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Representations of Women in the Literature of the U.S.-Mexico War

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REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN THE LITERATURE OF THE U.S.-MEXICO WAR

by

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REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN THE LITERATURE OF THE U.S.-MEXICO WAR

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University of Nebraska, 2018

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This dissertation examines figures of women as represented in the literature of the U.S.-Mexico war in order to think through the ways in which the border conflict was preserved in nineteenth-century U.S. American collective memory. Central to my dissertation is a consideration of the intersections of history, myth, legend, and fiction in the memorialization of this war. This dissertation demonstrates that a close look at fictionalized accounts of women’s experiences of and roles in the U.S.-Mexico war highlights the ways in which historical fictions influence how we remember this moment of our collective past.

Focusing on popular accounts of the disputed border region that appeared in print primarily between 1846 and 1855, this study examines the work of two writers, George Lippard’s *Legends of Mexico* and Augusta Jane Evans’s *Inez: A Tale of the Alamo*, in addition to a collection of journalistic accounts about the Great Western that were written by various correspondents of the war. These works focus on the nineteenth-century dispute over the U.S-Mexico border in order to commemorate the actions of those involved in the conflict and to offer alternatives to traditional ways of representing war. The representations of women in these texts vacillate between the conventional and the radical. Taken together these figures push at the limits of nineteenth-century conventionality more broadly. This dissertation focuses on representations of the war
and the ways that representations of women challenge conventions of gender. This dissertation finds that despite attempts in U.S. American culture more broadly to create a cohesive narrative about the conflict with Mexico these popular attempts ultimately failed to do so, and that the ways in which women are figured in these narratives offer avenues for understanding the implications of the general lack of cohesion in the cultural narrative of the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico.
This work is dedicated to my son, Henri Jean-Yves Cayer.

You were born the year I began this work, and I cannot imagine having completed it without you in my life, little dude.
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INTRODUCTION

One of the most decisive moments in antebellum America in terms of military power and the pursuit of Manifest Destiny—the U.S. War with Mexico—was also one of the most divisive moments of the period in terms of deepening party and sectional differences. As such, the U.S.-Mexico war held a somewhat ambiguous place in the collective imagination of the United States in the nineteenth century. Figured by antebellum writers and politicians as an unjust war pursued for the purposes of territorial expansion, the war, as John-Michael Rivera argues, was more broadly represented as a heroic attempt to extend democracy from a “moral” American nation throughout the continent by “civilizing an unjust Mexican nation.”¹ In the course of the conflict, the American public was presented daily with both intrepid and horrifying reports from the battle front along with pro- and anti-war treatises in the periodical press. During and immediately following the war years, Americans also consumed a wide range of war romances and lithographs of war heroes and scenes of battle that served to preserve the auspicious aspects of the war and obscure the war’s darker implications.

Often treated as little more than a speed bump on the path to the American Civil War, the 1846-48 war between the United States and Mexico was a major event. It took place at a crucial moment, when the United States was still creating a national identity for itself. The conflict held serious implications for still developing American literary traditions. Robert W. Johannsen’s expansive history of the war, To the Halls of the

Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination, establishes the importance of the war in developing how antebellum Americans viewed themselves and the world.\(^2\) Drawing from a wide range of materials, Johannsen’s work pioneers the way for further study of the conflict and its import across many humanities disciplines, including nineteenth-century literary studies. With the exception of a few low-profile inquiries, the literature of the U.S.-Mexico war falls out of the scholarly conversation following Johannsen’s important monograph. However, this body of literature has received increased scholarly attention in recent decades. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, there have been a handful of studies that do much to fill in the gaps in scholarship surrounding the literature of the war.

In the early twenty-first century, sustained discussions of the literature pertaining to this conflict begin to emerge concurrent with a turn to a more hemispheric perspective in American literary scholarship. In *Continental Divides: Revisioning American Literature*, Anne Goldman surveys regional narratives following both the war with Mexico and the American Civil War, and makes the case for redefining “American” literature from a broader, hemispheric perspective that both recognizes and challenges the complex regional divisions in the nineteenth-century American literary topography.\(^3\) Shelley Streeby’s *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* examines popular and sensational literature of the U.S.-Mexico War and argues that concepts of empire are centrally important to understanding the history of the United


States and its literature.\textsuperscript{4} In \textit{Identity Politics of the Captivity Narrative after 1848}, Andrea Tinnemeyer argues that the war with Mexico influenced “the ways in which the nation projected and imagined itself.”\textsuperscript{5} As Tinnemeyer demonstrates, new American identity formations along race lines outside of the ever-present black-white dichotomy, stemmed from the war.

Though the border conflict and its reverberations are important to varying degrees in each of the projects mentioned above, the literature of the war is not their sole focus. Perhaps the most sustained study of exclusively border war literature is Jaime Javier Rodríguez’s \textit{The Literatures of the U.S.-Mexican War: Narrative, Time, and Identity}, a sweeping (yet thorough) survey of dime novels and anti-war narratives written from the U.S. perspective as well as Mexican narratives of and responses to the conflict.\textsuperscript{6} Drawing on Bakhtinian theories of narrative form and community and various studies of Mexican history and nationalism, Rodríguez provides a complex and broad view of this war literature, one which takes into account long lost narrative perspectives from both sides of the border.

Scholars such as Goldman, Streeby, Tinnemeyer, and Rodríguez (as well as others not mentioned here) have begun to pay overdue attention to narratives and voices that

\textsuperscript{4} Shelley Streeby, \textit{American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture} (Berekely: University of California Press, 2002).
\textsuperscript{5} Andrea Tinnemeyer, \textit{Identity Politics of the Captivity Narrative after 1848} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), xiv.
\textsuperscript{6} Jaime Javier Rodríguez, \textit{The Literatures of the U.S.-Mexican War: Narrative, Time, and Identity} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).
were once, as Rodríguez writes in his dissertation, “long forgotten.” This kind of literary recovery work, “the excavation [and examination] of what has been buried by layers of time,” provides the kind of “previous critical record” that scholars of American literature have lacked. When Rodríguez presented his Doctoral thesis—“Invocations of Battle: The Literary Nationalism of the War Between the United States and Mexico, 1846-1848”—in spring 2000 he did so at a time in which a dearth of scholarship on the war existed. There remain significant gaps in the scholarly coverage of the literature pertaining to the U.S.-Mexico War, but there is a growing body of scholarship from a range of scholars, both seasoned and novice, from a range of perspectives. It is no longer the case that these literatures, the various narratives of the border conflict, are forgotten and unknown. Conversely, the conflict between the U.S. and Mexico is getting increasing attention in the field of literary studies, and a lively conversation regarding narratives of the war of expansion is currently taking place.

Much of the scholarship on the literature of the U.S.-Mexico war focuses on the masculine: men, their war experiences, and the threats of this war to masculine identity. For example, Amy S. Greenberg’s Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire focuses on concepts of masculinity, rather than gender more generally. Greenberg argues that the imperial project of territorial expansion led to the evolution of what she identifies as ideals of masculinity: “restrained manhood and martial manhood.” Perhaps

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7 Jaime Javier Rodríguez, “Invocations of Battle: The Literary Nationalisms of the War Between the United States and Mexico, 1846-1848,” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2000), iv.
8 Rodríguez, “Invocations,” 8.
her focus sense in the study of a war that was fought before women could officially join
the military. Perhaps. However, women do come up in the literature itself quite
frequently, as both writers and subjects of the texts related to this war. A handful of
studies which focus specifically on women and the war exist. Peggy Mullarkey Cashion’s
of women’s experience of this conflict. Her project examines the war correspondence of
women (mostly wives of U.S. officers stationed at the border) in order to show how the
war affected the lives of women and how they responded to and coped with the conflict.10
Though Cashion’s work is important for understanding women and the war through the
lens of women’s history, there is still work to be done from a literary perspective. Megan
Jenison Griffin’s dissertation, “Partisan Rhetorics: American Women’s Responses to the
U.S.-Mexico War, 1846-1848,” highlights nineteenth-century women writers whose work
engages with the war in some way.11 Her project provides an important precedent for my
work. Griffin defines an identifiable corpus of women’s U.S.-Mexico War literature and
situates this body of work within nineteenth-century American literary history more
broadly. Though Griffin examines the work of women writers, masculinity and manhood
are still her central themes. Though the literature of the border conflict now has a more
central place within nineteenth-century literary studies, representations of women have
not yet been similarly interpreted.

10 Peggy Mullarkey Cashion, “Women and the Mexican War, 1846-1848” (MA thesis,
University of Texas, 1990).
11 Megan Jenison Griffin, “Partisan Rhetorics: American Women’s Responses to the
U.S.-Mexico War, 1846-1848” (PhD diss., University of Texas, 2010).
Despite the often romanticized depictions of the war with Mexico—particularly representations of its battles and its soldier-heroes—that circulated in lithographs as well as in popular newspapers and novels, the war was and is remembered as a controversial, bloody, and racially charged affair. In studying the U.S.-Mexico war, I am interested in the portrayals of race and violence in the popular literary, journalistic, and artistic record of the war, as it relates to the representations of women in the popular culture of the period.

One of the main lines of inquiry that has driven my work thus far pertains to the mingling of history with myth, legend, and fiction in the literature of this war: How is the war with Mexico remembered? To what extent is the memorialization of this war gendered? Both contemporary and later dramatizations of the war were engaged in creating a (historical) narrative of the event. Writers such as George Lippard were deeply concerned with influencing the ways in which this war was preserved in the collective American memory. There is no shortage of narratives romanticizing the conflict between Mexico and the United States. Many of these texts unsurprisingly narrate the bloody and violent scenes one expects to find in a literature which takes war as its subject. My project reviews the ways in which female figures were deployed in this. Some were real women who were raised to legendary status in the war narratives; some were completely imaginary figures. By looking closely at fictionalized accounts of both types of women’s experience, we gain a better understanding of the ways in which historical fictions influence the ways in which we remember our past. These fictions of the war are as much about the boundaries of nineteenth-century conventions of gender as they are ideas of nationalism and the expansion of slavery.
Margery Hourihan’s work on the dominance of the masculine in the heroic tradition of Western literature provides a key theoretical framework for my examination of female heroism as presented in the literature of the U.S.-Mexico war. In her study of children’s literature, Hourihan addresses Western culture’s long history of “white European men” as the “natural masters of the world”:

In Western culture there is a story which has been told over and over again, in innumerable versions, from the earliest times. It is a story about superiority, dominance and success. It tells how white European men are the natural masters of the world because they are strong, brave, skillful, rational, and dedicated. It tells how they overcome the dangers of nature, how other ‘inferior’ races have been subdued by them, and how they spread civilization and order wherever they go. It tells how women are designed to serve them, and how those women who refuse to do so are threats to the natural order and must be controlled. It tells how their persistence means that they always eventually win the glittering prizes, the golden treasure, and how the gods—or the government—approve of their enterprises. It is our favorite story and it has been told so many times that we have come to believe that what it says about the world is true.12

The conceptualization of the heroic tradition as characterized by Hourihan applies to the literature that spooled out from the war between the United States and Mexico as well. Nineteenth-century concepts of Manifest Destiny and the vision of the United States as

the cultural, religious, and political savior of Mexico reflect the sentiments of superiority, dominance and success that Hourihan identifies as “our favorite story.” As Hourihan adeptly demonstrates, this story is a thoroughly masculine one. The stories of the war with Mexico examined in this dissertation both reinforce and push back on notions of white masculine superiority that Hourihan identifies at the heart of Western culture.

Yet women wrote about the war, in prolific fashion, and women were also written about by men and women in relation to the U.S.-Mexico war, quite frequently. Other scholars have examined how women are presented in the war literature in a few ways. A modest amount of scholarship exists on the roles that women played and the various tropes associated with them. However, for the most part, there has been no thorough, extended study of the ways in which women are figured in this body of literature. Though problematic, and in some ways predictable, these depictions of fictional and real (though often fictionalized) women deserve more scholarly attention.

The relationship between the United States and Mexico was strained and unstable for decades before and after the 1846-1848 conflict, however, this particular moment bears great significance for these neighboring countries and continuing relations between them. I begin with texts that appeared before the conflict had been resolved with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. I end with an 1855 novel that looks back to the period of the Alamo and the fight for Texas independence, which was very much related to the later annexation of Texas and the following U.S.-Mexico war.

Chapter One, “‘It is a picture to remember’: Visualizing War in George Lippard’s *Legends of Mexico,*” is a critical analysis of Lippard’s U.S.-Mexico war vignettes. Composed of sketches of soldier’s actions on the battlefield as well as representations of
women’s experiences of the war, *Legends* appeared at the height of hostilities between the two countries. *Legends* offers a highly pictorialized representation of the gendered heroics and tragedies of the border war. Lippard establishes the conventions for representing war and then overturns those conventions by simultaneously critiquing the national project of expansion and valorizing the individual contributions of those involved. This chapter examines the ways in which Lippard’s work engages visual representations of the war between the United States and Mexico, and argues that in so doing Lippard challenges traditional ways of narrating war. Ultimately, *Legends* provides a complex version of the U.S.-Mexico war that is not easily reconcilable and that reflects a broader cultural dissonance regarding the war.

Chapter Two, “‘Her bravery was the admiration of all’: Figuring the Great Western as a Female War Hero in the U.S.-Mexico War,” examines the ways in which reports of one woman’s heroism circulated in the press and the legend that developed from those reports. In this chapter I piece together a narrative of the exploits of a woman named Sarah, who came to be known more broadly as the Great Western and the Heroine of Fort Brown. These bits and pieces when considered as a whole speak to notions of the female heroic ideal. I use the legend of the Great Western to interrogate the ways in which the “literary” hero, as defined by Theodore L. Gross, “dramatizes the moral texture of [the] country.” Gross argues that as “creations of the imagination, [these heroes] embody the unspoken ideals, the undesired terrors, . . . and the mundane existence of their readers. Heroes represent a people, and by discovering the meaning of their
character, . . . we discern the moral figure in the tapestry of the nation.”13 If Lippard’s Legends challenges the conventions of representing war and its heroes, then the legend of the Great Western can be seen as further pushing the conventional boundaries of this topic. This chapter argues that Sarah’s legend serves as an emblem of the collective memory of the U.S.-Mexico war.

Chapter Three, “The Inez of Augusta Jane Evans,” places Augusta Jane Evans’s 1855 novel, Inez: A Tale of the Alamo, in the context of the U.S.-Mexico war, arguing that the novel is as much about the latter conflict as about the fight for Texan independence. Through an examination of the three main female characters in the novel, this chapter highlights how Inez is unlike other U.S.-Mexico war novels that invoke the marriage plot. Often seen as a metaphorical representation of the political and martial reconciliation between the U.S. and Mexico, the cross-border marriage is a significant trope in the war literature. The idea is that through such familial mixing, the body politic of Mexico will be integrated into the United States. Often in these narratives of international marriage, Mexican women are figured much more positively than are their male counterparts, the message presumably being that there is no room in the U.S. for the corrupt Mexican men, but the exotic, sexualized Mexican women have a certain place. Given how often women with brown bodies were used in the antebellum period in the United States, this designated role for Mexican women points to the threat of the expansion of slavery, which factored into understandings of the war’s addition of territory, and to subsequent expansion. In this chapter, I examine these marriage plots

more closely, with an eye to nineteenth-century issues of race and anxieties regarding the purity of bloodlines.

The texts I write about in this dissertation can all be classified as historical fiction. Central to my dissertation are ideas of what it means to fictionalize a historic moment.

George Lippard had a loose definition of what history was and how to best preserve the present. The story of the Great Western was always built on speculation. Augusta Jane Evans’s commemoration of the Alamo integrates personal memory with historical record.

In this dissertation, I do not try to parse out the true from the false, the real from the fake, the history from the fiction. Rather, my project embraces the interweaving and makes the argument that, regardless of the truth of the matter, this interweaving is integral to all the stories we tell ourselves about our country’s past.

The avidity with which these kinds of narratives were created and consumed reveals a good deal about American cultural values, fears, and ambiguities during this period and warrants a deeper look into the ways in which women are figured in this body of literature. The women characters I examine “represent [the] complex and shifting constructions of womanhood” that Griffin identifies in other U.S.-Mexico war texts. My chapters highlight the ways in which these representations of the women of the U.S.-Mexico war “work variously to anxiously limit and to actively liberate what it means to be American and female.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Griffin, “Partisan Rhetorics,” 172.
CHAPTER ONE

“IT IS A PICTURE TO REMEMBER”: VISUALIZING WAR IN GEORGE LIPPARD’S LEGENDS OF MEXICO

“In a whirlpool of carnage like this, it is difficult to forget the roar, the smoke, the blaze, and gaze calmly upon the individual deeds of chivalry and murder. Yet, dipping our pencil in the blood of human hearts, and lighted in our task by the glare of battle, we will crouch here in the chaparral, and try to paint them all.”

George Lippard, Legends of Mexico, 1847

The U.S. war with Mexico figured prominently in print and visual culture during the years of the war and those immediately following the conflict. Though the war was a controversial affair that received much resistance from the American public, it was also a prevalent subject in popular literature and art at the time, one that was in high demand. Like the characters visualized in Richard Caton Woodville’s 1848 painting, War News from Mexico, the American public seemed to have an insatiable appetite for information from the war front (fig. 1). As one correspondent of the Charleston Courier commented in May 1846, “every rumor from the army is eagerly swallowed, and yet the cry is still like Oliver Twist for ‘more’ . . . the newspapers pour forth in a flood of extras, sometimes issuing two and three in a day.” As the press struggled to keep up with the demand for

16 Tom Reilly, War with Mexico! America’s Reporters Cover the Battlefront (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 2.
war news, the public’s hunger for visual representations of the war grew as well. According to Bryan F. Le Beau, “The market for American battle scenes blossomed during the Mexican War of 1846. The American people sought news, including pictures, of their soldiers in battle.” Reports and sensational stories from the front peppered antebellum American newspapers and other war materials proliferated and circulated widely, including, songs and poems, novels, and lithographs. According to Martha A. Sandweiss, Rick Stewart, and Ben W. Huseman, “the Mexican War was the most extensively recorded event in history up to that time.” Though largely produced independently, many of these war materials depicted the same scenes and themes, often borrowing from one another. At times the lithographs of the war seemed to visualize the conflict as it was presented in the written materials, offering illustrations that complemented and contradicted the textual record of the war. However, unlike many of the textual materials, the visual record of the war provides a highly sanitized view of the conflict. In general, war lithographs elide the blood and gore of battle to present artistic and heroic images of exceptional Americans. Images that—as Elisabeth Hodermarsky points out—were meant to be informative and celebratory; to rally American support and pique American interest.

17 Bryan F. Le Beau, Currier and Ives: America Imagined (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 64.
19 Sandweiss, Stewart, and Huseman suggest that the lithographic prints of the war were “precipitated” by the reports which circulated in the press (Eyewitness to War, 1).
20 Elisabeth Hodermarsky, ‘The Kelloggs’ Brothers Images of the Mexican War and the Birth of Modern-Day News,” in Picturing Victorian America: Prints by the Kellogg
My chapter focuses on the ways in which visual accounts of the war with Mexico—primarily lithographs—intersected with contemporary war literature—primarily the work of George Lippard. Printed war scenes most often appeared

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individually or in series, apart from any significant textual apparatus. Some visualizations of the war were brought into direct contact with war texts in illustrated books. George Wilkins Kendall and Carl Nebel’s *The War between the United States and Mexico, Illustrated* (1851) provides one example of a collaborative work in which images and text were brought together and intended to complement one another.\(^{21}\) Kendall, a prominent war correspondent, commissioned Nebel, an artist best known for his Mexican landscapes, to create designs for twelve lithographs that would accompany and illustrate Kendall’s battle descriptions.\(^{22}\) George Lippard’s *Legends of Mexico*, on the other hand, brings the visual and textual together in a much less explicit way. Though *Legends of Mexico* did not appear with illustrations, it was highly pictorial, both borrowing from and critiquing images relevant to the war. *Legends of Mexico* is composed almost entirely of a series of pictorial vignettes, and this approach let Lippard show the war from a “personal” point of view.

Lippard’s *Legends* first appeared in 1847 as installments in *Scotts’ Weekly*, and were gathered together and published in one volume by T. B. Peterson later that year.

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\(^{21}\) Other illustrated books on the war with Mexico that appeared before Kendall and Nebel’s in 1851 are amateur artist Thomas Bangs Thorpe’s “*Our Army* on the Rio Grande” (1846), William Seaton Henry’s *Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico* (1847), and George C. Furber’s *The Twelve Months Volunteer; or, Journal of a Private in the Tennessee Regiment of Cavalry, in the Campaign of Mexico, 1846-7* (1850). For more on the publication of these illustrated war narratives, see Rick Stewart, “Artists and Printmakers of the Mexican War,” in *Eyewitness to War: Prints and Daguerreotypes of the Mexican War, 1846-1848*, ed. Martha A. Sandweiss, Rick Stewart, and Ben W. Huseman (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1989), 10-13.

\(^{22}\) According to Stewart, Kendall was not only important for journalism, as the nation’s first war correspondent, but he also “played a pivotal role in the history of Mexican War printmaking, for he initiated, authored the accompanying text for, and published the most lavish and authoritative set of lithographs to record the conflict of the period” (“Artists and Printmakers,” 6).
Lippard conceived of the group of sketches as part of a much larger project. In a dedication which appears at the end of *Legends of Mexico*, Lippard states that he was “determined to write the Legends of Mexico—ancient and modern, from the era of Scott and Taylor, back through the mists of ages, to Cortez and Montezuma,” and dedicates the “first of the series, embodying the Battles of Taylor” to friend and fellow writer, Charles Chauncey Burr. His ambitions to write more legends of Mexico never came to fruition, and we are left with this handful of stories that focus on the U.S.-Mexico war campaign of General Zachary Taylor. Lippard intended for these legends to be stand-alone stories that when pieced together created a comprehensive view of the border region. “These works on Mexico,” he writes, “every one of which is intended to be distinct and separate, . . . form together, a complete book on the ‘golden and bloody land.’”

*Legends of Mexico* is comprised of seven chapters, or “legends,” which Lippard arranges more or less chronologically with occasional interludes that connect the legends of the U.S.-Mexico war to those of the past. The first, perhaps more context than legend, iterates what Lippard calls the “Crusade of the Nineteenth Century,” and characterizes the temperament of the current moment. From here, Lippard presents Taylor and his men at the “Camp in the Wilderness” before digressing to tell the legend of “The Dead Woman of Palo Alto.” Following this brief interlude, Lippard resumes his depiction of Taylor and his men, taking us through each major battle that took place under the General’s command: “Palo Alto,” “Resaca de la Palma,” “Monterey,” and “Buena Vista.” “The Dead Woman of Palo Alto” is the only one of Lippard’s *Legends* that focuses

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primarily on women, and as such is at the center of my analysis. Each of the subsequent legends related to the battles of Taylor includes a series of sketches, from representations of officers, such as Samuel Ringgold, to depictions of women at the home front, such as the wife of Captain Page. These images make up a layered vision of the gendered experience of war as Lippard imagined it. In this chapter, I focus first on the ways in which Lippard situates his *Legends* in the broader cultural context, moving on to discuss the story of the dead woman of Palo Alto. Finally, I address the ways in which depictions of other figures throughout *Legends of Mexico* both help to establish and push back on the conventions of representing war.

Part historical romance and part popular history, *Legends of Mexico* has been treated most often as a pro-war text that uncritically celebrates the brutality of the war. However, a closer look at how Lippard handles the visual in his fictionalized account of the war suggests that he was more critical of the United States’ involvement in Mexico than has been previously acknowledged. Though celebrating this war and others proved lucrative for him, Lippard ultimately held a more complex view of how the war was misrepresented to the American public. For Jaime Javier Rodríguez, “Lippard’s text argued that what was at stake in the war against Mexico was the very meaning of life in the

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24 For more on the interpretation of *Legends of Mexico* as a violent pro-war text, see John T. Flanagan and Raymond L. Grismer, “Mexico in American Fiction Prior to 1850,” *Hispania* 23 (December, 1940): 314, JSTOR; and Streeby, *American Sensations*, 59.

This chapter examines U.S.–Mexico war lithographs alongside the graphic descriptions of battles and scenes of war in Lippard’s *Legends of Mexico*, and argues that with these violent verbal images Lippard critiqued traditional ways of visualizing war. Using visual metaphors throughout *Legends of Mexico*, Lippard complicates the record of the war by insisting that Americans see war in a different way.

Lippard’s visualization of war includes not only battle scenes and great men, but also rank and file soldiers and women. It is in these moments that Lippard’s vision begins to complicate what it means to view war. Often these scenes provide troubling portrayals of suffering and pain that do much to undercut the celebratory tone of other sketches that appear in *Legends*, and that push back on what Lippard believed to be a problem in the visual representation of war more broadly—that it was far too often presented as a “pretty thing.” Lippard vacillates between a panoramic vision of the battlefield and a narrow view of individual experience. Lippard zooms in on specific moments of personal suffering, particularly the ways in which women were affected by the war. A close look at Lippard’s representation of women in these moments in addition to his presentation of the suffering of individual men on the battlefield offers insight into what we are to make of the incomprehensibility of this war.

Reading George Lippard’s *Legends of Mexico* is like walking through a gallery of nineteenth-century art devoted to the subject of war in general and the 1846-1848 conflict with Mexico in particular. Each chapter focuses on a moment or a series of moments, described in highly visual detail. Some of these scenes can be linked to the growing body

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of images which circulated or would have been on display in the nineteenth century, while some of the scenes Lippard visualizes are presented as if they should be painted. Lippard insists that we picture them, asking us to read his text visually. He constantly invites the reader to see something, to behold it, to gaze on this picture that he is describing. Lippard guides us through the campaigns of General Taylor, pointing out that which he wants us to see, and telling us how we should view these images. Along the way, Lippard takes us on tangents which at first have seemingly nothing to do with the subject of war. However, as we continue to read, we notice that these moments of seeming irrelevance are precisely the point of Lippard’s *Legends*. For he is attempting to write a history of the war that (at least in his estimation) is (or promises to be) a more complete vision of the moment than a so-called “official” or “traditional” history would be.

It is important to note that what Lippard writes, the *Legends* that he creates and invokes here, are decidedly not history—they are in large part, fictionalized embellishments of events and people associated with the war with Mexico. In no way am I suggesting that what Lippard puts forth in *Legends* should be read as “truth” or “true” history in the sense that it can be verified or is factually accurate. Instead, what I argue is that despite the inaccuracy of the stories he narrates, they contribute to a broader sense of America’s understanding of the war. They become part of the cultural memory even if they are not “real.” I argue that Lippard’s invocation of the visual in *Legends of Mexico* serves his larger goal: to present the American public with a more intimate and individualized view of these events; to show his readers how the war affected individual people so that the record (the memory) of the conflict becomes more “complete.” He
does not paint in broad strokes, rather the particulars give the true history of this moment—both in terms of the grand deeds of the prominent individuals involved in the war and the lesser known personages who participated in and were affected by the war. Lippard’s invocation of various genres of painting invites us to interrogate the war in addition to experiencing it aesthetically.\textsuperscript{27} Lippard takes his readers to each image and instructs them; directs their eyes where to look, and in so doing attempts to shape their vision of the war and how they would remember it.

“\textit{Pictures are now a necessity}”

The visual record of the war with Mexico was found primarily in lithographs that circulated during the war and in the years that followed. These prints commemorated battles, memorialized fallen war heroes, and championed leaders who—like Taylor—were successful in their military campaigns. The lithographic views of the U.S.–Mexican war are by far the largest and most varied group of images associated with the conflict. Though the U.S. war with Mexico “marked a pivotal point in graphic history, becoming the first event to be documented by both printmakers and practitioners of the fledgling art of photography,” in the 1840s photography was not a viable medium for capturing and distributing scenes of battle.\textsuperscript{28} Similarly, images of the war that were produced in other formats like oil paintings were scarce and certainly would not have circulated as readily or ad affordably as the lithographs did.

By the start of the war with Mexico in May 1846, lithography was a well-


\textsuperscript{28} Sandweiss, Stewart, and Huseman, \textit{Eyewitness to War}, 1.
established artistic practice in the United States, capable of producing cheap images in a short amount of time. This mode of artistic production proved well-equipped to illustrate the conflict, for which news reports and visual representations were in high demand. Though it would be nearly a decade before the first illustrated newspapers would be established, many newspapers were already pictorial, and prominent printmaker Nathaniel Currier observed that images had become an essential component in reporting the news, stating that “pictures are now a necessity.” The New Orleans Picayune noted that a “half hour’s study” of some of the finer illustrations of the war would “elucidate better than a volume of written description.”

Not long after the hostilities commenced, images of the war and its participants began appearing in the United States. Often these images were based on eyewitness accounts of the war that appeared in the press. Lithography firms rushed to be the first to depict the initial battles of the war. Currier’s firm, imitating the newspaper extra, introduced the concept of what Stewart identifies as “‘rush stock,’ cheaply printed

30 Le Beau, Currier and Ives, 8. For more on the necessity of images in reporting the news, see Tyler, The Mexican War, 8-11.
32 For more on the interpretive nature of the war lithographs, see Hodermarsky, “Kelloggs Brothers’ Images,” 73-8; Le Beau, Currier and Ives, 64-6; and Stewart, “Artists and Printmakers,” 19.
33 Stewart insists that “many of the Mexican War prints were brought out in a highly competitive atmosphere where being the first was most important and the difference between success or failure was a matter of days (“Artists and Printmakers,” 5). For more on the competitiveness of the lithography market, see Tyler, The Mexican War, 8 n8.
lithographs that were generated quickly after an event to capitalize on its public interest.”

