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ANDREW JACKSON AND TEXAS AFFAIRS, 1820-1845

By SARAH BROWN MCNIELL

When Andrew Jackson took over the reins of government in 1829 several foreign problems confronted him. One of these was a definite settlement of the boundary between the United States and Mexico along the Texas frontier. For some time after the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819 had set the line at the Sabine River, the problem of boundary readjustment had been left to unsuccessful commissions.

After five months in office Jackson, at the prompting of Anthony Butler, military attaché of the American legation in Mexico City, began to make definite moves in the direction of Texas.¹ Joel R. Poinsett, minister to Mexico, was instructed to reopen discussions with Mexico concerning the sale of Texas in August, 1829. A maximum of five million dollars was set for use in the purchase; four lines were suggested, the money offer to decrease proportionately with the territory to be gained. As reasons for wanting Texas the President pointed out the need for more western land on which to relocate Indians, the need for guarding the western frontier, and the need for better protection of the port of New Orleans and all Mississippi River navigation.²

Included in Poinsett's instructions were several suggested arguments to be used to obtain the cession of Texas. Questions could be raised concerning the Sabine boundary—which of two streams really was the Sabine? Wouldn't the difficulty of establishing customs houses on such an insignificant stream encourage smuggling? Texas was depicted as an economic and military burden to Mexico, a confused area with explosive tendencies. The prevalence of non-Spanish settlers and the threats of the Comanche Indians in the territory were pointed to as further handicaps to Mexican rule. The United States suggested a boundary running from the Gulf on the east to the mountains on the west along a line drawn through the center of the Grand Prairie between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande.³

¹George L. Rives, *The United States and Mexico, 1821-1848*, 2 vols. (New York, 1913), I, 235.

²Eugene C. Barker, "President Jackson and the Texas Revolution," *American Historical Review* (New York), XII (1907), 789-90, citing MSS. Department of State, Special Missions, I, 34-50.

³William R. Manning, *Early Diplomatic Relations Between the United States and Mexico* (Baltimore, 1916), 338-40.

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Not only did Mexico refuse to negotiate the sale, but, offended by Poinsett's implications that she could not rule her own house, demanded the recall of the American minister in October, 1829. Jackson was increasingly anxious to buy Texas because he feared imminent revolt there and wished the United States to be free from accusation of instigation. Anthony Butler was chosen to replace Poinsett. By this time Mexican public opinion had become averse to sale of any Mexican soil, and Butler could accomplish nothing.⁴

The purchase attempts had aroused apprehension concerning American intentions, and in 1830 Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs Luis Alamán convinced the Mexican Congress of the need for immediate action. Entrance to Mexico from the north was denied except by passport; slaves were not to be introduced into the Texas area; further foreign (American, really) colonization in frontier regions was prohibited; and land grants were reappropriated where conditions had not been fulfilled. Military outposts were established and Mexico began tightening civil control in Texas.⁵ Undoubtedly, Mexican action came too late to serve any purpose other than to antagonize the already discontented Texans.

Anthony Butler, although unsuccessful in his initial attempts in 1829 to negotiate with Mexico, remained at his post. President Jackson was still hopeful that a satisfactory arrangement could be made for the purchase. In 1831 he urged Butler to press for settlement, warning that

There is reason to fear that a project is already on foot by adventurers from the United States, acting in concert with disaffected citizens of Mexico, to take possession of Texas and declare it an independent republic;

"Old Hickory" concluded his message with the somber note that

A revolt in Texas may close the door forever to its advantageous settlement, and may eventuate not merely in the loss of that Province to Mexico with much blood and treasure, but break up the friendly understanding which is now established between this Government and hers. . . .⁶

Again, in 1832, Jackson wrote to Butler with apprehension concerning the Texas negotiations. He expressed fears of an insurrection in the Mexican province within six months. If such an uprising should

⁴Barker, "Jackson and Texas," *loc. cit.*, 791-92.

⁵Justin H. Smith, *The Annexation of Texas* (New York, 1911), 9-10.

