

JOEL POINSETT AND THE PARADOX OF IMPERIAL
REPUBLICANISM: CHILE, MEXICO, AND
THE CHEROKEE NATION, 1810-1841

by
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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of History
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

June 2008

“Joel Poinsett and the Paradox of Imperial Republicanism: Chile, Mexico, and the Cherokee Nation, 1810-1841,” a thesis prepared by Feather Crawford Freed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Department of History. This thesis has been approved and accepted by:

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An Abstract of the Thesis of
Feather Crawford Freed for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of History to be taken June 2008

Title: JOEL POINSETT AND THE PARADOX OF IMPERIAL REPUBLICANISM:
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Approved: _____
Dr. Carlos Aguirre

This thesis examines the intersection of republicanism and imperialism in the early nineteenth-century Americas. I focus primarily on Joel Roberts Poinsett, a United States ambassador and statesman, whose career provides a lens into the tensions inherent in a yeoman republic reliant on territorial expansion, yet predicated on the inclusive principles of liberty and virtue. During his diplomatic service in Chile in the 1810s and Mexico in the 1820s, I argue that Poinsett distinguished the character of the United States from that of European empires by actively fostering republican culture and institutions, while also pursuing an increasingly aggressive program of national self-interest. The imperial nature of Poinsett's ideology became pronounced as he pursued the annexation of Texas and the removal of the Cherokee Indians, requiring him to construct an exclusionary and racialized understanding of American republicanism.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Jeff Ostler, whose generosity with his time, knowledge, and advice significantly improved my project. I would also like to thank Ian McNeely, who was always willing to joust with me and the material I sought to analyze. My most profound thanks go to my advisor and committee chair, Carlos Aguirre, who provided me with a remarkable level of support, both encouraging and challenging, which enabled me to see this thesis through to the end. I would also like to thank my wonderful friends: Becca Cherba, who always believed in this story, and Luis Fernando Ruiz, without whom this would not have been possible.

For Tony, Keasey, and Ty

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Chapter | Page |
|--|------|
| I. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| II. HEMISPHERIC REPUBLICANISM: JOEL POINSETT AND CHILE | 12 |
| III. IMPERIAL REPUBLICANISM: JOEL POINSETT AND MEXICO..... | 41 |
| IV. RACIALIZED REPUBLICANISM: JOEL POINSETT AND THE CHEROKEE NATION | 75 |
| V. CONCLUSION..... | 110 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 114 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Joel Roberts Poinsett (1779-1851) was a Charlestonian Huguenot, a world-traveler, and a statesman. Poinsett negotiated the promises and demands of the new United States republic during his service as a diplomat, politician, and ethnographer, using the doctrine of republicanism as both his guide and shield. As a youth, he traveled in Europe, Russia and Turkey, an experience that would provide the basis for his later anthropological contributions. Between the years 1810 and 1841, he served his country in a variety of important capacities, as a diplomat, senator, Secretary of War, and patron of the arts and sciences. Poinsett's career straddled the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian eras. He exemplified the transition from a republic based in the rhetoric of natural rights and inclusion to one that pursued hemispheric dominance and territorial acquisition. Poinsett embodied the tensions between international republicanism and national self-interest. Both found expression in the application of nineteenth-century republican ideology, and the career of Joel Poinsett.

Republicanism was a defining component of national identity in the early years of the United States. At once foundational and fluid, republican ideology provided political leaders in the United States, like Poinsett, with a vocabulary with which to

distinguish themselves from European colonialism and tyranny. In classical terms, the arbitrary and self-serving authority of a monarch would be replaced with a political system based on the participation of the people conducting the business of the public for the common good. The republic relied on abstract concepts with concrete applications: liberty, or the freedom from the arbitrary power of a hereditary ruler, and virtue, the patriotic sacrifice of personal ambition to the integrity of the republic. A republic required earnest participation and selfless cooperation from each citizen. Before the American Revolution, many enlightenment philosophers believed that these vital ingredients could only survive as guiding principles in small republics. Large nations were vulnerable to factionalism and competing interests, and regarded as unlikely locations for successful republican governments.¹

The United States established a republican form of government after successfully severing colonial ties with Great Britain in 1776. The new republic derived authority from the will of the people and guaranteed that the rule of law applied to all, regardless of status or hereditary claims to power. Freedom of the press and freedom of religion were constitutionally protected, seen by national founders like Thomas Jefferson as necessary components of a free and independent republic.² Liberty was protected through suffrage, representative government, and the separation of powers. The elective franchise was restricted to landowners in order to guarantee the virtue of the republic. The limitations to

¹ For a complete academic definition of republicanism, see *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, ed. David Miller, Janet Coleman, William Connolly, Alan Ryan (New York: B. Blackwell, 1987).

² See Thomas Jefferson, *Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia* (Richmond: J.W. Randolph, 1855). Jefferson discusses many of the opportunities and constraints facing the U.S., and the freedoms that protected the integrity of the U.S. republic.

civic rights and participation were attempts to ensure that the voting public, as landowners, had a stake in the integrity of the nation, and the means to remain independent of coercive economic influence. Jefferson considered landownership to be the foundation for a healthy republic, with the self-sufficiency of yeoman farmers acting as a bulwark against the centralization of power and the advent of tyranny.³ Free from dependence and committed to the principles which have empowered them, members of the yeoman republic were ideally suited to participate in the social contract between government and citizens. Land made men republicans, and access to land made republics prosper.

American revolutionary leaders that claimed the tenets of republicanism had universal appeal and application. Although the United States was a slave-trading nation that restricted political participation to white, landowning men, the nation inspired others with its promises of liberty and virtue. The United States demonstrated the feasibility of republicanism for skeptical European colonial empires. Creoles, men of European (and for the purposes of this thesis, Spanish) descent, who were born in the New World and denied political representation or authority, also observed the experiment in liberty and national independence in the United States. Jefferson imagined the potential of hemispheric republicanism and described a collection of “sister republics” throughout the Americas, connected through ideological affinity, free trade, and geographic proximity.⁴

³ Richard K. Matthews, *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1984), 32-34, 78.

⁴ Thomas Jefferson, “First Annual Message, December 8, 1801,” in *Writings: Addresses, Messages, and Replies*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library Classics of America, 1984), 501.

The inclusive and internationalist characteristics of republican ideology promised mutual respect and cooperation between fellow republics, although the inferiority of African Americans and Native Americans was an intrinsic assumption.⁵ As the nineteenth century progressed, independence movements consumed the Spanish colonies while the United States modeled a thriving republic.⁶ Fundamentally anti-monarchical, the United States inspired many Creole revolutionaries as they sought their national independence and sovereignty. Poinsett and other republican enthusiasts traveled to Spanish America seeking political and economic connections with an air of evangelical certainty, yet became entangled in the contradictions inherent in their ideology.

While imperial aspirations may have been embedded within U.S. plans for economic expansion, American attempts to dominate trade in South America and Mexico were relatively benign. Economic expansion enabled the public and private accumulation of wealth that rendered the experiment in republicanism viable. As former colonies sought independence from colonial empires, trade agreements with other sovereign nations bolstered their claims to nationhood. By binding together business and political leaders committed to anti-monarchical tenets, the economic expansion that the United States pursued through free-trade agreements with former colonies ostensibly strengthened republican ties between nations and men. Yet many republicans viewed the

⁵ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 98-104.

⁶ Alfredo Avila, "Pensamiento republicano hasta 1823," in *El republicanismo en Hispanoamérica: Ensayos de historia intelectual y política*, eds. José Antonio Aguilar and Rafael Rojas (México DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2002), 319-321.

relationship between liberty and commerce with suspicion, pointing to the contradictory co-existence of self-interest and republican virtue.⁷

The imperial nature of the United States republic became evident as it moved to extend its borders westward. The yeoman agrarian ideal depended on a limitless access to landownership. Territorial expansion was inherent to Jefferson's yeoman republic; sufficient land was the only way to support a growing citizenry and ensure their independence and self-sufficiency.⁸ Access to land not only prevented factional divisions, coercion, and dependence, it also provided the avenue to social mobility. Factionalism and competing interests would be avoided through self-sufficiency, which would be ensured through land-ownership. Jefferson contemplated a racially and ideologically homogenous republic, extending, at a future date "when our rapid multiplication will expand itself," to "cover the whole northern, if not southern continent."⁹ The growing yeoman republic could not, in Jefferson's view, "contemplate with satisfaction either blot or mixture on that surface," but the need for imperial action or exclusionary ideology was far off in "distant times."¹⁰ Land generated the ability to accumulate resources, and provided citizens egalitarian opportunities to achieve their best. Republicanism was a fragile system that relied on territorial expansion, and by extension, national self-interest.

⁷ J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 462.

⁸ Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 535.

⁹ Thomas Jefferson, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson Vol. XI*, ed Paul Leicester Ford (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), 317.

¹⁰ Jefferson, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, 317.

In a world of competing colonial empires, territorial acquisition, if not a noble goal, was an integral part of what it meant to be an empire. The expansion of the United States at the expense of European empires during the Jeffersonian Republic, for example Jefferson's purchase of the Louisiana Territory in 1803 and the later conquest of Florida, was rhetorically justifiable. The extension of the yeoman republic into Spanish territory could be viewed as liberation not imperialism. However, in a hemisphere of sisterly nations united by adherence to republican ideology, the encroachment of one nation's borders into the territory of another's was explicitly aggressive and implicitly imperial. In the early 1800s the distinctions between New World republicanism and Old World imperialism were important, but remained undefined.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the territory of the United States grew to meet the need for land, through the appropriation of land domestically, from Indian tribes, and internationally, from Mexico. The expansion of the United States was set against an ideological background that pitted European monarchies against independent republics, and the moral bankruptcy of colonial imperialism against the self-evident virtue of republicanism. How could an authentic republic foster republican institutions in another nation while simultaneously endeavoring to annex their territory? How could sincere American republicans (like Poinsett) inculcate internationalist values to their "sister republics," while pursuing agendas of national self-interest that infringed on their neighbor's sovereign borders? How could the United States deny the authenticity of another nation's republicanism as a prelude to land seizure?

An exploration of Joel Poinsett's career illustrates the paradox of imperial republicanism. During his service to the United States, Poinsett grappled with his own understanding of the intersection of republicanism and national self-interest. Through his experiences as a United States diplomat and politician, Poinsett developed strategies and theories that both broadcast republican ideology among newly independent American nations, and ultimately undermined their claims to the land within their sovereign borders. Poinsett obscured and refined his understanding of republicanism through a complicated combination of authenticity and self-interest. Poinsett developed an ideology that allowed him to navigate the contradictions between republican theory and republican pragmatism, through decades of travel, service to his country, and the articulation of his anthropological beliefs.

The spectrum of opinions regarding Poinsett's role in the United States' diplomatic and domestic history ranges widely. Historians' perceptions of his activities vary, from evil to heroic.¹¹ Chilean and Mexican supporters, who were Poinsett's contemporaries, praised his virtue and described him as an "ardent republican" and the "apostle of liberty."¹² On the other hand, his detractors and opponents decried his inter-hemispheric meddling, calling his tactics "Machiavellian," and Poinsett himself the

¹¹ For the uncritical account of Poinsett, see Fred Rippy, *Joel Poinsett, Versatile American* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1935); for the scathing indictment of his influence on the early republic of Mexico, see José Fuentes Mares, *Poinsett, historia de una gran intriga*, (México DF: Ediciones Océano, S.A, 1982).

¹² Lorenzo de Zavala, *Manifiesto de los principios políticos del Escmo. Sr. D.J.R. Poinsett* (Mexico City: Impr. del Correo, 1828), 2-3.

“author of all that is evil.”¹³ In contrast to these overly simplified or reactionary interpretations, my analysis of Poinsett seeks to understand the range of disparate interpretations of his place in history, and provide a framework for understanding the man and his era. The methodology employed in this thesis, however, is not one of biography. Instead of applying historical context to Poinsett’s life in an attempt to understand him, my goal is to use elements of Poinsett’s biography as access points into the ideas and activities with which he engaged so enthusiastically. Poinsett will be the lens into ideologies and motivations, both opaque and obvious, within the international and domestic policies of the United States.¹⁴ Poinsett’s own agency within larger political and economic forces needs not be exaggerated. He occupied positions of power and maintained connections to many other powerful men, but he was not a puppet-master, and his Creole and Native American peers were not hapless victims of his manipulation. Instead, he was uniquely positioned and suited to reflect the tensions and transitions within American republicanism.

This thesis will discuss three episodes in Poinsett’s life that illustrate the paradox of imperial republicanism, arguing that as a diplomat in South America, Poinsett learned important lessons in his failed attempts to embed American cultural and economic dominance within the Chilean state-building projects. He applied those lessons in

¹³Ramón Gamboa, *Representación del ciudadano síndico* (Mexico City: Impr. Del C. A. Valdés, 1829),8; “The Papers of Sir Charles Vaughan,” *The American Historical Review* 7, no. 2 (1902): 304-329.

¹⁴ Biography examines individuals, while in microhistory “the individual’s life serves as an allegory for broader issues affecting the culture as a whole.” See Jill Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections of Microhistory and Biography,” *Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (2000). She discusses the similarities and difference between the two approaches, observing “microhistories can focus on key events and episodes in an individual’s life in order to “evoke and period, a *mentalité*, a problem,” 132-133.

imperial republicanism successfully in Mexico. Later, as commander of the United States War Department, Poinsett then adapted and racialized his understanding of republicanism to justify and perform Indian Removal. The focus on the three episodes in Chile, Mexico, and the Cherokee Nation is derived from the richness and interconnectedness of the three narratives, which, taken together, address the historical questions posed above.

Chapter One will begin with an exploration of hemispheric republicanism through an analysis of Poinsett's early diplomatic career. From 1810 to 1814, the United States government appointed Poinsett Consul General to rebelling South American governments, or *juntas* in Buenos Aires and Santiago. He acted as a conduit for pro-American and pro-republican information. He allied himself with José Miguel Carrera, an aristocratic leader of a Chilean Creole *junta*, or ruling faction, and actively promoted republican institutions. He worked to marginalize monarchical and colonial influence in Chile, while pursuing preferential trade agreements in a self-interested rivalry with Great Britain. This episode illustrates the promise of republicanism as an international doctrine of inclusivity and reciprocal respect. It also reveals some of the limitations of the ideology amidst several competing nationalistic agendas. Poinsett's involvement in Chilean Creole independence movements and inter-elite rivalries taught him to choose his next allies wisely. The failure of the tangible forms of republicanism that he promoted in Chile to secure the preeminence of United States' influence in the region taught him to act more aggressively to further the interests of his nation. Chile served as a workshop, where Poinsett learned practical lessons in empire-building from competing, and ultimately successful, British agents operating in the same region.

Chapter Two will analyze Poinsett's next diplomatic mission as Minister Plenipotentiary to Mexico, from 1825 to 1829, with a brief explanation of his earlier trip to the newly independent nation in 1822. Conditions in Mexico were very different from those in Chile; the political leaders with whom Poinsett interacted had already broken with Spain and established a sovereign nation. Poinsett's goals also differed in his second diplomatic mission. Mexico and the United States shared a vast and sparsely settled border. Armed with new strategies to combine republican rhetoric with imperial designs, Poinsett attempted to renegotiate the United States-Mexico border and purchase the state of Texas. Poinsett's years in Mexico expose the tensions and contradictions within an increasingly imperial and land-hungry republic, and the hardening of United States expansionistic aspirations. The United States officially defined its international posture according to its opposition to European aggression with the proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823. Contrary to common historical view, Poinsett's mission to Mexico will be revealed to be a success, as the allies he chose, the networks he formed, and the speculative land ventures he supported, all contributed to the establishment of the Republic of Texas.¹⁵

Chapter Three turns to a different arena of early U.S. imperialism, and Poinsett's role in the removal of Native Americans west of the Mississippi River, to Indian Country. As Secretary of War, Poinsett administered the removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia, and the more pronounced tensions within his political thought became evident.

¹⁵ Rippy, 115-117. Rippy notes Poinsett's failure to buy Texas or successfully negotiate a lasting trade agreement with the Mexican government, ignoring evidence that Poinsett facilitated the secession of Texas through political masonry and land speculation.

Poinsett, a champion of republicanism, officially denied the legitimacy of the republicanism of the Cherokee Nation. For these purposes, Poinsett deployed a racial theory that restricted the capacity of indigenous people to adopt a truly republican form of government. During the years 1837 through 1841, as the Secretary of War under President Martin Van Buren, Poinsett applied racialized republicanism as his rationale in the implementation of Indian Removal. Poinsett's forcible removal of the Eastern Cherokee from Georgia on the Trail of Tears occurred in the face of vigorous protests from legally savvy and republican-minded Cherokee leaders and Anglo-American supporters. This episode most clearly exposes the paradox of imperial republicanism through the naked aggression displayed in Indian Removal. The land-hunger of the republic and perceived racial differences of Native Americans worked together to reshape the definition of republicanism into one that tolerated the appearance of continental imperialism, while simultaneously narrowing the definition to exclude the Cherokee Nation, and its competing claims to valuable land. Poinsett adapted the strategy he had developed in the former Spanish colonies fostering republican self-rule and national sovereignty, to the demands of domestic expansion and Cherokee removal, rejecting the Cherokees' republicanism, sabotaging their national viability, and attempting to depose their elected leader.

CHAPTER II

HEMISPHERIC REPUBLICANISM: JOEL POINSETT AND CHILE

Joel Poinsett lived in South America from 1810 to 1814, first in Buenos Aires, and then in Santiago. His appointment to the region illustrated the ideological, economic, and geopolitical aspects of the United States interest in its “sister republics.” The United States’ nascent republicanism, alternatively idealistic and pragmatic, found a foreign laboratory in Chile. Poinsett was not only a representative of the United States who publicly advocated a republican-style government; he actively and self-consciously diffused ideologies and political policies that promoted an anti-monarchical social contract between the Chilean people and a Creole-led government. He also pursued an agenda of economic penetration, in competition with British agents in Chile, who also intended to establish preferential trade agreements with Santiago. Poinsett attempted to ensure the influence of the United States and procure trade agreements favoring the U.S. through direct support of rebelling Creole *juntas*, or ruling Creole governments.

Poinsett sought alliance with José Miguel Carrera, the leader of the ruling Chilean *junta*, in the hopes that would successfully lead the Chileans to independence, and use his position as the executive of the nation to procure trade agreements that

favored the United States. Poinsett used his credibility as the representative of the successful and inspirational United States republic to support Carrera's hold on power. Promoting the introduction of a printing press, newspaper, and provisional constitution, Carrera and Poinsett collaborated to legitimize Carrera's hold on power through the extension of republican liberty and claims to republican virtue. Poinsett's activity on behalf of an authoritarian, and ultimately unpopular, leader like Carrera shows that Poinsett's pragmatic and imperial intentions were veiled behind his republican rhetoric. National self-interest took priority over democratic guarantees. The nature of Poinsett's imperialistic intervention in Chile was economic, however, not territorial, and in the end, unsuccessful. Poinsett's rival British representatives were unfettered by ideological contradictions and emerged victorious in Chile. Great Britain, not the United States, established lasting cultural and economic influence in Chile and other South American nations.

In 1810, President Madison sent Joel Poinsett to Buenos Aires, as the United States General Consul to South America. The independence movements of Spanish colonies in the early nineteenth century were of great interest to political leaders in the United States, and that interest was multi-faceted. Madison's Secretary of State, Robert Smith, explained to Poinsett the significance of his mission in an official letter on August 27, 1810:

As a crisis is approaching which must produce great changes in the situation in Spanish America, and may dissolve altogether its colonial relations to Europe, and as the geographical position of the United States...give [us] an intimate interest in whatever may affect the destiny of that part of the American Continent, it is our duty to turn our

attention to this important subject and to take such steps not incompatible with the neutral character and honest policy of the United States as the occasion renders proper. With this view, you have been selected to proceed without delay to Buenos Aires, and thence, if convenient to Lima, in Peru, or St. Tiago in Chili, or both.¹⁶

The collapse of the Spanish colonial power, and the potential for both chaos and independence concerned the Madison administration on a geopolitical pragmatic level, but also resonated ideologically. For example, the Enlightenment philosophies that inspired the authors of the Declaration of Independence also shaped the ideas of Creole thinkers and revolutionaries.¹⁷ Complementary anti-monarchical agendas were possible, as Thomas Jefferson had imagined. The western hemisphere could be occupied by “sister republics,” nations led by representatives committed to the same general principles of virtue, law, and sovereignty, that were united by trade and good will, and free from the colonial restraints of Europe.

Smith went on to instruct Poinsett:

You will make it our object wherever may be proper, to diffuse the impression that the United States cherish the sincerest good will toward the people of Spanish America as neighbors, as belonging to the same portion of the globe and as having a mutual interest in cultivating friendly intercourse; that this disposition will exist whatever their internal system or European relations, with respect to which no interference of any sort is pretended; and that in the event of a political separation from the parent country and of the establishment of an independent system of National Government, it will coincide with the sentiments and policy of the United States to promote the most

¹⁶ Poinsett Papers (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania), Vol. 1, folder 1.

¹⁷ Charles C. Griffin, “Enlightenment and Independence,” in *Latin American Revolutions, 1806-1826: Old and New World Origins*, ed. John Lynch (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 248.

friendly relations and the most liberal intercourse between the inhabitants of the hemisphere, as having all the common interest, and as lying under a common obligation to maintain that system of peace, justice and good will, which is the only source of happiness for nations.¹⁸

Free trade was a significant concern to the Madison administration, and the closed ports of Spanish America were often resented by ideologues and capitalists, as evidence of the tyranny and futility of European monarchies.¹⁹ Smith emphasized the importance of establishing trade relationships with South American ports in his instructive letter, telling Poinsett “The real as well as the ostensible object of your mission is to explain the mutual advantages of commerce with the United States to promote liberal and stable regulations, and to transmit seasonable information on the subject.”²⁰ United States economic interests in Chile had primarily centered on contraband whaling trade in defiance of Spanish trade restrictions. This interest coincided with Poinsett’s social connections, as a patron of Poinsett’s, Dr. John Livingston, had significant business interests in Chilean whaling trade, through his representative, Matthew Arnold Hoevel.²¹ Free trade, rather than contraband trade, incorporated ideas of

¹⁸ Poinsett Papers, Vol. 1, folder 1.