The immediacy of the sketch-like lithographic medium and its connection with the press helped to preserve even lesser known moments. As Stewart observes, “Many of the prints of Mexican War scenes, especially those produced by lesser artists and smaller printing establishments, would not have existed except for the lithographic medium.” Lithography, then, served an important role in preserving a visual history of the war.

The majority of the war lithographs relied on reports of action from war correspondents like Kendall. As Hodermarsky has noted, the lithographs were often artistic interpretations of written scenes. Though some artists—often soldiers—witnessed the events they illustrated, a far greater number had never been to Mexico. Instead, they borrowed from the graphic descriptions of battle that proliferated in the popular press. The prints of the war were thus second-hand artistic renderings of historical events, often created by multiple people. The practice of lithography meant that the views of the war with Mexico were often twice removed from the actual experience of war and filtered through various perspectives. Though Sandweiss, Stewart, and Huseman convincingly portray the artists of the U.S.–Mexico War as “eyewitness[es] to war,” they were not true eyewitnesses; and their depictions of the war often provide a

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36 Hodermarsky, “Kelloggs Brothers’ Images,” 76-78.
37 According to Tyler, “most [but not all] of the artists probably never visited Mexico” (The Mexican War, 11).
38 The process of creating lithographs often meant that designers did not have control over the final product. See Stewart, “Artists and Printmakers,” 30-35.
skewed view of the conflict, despite the supposed accuracy with which the war was reported.³⁹

“Of all pictures, a field of battle, fresh, red, and reeking, is the most horrible to look at”

The U.S. war with Mexico was the most thoroughly reported conflict in America’s history until the Civil War.⁴⁰ The incidents of this conflict were recorded not only by military war correspondents, whose dispatches were reprinted throughout American newspapers, but also by soldiers who were engaged in the fighting. As one correspondent for Niles’ National Register remarked in May 1847, no other “war of the same extent” had been “so accurately and so universally known” as the war with Mexico was bound to be precisely because “nearly every soldier in the ranks of our army is capable of writing an account of what he sees, hears, or does.” Much like the reports of war correspondents, soldiers’ eyewitness accounts from the seat of war “spread over the Union” in newspapers, presenting the American public with gruesome and sensational first-hand accounts of the “realities” of war; accounts which seemed to offer more accurate and realistic views of combat than could be found in their visual translations.⁴¹

³⁹ Sandweiss, Stewart, and Huseman define “eyewitness accounts” of the war as follows: “Eyewitness accounts of the war took many forms, ranging from on-the-spot reactions to more carefully considered responses recorded days or even weeks following the event. Though based on actual events, both literary and visual reports could stray from accuracy for a number of reasons. . . . The sketches of field artists, for example, were usually translated to the lithographic stone by other hands. The ‘eyewitness prints’ in this study thus are prints based on materials (verbal or visual) provided by eyewitnesses” (Eyewitness to War, 2).

⁴⁰ For more on the newspaper coverage of the war with Mexico, see Lawrence Delbert Cress, “Introduction: The Mexican War, Foreign Correspondents, and George Wilkins Kendall,” in Dispatches from the Mexican War, by George Wilkins Kendall, ed. Cress (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 8-13.

Graphic descriptions of scenes and incidents from the war front flooded antebellum newspapers; and correspondents often spared no details in relaying the horrors of the battlefield—its violence and the results of such. Many antebellum newsmen “were not above publishing detailed descriptions of a battle’s more sanguine or emotional aspects.”42 Thomas Mayne Reid, writing as a war correspondent under the pseudonym, Ecolier, described the battlefield following a particularly bloody fight at Churubusco:

We have ridden over several battle-fields. They are all the same. The broken sword—the dismounted cannon—the ghastly dead—the not less ghastly dying—all combine to render the scene one of desperate desolation. Here a small group is gathered around a wounded officer. It is the Surgeon and his attendants. There a brave fellow, who struggles with fate, is endeavoring, with a piece of a torn scarf, to staunch the blood that wells from a life wound; while at a little distance a faithful comrade props up the head of his wounded fellow, and is pouring the last drops of water from his canteen, to quench the burning thirst of incipient fever. Of all pictures, a field of battle, fresh, red, and reeking, is the most horrible to look at, the most frightful to reflect upon.43

While Reid’s dark description of the “ghastly dead” and the “ghastly dying” comrades on the field highlights the tragedies of war; he does offer a brief moment of redemption—

43 Ecolier [Thomas Mayne Reid], “Sketches by a Skirmisher,” *Spirit of the Times*, December 18, 1847, 507, American Periodicals.
this violence is not without a cause. The “brave fellow” who lies dying, lies dying knowing that his death is honorable and contributes to a larger purpose. Although subtle, Reid’s description of the aftermath of battle codifies the violence of war as a “frightful” yet heroic and necessary endeavor.

A far more assertive and vivid report of the gruesome yet heroic aspects of the violence of war comes from an anonymous letter, which appeared in the June 27, 1846 issue of *Niles’ National Register*:

I returned shortly to the camp and found that our troops were resting immediately on the battle ground. Alas! what a sad picture presented itself; around were lying heaps of dead, dying and disabled men—the sigh, the groan, the shriek of agony, filled the air, whilst the eye could not rest upon spot but it met with a head, a leg, an arm, a body cut off by the waist, or the more fortunate dead, who had received their death wound from the rifle or musket.

Now, my dear sir, how can I describe to you the personal acts of bravery—not only in one instance but in twenty—and not simply by the officer, but by the common soldier? . . . So eager were our men for the fight that I cannot better describe their enthusiasm than to give you the idea that struck me it was this: Every man, officer and soldier seemed impressed with the idea that there was but a given quantity of fighting to be had—not enough for every man to have his fill of it—and, therefore, it
became everyone to get what he could as soon as possible.\footnote{44}{"Incidents of the Battle Field," \textit{Niles’ National Register (1837-1849)} 27, June 1846: 264, American Periodicals.}

Readers of periodicals such as the \textit{Spirit of the Times} and \textit{Niles’ National Register} saw a view from the front of the violence of war in horrific and heroic splendor. The results of this violent and bloody battle, as depicted by this unknown war correspondent, are tragic, shocking, and sickening. However, as the author emphatically suggests, the violence is simultaneously uplifting for American military morale because it is filled with honor, valor, and more than a tinge of heroism. The correspondent goes on to relate an act of retaliatory violence in battle: “Lieut. Jordon was attacked by 2 Mexicans and bayoneted in two places, when Lieut. Lincoln of the 8\textsuperscript{th}, rushed up and with his own sabre made perfect mince meat of the two. . . . the fact is every man was a hero.”\footnote{45}{“Incidents,” 264.}

The atrocities of battle presented in this scene are coded as not only heroic, but also necessary and justified. Similarly, this correspondent’s description of battle-eager American soldiers captures the spirit that swept through the United States at the outset of the war, encouraging men to volunteer in search of the glory of combat. Kendall describes a similar eagerness for battle action in his dispatches from the war: “all are sanguine in the belief that there soon will be stirring times in the direction of Monterey,” and “all are anxious to strike back, and they will be gratified.”\footnote{46}{George Wilkins Kendall, \textit{Dispatches from the Mexican War}, ed. Lawrence Delbert Cress (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 149 and 161.}

Though the U.S.–Mexican War lithographs illustrated quite clearly the glory of combat that was depicted in the popular press, they largely avoided the darker aspects of
war. In that way, the lithographs of the war with Mexico follow the patterns of literary
texts depicting the incidents of war. As Tyler notes, “The Mexican War, although it was
. . . as repulsive as any conflict, has few such graphic reminders of the personal
suffering.” The tendency to depict heroically violent scenes of battle permeated
journalistic accounts of the war with Mexico more broadly than the lithographic record.
The lithographs sanitized the violence of war. According to Stewart, the lithographs that
were meant to circulate widely throughout antebellum America rarely “evoked the
grimmer aspects of death on the battlefield.” In fact, as Sandweiss, Stewart, and
Huseman suggest, the fact that the lithographs largely overlooked the gruesome violence
of the war might have contributed to the popularity of the war prints: “it was the content
of the prints, as much as their distribution, that won the interest of the American people.
With their . . . capacity to show simplified versions of complex activities, prints earned
and kept the interest of a news-hungry public.” The war lithographs offered timely
interpretive illustrations of current war news without providing complete visualizations of
the atrocities of war—that was left to the individual viewer to imagine.

Carl Nebel, like other lithographers of the antebellum period opted to present a
more purified version of the war than could be found in the written account—a pristine
imagining of the conflict in which the violence of battle was downplayed or valorized

47 Stewart divides the lithographs of the war into “four categories of relative accuracy” of
both topographical features and figural features (“Artists and Printmakers,” 7). For more
on the (in)accuracy of the lithographs, see Tyler, The Mexican War, throughout.
48 Tyler, The Mexican War, 2.
50 Sandweiss, Stewart, and Huseman, Eyewitness to War, 3.
In his 1851 lithograph, *The Storming of Chapultepec—Quitman’s Attack*, Nebel creates a sense of depth and highlights the expansive nature of the battlefield of the U.S.-Mexico war. Despite the Mexican artillery that explodes in the center of the frame, injuring a handful of American soldiers in its path, the impact of this violence is displaced from view. We can only imagine what atrocities are taking place in the advanced regiments just beyond the line of smoke and vegetation that forms this print’s backdrop. Viewers were left to picture for themselves the darker scenes that were described in the journalistic record. Many lithographers “preferred to turn quickly away from the dreadful scene of shrieking wounded, to look out across the valley, where [one could find] solace in the beauty and grandeur of nature.” Nebel’s broad and expansive battle scenes simultaneously commemorate the conflict and encourage American viewers to escape from the war violence that proliferated in the popular press by gazing into the vast Mexican landscape.

The lithographs also offered Americans a way of seeing the war that encouraged manifest destiny and exceptionalism. Nathaniel Currier’s lithographs of the U.S.-Mexico war were hardly “accurate in their details” as they were of “a general nature, focusing on common aspects of battle.” Their main purpose was to “bring home the immediacy of the war [and present its heroes] in a way never experienced by Americans.” Currier’s, *Battle of Cerro Gordo April 18th 1847*, depicts the American forces bravely defeating the Mexican army in close combat (fig. 3). Grossly outnumbered by the American forces,

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51 According to Stewart, Nebel was the creator of the “most important series of eyewitness views” of the U.S.-Mexico war (“Artists and Printmakers,” 13).  
53 Le Beau, *Currier and Ives*, 64-65.
four Mexican soldiers, facing certain death, try valiantly and desperately to fend off the rapidly advancing American infantrymen. As the American forces ascend to take their place atop the hill at Cerro Gordo—leaving piles of dead Mexican soldiers in their path—they carry with them the American standard which will replace the almost-captured tri-colored Mexican flag. Despite the chaos in *Battle of Cerro Gordo*, this print offers a sanitized glorification of the war nonetheless. The fact that this battle was a particularly bloody one is almost completely lost on the viewer. What is not lost, however, is the insinuation that through heroic and violent acts such as those pictured here, America will rise to her proper place in the continent as champion of Democracy.

![Image](image.jpg)


Currier’s print illustrates what John-Michael Rivera describes as an essential ingredient in shaping the popular perceptions of the U. S.–Mexico war:

Americans had to believe that their war was not one of aggression but one to extend democracy. Creating an imagined and ‘mythic’ history of the war in the public sphere was a powerful discourse that helped the American people continue its rhetoric of natural rights to expand across the continent. If the war was just and America was a just nation of people, then Manifest Destiny was God’s gift to this benevolent nation, as O'Sullivan reasoned years prior.\(^5\)

Simplified and generalized visualizations of the violence of war, such as the ones

\(^{55}\) Rivera, *Emergence of Mexican America*, 64.
described above that circulated during and immediately after the war, helped present the conflict as a positive moment in America’s history. Scholars William H. Goetzmann and William N. Goetzmann go so far as to suggest that the images of the war with Mexico were “essentially wartime propaganda pictures and personal souvenirs [that] directly served the great national object of Manifest Destiny.”

The lithographic record provides a sanitized, patriotic, and at times beautiful version of the war’s history that promised to obscure its problematic realities. These images are important for considering how nineteenth-century Americans saw the war. Yet while publishers such as Currier celebrated such packaging of events for the American public, George Lippard challenged artists to visualize war—particularly the U.S. war with Mexico—in more critical ways, suggesting that a new way of picturing war was necessary.

“See the panorama of that wild excitement spread”

*Legends of Mexico*, Lippard’s key work on the war, presents a remarkably visualized view of the conflict, often depicting scenes of battle in gruesome and vivid detail. Though the series of legends was never illustrated, its visual texture is undeniable. *Legends of Mexico* was advertised by publisher T.B. Peterson as a collection of “historical pictures: . . . making altogether the most graphic and readable book ever written on the war with Mexico”; and Lippard often highlighted the visual nature of his work, suggesting scenes for illustration.

Throughout *Legends of Mexico*, Lippard

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summons an unnamed artist to “paint for [him], that picture”; to illustrate the scenes which Lippard has already described.\textsuperscript{58} Similarly, he consistently describes the Mexican landscape, battles of the war, and its combatants in pictorial ways, repeatedly asking his readers to picture these vistas. The images Lippard creates are brutal at times, poignant at others, and often highlight personal aspects of war. Though other scholars have interpreted the violent images in \textit{Legends of Mexico} as evidence of Lippard’s pro-war stance and sub-par literary abilities, suggesting that Lippard’s use of the visual undercuts his own insistence that the war was waged for laudable reasons, I argue that Lippard’s descriptions challenge prevailing notions of manifest destiny and exceptionalism that were largely confirmed by the lithographic record.

\textit{Legends of Mexico} opens at the height of American enthusiasm for the war with Mexico, and dramatizes the spread of a war spirit that Lippard suggests spanned the country, crossed sectional divides, and united the nation in a common cause against a common foe. Lippard describes this spirit as “a cry, a groan, a rumor” that spread throughout the country from the South and grew into a tempest that drove the American public into a frenzy for war. In the opening pages of \textit{Legends of Mexico}, Lippard flattens American sentiment about the war into a “bewildering” panoramic vision of “wild excitement,” suggesting that the push for war with Mexico was universal.\textsuperscript{59} It was not, as New York Whig congressman Daniel D. Barnard wrote in June 1846, for a Republic such as the United States “war is peculiarly an unnatural and hazardous state, never to be ventured upon for conquest, or for glory, or for any cause short of the defense of national

\textsuperscript{58} Lippard, \textit{Legends of Mexico}, 89.
\textsuperscript{59} Lippard, \textit{Legends of Mexico}, 11-12.
independence, liberty, or honor.” Barnard insists that “war must be justified on grounds which reason, religion, and humanity can approve.” The U.S.-Mexico war was no such war to the Whigs. For Frederick Douglass, this unfurling frenzy that Lippard characterized was both politically induced and served to undermine “the reason of the people”:

a general outcry is heard—“Vigorous prosecution of the war!”—“Mexico must be humbled!”—“Conquer a peace!”—“Indemnity!”—“War forces upon us!”—“National honor!”—“The whole of Mexico!”—“Our destiny!”—“This continent!”—“Anglo Saxon blood!”—“More territory!”—“Free institutions!”—“Our country!” till it seems indeed “that justice has fled to brutish beasts, and men have lost their reason.” The taste of human blood and the smell of powder seem to have extinguished the senses, seared the conscience, and subverted the reason of the people to a degree that may well induce the gloomy apprehension that our nation has fully entered on her downward career, and yielded herself up to the revolting idea of battle and blood.

In Douglass’s estimation, the drive toward war was predicated on notions of the superiority of “Anglo Saxon” blood and the extension of slavery. Where Lippard sees consensus, Douglass articulates discord. In her influential study of class and empire in Lippard’s work, Shelley Streeby highlights this one-dimensional portrayal of the


country’s eagerness for war. According to Streeby, popular literature of the mid-nineteenth century (including Lippard’s *Legends of Mexico*) allowed the American public, a “heterogeneous assortment of people[, to imagine themselves] a nation, staging their unity against the imagined disunity of Mexico.” Streeby faults Lippard for this panoramic view by insisting that his vision of the war blindly reinscribes imperialist, racialist, and oppressive American ideologies in his fiction; however, she does not consider some of the more promising complexities that Lippard’s *Legends of Mexico* also presents. Streeby implies that *Legends of Mexico* demonstrates Lippard’s wholehearted belief in the ideology of manifest destiny and his unquestioning support of the notion of American exceptionalism. There are, however, moments in Lippard that undermine this suggestion.

A key moment in Lippard’s critique comes early in the book, when he elucidates the various causes of the war. Even at this early moment, Lippard suggests that these reasons do not quite warrant war. He seems to be subtly undercutting these reasons, even as he is posing them as potential justifications for the war. Lippard asks, has America embarked on war to avenge the “blood of five hundred mangled bodies” that was shed during the fight for Texas independence, “the bodies of brave Texians?” Maybe, Lippard says, but maybe not. Is American aggression justified in this war because “the American People” have “borne for a series of years the insults and outrages of Mexican Military despots?” Again, Lippard’s answer is no. The real reason, Lippard discloses, is divine intervention. Lippard announces that America has been ordained by the “hand of

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Almighty God” to “write [His] lessons [for Mexico] in the blackness of the battle-field.” Lippard ostensibly touts manifest destiny here as the primary justification for American hostilities against Mexico. Yet, in the following paragraphs, Lippard issues a dark admonition to the American public regarding the precarious nature of providence: “Is this false? Does not Almighty God lead the Nations to civilization, through the reeking Golgothas of War? But have a care, brave People! The same tide of war, that now sweeps over the vallies [sic], and mounts the pyramids of Mexico, may roll back upon your American land.” Lippard undercuts the progress of manifest destiny by cautioning the American people not to rely too heavily on God’s good grace to justify expansionist pursuits; and—by insisting that American soil is not immune to the “blackness of the battle-field”—Lippard’s warning is hauntingly prophetic. Lippard casts a sense of doom over the American project of civilization that undercuts the imminence of continental expansion and the certainty of American exceptionalism. As Rodríguez argues, Legends of Mexico “simultaneously drives toward destinarian myth as well as the collapse of belief.” Lippard’s initial image of a unified America gives way to more disruptive possibilities. Lippard raises the notion that America may have—for the time being—fallen under some kind of divine protection only to highlight the flawed nature of this position. His insinuation that this divine favor—if it indeed exists—is likely to be fleeting suggests that Lippard does not entirely buy into myths of manifest destiny and American exceptionalism, and is subtly encouraging his readers to doubt them as well.

My interpretation of the previous passage highlights that Legends of Mexico is not

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63 Lippard, Legends of Mexico, 14.
64 Rodríguez, Literatures, 78.
a straightforward and one-dimensional pro-war text, and that Lippard is intentionally simultaneously celebrating and condemning the war. While there is much to value in Streeby’s analysis of *Legends of Mexico*, her critique implies that Lippard did not realize that he was providing such a complex depiction of the war. Streeby indicates that any nuance or complication of the war and its heroes that is found in *Legends of Mexico* is purely accidental and evidence of Lippard’s inferior literary abilities. In no way does Streeby acknowledge that perhaps Lippard’s purpose is precisely to unsettle Americans’ misguided notions about the “beauty” of war. Streeby is right to argue that the war scenes Lippard describes highlight the violence of empire building; however, I hold that he knowingly does so. These graphic scenes complicate and enrich Lippard’s text, and a closer reading of these moments offers new insight into a work that has been primarily categorized as a piece of pro-war propaganda. My study of Lippard’s romantic popular shows how, using the war with Mexico as his subject, Lippard worked to overturn traditional visualizations of war by presenting the American public with more realistic—albeit still imagined—images of war.

“A legend is a history . . . with the bloom and dew yet fresh upon it”

Early on in *Legends*, Lippard includes a short description of what history and legend mean. “Legend? What mean you by Legend? One of those heart-warm stories, which, quivering in rude earnest language from the lips of a spectator of a battle, or the survivor of some event of the olden time, fill up the cold outlines of history, and clothe the skeleton with flesh and blood, give it eyes and tongue, force it at once to look into our eyes and talk with us!—Something like this, I mean by the word Legend.” In this analogy, Lippard insists that history is dead, lifeless, and cold. Conversely, legend has the
power to reinvigorate history, to breathe new life into the stale, old stories of and from our past. Not only do legends live on through their telling, legends, as Lippard views them, also resurrect the past. Lippard goes on to say that legend “in its details and delicate tints” is essentially a type of history, one “with the bloom and dew yet fresh upon it.” A legend, in Lippard’s view, is “history told to us, in the language of passion, of poetry, of home!”65 In other words, legends are utterances of experience. They are stories, which are shared in a common language between members of a society. Legends are representative of the people who share them. They detail the grand as well as the mundane. In Lippard’s formulation, legends are a democratic way of looking at and preserving our shared past.

On the other hand, Lippard argues that “the thing which passes for History is the most impudent, swaggering bully, the most graceless braggart, the most reckless equivocator that ever staggered forth upon the great stage of the world. He tells us a vast deal of Kings and blood, Revolutions and Battles, Murderers by wholesale, but not a word does he say of that Home-life of nations.” In a key turn to the visual, Lippard punctuates his criticism of the kinds of stories that function as history with the following illustration: “History, for example, draws you a picture of a tall man on Horseback, with a cap and sword and feather, and calls it Washington, but what does History say of Washington, the Man, in his home, with the arms of his wife about his neck; or Washington, the Man, in his closet, with the thought of his country’s destiny, eating like a silent agony into his great soul?” He extends this visual metaphor of history further to

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say: “History deals like a neophyte in the artist’s life, in immense dashes, and vague
scrawls, and splashy colors: it does not go to work like the master painter, adding one
delicate line to another, crowding one almost imperceptible beauty on another, until the
dumb thing speaks and lives!” Lippard believed (as evidenced in Legends) that the most
effective way to shape history was via the visual. Lippard’s frequent invocation of the
visual suggests that he believed images were imbued with a certain communicative power
which narrative alone lacked.

He was not the only one in this era who felt so. As Françoise Forster-Hahn notes,
“Already in the 1840s . . . the American Art-Union advocated the persuasive power of
pictorial representation.” Relying on Mary Bartlett Cowdrey’s mid-twentieth-century
study of the American Fine Art Academy and the American Art-Union, Hahn quotes an
1845 statement of the American Art-Union as follows: “Every great national painting of a
battle-field, or great composition illustrating some event in our history—every engraving,
lithograph and wood-cut appealing to national feeling and rousing national sentiment—is
the work of art; and who can calculate the effect of all these on the minds of our youth?
Pictures are more powerful than speeches.” For Lippard, however, the interplay
between images and text was important too. His approach to integrating the visual speaks
to what Richard Leppert describes as the power of images: “images are less visual
translations of what might otherwise be said (in words) than they are visual

66 Lippard, Legends of Mexico, 27.
67 Françoise Forster-Hahn, “Inventing the Myth of the American Frontier: Bingham’s
Images of Fur Traders and Flatboatman as Symbols of the Expanding Nation,” in
American Icons: Transatlantic Perspectives on Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century
American Art, edited by Thomas W. Gaehtgens and Heinz Ickstadt (Chicago: University
of Chicago Press, 1992), 120.
transformations of a certain awareness of the world. . . . Images do not so much tell us anything, as make available—by making visible in a certain way—a realm of possibilities and probabilities, some of which are difficult to state in words.⁶⁸ Lippard was no artist; however, he wanted Legends to feel to readers as if it were illustrated. To do this, he relied on an existing stock of popular images, to which readers could refer as they visualized his narrative history of the war.

Lippard’s key criticism of history is that it eschews what he might call the personal for the public, and that it generally ignores the full humanity of the figures whom it aims to commemorate. In other words, in Lippard’s estimation, history by and large does not record complete lives, but rather, records deeds of so-called great men. The way Lippard understands it, history “deal[s] in vague generalities,” which he insists are “worse than robust lies, for they only tell half the truth, and leave the imagination to fill the other half with the infinite space of falsehood.” Instead, Lippard believes that history should strive to present a more complete, inclusive picture of the past and “while it delineates the great career of ambition, it should not neglect the quiet but still impressive walk of social life. While it eloquently pictures Washington the General charging at the head of his legions, it should not forget Washington the Boy, in his rude huntsman’s dress, struggling for his life, on a miserable raft, amid the waves and ice of the wintry flood.”⁶⁹ As is evidenced by the ways in which Lippard defines his understanding of both history and legend in exceedingly visual terms, what is at stake for

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⁶⁹ Lippard, Legends of Mexico, 27.
Lippard in not fully fleshing out the humanity of the historic record is the potential to
develop blind spots in our vision of the past. Lippard stresses the importance of picturing
the past throughout Legends of Mexico, offering the not so implicit argument that the
ways in which we see or visualize the past matters.

“The Dead Woman of Palo Alto”

Lippard moves directly from this delineation of history, legend, and the pictorial
quality of the two into a legend of his own making, that of the dead woman of Palo Alto.
The implication of this sequence is that the story which follows is an example of just
what Lippard argues history, to be really meaningful, needs more of: stories of individual
experiences that flesh out the true meaning of a particular event by creating a more
complete picture. Lippard aims to create a historic view of the present that resonates with
his American audience and in which his readers can see themselves participating.

The anecdote opens with a parallel between Zachary Taylor, who slumbers in his
military camp, and a “young girl in her virgin slumber, with her voluptuous form,” who
“dreams a sweet wild dream, amid the war of battle” in the “almost oriental city of
Matamoras.” Lippard describes her as “strangely beautiful” and places her in a highly
picturesque setting: a garden filled with rare and delicate vegetation. However, he writes
that “the most beautiful thing in all the place, was the woman who slumbered there!”

In so doing, Lippard links this woman with the more desirable features of Mexico, from an
American point of view: the landscape and it resources. The woman so described is Inez,
daughter of a respected Mexican general, and one of two women around which this

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70 Lippard, Legends of Mexico, 28.
legend is formed.

Lippard’s representation of Inez and her doppelgänger, Mahitili, provides a rich example of how *Legends of Mexico* intersects with visual culture. Indeed, Lippard links the two women with the art of sculpture: “the beggar girl of Mexico and the proud lady Inez—one in rags and the other in lace and gold—and yet resembling each other, like twin copies of some beautiful statue.”71 The two women, nearly identical in physical appearance—they are, after all, long lost twins—experience two entirely different fates. Though they look the same, we are meant to see them each differently in the legend that Lippard creates, and ultimately they symbolize different things. Lippard presents disparate views of these two women—asking us to behold Inez and Mahitili differently, to gaze at them in diverse ways—there are moments of confusion built into the narration in which it is unclear precisely which woman we are looking at, and what we are to take away from the moment. It is not until the end of the tale that we learn exactly how it is we should view each of them. In the paragraphs that follow, I delineate the path, however confused and convoluted it may be, that Lippard leads us down in order to get to the vision he intends us to see.

Lippard begins with his description of Inez. He asks us to view her both as a vision of purity and one of desire—she has a “voluptuous” figure that, as Lippard presents it, targets her for masculine desire, yet she still “maintains the purity marked by the virgin.” Lippard’s description is highly exoticized and eroticized. He asks us to behold her, placing the initial emphasis on the physical features and traits that Lippard

insists mark her as a sexual object and a racialized other, a native to Mexico: “Behold her! One of those wild, warm natures, born of the tempests and sunshine of the volcanic south; her cheeks a rich, clear brown; her eye-lashes long and dark.” Lippard’s description moves quickly over her body, highlighting briefly “her bosom full and passionate,” before describing her hair, “flowing from the forehead to the waist, a shower of midnight tresses, gleaming and darkening over a robe of snow.” Lippard’s sexualized description of Inez (specifically his repetitive use of “voluptuous” and “virgin”) falls in line with a broader cultural perception that characterized women with brown bodies as well as those from the “mongrelized” heritage of Latin America as having a heightened sensuality, particularly in contrast to American women with white bodies, who supposedly descended from “pure” bloodlines, and whose sensuality was often ignored or denied. In From Banana to Buttocks: The Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture, Myra Mendible traces a history of codifying Latin America as both “bounty and booty” in popular culture. Though her collection of essays focuses on more recent depictions of the Latina body, the history Mendible tells has its roots in the mid-nineteenth century, particularly in the political allegories associated with the U.S.-Mexico war, that circulated in the popular press. Mendible argues that the Latina body has often stood as a metonym for Latin American, signaling “a permeable racial and national border, a field of diverse oppositions between rationality and sensuality, culture and nature, domestic and foreign. Both those who favored and those who opposed annexation of Mexico employed

72 Lippard, Legends of Mexico, 26 and 28.
erotically charged rhetoric to defend their positions."\textsuperscript{73} Lippard is no exception to this tendency, as in his depictions of Inez and Mahitili.

Inez’s body is figured in full repose. We see her slumbering on a couch after having returned from the bath, her loose robe falling to reveal parts of her body, and you, the reader, “behold that young breast, beating with wild emotion.” Lippard positions the reader directly in front of Inez as she sleeps, “let us approach her couch, let us bend over this sleeping woman, and listen to the words which fall quivering . . . from her young lips.” For “even in her sleep she tells the story of her life.”\textsuperscript{74} Lippard’s description of her reads as if he is delineating for us the scene depicted in a painting of a nude woman. In this moment, Inez, as nudes depicted in art often are, is put on display for the express purpose of the reader’s concentrated observation. According to Leppert, “the painted nude represents nakedness as a state specifically made for concentrated looking. . . . The nude in art exists only to be seen for what it is: naked. It invites not the averted eye, but the stare.”\textsuperscript{75} In order for an image to be effective as a nude, Leppert argues further, we must be made to want to look at the body in the manner presented. Whether or not we want to look at Inez in the way Leppert describes, Lippard insists that we should allow ourselves to be captivated by her bare, feminine form, to allow our eyes to linger over her body.