⁶Jackson to Butler, February 15, 1831, John Spencer Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 6 vols. and index (Washington, D.C., 1926-1935), IV, 243-45.

occur, the American President knew that Mexico would be suspicious of American neutrality, and he knew also that he would have little power to prevent Americans from "emigrating," rifle in hand, to the disturbed area. Jackson took a dim view of an independent Texas, foreseeing such a small state as a perpetual problem. For these very sound reasons the President reiterated his desire for quick purchase.⁷

Anthony Butler's only hope was that money—the five million previously specified—would be persuasive. In late 1832 the Bustamante government in Mexico fell and for the first four months of 1833 General Gómez Pedraza, a known opponent of boundary change, ruled. Butler, staying on until General Santa Anna replaced Pedraza in April, 1833, busied himself trying to bribe Pedraza's Foreign Minister Lucas Alamán and formulating a plan whereby the United States could grant bankrupt Mexico a loan of five million dollars, taking Texas as security. Butler argued that the United States would certainly get Texas through foreclosure, but the home government found no constitutional authority for such a plan.⁸

When Santa Anna assumed control of the Mexican government the American minister was still unable to negotiate because of Santa Anna's heavy schedule and frequent absences from the capital. The Mexican vice-president, Gómez Farias, was conservative and incorruptible. Butler resorted to trying to convince Jackson that the real Sabine—the one meant in 1819—was what Mexico called the Neches. His idea was that the United States could invade the "disputed" area between the Sabine and Neches, stirring Texas to revolt against Mexico. The reasoning behind this proposal was that Mexico, on pain of losing Texas anyway, would sell immediately to the northern neighbor. In a letter in October, 1833, Butler described this plan to his chief, but concluded:

I will Negotiate or fight just as you think best. I am frank and speak to you in all the Confidence of an old and tried friend when I say that my preference is for the latter. We have abundant cause for quarrel and it would cost less by one half, aye two thirds to take, than to purchase the Territory.⁹

Jackson's reply to this scheme, if one were made, is unknown.¹⁰ The

⁷Jackson to Butler, February 25, 1832, *ibid.*, 409-10.

⁸Barker, "Jackson and Texas," *loc. cit.*, 791-92.

⁹Butler to Jackson, October 2, 1833, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, V, 214-16.

¹⁰Barker, "Jackson and Texas," *loc. cit.*, 794.

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President did write his minister later in that month saying:

Provided you keep within your instruction and obtain the cession it is not for your consideration whether the government of Mexico applies the money to the *purchase of men or to pay their public debt*. It is not for you to enquire [*sic*] how they will apply the consideration for the cession which we shall pay—all we want is a good and unincumbered cession of Territory that will give us a good and permanent boundery [*sic*]. I pray you my dear sir, to close this negotiation soon—four years has [*sic*] nearly elapsed since it commenced and our boundery [*sic*] remains unadjusted. . . .¹¹

In October, 1833, Butler discussed bribery with a Mexican official. He wrote his findings to the President who replied immediately censuring the diplomat for writing such a letter without coding it, for attempting bribery, and for misinterpreting his meaning of the use of "discretion" in expending the five million dollars. The mission was to settle the boundary question and Jackson emphasized that he wanted Texas "unencumbered" of Mexican claims, but not by foul means.¹² Butler, thinking that Jackson cared not concerning the disposition of the funds, felt undeserving of presidential censure, and in February and March of 1834 repeated his belief that the only ways of obtaining Texas were by bribery or by occupation of the Sabine-Neches region.¹³ It was on the back of the March letter that Jackson wrote, "A. Butler: What a scamp!" and a further notation concerning his recall.¹⁴

Butler, however, was not recalled immediately and he spent the remainder of 1834 and the better part of 1835 in various negotiations in the Mexican capital. Frequently he wrote that he was on the verge of success. Again the Minister suggested bribery schemes, and repeatedly Jackson warned him away. By mid-1835 the man in the White House had little confidence in his representative to Mexico, but allowed him to remain because he so earnestly begged for an opportunity to complete his mission. In October, 1835, Butler was deemed *persona non grata* and Jackson, in compliance with the wishes of Mexico, recalled him and sent as a replacement Powhatan Ellis.¹⁵

As to Andrew Jackson's conduct of the attempt to purchase Texas, Eugene Barker, a noted Texas historian, is inclined to believe that the President tried to maintain the honor of the United States and was

¹¹Jackson to Butler, October 30, 1833, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, V, 221-22.

¹²Jackson to Butler, November 27, 1833, *ibid.*, 228-29.

¹³Butler to Jackson, February 6, 1834, *ibid.*, 244-46.

¹⁴Butler to Jackson, March 7, 1834, and Jackson's endorsement, *ibid.*, 249-53.