¹⁹ Laura Bornholdt, *Baltimore and Early Pan-Americanism, a Study in the Background of the Monroe Doctrine* (Northampton, Massachusetts: George Banta Publishing Company, 1949). Bornholdt profiles Baltimore’s economic involvement with Spanish America, the resentment of the Baltimore business community for Spanish trade restrictions, and support of Creole independence movements.

¹⁹ Poinsett Papers, Vol. 1, folder 1.

²⁰ Poinsett Papers, Vol. 1, folder 1.

²¹ William L. Neumann, “United States Aid to the Chilean Wars of Independence,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 27, no. 2 (1947): 204-205. Hoevel’s career nicely embodies the intersection of American interests and strategies in Chile. Hoevel translated the first act easing trade restrictions in Chile in 1810,

liberty into economic interests, and preexisting United States economic interests were bolstered by liberal and stable trade agreements.

The United States' ideological and economic concerns were directly linked to interactions between increasingly competitive national projects. Antagonism and warfare, (between European powers during the Napoleonic Wars, and between the United States and Great Britain in the War of 1812) affected commerce and international relations. These tensions were displayed in the Spanish American colonies, as the United States, Great Britain, France and Spain vied for cultural and economic hegemony in the region. Spain attempted to maintain control over the ports of Spanish America. The United States and Great Britain both pursued trade agreements, and advocated free-trade ideology. Smith sought information on the region, on international relationships manifested there, and on South American resources. He told Poinsett. "Whilst you inculcate these as the principles and dispositions of the United States it will be no less proper to ascertain those on the other side, not only towards the United States, but in reference to the great nations of Europe."²² He directed Poinsett to "inquire into the state, the characteristics, and the proportions as to numbers, intelligence and wealth of the several parties, and the amount of population, the extent of organization of the military force and the pecuniary resources of the country."²³ The imperialism implied in this missive was economic, but in order to

from Spanish and English. He transported the first printing press to Chile in 1811 and sold it to the Carrera government. Poinsett would later name Hoevel a Consul of trade to Chile, under his authority in 1812.

²² Poinsett Papers, Vol. 1, folder 1.

²³ Poinsett Papers, Vol. 1, folder 1.

implement his instructions, Poinsett would have to create an aura of international republicanism and virtuous legitimacy.²⁴

Smith instructed Poinsett to conduct his sensitive communications with the United States government within encoded correspondence with the U.S. State Department. Smith told Poinsett, “You will receive herewith a cipher, which...will enable you to correspond in that mode...when occasion may render it necessary.”²⁵ Codes had been used by participants in the American Revolution, and the use of them during diplomatic and commercial interaction with South Americans implies a certain level of intrigue that Poinsett’s later actions would confirm.²⁶ Poinsett was not concerned enough to encode his general suspicion of European intentions in the southern hemisphere and discussed European counterrevolutionary movements and international privateering activities.²⁷ The involvement of the United States in Spanish America, however, was communicated between Poinsett and his contacts at the State Department through a complicated numerical code that was replaced periodically to ensure the secrecy of diplomatic communications, such as this excerpt from an encoded letter from Poinsett to James Monroe in October, 1811 that explained that Poinsett “been enabled to place the policy of the nations of Europe in its true light,” and, that after sharing “a fair statement of the

²⁴ Eugenio Pereira Salas, *La actuación de los oficiales navales norte-americanos en nuestras costas, 1813-1840* (Santiago de Chile: Prensa de la Universidad de Chile, 1935), 8-9. Salas called the United States and Great Britain “imperial rivals,” engaged in “gunboat diplomacy.”

²⁵ Poinsett papers, Vol. 1, folder 1.

²⁶ Ralph E. Weber, *United States Diplomatic Codes and Ciphers, 1775-1938*, (Chicago: Precedent Publishing Inc., 1979), 5.

²⁷ Poinsett Papers, Vol. 1, folder 6; folder 3.

views of the British toward these colonies,” Poinsett’s contacts in Buenos Aires had become “extremely excited against them, and their actions are watched with a jealous eye.”²⁸ Poinsett went on to explain his efforts to connect the independence movements in Spanish America to the interests of the United States:

I have found it necessary to direct their attention to some plan of effecting their independence. I have suggested to them...a barrier to the ambitious view of the European powers, an alliance of all Spanish American engaged in the same cause...[They] declare themselves [ready] to solicit the aid and protection of the United States and make one great simultaneous movement of the whole continent...I need scarcely observe that this has been conducted with the greatest reserve and in the name of a Creole.²⁹

Poinsett communicated with the United States from his post in Buenos Aires by relying on this secure system of communication. He informed the United States State Department that he had not only spread anti-European sentiment, but had also acted on behalf of, and in the name of, a member of the Creole leadership. Poinsett spent his time in Buenos Aires gathering information on British, French and Spanish activity, and the growing independence movement led by the Creoles. A month later, Poinsett informed the State Department that he was leaving Buenos Aires for Chile. In cipher he communicated his perception that the people of Buenos Aires were turning against British interests, saying “the jealousy of the people is awakened and a formidable enemy to the ambitious views of Great Britain...the new executive seems well disposed to the

²⁸ Poinsett Papers, Vol. 1, folder 12.

²⁹ Poinsett Papers, Vol. 1, folder 12.

United States and certainly aware of the policy of Great Britain.”³⁰ Animosity between Great Britain and the United States had not yet developed into the War of 1812, but British involvement in South America evoked suspicion. Poinsett hoped to dissuade the Creole leadership in Chile from aligning themselves with Great Britain and their economic interests, and instead advocate hemispheric republicanism.

When Poinsett arrived in Santiago late in 1811 he found an actively revolutionary Creole community. The era known in Chile as the *Patria Vieja*, or Old Fatherland, had begun in 1810. After the retreat of the Spanish Viceroyalty in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, the Chilean Creole elite gained the political power that had been denied them by the Spanish Crown. Showing an affinity for the American Revolution, the first Chilean Congress opened on July 4, 1811. Although not explicitly revolutionary, the coalition of liberal Creoles departed from Spanish precedent and passed laws relaxing trade restrictions.³¹ An edict issued by the Creole government outlawed the import of slaves to Chile, and decreed that all future children born to slave women would be freed.³² Although they passed laws that departed from the status quo, the Creole legislatures were not as radical as other members of the Creole Chilean elite who favored an ambitious independence project, or those who lived outside the capital and demanded political representation through a more regional, or federal system. The first Chilean congress centralized political power in Santiago, and excluded Creoles from the

³⁰ Poinsett Papers Vol. 1, folder 11.

³¹ Poinsett Papers Vol. 1, folder 16.

³² Sergio Villalobos, *A Short History of Chile* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria 1996), 83.

provinces far from the center of the government.³³ The political process also lacked popular representation. The imprisonment of the Spanish king ignited the independence movement, but did not drastically alter the relationship between the majority of the Chilean people and their governing body. Furthermore, the strength of the Creole leadership was compromised by the divisions between regional, economic and ideological interests. Influential families like the Carreras and the Larraíns, an even more powerful dynasty, grew impatient with the conservative reforms pursued by the first Congress, and called for more meaningful independence and democratization initiatives.³⁴

José Miguel Carrera was an aristocratic Chilean, who had returned to Chile from Spain in 1811 after fighting against Napoleon in Europe. Carrera's family traced their ancestry back to the conquistadors, and enjoyed a position of prestige and traditional political power in Santiago. The Carreras were not part of the most politically powerful group of Chilean families the "Eight Hundred," who, led by the Larraíns, controlled vast amounts of land and capital.³⁵ The Carreras did, however, have a history of influence in Santiago. The patriarch of the family, Ignacio de la Carrera, was a member of the first Chilean Congress. His three sons, José Miguel, Juan José and Luis Carrera were generals

³³ Gabriel Salazar, *Construcción de Estado en Chile (1760-1860): Democracia de 'los pueblos', militarismo ciudadano, gopismo oligárquico* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Sudamericana, 2005), 109-110.

³⁴ Stephen Clissold, *Bernardo O'Higgins and the Independence of Chile* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 94-95.

³⁵ The "Eight Hundred" was the nickname for a coalition of wealthy and entrenched families led by the Larraíns in Santiago. Excluded from the political and social opportunities available to men born in Spain, members of the Eight Hundred wielded extraordinary power under Spanish rule and after independence. See Clissold, *Bernardo O'Higgins*, 93.

in the army, commanded troops, and controlled artillery. Javiera, José Miguel Carrera, Juan José and Luis's sister dedicated herself promoting "the cult of the family," or the Carrera's hereditary claims to power, and self-evident superiority.³⁶ At times allied and at other times at odds with one another, the Carreras and the Larraíns cooperated at this time to further the cause of independence.

José Miguel Carrera rose to power in Chile through a succession of coups, the first in collusion with the Eight Hundred, on September 4, 1811.³⁷ Carrera and his brothers, supported by the troops of grenadiers and artillery that they commanded, surrounded the Congress and forced the ruling *junta* to resign. Many members of the Congress were replaced by members of the Eight Hundred, and a new executive *junta* was appointed that was under their control.³⁸ The Carrera family was not directly empowered by the Eight Hundred following the successful coup, and some historians have theorized that José Miguel may have felt snubbed. After members of the Eight Hundred were reported to have been boasting of their control over three members of the executive *junta*, the well-armed Carrera is quoted as asking, "But who is the president of the bayonets?"³⁹ Six weeks after leading the coup that put the *junta* of the Eight Hundred into power, the Carrera brothers and their army overthrew them. Members of the defeated

³⁶ Clissold, *Bernardo O'Higgins*, 93.

³⁷ Salazar, *Construcción de Estado en Chile*, 115.

³⁸ Salazar, *Construcción de Estado en Chile*, 123.

³⁹ Quoted by Clissold, *Bernardo O'Higgins*, 94.

group were arrested and congress was dismissed, and by December, Carrera had assumed dictatorial powers.⁴⁰ Once Carrera assumed power he imprisoned several of his rivals.⁴¹

It was at this moment that Poinsett arrived on the scene. Within weeks, Poinsett was formally received by Carrera in what Poinsett described as “a most distinguished manner.”⁴² On March 9, he explained his relationship with the Carrera family to James Monroe in cipher, saying, “The Carreras still hold the reins of government, and are favorable to a system of national independence.”⁴³ He went on to describe the involvement of private United States citizens in the independence movement: “The government has contracted with Americans to supply them 6,000 muskets and some cannons... with the assistance of two frigates, Guayaquil, which is in a defensive state, might be taken, and Lima reduced in three months.”⁴⁴ Poinsett’s interest in the tactical details of the Spanish American movements was a persistent theme throughout his correspondence from Buenos Aires and Santiago.⁴⁵ Once in Chile, he became directly involved in the fight for independence in Spanish America.

Poinsett’s decision to ally himself with Carrera was risky. Carrera’s claim to legitimacy was compromised by the violence of his seizure of executive control, the competing claims to power and authority of other Chilean elites, and the dictatorial

⁴⁰ Salazar, *Construcción de Estado en Chile*, 129-131.

⁴¹ Clissold, *Bernardo O’Higgins*, 95.

⁴² Poinsett Papers, Vol.1, folder 11.

⁴³ Poinsett Papers, folder 14.

⁴⁴ Poinsett Papers, folder 14.

⁴⁵ Poinsett Papers, Vol. 1, folder 15.

character of his regime. Once in power, Carrera needed to bolster the authenticity of his right to lead the Chilean people into nationhood. First, he convinced Bernardo O'Higgins to join his government as his deputy.⁴⁶ O'Higgins was the illegitimate son of the former Viceroy of Peru and a prominent leader in Chile's independence movement, and had strong affiliations to the Eight Hundred, particularly the Larraíns. O'Higgins' father had been removed from his position years before because of his son's political activities in England and his friendship with many advocates of Spanish American independence, such as Francisco de Miranda and José de San Martín.⁴⁷ However, the alliance did not last. O'Higgins became alienated by Carrera's decision to arrest members of the Eight Hundred, including close friends of O'Higgins. Carrera's mandates became increasingly dictatorial, and after having come to power promising political representation to the province, he instead worked to centralize political power and assert his authority.⁴⁸ After Carrera dismissed the congress he appointed Juan José Aldunate and José Nicolás de la Cerda as members of the executive triumvirate, men widely regarded as Carrera's puppets.⁴⁹ Although identified by many historians as a dictatorial ruler, Carrera's contributions to Chilean political culture have been widely recognized; particularly his

⁴⁶ Clissold, *Bernardo O'Higgins*, 95.

⁴⁷ Fernando Pinto Lagarrigue, *La masonería, su influencia en Chile: Ensayo histórico, político y social* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Oribe, 1966), 50-66.

⁴⁸ Clissold, *Bernardo O'Higgins*, 98.

⁴⁹ Duncan Stewart Young, "The Eighteenth-Century Background for the Chilean Army's Royalist Posture during the Patria Vieja, 1810-1814" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, 1976), 232-250.

use of the tangible symbols of republicanism in order to foster the ideology of independence and revolution through propaganda.⁵⁰

Although Carrera lost O'Higgins' support, he used his affiliation with the newly arrived American diplomat to reinforce the legitimacy of his claims to power. Poinsett supported Carrera's hold on power during the *Patria Vieja* by helping him apply some of the most recognizable and visible aspects of a republican government: independence from monarchy, an active press, and constitutional protections. Poinsett was involved with the development of the free press in Chile, and its implementation as a tool to broadcast propaganda favorable to Carrera's regime. Poinsett helped Carrera write the first provisional constitution of the Chilean nation, and even commanded revolutionary troops against royalist armies.⁵¹ The flexible nature of republican ideology supported Carrera's hold on power by arming him with the language of liberty and virtue, and the pressures of the wars for independence allowed him to postpone democratization. Poinsett endorsed the Carrera regime, and in turn, Carrera treated the United States' interests with preference.

The *Aurora de Chile*, Chile's first newspaper, was printed on a printing press owned by the Carrera regime.⁵² The press was brought from the United States to Chile

⁵⁰ Simon Collier, *Ideas and Politics of Chilean Independence, 1808-1833* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 124-129.

⁵¹ Eulogio Rojas Mery, *El general Carrera en el exilio* (Santiago de Chile: Instituto Histórico Carrera, 1954), 32. Rojas Mery details a letter from Carrera to Poinsett on January 26, 1816 that discusses the earlier loan for the printing Press; Manuel Reyno Gutiérrez, *El pensamiento del Gral. José M. Carrera* (Santiago de Chile: Reyno Gutiérrez, 1975), 119. Reyno Gutiérrez reproduces Carrera's will, in which Carrera's debt to Poinsett is addressed.

⁵² Villalobos, *A Short History of Chile*, 88; Neumann, "United States Aid to Chile," 206. Late in 1811, Hoevel brought the press to Valparaiso, and sold it to the Carrera government. Hoevel was representing Dr.

in December, just as Poinsett arrived and Carrera seized power. The newspaper filled its pages with praise of the “patriots,” the pro-independence government led by Carrera. Although not quite a free press, as it was owned and controlled by the Carrera government, the *Aurora de Chile* encouraged nationalism and republicanism, and promoted Enlightenment philosophies. The newspaper also presented a very positive image of the United States’ interest in Chile. The head printer that ran the press, Samuel Johnston, was from the United States, as were his employees.⁵³

Early in 1812, the first issue, or the *Prospecto*, of the *Aurora de Chile* published an essay written by Camilo Henríquez, the editor of the newspaper. The editorial celebrated the ideas of liberty and virtue. Henríquez wrote of the power of producing and spreading the written word, saying, “This is now in our power, the great, the precious instrument of universal enlightenment, the press.”⁵⁴ In February of 1812, the *Aurora* printed the “Canción a la Aurora de Chile,” a song that celebrated the potential of the nation:

The beautiful Chile has sprung to life to bring to light this beautiful day...How many precious fruits and gifts the wise author of nature distributed in the various kingdoms and nations. To Chile he gave both (fruits and gifts), what wealth! But idleness and sloth did not recognize the fruits and gifts, or have the strength to see them grow. The force and constraints that oppressed you, Chile, for such a long

Livingston’s contraband whaling interests off the coast of Chile, and also supporting U.S interests in the region. Madison had sent a letter to Poinsett earlier in 1811, making sure Poinsett and Hoevel were working together. See Poinsett Papers, Vol. folder 5.

⁵³ Samuel B. Johnston, *Cartas escritas durante una residencia de tres años en Chile* (Santiago-Valparaíso: Soc. Impr.-lit. “Barcelona,” 1917), 21.

⁵⁴ *Aurora de Chile*, “Prospecto,” February 1812.

time rendered useless most of your genius and art. Poor Chile, your fertile soil could have brought in million and millions, if you had allowed extractions and if you would have freed your commercial market.⁵⁵

The song went on to describe the wealth of Chile's gold and silver resources, and the deprivation the nation suffered under Spanish rule and restrictions.

The *Aurora de Chile* provided the Chilean readers with a very positive description of Poinsett's presence in Santiago. In March, the newspaper featured an article on Poinsett's official welcome as Council General of Trade to Chile. The *Aurora de Chile* reproduced Carrera's assurances that Chile shared in the commercial and social goals of the United States, and that "this [was] the universal feeling of our people," and Poinsett's corresponding assurances that the United States sought a mutually beneficial economic relationship and that the two nations should view one another as "friends and natural allies."⁵⁶ On April 9, the newspaper reported that Poinsett had made Matthew Hoevel Consul to Chile, indicating a unity between U.S. trade and diplomatic interests.⁵⁷

On July, 4 1812, Poinsett hosted the party to celebrate the introduction of the new Chilean flag.⁵⁸ Poinsett explained the way he envisioned those connections between the two nations in a letter to Carrera the day before the party, saying that it was, "a special coincidence that on that same date of my fatherland's separation from Great Britain [we celebrate the] creation of the Chilean national flag. This gives curious significance to

⁵⁵ *Aurora de Chile*, "Canción a la Aurora de Chile," February 27, 1812.

⁵⁶ *Aurora de Chile*, "Llegada del cónsul Joel Roberts Poinsett," March 2, 1812; Johnston, *Cartas*, 21-22.

⁵⁷ *Aurora de Chile*, "Mateo Hoevel nombrado Cónsul de EE.UU.," April 9, 1812.

⁵⁸ *Aurora de Chile*, "Manejo de Información," July 9, 1812..

tomorrow's celebration, in which we will see interwoven the symbols of two sister nations."⁵⁹ An anthem written to be recited at the party Poinsett hosted on the fourth of July was printed July 14 in the *Aurora de Chile*, establishing support for a ceremony where the Chilean flag was introduced and raised alongside the flag of the United States. One of the stanzas of the anthem began, "the illustrious patriotism of Washington extends its embrace to the strong South. A new world is reunited in eternal confederation," and the chorus repeated "Applaud, applaud! The heroes that the heavens gave to the Fatherland, as the glory elevated the glory of the Fatherland – which was never expected!"⁶⁰ The identities of the two nations were linked by their ideological similarities and the connection between Carrera and Poinsett. These links were in turn supported through the national newspaper, which had purchased its printing press from the future United States Consul appointee, Hoevel.

The *Reglamento constitucional provisorio de 1812*, or the Chilean Provisional Constitution of 1812, was another very promising component of Chilean republicanism that was fostered and influenced by Poinsett. Poinsett helped Carrera write and present the provisional constitution.⁶¹ The two men worked closely together on the document.

⁵⁹ William M. Collier and Guillermo Feliú Cruz. *La primera misión de los Estados Unidos de América en Chile* (Santiago de Chile: Imprenta Cervantes, 1926), 60. This extraordinary text reproduces many documents only available at the U.S. embassy in Santiago, including many letters between Poinsett and Carrera that are not otherwise available.

⁶⁰ *Aurora de Chile*, "Himno Patriótico," July 16, 1812.

⁶¹ Simon Collier notes the reforms Carrera pursued, but also his "military and absolute rule." See Simon Collier, *Ideas and Politics of Chilean Independence*, 12. Poinsett's influence on the first Chilean constitution is well documented by scholars of Chilean history, although the degree to which the document provided the basis for a liberal society is a subject of debate. Eugenio Pereira Salas briefly treats the first Chilean constitution, focusing on the liberal aspects of the document, such as freedom of the press and separation of the church and state. See Eugenio Pereira Salas, *La influencia norteamericana en las*

When Poinsett delivered his draft of the Chilean constitution, he noted that he was “submitting the constitution that we developed together...as we haven’t spent enough time on it, it wouldn’t be unexpected that some changes are made.”⁶² The constitution defined the Chilean nation, while also declaring loyalty to King Ferdinand VII, in defiance of the French who had deposed and imprisoned him. Poinsett’s draft of the Constitution of 1812 stayed true to many tenets of republicanism, such as religious liberty and his version of the constitution was devoid of Roman Catholic rhetoric. The document organized a Chilean Congress divided into a senate and a lower house, responsible for the protection of the freedom of the press and individual rights.⁶³ The executive, or *Gran Jefe*, would command the military and attend to foreign policy.⁶⁴ Together, the two branches would collaborate and appoint ambassadors, provincial officials, judges and the Supreme Court.⁶⁵

After some revisions the *Reglamento constitucional provisorio* was completed and approved in October 1812.⁶⁶ The document laid the foundation for an independent nation governed by a representative government negotiating a path to nationhood that

primeras constituciones de Chile (Santiago de Chile: Talleres Gráficos Valdes Hnos., 1945), 6-8. Pedro Lira Urquieta presents a very positive account of Poinsett’s influence on the Constitution of 1812, particularly the original draft’s absence of references to Roman Catholicism. See Pedro Lira Urquieta, *José Miguel Carrera* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1960), 31.

