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SLAVERY EXPANSION TO THE TERRITORIES, 1850  
 A FORGOTTEN SPEECH BY TRUMAN SMITH

CHARLES DESMOND HART

FROM the August evening in 1846 when David Wilmot rose in the House of Representatives to propose that slavery be prohibited in any lands which might be acquired from Mexico, down to the adjournment of the Special Session of the Senate just a few weeks before the commencement of the Civil War in the spring of 1861, the question of the expansion of slavery to the territories of the United States—especially to New Mexico Territory—dominated the debate in both Houses of Congress.<sup>1</sup> Most American historians would probably agree with the ante-bellum politician who remarked that the expansion of slavery to the territories was “the over-shadowing question in national politics” in the 1850’s.<sup>2</sup> Yet Richard Hofstadter overstated the case when he wrote that historians are “in general agreement with such contemporaries of Lincoln as Clay, Webster, Douglas, and Hammond that the natural limits of slavery expansion in the continental United States had already been reached.”<sup>3</sup> Although some historians have stated or implied that climate, soil, or other natural features would have prevented the further expansion of slavery,<sup>4</sup> other historians have stated or implied that slavery could have expanded to the territories remaining for settlement in the 1850’s.<sup>5</sup> Just as the people living in the 1840’s and 1850’s disagreed about the natural limits of slavery expansion, so did historians living in the 1940’s and 1950’s.

Still, the idea that “the natural limits of slavery expansion” had been reached, popularized in a famous article by Charles W. Ramsdell<sup>6</sup> has undoubtedly achieved wider acceptance, especially

during the 1930's and 1940's when the "revisionist" interpretation of the coming of the Civil War was so popular. On occasion the revisionists have discussed the problem in the light of geographic knowledge not available in the 1850's. At other times they have failed to use to best advantage such contemporary sources as the congressional debate on slavery in the territories. Seldom has the question of "natural limits" been discussed in the context of the debate on Oregon in 1848, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, or the Crittenden Compromise of 1860-1861. Time and again the few brief remarks of Henry Clay, Stephen A. Douglas, Daniel Webster, or Lewis Cass during the "Great Debate" of 1850 have been paraded across the pages of history, while the most detailed argument ever offered by a Congressman, or by an historian, to show why slavery could never be established in the territories of New Mexico and Utah has been ignored. Truman Smith's important speech, like so much of the debate behind the Compromise of 1850, has not received the attention it merits.

Truman Smith was not, of course, a Senator of first rank in what was probably the most able Senate of all time. He was not as influential as the great men of his own political generation—Clay, Webster, John C. Calhoun, and Thomas Hart Benton—or even of the new—Douglas, Jefferson Davis, William H. Seward, and Salmon P. Chase. Yet Smith was a power in the Whig party, especially while Zachary Taylor was President. Born in Roxbury, Connecticut, on November 27, 1791, he had been admitted to the bar after graduation from Yale (1815) and Litchfield Law School. After sitting in the Connecticut legislature in 1831, 1832, and 1834, he entered national politics, serving in the House of Representatives from 1838-1843 and 1845-1849. His chief interest was political management, and he was a Presidential Elector on the Whig ticket in 1844. One of the earliest supporters of the candidacy of General Zachary Taylor, Smith served as the first chairman of the Whig National Committee, directing Taylor's successful presidential canvass in 1848. He declined the offer of the Interior Department, accepting the Senate seat to

which he had been elected and becoming the floor leader of the administration forces.<sup>7</sup>

By July 8, 1850, when Truman Smith rose in the Senate to discuss the territorial issue, all the great speeches for which this session is remembered had been delivered. January, February, and March had produced the famous set speeches, most of them directed to the series of resolutions on the slavery question which Henry Clay had introduced on January 29. On April 29, Henry S. Foote of Mississippi finally succeeded in having the proposed resolutions on slavery referred to a Select Committee of Thirteen under the chairmanship of Clay. On May 8 Clay reported back two all-inclusive bills: California would enter the Union "with the boundaries she has proposed," and territorial governments "without the Wilmot proviso" would be established for New Mexico and Utah.<sup>8</sup> The debate then resumed and many of the old speeches were dusted off and delivered for a second time. When Truman Smith claimed the floor on the afternoon before President Taylor's death, it was already evident that the "Omnibus Bill" would never pass the Senate.<sup>9</sup>

Smith began by reminding his colleagues that he had never been one to agitate the slavery issue, although he could not regard the institution with complacency. Over the years he had done no more than reflect, in a moderate and reasonable way, the predominant sentiments of his constituents. He did not believe that the Union was in danger; still the present difficulties, which could be traced back to the policies of the Polk administration, should be settled before the sectional alienation became any greater.