Lippard moves from the sight of Inez to a narration of her dream, which turns out to be a memory from her not so distant past. Like the description of Inez, her dream is

\textsuperscript{73} Myra Mendible, \textit{From Banana to Buttocks: The Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 8.
\textsuperscript{74} Lippard, \textit{Legends of Mexico}, 28.
\textsuperscript{75} Leppert, \textit{The Nude}, 22.
also written in a way so that the reader should visualize the scene. Lippard emphasizes looking here too, pointing out that which we see and that which we should see if we are looking as intently on this scene as he directs us to do. The narrative changes abruptly when Lippard draws our attention to the developing scene before us, “But hold! A vision breaks upon us now. . . .—behold!” Set in a Mexican Cathedral, the dream depicts a wedding. Lippard describes the marriage, demanding we witness the sacrament along with him. The scene from Inez’s reverie reproduces familiar images of marriage. Lippard’s description of the marriage in Inez’s dream looks strikingly like the one in an 1846 lithograph by Sarony and Major, entitled The Marriage (fig. 4), with a few revisions.

In Lippard’s view of the marriage, as in the scene produced by Sarony and Major, the “luxuriant” couple kneel next to one another at the altar; however, Lippard’s matrimonial vision departs from Sarony and Major in the representation of who is to be married. Sarony and Major depict a marriage between two people who appear to hold a similar social standing and who appear to be from the same racial or ethnic background. Conversely, Lippard visualizes a cross-border marriage between two “impressive types of widely contrasted races”: “He, born of the land of Washington, a wanderer from the hills of Virginia—She, a voluptuous daughter of the land of the Aztec, with the old Castilian blood mingling in her veins with the blood of Montezuma.” Lippard’s groom is “dressed in the costume of the northern land”; his bride “a Virgin in the bloom of her southern life, dark in eyes” marked by the “fiery tinge of her clear brown cheeks.” Clearly, we are

76 Lippard, Legends of Mexico, 29.
intended to view these two as an unlikely match as Lippard proclaims them to be a “strangely wedded pair.” They are strange presumably because of mid-nineteenth-century preoccupations with purity of bloodlines and concerns about cultural and racial amalgamation that would suggest such interracial, cross-cultural unions to be both problematic and a threat to the integrity of the so-called “Iron Race of the North.” As Mendible observes, “even as the grand narrative of Anglo-Saxon ‘manifest destiny’ justified the acquisition of land, it complicated myths of racial and national purity. Isolationists argued that territorial expansion threatened to contaminate the national body with inferior races.” This threat of contamination was evidenced in the popular culture of the period. Take for example, a popular songster, compiled and published by William McCarty near the beginning of the war, in which one song in particular cautioned: “Americans protect your blood.” However, at this point in Legends of Mexico Lippard seems to welcome such mixing, and the marriage between Inez and the Virginian (though “strange”) serves as an example of just how the people of Mexico might “melt into” the body politic of the United States, to become part of the “new race” which Lippard calls “the American People.”

In Lippard’s formulation, both Inez and the Virginian stand as types, representative of their respective nations, and their marriage is meant to be emblematic of a potential diplomatic future for the United States and Mexico. This representation of

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77 Lippard, Legends of Mexico, 29 and 15.
78 Mendible, From Banana to Buttocks, 8.
80 Lippard, Legends of Mexico, 15-16.
international reconciliation via cross-border marriage between U.S. soldiers and Mexican

women was one of the tropes that developed in the literature of the U.S.-Mexico war. Lippard complicates this vision of reconciliation through cross-border marriage by introducing Inez’s father into the narrative. After the completion of the nuptials, Inez’s father (the proud Castilian general) tears their union asunder and plans to force Inez to marry another man—one presumably from Mexico. The threat of forced marriage and the denial of autonomy are central to Lippard’s story of Inez, and present a gendered take on resolving the dispute between these bordering nations. Read as a commentary regarding the relationship between the United States and Mexico, where Inez stands in for the country of Mexico, Lippard flips the real world situation on its head. From the point of view of Mexico, the very presence of the United States military in the region was an act of aggression and a way of bullying Mexico into a fight over land which the United States had no claim to. Discussing the “trickery in U.S.-Mexican relations,” Jaime E. Rodríguez and Kathryn Vincent point out that the Texas question was “replete with heated discussions of issues as precise as the drawing of boundaries and as large as national sovereignty, slavery, and freedom of religion. . . . This conflict’s highly charged tale of deception, aggression, and humiliation has been told and retold with patriotic fervor in the United States; in Mexico it is rarely discussed, so deeply did it wound the national pride.” To Mexico, it was the U.S. who forced an “engagement” between the two countries, and in so doing attempted to deny Mexico its autonomy regarding the

81 Streeby American Sensations; Rodríguez, Literatures; and Johannsen, Halls of the Montzeumas.
definition of its borders. Thomas Benjamin and Jesús Valasco Márquez note that in Mexico, “every schoolchild believes that Mexico was ‘robbed of its territory by gringos.’ Adults still feel deeply aggrieved that Mexicans were forced to yield Texas, California, and New Mexico after the invasion of their territory and the occupation of their capital by U.S. troops.” Yet in Legends, Lippard suggests that it is Mexico that is being difficult, its men the ones who stand in the way of international harmony in the Americas.

This idea of Mexican men as the obstacle to reconciliation is developed further as the legend of the dead woman of Palo Alto unfolds and the fates of both Inez and Mahitili are revealed. When Inez awakens from her dream, we see the reality of her situation: she is a prisoner in her father’s home on the eve of a wedding in which she will be “married to a man whom her soul abhorred.” Though Inez vows to resist the tyranny of her father, she has remained his prisoner for the past six months. Just as hope of eluding the fate of a forced marriage dwindles, Lippard presents us with another picturesque vision of the “strangely wedded” couple. Only this time, the scene is one of rescue and not marriage. Inez is the damsel in distress and the Virginian her valiant liberator. When he appears in her window, Inez, certain that she sees “the vision of her dead husband,” sinks to her knees. Lippard describes the scene as follows: “This beautiful woman, on her knees, the white robe falling from her shoulders, and revealing half the beauty of her bosom—that silent figure, standing in the window, his deep eye glaring from a face pale as death, formed together, with the light and shadow, the fountains and flowers, a strangely

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impressive scene.”

The couple quickly gains their composure and makes a hasty escape, “their eyes dazzled by a picture” as the panorama of Matamoras amid the roar of battle and the beleaguered Fort Brown in the distance spreads before them. Pausing for a moment before they flee, the couple takes in the “terrible sight.” Of course Lippard, ever our guide through this gallery of images, expects us to look along with them and describes the battle scene as follows: “They stand upon the balcony, while the thunder of the cannon shakes the earth, and the hoarse murmur of the Mexican army, swells terribly in each interval of the night battle. That river, crowded with boats, that shore darkened by legions, whose lances glitter like torches of flame, that fort, defended by three hundred men, its banner waving on, through the lightning of battle, it was a sight to fire the blood and make the heart leap.” This expansive view of the battle landscape so strategically placed during the escape of Inez at once heightens the urgency of the situation—the couple risks death in this attempt at liberation—and reveals the sense of duty the Virginian feels to join his comrades in the fight against Mexico—“there they are, my countrymen—fighting on, when hope is gone!” After depositing Inez at a safe location, we next see the Virginian at the close of the battle at Palo Alto, where he and the father of Inez, engaged in combat against one another, discover the dead woman of Palo Alto.

The Virginian, seeking water to offer the dying father of Inez, approaches the banks of a small lake located in the chaparral near the field of battle, “when another sight palsied his hand, and turned his face to the color of ashes and clay.” Before him lay the

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85 Lippard, *Legends of Mexico*, 32.
dead body of a human being: “it was a woman, naked as Eve before she fell, with the blood streaming from her white bosom. . . . Not a vestige of apparel was there, upon her form, to denote her rank, or enable the living to identify the beautiful dead.” Lippard instructs us to gaze at this woman, whose nude form he describes as “matchless,” “chaste yet voluptuous,” the bosom of which is “just blossoming into bloom.” Had we been there, he insists that we “would have knelt by her, and gazed for hours upon the silent beauty of the murdered girl.” The description of looking and extended observation that Lippard presents here is not unlike how one might view a nude painting in a gallery. Like the image of Inez described above in various stages of undress, this nude figure is also presented for our concentrated observation; however, this nude form is much more tragic and problematic than that of Inez as pictured earlier, slumbering in her chamber or assuming the role of damsel in distress.

Forgetting the dying Mexican general, the Virginian kneels by the dead woman, whom, upon further inspection, he believes to be his wife, Inez. At this point in the narrative, the identity of the dead woman of Palo Alto is unclear, though the Virginian’s reaction, his rage and subsequent madness, suggest that we are to believe for the moment that this “naked and dishonored thing” is Inez. In his despair and haunted by the “horrible vision” of his young virgin wife, murdered in such outrageous fashion, the Virginian flees, riding frantically through the wild, eventually stumbling across “a quiet group of homes in the wilderness.” Here the Virginian sees “a bloody altar of the far gone time,” which Lippard links to the history of “Montezuma” and the old Aztec civilization, and

86 Lippard, Legends of Mexico, 39.
which the Virginian imagines as a site for sacrificial rites, specifically human sacrifice. Seeing men atop the altar, imagining “the figures of the sacrificial priests gloating over their victim’s writhing form,” and remembering Inez, whom he found “a murdered and dishonored thing, in the shadow of the lonely chaparral,” he races to the top of the altar to find an unexpected sight.

Instead of a savage, uncivilized people, what struck the Virginian with surprise “was the universal expression which reigned upon every face. . . . all wore one look. It was pity, it was sympathy, it was love, yes, as the angels love! It was religion!” Instead of finding the human victim of a sacrificial rite, the Virginian sees a sleeping Woman, “wrapped in a white robe, . . . smiling in her calm repose.” The woman is none other than Inez, who due to circumstances following her rescue, lost her way and wandered through the wilderness. In her wanderings, Inez, like the Virginian after her, chanced upon this hidden Aztec civilization at a moment when, confused by the thundering of the nearby war between the United States and Mexico, the isolated community prepares to offer a sacrifice in the form of a dove. Inez, disheveled from her arduous journey, interrupts the ritualistic moment and instead of becoming a sacrificial victim, she is hailed by the “hardy people.” Though the threat of human sacrifice underlies the convoluted narrative of this legend, Lippard ultimately stresses the peacefulness of this people, who have not yet been disturbed by white civilization and the colonizing power associated with such contact. In the end, the Virginian and Inez are reunited, and Lippard places them in the center of our view: “the Husband on his knees, with his beautiful wife upon his breast,
her dark hair waving over his shoulder.” Lippard leaves us with this vision of Inez and the Virginian in this remote Mexican Eden—we do not hear anything of their fates following the end of the war.

Only after the fate of Inez is favorably sealed does Lippard reveal the circumstances surrounding the death of the dead woman of Palo Alto, which he does in pictorial fashion. Lippard, once again, asks us to behold “the scene which spreads before” us. We enter the tent of Arista, in which we see the kneeling form of a young girl, “attired in a garment of richest dyes, which half-revealing the warm bosom, girdles her slender waist, . . . displaying the sculptured proportions of her voluptuous limbs.” Lippard wonders: “Is it the Lady Inez, whom we behold?” Hers is “the same form; the same ripeness on the lip, the voluptuous swell in the outline of the form; dark flowing hair, and large full eyes, all the same.” Yet, knowing the fate of Inez, by now we can assume this woman to be none other than Inez’s lost twin, Mahitili, even though Lippard continues to confuse the issue for his readers. Mahitili’s only companion is her lover, a Mexican soldier, Francisco. Lamenting Mexico’s imminent defeat in battle, Francisco considers killing Mahitili, for such a fate, he argues, is preferable to leaving her to the “mercy of the foe.” The implication is that Francisco would rather Mahitili die by his hand than to be at risk of suffering a woman’s fate in the hands of an enemy. However, Francisco ultimately decides to flee the area in an attempt to save both their lives. Leaving Mahitili in the tent alone in search of a horse with which to make their escape, Francisco dies on the battlefield, pinned beneath the very horse he sought when both horse and rider were

87 Lippard, *Legends of Mexico*, 41-43.
88 Lippard, *Legends of Mexico*, 44.
hit with the same cannon ball.

Mahitili waits in Arista’s tent for Francisco’s return, but instead is confronted by a Ranchero who, standing before the tent with a horse ready, convinces her that he’s come in Francisco’s stead, and that her valiant soldier waits for her in the chaparral. “Without a suspicion, she bounds to the saddle,” oblivious to the Ranchero’s pilfering as he gathers valuable items into his bag before they ride away together, the “voluptuous burden” of Mahitili and the “half-savage” of the Ranchero. Once into the darkness of the chaparral, as the shadows gather them in, Mahitili calls out for Francisco, “quivering with an unknown fear,” questioning the Ranchero as to the whereabouts of her lover. The Ranchero “surveyed with one gloating look, the warm beauty of her face, and the luxuriant swell of her bosom,” replying to her entreaty: “‘He is here!’ . . . , and Mahitili felt the blood grow cold, from her heart to her fingers.” Mahitili is preyed upon by the ranchero and she knows only too late what his intentions are. Not long after, the dying Mexican general and the Virginian “beheld the naked body of a murdered and dishonored woman.” Though Lippard does not explicitly narrate the pain which she suffers, he makes overt gestures about the nature of her death. In the end, Mahitili fails to escape the fate which Francisco feared for her; however, she falls prey to a fellow countryman, and not by the hands of the enemy as Francisco had feared. When read against the successful union of Inez and the Virginian, the failure of Francisco to successfully save Mahitili speaks to nineteenth-century characterizations of Mexican men as both incompetent and corrupt.

89 Lippard, *Legends of Mexico*, 46.
The juxtaposition of Mahitili’s death with that of Francisco tells us a bit about how concepts of the fallen are developed in nineteenth-century American art and literature. Mahitili’s rape and murder and Lippard’s display of her defiled feminine body is meant in part to shock us and in part to highlight the different ways in which we conceive of fallen men and women. In “Lost and Found: Once More the Fallen Woman,” Linda Nochlin examines the differences between masculine and feminine notions of the “fallen.” Nochlin takes the following passage from an unidentified novel by British writer Rose Macaulay as a starting point: “it’s a queer thing . . . how ‘fallen’ in the masculine means killed in the war, and in the feminine given over to a particular kind of vice.”

Nochlin argues further that “the sexual asymmetry peculiar to the notion of falling is worth considering, especially in the nineteenth century, when both aspects were taken more seriously than they are today. In art, fallen in the masculine tended to inspire rather boring sculptural monuments and sarcophagi. Fallen in the feminine, however—understood as any sort of sexual activity on the part of women out of wedlock, whether or not for gain—exerted a peculiar fascination on the imagination of nineteenth-century artists, not to speak of writers.”

In Legends, we see the fall of Francisco, buried beneath the horse he had sought in order to lead Mahitili to safety. Lippard describes him in vivid strokes: “Look yonder by the light of the moon, and behold a young form, stretched stiffly on the prairie, his face buried in the sod, his arms extended, the fingers clutching bloody grass, while the head of a dead steed rests upon his back!”

His death is tragic, to

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91 Nochlin, “Lost and Found,” 139.
92 Lippard, Legends of Mexico, 46.
be sure, but it bears none of the markings of the shameful as does Mahitili’s death. As he
does Inez, Lippard presents Mahitili in various stages of undress—she, too, appears in the
narrative as a representation of the female nude. But Mahitili represents a different sort of
nude than Inez does. Raped and murdered by the ranchero—the quintessential villain in
many of the U.S. narratives of the war—Mahitili represents the fallen woman and the
worst sort of excesses associated with uncontrollable masculine sexual desire. In some
ways, Mahitili’s fate serves as a particularly racialized commentary on the dangers
women faced when left unprotected.

As can be seen in the legend of the dead woman of Palo Alto, Lippard brings
Mexican women into his narrative of the war in problematic ways. As will be discussed
later, _Legends of Mexico_ features representations of American women who are involved
in or affected by the war too. In all cases, Lippard’s portraits of women are visual in
nature. The Mexican women that he imagines are almost always victims, damsels in
distress in need of rescuing by the American military men. The American women include
camp followers who show up on the battlefield and wives and sisters who remain home,
awaiting the return of their soldiers from the war. One “real” woman is related to an
officer, Samuel Ringgold. Another, the wife of Captain Page, does not wait at home for
her soldier’s return; rather, she journeys to the seat of war in an attempt to reach her
husband before it is too late.\(^93\) Lippard’s presentation of these women indicates that,
though they are not directly part of the action of war, Lippard still deems their

\(^{93}\) The wife of Captain Page and her story show up in the press coverage of the war. In
some ways her gesture becomes national news (a legend of sorts) that can be compared
loosely to the ways in which the story of the Great Western circulated in the press.
involvement in the conflict worthy of remembering and presenting as part of the history. His illustrations in *Legends* are not without their problems of gender and race, but they contribute to a narrative of the war that might not otherwise be understood.

“*War has been painted too long as a pretty thing*”

*Legends of Mexico* is book-ended with images: it begins with the panorama of a spreading fever for war and ends with a heroic portrait of Zachary Taylor. Thus, Lippard frames the book with traditional and unsurprising portraits in line with contemporary lithographic representations that romanticize the conflict and valorize its combatants. Throughout *Legends*, Lippard invokes history painting, landscapes and battle scenes, as well as portraiture. According to Stewart, many of the era’s lithographers “ignore[d] the trauma of battle and deaths of fellow soldiers in [their] visual images,” focusing instead on the landscape or panoramic views that highlighted the beauty of war from a distance.94 Even in his descriptions of the first major battle of the war—the battle of Palo Alto—Lippard engages in these traditions highlighting the beauty of war. Like the panorama of this battle featured in prints by Angelo Paldi and Carl Nebel (fig. 5 and fig. 6), Lippard’s description of the skirmish emphasizes the landscape—“a glorious place for a battle field”—and admires the “gorgeous array” of the opposing armies as they wait, “palpitating with the hunger of battle.” Lippard goes on to describe the Mexican and American forces on the cusp of battle as they await “the signal word of fight,” insisting “it must be confessed that the details are very beautiful.”95 Lippard valued and respected the merits of soldiering and celebrates them in *Legends of Mexico*; however, he is not


Fig. 6. Carl Nebel, *Battle of Palo Alto, 1851*, toned lithograph, George Wilkins Kendall, *The War Between the United States and Mexico Illustrated* (New York: D. Appleton, 1851).
entirely at ease with the ways in which war has been visualized historically. In *Washington and His Generals*, Lippard announces his disillusionment with existing images of war, insisting that “war has been painted too long as a pretty thing, spangled with buttons, fluttering with ribbons, waving with plumes. Let us learn to look upon it as it is; a horrible bandit, reeking with the blood of the innocent, the knife of murder in his hand, the fire of carnage in his eye.”96 Dissatisfied with the ways in which the visual record of the war elided the grim aspects of combat to present war as a “pretty thing,” Lippard sought to complicate that vision in *Legends of Mexico*. Lippard’s description of the battle of Palo Alto quickly turns from the beauty of war to the “infernal revelry of war.”97

Lippard does not deny the attractiveness of war; however, in his descriptions of war’s beauty he simultaneously insists that the tendency to paint war solely as a beautiful endeavor is problematic. Lippard does see beauty in war, but that is not all he sees. What is beautiful about war—in Lippard’s estimation—is the pomp, the ceremony, the patriotism, the many disciplined men who sacrifice their lives for their country:

“Beautiful it was, I say to see the going forth of this army—But the coming back? The heart grows cold to think of it.—. . . The going forth is beautiful. . . . The coming back? Hark! through the darkened air, did you not hear a sound, like the closing of a thousand coffin lids?”98 Lippard suggests there is a beauty at the outset of a battle that is represented by the spectacle of setting out for combat; the venturing out from camp and

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97 Lippard, *Legends of Mexico*, 54.
98 Lippard, *Legends of Mexico*, 76.
the time just before battle are—for the time being—beautiful things. What is horrible, he suggests, is the aftermath of battle, the coming back. For, even though the battle is done the war is still waging; the angel of death will have more work to do upon the morrow; and the demand for coffins will be up, again. As David S. Reynolds astutely observes, “Lippard’s patriotic respect for sterling soldiership was qualified by an acute perception of the grisly realities of the battlefield. In his accounts of . . . Mexican War combat Lippard frequently begins by highlighting the heroism of American soldiers and ends by describing the bloody aftermath of battle.” Lippard often contrasted his enthusiasm for “man’s bravery” with “an ironic recognition of war’s inhumanity, shifting rapidly from heady jingoism to a kind of grim naturalism.”

In so doing, Lippard suggests throughout *Legends of Mexico* that war needs to be more fully visualized for the American public. He insists that Americans need to see both the beautiful and heroic aspects of combat as well as "the horrible summing up of the great game of war.”

Lippard describes the skirmish at Palo Alto with gruesome realism—“every shot makes a lane of dead, every ball bears a head, or an arm away!” In Lippard’s portrayal of this battle, shots from both sides spray “shower[s] of blood into the faces of living men”; “brave forms” lose their lives; and “howl[s] of pain” are heard as the battle continues. It is in this grim setting—in “the heat of this terrible fire”—that Lippard slices through the darkness of war to provide a point of light. He paints a scene which he claims has “no parallel in history”: the death of Samuel Ringgold. Lippard implores his readers to “behold the picture, framed as it is, in the smoke of the burning prairie.” Ringgold is

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100 Lippard, *Legends of Mexico*, 76.
described in *Legends of Mexico* as a “magnificent picture of manhood”: he rides atop his horse, his “stern face, surmounted by the helmet” and his “broad chest, heaving with the fever of the fight.” Moments later the “Mexican cannon is heard” and Ringgold is “enveloped in a cloud of smoke.” The vision that emerges from this smoke cloud is agonizing to behold. Ringgold—“horribly wounded, with the bones of each leg laid bare”—lies next to his dying horse and selflessly urges his comrades to fight on without him. Surrounded by officers of his own caliber as well as masses of “rude soldiers,” Ringgold dies in glory: “Ever and anon, . . . the full light of the setting sun poured upon his pale forehead, and lighted his face as with a glory.”101 As Lippard’s description implies, Ringgold’s death is an honorable (and, perhaps even saintly or divine) sacrifice that will be widely remembered.

Many of Lippard’s readers most likely saw this scene in lithographs of the war. Images memorializing Ringgold’s death circulated widely. Many of the era’s major firms issued at least one image to commemorate the death of Ringgold.102 Lippard’s heroic and glorified depiction of Ringgold’s death mirrors quite closely the lithographic views of this event. In fact, Lippard’s description of the scene reads like an ekphrasis of the many lithographs which collectively imagine Ringgold’s death. James Baillie’s lithograph, *Death of Major Ringgold*, closely matches Lippard’s description of the event in that Baillie pictures this death scene as heroic and melodramatic (fig. 7). Lippard’s account focuses on “three figures in the picture [which stand] out from all others [and] rivet our

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101 Lippard, *Legends of Mexico*, 54 and 66-68.
102 For more on lithographs which commemorated the deaths of famous soldiers like Ringgold, see Stewart, “Artists and Printmakers,” 26-8 and Tyler, *The Mexican War*, 2.
eyes.” Similarly, pictured in the center of Baillie’s lithograph and set apart from the rest of the American army, are the three figures Lippard seems to describe. Just as Lippard envelops Ringgold in an effulgence of light, Baillie presents Ringgold separated from the ongoing action by a halo of white. In Baillie’s view of this scene, Ringgold and his fellow officers are visually separated from the chaos of war. However, just beyond the center of the frame we can see that—as Ringgold is dying in the arms of his fellow officers—the battle wages on. In his sketch of Ringgold’s death, Lippard insists that we see “the heroes of the day, standing amid the dead bodies of their comrades.”

Certainly, more men are dying as heroically as Ringgold is, but Baillie keeps those deaths from our view—we do not see the “dead bodies” Lippard suggests that we should. Baillie’s *Death of Major Ringgold*, with its neat and narrow depiction of death, suggests that only the deaths of the war’s greatest heroes would be illustrated.

Kelloggs and Thayer’s *The Death of Major Ringgold* provides a more chaotic view that more closely matches Lippard’s in terms of illustrating mayhem and brutality (fig. 8). Though Kelloggs and Thayer focus primarily on Ringgold, they—unlike Baillie—also visualize the dead and dying comrades found in Lippard’s sketch of the event. Whereas Baillie visualizes Ringgold’s death apart from the action of battle, Kelloggs and Thayer place Ringgold’s death in the center of the action, simultaneously suggesting that one cannot separate the two and acknowledging that Ringgold’s death at Palo Alto was one loss. Strewn across the foreground in *The Death of Major Ringgold* are four anonymous soldiers whose deaths are largely overshadowed by the dying Ringgold.

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Fig. 7. James Baillie, *Death of Major Ringgold*, c1846, lithograph, Washington, D.C., The Library of Congress.

Fig. 8. Kelloggs and Thayer, *The Death of Major Ringgold*, 1846, lithograph, Hartford, Connecticut Historical Society.
These men are trampled under the feet of Ringgold’s entourage and the implication is that they are not worthy of the same kind of commemoration that Ringgold receives.

In Ringgold’s death and the violence which surrounds it, Lippard finds both the “strong lights” of the beautiful aspects of war and the “dark shadows” of combat’s grim underbelly. Though Lippard concedes that Ringgold’s actions are honorable and worth remembering, what makes Lippard’s visualization of Ringgold’s death different from the lithographs is Lippard’s juxtaposition of the glorious and glorified death of Ringgold with the forgotten (and often gruesome) deaths of common soldiers. Lippard shifts our gaze away from the hero—in this case, “Ringgold erect on his white horse, . . . a strong picture, boldly marked out”—and on to the common soldier, whose death Lippard describes as follows:

The common soldier, by [Ringgold’s] side, attired in a blue round jacket, his broad chest, laid open to the light! . . . You behold him, . . . in the act of listening to the words of Ringgold. His swarthy face is all attention, his honest brow, covered with sweat. . . . Look! Ringgold in the energy of the moment bends forward extending his hand—and at the very instant, the soldier is torn in two, by a combination of horrible missiles, which bear his mangled flesh away, whirling a bloody shower through the air. That thing beneath the horse’s feet, with the head bent back, until it touches the heels, that mass of bloody flesh, in which face, feet and brains, alone are distinguishable, was only a moment past, a living man.104

104 Lippard, *Legends of Mexico*, 54.
Lippard moves from the glorified Ringgold—whose heroic death is well-chronicled and visualized—to the messy death of a more obscure soldier no less brave or patriotic, but who is likely to be omitted from the national memory. Among Lippard’s more grotesque, gruesome, and graphic descriptions of battle, are interspersed moments like these in which Lippard steps back from the carnage of war and insists that we as readers recognize the mass of humanity that has been lost as a result of such brutality. Lippard does not present such graphic descriptions merely for the sake of shocking his readers, but does so with a purpose: to critique the fact that—though he believes they should be—scenes like this are traditionally not captured by the visual record of war. Lippard’s narrative reveals an anxiety that there will be many soldiers lost and forgotten in the war with Mexico.

Though Lippard writes extensively about the well-known heroes of the war (i.e., Taylor and Ringgold), he suggests that we also need to visualize and remember those in the lower ranks. “Dipping [his] pencil in the blood of human hearts,” Lippard endeavors to sketch the “individual deeds of chivalry and murder,” but no matter how much he tries “to paint them all” he simply cannot.\(^{105}\) Lippard’s disturbing visualization of the common soldier’s death—the complete destruction of his body—exposes the underlying humanity of unknown soldiers which gets lost in images like *The Death of Major Ringgold* and *Battle of Cerro Gordo*. The prints of the war with Mexico glorify the deaths of men like Ringgold, while the similarly heroic deaths of countless common soldiers are not seriously considered. Most often in the lithographic record the common soldiers are a

\(^{105}\) Lippard, *Legends of Mexico*, 89.
mass of disposable bodies, hardly individual men. Lippard’s turn to the everyday soldier allows him to write about the gruesomeness of war and the destruction of bodies in ways that writing about the country’s beloved heroes might not have permitted. While Lippard’s macabre description of the common soldier’s death is disconcerting, it also highlights the grim and individual aspects of combat he so aptly insists are not pictured in the visual record of the war. It is this more “realistic” and troubling vision of war that Lippard would like to see illustrated for the American public—a visualization that, though shocking and gruesome, more appropriately emphasizes the realities of the everyday soldier and costs of the war.

Lippard’s representations of individual soldiers allow him to show the more personal aspects of war, specifically the ways in which war affects individuals and families. Lippard couples the sketch of Ringgold’s death and the death of common soldiers with scenes of mourning and anticipation that attempt to depict the effects of war on the domestic front. What also needs to be pictured in the record of war—according to Lippard—are the ways in which the “horrible summing up” of combat affects those who await the soldier’s return. This more personal approach to illustrating war is largely absent from the lithographs. Artists did portray soldiers coming home from the war; however, these images are overwhelmingly romantic and sentimental, often depicting the soldier’s happy return to the embrace of his beloved. Currier’s Soldier’s Return is an example of the stock illustration of the soldier’s homecoming used by various lithography firms (fig. 9).  

