

REACTIONS OF OHIOANS TO THE TEXAS QUESTION

A Thesis

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by

Gretchen Ake Fluke, B.A.  
The Ohio State University  
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Approved by

  
Adviser  
Department of History

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## CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.

The reactions of Ohioans to the issue of the annexation of Texas in 1844 and 1845 were varied. Some Ohioans ignored the question; some tried to divert attention from it; some considered other current topics much more important. Because of the controversy the Texas question would provoke if it were debated freely, few people in Ohio faced the issue with any candor.

The real problem confronting the country was that of the extension of slavery. If Texas were to be admitted to the Union, there was little doubt that the move would add to the number of slave states, in spite of several attempts to divide the area into both free and slave states. Even though the extension of slavery was discussed somewhat in Ohio, the question of whether slavery should exist at all was so potentially explosive that it was seldom put before the public. Abolitionists, of course, discussed the subject and, as a result, were considered radicals.

There were two areas of Ohio where the Texas question was discussed openly. One was the southwestern part of the state where the population was the heaviest, Cincinnati being the largest Ohio city in the 1840's. But since the area bordered on a slave state, usually arguments other than the extension of slavery were used. The other area where the Texas question was a frequent topic was northeastern Ohio, the Western Reserve, where the abolition movement was strong. There, led by such men as Joshua Giddings and Elisha Whittlesey, slavery and Texas were often synonymous.

In the central part of the state, annexation was not usually the main topic of discussion.

Politically, the Whigs kept the Texas question before the public, while Democrats seriously tried to ignore it or circumvent it. Most Democrats were not in favor of annexation before it became an issue and found themselves in the position of having to go along with their party on this if they were to support their party on other things. For a while, shortly after the public learned of the treaty of annexation in 1844, pleas came from all over Ohio to keep the measure from becoming a political issue, but to no avail. The national parties in the months preceding the election of 1844 divided into opposing camps on the Texas question.

The years 1844 and 1845 are the significant times in the debates over annexation. It was not until late March of 1844 that the people of the United States realized that the national government had made serious moves to acquire Texas. Most Ohioans showed great disapproval of the treaty the Tyler administration had negotiated. The second event bringing the Texas question before the public was the presidential election of 1844 in which both major parties and the small, but vocal, Liberty Party took stands on the issue. After the election and Polk's victory, many assumed that Texas was as good as annexed already. But debates continued when the joint resolution came before Congress in 1845, and although some people ignored the matter as a fait accompli, others stormed and threatened that completion of the proceedings would have dire consequences for the whole country.

To understand how the arguments over Texas developed, it is necessary to examine the related events in the years prior to 1844. Even before the independence of Texas was fully recognized by the United States in 1837,



some Ohioans began to worry about the possibility of the area being added to the country. Thomas Morris, Democratic senator from Ohio, foresaw the impact that annexation might have upon the slavery issue and hoped to disassociate that topic and Texas in order to avoid future dissension. In 1836 he had offered a resolution in the Senate which had stated approval of events leading toward freedom in Texas and asked that everyone work to avert the influence of the slave states in that area.<sup>1</sup>

Reacting to the news of the United States recognition of Texas as an independent republic, the 1837-1838 session of the Ohio General Assembly attempted to determine whether or not it should support any action to acquire Texas and decided not to favor such a move at that time. Wilson Shannon and Benjamin Wade had supported the measure, but Thomas Morris had not because the move was not binding on the future.<sup>2</sup>

Neither Andrew Jackson nor Martin Van Buren as President had made any overt move to begin the annexation process after Texas gained her independence. For a while, controversy over annexation all but died away.

The election of 1840 had a great influence on later debate, but the influence was very indirect as annexation was not an issue at that time. Great bitterness had arisen between the two parties as a result of the Log Cabin campaign. Many Democrats felt they had been tricked by all the ballyhoo sponsored by the Whigs, and even though the former had recovered enough to have a governor elected from their party in 1842,

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<sup>1</sup>B. F. Morris, The Life of Thomas Morris (Cincinnati, 1856), 330.

<sup>2</sup>The Ohio Coon Catcher (Columbus, Ohio), September 7, 1844.

they were still thought of as the underdogs. Whigs in the state were somewhat embarrassed by their own position of having lost in an off-year election and of having to show allegiance to John Tyler, a President they did not like.

