The British Press and the Mexican War: Justin Smith Revised

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In 1846 England was one of the great powers of the world; the United States, although not on a scale with some of the European countries, held the dominant position in the Western Hemisphere; and Mexico, twenty-five years after winning independence from Spain, was still trying to establish itself as a stable nation. Except for a direct attack on Great Britain, the actions of neither the United States nor Mexico were really a threat to England. The English government considered itself a friend of both countries, although the continued growth of the United States was a matter of some concern. Indeed, it was in 1846 that the two countries had settled the dispute over the Oregon Territory which could have led to a serious conflict.

When the war between the United States and Mexico broke out in May of that year, the British government officially assumed a friendly, neutral stance; yet, at the same time, it cast a begrudging eye upon the obvious opportunity the United States had for what many English believed to be aggrandizement. The English government, then, ignored the conflict in America as much as possible; however, the war did seem to stir a certain amount of interest among the informed public of England.

The first person to comment on this public reaction was Justin Smith. In 1914 Smith, who wrote the first complete history of the war between Mexico and the United States, read a paper to the Massachusetts Historical Society entitled "Great Britain and Our War of 1846-1848." In this paper, which was a preview of a chapter in his book, he analyzed the attitudes of the English
public toward the war, basing his conclusions upon his research in British newspapers and his own broad knowledge of the conflict. As one reads Smith’s comments sixty years later, it appears that, especially in regard to the British, he was all too much a captive of his times. The purpose of this study, then, is to take a fresh look at the subject, reevaluate the evidence Smith used, and then come to some conclusions about the merits and shortcomings of the earlier work.

First it is necessary to set the stage by briefly examining the official and unofficial policies the British government pursued during the conflict between the United States and Mexico. On May 13, 1846, the United States declared war on Mexico. Secretary of State James Buchanan immediately sent a dispatch to Louis McLane, the American minister in England, telling him of the war. Buchanan instructed McLane to inform Foreign Secretary Lord Aberdeen that hostilities had commenced, that the objective of the United States was to conquer a lasting peace, and that Mexico would be blockaded to hasten such a peace.¹

The two men who occupied the British Foreign Office during the two years of war were very different individuals, who followed quite different policies. Lord Aberdeen held the position for less than two months after Zachary Taylor crossed the Rio Grande. He was regarded by Americans and English alike as a pursuer of peace who was agreeable to compromises and approaches which would lead to such a goal. Lord Palmerston, the man who controlled British foreign affairs for the majority of the two years, had a reputation for aggressiveness and taking a hard line. Certainly George Bancroft, who replaced McLane as minister to England in the latter part of 1846, neither liked nor trusted him.²

McLane and Bancroft were concerned not only about the attitudes of the official policy makers, but also about English public opinion. Immediately after news of the war became public, British opinion seemed to be, at least to McLane’s mind, overwhelmingly against the United States. According to McLane, many were concerned about the increased power that an American victory would bring to the United States. A belief which gained some currency
in Britain was that the preparations being made, ostensibly for the conflict with Mexico, were in reality for a war with Great Britain. In light of this the American minister pleaded with his government for a swift conclusion to the war.\(^3\) Aberdeen, however, persuaded McLane that the government was not going to assume a militant stand, and showed the worried minister an earlier note to Mexico warning that England would remain neutral if hostilities broke out.

As time went on and Bancroft replaced McLane, the American minister’s reports on British policy grew more sanguine. Although he still detected indications of English bluster from time to time, Bancroft reported that the British would even permit the annexation of Mexico—a sentiment echoed by Palmerston himself.\(^4\) In a typical statement, Bancroft, who never could be accused of underestimating the greatness of the United States, wrote to Buchanan:

\[\ldots\] through the clouds of angry words and feelings, public and private, the conviction is constantly becoming deeper and deeper, that it is in vain for European Powers to attempt to arrest or check the prosperity of our country.\(^5\)

Indeed, by the end of the war, both the English leaders and the public were congratulating the United States on its successes, and Bancroft still believed an annexation of Mexico would be sanctioned.\(^6\)