The Whigs had warned Polk that he would bring great trouble on the country if he converted a defensive war into an offensive war and demanded more territory than was necessary for indemnity. As Smith himself had pointed out in March 1848, the line of the Missouri Compromise of 1820 was certain to be overthrown because the geographical position and the physical character of the Mexican Territories rendered such a division impracticable. Many had voted for the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo as being

better than the continuance of a deplorable war. The cost of the Mexican War had been too high—one hundred and fifty million dollars, twenty-five thousand men, and sectional discord on slavery in the territories.

In any case, the Mexican Territories had been conquered, and nations could not recall their indiscretions. If only the country could be brought to understand that the importance of these acquisitions had been greatly overrated, then the present excitement would end. After all, the slavery question was of greater importance to the ambitious politician than to the toiling millions. Although many people thought that the struggle was basically one between the sections for political power, the opening of the new territories to slavery had nothing to do with control of the government. Smith believed that the parties would go on much as before.

Furthermore, there was no real possibility that the equilibrium between the free and slave states could be maintained. The population trends were against it. Even though four or five of the slave states, including Virginia, would be free by the end of the decade, the remaining slave states had no reason to fear for the future of their domestic institutions. The South had controlled the federal government from the beginning, and the North had never attempted to form a sectional party to alter this situation. Not even the abolitionists demanded that the federal government legislate against slavery in the states where it already existed.

The real obstacle to the establishment of slavery in the territories won from Mexico was a legal one. Slavery, the creature of municipal law, was local in character, and could have no extra-territorial existence except in states where slavery was tolerated. Only the Fugitive Slave Law gave the institution any recognition in a free state. The claim that it was a slaveholder's constitutional right to take his slave property to the territories was merely an attempt to monopolize the land. In fact, the controversy was not between slave and free states but between slaveholders and non-slaveholders. The non-slaveholder from a slave state could go to a new territory with the same advantages as a man from a free

state. A slaveholder could do likewise if he were willing to convert his human property into cash as he would his immovable property.

Southern institutions were in no greater danger now than in the past. Residents of the slave states in general agreed that the odious slave trade in the District of Columbia should be terminated. On the larger question of slavery in the federal district, in spite of the many petitions sent to Congress annually, Northerners in general were little interested in its abolition. Smith, like John Quincy Adams before him, opposed abolition in this area as likely to produce more harm than good. In spite of the important principles involved in some of these questions, from a practical point of view, trivia were responsible for the present discord. The idea of aggression by the free states on the just pretensions of the slave states was "absurd and chimerical to the last degree."<sup>10</sup>

Truman Smith then went on to present a definitive statement of the position that "the natural limits of slavery expansion" had been reached in New Mexico and Utah, as follows:

But if I am wrong in the views which I have presented to show that it is not important to the South to maintain in this Chamber that equilibrium which has already been lost irretrievably in the House of Representatives and in the electoral college, the question arises whether it is not morally certain that our recently acquired Territories will be free, whatever Congress may do on the subject.

1. It is a significant fact that so far as the only region is concerned into which slavery could be introduced with advantage the question has already been settled against it. I refer to so much of our new possessions as are included within the limits of the proposed State of California. No matter whether California be or be not admitted now, or whether she be or be not remanded to a territorial condition, there has been such a development of public sentiment there as to render the exclusion of the institution inevitable.<sup>11</sup>

The result in California is exactly what it would be in ninety-nine times out of a hundred in case of the acquisition of gold-producing regions by the United States. Free labor, whether from the free States or slave States, is always more prompt and energetic than slave labor: the former will ever get into such countries first, and then will exclude the latter.

The only effect of dividing California by the parallel of  $36^{\circ} 30'$  would be to make two free States on the Pacific in place of one. The idea of making a free [sic] State below that parallel, with the free State of California on the north, with the rights of recapturing "fugitives from labor," and with the free Mexican States of Lower California and Sonora on the South, without any such right, will be found illusory.<sup>12</sup> The policy of the States this side of the Rocky Mountains should be to make as few States as possible out of our new possessions; and I shall not depart from that policy, though I feel perfectly assured that they will all be free States.