Before the Texas issue was fully revived in 1844, Ohioans occasionally voiced opinions on annexation. Most of the people in the state did not have much of an opinion until they were forced by circumstances to decide, and those who did consider the matter were few. One of the more frequent themes in the days before the main arguments prevailed was that, depending on which region's interests were favored, either the North or the South might attempt to dissolve the Union.<sup>3</sup>

The first official moves to acquire Texas were made by the United States government in the summer of 1843. The government of Mexico, hearing of the move, a few months later threatened war if annexation were completed. Tyler, in answer to Mexico, announced firmly that he would support Texas if war were to occur.<sup>4</sup>

Less than a week after Tyler's December message reached the public, the Ohio General Assembly began to bicker over what kinds of instructions to send to their representatives and senators in Washington. As this was the first time in a few years that the subject had been discussed, there was much confusion and many motions to amend, to table, to send to committee, and even to recess, most of which was rejected. The final instructions were weak, and since the matter did not come up officially until later, the Ohio legislators paid the instructions little immediate attention.

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<sup>3</sup>Edgar Allen Holt, "Party Politics in Ohio," Ohio Archeological and Historical Quarterly, XXXVIII, (1929), 82.

<sup>4</sup>Ohio Statesman, (Columbus), December 9, 1843.

Before the controversy over the treaty is discussed, it will be helpful to define some of the other issues confronting Ohioans and to examine some of the arguments used for and against annexation in 1844 and 1845.

## CHAPTER TWO. THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF OTHER ISSUES AND ANNEXATION.

An examination of the reactions of Ohioans to the annexation must be preceded by noting some of the other political issues and the relationship of those issues to the Texas question. Although the topic of annexation was important in 1844 and 1845, it was not always before the public. Frequently people declined to discuss the subject or newspapers would go for weeks without even mentioning it.

Most of the debates in Ohio were along political lines because 1844 was an election year which saw a vigorous and almost evenly balanced campaign conducted throughout the state. Two minor subjects were those of distribution and nativism. These topics, fairly insignificant in Ohio, were controversial subjects in other areas. As to the question of distribution to the states of the monies collected from the sale of public lands, the Democrats opposed while the Whigs favored the policy. Nativism was a popular topic in the East, but only in a few places in Ohio, mainly Cincinnati. Both political parties tried to play down the charges of nativism against themselves and build up the charges against their opponents, the Democrats being more successful in this endeavor. In Cincinnati the German population was sensitive to the problem and caused some consternation among the Whigs there.

The tariff was another topic which was a big issue elsewhere, but it did not make a great impact on the common man in Ohio. This issue favored the Whigs in that they could argue that their tariff passed in 1842 had revived prosperity in the country.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Francis P. Weisenburger, The Passing of the Frontier (Columbus, 1941), 440.



The biggest political issue in Ohio was the problem of banking and the currency. The Whigs were wise to take a consistent middle-of-the-road stand and to sit back and watch the Democrats try to extricate themselves from the muddle in which they found themselves. The Democratic views on banking contributed more than anything else to their defeat in the election to come.

In the early 1840's the Democrats had differed on how to bring prosperity back to the state. The radical branch, or Locofocos, favored the creation of a state owned and operated banking system, or even a privately owned system. The radicals were opposed by Wilson Shannon, Democratic governor of Ohio from 1838-1840 and 1842-1844, whose second term was "characterized by a further breach between the Democratic factions."<sup>2</sup>

The Democratic candidate for governor in 1844, David Tod, became embroiled in the controversy when he decided to advocate only specie in circulation. This stand was popular with people who had been hurt by the depression in 1837 and were afraid of paper money and speculation. Mordecai Bartley, the Whig gubernatorial candidate, opposed Tod's position.

Another aspect of the banking problem was that before 1842 banks had received their charters from the state legislature and were protected by provisions of their charters. Then the Latham Act and the Bartley Act stressed the individual liability of bank officials and stockholders, and were so extreme that new investment in banks was discouraged. As a result, in the Democratic camp, Thomas L. Hamer allied himself with Wilson Shannon against Samuel Medary and John

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<sup>2</sup>The Ohio Historical Society, The Governors of Ohio (Columbus, 1954), 44.



Brough who supported the bank bills. Thus by January of 1844 "a split had occurred in the ranks of the Democrats; and this split was to become so serious in the following months that it was destined to mean defeat in the closely contested election in the fall."<sup>3</sup> That split was caused by the banking issue.