In Soldier’s Return, the gallant soldier comes back from war unscathed

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Fig. 9. Nathaniel Currier, *Soldier’s Return*, c1847, lithograph (hand colored), Washington, D.C., The Library of Congress.

and seamlessly resumes his pre-war romance: having won glory in battle he returns unaffected to claim his proper place. There is no hint of the darker homecomings in which soldiers returned from battle disfigured, either physically or emotionally.

Similarly, the lithographic record does not visualize what happens when the soldier fails to return.107 Throughout *Legends of Mexico*, Lippard presents readers with scenes of

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107 Lippard briefly addresses the impossibility of the soldier’s return home in ‘Bel of *Prairie Eden*: “His fancy dared not look upon the picture of the future, for a vision of war and battles rose up before him, and while his young blood danced with the raptures of a
reunion and mourning that challenge such sentimental scenes. At times he interjects these scenes onto the battlefield and at others he illustrates the break between the battlefield and the home front. In both, Lippard attempts to show the impact of war on individual families: both Mexican and American.

Following the portrait of Ringgold’s death, Lippard visualizes the emotional impact on the hero’s family. He transports his readers from the battlefield at Palo Alto to the distant Ringgold home. Here we see Ringgold’s sister dream of his return; she pictures Ringgold “mounted on his own gallant steed—. . . the laurel upon his white forehead, the glow of victory upon his battle worn cheek!” We, however, know that Ringgold will not return triumphant from the war; that his sister’s hopes of his return will be dashed when “[Ringgold’s] watch and chain, placed in her hands, and stained with his dying blood, will make [her] heart swell with agony too deep for tears.” Lippard juxtaposes this image of Ringgold’s mourning sister with the unnamed wife of Captain Page, another soldier who also suffers horrific wounds in the battle of Palo Alto. Like Ringgold’s sister, Page’s wife waits and “pictures the form of a brave soldier . . .. How he will return.” In a seemingly deliberate critique of scenes like those visualized in Currier’s Soldier’s Return, Lippard’s description of this woman and the hopeful return of her husband quickly darkens. The woman pictures “how she will hear [her returning husband’s] footstep in the hall, how she will spring forward to the threshold, and bury her head upon his bosom.” She does not yet know, however, that her husband already

soldier’s life, he seemed to hear a voice which said,--‘And that home you will never reach again!’” Lippard, *Bel of Prairie Eden: A Romance of Mexico* (Boston: Hotchkiss and Company, 1848), 11.
“writhes upon the dust, his limbs quivering in the blood, which pours from his wound, and swells in little pools.” She does not yet know of the “horrible” and “ghastly wound” he has suffered—a wound that “in a single moment” disfigured his “manly face” and “wrecked [it] into deformity!” Upon hearing of her husband’s injury, the woman rushes to the border to be by his side, “hungering to behold him”; yet, her hopes of a joyful reunion fade to nervous anticipation at what awaits her.

Lippard describes this “most heart-rending” reunion—the likes of which had not been drawn in the visual record of the war—and insists that it should be visualized: “Well may the heart of the Painter grow sick, as his pencil delineates that scene.” Lippard raises the possibilities of soldiers damaged and deformed. The reunion of the “faithful” wife with her “mangled” husband is anything but romantic. She does not recognize this soldier—“the form of a man”—who lies dying with his deformity veiled from her. She knows the “fearful truth” but cannot “look upon [her] husband’s face. Those features which once won her love . . . are now a mass of ruins.”108 Her husband has been changed by war. He has become unrecognizable, and the possibility for him to return to life as it was before the war is nothing more than a fantasy. As Lippard’s visualization of this reunion mournfully illustrates, war changes men in a way that renders homecomings like the ones in Currier’s Soldier’s Return an impossibility. However, Lippard is not only concerned with the return of the soldier, he also insists on visualizing the consequences of war in terms of the personal losses which families often suffer in times like these.

Perhaps one of the most poignant images Lippard illustrates is the scene following

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108 Lippard, Legends of Mexico, 68-70.
the death of the “common soldier” who died by Ringgold’s side. The soldier’s wife, with “her babe slumbering in her arms amid the fierce roars of battle,” witnesses the gruesome death of her husband. She had followed him to the seat of war in hopes of a better life; what she realizes instead is horrific loss. Unable to contain her grief, she approaches her husband’s mangled remains and “place[s] the gory head upon her lap.” Lippard sketches her cradling her husband’s “bloody head . . . while the fight whirled around her.” She remains there among the “heaps of slaughter” until “they came with spades to hide the hideous corruption of the field . . . . And as they huddled the miserable thing, into the hurried grave” her “low-toned, monotonous lament broke over the dead silence of the deserted field.” Though this scene of the grieving wife is obviously embellished and a dramatization of Lippard’s own grotesque imagination, it is realistic in its portrayal of grief and the terrible losses of war. Lippard briefly focuses on this “breathing time in the work of blood” and looks ahead “to the battle once more!” Throughout *Legends of Mexico*, Lippard reminds his readers that the brutal reality of war is the certainty of death not just of American soldiers, but of Mexican soldiers as well.

In a somewhat surprising turn, Lippard asks his readers to sympathize with the people of Mexico. Describing the beauty of the Mexican army setting out for battle, he glances back at the people of Matamorases and sees a common humanity with these people who live on opposite sides of a contested border. In this backward glance, Lippard touches on the same kinds of losses that he sees on the American side:

Angel of death, hovering over those legions, with the light of the evening

star, upon your livid brow, tell us, have you the heart to enter Matamoras now, and gaze upon those children, who will be fatherless to-morrow, upon those wives who to-morrow will look for their husbands, and find them floating with cold faces, on the river’s wave, or seek for them in vain, among the heaps of battle dead?\textsuperscript{110}

Lippard attempts to show the impact of war not only on American families, but on Mexican families as well. The cost of this war on both sides of the border amounts to a tremendous loss of life that will certainly affect the social fabric of both nations. This is the “horrible summing up” of war that Lippard insists is not visualized for the American public in the lithographic record. War takes a visible toll on families and Lippard seems to suggest that these scenes need to be visualized in order to more completely historicize the war. For Lippard, visual manifestations of grief and loss are necessary to properly remember the war and to provide our national memory with a greater sense of the inhumanity of war. Lippard makes the case that visualizing these more poignant and touching, albeit horrifying, moments of personal loss is necessary in creating a more critical view of war.

The vision of war that Lippard presents to his readers is both bloodier and more personal than that in the lithographic record—at times it is just as generalized and glorified; however, Lippard insists that we see war’s more individualized and violent realities too. According to Reynolds, “in his historical legends, [Lippard] transferred blood and savagery from the medieval castle to the American battlefield, becoming one

\textsuperscript{110} Lippard, \textit{Legends of Mexico}, 76.
of a handful of antebellum American writers who described the terrors of war with some amount of realism.”

Perhaps one of the most horrible realities of war is the suffering of the men who are wounded in battle. The dead are gone, they have moved on, but the wounded remain, a constant lingering reminder of the atrocities of war. “To the rear with the wounded—yes, American and Mexican . . . . For the dead we do not care. . . . Pain, want, the world itself, to them are now but empty names, for they are dead. But the wounded, oh, have you the heart to gaze upon them . . . ?” The shrieks of the wounded, “howling, mad with pain,” and their disfigured bodies, “bleeding and limbs crushed,” haunt us. Their suffering provides “sights to wring the soul of the strong man.”

These scenes of wounded yet living men are those we dare not look on and that cause us to turn away from the realities of war. For this reason alone—because these images of suffering make us uncomfortable—Lippard suggests that it is precisely these scenes which need to be recorded in the visual memory of war.

“But why need we picture?”

Lippard insists that horrifically graphic descriptions of the violence of war allow his readers to see the personal and emotional violence that war wreaks on individuals, families, and nations. Lippard presents his audience with a smorgasbord of carnage and suffering with the express purpose of attracting and putting off the reader. He showcases this suffering in all its painful gore so that readers become uncomfortable, even queasy, with mass bloodshed. “But why need we picture” the agony of war? Lippard suggests

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111 Reynolds, *George Lippard*, 37.
113 Lippard, *Legends of Mexico*, 129.
that we need to “picture” the horrors of combat so that we do not remain comfortable with waging wars and so that justifying them becomes more difficult. Lippard seems to understand the notion that “images can . . . document the sordid, the repellant, and the injurious [aspects of combat], and force public revulsion against a war.”

For Lippard, artistic and historic representations of war had for too long participated in this project of making war palatable to the American public. Throughout Legends of Mexico, Lippard suggests that both the written and the visual record of combat should instead make us uncomfortable with war—but, as he demonstrates, they do not.

According to Lippard, war has not been fully visualized or historicized, and in his view these two ways of recording war function together. Lippard believed that history should “speak to the heart, should not lie to us by wholesale, or deal in vague generalities . . . : No! It should, in narrating the records of an event or age, make us live with the people, fight by them in battle, . . . make love, hate, fear and triumph with them.”

As Rodríguez thoughtfully observes, Lippard “claims openly that he is reaching for something more profound than mere history, a lifeless, vacuous domain which to ‘legend’ responds by imparting the texture of universal, eternal reality, even if brazenly fictional.” For Lippard, the way to accomplish this more complete, yet “fictional,” representation of an event or age was through a merging of art and history.

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115 Lippard, Legends of Mexico, 27.
116 Rodríguez, Literatures, 78.
*Legends of Mexico*—itself a series of war pictures—simultaneously relies on and revises historical and artistic representations of war to ensure that the war with Mexico is more realistically shaped in the American imagination. In *Legends of Mexico*, Lippard writes against a kind of massive cultural forgetting, a misremembering of the war that becomes problematic. His imagined portraits of the war suggest that though the history of war is largely interpretive, Americans must never forget its realities. Popular prints may not be the most credible or historically accurate images, but they still offer an image of the past that—for Lippard—seems dangerous.

In a brief sketch titled, “A Sequel to the Legends of Mexico,” Lippard acknowledges the dangers associated with misremembering or misinterpreting representations of war. Lippard worries “whether the very pictures of war and its chivalry which I had drawn, might not be misconceived and lead young hearts into an appetite for blood-shedding.”¹¹⁸ Lippard is afraid that his message in *Legends of Mexico* has the potential to be misinterpreted, creating a reaction opposite to what he wanted. If we read *Legends of Mexico* as simultaneously celebrating and condemning the war, then this sequel makes his position more clear. Lippard is worried that a treatise that would discourage Americans from romanticizing combat, might instead be misread as a glorification of the same, and could be used to inspire the very acts he wishes to condemn. That is the great irony contained within *Legends of Mexico*: that Lippard, in trying to criticize war has actually created a work that can be misinterpreted as pro-war propaganda. In this way, *Legends of Mexico* is not so much a book about the U.S. war

¹¹⁸ George Lippard, “A Sequel to the Legends of Mexico,” *White Banner* (Philadelphia: [published by the author], 1851), 108.
with Mexico as it is a book about (mis)representations of war in general. Lippard draws a bleak picture of any such effort to disabuse the people. His sketches must romanticize the conflict in order to express disillusionment with the efficacy of war “to make room upon the earth for honest men to live in.”\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{119} Lippard, \textit{Legends of Mexico}, 9.
CHAPTER TWO

“HER BRAVERY WAS THE ADMIRATION OF ALL”: FIGURING THE GREAT WESTERN AS A FEMALE WAR HERO IN THE U.S.-MEXICO WAR

“Any female who is a combatant in a real war is not a real woman. Physically or psychologically, she must be either peculiar or perverted because women by nature require male protection. Women are too weak physically and too gentle psychologically to go to war. So women can’t have been in war—even if they were.”

~Linda Grant De Pauw, Battle Cries and Lullabies, 1998

Stories of heroism during the U.S.-Mexico war circulated broadly in the print culture of the period. Almost instantly reports of actions on the battlefield appeared in newspapers near the border region and were picked up across the country. Most of these stories detailed the exploits of men, soldiers involved in the bloody business of—depending upon one’s perspective—defending a nation’s borders or enacting the most egregious land grab in the history of the United States. Mixed in with all the descriptions of camp life, the graphic chronicles of combat, and the valorizations of in battle, one particular story of bravery sticks out. It is the story of a woman, a camp follower, who would be known by her contemporaries more familiarly by the sobriquets she earned in service to her country than she would be known by her own name. Locating the story of this woman—the Great Western and Heroine of Fort Brown—provides the original impetus for this chapter.

Robert W. Johannsen’s pioneering social history, To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination, claims that at the time of
the war “no woman . . . was accorded as much attention” as the Great Western, a “laundress,” whose life and history is “shrouded in the mists of legend.” Though shrouded, Johannsen identifies the woman behind the sobriquet as “Sarah Borginnis (or Bourdette)” and ends his short sketch by declaring her “the unchallenged Heroine of the Mexican War.” In this sprawling social history but comprehensive volume, Sarah gets a little over one page. Johannsen’s scant coverage of this woman—of any of the women he mentions who played a role in the U.S.-Mexico war, really—and the simultaneous suggestion that she was part of a “new stock of heroes” reveals a gap in scholarship.\(^\text{120}\) If, as Johannsen indicates, the Great Western received a fair amount of attention during the war, certainly more could be told of her story than the page or two which appeared in *To the Halls of the Montezumas*. What might the story of the Great Western tell us about what it meant to heroize a female camp follower at a time when military service was barred to women? What might the legend of the Great Western tell us about the ways in which the U.S.-Mexico war figured in the cultural memory of the United States more broadly?

The story of the Great Western did not appear in a sole, single-authored, comprehensive text which circulated during the war. Rather, the story unfolded in the press over time, and a handful of voices contributed. The legend that I examine in this chapter is a compilation of various iterations of the Great Western’s exploits. Though the items which my research turned up do not represent a complete collection of materials about the Great Western, they do give a sense of the extent to which stories about her

\(^{120}\) Johannsen, *Halls of the Montezumas*, 139, 141, and 108.
circulated, and they provide a basis for analyzing the meaning-making by the culture that celebrated her. What might this legend, cobbled together from disparate narrative bits, tell us about nineteenth-century American perceptions of female heroism in particular and perceptions of the U.S.-War with Mexico in general? In the sections that follow I consider the cultural and literary implications of the Great Western, and argue that this legend provides a key account of the U.S.-Mexico war that does not fit into the dominant national narrative the U.S. was generating in the antebellum period.

I focus first on the narrative of the Great Western as it appeared in contemporary newspapers. This archival approach provides a new framework with which to view the narrative of this woman’s life and the stories of her heroism that made her a legend in her own time. I focus next on later reminiscences of the Great Western’s contributions and service to the army, in addition to accounts that were left in manuscript and published much later. Though evidence suggests that much more may have circulated about the Great Western in the oral history and lore of the period, it is impossible to know just how widely the oral legend circulated. In fact, details in manuscript accounts did not garner much attention until researchers in the mid-1950s recovered them. The story of the Great Western that circulated in nineteenth century print culture and the narrative which was recovered and reconstructed in the twentieth century are two different legends. These later additions make up the bulk of the Great Western’s story, which has circulated since the 1950s, in circles which study the history of the American West.

This chapter reexamines the narrative of the Heroine of Fort Brown as it originally appeared in print contemporaneous to and shortly after the war, and in so doing uncovers the story of a more fully developed character instead of the sexualized trope of
the camp follower as prostitute that persists in the later reconstructed narrative. I place the legend as it appeared in the nineteenth-century press in conversation with the story as it has been recovered. This juxtaposition complicates the tale of Sarah, the Great Western and Heroine of Fort Brown, and contributes to the conversation regarding the kinds of figures who constituted notions of feminine war heroism in mid-nineteenth-century America.

The dynamics of war stories such as these, with all of the nuanced relationships between reality and fiction, are fascinating; however, my focus is not on finding some kind of truth in the telling, but rather on the fictional because, as Susan Pendergast Schoelwer writes, sometimes “the symbol . . . becomes more important than the fact if that symbol fulfills a public need.”¹²¹ I’m interested primarily in the ways stories about Sarah’s life, specifically her role in the conflict between the U. S. and Mexico, circulated in the popular press, became part of the nineteenth-century imagination, and their development (or lack thereof) tells us about the culture which created them. The journey of her story through American newspapers and other popular texts during and shortly after the war illustrates how widely her story circulated. The story of the Heroine of Fort Brown reverberated in the nineteenth-century imagination and lingers in the lore of the west.

“American blood upon American soil”

In the spring of 1846 amid conflict between the United States and Mexico over

the location of the border between the two countries, General Zachary Taylor and the so-called Army of Occupation arrived on the northern side of the Rio Grande river. Taylor’s forces were sent to the troubled border region to defend what President James Polk and the U.S. government claimed to be the southern border of the United States. They were actually in contested territory: the United States claimed that the border was further south, at the Rio Grande River; Mexico claimed the border was further north, at the Nueces River. Arguably, the space of land in between the two rivers was neither American nor Mexican soil for the boundary had not been entirely resolved following the Texas revolution of 1835-1836. However, the U.S. annexation of Texas meant that the border with Mexico needed to be more clearly defined in 1845. Tensions along the border remained high, and diplomatic negotiations floundered. Attempts by the envoy to Mexico, John L. Slidell, to purchase the disputed land went nowhere. In fact, the dispatching of a sizeable military force to the border region belied Polk’s interest in settling the dispute with diplomatic negotiations. Taylor’s presence in the region was perceived as a threat and an ultimatum of sorts that did much to undermine Slidell’s diplomatic mission. When Taylor and his men arrived on the banks of the Rio Grande, they promptly set up camp and established Fort Texas. This military move by the United States was justifiably interpreted by Mexico as an act of war, perpetrated by the American government in order to strongarm Mexico into conceding their claim. Taylor’s army was one of occupation, and from the Mexican government’s point of view, Taylor’s mission was not one of self defense, as claimed by Polk, but rather, invasion.

In late April 1846, defending what they believed to be Mexican land that was occupied by a hostile American military force, “a company of Mexican Dragoons . . .
crossed the Rio Grande, . . . attacked a portion of Gen. Taylor’s command, killing a number, and taking 150 prisoners.”\(^{122}\) This incident was referred to as the Thornton Affair, after one of the American commanders in charge of the company involved in the skirmish. Reports of the Thornton Affair soon reached Washington, D.C., and on May 11th, President Polk declared in a message to Congress that “Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon American soil.”\(^{123}\) Polk’s message, often discussed as a thinly veiled lie, demanded that Congress declare war on Mexico, that the protection of American citizens and American soil and the quick restoration of peace between the two nations hinged on a strong military effort to stop this invasion by Mexico. The U.S. government declared the conflict with Mexico to be a “war of reconciliation,” and Polk placed blame for the outbreak of hostilities on Mexico alone.\(^{124}\) In his message to Congress regarding the matter he declared: “As war exists, and, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of Mexico herself.”\(^{125}\) For Polk, duty and patriotism dictated that the United States must act. In the weeks following Polk’s declaration these sentiments were echoed in the press. One New York Herald correspondent wrote from Point Isabel: “However this may be, Mexico having elected war, she must be made to feel its inconveniences; . . . it is still a

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\(^{125}\) Polk, “Hostilities by Mexico,” 3.
defensive war on our part; and should Matamoras, Comargo, Mier, and the other towns east of the mountains—should her capital be occupied by our armies—let not Mexico forget that it was on her own pressing invitation that we were induced to visit those cities.”¹²⁶ However, by Polk’s (and this correspondent’s) own logic, one could argue that Mexico also acted according to the rules of patriotism and duty when they moved to defend their border, both in the so-called Thornton Affair in late April, and later in the first weeks of May with the Siege of Fort Texas. On May 3rd, before war was officially declared by the United States and in an attempt to defend against U.S. encroachment, the Mexican army of the north, led by General Mariano Arista, bombarded Fort Texas in a week-long siege that effectively began active hostilities between the U.S. and Mexico. Not only did this conflict mark the unofficial beginning of the war, it also provided fodder for many of the first stories of heroism that circulated in the United States. Popular writers such as George Lippard wasted no time in turning the reports from the battlefront into legends that circulated broadly in popular print culture and that shaped the American memory of the war even as it happened.

The Siege of Fort Texas was not a particularly bloody encounter, but it resulted in some of the first casualties of the war. Major Jacob Brown, the leader of the American forces during the bombardment at the fort, was injured in the early days of the siege but continued to lead the defense. Brown died from complications related to his injury on May 9th before the Mexican forces withdrew and the siege ended. Following the hostilities, the fort became more widely known as Fort Brown in honor of the Major’s

leadership during the bombardment. While Brown was defending the fort, Taylor and a sizeable contingent force were marching south from Fort Polk at Point Isabel to aid the American forces. The Mexican army attempted to thwart Taylor’s mission to relieve Fort Brown, and engaged the army of occupation at Palo Alto and at Resaca de la Palma on May 8th and 9th, respectively. Both attempts by General Arista were unsuccessful, and resulted in the first victories for the United States.

News of these skirmishes spread through the press, as interest in reports and stories from the border was high among the American public. Some of the first stories about the bombardment at Fort Brown circulated without much delay, first appearing in New Orleans-based papers like the Delta and the Picayune before they were picked up by other papers and zoomed through the press. One need look no further than the morning edition of the May 26, 1846 New York Herald for an example of the speed with which a large volume of war news spread, and the eagerness with which it was consumed by the public. On this date the Herald devoted the first page and more than half of the second to printing “all the important intelligence that reached us yesterday [from the Rio Grande],” intimating that it “will be read with the greatest interest by everyone.” Many of the items in the Herald were reprinted from southern papers, including the Picayune and the Delta. Packed full of “highly important” news from the “seat of war,” the Herald insisted that “the particulars of these splendid achievements should be scattered throughout the Union.”

Indeed, these items were well on the way to spreading across the country.

Following the victories at Fort Brown, Palo Alto, and Resaca de la Palma, the

state of Louisiana sent a Legislative Deputation to visit Taylor’s camp on the Rio Grande in June, and to offer “resolutions of thanks” for the “great gallantry displayed” by Taylor and the army of occupation during the first weeks of May. The speed with which news of action on the border moved across the country was characterized for Taylor by one of the members of the Deputation as follows: “the news of the first and second battle has spread on the wings of the wind to every part of our nation, and everywhere the hosannas of your countrymen are heard—throughout the land your names are mentioned with feelings of respect and love.”

This description of the interest in news from the war conjures images like Richard Caton Woodville’s 1848 painting, *War News from Mexico*. Woodville visualizes a cross-section of the American public, whose attention is fixated on a newspaper—everyone, it seems, had a stake in this war; and everyone, it seems, had their eyes on the press.

The *Daily Delta* appears to have been one of the first papers to cover the Legislative Deputation at Matamoros. Many of the other newspapers that carried this particular story note that it originated in the New Orleans *Daily Delta*, and I have not been able to locate an earlier report in another paper. The *Delta* report of the committee’s visit to General Taylor’s camp included descriptions of a banquet, held at the former headquarters of General Arista, in a show of pomp that provided “a singular spectacle for the Mexicans who assembled, in large numbers, to witness, for the first time, the headquarters of their General occupied by the American officers, and the star spangled

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For the Americans, it was a celebratory evening filled with toasts to the soldiers involved in these early skirmishes along the border, and with toasts to the states whose “brave, generous, intelligent and patriotic” citizens supported the cause of the army, of Taylor and his troops. It was at this banquet that one of the esteemed guests, Lieutenant Braxton Bragg (who would later fight as a general for the Confederate army in the American Civil War), offered a toast honoring an army laundress and camp follower who acted bravely during the Siege of Fort Texas, and who was thereafter lauded as the Great Western and the Heroine of Fort Brown. Bragg’s toast celebrates a woman, presumably the wife of one of the soldiers, who “during the whole of the bombardment, remained in the fort, and though the shot and shells were constantly flying on every side, she disdained to seek shelter in the bomb proofs, but labored the whole time in cooking and taking care of the soldiers, without the least regard to her own safety. Her bravery was the admiration of all who were in the Fort, and she had thus acquired the name of the Great Western.” Her real name was Sarah.

“The Great Western to her generation”

Before outlining the story of the woman who came to be known as Sarah Bowman, I need to explain the rationale behind my choice of address. Though she was “the Great Western to her generation,” scholars speculate that she may have been born Sarah Knight; however, the details of her birth, even her name, remain ambiguous at

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131 “Dinner,” June 20, 1846, 2.
best. The life of this woman, like the lives of so many others in this period of American history, is not well documented. The handful of studies that highlight the Great Western emphasize her supposedly frequently shifting surname; she is referred to as Sarah Langwell, Borginnis, Bourdette, Davis, Bowman, etc. The explanation is that because she frequently married in order to stay with the army during the war, her name frequently changed. However, as there are no official records of her name changes, it is difficult to what her name was at various times. Since her birth name is uncertain too, using “Knight” seems highly speculative and veers away from most discussion of this woman. Most modern accounts of the Great Western identify her by what most believe to be her last known name: Sarah Bowman. For the purposes of my study, calling her by this later, married name, seems anachronistic; by all accounts, she was not “Sarah Bowman” when she was involved in the 1846-1848 war with Mexico and earned her nom de guerre.

Though descriptions of the Great Western began appearing in the press about a month after the bombardment of Fort Brown, her “real name” didn’t appear in print until almost a year later, when an unsigned article titled “The Great Western” was featured in the April 1, 1847 issue of the Daily Delta. This article identifies her as “Mrs. Bourdette” and there is no mention of her first name. Shortly thereafter, another unsigned article appearing under the same head in the Daily Delta identifies the Great Western by her full

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(married) name, Sarah Bourdette. Regardless, during her lifetime and for decades following, she was known to the public primarily by the nicknames assigned to her for her size and her actions during the war. For most of the U.S. and in the public narrative of the war, she became this caricature of a person. A century later, when scholars and popular historians took an interest in recovering her story, her full name remained in doubt. If she was possibly Mrs. Bourdette at the commencement of the war, she was likely Sarah Bowman when she died.

Because of the questions regarding her surname and because my chapter grapples more with the legendary representations of this figure than biographical facts, I will refer to this woman by her most stable forms of address: her first name, “Sarah”; and the nicknames given to her during the war with Mexico, “Great Western” and “Heroine of Fort Brown.” Regardless of the various sobriquets she garnered, at all points throughout her life her name was Sarah.

“As I have no news, I may as well spin a yarn or two”

In her study of the hero in women’s romance writing, Judith Wilt expounds on the processes of constructing a hero. She writes: “for some nineteenth-century thinkers” heroes descend from the hands of God; for others, “it is the community and more specifically the nation that makes (and unmakes) the hero, and the moral as well as political future.” Regarding a nation’s need for making heroes, Edward S. Wallace notes that fabrication is allowed: “Sometimes it has been necessary to manufacture them

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out of whole cloth.” The story of the Great Western has not been entirely made up—there is no doubt that Sarah existed—but, the legend that surrounds her life has embellished it. Her story, though not entirely fabricated, has been embroidered upon over time. The nineteenth-century heroization of her that has led to the stories still told in certain circles today, originated in about half a dozen articles that circulated in the press during the war. Some of these articles presented the story as an accurate representation of actual events, while others highlighted their embellished nature: “As I have no news, I may as well spin a yarn or two.” Sketches of the Great Western, such as the one that appeared from “Capt. Tobin’s Knapsack,” did not even attempt to pass their narratives off as truth. After all, in the case of legend, what matter the truth of the tale?

Most of these articles appeared in numerous iterations, reprinted time and again in papers that spanned the country. The practice of reprinting is important here was common in the period. The repetition of the same handful of tales was key to developing the legend of the Heroine of Fort Brown. Stories about her were repeated from New Orleans to Sandusky, from Tallahassee to Buffalo—just as the news of the war spread throughout the country, so too did the story of the Great Western.

It is likely that the same stories also circulated orally. In Founding Myths: Stories that Hide Our Patriotic Past, Ray Raphael argues that this kind of oral retelling is necessary in the development of a legend. Though it focuses on the American Revolutionary War, Raphael’s work is also relevant to the U.S.-Mexico War. Raphael

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writes: “For decades, men and women . . . told and retold what had happened, augmenting and enriching their skeletal memories of actual events, removing what was too painful to recall (no shortage there) while embellishing what could be seen as heroic (no shortage there either).” The same can be said of the stories which spooled out from the war with Mexico, though perhaps to a lesser degree in an interestingly print-bound world: strategic forgettings and embellishments and tall tales abound. Even so, “there is truth in the shape of stories even when we know their content is fantasy.” Despite the embellishments, Raphael argues, with a hint of irony, that the repetition of the tales lends a certain semblance of authenticity to them. In the following sections, I stitch together the various pieces of embellished fabric that make up this legend that I’ve found scattered throughout nineteenth-century newspapers.

“Incidents of the Army”

On June 20, 1846, Sarah was introduced to the public in print as the Great Western. As mentioned above, on this date the New Orleans-based paper, the Daily Delta, reported on the Legislative Deputation that was sent to Matamoros to celebrate General Taylor’s victories. This report includes a description of a dinner given by Taylor at Arista’s headquarters and was followed by other war news under the head: “Incidents of the Army.” Buried in these pieces are two separate anecdotes that describe the Great Western’s actions during the bombardment at Fort Texas, however briefly. The first anecdote is the toast given by Bragg during the collation. As far as I can tell, Sarah was

139 Hourihan, *Deconstructing the Hero*, 1.
140 Raphael, *Founding Myths*, 4.
not present at this dinner, but she was the topic of conversation, at least for a moment. Bragg’s toast celebrates the Great Western’s domestic contributions to the American army’s resistance during the bombardment of the fort. She “labored the whole time in cooking and taking care of the soldiers” and did so “without the least regard to her own safety.” As an army laundress whose charge was to take care of the soldiers in her detachment, Sarah was not expected to engage in combat. Though, as later stories will tell, she was more than willing to.