In Parliament, debate in the House of Commons turned to the war on only two occasions, both times early in the course of the conflict. In late June 1846 Prime Minister Robert Peel explained the government’s position; but in August Lord George Bentinck and Benjamin Disraeli made speeches which must have made Americans uneasy. Lord George reminded the House that private interests in Great Britain had important investments in Mexico which were being imperiled by the war. Moreover, he continued, the United States was set upon a war of aggressive conquest, which could possibly lead to an attempt to seize British possessions in the West Indies.\(^7\) Disraeli echoed this, calling on the government to
join with several other countries to govern Mexico as a protectorate and to create a strong, free, nation. Two other members who joined the debate counseled greater moderation and a course of non-interference in a matter they considered of no critical importance.

From general public and semiofficial reaction to the war, it seemed possible that the government of Great Britain might strongly and formally encourage America to make an early peace. The actual policy was simple but firm. Aberdeen, when McLane informed him of the outbreak of hostilities, immediately made an unofficial offer of mediation to the American minister. This was eventually conveyed to Washington where it was ignored by the United States. Palmerston made a second, official offer of mediation to both countries shortly thereafter and this was rejected by both belligerents. Also, a precautionary defensive step of making a shipment of arms to Canada was taken. The government of Great Britain, then, was able to ignore the whole matter officially while standing ready as a mutual friend to work out a suitable peace.

Several problems arose out of, or were affected by, the war. Because the Oregon dispute, which was a definite threat to friendly Anglo-American relations, had not been fully settled by the time the war began, it was a matter of immediate and considerable concern. McLane, in fact, accused Aberdeen of urging the Mexicans to war in order to pressure America into accepting an Oregon settlement favorable to the British. Although the Foreign Secretary denied this, it is likely that the approach of war, combined with his conciliatory attitude on the Oregon question, did lead to an early settlement. Disraeli, however, was unsatisfied and warned that with the acquisition of Oregon and Texas the United States was taking steps toward surrounding and ultimately seizing a great deal of Mexico.

California was another territory which might have led to trouble between the United States and Great Britain during the war. When the Hudson’s Bay Company, long before the war, advised its government to take possession of the area as a colony, the suggestion was turned down. An unofficial offer by the Mexican agent
in London to sell California to Great Britain, after the territory had been lost, met the same fate. Bancroft correctly analyzed the position of the English when he wrote informally to President Polk that Great Britain did not have any love for the United States, but the British government was reluctantly forced by its respect for America to remain neutral in regard to California. Palmerston also skillfully handled two issues which grew out of the war itself. Rumors that an agent of Mexico was issuing letters of marque in England elicited a question in Parliament about the legality of such actions. Palmerston assured the questioner that upon request of the Queen the Foreign Enlistment Act would be invoked against anyone soliciting for privateers. Although the report about the Mexican agent was false, Palmerston’s response was undoubtedly reassuring to the United States. Another incident relating to the war was also handled to the satisfaction of the American government. In August 1847 the mail steamer Teviot, which as a mail ship was allowed to go through the U.S. blockade to Mexico, brought to Vera Cruz General Mariano Paredes, the former Mexican President. The United States government claimed that because a ship captain should be responsible for his passengers, Captain May of the Teviot was grossly negligent in permitting Paredes to return to Mexico. The United States protested, asking that some action be taken against the captain. Palmerston turned the matter over to the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company which suspended May.

Although England held itself aloof from the war and acquiesced in the tremendous territorial expansion which resulted from the American victory, it is probable that an alteration in the Anglo-American power relationship was an outcome of the war. By permitting the United States to absorb the Oregon, California, and New Mexico territories the British were giving up any hope of establishing or supporting a power in the Western Hemisphere strong enough to be a balance to the United States. England, of course, still held a strong position anywhere in the world through its sea power, and Palmerston consoled himself in the accurate belief that the United States was headed toward division partly
due to its expansion. Fortunately for the United States England did not aid or encourage Mexico; nor did the British take advantage of America, especially on the Oregon question, during the war. Indeed, both Aberdeen and Palmerston seemed almost resigned to continued territorial expansion of the United States.