¹⁵Barker, "Jackson and Texas," *loc. cit.*, 796-97.

sincere in vetoing Butler's fraudulent schemes. He does find that Jackson made poor choices of agents, but believes this unintentional.¹⁶

Richard R. Stenberg, in reviewing the Jackson-Butler relationship, casts the President in the role of villain as he does in other studies concerning Jackson and controversial issues.¹⁷ Working on the thesis that Jackson wanted Texas by means fair or foul, save at the expense of his own reputation, Stenberg maintains that Butler was not disclaimed for attempting bribery, but rather for letting his methods be recognized as such. This anti-Jackson writer credits the first censure of Butler for attempting bribery in 1833 to United States' knowledge that the new Mexican government was less approachable by such means than its predecessor. The rejection of the proposal of a loan to Mexico with a mortgage on Texas was made, not on the grounds of constitutionality, but because the United States had a prospect of getting Texas free if the Texas Revolution, predicted by Sam Houston in a letter to Jackson in February, 1833, came about.¹⁸

Stenberg interprets, as did Anthony Butler, the following sentence to mean that the President was authorizing bribery: "' . . . it is not for your consideration whether the Government of Mexico applies the money to the *purchase of men or to pay their public debt.*'"¹⁹ Jackson's subsequent explanation, that he meant that the Mexican government could use the purchase money to reimburse Mexicans who would lose land grants in the sale, is deemed an afterthought designed to release him from any implication in shady dealing.²⁰

The failure of the executive to recall the minister to Mexico is

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 809.

¹⁷Cf. Richard R. Stenberg, "The Jefferson Birthday Dinner, 1830," *Journal of Southern History* (Baton Rouge, La.), IV (1938), 334-45; Stenberg, "Jackson's 'Rhea Letter' Hoax," *ibid.*, II (1936), 480-96; Stenberg, "Jackson's Neches Claim, 1829-1836," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* (Austin, Tex.), XXXIX (1936), 255-74; Stenberg, "Andrew Jackson and the Erving Affidavit," *ibid.*, XLI (1938), 142-53; Stenberg, "Jackson, Buchanan, and the 'Corrupt Bargain' Calumny," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (Philadelphia), LVIII (1955), 61-85. These works are outgrowths of his doctoral dissertation, *American Imperialism in the Southwest, 1800-1837* (University of Texas, 1932), cited in Llerena Friend, *Sam Houston: The Great Designer* (Austin, 1954).

¹⁸Richard R. Stenberg, "Jackson, Anthony Butler, and Texas," *The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, XIII (1932-33), 273-74, 276. That letter, dated February 13, 1833, is in Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barker (eds.), *The Writings of Sam Houston*, 8 vols. (Austin, 1936-1943), I, 274-76. Houston also claimed (though the editors say that evidence shows his suspicions to be unfounded) that Butler did not actually desire to see Texas acquired by the United States because he had personal land interests which would be better advanced by the retention of Texas by Mexico.

¹⁹Stenberg, "Jackson, Anthony Butler, and Texas," *loc. cit.*, 275, citing Jackson to Butler, October 30, 1833, in Butler MSS.; Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, V, 221-22.

²⁰Stenberg, "Jackson, Anthony Butler, and Texas," *loc. cit.*, 282.

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cited as evidence that Butler's final mission was made in the hope of success through bribery. The President's indictment of the method was written for "cover" if the mission failed or were found out. To Stenberg the administration's repudiation of Butler came, not because of presidential disapproval of his conduct of the mission, but because bribery in Mexico and intrigue in Texas were becoming increasingly in danger of exposé, because Secretary of State John Forsyth was a bitter enemy of the diplomat, and because the Mexican government's demand for recall had ended Butler's usefulness as a purchasing agent.²¹

George Rives, author of the first comprehensive account of United States and Mexican affairs during this period, substantiates the Barker view that Jackson was guilty of misjudgement but not of misdemeanor. He points out that the agent in Mexico City was noted for lying and gambling, and was prompted in many of his dealings by concern for his own land holdings near Nacogdoches in the Sabine-Neches area. By promising and cajoling, Butler retained his post, escaping dismissal near the end of his service only through his chief's extreme loyalty to old friends.²²

John Spencer Bassett believes Jackson's memorandum, " 'Nothing will be countenanced by the Executive to bring the Government under the remotest imputation of being engaged in corruption or bribery . . .,' " to be a sincere expression of the President's feelings on the question in 1835.²³

While most writers concur in the opinion that Andrew Jackson's conduct of the Texas purchase mission brought discredit to his administration and complication to Mexican-American relations, few, with the exception of Stenberg, would discredit the President by calling Anthony Butler's treachery Jackson's.