2. I will next proceed to consider whether there is any danger of the introduction of slavery into New Mexico and Deseret, or Utah, as it is called in this bill. Is it possible that either the one or the other will become the theatre of slave labor? I will begin with New Mexico. And here I observe that the obstacles to the introduction of the institution into that country are (1) legal; (2) social; and (3) physical.

(1) That slavery had been abrogated in New Mexico before the cession to the United States by the late treaty. On this point I refer to an exposition addressed to the Senate by the honorable Senator from Missouri [Mr. Benton] early in the present session, which, in my judgment, is full and conclusive. The inhibition, no doubt, continues to this day, as one of those municipal regulations which remain in force notwithstanding the conquest.<sup>13</sup>

(2) If the ordinances and laws of Mexico abrogating slavery do not continue, yet it may be assumed that *there is no law authorizing it*; and this is just as serious an obstacle to its introduction as a positive law forbidding it. Being against common right, no law

for it is as efficacious as ever so much law against it. Such are the principles of jurisprudence throughout the civilized world.

(3) At any rate, the right to carry slaves into New Mexico, and to hold them there, is in doubt; and this will be a serious barrier against its introduction. I know of nothing so sensitive of danger as slave property, or so timorous, in face of legal doubt and difficulty. Who will think of taking this species of property from under the guarantees which the well-considered and thoroughly matured code of a slaveholding State has thrown around it, into the interior of this continent, when the owner will have no assurance that he can hold it for a single hour? The certainty of litigation, and the uncertainty of the event, will be sufficient to deter him.<sup>14</sup>

In the next place, I will speak of the social difficulties in the way of the introduction of slavery into New Mexico. And here I observe:

1. It is understood that public sentiment, without distinction of race or color, is utterly opposed to it. The American, whether from the free States or slave States, the Spaniard of the full blood, and the mixed Spaniard and Indian race, are all much opposed to negro bondage.

2. The prejudice of color does not exist in New Mexico. This prejudice is the principal bulwark and safeguard of slavery. The negro laborer would find himself on a footing of equality with the white, Indian, or mixed laborer—just as respectable in every regard; and how could he be held in bondage under such circumstances?<sup>15</sup>

3. Slave labor could not, it is believed, be advantageously used in competition with the cheap peon labor of New Mexico. Peon labor is cheap in wages, and cheaper in subsistence. The wages are only twenty-four dollars per month, and subsistence but twenty-four pounds of maize, or Indian corn, per week. This is not even ground or converted into meal, and the peon tastes scarcely one morsel of meat from the beginning to the end of the year. If, therefore, any slaveholder had occasion to go to New

Mexico, to embark in agricultural or other business, he would find it greatly to his advantage to sell his slaves, and to employ the native labor of that country.

4. The slaves would be sure to receive the countenance and sympathy of the people of New Mexico, and of the savages who infest the surrounding mountains, and the facilities of escape into these recesses and into the adjoining territories of Mexico would be so great, and the encouragement to flee, and the protection after fleeing so certain, as to render such property valueless. Some time since three highly respectable gentlemen from Santa Fe—Messrs. William Curtis Skinner, James L. Collins, and Henry Connelly—visited this city, and I had a full and highly satisfactory conversation with them, touching the state of things in that country, in reference to the question which I am now considering. At my instance they addressed to me a letter on the subject, dated May 18, from which I submit the following extract:

The greatest danger, in our opinion, to the security of slaves in New Mexico lies in the proximity to the settlements of the many tribes of Indians, with whom they could at all times find a refuge, securing to the fugitive every chance against his recapture. . . .

Again: the southern portion—and this is the part, if any, where slave labor ever could be profitable—of our territory borders upon that of the Republic of Mexico: a narrow stream, fordable at almost every point, presenting no obstacles to the escape of a slave to a country where he would be as free as in the land of his forefathers, and far more secure from recapture. A Mexican has no sympathy with slavery—the idea is full of repugnance to him, and his every feeling would be enlisted to give the bondman freedom.