With this background, we can now turn to the reaction of the British public to the war, and then proceed to critique Justin Smith's evaluation of these sentiments. Although newspapers could not be considered a totally accurate gauge of public opinion, it is still valuable to analyze and compare the position of several contemporary publications in order to understand what attitude many of the informed public had toward the war on the other side of the Atlantic. It is possible, moreover, to gain a greater insight into Smith's presentation by examining newspapers, since he used them as virtually his only source.

Even though response to the war between the two American neighbors bordered on disinterest at the official level, this was hardly indicative of the reaction of several leading newspapers and periodicals of the time. All of the publications included in this study presented not only a great deal of news from the battlefields, but also considerable advice and comment on the justification, prosecution, and results of the war.

Possibly the most important newspaper in the world in the mid-nineteenth century was the *Times* of London. With correspondents in every part of the world, the *Times*'s peerless international coverage was thorough. The amount of news about the war between the United States and Mexico and the quantity of comment on the war far surpassed that of any other paper in England. The *Times* was considered to be "... on the side of the more liberal conservatives" before the 1848 revolutions. The editor of the paper, in part for personal reasons, was a supporter of Aberdeen in almost everything he did. Because the London paper objected to the Corn Laws, however, it was not friendly to any other part of Robert Peel's government. On the other hand, the *Times* frequently quarreled with the succeeding government of Lord
John Russell, especially attacking Palmerston. The anti-American and rather antidemocratic views of this newspaper almost always overrode any other consideration when it editorialized on the war.

To provide a balance, several other sources of editorial comment have been examined. The Manchester Guardian, aimed at the cotton manufacturers at Lancashire and influenced by the commercial contact between Liverpool and the New World, was one of the important newspapers published outside London. The Guardian advocated the franchise for the middle class (but not lower classes) and a laissez faire economy.15

The Examiner, a London Sunday paper, and The Illustrated London News were two publications which presented both hard news and an abundant number of feature articles, and thus fall between the classification of newspaper and periodical magazine. Both were reform-minded, calling for better treatment of the poor, factory legislation, and reforms in the parliament, the army, and prisons.16 A conservative, loyalist Canadian newspaper, (Canada, of course, was still a colony at the time), the Montreal Gazette, adds to the balance of opinion, by providing an unmistakably English point of view from the New World. Two periodical essays from the Westminster Review and Tait's Edinburgh Review round out the sources examined. As we shall see, the opinion of the English newspapers and periodicals in regard to the war possessed a great degree of unanimity, despite their diverse attitude on domestic matters.

All of the daily or weekly publications had basically the same format for presenting war news and views. As ships arrived from America, the United States newspapers were searched for significant news. The papers would then print this in a column entitled "United States" or "The War between the United States and Mexico," which would usually be headed with a short paragraph informing the reader upon what ship the information had arrived and whether the news was interesting or not (it was usually deemed uninteresting). The news was presented in the form of long excerpts from American papers, important messages and
speeches, or a well pieced together summary of several newspaper reports. Editorial comment and the hard news were very rarely mixed together.

The *Times*, with its correspondents, was able to add to this second hand information. A regular reporter was in Mexico writing and commenting about conditions in that country. In the United States the *Times* had two contributors. The regular correspondent reported infrequently; but an American citizen, who signed his regular reportorial letters to the paper "A Genevese Traveller," contributed his usually Anglophilic impressions of his country.

At the beginning of the war, a great deal of news about the conflict filled the pages of the papers; but as it progressed slowly with long lulls, the news became at times rather sparse. Then, with the outbreak of the rash of revolutions in Europe in 1848, news of the end of the farther removed war all but disappeared. Even the *Montreal Gazette* failed to report the final ratification of the treaty between the United States and Mexico.

For the most part, each paper restricted its judgments and comments to the editorial columns. Only the *Times*, whose correspondents regularly mixed fact and opinion, permitted comment on the news to escape its editorial page. Also, a few readers contributed letters stating their views on the war on the North American continent. Although the factual reporting is important in the sense that its quantity might be indicative of the concern each publication showed for the war (e.g., the tapering off of news at the onset of the 1848 revolutions); it is the editorial opinion which is critical for this study. It is this comment which at times must have helped shape, and at other times reflected, the opinions of the readers of the newspaper. It is possible, then, to begin to get at what public opinion there was in Great Britain concerning the war between Mexico and the United States by examining newspaper editorials.