Historian Justin H. Smith, whose work on the Texas annexation was hailed when it appeared in 1911 as a controversy-settler, expresses what is still the prevailing opinion of biographers and of text²⁴ and monograph writers in the following passage:

Undoubtedly Jackson desired to acquire Texas; but a wide gulf

²¹*Ibid.*, 284.

²²Rives, *U. S. and Mexico*, I, 236-37, 255-58.

²³John Spencer Bassett, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, 2 vols. in one (New York, 1925), 676.

²⁴*Cf.* Samuel F. Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States* (New York, c1950), ch. XIII; Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York, c1950), ch. XVI.

yawns between wishing to purchase an article and conspiring to steal it, and no good evidence has been unearthed in support of the highly improbably [*sic*] theory that he crossed the gulf. Moreover, he was not a coward or dissembler, and the language used by him at the time was perfectly clear.²⁵

A second point of controversy concerning Andrew Jackson's part in Texas-American affairs is whether or not his dealings with Sam Houston and his foreknowledge of the Texas revolt connoted American instigation in that area. Sam Houston's sudden and mysterious departure from public life in Tennessee in April, 1829, immediately gave rise to numerous rumors concerning conspiracies. One tale told of a Houston scheme to invade Texas with a force of Cherokees with the aim of making himself emperor there.

Jackson apparently learned of these rumors very quickly, for Houston wrote to him on May 11:

. . . I cannot brook the idea of your supposing me capable, of an act that would not adorn; rather than blot the escutcheon [*sic*] of human nature! This remark is induced by the fact, as reported to me, that you have been assured that I meditated an enterprize calculated to injure, or involve my country, and to compromit [*sic*] the purity of my motives.

Jackson replied on June 21:

It has been communicated to me that you had the illegal enterprise in view of conquering Texas; that you had declared you would, in less than two years, be *emperor* of that country, by conquest. I must have really thought you deranged to have believed you had such a wild scheme in contemplation; and particularly, when it was communicated that the physical force to be employed was the Cherokee Indians! Indeed my dear sir, I cannot believe you have any such chimerical, visionary scheme in view. Your pledge of honor to the contrary is a sufficient guarantee that you will never engage in any enterprise injurious to your country, or that would tarnish your fame.²⁶

The source of Jackson's original information concerning the rumored "conspiracy" is unknown, but Miss Llerena Friend is inclined to think it was from letters received by his private secretary, Andrew Jackson Donelson, from his brother Daniel Donelson. Only one of these letters is known to exist, but that one, undated but marked "Received June 11, 1829," indicates that the brothers Donelson had

²⁵Smith, *Annexation*, 26.

²⁶Williams and Barker (eds.), *Writings of Sam Houston*, I, 132; Friend, *Sam Houston*, 50, quoting Henderson Yoakum, *History of Texas*, I, 307. Marquis James says that Jackson extracted from Houston a "pledge of honor" to respect Mexican sovereignty. *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, 2 vols. in one (Garden City, N.Y., c1938), 702. See also Alfred M. Williams, *Sam Houston and the War of Independence in Texas* (Boston, c1893), 41.

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been corresponding about Houston ever since his separation from his wife. The close relationship existing between Jackson and his secretary makes it practically certain that the President was aware of the contents of these letters. In the one received on June 11 Daniel wrote his brother that he did not believe the physicians' reports pronouncing Houston "deranged upon the subject of jealousy— . . ." He continued,

. . . I lead to this unbelief in consequence of frequent conversations which he had with me upon a certain subject soon after he was married, say three weeks. I mean the revolution of Texas. . . . Some time in March he informed me that Wharton [his agent] had gone, clothed with full powers from him, such as preparing the minds of the leading men in that country for such an undertaking, and when everything was properly arranged he was to be notified of the fact. That done, he would immediately leave the U. States in order to enter upon the duties of what he called his grand scheme— . . .