The second anecdote that appeared alongside Bragg’s toast provides a slightly more colorful and exaggerated narration of Sarah’s deeds during the siege: “There was a woman in the fort . . . who regularly and attentively, the whole time, plied the men at the guns with coffee and other refreshments, while they plied the Mexicans with shot. . . . She is a large athletic woman, having a frame well proportioned to her big, generous heart. She is now the favorite of the whole army, and being a native of Indiana, the sobriquet everywhere attaches to her of the Great Western.” This depiction is the stuff from which legends are made, and this anecdote offers much to consider in the way of gender expectations nostalgia for the United States’s eighteenth-century fight for independence. I will return to these themes, after highlighting the sensational nature of this story, the hyperbole and ambiguity with which this woman is described, and the over-the-top circumstances of her actions.

The Great Western is placed in the center of the action: “where the shot flew

141 “Dinner,” June 20, 1846, 2.
thickest there was she,” as if seeking out or attracting the highest level of danger during the siege. In this brief telling, despite the notion that the bombardment seemingly happens around her, she never stops performing her duty. Additionally, the vivid, yet unbelievable description of her administering acts, such as “frequently” lighting cigars for the soldiers with a piece of an “exploded shell” demonstrates the Great Western’s heroic quality and simultaneously pushes at the boundaries of plausibility. From the very beginning, heroism is merged with the absurd in the story of the Heroine of Fort Brown. This sensationalism, the accompanying exaggeration, and the ambiguity of identity do much in the way of laying the foundation for the legendary narrative.

Reports of Bragg’s toast at the Arista headquarters dinner appeared fairly quickly after the event: within a couple of weeks the Delta ran the feature on the Legislative Deputation as well as the slightly expanded version that appeared along with other “Incidents of the Army.” The deputation did not visit Taylor on the Rio Grande until a month after the bombardment of the fort. In the interim, additional reports of the siege began circulating. These write-ups of the bombardment, both the earlier and more official reports that appeared before the visit of the Legislative Deputation made no mention of Sarah, the Great Western, or the Heroine of Fort Brown.

As early as May 13, 1846, just days after the siege ended, the Delta printed a short report of the bombardment taken from a May 4, 1846 letter sent from a soldier at Fort Brown to his father. In this letter the soldier “describes with minuteness the number of shots fired by either army during the attack of the previous day. He tells of one, and only one of the Americans being killed. . . . He concludes thus: ‘We expect the Mexicans to storm us to-night in full force—if they come, your son is no coward, and will do his
duty.’”¹⁴³ Stories about the bombardment continued to appear in the press. The front page of the May 21, 1846 issue of the *Picayune* featured correspondence sent from the “Camp Opposite Matamoros,” dated May 13, 1846. The editors classified the letter as follows: “We have nowhere else seen so circumstantial and interesting an account of the bombardment of the camp opposite Matamoros as is contained in the following letter. It is due the author to state that it was written exclusively for the gratification of ‘a select few’ of his friends—and not for the public eye.” This letter, the editors warned, contained an “air of levity with which serious matters are discussed,” but “under all his exuberance of fun and humor, we do assure the reader that the writer bears a heart which beats with every generous and manly impulse, and he is fully cognizant of all the sober realities of the service in which he is engaged.”¹⁴⁴ In this long letter, providing a minute, day-to-day account of the siege, no mention of the Great Western is made.

Likewise, the official report of the bombardment at Fort Brown written by Edgar S. Hawkins, the commander who took charge of the fort after the fall of Major Brown, omits the Great Western entirely. Hawkins provides a day-by-day explanation of the defense in which he highlights the technical and strategic aspects of the siege. His report is peppered with mentions of the specific officers involved and with more general observations about the dedication of the ordinary military men who were charged with holding the fort. On May 5th he notes that “every man [was] at work to-day strengthening the defenses.” Similarly, the following day he declares that “every man kept at his post,

as an attack was confidently expected in the morning.”145 Nowhere in his report does Hawkins mention the Heroine of Fort Brown and her dedicated ministering to the troops during the siege.

The absence of Sarah from Hawkins’s report is not particularly surprising, yet there are some implications to take away from the omission of her here. For instance, even though Sarah was reportedly on the army’s payroll as a laundress, her role as such and as a camp follower and cook did not necessarily place her in a position to deal with the real “heroics” of war. Though Sarah’s service at Fort Brown filled a necessary wartime need, it was not highlighted in the immediate official reports. In Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community During the American Revolution, historian Holly A. Mayer insists that no military history is complete without taking notice of the “cloud of persons who performed multitudinous tasks to keep the army going.”146 Her study of the army focuses on the American Revolutionary War period, yet the concept of the army as a community which includes more than those who have been mustered into service is applicable to the period of the U.S. war with Mexico. Mayer writes: “Soldiers alone do not make an army. They are the most fundamental part of that military force, but as hard as they work, and as much as they do, an army seldom marches out on their efforts alone.”147 The legend of the Great Western speaks to this notion that the operation of the army depends upon the service of a broader network of people than those who are called

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146 Holly A. Mayer, Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community during the American Revolution (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), x.
147 Mayer, Belonging to the Army, 1.
soldiers. There is a sense in the legend that Sarah belonged with the army, “indeed, it is only when she is abroad with the soldiers that she appears to be at home.” In this vein she is not part of a military regiment per se, rather she is an auxiliary member whose main objective is to fulfill a support role—an important role, to be certain, but one that is not glamorous or newsworthy, not traditionally seen as military service, not “heroic.” As Mayer points out: “Their work proved necessary but not extraordinary, for their tasks tended to be identical to the everyday chores of their sisters at home.” A look at the commander’s report suggests that this kind of action performed by this kind of person was not officially recognized or mentioned in summaries of battle and strategic movements during a war campaign.

Not only is Sarah missing from the official reports that appeared in the press, but so too were the individual actions of lower ranking soldiers. The only soldiers who Hawkins mentions by name are commissioned officers. Individual troops are invisible in his account. The mentions of the actions of the general rank and file appear en masse, the implication being that their individual contributions to the success of the regiment are not only too numerous to record but also that they are not as important as the contributions of their leaders. A relatively early report from the opening skirmishes from the New York Herald of May 26, 1846 underscores the notion that in military conflict certain lives are more worthy of being recorded than others. Following a detailed list of officers wounded or killed in each battle, the correspondent simply states: the “number of non-

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148 “The Great Western,” New Orleans Daily Delta, April 1, 1847, 2.
149 Mayer, Belonging to the Army, 7.
commissioned officers and privates not known.” If the contributions of ordinary soldiers were not important enough to warrant specific mention in the news from the seat of war, then certainly the actions of a female camp follower and army laundress were exponentially less so.

It really seems to be Bragg’s toast that put the Great Western on the public stage during the war. Though the toast and the more thrilling anecdote first appeared in the Delta, they reached a much wider readership via reprintings in other papers. The Delta was one of the newspapers that provided the rest of the nation with information from the front. Like most of the other news items associated with the war, it did not take long for the story of Bragg’s toast and the accompanying “incident” about the Heroine of Fort Brown to be picked up. The spreading of news through reprinting is not unique to the story of the Great Western. Interest in war news was high. The various pieces of war news featured in the Delta of June 20, 1846 were reproduced by some editors in toto while others selected, or clipped, choice passages and reprinted only those selections in the columns of their own papers. What is present, though, in a large majority of the reprintings of this particular collection of items covering the war is the toast recognizing the brave actions of the Heroine of Fort Brown. As the story spread through reprintings, more substantial descriptions and rumors of her involvement appeared in the press over the weeks and months that followed.

“The Heroine of Fort Brown” in the Picayune

It is difficult to know precisely when more detailed stories of the Great Western

began circulating. Greta Anderson states that the “first full account of her patriotic service” did not appear in the press until the July 4, 1846 edition of “a Philadelphia newspaper,” and that another story appeared in “a New York City newspaper . . . soon after.”¹⁵¹ I have not been able to locate the first account to which Anderson refers, but the story from the New York paper is likely correspondence that appeared in the New York Herald on July 21, 1846, which happens to be a reprints material from the New Orleans Picayune. A few weeks after Bragg’s toast appeared in the Delta, the New Orleans Picayune, printed a lengthy feature which offered a much more detailed account of the Great Western. This piece, signed “H.,” appeared in print July 11, 1846 and presented the public with the first extended account of the Great Western’s contributions to the success of the American forces in staving off a Mexican takeover of Fort Brown. This account appeared in the Picayune after many other detailed reports of the action during the bombardment had been circulating for weeks, and was authored by Christopher Mason Haile, one of the more prolific correspondents for the New Orleans-based paper.¹⁵²

Haile arrived in the area in late May 1846, during a lull in the fighting, just weeks after the initial skirmishes. In his first letter sent from the border, Haile writes: “Instances of individual heroism occurred at these two engagements, which would have immortalized a Spartan. I shall note down as many of these as I can gather, and will prepare recitals of them for the Picayune.” Like Lippard, Haile aims to capture and

¹⁵² Haile authored the “Pardon Jones” letters, sketches of southern humor which also appeared in the Picayune. For more on Haile, see Ed Piacentino, C.M. Haile’s “Pardon Jones” Letters: Old Southwest Humor from Antebellum Louisiana (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009).
narrate moments of individual experience within the larger story of the war. Haile’s recital on the Heroine of Fort Brown is an important example of one of these moments. One can see from his initial dispatch that Haile intended to provide his readership with a story of the war different from the official reports and accounts that focused on generalities, collective actions of the rank and file, and individual exploits of a handful of officers. In this goal, he was not unlike Lippard. As a war correspondent Haile sought an accurate representation of military and camp life on the border: “As soon as I become a little better acquainted with matters and men in this vicinity, I shall be able to give you more interesting matter for publication.” What was important for Haile was to tell stories that would capture the experience of war in entertaining and memorable ways that would breathe character human interest into the record of the war. Soon he gathered enough information from the camps to write the most significant stand-alone accounts of the Great Western’s role in the defense of Fort Brown.

“The Heroine of Fort Brown” appeared as a piece of special correspondence, dated June 25, 1846. Haile opens this letter with a brief meditation on the power and purpose of music among the regiments on the Rio Grande, in which he notes that each regiment has a band with talent enough to “discourse the most delightful music.” In Haile’s estimation, music is the “soldier’s sweetest solace in camp.” It provides rhythm and structure to the days: waking, drilling, eating, and sleeping are all marked by the fife and drum, and each regiment is kept in time by its own band. In addition, the camp music

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is “soul-stirring” and “insinuating”; it “rouse[s] the sturdy soldier and cheer[s] him on to duty”; it makes “him feel like fighting after he is up.” In other words, even as the regimental bands brought a touch of culture and refinement to camp life, they had a significant hand in setting the mood of the camp.154

These words on music serve as a backdrop for introducing women into the narrative of the war for, as Haile writes, “speaking of music always reminds [him] of the gentle sex.” Haile does not skip a beat in shifting the theme of his letter from camp music musings to a chivalric nod to “dear woman”: “allow me to perform one set of justice towards the sex, that has been withheld from them in all accounts that have been given of the battles and other arduous duties of the Army of Occupation.” The events he is about to narrate, Haile declares, “prove that the sex has not been unrepresented in the soul-stirring and bloody scenes on the Rio Grande.” In other words, Haile recognizes that though women were involved in the conflict in some capacity, their actions, like so many details of individual experience in a war, were not recorded, and with his recital detailing the exploits of the Great Western, Haile attempts to close that gap in the record. The story of the Great Western is not part of the “official” record. As we saw in reports from commanders and other initial pieces of correspondence from the seat of war, the Great Western was overlooked until “brought to the notice of the public in a few remarks by Lieut. Bragg.” Haile’s telling of the Heroine of Fort Brown includes “a few of the incidents of the life of this extraordinary woman,” elaborated in more detail, but the basis of the story he writes is made up of rumors and anecdotes which he was “able to pick up

Almost all of what is known about her service during the U.S.-Mexico war campaign is based on battlefield stories that spread by word of mouth and secondhand tales told, often told by those much removed from the action of the war.

According to the bits that Haile picked up in camp, Sarah was with the Army of Occupation at Corpus Christi the previous autumn, in what would have been late 1845. According to legend, she had supposedly already earned her *nom de guerre* and was “more familiarly known in the Army of Occupation as ‘The Great Western’”; however, Haile does not mention the source of the nickname. When Taylor received his marching orders to preemptively establish a presence on the Rio Grande, the Great Western joined the brigade, choosing to follow the men overland “on their tedious and arduous march” south to the Rio Grande in lieu of travelling by boat with other camp women and some of the men. Even her husband, “whether on duty or for disability [Haile was] unable to learn,” travelled to the contested boundary by water. “Not so with ‘The Great Western.’ . . . She, true to her character, declaring that the ‘boys’ (young officers of her *mess*) ‘must have somebody to take care of them,’ purchased a mule and a cart” and mobilized her operation.156

Before Taylor, his men, and their entourage reached the banks of the Rio Grande, Sarah, so the story goes, had already demonstrated her grit and begun to earn the esteem of her military companions. Take, for instance, the following incident described by Haile:

The Brigade to which she was attached arrived upon the banks of the Sal

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156 H., July 11, 1846, 2.
Colorado as General Taylor was preparing to cross with the Dragoons, and the 1st Brigade of Infantry. The Mexicans upon the opposite bank were making great demonstrations by blowing bugles, etc., etc. After calmly surveying the scene from her cart, she remarked, with great coolness and determination, that ‘if the General would give her a good pair of tongs, she would wade that river and whip every scoundrel that dare show himself. It may be imagined that the men were not backward in crossing after that.\textsuperscript{157}

If her insistence upon accompanying Taylor’s men during the march from Corpus Christi to the Rio Grande had not already done so, this colorful moment on the Arroyo Colorado cemented a legendary status for the Great Western among the men in her brigade. In the “tongs” incident, Sarah is identified as an electrifying example of courage and bravery whose actions led the soldiers to follow in her example. During Taylor’s march south, she was “the woman who had rallied the men past the first hurdle” when they reached the Arroyo Colorado.\textsuperscript{158}

The next moment of heroic action in the narrative of the Great Western does not occur until the bombardment of Fort Brown in the beginning of May 1846. A garrison of infantry and artillery troops remained in the fort, along with the Great Western and other camp women, while Taylor and most of his men traveled to Point Isabel to support the U.S. contingent stationed there. As Haile points out, “how that noble Regiment and the two companies of Artillery left in this work sustained themselves, is already known, but nothing will more gratify them than to have justice done to their gallant heroine, of whom

\textsuperscript{157} H., July 11, 1846, 2.
\textsuperscript{158} Anderson, \textit{More Than Petticoats}, 12.
they speak in the strongest terms.” And so, to fill a gap in the record of the Fort Brown bombardment, Haile relays the drama of the siege as told to him by the men among whom the Great Western served. At the commencement of hostilities on May 3rd, the camp women were encouraged to take cover: “The magazines were the only ‘bomb-proofs’ in the fort, and as the Government had sent no ammunition to fill them, the next most inflammable material—the women—found perfect security in them. These women, however be it said to the honor of the sex, were not idle. Most nobly did they ply the needle in preparing sand bags out of the officers’ and soldiers’ tents, wherewith to strengthen the work, and to protect the artillerymen when serving their guns.” The Great Western, however, “true to herself again, declined participating in this protection or sewing, and continued her labors at the fire, in the open air.” She remained at her mess tent near the center of the fort from the “firing of the first gun,” and “when the hour arrived for breakfast but few expected the luxury which awaited them.” To those troops who were “unable to leave their guns, [coffee] was carried by this ‘ministering angel;’ and, as may readily be believed, no belle of Orleans, as much as she might be admired and beloved, ever met a more gracious reception.” The bombardment wore on into the afternoon, when “the good and generous woman provided those who were almost utterly exhausted and worn out, a delicious dish of bean soup—the bean soup is declared by the Mexicans to be the foundation of that invincible spirit which they have seen so strikingly displayed by the Yankee soldiers.” Just as every soldier kept his post during the siege, “thus did she continue to discharge her duties during the seven days that the enemy kept up an incessant cannonade and bombardment. She was ever to be found at her post; her
meals were always ready at the hour.”159 Though the Great Western did not participate in the fighting directly, her efforts provided the support for others to continue their soldiering.

This account suggests that the success of this particular campaign would not have been possible for the Americans if not for the Great Western. In other words, Haile’s account raises the possibility that Fort Brown might have fallen during the Mexican bombardment if it were not for the service of this “ministering angel.” She is instrumental in the defense of the fort, earning for herself, if not official recognition of her service, then certainly the respect of her comrades as well as a second *nom de guerre*: the Heroine of Fort Brown. In what is perhaps the most poignant moment in his dramatization of the Great Western’s contributions to the army, Haile imbues even the most mundane of services—the feeding of the troops—with honor: “our heroine must rest contented with the reflection that she nobly performed her own duty, and will long be remembered by the besieged garrison of Fort Brown.”160 If the proliferation of stories about the Great Western—both reprintings that do not vary much from Haile’s original telling, as well as iterations that morphed over time to include new and, at times problematic, details—is any indication, Haile’s instinct to record moments of individual heroism from the war appears to have resonated with the American public. Though the Great Western was not so long remembered as Haile predicts, for a time, the legend spread.

Like the Bragg toast, Haile’s story made the rounds in the press. However, most reprintings omit the opening bit about music and its influence on camp life. Reprintings

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159 H., July 11, 1846, 2.
160 H., July 11, 1846, 2.
in high-profile and widely circulating papers, such as the New York *Herald*, begin with the story of the Great Western proper. Though at first glance, Haile’s treatise on music in the camps seems somewhat extraneous, upon further examination one can see that it adds a level of complexity to his account of the Heroine of Fort Brown. That nuance is lost in the bulk of the reprintings. The sense of the story shifts without the opening paragraph that frames the narrative and sets the tone of the tale as one of respect and appreciation for not only the potential richness of camp life, but also the unique contributions that various members of this military community make to its morale in order for it to function properly. As a result of this excision, the sense of the camps as a possible place of cultural creation, and not just in terms of music alone, is missed, as is Haile’s implicit emphasis on the Great Western as another possible provider of solace and comfort in the camps.

*The Great Western after Fort Brown*

Following the bombardment at Fort Brown, the Great Western, true to her role as a camp follower, travelled with the army when they marched out of the fort. The next episode in her saga appeared in the press nearly a year after Haile’s sketch was first published in the *Picayune*. On April 1, 1847, the *Delta* featured an unsigned article about the Heroine of Fort Brown that tells the stirring, though brief, story of a confrontation with a “runaway waiter,” put in his place by the Great Western, who “still sticks to the army.” This incident took place during the battle at Buena Vista, mere miles from Saltillo, “where [the Great Western] exhibits the same rough-and-ready good nature, the same *esprit de corps*, which has distinguished her since she ‘joined the army.’” The story in the *Delta* illustrates the Great Western’s “contempt for cowardice,” and her unfailing
belief in the capabilities of Taylor and the Army of Occupation: “Let any one say a word against the American Army, and she is sure first to set him up and then to knock him down.—One instance, by way of illustration: On the evening of the battle of Buena Vista, Feb. 23d., a little effeminate fellow . . . rode into Saltillo and up to the quarters of the Great Western.” Upon his arrival, this “effeminate fellow,” a “counterfeit soldier—the apology for a man,” claimed an American defeat and reported that Taylor and his men were on the retreat. To which the Great Western legendarily replied: “It’s a——no-such-thing . . . Gen. Taylor never retreats—the American army never retreats—it never has since I joined it—nor ever before, to my knowledge; so clear out, you skunk, you, or I’ll give you what you did not wait long enough for the Mexicans to give you!’ And here she brandished an old sword, which she had converted into a carving knife, over the head of the little man, from which he ran off still faster than he ran from Buena Vista.”

As if not sufficiently sensationalized, the details of this particular moment in the legend become overdramatized and more violent in subsequent retellings, and the gendered dynamics of the scene are played up even more. In one version which circulated broadly, the Great Western knocks the retreating soldier to the ground with one punch, and censors him with the threat of death: “you just spread that report, and I’ll beat you to death.”

Reportedly, “the remainder of the deserters had second thoughts, and preferring

\[161\] “The Great Western,” *New Orleans Daily Delta*, April 1, 1847.
the Mexicans to Sarah, quickly returned to battle.” Like the crossing of the Arroyo Colorado, this moment illustrates the Great Western’s ability to inspire or shame her male comrades into action. This moment—the chastisement of the deserting soldier—is both comedic and emblematic: we are meant to laugh at the expense of the fellow and to simultaneously be disgusted with his lack of soldierly (or, masculine) courage, a lack of courage that is placed in high relief when juxtaposed with the larger-than-life character of the Great Western, who is a woman and yet more willing to face the enemy than her male compatriots.

Here the tone of the narrative turns on a dime. As the story in the Delta goes, not long after having so vehemently defending Taylor’s and the army’s honor, the Great Western is told of the death of Captain George Lincoln. This news deeply affects her: “On hearing it, the large knife fell from her hand—she fell herself onto a chair and wept like a child.” The illustration of such a range of emotion here, from out-manning the effeminate soldier to mourning the death of her friend and comrade-in-arms like a child, complicates the figure of the Great Western and speaks to her motivations for sticking with the army. She is not merely a camp follower, hanging onto the army for personal gain, but rather, she becomes an auxiliary service member who performs necessary functions, including offering patriotic support for the military’s mission, boosting morale, and properly honoring the “brave dead.” In the case of Captain Lincoln, the Great Western personally ensured that his body would not be dishonored: “Off she went to the

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163 *Sandwich*, *The Great Western*, 17.
blood-stained battle-field, sought among the dead and dying till she found out the corpse of the brave Captain, which she brought to Saltillo and had decently interred.—She now keeps his sword and other equipments, and vows not to part with them through life.”

In what appears to be a collection of sketches compiled and partially written by one Lieutenant G. N. Allen, more details about Sarah’s involvement in preserving the military paraphernalia of George Lincoln enter the story:

Some days after the battle, Capt. Lincoln’s horse was offered for sale at auction. When the first bid was announced, the canteen woman, honored with the sobriquet of “The Heroine of fort Brown,” with whom Lincoln was an especial favorite, stepped forward and said that a man who offered seventy-five dollars for a horse like that could not want it—that she would give two hundred and fifty dollars for the animal, and at that price it was knocked off to her. When asked what occasion she has for the horse, she declared her intention to keep it till an opportunity offered of forwarding it to Lincoln’s mother, for whom she designed it as a present. [She afterwards relinquished the horse to the Kentucky Regiment, by whom he was presented to the family of the deceased, and forwarded to Boston.]

The same was not done for every soldier who lost his life in battle, but these moments in the record serve to demonstrate the Great Western’s strong devotion to the army and the soldiers therein as well as the depth of her commitment to the military’s mission. Lincoln’s remains were eventually returned to Boston and presented to his family in

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164 “The Great Western,” *New Orleans Daily Delta*, April 1, 1847.
funeral services which took place in late July 1847 and his horse appeared in the funeral procession.165

Other iterations of this story, the “interesting incident relative to the late Capt. Lincoln,” resonated through the press and describe the Great Western as a “queer old woman” who is “represented as a great stickler for the army.”166 One account that appeared in late April 1847 and that is presented as a “yarn” characterizes Sarah’s actions as follows: “before the last fight, on the occasion of an alarm or stampede in Saltillo, she took command of a Commissary store and 30 men, (the officer in command non in.), and behaved splendidly. Since the fight she purchased at a high price, the horse used by the late lamented Capt. Lincoln, to save the Captain’s charger, as she said, from ever meeting with an unkind master.”167 These slightly revised versions stress both the peculiarity and the importance of the Great Western’s actions during and after the battle at Buena Vista.

*The Great Western, “an ornament to her sex”*

A few weeks after the account of the runaway soldier and the death of George Lincoln appeared in April 1847, the *Delta* included another article about Sarah. A sort of tribute to the Great Western, the article reads as follows:

This is the *nom de guerre* which has been conferred on Sarah Bourdette, a woman of bravery, character, and integrity, who has been with the army in an humble capacity since the commencement of the war with Mexico.

165 [G. N. Allen], *Mexican Treacheries and Cruelties: Incidents and Sufferings in the Mexican War* (Boston and New York: N.P., 1847), https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t5gb2h505.
Although poor and uneducated, she is a perfect heroine, and richly merits some token of esteem from those who know how to appreciate real worth and unadulterated character. To the sick soldier she has been a mother, and there is scarcely a man who knows anything about the operations of our forces in the enemy’s country, who will not bear testimony to as to her kindness to the wounded and the needy in the hour of distress. Although the wife of a common soldier, and following the army in a humble situation, Mrs. Bourdette is an ornament to her sex, and if any one deserves a testimonial as to real merit, unimpeachable character, and bravery that would have done honor to a Joan d’Arc, she does.  

Stressing Sarah’s “unimpeachable character,” this piece speaks highly of the Great Western and her relationship with the Army of Occupation during the war with Mexico. This article echoes Haile’s sentiments in his initial sketch of this figure. At the close of his recital Haile insists on her reputable character. He defends her honor and highlights the quality of her reputation: “But her reputation, the dearest of all things to a woman, is what she prides herself on. The tongue of slander had never yet dared to attack her well earned and well sustained character. With virtue as a basis, and such heroic conduct to build with, she need never fear the necessity of exercising her extraordinary physical ability in defence of that reputation. But if attacked, the gallant defenders of Fort Brown, will, I doubt not, be found pressing forward in her defence, and woe to the dastard who receives a discharge of artillery from such gunners.”  

As with the later anonymous

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169 H., May 26, 1846, 2.
article from the *Delta*, Haile’s seemingly unprovoked focus on character implies that perhaps there was some aspect of the Great Western’s reputation that needed defending, the possibilities of which I will address in a later section.

It is not hard to see why the story of the Great Western spread throughout the press. By all accounts, Sarah was extraordinary. She was a woman of strength and spirit, and, as Haile tells it, “she is probably as celebrated for her personal appearance, as for her deeds.” Her height alone “fully entitles her to a place in the Grenadiers, any soldier of which might well envy her athletic but graceful form.” She is no typical example of the so-called “gentle sex,” which makes Haile’s lead-in to her story somewhat ironic: he sets his readers up for a tale about “dear woman” only to present them with a version of femininity that is far different from what one would expect of the same.¹⁷⁰ The stories that develop about this female figure present a woman whose very stature and demeanor transcend the confines of her sex and make her seemingly more like the men with whom she serves than the women with whom Haile attempts to catalog her. In fact, as an anonymous correspondent to the *Delta* wrote in April 1847, a move was made in New Orleans to commemorate the Great Western in much the same way that military men had historically been. Those efforts were characterized in the *Delta* as follows:

> Swords have been given to officers, medals to those who have distinguished themselves, and compliments showered on all those who have in any manner rendered themselves popular, and we are glad to see that Mrs. Bourdette is not to be forgotten. We understand that a

¹⁷⁰ H., May 26, 1846, 2.
subscription will be opened to present her with some token that will show her in what light she is looked upon by the citizens of New Orleans, and prove, that whilst we compliment those in a high position, we do not forget the humble. The heroine of Fort Brown will not be forgotten, and the gallant woman who has followed our army and rendered so much service to those, who in their direst distress were friendless, will, we are sure, be properly appreciated by her sex and the public of New Orleans.\textsuperscript{171}

She is no ordinary woman, rather she is a verifiable virago in the archaic sense of the term, and even though her gender limits her role as a combatant in the war, over time she comes to be characterized as the “Amazon on the Border.”\textsuperscript{172} Though the Delta correspondent insists with confidence that the Heroine of Fort Brown will long be remembered, her story faded from public memory to be picked up by popular historians much later.

\textit{Echoes of the Great Western}

Stories related to Sarah’s service at Saltillo and the battle of Buena Vista resonated into the late nineteenth century. In these later reminiscences, the Great Western is presented as a nurse and general caregiver for the soldiers who were wounded in battle. For example, W. Augustus Knapp, secretary with the Whiting expedition of 1849, reminisced about the Great Western: “It so happened that there was a woman known to history during the Mexican war as the Great Western who . . . took it upon herself to

\textsuperscript{171} H., May 26, 1846, 2.
\textsuperscript{172} Charles Howard Shinn refers to her as the “brawny frontier Amazon” in “Tales of the Mexican Border,” \textit{New Peterson Magazine} 1, no. 6 (June 1893): 602.
carry in wounded soldiers during and after the battles, and thus became known far and wide.” Having fallen ill with “calentura” near El Paso, Knapp found himself under Sarah’s care. As he tells it, the Great Western, who “after the close of the war settled down” in El Paso and “kept a kind of inn,” took him under her care and “brought [him] all the necessary remedies at hand, and prepared food that [he] could eat when able,” giving him “every care and attention that it was possible to obtain under the circumstances.”

The legend of the Great Western appears again near the end of the century in a survey of Mexican border tales that reviews, among others, Knapp’s account. In reference to “An Old Californian’s Pioneer Story,” Charles Howard Shinn identifies Sarah as “a strange and notable woman of the border” who “was the heroine of a dozen or more dime novels and of many real episodes of Texan history.” I have not been able to locate any of the dime novels that Shinn mentions, but her story can be traced in the history of the region to a certain extent. Shinn provides a much condensed version of the Great Western narrative. He hits on all the high points, presenting the Great Western as a “giant . . . of enormous strength” able “to hold her own with any man” who “followed the army and took care of the wounded and sick soldiers.” He goes on: “She seems to have been a very rough diamond; but border annals give her credit for carrying men off from under the enemy’s hottest fire, not without cursory remarks that would not appear well in print.” In short, though she was no lady in the traditional sense of the term, she was

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well-respected by her comrades and her actions during the war were commendable and marked by honor.