⁶² William M. Collier and Feliú Cruz, *La primera misión*, 86-87.

⁶³ William M. Collier and Feliú Cruz, *La primera misión*, 86-87.

⁶⁴ Pereira Salas, *La influencia norteamericana*, 7-8. Collier and Feliú Cruz reproduce Poinsett’s draft of the 1812 constitution in *La primera misión*, 71.

⁶⁵ Pereira Salas, *La influencia norteamericana*, 8.

⁶⁶ Lira Urquieta, *José Miguel Carrera*, 31.

paid homage to the king of Spain while supplanting the authority of the Spanish Crown, and supported the dictatorial mandates of general and executive Carrera while protecting the rights of the new Chilean citizenry. However, the revisions to Poinsett's draft limited the liberal language, and prominently featured governmental deference to the Catholic Church.⁶⁷ Although the document was never fully implemented, the provisional constitution promised political power to the Chilean people, and authorized them to intervene if the government acted outside of constitutional law.⁶⁸

In March 1813, the royalists in the Viceroyalty of Peru invaded Chile near Talcahuano to suppress the patriots and the increasingly independent *junta* led by Carrera.⁶⁹ O'Higgins, previously alienated by the arrogance of the Carrera government, rejoined Carrera, and defended the newly-defined Chilean nation against the counterrevolutionary forces.⁷⁰ Poinsett acted as Carrera's chief military advisor during successful battles early in the campaign against the Peruvian Viceroyalty. Chile did not have a navy, and was vulnerable to sea attacks. On April 5, 1813, merchant ships, manned by more than fifteen Americans merchants, printers, and Chilean supporters, blockaded the port of Talcahuano from Spanish invasion, with the printer of the *Aurora de Chile*, Samuel Johnston second in command of the *Colt*.⁷¹ The printers, merchants,

⁶⁷ Junta de Gobierno, *Reglamento constitucional provisorio* (Santiago de Chile: Impr. del Gobierno, 1812).

⁶⁸ Salazar, *Construccion de Estado en Chile*, 137-9.

⁶⁹ Rippey, *Joel Poinsett*, 48-52.

⁷⁰ Clissold, *Bernardo O'Higgins* pg 103-104.

⁷¹ Neumann, "United States Aid to Chilean Wars," 207.

and Chilean revolutionaries were successful in the port of Tacahuano. However, divisions between Carrera and O'Higgins ultimately weakened both Carrera's claim to power, and the Chilean fight for independence.⁷² The patriot's resistance to royalist attacks began to falter. After spending over a year pursuing legitimacy through republican rhetoric and symbols, and independence through military action, Carrera's government began to lose its grip on power. Military failures undermined "the president of the bayonets." After the royalist victory at Chillán in October 1813, Carrera and his brother were temporarily captured and imprisoned by the royalists, and this provided his rivals within Chile an opportunity to seize power.⁷³ Troops loyal to O'Higgins and the Eight Hundred turned on the Carreras. The *junta* in Santiago became more sympathetic to the Eight Hundred and suspicious of Carrera's dictatorial grasp on power and military ineptitude. While Carrera was detained, the *junta* decided to remove him from power.⁷⁴

During Carrera and his brother's imprisonment by royalists, the factions loyal to O'Higgins made no direct effort to secure their freedom, even though they fought a common enemy.⁷⁵ After weeks of confinement, Carrera and his brother escaped from the royalists that held them captive. They survived without help from O'Higgins, but reunited with him once again to fight the royalists, apparently considering the risk of Spanish reconquest more significant than his competition with fellow revolutionaries. Carrera and

⁷² Lira Urquita, *José Miguel Carrera*, 22-54; Reyno Gutiérrez, *El pensamiento del Gral. José M. Carrera*, 9.

⁷³ Clissold, *Bernardo O'Higgins*, 109.

⁷⁴ Clissold, *Bernardo O'Higgins*, 112-114.

⁷⁵ Clissold, *Bernardo O'Higgins*, 119-123.

O'Higgins worked out a battleground compromise and restored their alliance. With O'Higgins' support, Carrera returned to power, and the factions worked together to repel royalist advances. On October 1, 1814, however, the patriots suffered a devastating loss to the Spanish royalist forces at Rancagua. Communication broke down between the two revolutionary factions and the royalists capitalized on the lack of cooperation between the troops led by the Carreras and those that followed O'Higgins. Carrera failed to provide O'Higgins with crucial support, and the patriots were routed. The defeat at Rancagua marked the end of the *Patria Vieja* and the restoration of Spanish royalist control over Chile.⁷⁶

The opposition and competition between Carrera and O'Higgins had obvious human and strategic costs. The divisions between the Creole factions also reflected an international opposition and competition between the United States and Great Britain. Poinsett's influence over Carrera and his involvement with both printing political propaganda and writing a constitution had fostered pro-United States sentiment among Carrera and his allies. However, Poinsett's position in Chile depended on the success of the Carrera regime, to both fend off Spanish attacks and maintain authority within the Creole revolutionary elites. Carrera's rivals, particularly O'Higgins, had ties to the British. The U.S. and Great Britain were engaged in the War of 1812, and Poinsett's British rivals were eager to see his influence in Chile diminish, as were members of the Chilean elite, who had accused him of fomenting discord in Chile and criticized his

⁷⁶ Villalobos, *A Short History of Chile*, 93.

active support of the Carrera dictatorship.⁷⁷ Poinsett and Carrera were linked in the minds of many, and Poinsett's activities were seen as out of line with the type of disinterest expected from a man in his diplomatic position. Once Carrera began to lose power, Poinsett's influence in Chile too began to wane.

British influence ultimately displaced that of the United States. The same free-market ideals that Poinsett was directed to espouse in his letter of instructions from the Secretary of State also favored the British. British agents, like Poinsett, worked to establish favorable trade agreements with Chilean Creoles, and edge out their enemies in the United States.⁷⁸ The United States' interests in Chile were vulnerable, predicated on the ability of the Carrera government to maintain the authority to wield force. The divisions among the Chilean elites gave purchase to the British interests, who pragmatically negotiated a middle ground between the patriots and the royalists. The British were able to engage in free trade, while remaining comparatively untainted by Chilean factionalism and the implied hypocrisy of empty rhetoric. In contrast, Poinsett bound United States trade interests to Chilean liberty, republican ideology, and the success of an authoritarian aristocrat.

Many leaders of the Chilean independence movement were also bound to British citizens through cultural and fraternal networks. O'Higgins and other important Creole

⁷⁷ Poinsett Papers, Vol. 1, folder 16.

⁷⁸ British presence during *Patria Vieja* was minimal, but after 1817 commercial ties between the two nations became strong and British immigration was encouraged. In 1818, the British government sold the O'Higgins government the warship *Windham*, which was renamed the *Lautaro*. See Jay Kinsbruner, "The Political Influence of the British Merchant Residents in Chile During the O'Higgins Administration, 1817-1823," *The Americas* 27, 1 (1970): 27-31.

revolutionaries were members of a masonic lodge known as the *Lautaro*. The *Lautaro* lodge was founded by admirers of Francisco de Miranda as an instrument of Spanish American independence earlier in the century, organized around the *Matriz Lodge* in London.⁷⁹ During years spent in England, the founding members of the *Lautaro* Lodge, José San Martín and Simón Bolívar, formed the fraternal society committed to Miranda's goals.⁸⁰ Organized around the strong and compelling purpose of Spanish American independence and the unification of the Americas, the *Lautaro* Lodge had roots in England and ties to other liberal British voluntary associations. Members like San Martín and O'Higgins, established economic and political ties with British counterparts.⁸¹ O'Higgins' ties to Miranda reached back to O'Higgins' youth, when Miranda tutored him in mathematics.⁸²

Carrera never achieved the high degree of intimacy with the *Lautaro* lodge members that they enjoyed with one another, perhaps because he did not live in England, but instead spent his time in Spain fighting Napoleon, or perhaps, as some historians theorize, his interests were not inter-continental and did not tend toward grand

⁷⁹ Fabián Onsari, *San Martín, la Logia Lautaro y la francmasonería* (Buenos Aires, Supremo Consejo del Grado 33 y Gran Logia de la Masonería Argentina, 1964), 74. For a rich explanation of Miranda activities in the Spanish American independence movements in the early 1800s, see Karen Racine, *Francisco de Miranda, a Transatlantic Life in the age of Revolution* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2003).

⁸⁰ Onsari, *San Martín*, 74-97.

⁸¹ Pinto Lagarrigue, *La masonería*, 66.

⁸² For a compelling analysis of the usage of freemasonry in service to the British Empire during the mid-Nineteenth Century, see Jessica Harland-Jacobs, "'Hands across the Sea': The Masonic Network, British Imperialism, and the North Atlantic World," *Geographical Review* 89, 2 (1999): 237-241. She maps out the masonic lodges and affiliations that connected the British Empire like a "vast chain." Her identification of Freemasonry as a tangible network linking an international brotherhood of British imperialists throughout India and other British colonies is particularly important in understanding the function of masonic lodges in the developing American republics.

unification, but instead represented more local and nationalistic goals.⁸³ Another indicator that Carrera was not a central member of the lodge is the observation that *Lautaro* lodges were not a part of Carrera's regime in 1812 and 1813. Only after O'Higgins and San Martín liberated the Southern Cone from Spain in 1817 did the lodges spread rapidly throughout Chile.⁸⁴ While the precise reasons for Carrera's exclusion from the *Lautaro* lodge remain unclear, the consequences of his exclusion were decisive after the patriots were defeated by the royalists. His rejection by the men, who would eventually be known as the 'liberators,' was demonstrated once the patriots fled to Argentina. In October of 1814, after the royalist forces routed O'Higgins and Carrera at the battle of Rancagu, O'Higgins led his forces over the Andes to be welcomed and sheltered by San Martín and integrated into his army in Cuyo, Argentina.⁸⁵ Having heard of his tyranny and incompetence from O'Higgins, San Martín did not extend a welcome or any warmth to Carrera, who arrived later. Having already recognized O'Higgins as the legitimate leader of the Chilean patriots, San Martín displayed his disdain for Carrera by threatening to search his bags for looted Chilean wealth upon Carrera's arrival in Cuyo.⁸⁶ Alienated from San Martín and O'Higgins, Carrera allied himself with an Argentine, Carlos María

⁸³ Pinto Lagarrigue, *La masonería*, 66.

⁸⁴ Rojas Mery, *El general Carrera en el exilio*, 60-65.

⁸⁵ Clissold, *Bernardo O'Higgins*, 132-133.

⁸⁶ Clissold, *Bernardo O'Higgins*, 134-135.

de Alvear, who was briefly the Supreme Director of the Argentine *junta*, until he himself was ousted and replaced by another prominent member of the *Lautaros*.⁸⁷

Carrera's original fall from power in 1813 had doomed Poinsett's mission. When Carrera was imprisoned by the royalists following the battle of Chillán, Poinsett was suddenly without allies in a hostile land. He tried to use his influence to convince O'Higgins to secure Carrera's release. In a letter to O'Higgins on April 11, 1814, Poinsett implored him to arrange a prisoner exchange to free the Carrera brothers, but O'Higgins made no move toward the release of his rival.⁸⁸ Instead of responding to Poinsett, O'Higgins displayed sympathy to the British by meeting with Captain Hillyar, a British Navel officer intent on supplanting Poinsett's influence in Chile. British opinion was very much against Poinsett, as implied by correspondence between British that accused Poinsett of abusing his influence over Carrera, "circulating poison... [and] contaminating the whole population on that side of the continent."⁸⁹

Captain Hillyar had come to Chile with arms, ships, and the Treaty of Lircay. The latter was a peace deal the British were attempting to broker between the Chilean patriots and the Spanish royalist forces.⁹⁰ The British laid equal odds on the struggle between colonialism and independence, cultivating friendly trade relationships with both the patriots and royalists. With Carrera imprisoned and Poinsett vulnerable, Hillyar asserted

⁸⁷ Pinto Lagarrigue, *La masonería*, 67-68.

⁸⁸ William M. Collier and Feliú Cruz, *La primera misión*, 182.

⁸⁹ Edward Tagart, *A Memoir of the Late Captain Peter Heywood, R.N.* (London: E. Wilson, 1832), 256-257.

⁹⁰ Clissold, *Bernardo O'Higgins*, 123-125.

British dominance over the United States in Chile, extending the battleground of the War of 1812 to the neutral Chilean waters.⁹¹ In March of 1814, Poinsett attempted to leave Chile on the American ship, the *Essex*. His friend Commodore David Porter, the commander of the ship, had returned to the port of Valparaiso, having visited Chile the previous year. As Porter, Poinsett, and the men of the *Essex* attempted to leave the port, Hillyar approached, commanding the British frigates the *Cherub* and the *Phoebe*. Hillyar ordered the frigates to prevent the *Essex* from sailing out of the port of Valparaiso. While Chilean troops remained passive onlookers, the British engaged the American frigate. The British ships fired on the *Essex* for three hours, after the American ship had become disabled due to an incident with its anchor.⁹² One third to one half of the men on the *Essex* were killed.⁹³ After the incident, Captain Hillyar arranged for the surviving crew members of the *Essex*, including Porter, to be transported to the United States on the *Essex Jr.*⁹⁴ In an insulting gesture, Hillyar would not allow Poinsett to accompany them.⁹⁵ On April 17, 1814, as he departed Chile, Porter wrote a letter to Poinsett, telling him that Chile was “uncontrollable,” and the British influence was, “more decisive everyday, in spite of all our efforts.” Poinsett had accomplished all that was possible, without a “superior force,” Porter assured him.⁹⁶ Porter went on to urge Poinsett to leave Chile as

⁹¹ Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Short History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 51.

⁹² William M. Collier and Feliú Cruz, *La primera misión*, 178-179.

⁹³ Pereira Salas, *La actuación de los oficiales navales*, 20.

⁹⁴ Neumann, “United States Aid to the Chilean Wars,” 209.

⁹⁵ Rippy, *Joel Poinsett*, 54.

⁹⁶ Poinsett Papers, Vol. 1, folder 16.

soon as possible. “You have done everything you can for your friends, nothing more can be expected, so now you should think of saving yourself.”⁹⁷ Poinsett fled Chile over the Andes with Juan José Carrera, eventually making his way back to Buenos Aires.⁹⁸

By the time Poinsett reached Charleston a year later, in May of 1815, Carrera had escaped the royalist prison, rejoined O’Higgins, lost to the royalists at the disaster of Rancagua, been replaced by O’Higgins as the recognized leader of the Chilean patriots, rejected by San Martín, and excluded from the dominant project of Spanish American Independence. Carrera lost power to his rival, O’Higgins, and with Carrera’s exclusion from authority, the influence of the United States in the Chile and Argentina declined, while the region’s economic, political and cultural connections with Great Britain grew even stronger.

Carrera lived in exile in Argentina after fleeing Chile and the Spanish restoration following the Battle of Rancagua. He then traveled to the United States to seek arms, ships, money and volunteers to enable him to retake Chile from royalist rule.⁹⁹ Carrera had counted on Poinsett’s support in his efforts, but found him somewhat distracted. Carrera did inspire enthusiasm among many merchants and ideologues in the United States, particularly in Baltimore, where trade relationships with Spanish America had been already established.¹⁰⁰ Carrera reunited with Porter, the Commodore of the sunken

⁹⁷ Poinsett Papers, Vol. 1, folder 16.

⁹⁸ Rippey, *Joel Poinsett*, 54-57.

⁹⁹ William M. Collier and Feliú Cruz, *La primera misión*, 208.

¹⁰⁰ Bornholdt, *Baltimore and Early Pan-Americanism*, 65-79.

Essex and also wrote editorials for the Baltimore *Patriot* and the New York *Columbian* that explained his claim to power in Chile.¹⁰¹ Carrera's cabal of supporters included Aaron Burr, Eli Whitney, Baptist Irving, John Skinner, DeWitt Clinton and others.¹⁰² Porter and Carrera solicited support from Baltimore investors and businessmen, and arranged to buy gunpowder from Charles Dupont.¹⁰³ Carrera eventually visited Poinsett in Charleston, where he was introduced to John Jacob Astor, and together they coordinated a purchase of armaments.¹⁰⁴ Carrera and his American supporters organized the "*Expedición chiquita*," a plot to invade and liberate Chile.¹⁰⁵ Carrera planned a "Congress of the Americas," with himself at the head of a loose coalition of independent Spanish American nations, protected by the United States.¹⁰⁶ However, Carrera and the arms and ships he had acquired in the United States were seized by O'Higgins, San Martín, and Bolívar, who briefly imprisoned Carrera and used the arms to liberate Chile and Peru.¹⁰⁷ Carrera was again marginalized, and spent the rest of his life seeking power and revenge. In 1818, after his brothers were executed by an associate of O'Higgins, Carrera wrote a proclamation "To the Free Citizens of Chile," which outlined his

¹⁰¹ Bornholdt, *Baltimore and Early Pan-Americanism*, 60-70.

¹⁰² Rojas Mery, *El general Carrera en el exilio*, 50.

¹⁰³ William M. Collier and Feliú Cruz, *La primera misión*, 208-215.

¹⁰⁴ William M. Collier and Feliú Cruz, *La primera misión*, 218.

¹⁰⁵ William M. Collier and Feliú Cruz, *La primera misión*, 218-220.

¹⁰⁶ William M. Collier and Feliú Cruz, *La primera misión*, 221-222.

¹⁰⁷ William M. Collier and Feliú Cruz, *La primera misión*, 253.

bitterness.¹⁰⁸ He condemned the “tyranny of the most detestable, iniquitous triumvirate,” which had “subjected [his brothers] to horrible prisons, dungeons, and chains; [they] had been abandoned in the middle of their own country...and perished like common criminals on April 8. What a dark and horrifying day in Chile.”¹⁰⁹ Carrera blamed the leadership of the *Lautaros* for ordering the execution, saying “Pueyrredón, San Martín, and O’Higgins—they are the barbarous assassins. The cowardly and effeminate [executioner] was no more than an agent for these sanguinary monsters who were vomited by hell for the condemnation of our American.”¹¹⁰ Carrera continued to malign the *Lautaros* in letters and newspaper publications until he was executed by followers of O’Higgins in Mendoza in 1821.¹¹¹

Following the fall of Carrera in Chile and the fiasco of the “*Expedición chiquita*,” Poinsett refused a second mission to South America in 1817. In an untitled letter from Charleston, Poinsett explained his decision. “I never will again leave America in a subaltern capacity or as an unauthorized agent of the Government; but if the U.S. resolve to espouse the cause of our Brethren of the South, and I should be thought worthy to contribute towards so glorious an end, there is no sacrifice I think too great. I am ready to

¹⁰⁸ José Miguel Carrera, “A los habitantes de los pueblo en Chile,” in *La Imprenta Federal del General José Miguel Carrera, 1818-1820*, ed. Guillermo Feliú Cruz (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1966), 66.

¹⁰⁹ Carrera, “A los habitantes de los pueblo en Chile,” 66.

¹¹⁰ Carrera, “A los habitantes de los pueblo en Chile,” 66.

¹¹¹ Lagarrigu, *La Masonaría*, 69-71.

promote the cause of Freedom by every exertion in my powers.”¹¹² He went on to compare Carrera with O’Higgins: “Our friend [Carrera]... possesses more intellect and more vigor of Character and I think is the only man I knew there capable of carrying the revolution to a successful termination, but his Republicanism was due to my ascendant over him and I found on that subject he was difficult to govern.”¹¹³ His mission in Chile had been unsuccessful. The leader he supported only learned the superficial lessons of republicanism, and ended up marginalized, exiled and executed. The United States’ rival, Great Britain, emerged victorious and dominant in the region. Poinsett fled Chile without the trade agreements and hemispheric influence he sought, but his experiences in South America prepared him for future endeavors. After he returned from Chile, Poinsett turned his attention to domestic matters, serving as a South Carolinian congressman until he was elected to the United States Congress in 1820.¹¹⁴ He would serve in Congress until he again undertook diplomatic service, this time in Mexico.

¹¹² Henry Bartholomew Cox, “Reasons for Joel R. Poinsett’s Refusal of a Second Mission to South America,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 43, no. 3 (1963): 405-408.

¹¹³ Cox, “Reasons for Joel R. Poinsett’s Refusal,” 405-408.

¹¹⁴ Rippey, *Joel Poinsett*, 70-76.

CHAPTER III

IMPERIAL REPUBLICANISM: JOEL POINSETT AND MEXICO

Poinsett's experiences in Chile taught him valuable lessons that he applied to his diplomatic work in Mexico during the 1820s. He did not forsake the symbols of republicanism, the flags and national holidays, or the tangible aspects of sovereignty, such as the press and constitutions, but his goals were different, as were the conditions he faced. U.S. priorities in Mexico were more explicitly territorial and expansionist. The United States wanted more than just preferential trade agreements with the new Mexican nation; the U.S. hoped to gain the Northern Mexican state of Texas. Although hemispheric republicanism had adherents in Mexico, Poinsett faced many skeptics who claimed that his rhetoric and ideology were merely distractions from United States' imperial intentions. Poinsett's developing strategy of imperial republicanism responded to the changing nature of his national self-interest and integrated the lessons he learned in Chile. He embraced the promotion of republican rights and guarantees, while also cultivating the economic and social connections that had worked in Great Britain's favor in Chile. Poinsett again competed with British diplomats who sought favorable trade agreements with the Mexican government. Poinsett chose his allies in Mexico carefully,

bolstering their political power and cooperation through overlapping networks of fraternal, political, business and land interests.