Daniel tried unsuccessfully to dissuade him from his plan, considered him a "scoundrel," and believed that he had "married Miss Allen to leave her, in order to have a justification for his leaving the U. States."²⁷

If there were any truth in Donelson's conjecture, according to Friend, the Texas idea must have been the result of Houston's tortured mind resulting from his unhappiness in marriage, rather than the reverse. She also expresses no doubt of Jackson's sincerity in accepting Houston's disavowal. But Richard Stenberg, again on the opposite side of the fence, points out that Jackson in his letter of June 21 did not actually tell Houston to discontinue any revolutionary activity in which he might be engaged. Also, he refers to a memorandum which Jackson claimed in 1838 to have found in his "Executive Book" under the date of May 21, 1829, about information received from General Duff Green that Houston was planning to conquer Mexico or Texas and that, although he viewed Houston's plans as "mere effusions of a distempered brain, he had directed Secretary of War John Eaton to write to the governor of Arkansas Territory instructing him to investigate and to put down any activity of that nature. Since Stenberg could find no evidence that Eaton had ever sent such instructions to the Arkansas governor, he concludes that Jackson's notation was a deliberate attempt to conceal a prearranged plot.²⁸

²⁷This letter is printed in Stanley F. Horn (ed.), "Holdings of the Tennessee Historical Society: An Unpublished Photograph of Sam Houston," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* (Nashville), III (1944-45), 349-51.

²⁸Friend, *Sam Houston*, 51; Richard R. Stenberg, "The Texas Schemes of Jackson and Houston," *The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, XV (1934-35), 230-31, citing "Executive Book" in Jackson Papers (Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress).

Houston's visits to Washington and return trips to Texas in 1830 and again in 1832-33, this time as an Indian commissioner appointed by Jackson, have also been branded "suspicious." Finally, in 1837-38, a storm of accusation of collusion between Old Hickory and The Raven broke over the revelation of the Mayo and Fulton letters. On December 2, 1830, Dr. Robert Mayo had written Jackson about an attempt being organized by Sam Houston to recruit an army in the United States for the purpose of conquering Texas. This information, gleaned from The Raven himself in February and later from a Mr. Hunter, an ex-West Point cadet who represented himself as a recruiting officer for the Texas campaign, had been previously transmitted by Mayo to President Jackson in a personal interview in November of that year. Late in 1836 Jackson, preparing to leave the White House, returned Mayo's letter enclosing by mistake a copy of a letter written in 1830 to William Fulton, secretary of the Arkansas Territory. The President's letter to Fulton repeated the Mayo account of Houston's activities, expressed the opinion that the information was erroneous, but asked that the Arkansas official keep an eye open for any evidences of war-making in the southwestern area. Mayo, who had earlier been disappointed at the President's seeming lack of action, pounced on the Fulton letter as evidence that Jackson had believed the threatened conspiracy, but had done nothing effective about it.²⁹

John Quincy Adams, by then a member of the House of Representatives, took up the cry and charged first that the letter had never been mailed to Fulton, and second that it had been mailed to the secretary rather than to the governor of the Arkansas Territory because Fulton could be counted on to go along with the Jackson-Houston schemes. The Adams' case was based on weak evidence, for the original Jackson-Fulton letter was found in 1839. General agreement was reached by most contemporaries and later historians that the action of the two officials was sufficient in light of the nature of the threat.³⁰

Richard Stenberg charges that historians have "exculpated Jackson, abandoned Houston to his own weak devices, and left the Texas Revolution to take a natural course." Concerning the Mayo

²⁹Barker, "Jackson and Texas," *loc. cit.*, 798-99, citing Robert Mayo, *Political Sketches of Eight Years in Washington* (Baltimore, 1839), 117-29. Jackson claimed that Mayo purloined the letter. Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, IV, 213-14.

³⁰Barker, "Jackson and Texas," *loc. cit.*, 800-02; Stenberg, "Jackson and Houston," *loc. cit.*, 236.

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letter incident, this historian believes that the copy of Jackson's letter to Fulton acquired by Mayo, since it included erasures and insertions, actually was the original, which Jackson decided not to send; that a copy was finally sent to Fulton in 1833; and that all other official correspondence on the matter was destroyed to avoid charges of procrastination. As evidence Stenberg calls attention to the incorrect addresses for Fulton noted on the back of the Mayo "copy" which he claims Jackson put there to provide a possible explanation for Fulton's failure to receive the communication. Also, after the Mayo revelation in 1837-38, Fulton "remembered" that he had received Jackson's letter early in 1831 and had reported that he could find no warlike activities; yet no such report has ever been found in any Jackson or governmental files. Finally, Jackson also "remembered" in 1838 that Fulton's reports of 1831 "went to shew [*sic*] that the rumors were all groundless, and that Genl Houston had settled in Texas and was practising [*sic*] law there as a livelihood [*sic*]" but Houston did not actually settle in Texas until 1833.³¹