Before the outbreak of the war, the settlement of the Oregon dispute was the subject which filled the "United States" columns and which was granted editorial space in English newspapers. The *Guardian* and the *Examiner* advised Aberdeen not to weaken to
the war party of Polk, which was trying to make political capital out of the issue. They recommended such a course even if it meant plunging Great Britain into a war with the United States.\textsuperscript{17} In April reports of a possible conflict between Mexico and the United States began to appear. As these predictions grew into reports of actual fighting, the Oregon issue was still the foremost concern in England. The \textit{Times} called for a speedy finalization of the Oregon question while the war, which then seemed to be destined for a swift completion, occupied America's attention. There was a concern that after the war the United States would undoubtedly be more bellicose than ever, this time toward Great Britain.\textsuperscript{18} Understandably, then, English newspapers viewed the conflict in its early stages mainly in terms of its effect on the Oregon question.

In all wars it seems to be the duty of those who report it, if they are to do a complete job, to evaluate the causes of the conflict and sometimes place the guilt for the war. The English newspapers were by no means derelict in this duty. Almost unanimously the publications condemned the United States as the aggressor. All five papers responded to President Polk's war message. These journals rejected Polk's contention that the Mexican government was at fault because it refused to negotiate with Minister John Slidell and because Mexican troops attacked an American patrol. Instead, the British press accused the United States of intentionally precipitating the war by sending Zachary Taylor across the Nueces River into the disputed boundary of Texas. The \textit{Examiner}, the \textit{Gazette}, and the \textit{Times} all soon correctly discerned that a major American objective was California. The latter paper pointed to instructions issued in 1845 to the American Pacific Commander to occupy Pacific ports in case of war.\textsuperscript{19} Needless to say, this reconfirmed the belief that Polk and the "war party" were acting from purely acquisitive motives. Nowhere in the papers could a reader discover any hint that Mexico might in some way be blamed for the war. The only attitude which was anything less than accusation of the United States was the belief that because America was so strong and Mexico so weak a war was inevitable.
In accord with this idea a reviewer for the Westminster Review maintained that the United States could bring some order out of chaos by conquering its weaker neighbor.20

Even though the newspapers seemed to be primarily interested in battlefield strategy and in the internal affairs of the two countries, they all were aware of the effects of the War on England. The offers of mediation, which Aberdeen and Palmerston presented, were, of course, praised, but the Guardian and Examiner correctly predicted that both countries, certainly the United States, would reject the offers.21 While the Montreal Gazette, early in the war, believed that neither England nor France would permit the United States to invade Mexico; the other newspapers took a less concerned outlook, but assured their readers that Great Britain would react if threatened and, indeed, had increased the size of its fleet in the West Indies.22

Probably the greatest immediate impact of the war on Great Britain was economic, and the papers were well aware of the commercial effect. Although Lord George Bentinck's concern for private investors in Mexico was not reflected in the newspapers, trade was a special point of consideration. The Times claimed that the blockade of Mexico was having an especially adverse effect on the port of Liverpool. A letter writer reported that no one would unload Mexican ships, fearing a "war risk."23 Mexican bond holders were also obviously upset at the war.

Mexican privateering, which was a potential threat to American shipping, was a genuine concern for British commercial interests. In fact, shipping insurance rates rose for a short period at the beginning of the war in response to a fear for the safety of American vessels. The unsettling report that a Mexican agent was issuing letters of marque stemmed entirely from articles in the Times. On January 8, 1847, the Times announced that for the first time in forty years authorization for privateering was being offered in England. Five days later an editorial in the same paper condemned this "barbaric custom." In the same issue a letter also poured out vituperation on the practice of privateering. This minor controversy subsided quickly when on January 15 Frederic Bernes, a gunshop
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owner, explained in a letter to the *Times* that he had merely advertised that a genuine Mexican letter of marque was on display but none were being issued.  