The story of the Great Western that circulates today is not the same version of the story that circulated in the press at the time of the war. Though the details which make up the bulk of the legend are the same, the classification of the Heroine of Fort Brown—i.e., the characterization of what kind of woman she was—is markedly different today. The details that altered the tenor of the legend entered into the written record largely via private accounts, memoirs, and speculations about the war written retrospectively by soldiers who served on the border. The story that circulated in newsprint during and immediately following the U.S. war with Mexico was farfetched and the legend of the Great Western was definitely crafted out of “whole cloth,” but as sensationalized and fictionalized as it was, in the nineteenth century it was not an overtly sexualized tale. That dimension of the story was not added to the print record until much later, and with it the legend of the Great Western drastically changed.

When in the 1950s, stories of the Great Western and Heroine of Fort Brown began to circulate in the popular culture of the American west, they did so with a particular emphasis on the supposed promiscuity of the woman behind the legend. In 1956, then Life magazine editor Roger Butterfield edited and published a version of Samuel Chamberlain’s manuscript, My Confession: Recollections of a Rogue. Chamberlain was a veteran of the conflict between the U.S. and Mexico and the Civil War. Late in life he wrote and illustrated a memoir of his service with the military. As far as can be determined, Chamberlain’s My Confession was not published until Butterfield issued an abridged edition of the memoir more than half a century after it was written. My
Confession offers a raucous account of Chamberlain’s experiences as a “rogue,” who served with the dragoons during the war between the U.S. and Mexico. Most notably, the Great Western makes an appearance. Instantly “recognized by all as Sarah Borginnis, the celebrated ‘Great Western,’” the heroine rode up to the leader of the dragoons and asked to accompany their expedition. When told that she could only do so if she “would marry one of the Dragoons, and be mustered in as a laundress,” Chamberlain writes that her ladyship gave the military salute and replied, “All right, Major, I’ll marry the whole Squadron and you thrown in but what I go along.” Riding along the front of the line she cried out, “Who wants a wife with fifteen thousand dollars, and the biggest leg in Mexico! Come, my beauties, don’t all speak at once—who is the lucky man?”

Whether the thought that the Great Western had one husband in the 7th Infantry and another in Harney’s Dragoons made the men hesitate, I know not, but at first no one seemed disposed to accept the offer. Finally Davis of Company E . . . said, “I have no objections to making you my wife, if there is a clergyman here to tie the knot.” With a laugh the heroine replied, “Bring your blanket to my tent tonight and I will learn you to tie a knot that will satisfy you, I reckon!”

Such was the morals of the army in Mexico. Mrs. Davis nee Borginnis went down on E Company books as “Laundress” and drew rations as such.175

This short anecdote and one illustration of the Great Western are the only mentions of the heroine in Chamberlain’s reminiscence. It is worth noting that though William H. Goetzmann, historian of the American west and another of Chamberlain’s editors, credits Chamberlain’s memoir to be a mostly true account albeit with some embellishments, this passage about the Great Western reads very much like a sensational piece of fiction.\textsuperscript{176} It is also worth noting the morally questionable character which Chamberlain gives to both the military and the heroine.

A couple of years after the appearance of Chamberlain’s memoir, Wallace outlined the details of the Great Western legend, tracking the point at which the sexualized elements entered the published narrative. He describes two such sources, both private accounts of encountering the legendary lady in the border region that were not published until much later. Both can be dated to 1855 or later and both classify the Great Western as a sex worker, operating a brothel and engaging in the trade herself. Wallace identifies the first as part personal memory and part memory handed down generationally. Charles Jefferson Haley Ake apparently met the Great Western near Tucson in 1855, when he was ten years old. His memory of her is as the proprietor of a saloon, who knew how to use the two “six-shooters” she carried. Wallace reports that he later noted that his father referred to her as “the greatest whore in the West.” The second source linking the Great Western to prostitution is personal correspondence from West Pointer and army Lieutenant, Sylvester Mowry, to his friend E. J. Bicknall, dated between October 29, 1855 and April 8, 1856. In one letter from this period, Mowry

writes: “The ‘Great Western’ you remember don’t you, as the woman who distinguished herself so much at the Fort Brown bombardment just before the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca. She has been with the Army twenty years and was brought up here [to Yuma] where she keeps the officers’ mess. Among her other good qualities she is an admirable ‘pimp.’ She used to be a splendid looking woman and has done ‘good service’ but is too old for that now.”\(^{177}\)

As far as I can tell, and as Wallace also notes, these private accounts provide the only suggestions that the Great Western strayed from the role of sutler and laundress during her years with the army. Yet, it is the sexualized details about this story which are subsequently highlighted in the legend of the Great Western from the 1950s on. In current popular retellings of this legend, the Great Western is classified as a “Big Beauty Who Could Whip a Man or Simply Love Him to Death” and as a “Mother and Mistress to the U.S. Army.”\(^{178}\) She is featured as one of a number of “Shady Ladies” of the nineteenth century and is grouped among other “Patriots, Prostitutes, and Spies” who were involved in the U.S.-Mexico war.\(^{179}\) Whether or not these details from private reminiscences about the Great Western are true is not really the point. Clearly, her contemporaries saw her in this way regardless of whether or not that vision made it into the press. What matters more is that this characterization of the Great Western is the story

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\(^{177}\) Wallace, “The Great Western,” 65.


that endures.

The story of the Great Western is a legend that overshadows other stories of women involved in the war with Mexico. In Brantz Mayer’s 1848 *History of the War Between Mexico and the United States*, the singularity of the Great Western’s character is underscored and this version of the war’s history closes with an anecdote on the Great Western: “Every war produces its singular characters whose influence or example are not without their due effect upon the troops, and, at the conclusion of these chapters, which are so stained with blood and battle, it may not be useless to sketch, even upon the grave page of history, the deeds of a woman whose courageous spirit bore her through all the trials of this bombardment but whose masculine hardihood was softened by the gentleness of a female heart.” The presentation of her extraordinariness is something that cannot be overstated.

The representation of her as exceptional is important and says something not all too surprising about the beliefs and values of American culture at this time. She is presented in some accounts as a “queer” example of feminine patriotism and yet she is also presented as somehow representative of the sex. She is evidence that women have not been left out entirely from the experience of this war, that they too have represented the U.S. in the border conflict, but (at least in the case of Great Western) it is the “masculinity” of such a woman that becomes the very thing that makes her heroic. In her study of female heroism, Hourihan teases out a phenomenon that can be applied to this notion of what makes the Great Western heroic. In the story of the Great Western, the

“meaning to be constructed . . ., like the meaning to be derived from most retellings of the history of Joan of Arc, is not that women can be heroes too, but rather that, if they want any part of the important action, they must become as much like men as possible. In the web of interrelated dualisms which underlie Western thought and culture, reason, action, and maleness are linked.”\textsuperscript{181} She is exceptional at this kind of thing precisely because, though she is a woman, she is also very much like a man. She is so manly that she out-mans most of the soldiers she serves with and this uber-masculinity is highlighted over and over again in the iterations of stories about her.

Given this focus on the manliness of Sarah, given the assertion that her heroic nature lies entirely in those characteristics of her personality, appearance, and strength which are in no way feminine in the nineteenth-century construction of the term, and given the sexualized overtones of her story, I argue that she’s held up for other women more as an example of what not to strive to be than she is held up as an example of ways in which women can be “successfully” or “appropriately” empowered. In other words, the Great Western was not representative of a desirable femininity for antebellum Americans. She was an outlier, an example of uncontained femininity who did not fit into the boundaries of gender afforded her by nineteenth-century constraints. Her brand of womanhood does not quite fit into the boundaries of the nation and as such to heroize her was problematic.

The Heroine of Fort Brown as an inappropriate example of femininity appears in the press not long after Bragg’s toast was reported in the \textit{Delta}. On July 4, 1846, an

\textsuperscript{181} Hourihan, \textit{Deconstructing the Hero}, 95.
article titled “A Plea for Peace” appeared in *Niles National Register*. Among other things, this article calls for the organization of a Peace Society and addresses issues of international prevention of war. Included in the piece is a transcription of an address given by Lucretia Mott on the subject of peace. Mott’s address stresses the “duty of women” to “direct the force of their moral influence against the iniquitous spirit of war.” What follows is a description of a petitioning campaign that is meant to be an example of appropriate female involvement in the fates of nations. The article concludes with an example of what is less appropriate. Ending with a reprinting of Bragg’s toast to the heroic actions of the Great Western, we are left with the sense that “the province of the female in this interaction” is not something which other women should emulate.

Engaging in wars in men’s business. Petitioning, the province of women. As this example demonstrates, though many Americans were lauding the Great Western for her actions, others, especially those who opposed the war, were criticizing the same. The Great Western becomes a problematic metaphor for unbridled and unchecked female power. She is celebrated, yet feared, and there is a condescension here that seems particularly patronizing at this moment in American history. By this time, women were lobbying for more rights; however, middle class women were limited in how they could appropriately engage with the public. The legend of the Great Western pushed too hard at boundaries of feminine propriety for this woman to become a lasting national emblem of female heroism.

As the stories which I have compiled demonstrate, and as John M. Belohlavek

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declares: “Sarah Bowman became a legend” during the U.S.-Mexico war, a legend which grew for a short time.\(^{183}\) There was interest in the story of this remarkable Amazon of the border, at least initially. However, aside from the initial press attention, the written trail of the legend quickly grows cold. The story of the Heroine of Fort Brown was a sensational flash and then this broader interest waned. However, mentions of her name continued to pop up in the press periodically until the announcement of her death in 1866. Additionally, she is mentioned often in soldiers’ reminiscences of the war and other manuscript accounts that were not published until much later. Though the figure of the Great Western was not elevated to the status of a lasting national emblem, she was widely recognized as such by soldiers at the front. For years the name of the Great Western continued to be recognized by Americans who learned of her in the service or read about her in the news of the war.

It is hard to determine precisely why the legend of the Great Western stagnates in the nineteenth century and disappears from American memory for a time. In some ways it is not all that surprising that the legend of the Great Western fizzled shortly after the close of the war. Its articulation was due to the demand for news from Mexico, more than the importance of the legend itself. Perhaps, like so many other tales, the story was destined to disappear from collective consciousness because it was merely a bit of journalistic sensationalism. Newspapers in the nineteenth century were not made to endure. In fact, the impermanence of the medium is one of its most notable features. It was in this ephemeral medium that the legend of the Great Western was introduced to the

American public. Wallace writes that “no poet celebrated her renown in verse” and “no legend grew about her exploits,” offering the speculation that the unpopularity of the U.S.-Mexico war and the “too real to be romantic” quality of the Great Western’s wartime deeds are what cause her story to fall from collective memory.\textsuperscript{184} Although it might be impossible to pin down with certainty just why the Great Western legend failed to endure, a consideration of factors that might have contributed to the collective forgetting of this legend provides some insight into the developing national narrative. In the sections that follow, I examine what it meant to be a camp follower at this point in American history and connect the fading of the Great Western legend to a more general disappearance of the U.S.-Mexico war from collective memory, in a way that had much to do with national memories of the American Revolution.

“Belonging to the Army”

To be a woman and to be associated with the army in the mid-nineteenth-century United States could mean a variety of things. Women had been affiliated with the army long before they could officially be mustered into military service. The presence of women with the armies on the battle front was so common in the years of the American Revolutionary War that is has been presented by historians as epidemic.\textsuperscript{185} In reference to

\textsuperscript{184} Wallace, “The Great Western,” 61.

\textsuperscript{185} I rely on scholarship related to the American Revolutionary War in order to demonstrate a historical precedent for the presence of camp followers and women of the army. Most scholarship regarding this phenomenon is centered on the women of the Revolutionary War period in addition to those who accompanied the Union and Confederate armies in the American Civil War, but almost no attention is given to the conflict between the U.S. and Mexico. However, the ways in which camp followers were figured in the Revolutionary War period are relevant to the ways in which they were perceived in the U.S.-Mexico war period.
the war for independence, Linda Kerber writes that “thousands of women and children traveled with the armies” and that camp followers were quite common. In his seminal study on women of the army, *Women Camp Followers of the American Revolution*, Walter Hart Blumenthal argues that “it was the tradition that men-at-arms needed women-at-arms.” Women were not needed as comrades on the battlefield, but rather to provide a system of support for the men. Women of the army performed necessary functions that enabled the army to fulfill its mission and that could often be described as “domestic” in character. Margaret Vining and Barton C. Hacker write that the women who followed the armies “earned their keep with foraging, cooking, laundry, needlework and nursing.” Similarly, Kerber notes that most of the women who followed the army of independence functioned primarily as nurses, laundresses, and cooks. According to Blumenthal, often the “ragged, unkempt appearance of the patriot forces” was attributed to the lack of sufficient women “to wash and mend for them,” and though that may have been the perception, this condition of the army was more likely due to insufficient supplies. What Blumenthal’s anecdote implies, however, is the importance of women’s contributions to the war efforts and the very gendered nature of the separation between

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189 Kerber, “May All Our Citizens Be Soldiers,” 97.

the soldiers’ duties and those of the women who accompanied them. According to Kerber, “women who served such troops were performing tasks of the utmost necessity if the army was to continue functioning”; necessary, but not heroic.\footnote{Kerber, “May All Our Citizens Be Soldiers,” 97.}

Historically, women who attached themselves to the army were of various social standings and statuses. Certain kinds of associations with the army carried with them a level of respectability while other were disreputable. Some of the women of the army were considered middle class and were often officers’ wives, while others were defined as lower class and known as camp followers or believed to be prostitutes. In her study of army officers’ wives in the west following the American Civil War, Michele J. Nacy draws a distinction between officers’ wives and what she identifies as “half-way ladies” “former laundresses” whose husbands had risen in the ranks. According to Nacy, officers’ wives “provided a [sense of] civility and refinement” at the frontier that would not have existed without their presence. The implication was that these so-called “half-way ladies” provided something else, and could not become true ladies for their “lack of money, refinement, and breeding.”\footnote{Blumenthal outlines a tendency to classify the women of the army in a range of ways: sometimes as wives of officers and soldiers, but most often they were more perceived to be “common trulls who were apt to make trouble, get drunk and shift their partners.”\footnote{Blumenthal, \textit{Women Camp Followers}, 46.}}

The epithet “camp follower” came to be associated almost exclusively with prostitution and other disreputable reasons for women to hang on to the army. So much so that later women of the army made efforts to distance
themselves and their work from the reputation associated with camp followers.

According to Vining and Hacker, in her campaign to organize a corps of nurses during the Crimean War, Florence Nightingale insisted on the importance of providing a uniform for her women recruits “particularly... when they are out of Hospital,” noting that the “necessity of distinguishing them at once from camp followers is particularly obvious when they are not engaged in Hospital work.”¹⁹⁴ De Pauw notes that since the “term ‘camp follower’ had disagreeable overtones” during the Civil War, “Americans called the women working for pay as sutlers and laundresses vivandières.”¹⁹⁵

In recent years, scholars such as De Pauw have examined the service of these women who were loosely and unofficially attached to the military in an attempt to re-define their service. However, the casual dismissal of women soldiers, camp followers and vivandières as “morally loose” that De Pauw identifies in earlier scholarship complicates this work. According to De Pauw, “the study of military prostitution is clouded by the tendency of older historians to absorb nineteenth-century views of morality and characterize as a whore any woman who was sexually active and was not married.”¹⁹⁶ Nonetheless, recent scholars argue that this stereotypical view limits our understanding of women’s experiences and roles at times of war. Vining and Hacker draw attention to the fact that “the term ‘camp follower’ has usually been used pejoratively and dismissively. But the women who followed the armies were not merely

¹⁹⁴ Vining and Hacker, “From Camp Follower to Lady,” 355.
whores and troublemakers. Many of them were soldiers’ wives.” Distinguishing between the different ways in which women of the army were classified Kerber likewise notes that these women “were not prostitutes, who were dealt with severely; not traditional camp followers . . ., who sold goods to soldiers. Often, they were married to waggoners or sutlers, and worked alongside their husbands.” Though such recent examinations of camp followers augment our understanding of the roles these women played in association with the army, at the time of the U.S.-Mexico war to be considered a camp follower would have carried with it connotations of a sexualized affiliation with the army of occupation.

1846 and 1776: The Great Western and Molly Pitcher

As John E. Dean notes, during the years of the U.S.-Mexico war, the Revolutionary War was still held as a “unifying Nationalist myth” in the collective memory of the United States. As such, the war of independence was often invoked during the 1840s in conjunction with the U.S.-Mexico war. Dean identifies a concerted effort in U.S. culture more broadly to connect the spirit of 1776 with the spirit of 1846. He argues that “the U.S.-Mexico War was a stage upon which the present could relive U.S. America’s glorious past of courageous U.S. American volunteers of all classes uniting to redeem a land from tyranny and oppression. This war could justify U.S. American myth.” Similarly, Johannsen ties the enthusiasm for the U.S.-Mexico war to a national nostalgia for the lost Revolutionary War heroes and a continuing connection to the ideals of liberty and self-governance.

197 Vining and Hacker, “From Camp Follower to Lady,” 355.
198 Kerber, “May All Our Citizens Be Soldiers,” 96.
199 Dean, How Myth Became History, 48.
associated with the U.S. revolution. He writes that the soldiers of the 1846-1848 war with Mexico were “raised on the tales of America’s struggle for independence,” and that they “were anxious to show that the patriotism of the fathers could still be found in the hearts of the sons.”

He identifies in the public a general sense of mourning for the heroes of the past: “Americans felt a loss of contact with their national origins.” He argues that Americans sought an “emotional means for preserving their links with the Revolutionary era” and “as the nation matured, its citizens became more aware of their heroic age.” In short, Americans felt a need both to connect with the heroes of the country’s past and to recognize the heroes of their current moment.

The fabrication of the legend of the Great Western and the mythologizing of her life speaks to this need to heroize that Johannsen identifies. With the enacting of war against Mexico in, the U.S. needed to identify a new stock of heroic figures, though the heroes of the Revolution were not completely forgotten. As Johannsen argues, there was a real interest in resurrecting the spirit of ’76 in ’46, but there was also an attempt to distinguish the current period from that of the earlier. In the case of the Heroine of Fort Brown, echoes of the legend of Molly Pitcher, the “Heroine of Monmouth,” reverberate. The identity of the real Molly Pitcher, and whether or not she did, in fact, exist, has been the subject of some disagreement among historians. Though Emily J. Teipe notes that the legendary figure of Molly Pitcher contains a “kernel of historical authenticity,” the Molly Pitcher that has endured over time as an emblem of real female patriotism is, like the

Great Western, largely a fabrication. Additionally, like the Great Western, “Molly Pitcher is a name that has come to symbolize a legend, a female figure powerful enough to fight on a battlefield with men.” Characterized in terms similar to those applied to the Great Western, the figure of Molly Pitcher was one of formidable force: a “very masculine person, alike rough in appearance and character,” though still “kind hearted and a good woman.” This description of Molly Pitcher is strikingly similar to the ways in which the Great Western was characterized in hypermasculine terms, yet still described in terms that stressed her femininity.

Though parallels between the legends of Molly Pitcher and the Great Western abound, one significant difference exists. Both could be classified as camp followers who supported their husbands in war; however, in the case of Molly Pitcher, her attachment to one man is a significant departure from the typical sense of promiscuity that is more generally associated with camp followers, and is particularly true regarding perceptions of the Great Western. The wholesomeness of the former is highlighted, while the promiscuity of the latter is presented with ever increasing emphasis. One eyewitness account that appears to form much of the basis of the Molly Pitcher legend places a woman on the battlefield with the artillery at Monmouth, attending a cannon with her husband the whole time. Emphasis is placed on this woman’s marital status in this


\[\text{204} \text{ Bohrer, Glory, Passion, and Principle, 171; Teipe, “Real Molly Pitcher,” 120.}\]
martial setting. Additionally, in her search to locate the “real” Molly Pitcher, Teipe looks at pension requests from some of the women who might have been inspiration her. In these pension documents, the applicants’ femininity is emphasized as is their adherence to eighteenth-century sexual and moral standards for women. No such attempt to attach the Great Western to one man in particular can be found. In fact, the promiscuity of the Great Western is emphasized and her morality is always in question. Even though the sexualized nature of the Great Western narrative did not enter the print record until the mid-1950s, it is likely that her contemporaries would have associated her character with those of the lower-class camp followers discussed above. Conversely, the legend of Molly Pitcher highlights a much more chaste form of patriotism than that which the Great Western represents.

Interestingly, both Teipe and Bohrer date the development of the Molly Pitcher legend that we know today to the mid-nineteenth century. In fact, Bohrer notes that, though reports of one of the women who was an historical precedent for the legendary Molly circulated in the press prior to 1848, she was not given the name “Molly Pitcher” until Nathaniel Currier “produced a print of a woman on the battlefield at Monmouth manning a cannon and called her Molly Pitcher.” The print to which Bohrer refers is one by the firm of Currier & Ives that appeared circa 1856, under the title: The women of ’76: “Molly Pitcher” the heroine of Monmouth. Previous to the appearance of the

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205 Teipe, “Real Molly Pitcher,” throughout.
207 Currier & Ives, The women of ’76: “Molly Pitcher” the heroine of Monmouth, New York: Published by Currier & Ives, [between 1856 and 1907], Lithograph, https://www.loc.gov/item/2002698846/.
Currier lithograph, she had simply been known as “Captain Molly.” Whether a conglomeration of details borrowed from the lives of various Revolutionary War women, or a complete fabrication, the figure of Molly Pitcher has endured in the American imagination as an icon of female heroism dating back to the war for independence. Bohrer argues that “the Molly Pitcher legend that developed in the nineteenth century transformed an unknown camp follower from a rugged, brazen member of the lower classes into a pretty young woman who elicits sympathy, not disapproval, making the story easier to relate to for all.”

The same kind of transformation did not happen with the legend of the Great Western, perhaps because her character was too closely linked with a problematic kind of femininity that could not be easily contained within nineteenth-century values regarding women and sex. If her contemporaries understood her to be a prostitute of sorts, then the stagnation of the Great Western legend can be read as evidence that, as Anne Helen Petersen argues, “the prostitute is clearly a troubling narrative force that demands neutralization,” in this case by forgetting. Perhaps the Molly Pitcher legend serves as an appropriate and safe counter legend to the Great Western—one that presents a more acceptable kind of femininity and that supplanted the legend of the Great Western in American memory.

The collective forgetting of the Great Western has as much to do with the character of the woman represented as it does with representations of the U.S.-Mexico border.

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209 Anne Helen Petersen, “‘Whores and Other Feminists’: Recovering Deadwood’s Unlikely Feminisms,” *Great Plains Quarterly*, 27 (Fall 2007): 270.
The collective forgetting of the legend of the Great Western is an emblem for the collective forgetting of the war. Just as the Great Western was supplanted in national memory by the Revolutionary War figure of Molly Pitcher, so too was the U.S.-Mexico war supplanted in the national memory by the war of independence. Despite all the gestures linking the 1846-1848 conflict to the war of 1776 in spirit and in purpose, ultimately the country as a whole could not reconcile the disparate meanings behind these wars. The war with Mexico was not the project of liberation and reconciliation, of nation building, that it was presented to be to the American public. Rather, it was a project of imperialism, something that Britain did but that the United States aimed to distance itself from. At this point in American history, the symbolic meaning of the war with Mexico as well as the figures associated with the conflict did not fit into an anti-imperialist narrative. What the Great Western in particular and the U.S.-Mexico war in general represented was at odds with the nationalizing myth that Johannsen and Dean identify as being so central to the antebellum U.S. American psyche. The war with Mexico was fought for questionable purposes, and no cohesive narrative of the invasion of Mexico could be compiled. As such, the conflict drove the U.S. further towards disunion. The U.S-Mexico war along with its “new stock of heroes” got lost in the larger cultural narrative of the United States that touts the fight for independence and the fight to overcome Civil War as the most important moments in American history.
CHAPTER THREE

THE INEZ OF AUGUSTA JANE EVANS

When, in 1855, *Inez, a Tale of the Alamo* appeared in print, it did so anonymously. Dedicated “to the Texan patriots, who triumphantly unfurled and waved aloft the ‘banner of the lone star!’ Who wrenched asunder the iron bands of despotic Mexico! And wreathed the brow of the ‘queen state’ with the glorious chaplet of ‘civil and religious liberty!’,” the novel was ostensibly a commemoration of those who fought for Texan independence. The conflict culminated in February and March of 1836 with the names of “Texan patriots” such as Travis, Bowie, and Crockett emerging as legends, while Mexicans such as Santa Anna denounced as villains. Based on the novel’s subtitle and a cursory glance at the dedication, one might expect the narrative which follows to dramatize in detail the legendary battle at the Alamo and the circumstances surrounding it. One might also expect the legendary and villainous figures mentioned above to be featured prominently as characters in the novel. *Inez* does no such thing. Rather, *Inez* can perhaps best be described as an historical novel and an anti-Catholic romance of the U.S.-Mexico border region that demonstrates nativist leanings and pro-slavery sentiments. The most prominent characters are three radically different women—Mary, Florence, and Inez—whose fates are imperiled by the machinations of one corrupt Roman Catholic priest, Alphonso Mazzolin.

Even the dedication demonstrates the chords of the religiosity and nativism that run through *Inez*. Directly celebrating religious liberty, the dedicatory remarks also hint at

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the importance of prayer. The “chaplet,” or garland, used to “wreathe the brow of the ‘queen state’” also connotes a string of beads that, like a rosary, is typically used for counting prayers. Placed in the broader context of the rampant anti-Catholicism that found its way into mid-nineteenth-century U.S. literature, even the phrase “despotic Mexico” carries religious implications. As Virginia Guedea and Jaime E. Rodríguez O. discuss, a particular concern for the expanding, largely Protestant United States was the supposedly “authoritarian and despotic heritage of Spanish Catholic culture” that was present in the developing nation of Mexico. This heritage and nation were both looked upon with “profound suspicion and distaste” by its neighbors to the north.\textsuperscript{211} Traces of this suspicion and distaste are present in the dedication to Inez, and are underscored by Evans’s celebration of the successful overthrowing of what Texas patriots believed to be Catholic Mexico’s usurpation of or encroachment on their liberties, both religious and civil.

Also evident from the outset are threads of Evans’s prevailing pro-slavery attitude. The years leading up to the fight for Texan independence marked a period in which illegal movement, or settlement across the border moved in the opposite direction from today. Empresarios such as Stephen F. Austin saw opportunity in settling in Texas, but felt restricted by rigid rules imposed by the Mexican government; including the insistence that the only religion which would be tolerated was Catholicism, and limits on

the extension of slavery. Mexico adopted an inhospitable attitude toward slavery in the 1820s and effectively abolished the abominable institution by 1830; however, Mexico never fully committed to enforcing the abolition of slavery in Texas. Alwyn Barr speculates that this lack of commitment rose out of fear that so doing would stir up political unrest among Anglo immigrants there. Nonetheless, the specter of abolition hung over slaveholding Americans who immigrated to the country, and it was a major point of discontent in the region. Mexico’s anti-slavery stance regarding Texas was complex and it accordingly played a significant role in stimulating the Texan’s pursuit of independence. Following the end of hostilities with Mexico, the constitution which effectively established the Republic of Texas explicitly sanctioned slavery and protected the right to hold humans as property in the new republic.

Evans’s emphasis on the guaranteed “civil” liberties that were secured by the “wrench[ing] asunder” of the “iron bands” of Mexico can be read as an evocation of this very specific civil liberty that was won by the Texan patriots whom Evans celebrates in her dedication. What is not lost on modern readers of Inez, however, is the great irony which manifests itself in Evans’s professed celebration of liberation found in her dedication: the “iron bands” American settlers in Texas found so oppressive did not keep them from imposing their own form of oppression on enslaved African Americans.

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214 For more on black Texans and the institution of slavery in, see Barr, Black Texans.
Ironically, the liberty sought at the Alamo led to the pursuit of another kind of despotism.

From the very beginning we can see that *Inez*, as a tale of the Alamo, is perhaps not quite what it purports to be. This chapter places Evans’s *Inez: A Tale of the Alamo* in a post-war context that was rife with anti-Catholicism and that saw a deepening of the sectional fractures that were developing in antebellum U.S. culture over the question of slavery. The rhetoric of the U.S.-Mexico war emphasized a nation united against a common foe. In doing so, it avoided the question of what would happen to any land that was acquired with the annexation of Texas—specifically, how it might serve to extend slavery and alter the balance of power between free and slave states. Evans was an unwavering supporter of American slavery and, a southerner herself, was invested in the maintenance of southern plantation culture that relied on the labor compelled from enslaved people of African descent. In this chapter, I assert that the anti-Catholicism in *Inez* is more about justifying the war with Mexico than the Alamo it depicts. Evans’s pro-slavery sympathies encouraged her to welcome the U.S. acquisition of more land with the annexation of Texas. However, her anti-Catholic prejudices simultaneously caused her to reject incorporating the racially and religiously different people of Mexico into the United States as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In other words, Evans wanted Mexican land, specifically for the extension and maintenance of slavery, but wanted it without the people of Mexico. Thus, the anti-Catholicism that Evans deploys throughout *Inez* acts in service of her pro-slavery leanings, and both become inscribed in her vision of the future for America.

The role of women is central to Evans’s articulation of her vision of the future for the United States and for U.S.-Mexico relations. As noted above, the three most
prominent characters in the novel are women. What follows is an examination of the ways in which Evans writes about these characters, including a discussion of her deployment of the marriage plot. I argue that Evans’s representation of these women demonstrates how her particular mix of anti-Catholic prejudice and pro-slavery sentiment could have only been developed in response to the issues raised by the U.S. war with Mexico.