Long before Stenberg put together this circumstantial evidence, a few writers had expressed their suspicions. An early Jackson biographer, James Parton, while not as vindictive as Stenberg, is inclined to question the President's conduct of the matter in late 1830. Parton draws no conclusions, but carefully points out the friendship between Jackson and Houston, the confusion surrounding the Mayo and Fulton letters, and Houston's ultimate role in the Texas Revolution. Augustus Buell actually implies that Houston was sent by Jackson to lead revolutionary forces.³² On the other hand, the acknowledged expert on Texas annexation, Justin H. Smith, concludes: "Only gross partisanship can find proof in this mere collection of circumstances and guesses that the President of the United States was a hypocrite, a liar, and virtually an oath-breaker." And the recent Jackson biographers, Bassett and James, find in the letter incident no evidence of duplicity and believe that Old Hickory was sincere in wanting to remain neutral. Also the major post-Stenberg writer, Llerena Friend, in a later doctoral dissertation at the University of Texas, comes to a similar conclusion, emphasizing the fact that Jackson actually did write to Minister Butler, February 15,

³¹*Ibid.*, 229-37.

³²James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 3 vols. (New York, 1861), III, 654-56; Augustus C. Buell, *History of Andrew Jackson*, 2 vols. (New York, 1904), II, 351-52.

1831, instructing him to tell the Mexican authorities that the United States government would take every possible step to thwart any anti-Mexican plot.³³

In 1833 Sam Houston made another journey from Washington to Texas, this time with a government commission to hold Indian conferences in the area. Marquis James dispenses with charges of subterfuge here by pointing out that Houston's reports of the parleys were so worthless that the Secretary of War refused to pay his expense account, and by noting that Jackson quickly disavowed Houston when the latter became involved with American land speculators who were revolution-bent.³⁴

Mexico, however, was alarmed by Houston's presence, and on October 30, 1833, President Jackson wrote the following letter to his minister, Anthony Butler:

. . . I regret to hear of the slanders of Yturbide and Tornel which have no foundation either in the acts or views of myself, or any part of the Government. The statement made of my intimacy with Houston is not true. The very opposite would have been nearer the fact, for we have had, ever since the intimation of his being regarded as unfriendly to the existing government of Mexico, a secrete [*sic*] agent watching his movements and prepared to thwart any attempt to organize within the United States a military force to aid in the revolution of Texas.³⁵

Secretary of State Edward Livingston's communications to Anthony Butler in 1833 have been cited also as evidence that the United States knew more of the approaching revolution than mere spectatorship would explain. Particularly pointed out were the following instructions: "The situation in the State of Texas y [and] Coahuila make it important that your negotiations on that subject should be brought to a speedy conclusion. It is at least doubtful whether in a few weeks any *stipulation could be carried into effect.*"³⁶

Studying this official statement in the light of the charge of American instigation, Justin Smith finds no basis of support. Smith, Barker, and Rives all indicate that intelligent diplomacy would require the United States to know and understand conditions in neighboring countries; that information could have come from the many Americans in

³³Marquis James, *The Raven; A Biography of Sam Houston* (New York, c1929), 180; Bassett, *Life of Jackson*, 677-78; Smith, *Annexation*, 25-26; Friend, *Sam Houston*, 54, citing Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, IV, 243-45.

³⁴James, *The Raven*, 192-93; James, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 703.

³⁵Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, V, 221-22.

³⁶Barker, "Jackson and Texas," *loc. cit.*, 793, citing MSS. Department of State, Instructions to Agents to Mexico, XIV, 292.

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Texas—particularly to President Jackson from his friend Sam Houston; and that Livingston's prophecy was not totally correct in that Texas did not immediately declare independence. Miss Friend adds the comment: "Had Houston's Texas schemes gone so far as Mayo declared and Mexico feared, surely there would have been knowledge of recruiting officers. No volunteers were found on the border."³⁷

Stenberg justifies his speculation that Jackson did not send his December, 1830, letter to Fulton until 1833 by claiming that by that time he had become alarmed at Mexican repercussions and belatedly decided to take a stand against Houston. But, looking back over the President's attempts to maintain neutrality after the Texan Revolution began, Smith concludes, "To suppose that he [Jackson] sacrificed his honor to incite a revolution yet was too honorable or too cowardly to aid it at the critical moment is hardly possible."³⁸

It is known that after attending the Texas Convention of April, 1833, in which a constitution was drawn up providing for Texas statehood within the Mexican confederation, Sam Houston did not reappear in public life until after the Revolution was under way. Barker finds no evidence that Houston was active in instigating the revolt and concludes that his experience in political and military leadership, rather than previous revolutionary sympathy, led to his selection as a leader during the war. This view is corroborated by Bassett, James, Smith, and Friend, and even Stenberg admits that the Texas Revolution would have occurred with or without Sam Houston.³⁹

The third debatable matter for discussion is United States neutrality. With the outbreak of hostilities in Texas in 1835 the problem of maintaining neutrality became more complicated for the administration. That Jackson was aware of the situation and attempted to remedy it is exemplified by his official writings on at least four separate occasions.