In 1821, after several punishing years of warfare, Mexico emerged as an independent nation recognized for the vast territory and extensive natural resources contained within its far-flung borders. Agustín Iturbide, a royalist officer that originally fought to maintain Spanish claims to Mexico, later changed allegiance, and joined Vicente Guerrero. Guerrero, the heroic general who had fought with José María Morelos a decade before, was known for his opposition to racial and social distinctions. Together they formed the Army of the Three Guarantees, and led the Mexican independence movement to victory.¹¹⁵ Soon after declaring independence, Iturbide seized power, and declared Mexico an Empire and himself Emperor. The Monroe administration sent Poinsett to Mexico in 1822 to compile information on the empire under Iturbide. His report included census data, economic information, military preparedness, and resource estimation.¹¹⁶ During his first stay in Mexico, Poinsett met with a minister to Emperor Iturbide, named Francisco Azcárate. Azcárate later reported that Poinsett had traced his finger across a map of Northern Mexico, indicating his desire to see his own nation's territory include all Texas, New Mexico, and Upper California, and parts of Lower California, Sonora, Coahuila, and Nuevo León.¹¹⁷ Poinsett's suggestion of the ideal U.S.-

¹¹⁵ The Three Guarantees were: independence from Spain, the protection of religion and Church privileges, and the equality or unity of Creoles and peninsulares. See Michael C. Meyer, William L. Sherman, and Susan Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 283-84.

¹¹⁶ Poinsett/Smith pg vii-vii, *Unpublished Report*.

¹¹⁷ William Manning, *Early Diplomatic Relations between the United States and Mexico* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1916), 289.

Mexican border was not officially sanctioned, but was reflective of the uncertain relationship between the Mexican Empire and the United States, and the ambition of U.S. political leaders.¹¹⁸

During his trip to Mexico, Poinsett also recorded his experiences in journal form, a travelogue published in 1823 under the title of *Notes on Mexico, Made in the Autumn of 1822*. Poinsett's book offered the reading public his reflections on Mexican politics, society, environment, culture, and recent history. *Notes on Mexico* included transcripts of Iturbide's speeches and congressional meetings, and reflected Poinsett's admiration for members of the opposition to Iturbide. On September 29, 1822, Poinsett remarked on Iturbide's recent arrest of oppositional members of congress: "[Iturbide] lately got rid of fourteen or fifteen of the most enlightened members of the congress by accusing them of being involved in a conspiracy against the government."¹¹⁹ Poinsett wrote, "I am ignorant whether they be guilty or not. If the character I have received of them be correct, they are probably guilty; for what noble and generous mind will endure patiently to see his country enslaved, and not make the effort to liberate it, and to destroy a usurper and tyrant!"¹²⁰ Poinsett advised Monroe against recognizing the Empire, writing in his official report that it would give Emperor Iturbide an advantage over the politicians who

¹¹⁸ The attempt to absorb Mexican territory occurred within a larger context of U.S. ambitions, including the Louisiana Purchase, and the acquisition of Florida.

¹¹⁹ Joel Poinsett, *Notes on Mexico, Made in the Autumn of 1822* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 71-72.

¹²⁰ Joel Poinsett, *Notes on Mexico*, 71-72.

supported republicanism.¹²¹ He communicated his impression that “the Mexican people were not more unanimous for the declaration of their independence, than they are for the establishment of a liberal, constitutional, and republican form of government.”¹²² He had become aware of the considerable economic and agricultural potential of the Mexican countryside and a republican-minded political faction in Mexico. Within the oppositional faction of idealistic and educated men, Poinsett met his most important collaborator in Mexico, Lorenzo de Zavala.¹²³

Lorenzo de Zavala was a dissident intellectual from Yucatán. He played an important role in the Mexican independence movement as a writer, journalist, and critic, and he later contributed to the efforts to replace Iturbide’s empire with a republican government. As a youth, Zavala expressed anti-monarchical views. In 1813, he edited *El arisarco universal*, or Universal Critique, a newspaper critical of the Spanish Crown.¹²⁴ Zavala was imprisoned for three years for his opposition to colonial rule. He was released in 1817 and elected as a member of congress under Emperor Iturbide in 1822. His condemnation of Mexico’s turn toward empire matched Poinsett’s. Zavala condemned Iturbide’s imprisonment of the oppositional congressmen that Poinsett had visited in confinement. Zavala eventually helped negotiate a compromise between congress and the

¹²¹ Joel Poinsett, *The Present State of Mexico: A Previously Unpublished Confidential Report of the Political Condition of Mexico in 1822, Prepared for the U.S. Secretary of State* (Salisbury, NC: Documentary Publications, 1822), 17.

¹²² Joel Poinsett, *The Present State of Mexico*, 17.

¹²³ Margaret Swett Henson, *Lorenzo de Zavala: The Pragmatic Idealist* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1996), 28.

¹²⁴ Henson, *Lorenzo de Zavala*, 13.

Emperor.¹²⁵ Zavala outlasted Iturbide, who abdicated his throne in 1823 in the face of overwhelming opposition. Zavala gained power in the Mexican Congress, and along with other educated and liberal Creoles, shaped pivotal governmental policies on colonization, policies that allowed almost unchecked settlement potential in Texas.¹²⁶ In 1824, Zavala was the “principal architect” of the Mexican constitution, and opposed a centralized form of government, arguing that giving more power to state governments would give more power to the Mexican people.¹²⁷ Zavala continued his involvement with newspaper publication, editing the *Aguila Mexicana* in 1823 and the *Correo de la Federación* in 1826, using these platforms to call for democratic reforms that extended political liberties to all Mexicans.¹²⁸ Zavala and the other Mexican dissidents to Iturbide’s imperial project impressed Poinsett. Under the conditions of Iturbide’s rule, Poinsett did not recommend that President Monroe formally recognize the Empire of Mexico.

Poinsett returned to the United States with no indication that Emperor Iturbide sympathized with the expansionist ambitions of the U.S., but he had established an understanding of the political tension and economic potential in Mexico. Contrary to Poinsett’s recommendations, President Monroe recognized the legitimacy of Iturbide’s government that same year.¹²⁹ Once forced from power in 1823, Iturbide was exiled by

¹²⁵ Henson, *Lorenzo de Zavala*, 21.

¹²⁶ Henson, *Lorenzo de Zavala*, 21.

¹²⁷ John-Michael Rivera, “‘A Complete Though Bloody Victory’: Lorenzo de Zavala and the Transnational Paradoxes of National Sovereignty,” *American Literary History* 18, no. 3 (2006): 431-432.

¹²⁸ Henson, *Lorenzo de Zavala*, 40-42.

¹²⁹ Rippy, *Joel Poinsett*, 104.

members of a political coalition called the *Escoceses*.¹³⁰ The powerful, conservative group was comprised of priests, politicians and generals who not only led the opposition to Iturbide, but also belonged to the Scotch Rite Masonic Lodge. The fraternal association coalesced into a political party known as The Scotch, or *Escoceses*. Originally the locations of dissent, by 1825 the lodges were now the sites of the party in power. Once on power, the *Escoceses* lacked an overtly republican agenda. Instead, the government led by President Guadalupe Victoria was sympathetic to European monarchical influences, and supported the privileged landed elite, the authority of the Catholic Church, and a centrist form of government.¹³¹

In 1825, Poinsett was sent to back to Mexico, this time in the official capacity of United States Special Envoy and Minister Plenipotentiary, or ambassador. As he had in Chile, he presented himself as a representative of republican ideology and policy, while he pursued imperial goals. Again he was instructed to foster American political values and negotiate trade agreements with a young republic. Superficially, the directions he was given resembled his goals in South America, a decade or so before. Henry Clay, the Secretary of State, told Poinsett:

The mission on which the President wishes you, with all practicable dispatch, to depart, would, at any time, be highly important, but possesses, at this moment, a peculiar interest...You are the first minister actually leaving the United States, to reside near a Sovereign Power established and exerted on this continent, whose territories are

¹³⁰ Stanley C. Green, *The Mexican Republic, the First Decade, 1823-1832* (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987), 35-41.

¹³¹ Richard Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens: Politics and the Masses in Mexico City from Colony to Republic* (Wilmington, DE: The Scholarly Resources Press, 2001), 80.

coterminous with our own...But what gives, with the President, to your Mission, peculiar importance, at this time is that it has, for the first its principle object, to lay, for the first time, the foundations of an intercourse of amity commerce, navigation and neighborhood, which may exert a powerful influence, for a long period upon the prosperity of both States.¹³²

However, Poinsett was given another assignment that was explicitly territorial—the renegotiation of the border between Mexico and the United States and the purchase of the Mexican state of Texas. Clay warned Poinsett of the possible implications of border renegotiation, saying that “some difficulties may possibly hereafter arise between the two countries from the line thus agreed upon...the President wishes you to sound [the Mexican government] on that subject, and to avail yourself of a favorable disposition, if you should find it, to effect that object.”¹³³ Clay went on to suggest borders based on different geographical features, other than the Sabine River that had served to demarcate the line between Mexico and the United States: “The line of the Sabine approaches our great western mart nearer than could be wished.”¹³⁴

Poinsett set about bolstering his connections to powerful Mexican statesmen with inclinations toward pursuing a republican form of government in Mexico, and closer ties with the United States. His closest friend and collaborator was Zavala, one of the liberal,

¹³²Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 229.

¹³³ Clay to Poinsett, March 25, 1825, *American State Papers*, Foreign Relations, Vol. 6, 580.

¹³⁴ Clay to Poinsett, March 25, 1825, *American State Papers*, Foreign Relations, Vol. 6, 580; Poinsett would formally offer the Mexican government 1million dollars in 1827. See John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams: Comprising Portions of His Diary, 1795-1848* (New York: J. B. Lippincott & Co. 1877), 239.

politically active Mexicans whom Poinsett had met in 1822.¹³⁵ Zavala had spent the years since Poinsett's 1822 departure from Mexico integrating actual elements of republicanism into Mexican society. Like Poinsett, Zavala understood the importance of a free press, had been directly involved in several newspaper publications, and was well-read in the works of republican philosophers like Locke, Jefferson and Rousseau.¹³⁶ Zavala had worked with discretion as the *Escoceses* consolidated their power, and avoided alienating the party, or abandoning his principles. Zavala's republican credentials were further bolstered by his record of supporting public education, opposing slavery, and encouraging robust public debate to protect the integrity and transparency of government.¹³⁷ Through their public friendship and collaboration, Poinsett attached his own interests to Zavala's reputation as a progressive intellectual heavy-weight committed to republican principles.

Poinsett had learned that concrete products of republican philosophy, like freedom of the press and constitutional guarantees, while essential, were not sufficient to fulfill his instructions. Particularly worrisome to Poinsett was the fact that Great Britain had already established friendly relations with the Victoria government. Poinsett engaged in a rivalry with the British Charges, George Canning and Henry Ward. Poinsett described how this rivalry centered on the desire for preferential trade agreements with the Mexican government, in a letter to Rufus King, U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain,

¹³⁵ Henson, *Lorenzo de Zavala*, 28.

¹³⁶ Rivera, "A Complete Though Bloody Victory," 430-432.

¹³⁷ Rivera, "A Complete Though Bloody Victory," 432.

dated October 10, 1825, saying that the relationship between Mexico and Great Britain was interfering with his mission. “The difficulties I had encountered in my negotiations with this government,” Poinsett wrote, “all arose out of their pre-existing (trade) treaty with Great Britain.”¹³⁸ Poinsett went on to say that he had never confused Great Britain with “the powers of Europe that are hostile to the independence and liberties of these countries,” but instead had “considered her interests identified with ours.”¹³⁹ Poinsett further explained his concern that the rivalry between himself and the British diplomats signified Great Britain’s indifference, or even hostility to, republican and free-trade ideology. “I...came here disposed to make common cause with her envoy for the extension of liberal principles of trade for the mutual protection of our industry and capital,” Poinsett wrote, “but if Great Britain seeks to divide these countries, or destroy the principles of republican government which are taking root in these countries...her ministers must not complain if we exert all our influence to counteract their views.”¹⁴⁰ For Poinsett, Freemasonry provided the venue he sought. In order to understand how the American ambassador was able to establish himself in Mexico and form lasting alliances with Mexican leaders, this chapter will now examine the Masonic and political networks of which Poinsett was a part.

Within months of arriving in Mexico City, Poinsett hosted a meeting in his home, and invited Zavala and several of his political allies. General Vicente Guerrero, the

¹³⁸ William Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States Concerning the Independence of the Latin-American Nations, Vol. III* (Oxford: University Press, 1925), 1634

¹³⁹ Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 1634.

¹⁴⁰ Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 1634.

widely popular hero of the independence wars also attended, as did like-minded priests and politicians. Poinsett requested a charter from the South Carolinian Master Lodge, and formally organized the York Rite Lodge, or *Yorkinos* in Mexico City.¹⁴¹ In a letter to Rufus King on October 14, 1825, Poinsett described his role in the organization of the *Yorkinos* and his hopes that the lodge would foster liberal governmental policies. “With a view to counteract the fanatical party in this city (Mexico), and, if possible, to diffuse more liberal principles among those who must govern this country,” Poinsett wrote, “I encouraged and assisted a number of respectable persons, men of high rank and consideration, to form a grand lodge of ancient Masons.”¹⁴²

The *Yorkino* lodges multiplied rapidly. Zavala reported that 80 *Yorkino* Lodges opened in Mexico City in three months, and other reports indicate the presence of *Yorkino* lodges in every state in Mexico by the end of the decade.¹⁴³ Poinsett’s assistant, Edward Tayloe, described the rise of the *Yorkinos* in a letter to his brother on November 29, 1825, crediting Poinsett with assisting a number of leading Mexican statesmen to start a party that would advance the nation. “Freemasonry... flourishes greatly (in the capital), and numbers among members the first men of the country and several influential priests... No greater proof can be adduced of the progressing improvement of the country.

¹⁴¹ Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens*, 76-77.

¹⁴² United States, *Despatches from United States Ministers to Mexico, 1823-1906* (Washington: National Archives and Records Service, 1955), roll 2.

¹⁴³ Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens*, 77.

And to this...our minister has given strong aid.”¹⁴⁴ His expectation that *Yorkino* institutions would sow the seeds of political improvement and liberal progress seemed well founded. As the *Yorkinos* gained political power, they increased popular involvement in politics, pursued a federalist form of government modeled after the United States, and worked to minimize the economic and political clout of the Catholic Church and members of the Spanish-born elite.¹⁴⁵ Ward described the *Yorkinos* to Charles Vaughan, the British diplomat in Washington D.C. very differently than Tayloe: “You can have no idea, my dear Vaughan, of the sort of men with whom the *Yorkinos* have sought to fill their ranks: half-pay officers, clerks in public offices, petty advocates, clergymen who are reduced to seek, by an affectation of liberal views, that promotion which their characters prevented them from obtaining before. Such are the elements of which the New York lodges are composed.”¹⁴⁶

The *Yorkinos* were a lodge in form, but a political party in function, and its founding members were important national figures, senators, generals, and priests who used their lodges as effective political organizations. The Masonic language of brotherhood and tolerance brought together a coalition of members, ardent republicans, pro-United States politicians, and even disgruntled former Iturbidists. The secrecy of the lodges encouraged open debate and oppositional views. The power of the *Escoceses* also indicated that political masonry was an avenue to political authority, a fact that may have

¹⁴⁴ Edward Tayloe, *Mexico, 1825-1828: The Journal and Correspondence* (Chapel Hill, NC: The North Carolina Press, 1959), 89.

¹⁴⁵ Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens*, 76.

¹⁴⁶ Vaughan, *The Papers of Sir Charles Vaughan*, 326.

enabled an alliance between men with a variety of viewpoints. The ideology of masonry, focusing on fraternal loyalties, equality among members, and adherence to Masonic code supported the *Yorkino* coalition. Masonic Lodges were often the locations of connection and exchange, providing a safe venue for dangerous ideas, a neutral meeting-ground for educated men, and a stable organizational structure that gave freemasons a sound basis for a political organization. Tolerant of all monotheistic religions, committed to free thought, and deeply influenced by Enlightenment theories of natural rights and constitutionalism, in many ways masonry manifested republicanism.¹⁴⁷ Yet the two Masonic associations in Mexico were bitter rivals.

The animosity between the lodges was a public affair, as each lodge (or political party) had its own newspaper. The *Escoceses* had been publishing a newspaper, *El Sol*, since 1821.¹⁴⁸ In 1826, the *Yorkinos* began publishing a rival newspaper edited by Zavala, *El Aguila Mexicana*. The two parties used the periodicals to challenge and attack one another.¹⁴⁹ The *Escoceses* and the *Yorkinos* engaged in partisanship and propaganda as the 1826 Congressional elections neared, and *El Sol* and *El Aguila* each sought to convince their readers of their respective party's legitimacy. *El Sol* linked *Yorkinos* to Jacobins and "léperos," or members of Mexico's urban lower classes, and accused them

¹⁴⁷ Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (New York: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 20-27.

¹⁴⁸ Stanley C. Green, *The Mexican Republic, the First Decade, 1823-1832* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987), 94.

¹⁴⁹ Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens*, 80

of violence and fraud.¹⁵⁰ In so doing, the paper roused suspicions of a secretive group of men manipulating the votes of Mexico City's urban lower classes, and evoked images of the terror that followed the French Revolution. This fit in with *Escoceses'* accusations that Zavala was escorting vagrants to polling places for the 1826 elections.¹⁵¹ This charge was expressed on one occasion through a fanciful dialogue, published in *El Sol*, between a merchant and a barber. The merchant described how prominent *Yorkinos* gave poor men, or *léperos*, money to vote.¹⁵² The potential for *Yorkinos* to both unleash and control the new political power of Mexico's masses unnerved their opponents.

El Aguila, under Zavala's direction, sought to galvanize both nationalism and republicanism, urging the Mexican government to adhere to the constitution and pursue "liberty for the republic." The newspaper supported the *Yorkino* proposition that the nation's first commemoration of Mexican independence should occur on the night of September 15, instead of the following day, as the Victoria government planned.¹⁵³ The significance of the date and format of the nationalistic celebration was not lost on the editors of the paper, or the political parties they represented. Symbols of nationalism and the details that governed them (the dates and manners in which national memory was commemorated) were valuable and necessary tools for building legitimate claims to political authority. The *Yorkinos*, and their newspaper *El Aguila*, publicly chastised the

¹⁵⁰ *El Sol*, No. 1171, August 28, 1826.

¹⁵¹ Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens*, 81.

¹⁵² *El Sol*, No. 1171, August 28, 1826.

¹⁵³ Warren, *Citizens and Vagrants*, 77.

Escoceses and *El Sol* over the timing and format of the nationalist event. They demanded that the celebration last through the night, and be accessible and inviting to all classes of Mexicans. The *Yorkinos* prevailed and the celebration went as they had recommended.¹⁵⁴ Poinsett and Tayloe attended the celebration of Mexican independence, and Tayloe wrote a letter to his parents describing the stirring fireworks display that the *Yorkinos* had arranged, and the “allegorical paintings of independence,” and the “patriotic songs” that had stirred the crowd.¹⁵⁵

Due to the surge in lower-class political involvement, at least thirty thousand votes were cast in the 1826 Congressional election, twenty-three times more than the number of votes cast in the previous presidential election.¹⁵⁶ The election was a significant victory for the *Yorkinos*, and they gained a majority in the legislature. Tayloe described the election in a letter to his brother, with an air of naiveté. “August 20, 1826, this is election day. The contest is spirited between several parties. Strange as it may appear, two are distinguished by masonic names—*Yorkinos* and *Escoceses*,” Tayloe wrote, “The Yorks are the federalists, who are liberals, and friends to the existing federal constitution. This party is gaining ascendancy throughout the republic. Their opponents—the Scotch—are composed of Centralists, Bourbonists, and Monarchists.”¹⁵⁷ The political

¹⁵⁴ Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens*, 77-78.

¹⁵⁵ Tayloe, *Mexico, 1825-1828*, 80.

¹⁵⁶ Warren, *Citizens and Vagrants*, 80.

¹⁵⁷ Tayloe, *Mexico, 1825-1826*, 129.

party that was first organized in Poinsett's home had soon become ascendant advocates of the United States' model of federalist, anti-monarchical republicanism.

The *Yorkinos*' political ascendancy rested on greatly expanded suffrage and high voter turn-out in the Mexico City metropolis. Unleashed by independence, popular involvement in politics was becoming a powerful social force and a vehicle for national identity; the *Yorkinos* effectively used their Masonic network to draw in members. Although the *Yorkino* lodge was an exclusive institution with prohibitively high dues, it became known as the "people's party," for newly politicized, non-elite, groups.¹⁵⁸ This ability to exist as both an exclusive organization and a beacon of equality was a particular strength of freemasonry that served the *Yorkinos* well, especially as the election neared and the voting power of lower-class Mexicans grew exponentially.

With control of the Mexican legislature, the *Yorkinos* endeavored to increase popular support and political power in preparation for the 1828 presidential election. Their ability to act as a conduit for republican ideology and liberal progress was compromised by their rivalry with the *Escoceses*, the growing suspicion in Mexico towards the secrecy of freemasonry, and the intentions of the United States of America. *Yorkinos* courted Mexican voters with an effective mixture of nativism and popular initiatives.¹⁵⁹ One of the *Yorkinos*' most controversial acts of legislation was the first expulsion of native born Spaniards, or *peninsulares*, from Mexico.¹⁶⁰ By targeting the

¹⁵⁸ Green, *The Mexican Republic*, 94.

¹⁵⁹ Harold Dana Sims, *The Expulsion of Mexico's Spaniards, 1821-1836* (Pittsburgh: The Pittsburgh University Press, 1990), 27.

¹⁶⁰ Sims, *The Expulsion of Mexico's Spaniards*, 27-28.

peninsulares, the *Yorkinos* capitalized on widespread resentment of the continued wealth and influence of the elite group, and also emphasized the *Escoceses*' affiliation with the Spaniards.