Two other issues were important in 1844 and 1845 but advocates and opponents did not divide along party lines. The final negotiations for the Oregon territory were anticipated by all Ohioans. Few could see any reason why the United States should not have as much of Oregon as possible. In the campaign the Democrats were to make this part of their platform; thus the Whigs kept quiet because they agreed.

Slavery could have been a big issue in 1844 and 1845. In Ohio the abolitionist movement had grown greatly and even the more moderate anti-slavery people were aware of the issue. Fear of slavery was the force underlying most of the opposition to the annexation of Texas. But strangely enough many people tried to avoid discussion of slavery because of the bitterness an outright acknowledgement of the problem would cause.

One of the most common arguments against annexing Texas was that the move would lead to war with Mexico. This would be the first time the United States had ever taken over a foreign country, and some argued that the United States had no right to do so. Mexico would be insulted by our breaking a precedent in taking land Mexico thought rightfully belonged to her.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Delmer John Trester, "The Political Career of David Tod," Ph.D. dissertation (Columbus, 1950), 27-28.

<sup>4</sup>The Ohio State Journal (Columbus, Ohio), April 18, 1844.

Another great fear in the United States was that of war with England. England had built up a fairly lucrative trade with Texas. Much speculation existed as to whether England wanted Texas for herself and was either bargaining with Mexico or trying to involve her in a war with the United States. In all probability, England was trying to restrain Mexico, yet the pro-annexationists used the fear of England to their advantage.<sup>5</sup>

Pure expansionism did not show up as one of the reasons for taking Texas until annexation was almost certain. Those opposed to adding territory to the United States stated that expansion was immoral, the same argument used by those who did not want Oregon.

The recurring argument that adding another slave state would help thin out slavery was used again in the 1840's. A letter printed in the Ohio Statesman and signed by "Annexationist" maintained that if Texas were annexed, all the slaveholders would want to move there. Then Northerners and freeholders could move into the old South.<sup>6</sup> The Statesman itself endorsed annexation because too compact a population was deemed not good for the country. The people should spread out and remain uncrowded.<sup>7</sup>

All sides in the debates over the Texas question used the threat of dissolution of the Union at one time or another. People in both the North and the South decided that if their wishes did not prevail, it was due to the other section's control of Congress, and if the

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<sup>5</sup>Justin H. Smith, The Annexation of Texas (New York, 1941), 302.

<sup>6</sup>The Ohio Statesman, August 28, 1844.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., July 10, 1844.

other section controlled Congress, then the first section was under no obligation to follow measures passed by the opposition.

Other points of debates included the debts of Texas which the United States would assume if it admitted the area. Many were unwilling to pay the debts of an area they did not want in the first place. Those in favor of annexation argued that Texas would become prosperous once she was a part of the United States and would bring in money from production, markets, and taxes.

Undoubtedly annexation was one of the most important topics being discussed at the time, yet many people hoped that disputes over the subject would be kept at a minimum by sensible citizens. A pervasive fear among Ohioans in the spring of 1844 was that the Texas question would become political. The Ohio State Journal flatly stated that annexation never should be a party issue because everyone was against the move anyway. "There is a feeling abroad in the country, on this subject, that will impetuously rush over and obliterate party lines..."<sup>8</sup> Two other Ohio papers protested the political aspects of the question a month later.<sup>9</sup> All of these papers were known to be affiliated with the Whigs. The Democrats seemed to be silent on the subject, although, as will be seen, those who openly stated northern anti-annexationist views found themselves in trouble when the party did decide to take a stand. The Democrats who were silent during the first discussions found their position more clearly defined in a few months.

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<sup>8</sup>The Ohio State Journal, March 26, 1844.

<sup>9</sup>Tri-Weekly Cincinnati Gazette (Cincinnati, Ohio), April 23, 1844.  
Western Reserve Chronicle (Warren, Ohio), April 30, 1844.