In a message to Congress in December, 1835, Jackson said:
Recent events in that country [Mexico] have awakened the liveliest

³⁷Smith, *Annexation*, 22n; Barker, "Jackson and Texas," *loc. cit.*, 793; Rives, *U. S. and Mexico*, I, 239; Friend, *Sam Houston*, 55; Friend admits however, that Jackson's denial in his 1833 letter to Butler of intimacy with Houston was "a little extreme, but perhaps it was all in the name of diplomacy." *Ibid.*, 55n.

³⁸Stenberg, "Jackson and Houston," *loc. cit.*, 238-39; Smith, *Annexation*, 27.

³⁹Barker, "Jackson and Texas," *loc. cit.*, 802-03; Bassett, *Life of Jackson*, 277; James, *The Raven*, 189-208; Smith, *Annexation*, 28; Friend, *Sam Houston*, 55-61; Stenberg, "Jackson and Houston," *loc. cit.*, 245.

solicitude in the United States. Aware of the strong temptations existing and powerful inducements held out to the citizens of the United States to mingle in the dissensions of our immediate neighbors, instructions have been given to the district attorneys of the United States where indications warranted it to prosecute without respect to persons all who might attempt to violate the obligations of our neutrality. . . .⁴⁰

Again, in April, 1836, the President stressed the neutral position of the United States government. On the back of a letter written by Stephen Austin asking for a loan to Texas from the treasury surplus, Jackson wrote:

The writer did not reflect that we have a treaty with Mexico, and our national faith is pledged to support it. The Texans before they took the step to declare themselves Independent which has aroused all Mexico against them ought to have pondered well—it was a rash and premature act, our neutrality must be faithfully maintained.⁴¹

In July, also of 1836, Santa Anna, captured leader of the Mexican forces, wrote from a Columbia, Texas, prison asking Jackson to intervene on his behalf so that he might return to Mexico, stop the army which was threatening to re-invade Texas, and thereby bring peace. Jackson's reply issued in September, 1836, lauded Santa Anna's desire for peace, but reminded him that Mexico no longer recognized any official capacities of the prisoner. The American chief executive also pointed out that any intervention by the United States without an invitation to mediate from the government of Mexico would be inconsistent with established policy.⁴²

The most serious charge of neutrality violation directed against the United States came late in 1836 when General Edmund P. Gaines led an expedition into Nacogdoches in the disputed Sabine-Neches region to put down Indian uprisings. The General's orders allowed him to pursue Mexican-incited Indian raiders into Mexican territory, if necessary, and Gaines was inclined to be credulous and hasty. A Gaines-issued requisition for troops to Governor Newton Cannon of Tennessee was countermanded by President Jackson who reminded the Governor that

The obligations of our treaty with Mexico, as well as the general

⁴⁰Andrew Jackson, Seventh Annual Message, December 7, 1835, James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1902*, 10 vols. (n.p., 1903), III, 151.

⁴¹Barker, "Jackson and Texas," *loc. cit.*, 805, citing Jackson MSS. A copy of the letter without the endorsement can be found in the Austin Papers.

⁴²Santa Anna to Jackson, July 4, 1836; Jackson to Santa Anna, September 4, 1836, Richardson, *Messages*, III, 274-76.

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principles which govern our intercourse with foreign powers, require us to maintain a strict neutrality in the contest which now agitates a part of that republic.

Should Mexico insult our national flag, invade our territory, or interrupt our citizens in the lawful pursuits which are guaranteed to them by the treaty, then the government will promptly repel the insult, and take speedy reparation for the injury. But it does not seem that offences of this character have been committed by Mexico, or were believed to have been by General Gaines.⁴³

In September, 1836, the President wrote directly to his border general reminding him of the obligations of neutrality. Jackson stressed that only Indian uprisings were to be dealt with on Mexican soil and further warned: "You must be careful not to be deceived by the evidence on which you act."⁴⁴

Writers Barker, Rives, Bassett, and Friend have no censure for Jackson in the action of Gaines. Concerning the invasion of the Sabine-Neches region and the occupation of Nacogdoches, Barker says, "The strict letter of his instructions gave General Gaines authority for this movement, but their spirit enjoined a greater degree of critical judgment than he was capable of exercising."⁴⁵ This attitude by no means clears Jackson of responsibility for the incident, but it does show his error to be faulty judgment rather than overt war action.