5. But to make New Mexico a slave State, it is necessary that something more should be done than a few slaveholders removing there; they must go there in sufficient numbers to change public sentiment, and to overcome at the polls the repugnance of the non-slaveholding emigrants from the United States, and the native inhabitants of the country for the institution. The gentlemen already named in the same letter remark:

Public sentiment in New Mexico is against the introduction of slavery there; and in this there is, we believe, no distinction between the native and the American population. We do not remember ever to have heard a single American express himself favorable to the introduction of slavery among us. . . . When the time may arrive for the formation of a constitution, preparatory to our admission into the Union, there is not the *remotest* probability that any constitutional sanction would be given by our citizens to the introduction of African slavery among us.

I now come to the physical obstacles to the introduction of slavery into New Mexico. Can slave labor be profitable there? Does the country, in its geographical position, soil, climate, natural and artificial products, and resources of every kind, hold out any such inducements as will be likely to fix on those regions the evils of slavery? No man will carry slaves into these remote regions on a mere theory. He will not amuse himself with asserting a principle, or what is called such, at the hazard, or rather certainty, of soon finding the bottom of a long purse. Everything of this sort must be brought to the test of the accounts—to the old fashioned, and sometimes disagreeable, ordeal of “profit and loss.”

To enable us to reach a satisfactory solution of the inquiry which I have instituted, it is necessary to consider:

1. The geographical position and relations of New Mexico: In a letter dated December 18, 1847, addressed to me by Lieutenant Peck, of the corps of topographical engineers, (who was concerned with Lieutenant Abert, of the same corps, in making a reconnoissance or examination of that country in the years 1846-47) and which I published in a speech delivered by me in the House, March 1, 1848,<sup>16</sup> that gentleman remarks:

With respect to the connection of New Mexico with other parts of the continent . . . we may consider New Mexico as completely isolated from the rest of the continent. . . .

2. The surface and soil of New Mexico, and the extent to which it is susceptible of cultivation: The whole expanse comprised within the province is very large, and is believed to be about

one hundred and fifty thousand square miles. The only parts which are susceptible of cultivation are to be found in the southwest corner of the Territory, containing not exceeding twenty-five thousand square miles, which are divided equally by the Rio Grande running across the region now indicated from north to south, and towards the western border. It is exceedingly mountainous, and the country rises very rapidly from the river in both directions. Lieutenant Peck, in the letter above referred to, says that "a large portion" of this area is made up of rocks, sands, and desert wastes. If you cast your eye on the map, you will see from the position of the towns where the arable land is found. A narrow strip along the Del Norte, with a few detached patches here and there upon the affluents of the same river, constitutes it all; for there is very little land not already improved that is worth occupying.

3. Climate and aridity—necessity of irrigation: "The general character of this Department," (says Mr. Ruxton, p. 191), "is extreme aridity of soil, and the consequent deficiency of water which must ever prevent its being thickly settled."<sup>17</sup>

4. The number, extent, and value of its streams. Mr. Gregg . . . (pp. 138, 140) says: "There is not a single navigable stream in New Mexico. The famous Rio del Norte is so shallow for the most part of the year that Indian canoes can scarcely float upon it."<sup>18</sup>

Many more extracts of the same character might be added; but these are sufficient to illustrate the inadequacies of the rivers and streams of New Mexico even for the purpose of irrigation, and much more for navigation and other uses of civilized life.

5. Timber and hard wood: New Mexico destitute of both. . . . Lieutenant Abert, in his report (page 475) says: "Hardwood cannot be obtained in the whole of New Mexico. The country around us seemed to produce no wood except cedar. . . ."

What must a country be which is so entirely destitute of such important elements as wood and timber? And how valuable as the theatre of slave or any other kind of labor, let the people of the States on the Atlantic coast and in the Mississippi valley answer.

6. Its artificial products. . . . Lieutenant Emory, in his report

(p. 39), says "the soil" of the above-named valley [the Rio Grande] "is very sandy, and is better adapted to Indian corn than wheat. . . ." <sup>19</sup>

It thus appears that cotton, sugar, and rice, the usual products of slave labor, are not, and it is believed cannot, be raised in New Mexico. Will slaveholders abandon these sources of wealth in the present slave States to devote themselves and the labor of their people to the production of wheat, corn, beans, pumpkins, melons, and red pepper, amidst the Rocky Mountains?

7. The natural products or resources of New Mexico: These are pasturage and mines. . . .

Pasturage is, in fact, the principal source of wealth to New Mexico, but it has of late been greatly impaired and almost destroyed by the incursions of the savages of the surrounding country. If these can be restrained, and property and life protected as they should be at any cost, by the strong arm of the Government, no doubt the business of horse, mule, cattle, and sheep raising can be pursued there to great advantage. But wool-growing is no object, on account of the low price of wool. Lieutenant Abert says in his report, p. 452: "Wool is not considered very valuable, and can be bought for four cents a fleece, or a proprietor will permit anyone to shear his sheep for one dollar per hundred."