In some areas of the country the Texas question stood far above the other issues in 1844 and 1845. In Ohio the question was often in the forefront, but it often disappeared from public debate all together. Whigs warned the public not to be distracted by the Texas question. Some spokesmen for the party were afraid that while the people were paying so much attention to Texas, they would be deceived on other issues.<sup>10</sup>

In general the Texas question was less frequently brought up in meetings and speeches than was the problem of money and banking. One campaign paper stated that "Texas is a minor question in comparison even with the single issue of a United States Bank."<sup>11</sup> And in Ohio the issue of a United States Bank was no longer a very big one by 1844. The Democrats attempted to play down the topic of annexation. The Ohio Statesman said about the issue, "In real importance, the Texas question sinks into insignificance when compared with the question of the occupation of Oregon Territory by the United States."<sup>12</sup> That judgment was a real attempt to divert the minds of the public because in Ohio, banking and money problems were consistently before the public.

At times when the Texas question was being debated, the topic reached even the common man. In allighter mood one Ohio paper told of a current way of proposing marriage by the gentleman saying to the lady, "Miss, are you in favor of annexation?"<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Western Reserve Chronicle, July 30, 1844. reprint from Junius Tracts, no. IX.

<sup>11</sup>Ohio Coon Catcher, August 24, 1844.

<sup>12</sup>Ohio Statesman, May 17, 1844.

<sup>13</sup>The Scioto Gazette (Chillicothe, Ohio), April 18, 1844.

The Texas question was at its height in Ohio in the spring of 1844. During the early summer not much was said on the subject. Debates resumed in the fall and winter when the national eye was again focused on Texas.



### CHAPTER THREE. THE TREATY OF ANNEXATION.

Although negotiations had begun with Texas for a treaty of annexation as far back as the summer of 1843, very few people were aware, even in early March of the following year, that the administration had actually been making such moves. If those in touch with the public did know about the treaty, they did not write or speak about it, possibly to keep the whole thing from becoming an issue which might upset the country.<sup>1</sup> But rumors finally started in Washington and reached Ohio some time in March. Even then people were hesitant to discuss the subject. One newspaper was not sure a treaty existed at all and thought the people in Washington were creating a "tempest in a teapot." As far as that paper was concerned, the annexationists were of little danger to the country.<sup>2</sup>

This paper was supported by the Cincinnati Gazette. After reading a pamphlet written by Robert Walker citing the reasons for annexation, the Gazette decided that the proposal constituted no real threat to the union.<sup>3</sup>

Whether President Tyler or Robert Walker was responsible for starting the annexation moves this time, it did not matter.<sup>4</sup> To Ohioans, when they did realize that the administration was serious, annexation became Tyler's scheme. One newspaper stated that its

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<sup>1</sup>Justin H. Smith, The Annexation of Texas, 180.

<sup>2</sup>The American Union (Steubenville, Ohio), March 28, 1844.

<sup>3</sup>The Cincinnati Gazette, March 21, 1844.

<sup>4</sup>James C. N. Paul, Rift in the Democracy (Philadelphia, 1951), 126.

opposition to the plan was because Tyler had been responsible for it.<sup>5</sup> The Scioto Gazette was very blunt about where to put the blame. The treaty, it said, was to satisfy the "petty ambition of a 'weak and imbecile' Executive...." "John Tyler, for conceiving it and pushing it as he has, stands alone, almost great - in infamy."<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the actual terms of the treaty would never have been known by the public if it had not been for Benjamin Tappan, senator from Ohio. Tappan revealed the contents of the treaty to the New York Evening Post and that paper printed the news on April 27. Tappan was severely reprimanded by the Senate, making it necessary, in turn, for him to apologize to his fellow members for his misdeeds.<sup>7</sup> To the issue of the annexation of Texas he was generally favorable, but had serious misgivings about the treaty, as did his colleague, William Allen.

1844 being a presidential election year, Ohioans looked to the two probable party candidates for their views on the treaty and annexation. Both Henry Clay and Martin Van Buren, however, were being very circumspect, most likely hoping that the touchy question of annexation would somehow fade away and thus require no statement on the subject. But demands upon both candidates became stronger until the men were eventually obliged to speak. Oddly enough, they spoke out on the same day. Henry Clay's Raleigh letter was short and to the point saying he was not in favor of annexation until it could be done with

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<sup>6</sup>The Scioto Gazette, June 13, 1844.

<sup>7</sup>John Harstine, "The Senatorial Career of Benjamin Tappan" (Columbus, 1939), unpublished M.A. thesis, 70-71.

honor and without war. Clay's opponents in Ohio found little to criticize in his letter. They felt nearly the same way.