In 1827, the inter-masonic rivalry between the *Yorkinos* and the *Escoceses* became more tangible and immediate with the discovery of the conspiracy of *Escocés* priest, Father Joaquín Arenas.¹⁶¹ Arenas plotted with Spanish émigrés to prepare for the Spanish re-invasion of the nation and the simultaneous attacks on the cities of: Mexico, Puebla, Tehuantepec, Acapulco, Durango Cuernavaca, and Tampico.¹⁶² A new, more radical *Yorkino* newspaper, *El Correo de la Federación* incited anti-Spanish sentiment and invasion fears by reporting extensively on the failed conspiracy.¹⁶³ Now on the defensive in the contest for public approval, *El Sol* implicated Poinsett in the scandal, reporting rumors that a letter he had written was found among Arenas' belongings.¹⁶⁴ This rumor was never substantiated, but whether or not Poinsett arranged the failed conspiracy in order to discredit the *Escoceses*, *El Sol's* accusation illustrates the complexity of the situation in which he had emerged himself, and the way his political enemies perceived his involvement in Mexican factionalism.

The *Yorkinos* benefited from the conspiracy plot. As the presidential election approached, the *Escoceses* became increasingly associated with the threat of the Spanish

¹⁶¹ Jorge Fernando Iturribarría, "La conspiración del Padre Arenas," *Humanitas* 1, no. 1 (1960): 517-523.

¹⁶² Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens*, 82.

¹⁶³ *El Correo de la Federación*, June 2-6, 1827.

¹⁶⁴ *El Sol*, January 23, 1827.

designs on the nation and the duplicity of pro-monarchical politicians. However, the entire affair also raised suspicions of all secret societies in Mexico and their capacity for conspiracy and treason. Poinsett was regarded by many Mexicans as an imperial interloper with designs on Mexico's northern territory, and came under attack for his role in organizing the York lodge and his influence on prominent *Yorkinos*.¹⁶⁵ Zavala, Poinsett's closest Mexican associate, published a defense of Poinsett's activities and republican credentials, describing Poinsett's anti-monarchical beliefs and decrying the aristocratic and anti-republican positions of his critics. Zavala provided his readers with a brief description of Poinsett's "defense of liberty" in Chile, and included letters Poinsett had exchanged with his revolutionary associates there.¹⁶⁶

Conflicts between the two parties intensified as the 1828 presidential election neared.¹⁶⁷ The *Yorkino* candidate Vicente Guerrero was a widely celebrated General of the Wars of Independence, popular with the poor and rumored to be of part indigenous and part African ancestry.¹⁶⁸ He opposed monarchy, advocated racial equality, social leveling, and republican government.¹⁶⁹ Tayloe described Guerrero in a letter to his brother in July 1827, predicting the hero and leader of the *Yorkino* party would be

¹⁶⁵ Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens*, 82.

¹⁶⁶ Lorenzo de Zavala, *Manifiesto de los principios políticos del Escmo. Sr. D.J.R. Poinsett* (Mexico City: Impr. del Correo, 1828), 2-3.

¹⁶⁷ Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens*, 87.

¹⁶⁸ Theodore G. Vincent, *Vicente Guerrero, Mexico's First Black Indian President* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2001), 8-12.

¹⁶⁹ Theodore G. Vincent, "The Contributions of Mexico's First Black Indian President, Vicente Guerrero," *The Journal of Negro History* 86, 2 (Spring, 2001): 148-159.

Mexico's next president. "He was from the first most ardent in the cause of Mexican liberty...He is a man of strong natural powers," wrote Tayloe, "He received very little education, and speaks the language of the Indians...he is said to have some African blood."¹⁷⁰ Guerrero's racial heritage and his ties to indigenous communities inspired hope and loyalty in many Mexicans. If liberty and virtue were the true measure of a republican, many believed Guerrero offered both to the nation.¹⁷¹ Not only had he fought the authority of the Spanish monarchy, but he continued to identify his own interests with the greater good of the Mexican people.

Surprisingly, Guerrero's opponent, Manuel Gómez Pedraza, won the August 1828 presidential election. The results of the election were contested and violent upheavals and organized uprisings undermined his government. Antonio López de Santa Anna started an armed uprising to protest the results of the election.¹⁷² Widespread suspicion of fraud galvanized Guerrero's lower-class supporters. Santa Anna led troops to the capital to support Guerrero, and Guerrero's urban followers mobilized, demanding their *Yorkino* candidate take office.¹⁷³ After days of uprising and protest, the wealthy Spanish merchants of the Parian marketplace were financially devastated.¹⁷⁴ Poinsett supported

¹⁷⁰ Tayloe, *Mexico, 1825-1828*, 158-159.

¹⁷¹ Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens*, 80-81; 87.

¹⁷² Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens*, 89.

¹⁷³ Vincent, *Vicente Guerrero*, 173.

¹⁷⁴ Silvia Arrom, "Popular Politics in Mexico City: The Parian Riot, 1828," *Hispanic American Review* 68, no. 2 (May, 1988): 257-262. In her analysis of the political nature of the riots, historian Sylvia Arrom reveals the links between the violence of the riots to the rhetoric published in the *Yorkino* newspaper, *El Correo de la Federación*, that decried the wealth and corruption of the *parianistas*, and the rioters' loyalty to Guerrero and the *Yorkino* party.

Guerrero's claim to the executive position, but distanced himself from the violent nature of Mexico's change in government. Poinsett's involvement in the riot was later described by Charlestonian admirers in an 1833 publication, focusing on his heroic resolve in the face of chaos:

Mr. Poinsett, with his Secretary of Legation, Mr. John Mason, Jr., threw themselves into an open balcony which overlooked the crowd, and unfurling the STAR-SPANGLED BANNER, demanded that all persons in his house should be protected while the flag of his country waved over them. The scene changed as by enchantment; and the very men who were about to make the attack, cheered the Standard of our Union, and placed sentinels to guard it from outrage. The history of the world presents no parallel to such a scene: and its moral beauty and grandeur should be equally preserved on the page of the historian and the canvass of the painter.¹⁷⁵

El Sol implicated Zavala and Poinsett in the uprising, accusing them of orchestrating the riots and unrest in order to steal the presidency for Guerrero and the *Yorkino* party.¹⁷⁶ A British pamphlet published after Guerrero assumed the presidency accused Poinsett and Zavala of manipulating Mexican politics.¹⁷⁷ The unnamed author (perhaps Ward) accused Poinsett of being “interested in keeping Mexico in confusion,” and able, through his “mild and polished manners... information and wit... amiable character and the republicanism he displays” to covertly manipulate Mexican politics and

¹⁷⁵ Committee for a National Painting, “Solicitation by William Drayton, Daniel E. Huger, Benjamin F. Pepoon” (Charleston: Ephemera Collection, 1833), Portfolio 46, Folder 46.

¹⁷⁶ Green, *The Mexican Republic*, 162.

¹⁷⁷ Joel Poinsett, *Mexico and Mr. Poinsett: A Reply to a British Pamphlet* (Philadelphia: s.n., 1829), 9.

sabotage the young nation.¹⁷⁸ In a response to the pamphlet, Poinsett defended Zavala against charges that he organized the coup, calling him “the earliest friend” that he had in Mexico, and objecting to the “cruel and unjust persecution” to which he was subjected.¹⁷⁹ Poinsett’s British critics saw his involvement with Mexican politics through freemasonry and his alliance with Zavala as disruptive and unethical. The British author recognized that the trappings of republicanism gave Poinsett an air of legitimacy in his interactions with his Mexican associates, but also veiled an imperial agenda.

Suspicion of American aggression and distrust of Poinsett grew within Mexico, particularly in the state of Veracruz, a stronghold of the *Escoceses*. *El Sol* published editorials and pamphlets claiming that Poinsett used masonic networks to pursue imperial intentions. Ramón Gamboa, an *Escocés* from Veracruz, published a scathing review of Poinsett’s activities on August 3, 1829, accusing him of political masonry and national self-interest. Gamboa called Poinsett the “author of all that was evil,” and charged Poinsett with using his influence on the *Yorkinos* in the government to destabilize Mexico and turn the republic into a “political labyrinth” in order to take Texas for the United States.¹⁸⁰ This criticism exemplified growing *escocés* condemnation of Poinsett’s

¹⁷⁸ Poinsett, *Mexico and Mr. Poinsett*, 9.

¹⁷⁹ Poinsett, *Mexico and Mr. Poinsett*, 9.

¹⁸⁰ Gamboa, *Representación del ciudadano síndico*, 8.

imperial designs on Mexico's northern state and the danger political masonry posed to Mexico's national sovereignty.¹⁸¹

Yorkino policies in the late 1820s fueled suspicions that the political organization was not only problematic because it was based on a secretive and exclusive fraternal organization, but also because the *Yorkinos* awarded many of their fellows with *empresario* grants that gave them rights to wide swathes of the states of Texas and Coahuila.¹⁸² The permissive colonization policy that Zavala had crafted in 1823 allowed *Yorkinos* to seek and receive large land grants. The land grant-holders or *Empresarios*, only achieved ownership of the parcels of land they controlled if they were successfully settled by colonists willing to assimilate to Mexican culture. Most settlers in Texas came from the United States, where land companies advertised the agricultural and economic possibilities in the Mexican state.¹⁸³ A letter from Henry Ward, the British diplomat in Mexico, to Vaughan, the British diplomat in Washington D.C., noted the disproportionate settlement of Anglo-Americans settling in Texas. "With regard to the encroachment in Texas," Vaughan wrote to Ward in February of 1826, "It was stated more that 20,000 persons have left the western states of (the United States) for the province of Texas. It

¹⁸¹ The growing condemnation over Poinsett's influence and designs on Texas was formally expressed in June of 1827 in the *Vera Cruz Manifesto*, a pamphlet authored by prominent *Escoceses* who were demanding Poinsett's expulsion. See Rippy, *Joel Poinsett*, 123-124.

¹⁸² Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2005), 69. *Escoceses* also held *Empresario* grants, but not in the number that *Yorkinos* and Anglo-Americans did.

¹⁸³ Elgin Williams, *The Animating Pursuits of Speculation: Land Traffic in the Annexation of Texas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), 39; Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company, *Address to the Readers of the Documents Relating to the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company, Trust Deed* (New York: Hopkins and Son, 1831), 1-11.

does not seem, however that they have amalgamated well with the old Spanish settlers, as it is their custom, whenever a crime is to be punished, or dispute to be settled, to send for a judge [from the United States].”¹⁸⁴

Zavala and other founding and prominent members of the lodge obtained land grants after the *Yorkinos* took office in 1826.¹⁸⁵ Zavala’s grant was located in east Texas, and included the land between the Sabine and Trinity rivers, where Cherokee Indians had established a community when the Spanish had allowed them to settle before Mexican independence.¹⁸⁶ The Cherokee community had been allowed to stay in Texas under the Constitution of 1824. In 1825, Ward encouraged President Victoria to grant land ownership to the Cherokee. Ward had concerns about the flood of immigrants into Texas from the United States, and recommended that Victoria use a large Cherokee settlement in the north as a buffer against U.S. influx. Ward advised Victoria to give the Cherokee chief, John Deerhunter, a land grant in exchange for settling 30,000 Cherokees in the area. Poinsett, “who apparently had the ear of those in power,” discouraged the Congress from granting the Cherokee permanent land ownership.¹⁸⁷ While the Cherokee never attained land ownership in Texas, Zavala’s land claim remained valid. Poinsett’s own feelings about the Texas region were implied in an encoded dispatch he sent to Henry

¹⁸⁴ Vaughan, *The Papers of Sir Charles Vaughan*, 325.

¹⁸⁵ The connections between Masonic membership and Texas land grants were pervasive, and “more than half of all land grants in Mexican Texas were awarded to Anglo-American, Mexican, and Native American Masons, while the proportions of Masons within the population of Texas at large was less than ten percent.” See Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 68.

¹⁸⁶ Dianna Everett, *The Texas Cherokee: A People between Two Fires, 1819-1940* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 20

¹⁸⁷ Everett, *The Texas Cherokee*, 41.

Clay at the beginning of his diplomatic service: “We ought to have on the frontier a hardy race of white settlers,” he wrote of the borderlands.¹⁸⁸ *Yorkino* colonization policies in Texas enabled this goal, in part by denying land ownership to the Cherokees, and instead encouraging Anglo-Saxon immigration.¹⁸⁹

Moreover, the *Yorkino*’s political ideology of federalism made the Mexican hinterlands vulnerable to isolation and secession, by weakening their bonds to the metropolitan center. Federalism decentralized power and gave states like Texas and Coahuila greater autonomy.¹⁹⁰ Over the course of the late 1820s, ties between Texans and Mexico City loosened. The state government of Texas had already established a policy that encouraged settlement, in the hopes that self-reliant and entrepreneurial Texans would develop the region for Mexico. Instead, the primarily Anglo-American settlers retained cultural and economic ties to the United States. As the *Yorkinos* became more popular their federalist policies were implemented, and *Yorkinos* in power in the Texan state legislature entered into business arrangements preferential to the United States. An *escocés* clergyman, Ramos Arizpe traveling in Texas in 1828 described the situation:

I visited the capital of the state of Coahuila and Texas and was dismayed to learn that due to the inconceivable stupidity of three successive *yorkino* legislatures, the exclusive rights to navigate the Rio Grand on a steamboat were given to a company promoted by Anglo-Americans and supported by capitalists of their republic... This

¹⁸⁸ United States, *Despatches from United States Ministers to Mexico*, roll 3.

¹⁸⁹ Andrés Reséndez, “Masonic Connections, Pecuniary Interests, and Institutional Development along Mexico’s Far North,” *The Divine Charter: Constitutionalism and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Mexico*, ed. Jaime E. Rodríguez (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2005), 111.

¹⁹⁰ Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 64.

disastrous policy in effect puts the line that North Americans have long coveted as the limit of their own territory in the hands of individuals and capitalists from the United State.¹⁹¹

Dissatisfaction with *Yorkino* settlement policies added to the growing chorus denouncing their political power and the presidency of their leader, Vicente Guerrero. Noted historian Andrés Reséndez has observed that “the predominance of Anglo-American *Empresarios* in Texas constituted one of the main rifts between the *Escoceses* and the *Yorkinos*.”¹⁹²

Guerrero’s presidency was brief. During his time in control of the executive branch, he abolished slavery in Mexico, codifying the commitment to social leveling he had shared with Morelos. In a speech in April, 1829, Guerrero promised to work to “procure the widest possible benefits and apply them from the palace of the rich to the wooden shack of the humble laborer.”¹⁹³ He went on to assert “if one can succeed in spreading the guarantees of the individual, if the equity before the law destroys the effects of power and gold, if the highest title between us is citizen, if the rewards we bestow are exclusively for talent and virtue, we have a republic, and she will be conserved by the universal suffrage of a people sold, free, and happy.”¹⁹⁴ His presidency left an ambiguous legacy, however, stigmatized by his *coup de etat*, Poinsett’s influence, and the broken state of the Mexican treasury.¹⁹⁵ The exaggerated reports of bloodshed at

¹⁹¹ Quoted by Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 67-68.

¹⁹² Reséndez, “Masonic Connections,” 114.

¹⁹³ *El Correo*, April 4, 1829; Vincent, *Vicente Guerrero*, 179.

¹⁹⁴ *El Correo*, April 4, 1829; Vincent, *Vicente Guerrero*, 179.

¹⁹⁵ Green, *The Mexican Republic*, 167-174.

the Parian riots and the *Acordada* Revolt created a backlash against expanded suffrage.¹⁹⁶ The *Yorkinos* lost power quickly, public opinion turned against masonic involvement in Mexican politics, and Poinsett's influence on Guerrero became increasingly problematic.¹⁹⁷ Guerrero requested Poinsett's recall from Mexico late in 1829, and Poinsett left the country soon after Christmas.¹⁹⁸ Guerrero was removed from power the next year, and later captured and executed by agents of the subsequent, conservative, centrist regime led by Anastasio Bustamante.¹⁹⁹

Unlike Guerrero, Zavala withstood the *Yorkinos*' fall from power. Zavala left Mexico for the United States in 1830, not long after Poinsett returned home.²⁰⁰ Also in 1830, Zavala went into the land speculation business with David Burnet and a wealthy German investor named Joseph Vehlein, the two holders of land grants adjacent to Zavala's own in Texas. Together with Northern investors, they formed The Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company.²⁰¹ In the book he wrote that year, *Journey to the United States of North America*, Zavala described his role in the formation of the land company. "One of the first things that I did when I arrived in New York was to bring about the formation of a company...relative to colonizing the lands that lie between the Sabine

¹⁹⁶ Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens*, 91.

¹⁹⁷ Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens*, 93.

¹⁹⁸ Rippy, *Joel Poinsett*, 128.

¹⁹⁹ Vincent, *Vicente Guerrero*, 204-205.

²⁰⁰ Lorenzo de Zavala, *Journey to the United States of North America* (Austin: Shoal Creek Publishers, Inc., 1982), 8.

²⁰¹ Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company, *Address to the Readers of the Documents*, 1-11.

River, Galveston Bay, the town of Nacogdoches and the sea,” wrote Zavala, “My enemies in Mexico had many disagreeable remarks to make considering this action...they said that I had sold a part of Texas to the United States.”²⁰² Zavala entered into a contract with Poinsett, giving Poinsett the authority to seek investors of the land company.²⁰³ Zavala and his *Empresario* partners awarded control of a parcel of the Galveston Bay and Land Company’s acreage to Poinsett. Poinsett’s stake in the land speculation company was bordered by the Sabine and San Jacinto rivers.²⁰⁴

On April 6, 1830, following a report from General Mier y Terán’s Boundary Commission, the Mexican government passed a law banning further Anglo-American immigration into Texas.²⁰⁵ The rift between centrists and federalists over the “Texas question” and the suspicions of Anglo-American land speculation led to further political unrest.²⁰⁶ During the early 1830s, federalist and centralist governments in Mexico replaced one another in quick succession.²⁰⁷ Northern states, particularly Texas, viewed the unstable central government with suspicion. In 1834, José Antonio Vázquez, the representative of Monclova, told his community that “The City of Mexico, that

²⁰² Zavala, *Journey to the United States*, 95-96.

²⁰³ Henson, *Lorenzo de Zavala*, 42-46.

²⁰⁴ Zavala, *Journey to the United States*, 119; Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company and Joel Poinsett, *J.R Poinsett- Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company Certificate, 1830 Oct. 16* (Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Historical Society Special Collections & Archives).

²⁰⁵ Mier y Terán reported an alarming rate of Anglo-American settlement in Texas and recommended drastic restrictions. See Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 120.

²⁰⁶ Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 121.

²⁰⁷ Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 152-153.

inexhaustible volcano of revolutions, has shaken the whole nation; it has leveled to its foundations...its liberties, the federal constitution...and its disorganizing vibrations must necessarily, within a very short time, reach that remote corner of the Republic which you inhabit.”²⁰⁸ In contrast to the disorder of Mexico City, Texas was increasingly seen as a haven of liberty, but one in danger of being subsumed by the unstable center. This view is reinforced by Texas historian William C. Binkley. In his widely respected 1952 book, *The Texas Revolution*, Binkley dismisses both the extension of slavery and the interests of land speculators as determinates leading up to the Texas Revolution. Binkley instead finds the sources of the secessionist movement in Texan revolutionaries’ attempts to build a community, protect federalism, and preserve the Mexican constitution of 1824 against the increasingly centrist policies of Mexico City. He also credits the Texans’ “courage, initiative and resourcefulness, combined with their determination to resist oppression and to maintain their rights,” and the certainty and hardiness of Anglo-American Texans, which “inevitably begot an enthusiasm which no Mexican mind could comprehend.”²⁰⁹ While interest in federalism and republican integrity were certainly powerful motivators for those who sought Texan independence, the difference in Mexican and American minds, and their somehow unequal capacities for courage, resourcefulness, and determination, is a profoundly unsatisfactory and artificial interpretation of the events leading to Texan secession. The interests of land speculators

²⁰⁸ Quoted in Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 154.

²⁰⁹ William C. Binkley, *The Texas Revolution* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1952), 70.

(including slave-owning planters) and the ideas of Anglo-American racial superiority, however, are more reasonable components to an explanation of the Texas Revolution.²¹⁰

As conflict with the Mexican government increased, the language of independence became more and more racialized. A noted historian, Reginald Horsman, historian, observed in his compelling study on the development of race theory, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, that “the catalyst in the overt adoption of a racial Anglo-Saxonism was the meeting of Americans and Mexicans in the Southwest.”²¹¹ Horsman argues that “by the late 1830s the Americans were eagerly grasping at reasons for their own success and the failures of others... White Americans of Jacksonian America wanted personal success and wealth, they also wanted a clear conscience. If the United States was to remain in the minds of its people a nation divinely ordained for great deeds, then the fault for the suffering inflicted in the rise to power and prosperity had to lie elsewhere.”²¹² Many American politicians and Texan settlers referred to the Mexican people as a “mongrel race,” and glorified Anglo-Saxonism.²¹³

The political upheaval in Mexico did not prevent representatives of the Galveston Bay Company from inviting more settlers to buy permits to settle on their land

²¹⁰ More current historiography finds the origins of the Texas Revolution in a combination of reasons, primarily the density of Anglo-American population in Texas, broad-based alienation among Anglo and Mexican Texans from the central government in Mexico City, and Santa Anna’s turn toward conservatism and centrism in the second half of the 1830s. See Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone To Texas: A History of the Lone Star State*, (New York: University of North Texas, 2003), 131-133.

²¹¹ Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 208.

²¹² Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 210.