Sheep, therefore, are raised in New Mexico merely for the sake of mutton, and this is understood to be the best in the world. Stock of every kind is taken into Mexico and sold at remunerating prices. No doubt, then, this kind of business may become a capital object. But can slave labor be employed therein? If any slaveholder were to make up his mind to remove to that country to undertake this pursuit, would he take his slaves along with him, or would he employ the cheap labor of the country? In the first place, I have to say that the business requires very few hands. One half-dozen pastores or shepherds would be adequate to take care of thousands of horses, mules, cattle, or sheep. There is no grass to be cut, cured, and housed, and no fodder to be dealt out in the winter season. Probably one or two thousand pastores would be sufficient for the whole country. Not many slaveholders would remove to

New Mexico with a view to this pursuit; and they would be completely within the power of the present inhabitants, who are so utterly averse to the institution.

Besides, this species of property would be quite insecure, particularly when thus employed. Would any owner dare to send his slaves on to "the high table lands" of that country in charge of his flocks? If he did, how long would they remain in bondage? If he were to convert them into pastores or shepherds, and were to put a crook into the hands of each to rule his flock, he would soon discover the necessity of employing another set of shepherds to watch the watchers, and to prevent their running away. This ancient implement of pastoral life would be found exercising dominion not only over quadrupeds but bipeds, and though it might sometimes be used to seize a lamb by the neck, it would probably be much oftener required to fasten on a negro's leg; otherwise he would make off to parts unknown. The idea of employing slaves in this business is too visionary to merit serious notice.

I am sensible that mines are among the natural resources of New Mexico, and that it is extensively believed at the South that slave labor could be employed and to great advantage in their development and improvement. But I have to observe, in the first place, that we have no evidence that they are of considerable value, or rather the evidence is all the other way. . . .

Lieutenant Abert, in his report, page 451, in speaking of the Gumbecinos, says: "One cannot but feel pity for these miserable wretches, and congratulates himself that he does not possess a gold mine. Even the life of the poor pastores is much preferable to that of these diggers of gold."

Without undertaking to place an estimate, even in a general way, on the value of these mines, I would observe it is not at all probable that any one will undertake to improve them so long as those of California are open and are so much more productive. Will mines be worked which can afford wages at only three reals (37 cents) per day, when, in California, an able-bodied man can

command eight or ten dollars per day? Wages are the true measure of profits.

But if the facts be otherwise, is it likely that any one would think of employing slaves in this business? Would not the legal and social difficulties already averted to constitute insuperable barriers? Would not the Gumbecinos be employed in the preference, who are so cheaply compensated and subsisted?

How, then, can New Mexico become the theatre of slave labor? Besides the non-adaption of its soil and climate to the production of cotton, sugar, and rice, the mere cost of transportation would exclude their cultivation. It appears by Lieutenant Abert's report, page 499, that freight from Santa Fe to the navigable waters of the Missouri costs \$9 per hundred! So that to get these articles to market would cost all, if not more than, they could command in market. The want of navigable rivers and other means of cheap transportation must limit production to the consumption of the country, excepting only livestock, where nature herself furnishes cheap means of access to distant markets. The distance to the Missouri River is over eight hundred miles; to the nearest port on the gulf (in Texas) about one thousand miles; and to Chihuahua (the nearest market in Mexico), as we have already seen, four hundred and twenty miles; and that, too, over about two hundred miles of desert. Taking into view, then, all the circumstances of the case, let the South go to New Mexico with her slaves if she can. I want no higher guaranty against the introduction of the evil than such as the facts of the case afford. . . .<sup>20</sup>

TRUMAN SMITH then turned to the "even more serious" obstacles which stood in the way of slavery expansion to Utah Territory. The eastern rim of the Great Basin was the only portion of "these desolate regions" that could ever become the abode of civilized man. There were the same legal and social difficulties for slavery

as in New Mexico, and the distance to the markets was even greater. Both Lieutenant Emory and Dr. John Bernhisel, the agent of the settlers of Utah Territory,<sup>21</sup> had expressed the opinion that slavery could never be established in this region. "Any man who should even think seriously of taking his slaves into a country so elevated, and so far removed from good markets, would only be worthy of a commission of lunacy."<sup>22</sup>