“Inez, for all that we know, may be a brilliant novel”

_Inez_ was the first novel of the young southern woman writer, Augusta Jane Evans, who reportedly wrote the tale as a gift to her father when she was a teenager. As the story goes, the financial insecurity of the Evans family led Evans to pursue a writing career, and _Inez_ was an attempt to win her father over to the idea.215 Evans’s strategy to overcome her father’s reservations was successful and, as Rebecca Grant Sexton notes, “although she wrote her first two novels because she and her family needed money, Evans continued to write long after she had become wealthy.”216 However, it was not from sales and acclaim associated with _Inez_ that Evans earned her wealth and her reputation as a popular writer.

In February 1855, the _New York Times_ announced the novel in its “New Publications” section as “A very spirited and powerful story, by an American lady, embodying the incidents of a romantic life in Texas, and illustrating the influence of the

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216 Rebecca Grant Sexton, _A Southern Woman of Letters: The Correspondence of Augusta Jane Evans Wilson_ (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), xxii.
Catholic priesthood on the social and domestic relations. It is a story of deep passion, and written in a style of uncommon vividness and beauty.”

Advertisements for *Inez*, such as this one placed by Harper & Brothers in the *Times*, cast the novel in a favorable light but ultimately did not entice a large number of readers to take up the novel. Although *Inez* marked the beginning of Evans’s writing career, it did not receive a large audience initially. In fact, its critical reception was poor overall and the novel was generally unpopular. Some critics, however, provided a more positive take on the novel. *Godey’s Lady’s Book* optimistically reviewed the novel in its April 1855 issue, predicting that *Inez* would “doubtless have a good run during the present excited state of the public mind on the vexed questions of religious faith and observance.”

An early review of *Inez*, such as the following from the *Spirit of the Times*, classified the novel as “a well-written book, [that] gives many exciting scenes which occurred in the war of liberty which was carried on between the Texans and Mexicans, after the former had determined to form a nation and act for themselves. Domestic troubles send the principal characters to these scenes of trial, and death happily terminates their cares and afflictions.” This more positive, though darkly humorous, take on the novel was uncommon, even shortly after *Inez* was published.

Billed as a “tale of the Alamo” with a religious bent, Evans’s *Inez* played on

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218 “Literary Notices,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine*, 50, April 1855, 370, ProQuest.
impulses of patriotism and nostalgia in antebellum America, but the novel was not seen as artistically exceptional or of significant merit. Though Julia Deane Freeman, writing under the pseudonym of Mary Forrest, observed in 1861 that ‘‘Inez’’ was noticed very favorably by the press, with the exception of the Catholic journals, which, as a matter of course, took umbrage at her strictures upon papacy, and charged at the young heretic with might and main,’’ there is not much evidence to show that critics responding to the novel in 1855 had such favorable things to say. In fact, the initial response to Inez appears to be overwhelmingly negative. As Evans biographer, William Perry Fidler, notes: “Most critics have agreed with a contemporary’s estimate of Inez as a work of art”: “There is not a natural character and scarcely a natural phrase in the whole volume.” Indeed, Inez is a tedious tale with none of the complex development that marks a literary masterpiece. Another criticism which appeared in Graham’s American Monthly Magazine in May 1855 insisted that readers knew all they needed to know about the novel from the writer’s dedication: “A story whose style and purpose are probably indicated by the dedication. . . ‘Inez,’ for all that we know, may be a brilliant novel; but how can the author expect any reader to get beyond the dedication?” Yet another notice, which appeared in July 1855 simply stated: “Inez: a Tale of the Alamo . . . is a very weak anti-Romanist novel.” A brief survey of initial critical reactions to the novel demonstrates that Inez was decidedly

220 Mary Forrest [Julia Deane Freeman], Women of the South Distinguished in Literature (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1861), 330.
221 Fidler, Augusta Evans Wilson, 44; “Art. X.—Critical Notices,” The Southern Quarterly Review, April 1855, 542, American Periodicals.
222 [Review 4—No Title], Graham’s American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion 16, no. 5, May 1855, 480-481, American Periodicals.
not well-received when it first appeared in the antebellum literary marketplace. A look at current criticism of the novel reveals a similarly harsh critical response.

Current criticism of the novel reflects many of the same sentiments found in nineteenth-century reviews. Alexander Cowie lauded Evans as “perhaps the most talented and certainly one of the most popular” of the “domestic writers whose books first appeared in the [1850s].” Sexton notes that with the exception of *Inez*, the success of Evans’s novels made “her name a household word across the United States.” In Cowie’s estimation, Evans was peerless in her time, a real “first-rate writer of a second-rate type of fiction.” However, of *Inez*, he wrote that it “did not display her most vendible qualities” and that it was “a crudely assembled story with little characterization, no humor, and inferior stylistic quality.” He went on further to say: “Sentiment it contains, but much of the author’s energy is drawn off into an account of the siege of the Alamo and tirades against Catholicism.” Cowie found moments of hope in *Inez*, but ultimately dismissed the work as a failed attempt by Evans to write a historical novel. Like Cowie before him, Fidler also found fault with Evans’s first novel. Labelling the text a “juvenile novel,” Fidler asserts that “the sheltered Puritan authoress was incapable of responding to the demands of her story, particularly the love theme.” Thus, from Fidler’s point of view, “the zealous teen-age authoress” needed more life experience if she were to become a successful writer. As the first novel of an adolescent writer, it is not surprising that the

maturity of *Inez* factors into its critical reception. Cowie’s sentiments are echoed by Sexton in her introduction to Evans’s collected correspondence, in which she describes *Inez* as an “immature work.” In a more recent study of *Domestic Novelists in the Old South*, Elizabeth Moss focuses on the artistic quality of the work, describing the literary weaknesses found in *Inez* as follows: “Marred by dense prose, an unrealistic setting, and a plot so complex as to be laughable, *Inez* contained few hints of its author’s vivid imagination and natural storytelling ability.” Though contemporary criticism of *Inez* generally confirms the nineteenth-century estimation of the novel, as these examples demonstrate, more recent critics view the novel even more harshly than their nineteenth-century counterparts.

Despite the novel’s negative critical reception and lackluster sales, surprisingly *Inez* was often re-printed through the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. After its initial publication in 1855, the novel was first re-issued during the latter half of the Civil War. When *Inez* appeared in the 1860s, Evans’s name graced the title page, and though the edition was not authorized by Evans, the publishers capitalized on her growing reputation. Almost every subsequent decade through the beginning of the twentieth century saw a new printing or re-issue of *Inez*. *Inez* was issued by a number of New York-based publishers and by the end of the century, publication of the novel had spread west to Chicago and internationally to London. Though Fidler’s publication...
history of the novel claims that *Inez* would not have been initially published without a subsidy provided by Evans’s uncle, Melissa J. Homestead refutes that claim, based on Evans’s publishing contract with Harpers, “which mentions no such subvention.”

According to Mary Kelley, even though the novel was never a commercial success, “*Inez* was being issued by eight different publishers as late as 1912.” Perhaps the novel endured and reappeared over time in part because Evans had earned quite a following with her later, more popular novels. Perhaps it was the subject of the novel suggested by its subtitle that ensured *Inez*’s perennial presence in the American literary marketplace. As one publisher’s notice remarked upon the appearance of yet another edition in 1895—this was not her most popular novel, but as it was purportedly a tale of the Alamo, it would be read so long as “American patriotism” was alive. The notice appeared in *The San Francisco Call* and reads as follows: “The tale possesses the usual attributes of the author’s fiction, but has never acquired the popularity of . . . some of her other books. Because it is a tale of the Alamo, of sentiment groping about the scene of that horrible butchery, it will always be read wherever burn the fires of American patriotism.” For whatever reason, whether it be affiliation with the rest of Evans’s oeuvre or the subject


matter of the novel, *Inez* continued to be produced and read long after it first flopped.

Although *Inez* was not particularly well-received and is flawed artistically, its persistence in the literary marketplace suggests that there is something worth paying attention to in the novel. In this chapter, I am not concerned with discussing the artistic merits of this tale. What is more important is consideration of the ways in which the text reflects and/or anticipates anxieties that were present and developing in mid-nineteenth-century U.S. American culture regarding the place of Mexico and Mexicans in relation to the United States. And, unlike Moss, who wrote that “on the rare occasions that *Inez* commands scholarly attention, it is as an example of the worst excesses of sentimental fiction rather than as an early indication of Augusta Evans’ literary genius,” I believe that the novel’s conventions of women merit further study. *Inez* has indeed received some scholarly attention in recent decades; however, the novel is rarely the primary focus of inquiry. Most often discussions of *Inez* are buried within larger studies that center on themes or trends in antebellum American literature and culture to which certain aspects of the novel speak. Some of the more promising, though particularly harsh, recent criticism of the novel focuses on its anti-Catholic sentiment and racial tensions. I will address this body of scholarship in later sections of this chapter, but for now I want to stress the fact that the majority of scholarship that looks at *Inez* has been sporadic, widely dispersed, and is at times dismissive of *Inez*’s potential import as a novel relevant to continuing border conflict between the U.S. and Mexico.

*Remembering the Alamo after 1848*

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234 Moss, *Domestic Novelists*, 153.
A novel which purports to be about the Alamo may seem out of place in a survey of U.S.-Mexico War literature; however, *Inez* is just as relevant to considerations of the latter conflict as it is to the earlier dispute for Texan independence, perhaps even more so. The process by which Texas became part of the Union began in some ways with the fight at the Alamo in 1835, which in popular myth led to the declaration of Texas independence and the subsequent U.S. annexation of Texas in 1845. Granting Texas statehood happened shortly before the U.S. went to war with Mexico and was arguably one of the causes which precipitated the war. Though a decade separated the two conflicts, they were closely related. When Evans wrote *Inez* she did so from the vantage point of the 1850s. Her retrospective look to the Alamo relied on the historical memory of an event that she did not witness, colored by her personal memory of the time she spent in San Antonio, Texas with her family when the U.S.-Mexico war was waging. Details of Evans’s own family history in addition to thematic elements of *Inez* give grounds for examining this text within the context of the U.S-Mexico War. Though Evans sets out to commemorate the earlier conflict at the Alamo with, *Inez* speaks more to the cultural and political realities of 1848 and the post-war United States.

The conflict at the Alamo functions more as a backdrop for the religious and domestic romance that unfolds in *Inez* than as an element of the narrative. Over the course of the novel, some concern about the political instability of the region surfaces, and as the conflict draws nearer, preparations are made for the female protagonists to leave the border region for a safer locale. Although some narrative space is dedicated to a superficial account of the military action at the Alamo, by and large the conflict over Texan independence provides a convenient impetus for Evans to address other
“domestic” concerns in *Inez*. What might we learn if we read *Inez* through the lens of the U.S.-Mexico War instead of the conflict at the Alamo, as the subtitle asks us to? Even though *Inez* is set in the mid-1830s, at the time of the battle of the Alamo, Evans’s first novel is more representative of concerns associated with the war between the United States and Mexico that was fought a decade later than it is about concerns associated with establishing the Republic of Texas.

In 1845, when Evans was barely ten years old, the financially ruined Evans family moved to the border region, seeking economic opportunity in Texas. As Evans’s biographer Fidler writes, many southerners in the 1830s and 1840s went to Texas in response to “the clamor of Southern leaders and newspapers to avenge Mexican insults to our honor” and in search of economic security. According to Fidler, Evans’s father, Matthew, was in the latter camp, settling in San Antonio for a time and acquiring part ownership in a sheep ranch.\(^{235}\) Life in Texas proved to be rough and the Evans family continued to struggle financially. According to Anne Sophie Riepma, the family was unable to afford to send Evans to a girls’ school in San Antonio, and she thus received instruction from her mother at home.\(^{236}\)

San Antonio was an important headquarters and rendezvous for the American forces during the war with Mexico. Freeman characterizes the scene at San Antonio as follows: “Between the lawlessness of the soldiery, and the incongruous nature of the population, society was in a thoroughly disorganized state.”\(^{237}\) It is feasible that Evans

\(^{236}\) Riepma, *Fire & Fiction*, 15.
would have seen firsthand some of this “lawlessness” and “disorganization” in addition to the military’s comings and goings during the time that she was in San Antonio. The family remained in the area until 1849, well after war between the two countries officially ended. Later in life Evans told her niece, Lily Bragg, “that she and [her mother, Sarah,] had persuaded her father to go to Alabama because of the widespread violence and immorality in and around San Antonio.”

No doubt, the time spent in that city during the war with Mexico influenced Evans’s decision to use San Antonio and the Alamo as the backdrop of her first novel, which she began writing after the war with Mexico, when she and her family were already living in Mobile, Alabama.

Though life was tough for the Evans family in San Antonio, it seems as if it was a formative period in Evans’s development as a writer. In *Women of the South Distinguished in Literature*, a collection which appeared in 1860 and featured biographical sketches, Freeman asserts that “it was in San Antonio that the idea of authorship first dawned upon [Evans].” In a letter to Freeman, a transcription of which was included in *Women of the South*, Evans characterized her deep desire to write about San Antonio:

I remember rambling about the crumbling walls of the Alamo, recalling all its bloody horrors; and as I climbed the moldering, melancholy pile, to watch the last rays of the setting sun gild the hill-tops, creep down the sides, and slowly sink into the blue waves of the San Antonio River: as I looked over the quietly beautiful valley, with its once noble Alameda of

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238 Riepma, *Fire & Fiction*, 16.
stately cottonwoods, my heart throbbed, and I wondered if I should be able, some day, to write about it for those who had never looked upon a scene so fair. I seem, even now, to be winding once more through that lovely valley, holding my mother’s hand tightly, as she repeated beautiful descriptions from Thomson’s ‘Seasons’ and Cowper’s ‘Task;’ again I see the white flock slowly descending the hills, and bleating as they wound home to my father’s fold.  

As depicted in this letter, Evans’s memory of exploring the crumbling Alamo and imagining the “bloody horrors” of the siege focuses not on wishing to narrate the battle which took place there, but rather on her doubt as to whether or not she would ever be able to represent the beauty of the landscape “for those who had never looked upon a scene so fair.” Her memory quickly moves from the “moldering, melancholy pile” to the sunset, the hills, the San Antonio River, and the pastoral valley—it is a scene which stirs something within her, connected to a desire to write great poetic literature. Evans’s letter reflects a sense of anxiety and doubt not unlike that which was present in American literature more broadly at this time, as writers strove to establish a literary tradition apart from that which had been inherited from Great Britain.

Evans reflects this appreciation for the natural beauty of the San Antonian landscape in Inez. In fact, some of the best descriptive moments of the novel involve discussions of the land and natural features of this place. The story of Inez opens at a momentous point in the lives of two of the primary women characters, Florence Hamilton

and Mary Irving. In a brief interlude providing the women’s backstory we learn that Florence lost her mother at a young age, and that shortly thereafter Mary came to live with the Hamiltons, when her parents’ deaths left her an orphan. Here, the trajectory of Florry’s and Mary’s lives mirrors very closely that of Evans’s life. The cousins are together at a New Orleans boarding school when Florence receives news that her father (like that of Evans) has lost their family plantation, is penniless, and will be coming to collect her the next evening on his way to Texas. Unwilling to part with her dear cousin and childhood friend, Mary chooses to go along, and before the close of the third chapter, the three are on their way to the border region. They arrive in San Antonio a little more than a year before the conflict at the Alamo, and we next join them when a year has passed.

The respect and awe that Evans held for the Mexican landscape is demonstrated when she introduces us to the city of San Antonio. It is near the end of summer, “and the last rays of an August sun illumined a scene so beautiful, that I long for the pencil of a Claude Lorraine [sic].”240 Like George Lippard before her, Evans invokes the visual to help her readers imagine the land and cityscape that she cannot describe, and that she so admired when living in San Antonio. Evans directly references seventeenth-century artist, Claude Lorrain, perhaps most well-known for his classical landscape paintings. In so doing, Evans links her description of San Antonio with a very specific and picturesque style of vision. For those of her readers who were familiar with Lorrain’s work, San Antonio can easily be visualized as a verdant pastoral idyll.

240 Evans, Inez, 27.
In her initial description of San Antonio, Evans introduces a slight anachronism into her narrative that belies further that this tale is one of the Alamo. She describes the place as a “far off town, in a far off state.”\textsuperscript{241} At the time in which the novel is set, Texas was not yet an independent entity, let alone a state in the Union. It would not be such an entity until almost a decade later, at the end of 1845, when Texas achieved statehood and was admitted to the Union. The fact that Evans refers to Texas as a state is a symptom both of the vantage point from which she wrote \textit{Inez} (in the early 1850s), and that she was more preoccupied with the political and cultural realities associated with the newly acquired state of Texas than she was with the history of the Alamo.

At any rate, Evans stresses the beauty of this Texan town. Her description reads like an ode addressed to the lovely borderland town:

Thine was the sweetness of nature; no munificent hand had arranged, with artistic skill, a statue here, a fountain there.

The river wound like an azure girdle round the town; not confined by precipitous banks, but gliding along the surface, as it were, and reflecting, in its deep blue waters, the rustling tule which fringed the margin. An occasional pecan or live-oak flung a majestic shadow athwart its azure bosom, and now and then a clump of willows sighed low in the evening breeze.

Far away to the north stretched a mountain range, blue in the distance; to the south, the luxuriant valley of the stream. The streets were

\textsuperscript{241} Evans, \textit{Inez}, 27.
narrow, and wound with a total disregard of the points of the compass. Could a stranger have been placed blindfolded in one of them, and then allowed to look about him, the flat roofs and light appearance of most of the houses would have forced him to declare that he had entered a tropical town of the far-east.\(\text{242}\)

Evans focuses on a feminine natural setting in these first few paragraphs about San Antonio. The physical features are paramount: the river, the mountain range, the luxuriant valley. The range of terrain within view reminds one of Lippard’s panoramic vision of the diverse Mexican landscape. In Lippard’s vision, Mexico is “a land, where in the course of forty-eight hours, you can ascend from the hot plains of the tropics . . . to the mild clime of eternal spring . . .; to the snow-clad mountains . . . . A land, no less beautiful with its flower-framed lakes . . . , no less gorgeous with its panorama of mountain, pyramid and valley.”\(\text{243}\) One of the things that seems important to Lippard is the beauty of this variegated land. He writes the landscape so that others can visualize an ascent to glorious heights along with him. A similar preoccupation can be found in Inez regarding Texas and San Antonio more specifically, but Evans sees it as nurturing, sweet and welcoming with familiar oats and pecans rather than exotic pyramids.

The descriptions of San Antonio in Inez and in Evans’s letter not only demonstrate an appreciation of its domesticated beauty, but also convey a preoccupation with the value of the land. Its economic status was undetermined at the time that Evans lived in San Antonio. The “luxuriant valley” that Evans imagines promises to be

\(\text{242}\) Evans, Inez, 27-8.
\(\text{243}\) Lippard, Legends of Mexico, 13.
productive, an ideal place to establish a new plantation. Lippard’s Mexico is “a land rich in the productions of every clime, where the fruits are more luxuriant, the flowers more rain-bow like in their dazzling dyes, the birds more radiant in their plumage, than in any other land on the wide earth of God.”

Lippard highlights the broad range of climates and types of landscapes contained within the borders of Mexico. But both Evans’s San Antonio and Lippard’s Mexico are not only beautiful, but also exceptionally productive of “fruits” different from those that the land and climate of the United States allow. This idea of the land’s perceived productivity and value to plantation economy was an important factor for the people who wished to establish an independent republic there.

But it was really only relevant to the United States with the annexation of Texas in 1845 and the subsequent border war. For some citizens of the United States, this direct link to slavery made acquiring this land all the more appealing.

In the years surrounding the U.S. annexation of Texas and leading up to the war with Mexico, American sentiment about the acquisition of northern Mexico was mixed. Further extending the idea of Manifest Destiny, some factions vied for the ingestion of all of Mexico into the United States. Known as the “All Mexico” movement, this approach underscored U.S. superiority and the consequent obligation to “uplift the inferior races of Mexico.”

In an article on anti-Catholicism and the annexation of Mexico, John C.

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245 John C. Pinheiro, “‘Religion without Restriction’: Anti-Catholicism, All Mexico, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 85. The All Mexico movement reached its height in the years leading up to and during the war with Mexico. Some politicians and newspaper editors alike believed that the annexation of all of Mexico was the only natural conclusion to the war with Mexico. On October 8, 1846, the *New York Herald* wrote of the movement, “it is a gorgeous prospect, the annexation of all Mexico. It were more desirable that she should come to us
Pinheiro writes of the All Mexico debate in Congress that began in late 1847 and continued into the spring of 1848: “Some members reflected the growing sentiment voiced in certain leading newspapers that all of Mexico ought to be annexed. Many claimed that Mexico’s apparent [political] intransigence left no other solution. Frequently, proponents of this position argued that total annexation not only was the best means of promptly ending the war, but also the providential fulfillment of America’s Manifest Destiny to overspread the continent with its people and their republican institutions.”

Not everyone felt the same way about incorporating all of Mexico into the United States, no matter how much land came with the deal.

Others objected to expansion altogether and wanted to bring as little (or none) of Mexico into the United States as possible. Reasons for opposing the absorption of such a large chunk of land into the Union were varied. Lyon Rathbun describes an anxiety that had its roots in values associated with the Revolutionary War period: “opponents of annexation fervently warned that acquiring Texas would ignite war with Mexico and set the nation on a path of empire building. Appealing to the civic principles of the Revolutionary generation, opponents urged the nation to cultivate the inner resources of the republic rather than pursue an expansionist policy that would transform the nation into an empire.”

What Rathbun touches on here is a historically rooted sense of exceptionalism that developed in the colonial period and that has consistently allowed voluntarily; but as we shall have no peace until she be annexed, let it come, even though force be necessary.” See, “Our Relations with Mexico: The Destiny of the Two Republics,” New York Herald, 8, Oct. 1846, 2, 19th-Century U.S. Newspapers. Pinheiro, “Religion without Restriction,” 85.

Americans to hold contradictory values simultaneously—in this case, anti-imperialism and a strong sense of manifest destiny that led to aggressive expansionism. Amy S. Greenberg echoes Rathbun, articulating perhaps a little more precisely the contradiction at play here: “That the United States was not imperialistic in the nineteenth century became a point of pride and honor among policy makers during the very same years in which America embraced colonialism. It was used to buttress the conviction that the United States was an exceptional liberty-loving nation that used its power, not to oppress the free . . . , but rather to free the oppressed.”248 Thus, one major thread in the argument against taking land from Mexico was that to do so ran counter to the idea of American liberty and placed the United States on the level of imperial countries such as Great Britain, from whom the U.S. strove to distinguish itself.

Another point of opposition had to do with the potential extension of slavery into Mexico. For those associated with the abolition movement, the expansionist interest in annexing Texas was directly linked to the southern interest in growing the institution of slavery. One key opponent of admitting Texas to the Union was former empresario Benjamin Lundy. According to Rathbun, Lundy had obtained an empresario grant to establish a colony near Tamaulipas, but the instability in the region made his plans unfeasible and he returned to the United States. Shortly thereafter, he published an anti-war pamphlet that positioned the annexation of Texas as an elaborate conspiracy orchestrated by slavery sympathizers for the express purpose of “extending and perpetuating the system of slavery and the slave trade in the Republic of Mexico.” Lundy

248 Greenberg, Manifest Manhood, 19.
calls other public men to action on the matter, insisting that it was their collective
obligation to awaken “the public attention to the enormity of this wanton aggression, this
violation of the integrity of a neighboring nation, by the southern slaveholders and their
unprincipled co-operators.” Lest the country be deceived and involve itself “in the deep
criminality, and perhaps the horrors of war, for the establishment of slavery in a land of
freedom,” anti-slavery advocates such as Lundy adamantly insisted that to support the
annexation of Texas was to support the cause of slavery.249 Adding Texas to the Union
was no innocuous act. For abolitionists, “the acquisition of Texas would put the nation
under the yoke of one faction, the slavocracy that would subordinate other interests
within the republic.”250

Despite such stringent opposition to expansion in the antebellum United States,
the impulse to fulfill the nation’s supposed manifest destiny was indefatiguable. Concerns
over reconciling American liberty with American empire in addition to concerns
regarding the spread of slavery were not widespread enough to extinguish the general
desire to extend the territory of the United States. The desire for more land was overall
quite rampant. Yet the United States did not ingest all of Mexico into the Union. Perhaps
the thread that connected the extreme impulses which championed taking all of Mexico
or none of it was the same thread that ultimately reined in expansionism, that is: the
question of integrating the people of Mexico into the United States citizenry. The desire

249 Benjamin Lundy, The War in Texas: A Review of Facts and Circumstances, Showing
that this Contest Is the Result of a Long Premeditated Crusade Against the Government,
Set on Foot by Slaveholders, Land Speculators, &c. with the View of Re-establishing,
Extending, and Perpetuating the System of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Republic of
Mexico (Philadelphia: Printed for the author, by Merrihew and Gunn, 1836), 1-2 and 64.
for more beautiful and productive land was tempered by squeamishness about integrating a large and seemingly culturally different populace.

*The anti-Catholic sentiment of Inez*

Such squeamishness is present throughout *Inez* in the form of anti-Catholicism. Evans introduces San Antonio with the utmost veneration for the natural beauty of the place. This respectful tone drains out of her voice as she turns to the town’s manmade structures, with their dirt floors and thatched roofs. Though she insists that the scene altogether was “picturesque indeed,” in contrast to nature, humans have only a crudely developed community without even the plastering skills of the ancient Montezumas. The implication is that the people who now inhabit the area are of a lesser degree of civilization than the Aztecs who once lived in the same place. And, just who are these people who live there now? Evans in answer next directs our eyes to the heavens: “Thy gorgeous skies have floated hither, and hover like a halo round the town. The sun had set; the glowing tints faded fast, till of the brilliant spectacle naught remained save the soft roseate hue which melted insensibly into the deep azure of the zenith.” Quiet starts to settle over the town, a quiet which is disturbed by the vesper bells chiming in the evening air, signalling to the “devout papists to bend for the vesper prayers.”251

From here, Evans asks us to “traverse with [her] the crooked streets” to stand in front of the belfry of the Catholic church, where we are first introduced to Alphonso Mazzolin, a priest characterized by “cunning, malignity, and fierceness.” Thus, when she takes us to San Antonio, Evans introduces first the land, and then the corrupt people who

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inhabit it; she strategically transitions from an appreciation of the flawless landscape to skepticism toward the conniving Catholic priest. We are meant to feel the same affinity for the land, the same aversion to the Catholic faith, and—like Mazzolin who recognizes a “breach” between the two countries “which can only be closed by the bodies of hundreds of these cursed [Protestant] heretics”—we are meant to recognize the inevitability of hostilities between the U.S. and Mexico. Ever the opportunist, Mazzolin positions himself to “carve [his] fortune in the coming storm”; and though he feels confident of doing so he acknowledges there is “but one obstacle here, . . . that Protestant girl. . . . I had rather deal with any three men. She is as untiring as myself.”

Evans pits the evil Catholic priest against the missionary-minded Protestant girl, but as we will see in more detail later, Mary turns out not to be Mazzolin’s most formidable rival after all.

Though the novel purports to be a “tale of the Alamo,” it is primarily a convoluted treatise against Catholicism. Instead of detailing what one might expect to find in a story of international conflict that resulted in the formation of a new republic, *Inez* delivers extensive and frequent dialogues challenging Catholic doctrine and beliefs. Much of the novel is devoted to long discussions between the Protestant Mary and her less religious cousin, Florry. These long exchanges are aimed at refuting and rejecting (even exposing as fraudulent and corrupt) the ideological and theological underpinnings of the Romanist faith in an attempt to save Florry from the mistake of Catholicism. This narrative structure suggests that rather than the fight for Texan independence, the true subject of Evans’s novel was the fight against the spread of Catholicism across the United States. In

252 Evans, *Inez*, 34.
other words, Evans’s novel addressed what she believed to be the most pressing issues of the post-war period, and those concerns had everything to do with the more recent conflict between the U.S. and Mexico.

The anti-Catholic sentiment that characterizes Inez suggests an overt preoccupation with successfully integrating into the American public the culturally different people of Mexico who, upon the redrawing of boundaries, found themselves suddenly living in a foreign (read: largely Protestant) country. Perhaps it is not surprising that Evans would choose to write a tale of the Alamo at this time. Questions of honor and patriotism, national belonging and who should be allowed citizenship in the United States encouraged Americans to look to the not so distant past the fight for Texan autonomy. In some ways, setting Inez in the recent past offered a buffer for Evans when narrating nativist fears about the current cultural moment.

Evans may have wanted to distance herself from the 1846-1848 conflict, but the themes which surface in Inez reflect this slightly later cultural moment. As the Godey’s critic who wrote about Inez in April 1855 notes, the religious themes in the novel demonstrated “relevance of the author’s subject to the times.” As David S. Reynolds discusses much more recently in Faith in Fiction, “increasingly rancorous anti-Catholicism . . . swept America between 1835 and 1850.” Similarly, Riepma writes that waves of Catholic immigrants from Europe coming to the United States in the “1830s and 1840s struck American Protestants with great fear. This resulted in a

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rancorous anti-Catholicism in America between 1835 and 1850.”255 By 1850, Roman Catholicism had become the largest religious denomination in America.