²¹³ Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 211.

holdings.²¹⁴ The Galveston Bay Company was the first commercial effort to colonize Texas. Agents like Zavala, Sam Houston, General John Mason (the father of Poinsett's Secretary Legate in Mexico, Colonel Mason), and Poinsett himself sought investors from the United States and abroad.²¹⁵ The company recruited settlement through publications like the *Guide to Texas Emigrants*, printed in 1834. Settlement permits, or land script, were given to the Americans who relocated in Texas. Land script did not confer ownership, but gave settlers the right to fulfill the colonization requirements set by the Mexican government.²¹⁶ Land script was often used as legal tender in Texan communities on the Galveston Bay Company's land, in a precarious informal economy.²¹⁷ The value of the script, and more significantly, the value of the parcels of land, was contingent upon the cooperation of Mexico City. As the 1830s progressed, gaining that cooperation became less likely. The Mexican government passed increasingly restrictive colonization policies. As the centralists achieved lasting power in 1834, the allocation of Texas land to Anglo-Americans provided conservative politicians with an example of the dangers of liberal colonization laws and federalist policies.²¹⁸ Were the Mexican government to deny land ownership to the immigrants that settled on the Galveston Bay Company's parcels, the land script, and the investments in the company would be rendered worthless. The

²¹⁴ David Woodman Jr., *Guide to Texas Emigrants* (Boston: Hawes, 1835), 1-17.

²¹⁵ Williams, *The Animating Pursuits*, 42-43.

²¹⁶ Settler's in Mexico were required to convert to Catholicism, obey Mexican laws. See Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 27-28.

²¹⁷ Williams, *The Animating Pursuits*, 27.

²¹⁸ Reséndez, "Masonic Connections," 119.

success of land speculation in Texas depended on securing ownership of that land, yet Mexico's government demonstrated their inclination to prohibit further American settlement in Texas and revoke existing American land claims in the region.²¹⁹ In 1835, General Mason traveled extensively between Texas and Washington D.C., trying to arrange a deal that would convince the Mexican government to cede two-thirds of Texas in exchange for 10 million dollars, but met with no success.²²⁰ The Mexican government refused, and while many in Washington supported annexation possibilities, there also existed a suspicion among Whigs and free-labor advocates that Texan independence would further entrench slavery into the Southern economy, and the political consequences of this domestically²²¹

A letter written by David Burnet to the Galveston Bay Company's trustees assured his investors of the fertility and beauty of the land, but could not offer assurances on their relationship with Mexico City.²²² The glowing description of Texas served two goals: attracting settlers and advocating annexation of the region to the United States. The land company's interest in the political future of Texas was indicated by editorial remarks that had been published in the *National Intelligencer* in 1829. These were reprinted in 1834 in the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company's "Guide to Texas Emigrants." The

²¹⁹ Williams, *The Animating Pursuits*, 27-28.

²²⁰ Katie M. Rowland, "General John Mason," *Quarterly of Texas State Historical Association* 11, no. 3 (1908): 165.

²²¹ Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 216.

²²² Woodman Jr., *Guide to Texas Emigrants*, 20.

newspaper article called on the United States to annex Texas, and add “this vast province to our already extended empire.”²²³

The relatively dense settlement of Anglo-Americans in Texas both supported and demanded annexation. In 1835, Stephen F. Austin wrote of the way the “great migration” of Anglo-Americans into Texas had increased land value and supplied manpower on the frontier.²²⁴ A year later, he wrote of the urgency of the annexation of Texas to the United States, and the threat posed by nonwhite Texans to both investment money and the prosperity of the United States. He warned Senator L.F. Linn that, if Mexico were to retain sovereignty over Texas “the nucleus of republicanism is to be broken up, and its place supplied by a population of Indians, Mexicans, and Renegados, all mixed together and all the natural enemies of white men and civilization.”²²⁵ Not only was annexation the only protection for republicanism in Texas, but also for all white American civilization. Sam Houston, while not as inclined to denigrate Mexicans, characterized Anglo-Americans as ideally chivalrous and superior freedom warriors, fighting against the despotism perpetuated by Mexicans who would “like the Indian race, yield to the advance of the North American Population.”²²⁶

²²³ Woodman Jr., *Guide to Texas Emigrants* 131-132. Interestingly, the same article connected Poinsett’s time in Mexico to the annexation debate, and chastised the British for imagining that Poinsett, through the *Yorkinos*, had attempted to acquire Texas for the United States.

²²⁴ Williams, *The Animating Pursuits*, 58.

²²⁵ Quoted in Williams, *The Animating Pursuits*, 79.

²²⁶ Quoted by Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 214.

By 1835, the Texan revolutionary movement had begun in earnest. Led by *Empresarios* like Austin, Houston, Zavala and Burnet, the call for secession and annexation increased. Investors in land grant schemes now funded the revolution with loans to the Texas revolutionaries.²²⁷ Zavala was still connected to Poinsett through their friendship, ties to the land Galveston Bay Company, and mutual support for Texas independence. Zavala and Poinsett had remained in communication on the political developments, and Zavala's decision to move to Texas in 1835. Zavala wrote to Poinsett soon after he established his residence in San Jacinto, telling him he had decided to encourage Texas to separate from Mexico, saying it was "impossible for the South of the Mexican Republic to remain united to the north, where there is a new population."²²⁸ Austin wrote to Burnet, asking that Burnet greet his friend, Zavala, for him. He expressed his position on war and annexation to his friend: "We all, as I hope and believe, have but *one* object in view, which is the total separation of Texas from Mexico, and its creation into an independent republic, or its annexation, as a state, to these U. S. of the North."²²⁹ Texas newspapers connected independence to the rights of Texans and the republican style of political and social contract they had believed to have undertaken when they immigrated. For example, the *Texas Gazette* published an editorial that justified breaking with Mexico and annexation to the United States: "There can be as little doubt of the right of Texas to object to the centralism, or consolidation of the government," an article

²²⁷ Williams, *The Animating Pursuits*, 74.

²²⁸ Henson, *Zavala, the Pragmatic Idealist*, 74.

²²⁹ Stephen F. Austin, *Fugitive Letters, 1829-1836* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1981), 42.

in the *Texas Gazette* read on October 26, “Emigrants took lands under a republican government; and to such only do they owe allegiance...they are, therefore, fully justified in separating from the government, and in either declaring their state to be sovereign and independent, or seeking to be admitted as a member of the United States.”²³⁰ Many Texans supported independence with an understanding of racial superiority and political supremacy. The developing vocabularies of both ideologies disguised the imperial aggression implied in the decision of predominantly white American settlers, with support from many U.S. politicians and businessmen, to occupy Texas and peel the state away from Mexico.

Zavala’s home was very near the site of the battle of San Jacinto where on April 21, 1836, Mexican soldiers led by Santa Anna suffered a brutal and decisive defeat by Texas revolutionaries. Santa Anna initially escaped capture by hiding in an abandoned house, but was discovered and taken prisoner the following day. Contrary to popular accounts in both Mexico and America, Santa Anna’s capture was not so much a Wild West shoot-out as an encounter between members of a fraternal association. Santa Anna gave the sign of masonic distress, and exchanged the masonic handclasp with Sam Houston.²³¹ Perhaps when we imagine the drama of this era it would be better to discard images of rough-hewn men, dressed in greasy chaps and wielding six-shooters, in favor of frontiersmen wearing Masonic aprons, exchanging secret handshakes, and taking oaths

²³⁰ Carol Lee Clark, *Imagining Texas: Pre-Revolutionary Texas Newspapers, 1829-1836* (El Paso, TX: Texas Western Press, 2002), 54.

²³¹ James David Carter, *Masonry in Texas* (Waco, Texas: Committee on Masonic Education and Service for the Grand Lodge of Texas, 1955), 282-286. Carter bases this anecdote on witness accounts, and the image it creates fits well with other, more official, sources.

of international brotherhood. Masonry, land speculation and Texas independence created connections that spanned national borders, and connected enemies, allies and business partners. Santa Anna remained loyal to the republic of Mexico, yet Zavala bound his fate to the interests of the United States, Joel Poinsett and Texan independence. Zavala became the first Vice-President of the Republic of Texas, serving under Burnet, who was elected interim president.²³² The Galveston Bay Company occupied an important place in the economy and development of the Republic of Texas, maintaining “a perpetual charter of acquiring, holding, and disposing of real estate to an unlimited amount...together with the capacity to monopolize all navigable streams.”²³³

What occurred in Texas in the 1830s was in part tied to the actions taken by Poinsett in Mexico City during the 1820s. Unlike in Chile, Poinsett managed to establish economic, political, and fraternal connections which produced the capital, power, and enthusiasm that allowed him to succeed. And if Poinsett’s experience in Mexico can be described as a success from the American point of view, it can be, and was, described as a disaster from the Mexican point of view. In 1845, a well-known Mexican intellectual and journalist, Carlos María de Bustamante, said of Poinsett’s impact on Mexico, “The astute minister came to mock us, and this resulted thereafter in our ruin.”²³⁴

²³² Henson, *Zavala The Pragmatic Idealist*, 103.

²³³ Williams, *The Animating Pursuits*, 166.

²³⁴ Carlos María de Bustamante, *Apuntes para la historia del gobierno del General D. Antonio de Santa-Anna* (México DF: Imprenta de J.M Lara, 1845), 126.

CHAPTER IV

RACIALIZED REPUBLICANISM:

JOEL POINSETT AND THE CHEROKEE NATION

Throughout his diplomatic career Poinsett had urged the nations of Spanish America to implement republican policies and institutions that mirrored the United States' polity. Even as he pursued an agenda of national self-interest, he supported the rule of law, a free and active press, a political balance of powers, and the rights of the citizens to demand a just social contract. In Texas, this republican standard became the justification for many Texans to demand separation from Mexico and annexation to the United States. Although Texas would not be formally attached to the United States until 1845, the yeoman republic's access to land was assured by Texas' secession and affinity to the United States. However, by the same logic that the settlements of Anglo Americans created the conditions for the extension of the American republic into Mexican territory, the existence of Native American tribes in the Southeastern United States threatened the expansion of the U.S. into land needed to support the yeoman farmer. Assertions of landownership meant little if the land was actually inhabited by others. While in Texas the very presence of Anglo-Americans eventually made the land American, in the Southeastern U.S., the continued existence of Native communities separated the republic

from land. The necessary supply of land could not be assured unless it was first emptied of indigenous claimants. Furthermore, the need for farmland was not limited to the yeomen, as wealthy, slave-owning plantation farmers also sought to extend their acreage. Native American tribes occupied land coveted by white Americans, who were moving into the state of Georgia and the surrounding areas. The Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creek tribes relocated west of the Mississippi over the course of the 1830s, but significant portions of the Seminole and Cherokee continued to resist removal. Groups of Seminole Indians, and the escaped slaves that lived among them, hid in the swamps of Florida during a long military effort to hunt them down, and violently defied federal orders to surrender and relocate. Leaders of the Cherokee resisted removal by creating a government founded on republican principles and adopting cultural practices considered by many Anglo-Americans and Cherokee alike as evidence of civilization. Cherokee claims to sovereignty and republicanism necessitated a shift in emphasis in Poinsett's republican rhetoric and ideology, from inclusion to exclusion.

In response to Cherokees' aspirations to republicanism, Poinsett adopted different tactics than those he had used in the emerging nations of Spanish America. As a diplomat, he had fostered republican pretensions, as an Indian remover, he denied republican projects. Poinsett helped narrow the definition of republicanism according to race, and reject the belief that Indians had the ability to obtain liberty, virtue, and internationally respected claims to sovereignty. First he used his position as a respected patron of science to articulate a defense of a relocation policy towards Native Americans based on immutable racial limitation. Poinsett's stance on U.S.-Native American

relations signified a dramatic departure from the Jeffersonian model that had been guided by the belief that Native Americans could be eventually assimilated into Anglo-American culture. Poinsett entered into a new public debate that began to emerge in the 1830s, on perceived racial differences between whites, blacks, Native Americans, and Mexicans, as well as newly “discovered” people in Africa and the south Pacific.²³⁵ Poinsett needed an elaborate anthropological and philosophical justification, and his ideological rationale will be examined in-depth below. Later, as Secretary of War, he applied his military and political power to affect the forcible removal of the Cherokee Nation. In spite of previous, legally binding treaties and Cherokee advances toward integrating basic republican values into their culture and politics, Poinsett denied their sovereignty and attempted to discredit and depose their elected leader.

During the 1830s, Poinsett was a vocal advocate for Andrew Jackson’s Indian Removal Act of 1830. The law gave Jackson’s administration power to negotiate removal treaties that would reimburse the Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks, Cherokee and Seminole tribes for surrendering their land and moving to Indian Country. The absence of Indian settlements would guarantee sufficient land for a government founded on agrarian principles, and the new treaties would imbue the seizure of Indian lands with legal integrity. Yet, tribal leaders of the Seminole and Cherokee Indians refused to voluntarily cede their lands, negate their previous treaties that guaranteed them the rights to their land, and lead their people peacefully westward. Controversy over the Indian Removal Act, already a source of political friction, increased when removal was resisted and

²³⁵ Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 116-119.

became compulsory.²³⁶ Some adherents to the divisive policy defended the nullification of legally binding treaties and the removal of original inhabitants of the land by claiming that removal was the only way to protect Native Americans from the ultimate degradation and extinction that would result from their interaction with Anglo-Americans.²³⁷ Poinsett expanded this argument with an effort to explain cultural, and seemingly biological, variation among the descendants of Europeans and indigenous people of North America.²³⁸ In particular Poinsett, and other proponents of the 1830 Indian Removal Act, advocated an understanding of the immutable nature of Native American populations, and their fundamental inability to assimilate to Anglo-Saxon civilization. Poinsett built on polygenetic arguments that contended human variation could only be explained if the earth supported several species of humans, each with their own separate origin, and developed his own understanding of anthropology and republicanism that rationalized and justified Indian Removal.

On May 14, 1834, Poinsett, as President of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Charleston, delivered an essay entitled, *An Inquiry into the Received Opinions of*

²³⁶ Alfred A. Cave, "Abuse of Power: Andrew Jackson and the Indian Removal Act of 1830," *The Historian* 65, no. 6 (2003): 1332-1336; Lathel F. Duffield, "Cherokee Emigration: Reconstructing Reality," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 80, no. 3 (2002): 316.

²³⁷ Anthony F.C. Wallace, *The Long Bitter Trail* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 48.

²³⁸ Polygenists, like Benjamin Rush and James Madison believed that humans did not share the same origin. Polygenism provided a justification of slavery and Indian removal on racial differences, arguing that Blacks and Native Americans were fixed at lower stages of development. Patterson argues the debate between monogenists – those who believed humans were all of the same species, and polygenecists who believed there were races of people who represented separate species, become an "increasingly prominent feature of everyday discourse during the 1830s and 1840s." See Thomas C. Patterson, *A Social History of Anthropology in the United States* (New York: Berg, 2001); Robert F. Berkhofer, *White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian, from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978); Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

*Philosophers and Historians, on the Natural Progress of the Human Race from Barbarism to Civilization.*²³⁹ In this address, he opposed theories that humankind advanced through stages of civilization. He did not believe, he explained, that all human societies ultimately progress through three distinct, consecutive phases that culminate in an enlightened citizenry capable of advanced agrarian practices and principled social contracts. Poinsett set out to correct the misconception that humans began everywhere as barbarians achieving sustenance through hunting and gathering, who would ultimately progress to a pastoral stage when scarcity finally required them to domesticate the animals they once hunted. Or that this, in turn, would advance to the agricultural stage and true civilization, once growing population and dwindling resources made the shepherd's life untenable. He argued that what others perceived as stages within the progression toward civilization were actually fixed and immutable categories: hunters and gatherers would remain savages and barbarians; shepherds always were and always would be tribal nomads with no need for agriculture or the comforts and beauty of civilization; and farmers had always existed as such, the only people since time immemorial capable of such advanced pursuits. In his own words:

There is no record of the Caucasian race having risen by degrees from fishers and hunters to the pastoral state; nor is there any example of the Shepherd Tribes becoming civilized agriculturalists. Both races appear unchanged by climate or situation, and unaffected by any other circumstances than intermixture with each other. The same may be said of the hunting and fishing Tribes, which are constant in their habits and as irreclaimable as the Shepherd

²³⁹ Joel Poinsett, *An Inquiry into the Received Opinions of Philosophers and Historians: On the Natural Progress of the Human Race from Barbarism to Civilization* (Charleston: J.S. Burges, 1834).

race. In this instance, man resembles some other species of animals.²⁴⁰

On that evening in May, Poinsett stood before his audience in Charleston, savvy and well-traveled. His speech blended exotic eye-witness accounts and ethnographic analyses into a cosmopolitan celebration of the superior and exclusive nature of white civilization. He first demonstrated the fundamental importance of the types of ethnographic and philosophical inquiries he and his organization addressed. “Where science and literature are cherished, despotism cannot long maintain its domain,” he proclaimed. “Riches and plenty are the natural effects of liberty,” while learning fosters equality, and this virtuous combination, pursued by the Literary and Philosophical Society, “deserves therefore the patronage of the enlightened citizens of the republic.”²⁴¹ Quite unselfconsciously, he transitioned from a congratulatory inventory of the higher forms of learning made possible within a civilized and virtuous republic, to the subject of his essay, the immutable condition of members of indigenous hunting tribes. They, of course, were not poised on the cusp of exciting new scientific and philosophical understanding, but instead on the brink of extinction. Poinsett justified Indian Removal by asserting that Indians were not capable of becoming civilized, but were in danger of becoming fatally corrupted if they continued to live among civilized people.

²⁴⁰ Poinsett, *An Inquiry*, 34-35.

²⁴¹ Poinsett, *An Inquiry*, 7-8.

The ongoing debate over whether Indians and other ‘savages and barbarians’ had the potential capacity to become civilized was certainly not new.²⁴² Jefferson theorized that Native North Americans were capable of advancement toward civilization as individuals, but that tribes were not the type of social organizations that could adopt republican institutions.²⁴³ He recognized that Indians had art, reason, sentiment, oratory, and although Jefferson noted that they may be vulnerable to extinction, he considered them potential civilized citizens.²⁴⁴ Jefferson assumed Indians owned their land, although he considered future Indian migration westward as a way to facilitate the expansion of the yeomanry. Under Jefferson’s model, any land cessation from Indians had to occur through legitimate and binding treaties. The North West Ordinance of 1787 and the Trade and Intercourse Acts of 1790 were written from the position that the United States must expand honorably, through agreements achieved with Indian tribes, and not through coercive removal and land seizure.

Jefferson’s policy toward Indian tribes continued under subsequent administrations. In 1816, Secretary of War, William H. Crawford generated a series of recommendations to regulate the commercial interactions of Anglo and Native Americans. He advocated the implementation of protective measures that would create a government depot at the mouth of the Missouri that would support the economic viability of Indian traders. The depot would protect the interests of the Indians and serve as a

²⁴² For an in-depth analysis of the development of the debate see Wallace, *White Man’s Indian* and Horsman, *Race and manifest Destiny*.

²⁴³ Jefferson, *Notes of the State of Virginia*, 67-68 & 104.

²⁴⁴ Jefferson, *Notes of the State of Virginia*, 141-144.

buffer between them and corrupt whites, in order to “create capital in their hands.”²⁴⁵ He went on to say, however, that this advice was “substantially founded upon the conviction that it is the true policy and earnest desire of the government to draw its savage neighbors within the pale of civilization.” Crawford added, “If I am mistaken in this point – if the primary object of the government is to extinguish the Indian title, and settle their lands as rapidly as possible, then commerce with them ought to be entirely abandoned to individual enterprise, and without regulation.”²⁴⁶

In 1829, Lewis Cass, the governor of Michigan territory who later became Jackson’s Secretary of War, wrote an essay opposing policies of assimilation. Cass laid the foundation for Poinsett’s later address in Charleston, providing convincing ethnographic descriptions to bolster his claims. Cass had had observed the culture of Indians of the Northeastern United states, and argued that the tribes continued to decline, not improve.²⁴⁷ He saw no hope for the civilization of Indians, citing the dramatic population decline he attributed to their inability to assimilate.²⁴⁸ He believed that all Native Americans were precluded from civilization due to their fundamentally savage nature, recounting their hunting practices, and their resistance to the opportunities available to improve themselves. Although less familiar with the natives of the

²⁴⁵ Crawford to Gaillard, February 24, 1816, *American State Papers*, Indian Affairs, 14th Congress 142nd Session.

²⁴⁶ Crawford to Gaillard, February 24, 1816, *American State Papers*, Indian Affairs, 14th Congress 142nd Session.

²⁴⁷ Wallace, *The Long Bitter Trail*, 41.

²⁴⁸ Lewis Cass, “Documents and Proceedings Relating to the Formation and Progress of the Board in the City of New York, for the Emigration, Reservation, and Improvement of the Aborigines of America,” *The North American Historical Review* 30, no. 66 (1830): 69-70.

southeastern United States, he believed that ‘civilized’ tribes, like the Cherokee, were bound by the same limitations and incapable of civilization. He wrote that while “individuals among the Cherokee have acquired property, and with it more enlarged views and juster notions of the value of our institutions, and the unprofitableness of their own,” the majority of the tribe was “in a state of helplessness and hopeless poverty.”²⁴⁹ Cass went on to denigrate the accomplishments made by the Cherokee, doubting the existence of “a more wretched race than the Cherokee,” who “exhibit spectacles as disgusting as they are degrading.”²⁵⁰ Cass contested the idea that Indians had sovereignty over their lands, as they were in his opinion, only hunting grounds, writing: “it is not like our tenure; they have no idea of a title to the land itself. It is overrun by them rather than inhabited.”²⁵¹ Cass also argued that previous treaties made with tribes did not establish their sovereignty or land ownership, saying “No terms in these compacts could have been intended to convey the sovereignty of the territory, or the absolute dominion over the soil.”²⁵²

Poinsett’s treatment of the subject had neither the ambiguity of Crawford’s position, nor the pragmatic details of Cass’s report. Instead he approached the matter philosophically and anthropologically; he presented his own positions in opposition to well-known European scholars, and supported them with the evidence of his own travels

²⁴⁹ Cass, “Documents and Proceedings,” 71

²⁵⁰ Cass, “Documents and Proceedings,” 71.