A more substantial subject of concern to the *Times* was the forced loans which the Mexican government was attempting to extract from British citizens living in Mexico. The *Times* protested not against the call for loans, but against the fact that a disproportionately large amount was sought from British residents. Accordingly, the London newspaper readily backed Lord Palmerston in his protest to the Mexican government.  

It must have been gratifying, then, to Bancroft or any other American observer of English opinion, to see especially the *Times* take these positions which, if not exactly pro-American, were at least not at all sympathetic to Mexico.

A special bright spot that appeared among the castigations which the *Times* usually directed toward America during the war was the newspaper's overall attitude toward the prospect of the United States controlling Mexico, and how such a takeover would affect British interests. Even though the *Times* railed against what it termed American aggression, the paper, echoing the opinion first put forth in the *Westminster Review*, advised England not to waste time defending the Mexican government, since domination by the United States would create a much more settled, orderly country. The frequent revolutions would come to an end, property would be better protected, agricultural production would increase, and the level of civilization would rise. As a result of this, the *Times* editorialized, Great Britain's commercial interests would be greatly enhanced. It was wise, therefore, to permit a conquest by the United States.  

In regard to other phases of the war, however, the *Times* and other papers displayed a considerably less favorable attitude toward the United States. All the newspapers held the American army in particularly low esteem. The *Guardian* believed few would volunteer for the army, considering the health hazards and poorly organized supply system. The fact that the army was composed primarily of volunteers was a source of constant criticism from
all the papers. An ill-trained volunteer army, made up of a hodge-podge of nationalities, could never hope to be effective, they claimed. From time to time reports of drunkenness, brutality, and misconduct appeared in papers.\textsuperscript{28} The \textit{Times} seemed especially concerned that Americans would plunder the gold and silver riches of the Mexican churches.\textsuperscript{29} The commanders of the American army and their strategy were also targets of a good deal of comment. The \textit{Examiner} described Zachary Taylor as unimaginative and reluctant to place his successful record in jeopardy by making an attack on Mexican forces. The \textit{Times} questioned Winfield Scott's strategy of stopping and starting on his way to Mexico City.\textsuperscript{30} This newspaper also remained unimpressed by the crucial American victories at Buena Vista and Vera Cruz. Explaining that, even though beaten at Buena Vista, the Mexicans could still relax on the wide plateau which composed most of Mexico, and horrified by the bombarding of the city of Vera Cruz, the \textit{Times} could see little good in the American successes.\textsuperscript{31} The \textit{Guardian}, however, said the two victories proved conclusively that American forces were superior. As the war ground to an end the \textit{Times} finally concurred.\textsuperscript{32}

The Mexican army, however, fared even worse in the pages of English newspapers. The American triumphs were analyzed in terms of Mexico's weaknesses. To the \textit{Times} both armies displayed the poverty of character of the New World. An underlying theme in many articles of other papers was the natural supremacy of an Anglo-Saxon race over descendants of the Spanish. This was especially true of a writer in the \textit{Westminster Review} who believed the Mexicans were simply less civilized and unsurprisingly cowardly.\textsuperscript{33} In light of all this, the newspapers took it upon themselves to offer the underdogs some advice. Especially the \textit{Guardian}, but most of the other papers, implored the Mexican General Antonio López de Santa Anna to turn to guerrilla warfare as an effective means of combating the Americans' overwhelming strength. The Manchester publication and others pointed out that it would be next to impossible to defeat a scattered, mobile army in the vast unhealthy land of Mexico.\textsuperscript{34} It is clear that in the
estimation of English newspapers both armies were far inferior to those of Europe, especially the British military forces.

Along with analyzing and advising the two armies, English publications gave considerable attention to the governments of the opposing nations. Although most of the comments were directed toward the United States, the rather fluid situation at Mexico City was given some space. As noted before, the unstable Mexican government was an object of disgust. The British press reported Mexican rulers to be at best ineffective and at worst despots. They reviled a congress racked with intrigue and wrote with growing consternation about each revolution. The newspapers offered advice to the government, telling the Mexicans that their fight against the United States was hopeless and that they should begin to treat for peace immediately. The Times was especially offended at the prospect of such a weak government refusing to give in and begin negotiations to conclude the war.