Smith had admitted as long ago as the autumn of 1847 that there was nothing of a practical nature at stake in this dispute; yet he was not disposed to treat the territorial question lightly, especially since he had been instructed by his state to support the Wilmot proviso. Unless the slaveholding states stopped pressing the slavery issue on the Senate, he would abide by these instructions. Furthermore, the plan of settlement sponsored by Henry Clay was not a suitable one. It would mean the abandonment of the principle that land free when obtained should remain free with legal guarantees; he would not vote to convert free territory into slave territory by implication. The sections of the bill which dealt with slavery and the territories were too "artificial, indirect, contradictory, and repugnant," and would only produce a collision with the House of Representatives. In brief, Truman Smith favored the territorial policy of President Zachary Taylor.

Truman Smith's speech of July 8, 1850, contains much to interest students of the controversy over the expansion of slavery to the territories. His detailed expression of the thinking which inspired the territorial policy supported by Henry Clay, Daniel Webster and other Congressmen in 1850, is in itself enough to make it important. Moreover, Truman voiced the territorial policy of the Taylor administration at that time—an often neglected aspect of the "Great Debate." As floor leader of the administration forces in the Senate, he might well have convinced at least a few Northern Whigs that the Wilmot proviso was not necessary in order to keep the Mexican Territories free. More than one latter-day Congressman was to indicate awareness of these mid-century remarks; Truman Smith had anticipated most of the arguments to be used by Stephen A. Douglas and his followers from 1854 on.

In the event, Truman Smith was wrong when he argued that slavery could never be taken to the Mexican Territories. This miscalculation did not pass unnoticed during the 1850's. As early as March 1852, Representative Joshua Giddings of Ohio informed the House that slaves were being purchased in the neighborhood of Washington City for employment in the silver mines of the Territory of New Mexico—a region which several Northern gentlemen of the Senate had declared unsuitable for slavery in 1850.<sup>23</sup> More than once during the decade a Congressman explained his opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 or the Crittenden Compromise of 1861 by reminding his colleagues that slavery had already entered regions considered unsuitable. Thus the much publicized remarks of men like Truman Smith could have fostered the development among Northern Congressmen of the position that only the Wilmot proviso could *guarantee* freedom for a territory.

Truman Smith's opinions on slavery in the territories demand consideration in relation to the "revisionist" interpretation of the coming of the Civil War. Some historians, who believe that the natural limits of slavery expansion had been reached by the 1840's, have argued that sectional discord on the territorial issue was unnecessary, that the controversy was the result of agitation by partisan anti-slavery politicians. On more than one occasion, Smith, a man who sincerely believed that slavery could never be established in the Mexican Territories, considered voting for the Wilmot proviso. Indeed, by 1850, well before the anti-slavery politicians had become a significant force, Congressmen from both sections of the Union were taking uncompromising stands on the territorial issue, demanding the prohibition or recognition of the peculiar institution of slavery, while admitting that its natural limits had been reached. That these limits of slavery expansion were not the primary question, even to Smith, leads to doubt about the assumptions underlying the contentions of the "revisionists" on this issue.

Finally, the speech raises an important question which many Civil War historians have frequently failed to consider: What did

the *ante-bellum* generation know about the climate, soil, and other natural conditions of the western territories? If the opinions of Congressmen who spoke on the question in the fifteen years before the Civil War were representative of American opinion in general, then that generation had little firsthand knowledge of the region where the slavery controversy centered in the 1850's. Only a handful of Congressmen had ever set foot in the Mexican Territories, and few went to as much trouble as Truman Smith or Thomas Hart Benton to obtain accurate information about them. Most Congressmen probably formed their impressions of New Mexico and Utah on the basis of reports of the exploring expedition sent by President Polk, articles in periodicals, and speeches on the subject. In any case, Congressmen were prone to discuss the western territories in terms of the eastern United States. Only rarely did a speech by a man such as Joseph Lane of Oregon—who had seen cotton being grown in Arizona in 1848—indicate that at least a few men living in the 1850's foresaw the possibilities for cotton cultivation in the far southwest which would become a reality a century later.<sup>24</sup>

Study of Truman Smith's speech indicates the need for more systematic and comprehensive scrutiny of the congressional debate on slavery in the territories—as well as of memoirs, diaries, and newspaper editorials—in the search for more accurate answers to a question which still remains unanswered: What did *the people* living in the 1840's and 1850's believe were the natural limits of slavery expansion? Then, perhaps, we might be able to say with certainty whether men like Truman Smith were correct when they claimed that the sectional controversy over the expansion of slavery to New Mexico Territory was really only a dispute over an abstraction.