With such a shift in the religious landscape came anxieties which were rooted in nativist Protestant notions of self-preservation. Marie Anne Pagliarini traces an increasingly virulent anti-Catholic sentiment in the United States, dating from the 1830s through 1860. According to Pagliarini there was a “mass of anti-Catholic literature circulating at the time”256 Though this surge in anti-Catholic sentiment and its reflection in the literature of the United States began in the 1830s, Inez seems to respond more specifically to concerns about accepting Mexican Catholics than general fears about the spread of Catholicism. According to Pinheiro, “The U.S.-Mexican War provides a striking example of how the idea of American expansion had become intertwined with anti-Catholicism both in rhetoric and sentiment. Expansionist ambitions during the war combined with American suspicions about the Catholic church as a ‘Man of Sin’ that, having already impeded Mexico’s economic, social, political, and religious progress, aspired to do the same to the United States.” Pinheiro identifies further a reinvigoration of anti-Catholic rhetoric and sentiment during the U.S.-Mexico war: “the use of Mexico as an example of Catholicism run amok and as evidence demonstrative of Protestant America’s greatness gained new effectiveness thanks to the debate over Texas annexation. In 1847 and 1848, the question of what to do with the lands conquered during

the war with Mexico further inflamed this racial and religious rhetoric.” This surge of anti-Catholicism that Pinheiro links explicitly to the political, diplomatic, and martial events of the mid- to late-1840s supports my inclination to read the anti-Catholic and pro-slavery concerns in Inez as indicative of what Evans imagines for the future for the United States following the war with Mexico. The concerns are clearest developed in the commingled lives of Inez’s three central characters: Mary, Florence, and Inez.

*Rewriting war as romance*

The anti-Catholic and pro-slavery themes that permeate Inez help determine what cultural moment(s) the text responds to and critiques; however, other themes are present in the novel and, though it does not conform entirely to the conventions of the genre, Inez can be read as a kind of domestic fiction, with particular emphasis on the marriage plot. In her contextualization of Evans’s oeuvre, *Fire and Fiction*, Riepma claims that Inez “belongs to the tradition of the domestic novel.” As such Evans deals with the difficulties of domesticity that young women in the mid-nineteenth century faced, especially questions of personal financial security in light of potential problems in the family structure. Putting aside the pro-slavery and anti-Catholic themes of the novel for the moment, I would like to zoom in on the ways in which the three main women characters are presented, and to discuss the implications of these representations. Of primary importance to Inez is the way in which marriage, or the absence of marriage, is figured. Like so many of the texts which focus on women and the antebellum conflicts between the United States and Mexico, Inez is at heart a tale of romance, (un)requited love, and

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257 Pinheiro, “Religion without Restriction,” 77 and 81.
the possibility of marriage. Each of the main characters—cousins Mary Irving and
Florence Hamilton, both white, American, and Protestant with familial ties to the
southern economy of enslavement, and Inez de Garcia, a wealthy Mexican heiress,
daughter of a prominent Mexican general, and ostensibly of the Catholic faith—are faced
with the possibility of marriage in *Inez*. However, the prospects for each woman are not
of equal caliber or desirability. The remainder of this chapter addresses the complex
romantic lives of the women in this novel, touching on the roles that each woman plays in
Evans’s narrative, and argues that when examined in conjunction with Evans’s pro-
slavery and anti-Catholic leanings, these romantic (dis)connections articulate Evans’s
vision for the future of the United States, including its relations with Mexico.

Though Florence is the only one of Evans’s heroines to marry and to survive to
the end of the novel, both Mary and Inez are stronger characters, which may explain their
demise. Mary holds a prominent place in the narrative as the most openly and adamantly
anti-Catholic figure. She is an evangelical Protestant in a predominantly Catholic setting.
She attempts to open a school in order to teach Protestant doctrine in the area in order to
counter what she classifies as the ignorance of the Catholic church and its teachings.
Father Mazzolin believes that she is his greatest adversary and most significant threat to
achieving what he wants—to rise through the ranks of the clergy as a result of the
property he is able to secure for the church. Mary acts aggressively to temper the
influence of Mazzolin and to spread doubt about his teachings and ethics, but
ultimately—aside from swaying Florry away from Catholicism—Mary’s efforts prove
largely ineffectual. Perhaps the real target of Mary’s anti-Catholic teachings is meant to
be the Florry-like reader of *Inez*. 
Evans describes Florence and Mary as “diametrically opposed in disposition.” Where Mary is “earnest” and “sweet” with an “amiable character,” Florence carries an expression that “was cold and haughty.” Additionally, Florence is weaker in her religious convictions than her devout cousin. In fact, Florence’s wishy-washy Protestantism allows her to be duped by Padre Mazzolin into practicing Catholicism for a time. It is only the intervention of Mary that saves Florence from converting to Catholicism, and following indefinitely what Evans presents as the “mummery” of the Catholic religion. Framed as a character flaw and something which threatens her future marital prospects, this fluidity of religious belief is ultimately a key factor in Florence’s fate.

The story of the title character of the novel often seems to run secondary to the narrative of both Florence and Mary. However, at various times in the plot, the actions of Inez push the narrative forward. The trajectories of both Florry’s and Mary’s storylines are influenced by her actions. Because the fates of the other characters are so closely intertwined with Inez, who is the most developed of the three women, my analysis of the marriage plot in Inez is centered on her. Through an examination of the story of Inez we can understand the marriage plot as it pertains to Mary and Florry.

In her study of the white American readers for fiction about the Alamo, Susan Bost introduces Evans as an American author “who is known for her racist romances of Southern femininity,” and Inez as an “obscure” and “xenophobic” exploration of white femininity. Bost argues that Inez functions in the narrative solely as a foil for white

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259 Evans, Inez, 17-18.
American femininity, a racialized other against which Evans reinscribes ideas of white womanhood. Bost notes that “while most white writers of the period turned to slave women as the opposing pole for the ‘cult of true womanhood,’ Evans addresses the other U.S. South, and different national and ethnic tensions, by studying white womanhood alongside the Mexican presence in the United States.”

To be sure, throughout the novel Inez challenges expectations of femininity as they are defined by white Protestant culture, which resonates with Bost’s analysis. Perhaps precisely because she is figured as an other in the text—she is not white and is neither American nor Protestant (though not really Catholic, either)—Inez is able to operate outside of certain class and gender norms and expectations. In other words she moves through the world in ways that Mary and Florence would never imagine. However, though Bost’s analysis of the ways in which femininity is racialized in Inez is compelling, it does not fully account for the fact that Inez is the most important character in the novel. She is not merely a token good Mexican. Rather, she is the main character. After all, the novel is not Mary or Florry, but Inez. We see the most deeply into Inez’s motivations, and she is almost certainly the most well-developed character in the entire novel. Rather than reading Inez as a supporting character introduced primarily as a background against which Evans can differentiate and define white femininity, I read her as a key component of Evans’s narrative; a figure who is more indicative of Evans’s ideas about the possibilities for international reconciliation than she is about defining boundaries of racialized female propriety.

Our introduction to Inez comes immediately after we meet the corrupt Padre

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Mazzolin. She appears at the head of the chapter immediately following, a vision of propertied refinement, uncommon beauty, exceptional intellect, and unshakeable resolve:

“Inez de Garcia was an only child; and in San Antonio quite an heiress. Her wealth consisted in broad lands, large flocks, and numerous herds, and these valuable possessions, combined with her beautiful face, rendered her the object of considerable attention. Inez was endowed with quick perceptions, and a most indomitable will, which she never surrendered, except to accomplish some latent design; and none who looked into her beautiful eyes could suppose that beauty predominated over intellect.”

Though Inez is figured as a formidable woman, her autonomy is in peril throughout the novel. The threat of an unwanted marriage has hung over Inez most of her life.

Like the Inez of Lippard’s *Legends of Mexico*, Evans’s Inez is expected to marry a man of her father’s choosing. Since childhood she has been unwillingly betrothed to Mañuel Nevarro, an orphan cousin whose property was nearly as extensive as that of Inez. In an attempt to take charge of her romantic future, Inez breaks her engagement with Mañuel, declaring solemnly in a reversal of marriage vows, “that from this day the link which has bound us from childhood is at an end. Mine be the hand to sever it. From this hour we meet only as cousins! Go seek a more congenial bride!” Feeling neither romantic attachment to Mañuel nor a sense of filial obligation to fulfill her father’s plans, Inez refuses to consent to this arranged marriage, really a pecuniary arrangement which would secure the Nevarro and de Garcia properties to the Catholic church. In so doing, she disrupts the social order that her father and Padre Mazzolin wish to maintain, and

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relishes the ensuing chaos: “She felt the whirlwind she had raised gathering about her, yet sought not to allay it: she knew it was the precursor of a fierce struggle, yet quailed not. . . . She knew not fear; and her restless nature rather joyed in the strife.”  

The struggle that Inez acknowledges here is in part the struggle of a woman who pretends to be Catholic in order to subvert the stratagems of the evil Padre Mazzolin. She is not “the devout Catholic [many] suppose [her to be].” She is as calculating as the Padre, but unlike the maneuvering of Father Mazzolin, her schemes have a selflesss aim. The priest’s deceptions are dangerous to American interests, while the deceptions of Inez serve the interests of the United States. They are classified as a necessary means of escaping the tyranny and despotism that Evans associated with the Catholic church in Inez. As a rogue who truly operates outside of any national or religious allegiance, Inez is free to follow her heart. Her struggle is primarily one of romance in a time of war. Just as Lippard’s Inez is in love with a man “born of the land of Washington,” so too is the Inez of Evans. Inez loves the American doctor, Frank Bryant. From the moment she meets him, “the idols of her youth were neglected and forgotten [and] one image filled Inez’s heart”; hence her disinclination towards marrying Mañuel Nevarro. Though Inez “did not deceive herself for a moment by supposing that [Frank] would ever return her love,” she vowed to “remain unfettered, to see, to love, and one day to serve him”—it was her “dearest wish”—“and for its gratification she dared the rage of her father, and the hatred of her Padre.”

262 Evans, Inez, 37 and 39.
263 Lippard, Legends of Mexico, 29.
264 Evans, Inez, 69.
265 Evans, Inez, 65 and 69.
The actions of Inez for the remainder of the novel are consistent with her desire to serve Frank out of love, even though she has no hope for their eventual union. Inez does all in her power to ensure that her American friends are safe as the conflict over Texan independence comes to a head, and San Antonio becomes an increasingly dangerous place. Through a series of deceptions—to include donning the masculine dress of her father in order to escape from the convent in which Padre Mazzolin has imprisoned her—the disobedient Inez warns Mary and her friends of the risk they run if they remain in San Antonio. Her warning is timely, allowing the Americans, including Frank, to flee San Antonio for Washington D.C., which means that they are safe from the conflict at the Alamo.

The journey to Washington is pivotal in the novel, setting in motion circumstances which bring about the eventual fulfillment or failure of the marriage plot for each of the heroines of *Inez*. Mary’s fate is the first to be determined. Some time before departing for Washington, Mary falls ill and her weakened health makes the journey a perilous one. Shortly after arriving in the capital city, Mary’s condition worsens considerably, and the comfortless apartment that would be the location of Mary’s convalescence is transformed into a deathbed scene typical of nineteenth-century sentimental fiction. It is while she is on her deathbed that Frank reveals his love for her, but it is too late. Mary dies in Washington, surrounded by the ones she loves, but not before transferring her deeply Protestant moral responsibility to Florry, asking her to strengthen her faith: “My dear cousin, conquer your pride, cast away your haughtiness, and learn to lean on God, and walk in accordance with his law.” This transference is evident in the closing pages of *Inez*, when Florence shudders to think what she would
have become (read: Catholic) if it were not for the religious guidance she received from Mary. Florence is much changed, with “higter aims in life, and purer joys,” which she attributes to Mary’s Protestant teachings of Christ. As for Frank, he stays with Mary, comforting and holding her until he “felt her spirit pass away in the last sigh which escaped her lips.”

The journey to Washington also proves consequential for Florence, albeit in a much more pleasant way. In a moment of unlikely, yet happy circumstance, the group happens upon the sole love interest of Florry’s past. Dudley Stewart, one of Mary’s and Florry’s teachers at the boarding school in New Orleans, is on his way to San Antonio in the hopes of finding Florry when he crosses paths with his old friends. Before long we learn of their engagement, which is threatened by Florry’s brief foray into Catholicism. Learning that Florence had, for a time, followed the Catholic faith, Dudley, a stalwart Protestant, doubts whether he wants to marry someone who can be so easily persuaded to follow such a corrupt belief system. Though Dudley “fear[s] [Florry’s] code of morality too lax,” Mary is able to reconcile the couple’s differences and bring them to reconciliation before she dies. The two marry by the close of the novel, in the only successful fulfillment of the marriage plot in *Inez*.

The string of events that Inez sets in motion by advising Mary and Florry to leave San Antonio culminates when, following Mary’s death, Frank returns to the conflict-ridden border region. Following the departure of her American friends and the deaths of her father and Mañuel, Inez is effectively alone in the world. Still threatened by the

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Padre, Inez dons a masculine disguise and, in the persona of Antoine Amedo, moves about in secret. It is during one such outing that Frank encounters Inez in the wilderness between San Antonio and Goliad. After he discovers her identity, Inez reveals everything she has been doing behind the scenes to help her American friends, under the cover of her feigned Catholicism: “Dr. Bryant, I am no Catholic, nor have I been since you have known me. It was my policy to appear passive. I attended mass, and sought the confessional, and all the while cursed [the Padre] in my heart. I watched him, and saved your people from destruction. . . . I warned you of your danger, and happily you heeded the signs of the time; else you, too, would now moulder beneath the walls of the Alamo.”

As a result of her disloyalty to the Catholic church and to the nation of Mexico, she “was made a prisoner in [her] own home, ere the sod settled on [her] father’s grave.”

Inez has sacrificed greatly in the service of her American friends. She expresses her respect for Mary and her peaceful Protestantism, who was “the hope, the joy, the blessing of all who knew her”; and confesses her love for Frank, for whom she has “lost every earthly comfort and blessing; . . . struggled and toiled, and braved numberless dangers.” Inez wishes to stay with Frank, to guide him to safety as he leaves Goliad, to join him when he returns to the United States, and ultimately, she wants to marry him: “to be with [him] while life remains, and to die near, that [he] may close [her] eyes and lay [her] down to rest.” Frank rejects Inez, suggesting that for her to join him, particularly at this time, “would be the height of madness.” He goes further to classify her desire to be with him as strange, and in so doing insists that there is no place for Inez among the

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populace United States: “Bethink yourself, Inez! What can you hope to accomplish by this strange step? You have nothing to fear here from your own nation: what can you gain by seeking a home among my people? Strange, mysterious being! I wish for your own sake you were timid—that fear might strengthen your sense of prudence.” Frank closes off any potential future for him and Inez, rejecting even the idea of a platonic friendship. He insists that because Inez loves him and he does not love her, it is best that they part ways completely.

Frank does not survive long, however, without the protections of Inez. He is among the group of American soldiers who were killed by the Mexican army following the battle at Goliad in late March 1836. In a final act of service out of her love for Frank, Inez locates his body among the dead at Goliad, and under the cover of night, with the help of an elderly Mexican woman, she gives his body a proper interment. This loyalty ultimately brings about her death. A few days after the so-called massacre at Goliad, Inez raves under a raging fever, suffering delirium and temporary madness. Unlike Mary, who was surrounded and supported by her most cherished loved ones on her deathbed, in a perversion of the sentimental deathbed scene Inez dies almost entirely alone, tormented by the one person on earth whom she despises the most. Padre Mazzolin is summoned to deliver Inez her final rites; however, instead of shepherding her spirit peacefully to the beyond he torments and condemns her to the very end. Having died “without the pale of the church” Inez is not allowed “a narrow bed in consecrated ground”; rather, the “old friend” who helped her bury Frank arranges to have Inez buried next to him, and “with

the fierce howlings of the tempest for her funeral dirge, they consigned Inez—the proud, beautiful, gifted, yet unfortunate Inez—to rest.”

We can read the marriage plot and the fates of the three heroines in *Inez* as a metaphor for international relations between the United States and Mexico. The marriage prospects for all three of the main women characters are important in articulating the specific vision Evans saw for the U.S. When considered together, the failed marriages and subsequent deaths of Mary and Inez collectively form one part of Evans’s convoluted vision of future U.S.-Mexico relations. Throughout the novel, Mary and Inez are characterized in parallel ways. Both of them are depicted as Christlike figures in *Inez*: they both give themselves up to a higher power or for a larger cause outside of themselves. Though the circumstances of their deaths differ greatly, Evans clearly wants us to make connections between the two. They both contract feverish illnesses, which are the ultimate cause of death in each case. Additionally, when Inez confesses her love to Frank, she describes wanting to pass from this world in precisely the manner Mary does: with Frank there to lay her to eternal rest. Given the ways in which these heroines mirror each other in the novel, I read the fates of the two together in order to make sense of the implications of *Inez*.

Inez’s fate is the most tragic. She sacrifices all for the cause of the United States, but in the end no matter how hard she tries to prove herself worthy of American citizenship, she is told that she simply does not belong, that she is too other to fit into the citizenry of the United States. Evans makes that abundantly clear when Frank rejects her;

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there is clearly no place for Inez in American society. Rather than figuring a kind of international reconciliation or union through a potential marriage between Frank and Inez, Evans shuts down the possibility entirely by narrating the deaths of both characters. Evans does not figure international reconciliation as a cross-border marriage in Inez, something which runs counter to what other scholars have identified as a trope in literature of the U.S.-Mexico war. In American Sensations, Streeby outlines a trend of happy endings in the literature of the war with Mexico that was denoted by cross-national marriages, that she argues furthered a nineteenth-century imagination of incorporation and domination of Mexico in the form of a feminized prize. This international race romance breaks down in Inez. Whereas Lippard visualizes a kind of cross-national union that falls more in line with the trend Streeby identifies, Evans’s tale is an example of a distinctly different kind of closure. As Jaime Javier Rodríguez argues, these other kinds of narrative conclusions “do not end in marriages but in reconsolidated domestic and national spheres.” Evans seems to suggest even further that the cross-border, international race romance is potentially fatal for both republics. Instead of being emblematic of promise and advancement for both the U.S. and Mexico, the cross-border romance actually signifies stagnation and failure.

Though what Inez’s death signifies—namely that the people of Mexico do not belong in the United States—brings to mind the unpleasant and problematic realities of how U.S. Americans have historically talked about people from nations south of the border, her death is not entirely surprising. What is perhaps more perplexing is the killing

271 Streeby, American Sensations, 104-111.
272 Rodríguez, Literatures, 29.
off of Mary. If Inez’s death is a sacrifice indicative of the impossibility of the U.S. absorbing all of Mexico, how does Mary’s death fit into the picture? If the spread of Catholicism is a threat to American Protestantism, why kill off the one character who actively addresses that threat?

What we glean from Inez’s death is perhaps more straightforward than that which we learn from the death of Mary, but there is something worth teasing out of this incomprehensibility. The incoherence of Mary’s death speaks to the convoluted meanings of the war with Mexico for antebellum Americans. There was no clear consensus in the United States about whether to invade Mexico and whether the taking of contested land was a good idea. Considering the ways in which this war challenged widely held notions of American liberty that ran counter to notions of empire building, Mary’s death can be interpreted as symptomatic of Evans’s inability to reconcile these competing impulses.

Evans’s appreciation of the land acquired from Mexico is demonstrated throughout Inez. She writes that “a fairer spot by nature the face of the earth cannot boast.” Evans imagines what this favorable acquisition of land might mean for the American institution of enslavement. However, that favorable image is immediately tainted by the people who inhabit the land: “yet mark the sloth, the penury, the degradation of its people, the misery that prevails. And why? Because they languish under the iron rule of the papal see.”

Evans wants the land that was taken as a result of the U.S-Mexico war; however, she does not welcome the people of Mexico into the United States. If there is no real desire to make amends with the slovenly, degraded,

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273 Evans, Inez, 147.
miserable people south of the newly-defined border, what is the point of trying to spread Protestantism to them? Further, if the incorporation of racially and religiously different people into the United States is part and parcel of the imperial project of Manifest Destiny, one way of reading Mary’s death is as a way of shutting down this problematic imperial project. In a nativist turn, Evans seems to suggest that a certain level of religious tolerance might be necessary to live peaceably with the United States’s neighbors to the south, but that the commingling of people across the border is a bad idea. The sacrifices of both Inez and Mary—who attempt to make connections across the border—become muddled, leaving one wondering just what their sacrifices serve.

Perhaps the clearest articulation of the insistence on the separation between the people of the United States and Mexico can be found in the journey to Washington. That Inez does not go along when her American friends flee San Antonio is a moment worth examining more closely. Throughout the novel, it is clear that Inez tries to align herself with the American cause. In her confession to Frank after he returns from Washington, she declares her loyalties: “I am a friend to the Americans, though they have taken the last of my family there was to give. Yet I will be loyal to Mary and to you.” For Inez, love of people trumps love of country and transcends national boundaries. Having endeavored against the hypocrisy of Padre Mazzolin, Inez feels no affinity with the “blackness and deceit” presented “in the garb of truth and purity” that he and his brand of Catholicism represents. Rather, she feels more attuned with the “blue-eyed, sainted Mary” who was, as Inez eulogizes, “the hope, the joy, the blessing of all who knew
her.”\textsuperscript{274} However, try as she might, she is never fully accepted into the American fold, so to speak. Inez is no soldier in the sense that she fights at the Alamo. Her actions did contribute greatly to the safety of the Americans living in San Antonio, yet her service is rewarded with neither acceptance nor citizenship. She is told that her sacrifice is not worthy of entrance into the nation she so loyally serves and so desperately wishes to align herself with. She is told that she does not belong in the United States, because she is Mexican and believed to be Catholic, nor in Mexico, because she is not as Catholic as she is supposed to be. Inez dies in obscurity, without any real affiliations, either personal or national. Read allegorically, the journey to Washington provides a clear representation of who Evans believes should be included in the populace of the United States and who should not.

\textit{Inez} ends on a high note for a particular demographic, with a vision of what Evans imagines for the future of the United States. Florry is the only heroine to survive and marry. Though \textit{Inez} ends with a fulfillment of the marriage plot, it is not the cross-national marriage that has come to be associated with the literature of the war with Mexico. Rather, the marriage presented here reinforces the rigidity of national boundaries. In the final pages of \textit{Inez}, we are transported to a plantation somewhere in the southern United States. Dudley Stewart, the man whom Florry marries, has somehow managed to secure the title to the plantation that Florry’s father was forced to sell at the opening of the novel. Florry’s return to her childhood home indicates that her time in Mexico was but a brief interlude in her life—her future does not involve integration with

\textsuperscript{274} Evans, \textit{Inez}, 178, 226, and 266.
Mexico. The sojourn that was the time in San Antonio is behind her and now that she has been returned to the place where she belongs, she can pursue the Protestant mission at home. Florry’s future—and, by extension, the future of the American south—is tied to the plantation. If the deaths of Mary and Inez represent impossibility of cross-border incorporation, then the marriage of Florry reinforces of the system of slavery in the United States, which many argue was the primary cause of the U.S.-Mexico war. Evans leaves us with an idyllic image of the southern plantation, where Florry and Dudley hope that “no common share of happiness will be [their] portion through life!”275 As we know, this vision of union and plantation bliss will be shattered as sectional interests further diverge and the nation moves toward the Civil War.

275 Evans, Inez, 298.
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The U.S.-Mexico war remains largely unknown by most citizens of the United States. Compared to the numerous iterations of narratives related to the American Revolution, the Civil War, and later conflicts, the collective elision of the U.S.-Mexico war persists. The war with Mexico was not a topic that entered my education until studying antebellum American history and literature as an undergraduate student, and even then it got lost in the shadows of the Civil War. It was not until I was well into my doctoral coursework that I began to seriously consider the literature of the U.S-Mexico war as an area of study. I am going to talk a bit now about how I came to this topic and the relevance of this topic to the current cultural moment.

Lippard’s *Legends of Mexico* was my entry point into the literature of the U.S-Mexico war. As a doctoral student, I took a Nineteenth Century Studies seminar that examined the theme of violence in the long nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic. My final project for that course examined representations of sanctioned U.S. military violence in the war with Mexico. Though I did not write about Lippard’s work then, the experience of reading *Legends of Mexico* haunted me. I read Lippard’s narrative of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Mexico at a time in which the U.S. was currently engaged in the unending wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Conflicts which I was invested in on various levels, as members of my family were deployed to the region in addition to the unit that I served with as a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard, some of whom would not return. In part, *Legends* stuck with me because I could personally relate to the engagement of war in a foreign land. I read Lippard’s highly visualized *Legends* a few months after first encountering Francisco Goya’s startling graphic representations of
the inhumanities of war, posthumously titled: *The Disasters of War*. Though Goya’s scenes were not published until 1863, decades after his death, and neither Goya nor Lippard would have encountered one another’s work, I could not help but make connections between Goya’s chiaroscuro renderings and Lippard’s pictorial *Legends*. Both Lippard and Goya created graphic and disturbing representations of war independently of one another, but that spoke to common themes. Both Goya and Lippard attempt to visualize the “terrible moments” of an “unjust foreign invasion,” albeit in different ways. Of the many parallels to be found between *Legends of Mexico* and *Disasters of War* are the ways in which women are presented. At times tragic and horrifying, these representations speak to the levels of dehumanization that happen between nations at war. Yet, both attempt to highlight the humanity of their subjects through dramatizations of the intense personal suffering that affects societies during periods of war. My dissertation does not compare Lippard and Goya, but the thematic connections between the two have lead me to consider more deeply how women were presented in the literature of this war.

The collection of stories that Lippard gathers together in *Legends* is simultaneously fascinating and incomprehensible. As a body of work, this volume provides a strikingly layered vision of the war that is complex and that does not provide a straightforward judgment about the conflict. *Legends* is not without its problematic depictions of race and gender; however, Lippard’s turn to the personal costs of war in

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these sketches is significant. Lippard asks his readers to regard the pain of those involved in the war with Mexico, and in so doing we later learn that he intended such representations to serve as an argument against the practice of waging war. However, merely highlighting what war does is not enough to guarantee repulsion against such action. As Susan Sontag writes in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, “War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War *ruins*.” But, as Sontag then asks, “Is it true that . . . documenting the slaughter of noncombatants rather than the clash of armies could only stimulate the repudiation of war? Surely they could also foster great militancy on behalf of the Republic. Isn’t this what [these representations] were meant to do?”

Though Sontag’s study centers on war photography specifically, the concepts she develops in terms of how such horrific representations of suffering can be deployed is applicable to other and earlier modes of dramatizing the brutalities of war, of attempting to make the unspeakable experience of war somehow intelligible.

Lippard’s work was filled with a remarkable dissonance that was reflected in the collective body of materials that poured out in response to the war. As Andrea Tinnemeyer notes, the literature of the war was “far from a singular voice of militaristic might and righteousness.”

Even in a single-authored collection of legends of the war, the message we are supposed to take away in ambiguous. In Lippard, as in the other war narratives examined in this dissertation, just what to do with representations of women in the literature is unclear. Specifically, I address the unconventional legendary woman war

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hero that goes beyond Lippard’s *Legends* and simultaneously pushes against ideas of what kinds of figures can be and have been heroized. Additionally, I focus on an alternate representation of the Inez character in a novel which retrospectively considers the significance of the U.S.-Mexico war via a reminiscence of the Alamo. At play in all of these representations are complications of how race and gender intersect with the experience of war. There is still work to be done with the many representations of legendary women and supposed character types, like “Inez,” in order to more fully understand the implications of how women are figured in the literature of this war.

In *At War with Mexico: A Fictional Mosaic*, poet and historian Bruce Cutler reinterprets the U.S.-Mexico war years in a series of narrative poems that refigure or reimagine events from that time as they are preserved in historic materials, to include journalism, government documents, oratory, and individual pieces of correspondence. In so doing, Cutler highlights the hypocrisies of the moment and engages his readers with a more critical representation of the war than that which was recorded in the materials he rewrites. Cutler begins his fictional mosaic with the declaration that “Americans have long since left behind their role as outsiders in history.” A transformation which Cutler traces to the years in which the United States waged war against Mexico. He writes that these years “were filled with a mixture of hope, ambition, piety, incomprehension, arrogance, and greed. It was a time in our government’s history which Ralph Waldo Emerson characterized as that of a democracy turning into ‘a government of bullies tempered by [newspaper] editors’—with, of course, a small, articulate minority in opposition to its policies at every step of the way. Willy-nilly, it was at that time we
acquired our national persona, one which continues to drive us, and dog us, both.”

Cutler’s characterization of the U.S.-Mexico war period, the development of a national persona, and the ways in which the sentiments of that time reverberate yet today are concepts that inform my inquiry into representations of women in the literature pertaining to the war.

The years leading up to the war between the United States and Mexico were a time in which attitudes about race and the hierarchies of such were developing, often with participation from scientists of the period. And, in the American imagination, the narrative of manifest destiny—the idea that God himself seemed to dictate the course of national events—was a powerful concept driving expansion and the acquisition of land in various ways. As Cutler points out, and as is well understood more generally, tensions that developed from this outlook eventually played out violently in the Civil War. Though, as is ever more apparent in the current events of our own time, they have never been fully resolved. As Jaime Javier Rodríguez notes, “if one considers how often the U.S-Mexican border has been a zone of international violence, how intensively the border remains to be militarized to this day, and how closely matters of U.S. identity erupt from anxieties about Mexican contact, then observations made about the openly declared war in the 1840s can come to seem not only relevant but urgent and crucial in our contemporary moment.”

Examining the history of our relationship with Mexico—the way it has been presented and how it has been recorded—is an important exercise at a

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time in which our government acts in increasingly tyrannical ways, particularly against
our neighbors to the south.
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