The Mexican government, as a weak system almost incapable of functioning at all, may have been beneath contempt; but the United States could not fall to quite so low a level. Indeed, a great part of the editorial space the newspapers gave to the war between Mexico and the United States was devoted to heaping contempt upon the American government. The Guardian and the Times explicitly spoke out against democracy as a definite evil and a vulgar form of government which led to war and internal chaos.

The newspapers believed President James K. Polk led a war party which was seeking a conflict with another nation to gain popularity. The papers warned that this party not only had pushed the United States into war with Mexico, but also had a strong streak of Anglophobia which potentially could create a conflict with Great Britain.

As leader of this party, Polk especially was held in disrepute by the British press. He was called the “Napoleon of the backwoods,” and pictured as “... the unscrupulous ruler of a democratic state confidently appealing to the passions of the populace.” The reaction to the President’s major speeches was especially scornful. Bancroft noted that the papers sent up a “growl” in
response to the war message. Later they claimed Polk blundered into war with neither plan nor policy, and, as the war dragged on, he was reaping his reward. Although the Examiner actually praised one of Polk’s speeches as being temperate, his subsequent messages were greeted primarily with derision. Despising as futile his attempts at explaining the war, the Times said, “He has laid it on so thick as to form an expugnable edifice”; and The Illustrated London News termed the speech “bombastic.” As the 1848 presidential election neared, the Examiner and especially the Times took great pleasure in predicting Polk’s political demise. Taking an I-told-you-so attitude, the papers proclaimed that waging war was an unsuccessful method of gaining votes.

British newspapers recorded the strong antiwar sentiment in the United States with obvious satisfaction. Again and again each paper announced which groups had become war weary. The Times’s Genevese Traveller described the country as gloomy as the war continued much longer than expected; as early as November 1846 the Montreal Gazette announced that Americans were tiring of war; an antiwar feeling was reported to be growing in Congress; and in early 1849 the Times believed the administration itself hated the continuing war. When the United States smuggled Santa Anna into Mexico, it was taken as a sign that the American government was eager for a new Mexican government with which it could negotiate a peace treaty.

The primary vexation which plagued the American government was the cost of the war. Very early in the conflict every one of the newspapers correctly predicted it would be extremely expensive, and on financial grounds alone the United States administration would regret its decision to go to war. Of course, as the war continued, the publications noted the debates in Congress over further spending. In an age which believed deficit spending was a wrong which placed an unfair burden on posterity, the English journals were interested to see how America would finance the war, and commented ominously when Congress continued to appropriate funds. By the end of the war the Times and Guardian fully expected America to plunder Mexico to recoup at least part of
the expenditure. Thus, English public opinion, at least as reflected in several newspapers, held neither the Mexican nor the American government in high regard. The government of Mexico was scorned for its instability and weakness; while the United States was condemned by many for its democracy, its aggression, and almost surely because it was a nation which was becoming steadily more powerful and which some day would probably be a viable rival of Great Britain.

It was clear that the United States was by far the stronger of the two belligerents, and that it was merely a matter of time before the stronger would prevail. The capture of Mexico City by Scott's forces in September 1847 signaled the military end of the war. Mexico, however, by its very weakness was able to thwart the completion of an American victory and prolonged the war several months. There was no government which possessed sufficient strength to negotiate with the Americans. Any group that dared to sign a peace treaty would be overthrown immediately by its rivals. From the newspapers of Great Britain came more ridicule than sympathy for America's dilemma. Not only did this further substantiate their appraisal of the Mexican government, but it also was treated as something which would teach the United States another lesson. The Times, which declared the United States to be winners yet still losers, compared fully defeating Mexico with trying to crash into a comet which has no substantial nucleus.