## NOTES

1. Charles Desmond Hart, *Congressmen and the Expansion of Slavery into the Territories: A Study in Attitudes, 1846-1861* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle, 1965).

2. *Congressional Globe*, 36 Cong., 2 Sess., January 31, 1861, p. 677.

3. Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (New York, 1956), p. 118n.

4. See Charles W. Ramsdell, "The Natural Limits of Slavery Expansion," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 26 (1929), pp. 151-71; J. G. Randall, *Lincoln the President*, 2 vols. (New York, 1945), vol. 2, p. 240; Albert D. Kirwan, *John J. Crittenden: The Struggle for the Union* (Lexington, Ky., 1962), pp. 311, 383.

5. See Arthur Bestor, "The American Civil War as a Constitutional Crisis," *American Historical Review*, vol. 69 (1964), pp. 334, 336; Robert R. Russel, "The Issues in the Congressional Struggle on the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, 1854," *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 29 (1963), p. 189; Richard N. Current, *The Lincoln Nobody Knows* (New York, 1963), p. 99.

6. See note 4, *supra*.

7. Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1963), vol. 9, pp. 350-51.

8. *Congressional Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 Sess., pp. 944-48.

9. The Taylor administration supported a territorial policy which called for the immediate admission into the Union of California, with its constitution which prohibited slavery, and the admission of New Mexico as soon as the people of that region drew up a constitution. President Taylor was an outspoken critic of the Clay Compromise, and few Whigs supported it while he lived. The best introduction to the vast literature on the Compromise of 1850 is Holman Hamilton, *Prologue to Conflict* (Lexington, Ky., 1963), although this work does not supersede Hamilton's earlier writings, especially the second volume of his definitive biography of Zachary Taylor, *Soldier in the White House* (Indianapolis, 1950).

10. *Congressional Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, pp. 1173-80.

11. California, part of the conquests of the Mexican War, had never been organized as a territory. When Congress failed to provide governments for the Mexican Territories in 1848-49, the settlers of California, at the urging of President Taylor, had convened a constitutional convention and submitted an application for admission as a state into the Union.

Much of the Southern opposition to the entry of California was based on a concern for the legal precedents which would be set by the admission of a state under such conditions.

12. By 1849-50 few Congressmen were interested in an extension of the Missouri Compromise line of 1820 to the Pacific, thereby dividing California into two states. Of the 305 Senators, Representatives, and Territorial Delegates who served in this session, 180 spoke on slavery in the territories, but only 20 of these Congressmen, all from slaveholding states, were strong supporters of the extension of the 36° 30' line to the Pacific. See Hart, Chapter 2.

13. Benton's speech of April 8, 1850, is in the *Globe*, Appendix, pp. 446-50.

14. This argument by Congressmen who believed that slavery expansion was limited has received relatively little attention. It became even more significant when Kansas and Nebraska were the territories in question.

15. For the classic treatment of this subject see Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York, 1947), *passim*.

16. *Congressional Globe*, 30 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, pp. 383-93.

17. George Frederick Augustus Ruxton, *Life in the Far West* (New York, 1849).

18. Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 2 vols. (New York, 1844-45).

19. Lieutenants Emory and Abert were part of the party of army engineers sent out in 1846 by President Polk to explore the northern provinces of Mexico. Their reports on this country are contained in *Executive Documents*, 30 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 41.

20. Truman Smith's remarks on "the natural limits of slavery expansion" to New Mexico Territory are in the *Congressional Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, pp. 1180-82.

21. A native of New York, Bernhisel had been in Washington since the beginning of the session. A few weeks before, at the request of Truman Smith, Dr. Bernhisel had written him a long letter in which he described the land and the people of Deseret (Utah). Smith also read into the record letters he had received during the past year from Erastus Snow and General John Wilson, both of whom had resided in Salt Lake City.

22. Smith's remarks on Utah Territory are in the *Congressional Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, pp. 1182-84.

23. *Congressional Globe*, 32 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, p. 774.

24. *Congressional Globe*, 36 Cong., 1 Sess., p. 184.