in which French and Bavarian soldiers were routed by the English and Austrians. Its narrative concerns a little girl named Wilhelmine and her brother Peterkin, who years later found a skull near the battlefield and asked their grandfather Kaspar where it came from. He told her that a great battle had been fought there and many of the leaders had become famous. But he couldn't explain why it was fought or what good resulted from it. All he could say was

that it was a “great victory.” Such were the numerous European wars of the past that devastated the lives of ordinary people; so too was the present U.S. War against Mexico.

¹⁶¹ As is well known, the eagle served as a symbol of Roman imperialism. As a standard, it was “carried into battle and protected at all cost” (Carter 2006, p. 19). Moreover, as a “bird omen,” against which the early Jesus-movement counterposed the dove,” the bellicose eagle was the primary symbol of Roman military might and concomitantly of the Roman imperial ideology, while the dove was a contrasting symbol of nonviolence or fear” (Peppard 2011, p. 119).

¹⁶² Fuller quotes from Friedrich Schiller’s 1785 poem *An die Freude*, which was used by Ludwig van Beethoven in the final movement of his Ninth Symphony, completed in 1824. Fuller had presumably attended a performance.

¹⁶³ One can see in the New Testament accounts of Jesus’ baptism an ideological struggle between rival conceptions of power: “Read in the light of Roman imperial ideology, the narrative characterization of Jesus’ baptism mimics the accession of imperial power even as it disavows the authority and methods of imperial power. It mimics Roman imperial adoption but disavows the militaristic type of power transmitted through adoption. It mimics the bird omens of Roman warfare and imperial lore but disavows the dominating war-symbol of the Roman eagle. The bird omen of the dove instead portends the accession of a different son of God, whose rise to power, though it would be mocked and suspended by the colonial authority, would ultimately be vindicated by his adoptive father” (Peppard 2011, p. 124).

¹⁶⁴ Fuller refers here to the dedication of Trinity Church on May 20, 1846.

¹⁶⁵ Fuller 2000, pp. 424-25.

¹⁶⁶ Again, see Pinheiro 2014.

¹⁶⁷ *New York Daily Tribune*, July 8, 1846, p. 1; Fuller 2000, pp. 464-71. The full title of McKenney’s 1846 book is: *Memoirs, Official and Personal; With Sketches of Travel Among Northern and Southern Indians; Embracing a War Excursion, and Descriptions of Scenes Along the Western Borders*. McKenney served as the U.S. Superintendent of Indian Affairs (later the Bureau of Indian Affairs) from 1824-1830, a position he held within the War Department until he was removed by President Andrew Jackson. McKenney helped to draft and gain passage of the infamous 1830 Indian Removal Act.

¹⁶⁸ Fuller 2000, p. 464.

¹⁶⁹ Fuller 2000, p. 465.

¹⁷⁰ On the U.S. governmental policy of removal, in particular, the Indian Removal Act – and Cherokee and Seminole resistance to its implementation – see Ostler 2019, pp. 203-14, 247-87; and Hämäläinen 2022, pp. 387-400.

¹⁷¹ Fuller 2000, p. 465.

¹⁷² Fuller 2000, p. 471.

¹⁷³ Frank 2009, p. 204. For dissenting views on the relevance of Transcendentalism for the future of socialism in the United States, see Herreshoff 1967, pp. 11-30, for an overview of “Marx and the Transcendentalists” and Lynd 2009, pp. 92-96, for a comparative reading of Thoreau and the young Marx on alienation.

¹⁷⁴ For overviews of ecosocialism, see especially Foster 2000 and Saito 2017. Regrettably, neither Foster nor Saito discusses Transcendentalism as a social movement that generated varied responses to human alienation from, and exploitation of, the natural world, which dovetail with those of Marx and Engels. In passing, Foster (2020, p. 145) refers to Thoreau’s *Walden* as a book that failed to impress the English utopian socialist writer William Morris because of its supposed advocacy of “detachment,”

“renunciation,” and “asceticism” – but this enduring caricature of Thoreau’s project can no longer be sustained (see Walls 2017).

¹⁷⁵ On this intersection of Transcendentalism and Marxism in terms of the “class politics of nature,” see Newman 2005.

¹⁷⁶ Emerson 2008, p. 111.

¹⁷⁷ Marx 1979, p. 528.

¹⁷⁸ Marx 1979, p. 529.

¹⁷⁹ Marx 1979, p. 530.

¹⁸⁰ Marx 1979, pp. 530-31.

¹⁸¹ Marx 1979, p. 531.

¹⁸² Marx 1979, p. 531.

¹⁸³ Emerson 2010, p. 606. He acknowledges Marx as the foreign correspondent of the *Tribune* but writes his surname as “Max.” Regarding Emerson’s excerpt from Marx, Lewis Feuer wondered “Was Emerson’s absorption of a strain of Marx’s philosophy more ... than a solitary instance?” (Feuer 1960, p. 379). More recently, Robert Richardson has proposed that “the difference between Emerson and Marx is not in their assessment of modern industrial conditions, not in their grasp of the dynamics of industrial production, and not in their understanding of the alienation of the individual under the conditions of modern production but in the proposed remedy” (Richardson 1995, p. 509).

¹⁸⁴ Marx 1979, p. 532.

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