Finally, the newspapers began to speculate on the possibilities of peace. In April 1847 Polk had sent Nicholas Trist, a high ranking clerk in the State Department, to handle negotiations with the Mexican government. It was not until the autumn of that year, after the occupation of Mexico City, that any British paper was prepared to believe a treaty could be concluded. The Genevese Traveller, after months of declaring that there was no peace in sight, finally informed the Times in October 1847 that the war might come to an end soon. Most papers perceived that the United States did not care for all of Mexico, but wanted only the disputed Texas land, California, New Mexico, and perhaps the southern isthmus for a canal. The Guardian believed the
Americans would not care to deal with the problems entailed by absorbing more than that, while the Examiner advised Polk to be satisfied with the area from San Francisco Bay north.\(^{49}\) In March 1848, with the entire world preoccupied with the revolutions of that year, the United States and Mexico ratified a peace treaty.

To all of this castigation and criticism which the British press heaped upon the United States, Justin Smith reacted perhaps typically for someone writing in the early twentieth century. The first several paragraphs of Smith's paper provide the reader with strong clues to his attitudes. He first reviews briefly the sore points in Anglo-American relations, beginning with the Revolution and concluding with the disagreement over Texas before the United States annexed it. It is clear that Smith was a fairly strong Anglophobe. As such, Smith was too easily and too greatly offended by the anti-Americanism displayed by the British newspapers and was unable to put their comments on the war into proper perspective.

Smith, moreover, held Mexico in very low esteem. In The War with Mexico, his major work on the war, Smith characterizes Mexicans as a race inferior to Anglo-Saxons (a viewpoint which may have been confirmed in his mind by the confused conditions in Mexico at the time of his writing). He also goes to great lengths to place the entire burden of guilt for the war upon Mexico. Such an attitude seems to influence his earlier article.

First of all, he puts too much responsibility on England and the newspapers for encouraging the war. In his desire to place the blame on the Mexicans, Smith paints them as "born gamblers" who could be led into war by the faintest hopes of victory. It is Smith's opinion that the prospect of war between England and the United States over Oregon proffered such a hope.\(^{50}\) Certainly a conflict between these two would have been encouraging to Mexico. As Smith expands this point in The War with Mexico, he claims that the Mexican government actually pinned their hopes not merely on a war, but on an Anglo-Mexican alliance.\(^{51}\) By May 1846, however, Aberdeen had informed the Mexican leaders that such an alliance could never come about. The bravado of the
most foolhardy gambler would have been subdued, rather than fired, by England's official attitude. It is unlikely that England's official policy tipped the scale for war.

Smith also asserts that the depredations of the American government in the English newspapers encouraged the Mexicans to fight. As we have seen, it is true that before the war many English papers had doubts about American determination, ability, and strength; and expressed beliefs that a full conquest of Mexico could be a formidable undertaking. It is unlikely, however, that the influence that British journals had in Mexico could compare with the more substantial causes of the war—the reluctance of a weak Mexican government to treat with John Slidell; the unwillingness of Mexico to accede to a more powerful nation in what it believed to be excessive demands; or the presence of Zachary Taylor in the disputed territory.

Smith summarizes his other findings in four points:

... it seems to be clear that our succeeding in a war with Mexico was by no means considered in England a matter of course, as we have been accustomed to regard it; that our achievements produced a state of mind respecting us very different from that which had prevailed before; and that our terms of peace, instead of appearing extortionate were viewed as disappointingly moderate. It appears evident also that the British were disposed to welcome any safe opportunity for interfering.

His first point suffers from his own misapprehension of the inevitability of American victory. Throughout much of the war various problems which the English press pointed out—the vastness of the land of Mexico, its unhealthful climate, the problems of American finance, and the lack of full domestic support in the United States—were all very real hindrances to victory and were perceived by Americans. For many in the United States our succeeding in a war with Mexico, or at least our desire to succeed in such a venture, was not a matter of course. Smith's conclusion that British newspapers questioned America's fortitude is correct; however, they were being more factual and realistic than he is
willing to admit. He seems to regard these analyses, which were overstated at times, as unjust criticisms of America, primarily because they came from England.