²⁵¹ Cass, “Documents and Proceedings,” 80.

²⁵² Cass, “Documents and Proceedings,” 83.

and international awareness. Poinsett was on the cusp of an increasingly racialized understanding of human differences. This debate reflected a transition from the late eighteenth-century bias against non-white people, a combination of Enlightenment optimism and a “visceral distrust of physical difference,” to an “objective” and “self-conscious” belief in the “radical inferiority of certain viably different groups” that was articulated by the 1830s and 1840s.²⁵³ That evening in Charleston, Poinsett asserted evidence that nomadic and hunting people either lived separately from civilized people or became extinct, but did not progress toward civilization. He used his interaction with a nomadic chieftain in the steppes of Central Asia over a shared dish of singed sheep-head to exemplify “the chief reason of the immutable condition of these people,” which stemmed from “the invincible repugnance of mankind to submit to the restraints imposed by the labor of the agricultural pursuits, a repugnance to be overcome by absolute want.”²⁵⁴ The ‘absolute want’ necessary for advancing out of a nomadic, herd-based society could not materialize, however, because food and shelter were provided by the milk, meat and hide of the animals they lived among. The nomads, said Poinsett, “love their free and wandering life, and live surrounded by a superior race...without envying their condition, but actually commiserating them for the restraint under which they

²⁵³ Poinsett used the theories of historians Comte, De Buffon, Edward Gibbons, and William Robertson as foils, explicitly rejecting their shared belief that human societies originate from the same act of creation, progress toward enlightenment, and also Buffon’s pejorative assertion that New World climate produces weak and deficient inhabitants.. See Nicholas Hudson, “From ‘Nation’ to ‘Race’: The Origins of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 no. 3 (1996), 251.

²⁵⁴ Poinsett, *An Inquiry*, 13.

live.”²⁵⁵ After Poinsett described to the nomadic leader the comforts afforded by civilization, the chief “pitied the luxurious Frenchman who eats the most delicate foods, and drinks the choicest wines and lives in a palace, because he has no steppes, and is compelled to pasture his cattle within enclosed fields!”²⁵⁶

Also precluded from civilization, in Poinsett’s opinion, were people who achieved sustenance through hunting. Poinsett completely rejected the notion that the native inhabitants of the regions extending from the Hudson’s Bay to the Gulf of Mexico could be drawn ‘into the pale of civilization,’ as Crawford had endeavored to do. Indians were “found in the hunter state,” and the condition was immutable.²⁵⁷ One of his most colorful pieces of evidence showing the irredeemable nature of the savage man came not from his direct experience, but from a Jesuit priest who worked to convert and civilize Tupis, Tupayas, and Boticudos tribes people in Brazil. Poinsett told his audience that the Jesuit:

Having taught and catechized and instructed an old Brazilian woman in the nature of Christianity; and he had supposed fully converted her and completely taken care of her soul; finding her one day sick, he asked her if she could eat anything. “Grandam”, said he (that being the word of courtesy by which it is usual to address old women in Brazilian society) “if I were to get you a little sugar now, or a mouthful of some of our nice things...do you think you could eat it?”

“Ah! My grandson!” Said the old convert, “My stomach goes against everything – there is but one thing which I think I could touch. If I had the hand of a little tender Tapuya boy, I think I could pick the little bones – but woe is me , there is nobody to go out and shoot one for me!”²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ Poinsett, *An Inquiry*, 14.

²⁵⁶ Poinsett, *An Inquiry*, 14.

²⁵⁷ Poinsett, *An Inquiry*, 34-35.

²⁵⁸ Poinsett, *An Inquiry*, 41.

In Poinsett's view, the woman in Brazil and the Indians in North and South America societies resembled "some other species of animal."²⁵⁹ The divide between the hunter and the agriculturalist was "as great a difference between the two races as between the untamed wolf and the domestic house dog."²⁶⁰ He emphasized the hopelessness of attempts at cultural amelioration, stating, "It is to be feared that not even the most urgent of necessity can ever drive the free hunter of our forests from his indolent habits. They have proven untamable, and have either retired before the improvements of whites or have perished near them."²⁶¹ As fixed in their barbarity as the Brazilian grandmother, they had not, stated Poinsett, "made any progress in their social condition."²⁶²

Civilized agriculturalists were born, not made. Poinsett's travels again informed his definition of civilization as he identified examples of communities engaged in the activities so fundamental to the agrarian yeoman republic: "In the mountains of the Daguistan, which skirt the Caspian Sea, the inhabitants are agriculturalists, descendants of the Caucasian race. They descend into the plains in the spring of the year, and till and sow the land...these tribes had, from time immemorial, preserved their distinctive character and pursuits...it is impossible to imagine a nobler model of mankind than is presented by the civilized agriculturalist of the Caucasus..."²⁶³ According to Poinsett,

²⁵⁹ Poinsett, *An Inquiry*, 37.

²⁶⁰ Poinsett, *An Inquiry*, 35.

²⁶¹ Poinsett, *An Inquiry*, 20.

²⁶² Poinsett, *An Inquiry*, 43.

²⁶³ Poinsett, *An Inquiry*, 35-36.

societies, or 'races' were fixed at their stage of development. Hunters could not aspire to agriculturalism; therefore, barbarians could not become civilized. Agriculture was the basis of a successful republic, and if hunters, or Native Americans, could not become civilized agriculturalists, then they could not become republicans. Poinsett racialized the definition of republicanism in order to exclude claims to sovereignty and land raised by Indian tribes that resisted removal. He constructed a rationale that neutralized Native American aspirations to self-government by asserting that it was unobtainable. In Poinsett's view, the immutability of the 'savage' condition of all Indian tribes required removal. Poinsett did not directly address the Cherokee, and the case made against his position through their resolve to adopt Anglo-American civilization.

Members of the Cherokee Nation opposed removal on the very grounds that Poinsett dismissed. They had, claimed prominent Cherokee leaders, become civilized agrarian republicans. In April of 1834, a month before Poinsett delivered his address in Charleston, John Ross, the Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation delivered an address to the Seneca Indians. The Seneca tribe was part of the federation of Northeastern Indians called the Iroquois League. The Seneca Indians were facing pressure from corrupt land speculators who were emboldened by Jackson's removal policy to fraudulently acquire Seneca land.²⁶⁴ He encouraged his audience to resist removal by endeavoring to incorporate tenets of republicanism into their culture and government. First, he introduced their present situation under Jackson's Indian Removal policy and the

²⁶⁴ Arthur C. Parker, *The History of the Seneca Indians* (Port Washington, Long island: Ira J. Friedman, Inc., 1926), 142-143.

historical claims Native Americans had to the land they were supposed to cede. “The tradition of our Fathers and the written history of the white man tells us that this great and extensive continent was once the sole and exclusive abode of our race,” Ross announced, “Yes this charming country was once ours; and over these fields and through these forests our Fathers once, in careless gaiety, pursued their sports and hunted their game.”²⁶⁵ Ross supplemented this recognition of historical Native American claims to the land of North America with a description of the arrival that irrevocably changed the fate of Cherokee and Seneca alike. “Amidst all of this innocence, simplicity, and bliss-the white man came; and lo! the animated chase, the feast, the dance, the songs of fearless, thoughtless joy were over,” stated Ross, “ And ever since we have been made to drink the bitter cup of humiliation; treated like dogs; our lives, our liberties, the sport of the white man.”²⁶⁶ Ross then described how Indian tribes attempted to adapt to the advances of Anglo-Americans, until “driven from river to river, from forest to forest...we find ourselves fugitives, vagrants and strangers in our own country and look forward to a period of time when our descendents will perhaps be totally extinguished.”²⁶⁷

Ross, himself a well-educated plantation owner, then spoke of a solution to the untenable position that the Cherokee shared with the Seneca. “It is by education [that] the mind is cultivated and enlightened,” explained Ross, “whereby the intelligence of man

²⁶⁵ John Ross to the Seneca Delegation, Washington City, April 14, 1834, *The Papers of Chief John Ross Vol. I*, ed. Gary E. Moulton (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 285-286.

²⁶⁶ John Ross to the Seneca Delegation, Washington City, April 14, 1834, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 285-286.

²⁶⁷ John Ross to the Seneca Delegation, Washington City, April 14, 1834, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 285-286.

becomes expanded and is elevated, to the highest degree possible for human intelligence to attain.”²⁶⁸ Ross recognized that “in wisdom and superior knowledge, the force of power exists,” and encouraged his audience of Seneca Indians to join the Cherokee in seizing the power of knowledge and “encourage schools and the education of our children and the adoption of the habits of civilized life.”²⁶⁹ Progression towards civilization was a worthy goal for the tribes to share, especially as “the superiority of the white people over the Indian mainly consists only in their cultivation and acquirements of the arts and sciences.”²⁷⁰

Acknowledging the constraints on these proposals, Ross addressed the pressing issue of Jackson’s removal policy. First, Ross described the decision by the Choctaws, Chickasaws and Creeks to leave their lands and settle in Indian Country, and then turned to the different course of action the Cherokee, empowered by the knowledge of both history and law, had chosen. Although, “the existence of the Indian Nations as distinct independent communities within the limits of the United States seems to be drawing to a close,” said Ross, “we have determined to cling to our original rights in the country where we first drew the breath of life—for these rights have been recognized and secured by treaties under the solemn pledge of the United States to protect them unto us.”²⁷¹ Ross

²⁶⁸ John Ross to the Seneca Delegation, Washington City, April 14, 1834, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 285.

²⁶⁹ John Ross to the Seneca Delegation, Washington City, April 14, 1834, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 285.

²⁷⁰ John Ross to the Seneca Delegation, Washington City, April 14, 1834, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 285.

²⁷¹ John Ross to the Seneca Delegation, Washington City, April 14, 1834, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 286-286.

believed he could pursue a legal course of action that would forestall the removal of the Cherokee. He laid claim to the promise of civilization, the authority of Jeffersonian-era treaties, and the Cherokee Nation's rights to its land, while attempting to inspire the Seneca to likewise resist removal.

John Ross and other members of the Cherokee Nation had long realized that their best claim to their sovereignty and the land they occupied lay in changing their culture, political organization, and farming patterns to resemble those of Anglo-Americans. Reaching back to the Jeffersonian era, 1791, the Treaty of Holston demanded that the Cherokee advance to a higher degree of civilization, and become herdsmen and agriculturalists in order to keep their land.²⁷² The Cherokee worked to assimilate, and with the influence of Moravian missionaries, intermarriage with whites, and tribal strong leadership, built schools and developed a sophisticated, bicultural society. In 1810, the Cherokee organized a National government that reorganized their political system, creating a system of national courts and a police force.²⁷³ On July 4, 1827, Ross and other leaders reported the Cherokee Nation's constitution to the federal government, gesturing to the date made famous by American revolutionaries, as had the Chileans the previous decade.²⁷⁴ The document closely resembled the constitution of the United States, and explicitly extended the Cherokee Nation's legal jurisdiction throughout their territory. In

²⁷² Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, *The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 11.

²⁷³ Walter H. Cosner, Jr., "John Ross and the Cherokee Resistance Campaign, 1833-1838," *The Journal of Southern History* 44, no. 2 (1978): 192.

²⁷⁴ Mary Young, "The Cherokee Nation: A Mirror of the Republic," *American Quarterly* 33, no. 5 (1981): 507.

a further attempt to encourage literacy and national pride, Sequoyah, another prominent Cherokee, developed the Cherokee syllabary, putting the Cherokee language into written form. Ross purchased a printing press for the nation, and Cherokee leader Elias Boudinot edited the *Cherokee Phoenix*, the Cherokee Nation's newspaper.²⁷⁵ The *Cherokee Phoenix* had articles in both English and Sequoyah's syllabary, providing Cherokee people an opportunity to participate in public discourse, while bolstering their national identity. During this time, the Cherokee also altered their farming practices, often replacing subsistence-oriented agriculture performed by women with plantation agriculture done by men, and even slave labor. The Cherokee constructed a model republic, founded in the ideals of liberty, in the form of jurisdiction over their land, and dedicated to encouraging the virtue of the citizenry, by encouraging education, agriculture, and a participatory public.²⁷⁶

However, by working to achieve 'civilization,' the Cherokee aroused the ire of the state of Georgia. The political leaders in Georgia and the Anglo-American settlers that demanded land on Cherokee territory, refused to accept Cherokee jurisdiction over Cherokee land, the jurisdiction that the Cherokee constitution had codified. Georgia rejected Cherokee sovereignty and their constitution, declaring that Cherokee laws were invalid and superseded by the authority of the state government.²⁷⁷ Ross and his supporters fought Georgian political and territorial encroachment in two court cases,

²⁷⁵ Ross, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 5.

²⁷⁶ Young, "The Cherokee Nation," 503-504.

²⁷⁷ Duffield, "Cherokee Emigration," 323.

Cherokee Nation v. Georgia in 1831 and *Worcester v. Georgia* in 1832. First identified as a “dependent domestic nation by” the Supreme Court in 1831, the following year the highest court in the United States ruled that treaties made between the United States and the Cherokee represented a higher authority than that of the state government of Georgia and that therefore Georgia could not force the Cherokee Nation off of their land. Jackson did not enforce the court’s decision however, and Anglo-American conflict between the state of Georgia and the Cherokee Nation continued unabated. Gold was discovered in the Cherokee Nation, further encouraging Anglo-American migration to the region. The Georgian government began evicting Cherokee families from their homes and awarding their land to land-hungry Georgian farmers, plantation owners, and miners through a lottery system.²⁷⁸

In 1835, the Cherokee Nation’s claims to its land in Georgia were fatally comprised when a small, non-representative group of Cherokee signed the Treaty of New Echota. A faction of Cherokee, led by Elias Boudinot, Major Pathkiller Ridge, and his son John, agreed to cede all Cherokee land in the Georgia and surrounding states in exchange for 5 million dollars and relocation assistance for the Cherokee people.²⁷⁹ Ross had traveled to attend the meeting at New Echota, but his rejection of the treaty was deferred because he was arrested and held until after the treaty was signed.²⁸⁰ In 1836, Ross addressed the House of Representatives with his complaints, calling the group of

²⁷⁸ Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932), 238.

²⁷⁹ Ross, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 7.

²⁸⁰ Foreman, *Indian Removal*, 268.

Cherokee that signed the treaty “a spurious delegation,” who “in violation of a special injunction of the general council of the nation, proceeded to Washington city with this pretended treaty, and by false and fraudulent representations” agreed to a program of land cessation that “despoiled us of our private possessions.”²⁸¹

The members of the Treaty Party, as they came to be known, moved west of the Mississippi River. The majority of the Cherokee Nation did not support the treaty, considered it illegal, and resisted removal. The removal deadline specified in the treaty was May 23, 1838, and Ross dedicated the next two and a half years to exposing the illegitimacy of the treaty, traveling yearly to Washington with his delegation to deliver legal challenges to the government.²⁸² He protested the Treaty of New Echota on both legal and ethical grounds. In 1836, he gave an address to the House of Representatives, stating: “Our property may be plundered before our very eyes; violence may be committed on our persons; even our lives may be taken away, and there is none to regard our complaints. We are denationalized; we are disenfranchised; we are deprived of membership in the human family...”²⁸³ He then appealed the common heritage of republican independence of the Cherokee Nation and the United States. “It is true, our cause is your own,” asserted Ross, “It is the cause of liberty and justice...based on your own principles...for we have gloried to count your Jefferson and your Washington our

²⁸¹ Ross to the Senate and House Representatives of the United States of America, September 28, 1836, *Serial Set 99*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 12.

²⁸² Ross to the Senate and House Representatives of the United States of America, September 28, 1836, *Serial Set 99*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 12.

²⁸³ Ross to the Senate and House Representatives of the United States of America, September 28, 1836, *Serial Set 99*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 12-13.

great teachers.”²⁸⁴ The Cherokee leaders had adhered to the recommendations of these iconic men, “read their communications... with veneration,” and “practiced their precepts with success.”²⁸⁵ The resulting advancement of the Cherokee, said Ross, was manifest: “the wildness of the forest has given way to comfortable dwellings and cultivated fields, stocked with the various domestic enjoyments, have succeeded to the rudeness of the savage state.”²⁸⁶

Ross made his case that not only was the treaty illegal, but that the philosophical justification for Indian Removal was flawed. The Cherokee had demonstrated their civilization, which was the original requirement for the recognition of their sovereignty over their lands under the binding treaties of the Jeffersonian era. In August, 1837, Ross reminded Colonel John Mason Jr., Poinsett’s Removal Agent (who had previously served as his Secretary Legate in Mexico), that while it was “encouraging to [the Cherokee people] to be assured that their efforts to escape from ignorance and barbarism, their improvements in the arts and comforts of life, and the diffusion among them of the inestimable blessings of Christianity meet the cordial approbation of the President,” they were reluctant to alter “the course which in compliance with former presidents, they had

²⁸⁴ Ross to the Senate and House Representatives of the United States of America, September 28, 1836, *Serial Set 99*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 12-13.

²⁸⁵ Ross to the Senate and House Representatives of the United States of America, September 28, 1836, *Serial Set 99*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 12-13.

²⁸⁶ Ross to the Senate and House Representatives of the United States of America, September 28, 1836, *Serial Set 99*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 12-13.

pursued and found to be eminently successful in the advancement of their welfare as a people.”²⁸⁷

Poinsett and Ross, having given opposite opinions on the fate of Native Americans and their ability to advance toward civilization within a month of each other in 1834, crossed paths for the first time when Poinsett was appointed Secretary of War by President Martin Van Buren in 1837. Poinsett was authorized to carry out the policy he had advocated for President Jackson, and now he had the power of the United States military and the authority of the War department at his disposal. Unlike in Chile and Mexico, Poinsett would not have to rely on social networks and personal alliances to carry out his aim. Instead of cultivating a relationship with the Principal Chief of the Cherokee, Poinsett worked to depose Ross. Poinsett recognized the threat that Ross posed to the policy of Indian Removal through his legal and philosophical challenges of the policy, and his tendency to encourage other tribes to join him in his resistance. By attacking the ideological justification behind the seizure of Indian lands, Ross questioned the very basis of the American republic’s right to expand. Ross claimed that Cherokee Removal would not protect the tribe’s viability, as some claimed, but would instead interrupt their republic’s progress and violate their sovereignty over their territory. This sovereignty had been supported by the policies of former presidents and manifested by the development of the Cherokee culture. Ross did not confine his opposition to removal policies to his own followers, but reached out to the leaders of other tribes, like the

²⁸⁷ Ross to Colonel Mason, Red Clay, Cherokee Nation, August 11, 1837, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 514-515.

Seneca and in 1837, the Seminole, establishing himself as a leader with the dangerous potential to spark a pan-Indian resistance movement.

Poinsett's first opportunity to damage Ross' credibility as a leader of a broader resistance to Indian Removal came in the winter of 1837. Ross offered to act as an intermediary between Poinsett's military and the Seminole chiefs, who led a bloody insurgency against the United States government in the wilds of Florida. Although both the Seminole and the Cherokee faced removal, the two tribes shared few other similarities. While Cherokee lands were valuable to the expanding agrarian republic, the land that the Seminole occupied in Florida was unfit for farming. Poinsett's military leader in Florida, Major General Jesup questioned the wisdom and the cost of the Seminole Wars, as their lands were not necessary for farmland, but Poinsett insisted the army continue the bloody guerilla war.²⁸⁸ The impracticality of the Seminole Wars reveals the fundamental intolerance of Indian presence in the yeoman republic, and the vulnerability of the Indian Removal policy. If any significant number of Native people remained east of the Mississippi River, they might threaten the rationale behind the appropriation of Indian land through their ability to survive and thrive, and could possibly inspire increased resistance to the policy.²⁸⁹ However, Ross' offer to mediate between the Seminole Chiefs and the U.S. military was also problematic, as an alliance between the tribes was an unattractive possibility to removal proponents.

²⁸⁸ The decision to continue the Seminole Wars "rested solely with Poinsett," and in a "war full of bad decisions, Poinsett's rejection of Jesup's proposal stands out as one of the worst." See John Missall and Mary Lou Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004), 146.

²⁸⁹ Missall and Missall, *The Seminole Wars*, 150-152.

Ross sent a letter to the leaders of the Seminole, first establishing the similarities in the experiences of the two tribes. “I am of the aboriginal race of this great Island—and so are you. The path which leads from my Council fire to that of yours of a long one, and there has been no intercourse between us—our native language is different from that of yours, and we are strangers to one another.”²⁹⁰ Ross went on to commiserate with the “the gloom which overspreads your land, of the loud mutterings of the big gun and the shrill echo of the war-hoop,” and the “hostile blow which has been struck between you and our white brethren.”²⁹¹ Ross sought to encourage the Seminole by sharing his own resistance strategy: “Perchance you may have heard that the Cherokee are also in troubled about their own lands—this is true—but I have spoken to my people, and they have listened. I told them to remember the language of the President Washington and that of his illustrious successors, and to hold fast to the faith of treaties which by our mutual consent has been solemnly pledged between our nation and the United States.”²⁹² Ross and his delegation, having recently met with Poinsett, informed the Seminoles that “I told our older brother [Poinsett], that it grieved my heart to hear of the shedding of blood between our white and red brethren and the Seminoles—and asked if it could not be

²⁹⁰ Ross to the Chiefs, Headmen and Warriors of the Seminoles, Washington, October 18, 1837, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 523-524.

²⁹¹ Ross to the Chiefs, Headmen and Warriors of the Seminoles, Washington, October 18, 1837, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 523-524.

²⁹¹ Ross to the Chiefs, Headmen and Warriors of the Seminoles, Washington, October 18, 1837, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 523-524.

