

CQ: Should the United States, in 1846, go to war with Mexico?

Perspective: John O’Sullivan – yes

Excerpted from “Annexation,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17 (July 1845): 5–10.

It is time now for opposition to the Annexation of Texas to cease . . . It is time for the common duty of Patriotism to the Country to succeed;—or if this claim will not be recognized, it is at least time for common sense to acquiesce with decent grace in the inevitable and irrevocable.

Texas is now ours. Already, before these words are written, her Convention has undoubtedly ratified the acceptance, by her Congress, of our proffered invitation into the Union. . . . It is time then that all should cease to treat her as alien . . .

... It surely is to be found, that other nations have undertaken to intrude themselves ... for the avowed object of thwarting our policy and hampering our power, limiting our greatness and checking the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions. This we have seen done by England, our old rival and enemy; and by France...

It is wholly untrue that the Annexation has been a measure of unrighteous military conquest under forms of peace and law or of territorial aggrandizement at the expense of justice The independence of Texas was complete and absolute. It was an independence, not only in fact but of right. . . .

Texas has been absorbed into the Union in the inevitable fulfillment of the general law which is rolling our population westward; with that ratio of growth of population which is destined within a hundred years to swell our numbers to the enormous population of *two hundred and fifty millions* (if not more), is too evident to leave us in doubt of the manifest design of Providence in regard to the occupation of this continent.

California will, probably, next fall away from Mexico... Imbecile and distracted, Mexico never can exert any real government authority over such a country. . . . The Anglo-Saxon foot is already on [California’s] borders. Already the advance guard of the irresistible army of Anglo-Saxon emigration has begun to pour down upon it, armed with the plough and the rifle, and marking its trail with schools and colleges, courts and representative halls, mills and meeting-houses. A population will soon be in actual occupation of California, over which it will be idle for Mexico to dream of dominion. They will necessarily become independent. All this without the agency of our government, without responsibility of our people—in the natural flow of events And they will have a right to independence—to self-government—to the possession of the homes conquered from the wilderness by their own labors and dangers, sufferings and sacrifices. . . . Whether they will then attach themselves to our Union or not, is not to be predicted with certainty. Unless the projected rail-road across the continent to the Pacific be carried into effect, perhaps they may not; though even in that case, the day is not distant when the Empires of the Atlantic and the Pacific would again flow together . . .

Discussion Questions:

1. What did O'Sullivan mean by "manifest destiny"?
2. What reasons did O'Sullivan give to support his argument that Texas (and probably California) should be annexed by the United States?
3. According to O'Sullivan, what role did the Mexican government play in the independence of Texas?
4. According to O'Sullivan, is the United States taking or receiving Texas? Explain why he sees it this way.
5. What role did race play in O'Sullivan's understanding of "manifest destiny"?
6. In this editorial, O'Sullivan ignored the presence of Native Americans on the lands that he believed should be added to the United States. How or why was he able to do so?