Stenberg believes that Sam Houston planned to retreat to the Neches-Sabine area and thereby bring Mexico and the United States into war. Following this line of reasoning he considers the Gaines move a Jacksonian plot to aid the retreating Houston just prior to the battle of San Jacinto. Stenberg says: "The story of Jackson's having placed his finger on the map at San Jacinto saying that Houston would stop and fight the Mexicans there 'if he were worth a baubee' is plainly apocryphal."⁴⁶ But Buell in his history of Jackson cites a letter from the President to Houston, congratulating Houston on the San Jacinto victory and saying:

From what I could make out by an insufficient map I have and what information I could get of *the enemy's movements*, I was sure you would stand and fight on the west side of Galveston Bay, and probably just where you did, or on Buffalo Bayou. I expected *you*

⁴³Jackson to Cannon, August 6, 1836, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, V, 417-18.

⁴⁴Jackson to Gaines, September 4, 1836, *ibid.*, 423-24.

⁴⁵Eugene C. Barker, "The United States and Mexico, 1835-1837," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (Cedar Rapids, Ia.), I (1914-15), 20.

⁴⁶Stenberg, "Jackson and Houston," *loc. cit.*, 247n, 248-50.

would repulse the enemy, but I confess my astonishment that you should have ended the whole war in one battle.⁴⁷

Buell does mention, however, that this congratulatory letter surprisingly enough took the form of a commander's address to a subordinate who had conducted a campaign well, and he underscores Jackson's references to the Mexican troops as "the enemy." Buell also notes that American officers who went to aid Houston in Texas were not ordered back to their posts until after San Jacinto, despite Mexican diplomatic corps protests.⁴⁸ That Houston attributed his successes at the battle of San Jacinto to his recollection of Jackson's battle plans in the Creek campaigns can hardly be held against Old Hickory.⁴⁹

In his final annual message to Congress in December, 1836, the President explained that a policy of neutrality had been pursued as professed despite American public feeling for Texas. He cited this as a good example of not allowing public policy to be dominated by prejudice or partiality. His greatest lament was that Texas' desire for annexation to the United States was being misconstrued as American aggrandizement.⁵⁰

That neutrality violation occurred is unquestionable, but most historians credit it to public opinion, inefficiencies of the democratic system, and the weakness of the Neutrality Act of 1818, rather than to executive neglect. Some pro-Texas movements such as "filibustering expeditions," the solicitation of funds, and "emigration" with the "emigrants" toting guns instead of ploughshares, did not come under the neutrality act. But even so, the inadequacies of the law do not excuse a nation from international obligations.⁵¹

Although historians will probably never agree as to the uprightness of the United States government in its attitude toward the Texas-Mexican question, some general conclusions can be drawn. The majority opinion of historians studied is that Andrew Jackson tried to maintain the honor and neutrality of the United States, that he did

⁴⁷Buell, *History of Andrew Jackson*, II, 352-53, citing *Major's War for Texan Independence*, II, 23.

⁴⁸Buell, *History of Andrew Jackson*, II, 350-52.

⁴⁹Andrew J. Donelson to Jackson, December 28, 1844, Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, VI, 349-50.

⁵⁰Andrew Jackson, Eighth Annual Message, December 5, 1836, Richardson, *Messages*, III, 237-38.

⁵¹Barker, "Jackson and Texas," *loc. cit.*, 804-05; Bemis, *Diplomatic History*, 222-24; Bailey, *Diplomatic History*, 252.

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make poor choices of agents and military leaders, but not intentionally, and that he was guilty of no complicity with Sam Houston. True, much of the evidence is based on Jackson's own word, but that word is generally believed to be reliable.

There is certainly cause for regret in the handling of the situation. The discreditable purchase attempt and the faulty neutrality law made Mexico rightly fearful and suspicious of United States intentions—a situation which was to complicate gravely future Mexican-American relations. At the time, however, Jackson's diplomacy was considered satisfactory in both Europe and the United States.⁵²

⁵²Bassett, *Life of Jackson*, 683; Barker, "U. S. and Mexico," *loc. cit.*, 30; Rives, *U. S. and Mexico*, I, 261.