²⁹² Ross to the Chiefs, Headmen and Warriors of the Seminoles, Washington, October 18, 1837, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 523-524.

stopped, and healed by the balm of peace.”²⁹³ Poinsett agreed to let the Cherokee help negotiate a treaty and facilitate a meeting between Poinsett’s generals and the Seminole chiefs. “You, Osceola and Powel, and all others who may have been considered as principle actors in the conflict, shall be received into the equal favor and protection with all the Seminoles in the treaty of peace,” Ross assured the Seminole leaders, “I have therefore proffered to become mediator for the restoration of peace and friendship between you and our white brethren.”²⁹⁴

The Seminole Chiefs Osceola, Powel, and Micanopy had been elusive and dangerous, engaging in guerilla warfare against the U.S. military.²⁹⁵ Jesup worked to overcome their resistance, and had met with principal Seminole chiefs six months before, in June 1837. Jesup described the meeting to Poinsett, defending himself against anticipated accusations of leniency. “I might have seized them and captured their camp, but such an act would have been an infraction of the treaty,” he explained to Poinsett, but was, he continued, “unwilling to teach a lesson of barbarism to a band of savages.”²⁹⁶ These inhibitions to violating treaties ensuring peaceful meetings between the leaders of Indian chiefs and the U.S. military did not last, nor did they extend to the meeting mediated by the Cherokee that winter. Instead, Jesup’s troops abruptly seized Micanopy

²⁹³ Ross to the Chiefs, Headmen and Warriors of the Seminoles, Washington, October 18, 1837, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 523-524.

²⁹⁴ Ross to the Chiefs, Headmen and Warriors of the Seminoles, Washington, October 18, 1837, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 523-524.

²⁹⁵ Missall and Missall, *The Seminole Wars*, 146-149.

²⁹⁶ Jesup to Poinsett, Tampa Bay, June 7, 1837, *American State Papers*, House of Representatives, Military Affairs, Vol. 6, no. 760, 872. Jesup captured Osceola under a flag of truce before the meeting that was mediated by the Cherokee delegation.

and the other Seminole chiefs who had accompanied him, although their liberty had been assured.

Ross protested this violation to Poinsett, noting the damage it had done to the trust Ross had attempted to cultivate between the tribes. He wrote to him in January 1838, protesting “against this unprecedented violation of that sacred rule which has ever been recognized by every nation, civilized and uncivilized, of treating with all due respect those who have ever presented themselves under a flag of truce before their enemy, for the purposes of terminating warfare.”²⁹⁷ Ross pursued the subject in March, 1838, reminding Poinsett that:

The Cherokee mediators...no sooner recovered from their astonishment, than they asked to clear themselves from the appearance of treachery, in the mind of the Seminoles, who had unhesitatingly come through their means, into the lines of the army, for negotiation, and there lost their liberty...The reasons for anxiety among the Cherokee mediators on this subject were particularly cogent. Unless fully cleared from suspicion, what might be the consequence, should any of the Cherokee and Seminoles at some future time be neighbors? Merited distrust and scorn! Permanent and deadly rancor!²⁹⁸

The capture of the Seminole chiefs in the presence of the Cherokee mediators did not further a pan-Indian alliance, but instead threatened to poison the relationship between the two tribes and Ross’ relationship with Poinsett. Ross’ delegation later visited the captured Seminole chiefs, in an attempt to repair the damage caused by Cherokee involvement in their seizure, and previous disagreements that had erupted during their

²⁹⁷ Ross to Poinsett, Washington, March 8, 1828, *Serial Set* 285, 25th Congress, 2nd session, 11.

²⁹⁸ Ross to Poinsett, Washington, March 8, 1828, *Serial Set* 330, 25th Congress, 2nd session, 16.

journey to meet Jesup. Although the captive chiefs “at length acknowledged that they dismissed from their mind all suspicion of treachery, on the part of their Cherokee brethren,” Ross was unable to secure their release and heard rumors that members of the tribe continued to blame the Cherokees for their capture.²⁹⁹ Ross may have lost his credibility with the remnants of the Seminole leadership, but he had learned to be skeptical of the integrity of the Secretary of War.

As these events unfolded, the deadline for removal was fast approaching. Many Cherokees believed that Ross and his delegation would renegotiate an agreement with the federal government that would allow them to stay on their land. Ross was not without support in the Anglo-American community. Many members of Jackson and Van Buren’s rival political party, the Whigs, opposed the Democrat’s reinterpretation of U.S. policy toward Indians. Several churches and associations sent petitions to Washington in protest. For example, a memorial presented by Pennsylvanians asserted the Cherokee’s “ancient and indisputable title [to] the land on which they reside,” and the illegitimacy of a treaty signed by “less than a hundred obscure and unauthorized individuals.”³⁰⁰ This suggests, not only that the naked aggression of removal policy was morally repugnant to some Anglo-Americans, but also that the illegality of removal disturbed notions of justice and the rule of law. Treaties and laws were sacrosanct, the basis for a nation true to republicanism. Yet, to the dismay of many the legal integrity of the United States was

²⁹⁹ Ross to Poinsett, Washington, March 8, 1828, *Serial Set* 330, 25th Congress, 2nd session, 17.

³⁰⁰ Memorial of a Number of Citizens of Pennsylvania to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, Washington City, April 19, 1838, *House Serial Set* 330, no. 390, 1-2. This is but one example of several such documents.

blatantly sacrificed to expansion. The debate continued to rage as the Senate considered ratifying the treaty despite its blatant illegitimacy, ultimately deciding to do so. To ensure sufficient land for the yeoman republic, republicanism had to be blunted, and domestic imperialism pursued. Poinsett may have denied the Cherokee capacity for virtue and liberty, but the actions he took to remove them from Georgia revealed the emptiness of his rhetoric and ideology. If American republicanism was no longer substantially different from European colonialism, than what exactly defined it?

While Ross protested the Treaty of New Echota in Washington, the United States military began trying to capture Cherokee resisters and confine them to military encampments to await transport. This was a difficult task, and strategies employed in previous removal efforts reappeared in the effort to remove the Cherokees. In October 1837, Jackson had suggested to Poinsett that in order to flush out the Seminole resisters, he should find and capture the Seminole women and children in order to encourage the men to voluntarily assemble for removal.³⁰¹ April of 1838, Governor Lumpkin of Georgia echoed Jackson's strategy to the Georgia Senate, saying "I would suggest the propriety of collecting Indian women and children, and treating them with special care and kindness, where the men may happen to be out of place, either by design or accident—and a doubt can scarcely be entertained that the absent men will soon follow their women and children."³⁰² Through coercion and capture, the Cherokee were rounded up.

³⁰¹ Missall and Missall, *The Seminole Wars*, 149.

³⁰² Wilson Lumpkin, *The Removal of the Cherokee Indians From Georgia*, (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969), 229.

The Cherokee were separated from their homes and possessions and incarcerated while awaiting emigration. Ross ultimately accepted the inevitability of removal, and began facilitating the transition among the Cherokee from resistance to relocation.³⁰³ Ross received permission from Poinsett to take over the preparation for removal and to oversee the transportation of his tribe to Indian Country.³⁰⁴ His ability to carry out the safe relocation of his people was compromised by the reluctance of Poinsett to adequately protect the Cherokee emigrants, or fund their journey. In August 1838, Ross explained to Poinsett's military commander, General Scott, the hardship of "the emigration of our whole population; comprising all the conditions of human life; the sick, the infirm, from helpless infancy to decrepit age."³⁰⁵ Ross, conscious of the reluctance of the federal government to overspend, reminded Scott that "there are considerations more weighty, and of more importance to us than saving a few dollars by competing with speculators."³⁰⁶ Yet, Ross' concern for the survival of his tribe was not matched by the U.S. government.

The journey from Cherokee lands in Georgia to Indian Country, known as the Trail of Tears, was marked by disease, hardship, and death. Many of the emigrating Cherokee were destitute because their property had been seized during their detainment

³⁰³ Foreman, *Indian Removal*, 286-290.

³⁰⁴ Ross, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 9.

³⁰⁵ Ross to Scott, Cherokee Agency, August 25, 1838, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 662.

³⁰⁶ Ross to Scott, Cherokee Agency, August 25, 1838, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 662.

in the military camps, increasing their vulnerability to the elements.³⁰⁷ An account of the journey appeared in the December edition of the *Arkansas Gazette*, after twelve hundred Cherokee had passed through Lawrence County in Smithville, Arkansas, indicated the presence of death among the Cherokee. "I am informed they are very peaceable and commit no depredations upon any country through which they pass," the article read, "it is stated that they have the measles and the whooping cough among them and there is an average of four deaths per day."³⁰⁸ The small snapshot of mortality among Cherokee emigrants does not convey, however, the price the tribe paid for impeding the expansion of the United States. Ross' wife and another four to five thousand Cherokee died during removal.³⁰⁹

The lethality of emigration touched Ross' family, but he survived to continue to lead the Cherokee Nation once he arrived in Indian Country. By the spring of 1839, the majority of the Cherokee had arrived in Indian Country and reunited with members of the Treaty Party. Ross' party was joined in the new territory by the Texas Cherokee. The Texas Cherokee had also forcibly removed from their homes that winter, but by the Republic of Texas.³¹⁰ There was a contest for power and a shortage of resources in Indian Country. The Old Settlers had lived in Indian Country since they ceded their lands in 1817 and the Treaty Party had established their position in the years following the

³⁰⁷ Duffield, "Cherokee Emigration," 329-330.

³⁰⁸ *Arkansas Gazette*, December 20, 1838.

³⁰⁹ Duffield, "Cherokee Emigration," 339-340.

³¹⁰ Everett, *The Texas Cherokee*, 113.

Treaty of New Echota. The two groups were vastly outnumbered by the emigrating Cherokee.³¹¹ On June 10, Ross addressed the reunited, but still divided Cherokee Nation, and attempted to inspire a renewed harmony, saying:

Although many of us have for a series of years past been separated, yet, we have not and cannot lose sight of the fact that we are all in the household of the Cherokee family and of one blood. We have already met, shook hands and conversed together. In recognizing and embracing each other as Countrymen, friends and relations, let us kindle our social fire and take measures for cementing our reunion as a nation, by establishing a the basis for a government suited to the conditions and wants of the whole people; whereby, wholesome laws may be enacted and administered for the security and protection of property, life and other sacred rights, of the community.³¹²

On June 21, Ross and members of the Old Settler party together called a convention for July 1, with the goal of unifying the Cherokee nation under a new constitution.³¹³ The next day, unknown assailants murdered Elias Boudinot, Major Ridge and his son.³¹⁴ Ross immediately informed General Arbuckle, the military leader stationed in Indian Country, of the killings. “It has become my painful duty to report to you that I have just heard that Elias Boudinot is killed,” Ross wrote.³¹⁵ Ross invited General Arbuckle to investigate the crimes, writing: “I trust that you will deem it

³¹¹ Morris Wardell, *A Political History of the Cherokee Nation, 1838-1907* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1938), 14-16.

³¹² Ross to the General Council of the Cherokees, Takatoka, Cherokee Nation, June 10, 1839, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 712.

³¹³ Wardell, *A Political History*, 16.

³¹⁴ Wardell, *A Political History*, 17.

³¹⁵ Ross to General Arbuckle, Park Hill, June 22, 1839, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 717.

expedient forthwith to interpose and prevent the effusion of innocent blood by exercising your authority, in order that an unbiased investigation might be had in the matter.”³¹⁶

The murders of Boudinot and the Ridges were most likely the acts of followers of Ross, who resented the men’s acquiescence to the Treaty of New Echota.³¹⁷ After the killings, and in the face of growing unrest among the divided Cherokee, Ross continued to work toward the formation of a united Cherokee government. After the Cherokee convention on June 1, an Act of Union was drawn up for the nation on July 12.³¹⁸ The Treaty Party led a delegation to Washington to protest Ross’ leadership in Indian Country and accused Ross of fomenting a “political revolution,” by “claiming to have formed and to be in the administration of a government to which all the Cherokee must submit.”³¹⁹ Members of the Treaty Party were now part of a small minority in Indian Country, at risk of losing political power, and vulnerable to the kind of violent retribution suffered by Boudinot and the Ridges.³²⁰

In September, 1839, Ross cooperated with a faction of the Treaty Party, and submitted a new Cherokee constitution for federal examination.³²¹ The Cherokee constitution expanded suffrage, divided the powers of the government into three

³¹⁶ Ross to General Arbuckle, Park Hill, June 22, 1839, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 717.

³¹⁷ Ross, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 9.

³¹⁸ Wardell, *A Political History*, 28.

³¹⁹ T. Hartley Crawford to Poinsett, War Department, Office of Indian Affairs, Washington, March 30, 1840, *Serial Set 366*, Doc. 188, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 12.

³²⁰ Wardell, *A Political History of the Cherokee*, 28.

³²¹ Wardell, *A Political History of the Cherokee*, 32.

branches, and imposed term limits on elected officials. The constitution protected both collective and private property rights and included the guarantees of basic human liberties.³²² Poinsett's representatives in Indian Country hesitated to approve Ross' constitution and validate his authority over the entire Cherokee population, and his continued refusal to recognize the legality of the Treaty of New Echota. Poinsett demanded that General Arbuckle make finding the killers of Boudinot and the Ridges his first priority, and in November he cited the continued violence among the Cherokee as his motivation to discontinue federal annuity payments (the money pledged to the Cherokee Nation for reimbursement for removal costs and in exchange for their territories) to Ross and all the recent arrivals.³²³ However, the lack of financial assistance from the federal government and the refusal to recognize Ross' government did not dislodge him from his position of authority. Ross continued to lead the Cherokee Nation with widespread popular support.

On April 22, 1840, the Cherokee Nation again requested federal recognition of their constitution. However, Poinsett had set criteria for federal recognition that was untenable to the majority of Cherokee.³²⁴ The first of Poinsett's demands, that the Cherokee adhere to "a new constitution, that will insure...the abolition of all such cruel and savage acts as that under which the unfortunate Ridges and Boudinot were so inhumanly and brutally murdered," and conform "to the constitutional laws of the United

³²² Wardell, *A Political History of the Cherokee* 44.

³²³ Wardell, *A Political History of the Cherokee*, 41.

³²⁴ Wardell, *A Political History of the Cherokee*, 40.

State,” while sharing political power between “officers from each party, in reference to their numbers,” reflected recognizable republican values.³²⁵ However, Poinsett’s final condition for federal approval of the Cherokee republic-building project was Ross’ permanent exclusion from political leadership.³²⁶ Poinsett justified his attempt to remove Ross from power by implicating him in the murders of his opponents, although such suspicions were unsubstantiated. Ross’ true threat to Poinsett lay in the support Ross continued to garner from the vast majority of the Cherokee people and his unflinching effort to expose the illegal nature of the Treaty of New Echota.

Ross did not lose power, despite Poinsett’s efforts to destroy him, and continued to refuse to validate the seizure of Cherokee lands. On June 22, 1840, the Cherokee agreed on an Act of Union although conditions in the nation were dangerous. Violence between the Cherokee factions continued. Shortages resulting from the federal manipulation of annuity payments further exacerbated the deprivation that was wrought by removal. Poinsett continued to withhold annuities until late in the fall. Ross condemned Poinsett for his refusal to recognize Ross’ government and the will of the Cherokee electorate, even though Poinsett himself had observed, “that the majority shall rule is an axiom in politics now substantially admitted everywhere and one that must prevail universally.”³²⁷ Ross understood that through attempting to exclude Ross from the

³²⁵ Crawford to Poinsett, War Department, Office of Indian Affairs, March 30, 1840, *Serial Set 366*, Doc. 188, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 3.

³²⁶ Crawford to Poinsett, War Department, Office of Indian Affairs, March 30, 1840, *Serial Set 366*, Doc. 188, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 3.

³²⁷ Ross to John Bell and the House Committee on Indian Affairs, Washington City, April 20, 1840, *The Papers of Chief John Ross Vol. II*, 36.

Cherokee government, and thereby overturn the will of the Cherokee people, Poinsett was “making to annihilate all that has been done in our country and to substitute for it the will of the Secretary of War.”³²⁸ Poinsett’s rejection of the legitimacy of Ross’ executive position in the Cherokee Nation, which derived from the will of the majority of Cherokee voters, seemed to Ross “to result from a preconcerted scheme...to denationalize us under the pretext of necessity; to legislate us into nonentity.”

Poinsett was never able to bring about Ross’ removal from the political leadership of the Cherokee. Ross continued to lead the Cherokee Nation through the tumultuous years following removal, and the deprivation, vigilantism, and contests for power and resources that plagued the tribe. By September of 1843, an Indian Affairs Agent reported on the clear evidence of Cherokee republicanism. “Their own institutions are entirely germane to our own,” Agent Butler wrote to T. Hartley Crawford, “The government is founded on republican principles and modeled after the Constitution of the United States. Justice is administered with impartiality and dignity...almost in every respect; the Cherokees have lost the habits of barbarous origin, and fitted themselves for a moral affinity and political affinity with the civilized race.”³²⁹ The republican values of the Cherokee Nation, and of its Principal Chief, were resilient. The instability of tribal discord and vengeance, the trauma of emigration, and the interference of Poinsett could not subsume their pursuit of a political system that incorporated liberty and virtue into a plan for national survival.

³²⁸ Agent P.M. Butler to Crawford, Fort Gibson, September 30, 1843, *Serial Set* 434, no. 229, 9.

³²⁹ Agent P.M. Butler to Crawford, Fort Gibson, September 30, 1843, *Serial Set* 434, no. 229, 9.

Poinsett met with mixed success with the Cherokee Nation. He may have racialized his understanding of culture and civilization in order to deny the Cherokee sovereignty over their homeland, but he could not prevent them from internalizing the very ideology that he had deployed against them. He removed the Cherokee from Georgia, but could not remove Ross from power, or prevent Ross from recording the fundamentally dishonest and criminal behavior of the federal government towards the Cherokee Nation.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

After analyzing different expressions of nineteenth-century American republicanism manifested by Joel Roberts Poinsett in Chile, Mexico, and the Cherokee Nation, it becomes clear that the paradox of imperial republicanism is not so inscrutable. When land is seen as the foundation of a unique republican experiment and the source of virtue for its citizens, efforts to extend the sphere of liberty can lead to dominion over others. The internationalist tendencies reflected in the Jeffersonian-era rhetoric of ‘sister republics’ made sense of a republic seeking to distinguish itself from European empires, but did not feed the republic’s need for land. That the land was occupied, or part of another republic’s territory, caused an incongruence between ideology and pragmatism. The relationship between these ill-fitting parts became more problematic as the demand for land became more pronounced.

As illustrated by Poinsett’s ambiguous and contested place in history, this relationship was often hopelessly riddled with contradiction, self-interest, and mutually exclusive components. Poinsett’s attempt to help develop an independent nation with a liberal constitution and a free press in Chile could be discarded as a cynical attempt to curry favor with, and assert cultural dominance over, an emerging market and nation. Yet

Poinsett fought for Chilean independence, and worked to foster the universal truths he believed made his nation superior. Likewise, Poinsett's involvement with the early Mexican republic is easily obscured by the territorial acquisition he facilitated. At the same time, he supported the diffusion of ideology that resonated with thousands of Mexicans, *léperos* and intellectuals alike. This resonance carried into the Texas Revolution, a civil war of secession that was construed by many as the triumph of republican values over despotism and vice. Yet the self-evident righteousness of the American system required further explanation in the face of critics who questioned the annexation of Texas, Indian Removal and the extension of slavery.

Poinsett linked U.S. racial and political superiority in his essay on civilization in 1834, and explained to himself and his audience the authenticity of his republicanism. Once fully racialized and narrowed to exclude Native Americans and others not considered white, Poinsett's ideologies were not undermined by his policies toward the Cherokees, but instead required their removal. The belief in Native American inferiority, asserted through Poinsett's collection of 'evidence,' and the scholarship of others, compelled servants of the republic to employ draconian measures to excise, in the words of Jefferson, the "blot[s]...on the surface."³³⁰ Poinsett anticipated the extinction of the Indians, and their terminal condition perhaps, however inexcusably, lessened the value he put on their lives. Furthermore, the absence of Indians, in Poinsett's view, bolstered the strength of the true republicans, who, civilized and marked by whiteness, were entitled to the land.

³³⁰ Jefferson, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, 317.

The purpose of this thesis is certainly not to exonerate the “author of all that is evil,” or to absolve the engineer of the Trail of Tears.³³¹ To accept Poinsett at his word would be to ignore the evidence of duplicity, manipulation, and manufactured tragedy. However, dismissing his career as an example of rampant self-interest and empty of all principle would also neglect the powerful certainties that motivated him, and in many ways, the nation he represented. Forging ground between cynicism and naiveté, students of republicanism and the early nineteenth-century Americas, must navigate evidence of compelling ideologies, and the Machiavellian actions taken by men like Poinsett to perpetuate them. Above all, Poinsett was a faithful servant to a nation both imperial and republican. The independence and virtue that enabled American republicanism were guaranteed through access to sufficient land, while also dependent on convincing assurances of an authentic, national ideology.

While Poinsett’s shadow loomed large in the early nineteenth century, his role in the imperial direction of the early republic is not widely known or celebrated. Poinsett’s legacy as a statesman and Indian remover is not well remembered and few outside of the discipline of history can connect the man to the popular Christmas flower he introduced to the United States in the 1820s.³³² In Mexico, his name lives on as a pejorative and descriptive noun: *poinsettismo*, which connotes Yankee meddling and efforts at

³³¹ Gamboa, *Representación del ciudadano síndico*, 8.

³³² Poinsett brought the *flor de nochebuena* from Mexico to the United States, where the flower was renamed the Poinsettia.

hemispheric domination.³³³ Perhaps less inspirational than other American patriots, Poinsett is nevertheless a thread that connects the history of four nations and a harbinger of American Empire.

³³³ José Vasconcelos, *Breve historia de México* (México DF: Compañía Editorial Continental SA, 1980), 315; Ernest E. Rossi and Jack C. Plano, *Latin American Political Dictionary* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1980), 240.

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