Smith's second point about British attitudes toward America contains some validity, but is also stretched. He relies on a quotation from Bancroft, who was as much an Anglophobe as was Smith, to prove that a considerable change of attitude toward America had occurred in England after the war. It seems clear, however, that the British government, including Palmerston, had already conceded prior to the war that the United States was the unquestioned power of the Western Hemisphere, and this was one reason why Great Britain was unwilling to interfere. A more rigorous or fairer examination of newspapers, however, would have revealed that for years after the war the Times was still neither friendly towards nor respectful of the democratic United States, and that in other newspapers only the estimation of the quality of an American volunteer army was significantly altered by the war.

British "disappointment" that the United States did not annex all of Mexico, which is Smith's third point, was not as widespread as he would have us believe. Surely, the Times could see an ultimate commercial advantage in the United States acquiring Mexico; but perhaps even this was a rationalization for the British government's policy of nonintervention. It is true that other newspapers seemed resigned to annexation; however, as pointed out before, a majority of the papers analyzed in this study advised against taking the whole of Mexico. Although many in England were aware of the possibility that the United States could absorb all of Mexico, they were hardly disappointed when this did not come about.

Finally, Smith sees any effort by Great Britain to intervene in the war in any way as unnecessary meddling. He incorrectly states the British believed a war against the United States would "impooverish Mexico, make her less valuable as a customer (to Great Britain), and reduce her ability to pay English bondholders." This, of course, flies in the face of the Times's and other com-
mentators' beliefs that annexation by the United States might be a commercial good. Moreover, it seems that Smith protests too much over England's two rather forceless offers to mediate. After all, even before the war, Aberdeen warned the Mexican government that England would not come to her aid.

Although Smith made some points that could have been considered partially valid, he grossly overstated them as he took great umbrage at the verbal slaps of the English press. It is true that all the British newspapers examined in this study, especially the Times, were not particularly amicable toward the United States or anything it did. It does seem that even though they were unanimous in their contempt for the American government, and, to a lesser extent, for the American army, these publications held a certain deep-lying respect for the United States as a growing power. It was a nation much stronger and more capable than Mexico (or any other nation in the New World) and one which the newspapers obviously rated well below England. But at the same time the English saw the United States as an expanding threat, even to their own country. A strong Anglophobe, Justin Smith failed to detect this respect—even fear—of what might someday be. As a result his analysis of British attitudes is neither adequately penetrating, nor sufficiently objective.

NOTES


3. McLane to Buchanan, June 3, 1846, (Doc. 2846) in Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence 7:277.

5. Bancroft to Buchanan, January 4, 1847; (Doc. 2853), in Manning, Diplomatic Correspondence, 7:290.
18. London Times, April 11, 1846 and June 18, 1846.
19. Times, January 18, 1847; Examiner, June 18, 1846; Montreal Gazette, August 7, 1846.
21. Manchester Guardian, October 17, 1846; Examiner, July 18, 1846.
22. Montreal Gazette, June 6, 1846; Times, June 1, 1846.
23. Times, July 10, 1846 and October 25, 1847.
24. Times, January 8, 1847 and January 15, 1847.
25. Times, September 9, 1847.
26. Times, April 11, 1846 and August 26, 1846.
29. Times, November 13, 1847.
30. Examiner, February 2, 1847; Times, August 16, 1847.
31. Times, April 26, 1847 and May 10, 1847.
32. Manchester Guardian, February 17, 1847 and October 27, 1847.
34. Manchester Guardian, February 17, 1847 and October 27, 1847.
37. *Manchester Guardian*, June 21, 1846; *Times*, November 9, 1846 and December 31, 1846.
42. *Examiner*, January 2, 1847; *Times*, December 31, 1846; *The Illustrated London News*, June 2, 1847.
43. *Examiner*, January 2, 1847; *Times*, November 20, 1846.
44. *Times*, December 14, 1846 and January 18, 1848; *Montreal Gazette*, November 16, 1846; *Manchester Guardian*, September 16, 1846 and February 13, 1847.
47. *Manchester Guardian*, August 11, 1847; *Times*, March 27, 1847.
52. Smith, "Great Britain and Our War," p. 454.
St. Vincent Sanatorium, built as an industrial school and later used as an orphanage. It burned in July 1856. Photo courtesy of the Archives of the Sisters of Charity, Mt. St. Joseph, Ohio.