Van Buren's Hammett letter was written in much the same tone as Clay's letter. The New Yorker said he thought that, although annexation was constitutional, the move should not be attempted without the consent of the people. Unlike Clay's ideas, Van Buren's thoughts aroused much controversy. Whigs and Democrats not supporting him accused him of wanting annexation. The Daily Atlas of Cincinnati definitely categorized Van Buren as being in favor of annexation. That paper reprinted articles from other papers showing that it was not alone in its interpretation.<sup>8</sup> Another argument attempted to show a great fear of Tyler on Van Buren's part, such a fear that Van Buren had to adopt some of the President's slogans and tactics in order to defeat him in the event that Tyler should stand in the way of Van Buren's presidential aspirations.<sup>9</sup>

The reactions to the two letters are interesting because, although both were moderate in tone, only one received much criticism.

Popular reaction to the news of the treaty was strong in certain parts of Ohio and indifferent in others. The majority of meetings and rallies held as a result of the news of the treaty protested annexation. One such series of meetings was held in March in Cincinnati. The people at the meetings passed several resolutions disapproving of the treaty and appointed a committee to write to the leading candidates

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<sup>9</sup>The Cleveland Herald, April 15, 1844.

<sup>10</sup>The Cincinnati Gazette, March 30, 1844.



and have them explain their views on the topic. The committee chosen were men openly opposed to slavery - Salmon P. Chase, Samuel Lewis, Gamaliel Bailey, Jr., Thomas Heaton, and Tobias Finkbine.<sup>10</sup>

In Cleveland the opponents of annexation held meetings with varied results. At one meeting a committee was formed to circulate a petition to be signed by all those against the treaty. The leaders of the group were E. Wade, T. Richmond, J. A. Briggs, and E. Hurlbut.<sup>11</sup> Another meeting held on the Western Reserve produced no united front on the treaty. In spite of the efforts of a committee of five chosen by the group to draft resolutions, no decision could be reached on any anti-annexation resolutions.<sup>12</sup>

Other Ohio areas had shown some reaction to the news of the treaty. Occasionally politics entered the picture, but many gatherings were non-partisan. In general, Ohio was opposed to the move, and as the resolutions kept appearing from many areas, Ohioans hoped more than ever that the issue would not become political.<sup>13</sup>

A few meetings were held to applaud the treaty. One such conducted on April 6 at the College Hall in Cincinnati passed resolutions approving annexation. Leaders of the group included Jonah Martin, L. C. Rives, William Hatch, William Burke, S. Hazen, and Jedidiah Banks. Reporting and commenting on the meeting, the Cincinnati Gazette noted that those who favor annexation "are not

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<sup>10</sup>The Cincinnati Gazette, March 30, 1844.

<sup>11</sup>The Cleveland Herald, April 10, 1844.

<sup>12</sup>Western Reserve Chronicle, May 7, 1844.

<sup>13</sup>The Cincinnati Gazette, April 27, 1844.

of Ohio grit."<sup>14</sup>

In spite of the clamor to keep the acceptance of the treaty from becoming a political issue, politics did enter the picture. The Whigs opposed the treaty more wholeheartedly than did the Democrats. One Whig paper in Ohio, however, wanted acceptance of the treaty. In March the Toledo Blade said that annexation would be a good move for both the great races of our country.<sup>15</sup> Later the Blade backed down quite a bit. By May the paper was for postponing the move, saying that someday the United States could have Texas and Canada, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, and have all of them peacefully.<sup>16</sup> After another two months elapsed the Blade's stand on Texas was anything but equivocal. Annexation was a Tyler plot which would lead to war and a move like this would lead to war with Mexico.<sup>17</sup> The Blade's change is a good example of an about-face over the treaty itself, although others changed their minds at different points during the discussion of the Texas question.

Most of the debates and discussions on the treaty were overtly non-partisan, yet some of what was said had political overtones. Anti-Texas meetings were more heavily attended by Whigs and Liberty Party men. Whig papers were the strongest in opposing the move; but Democrats did present much opposition to the Whigs because in Ohio the general feeling was that adding Texas to the Union was not advisable at the time. In addition to considering it a measure for the

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<sup>15</sup>Toledo Blade (Toledo, Ohio), March 1, 1844.

<sup>16</sup>Toledo Blade, May 10, 1844.

<sup>17</sup>Toledo Blade, July 7, 1844.



personal gain of John Tyler, Ohioans were not ready to accept any consequences that the move might bring.

When the final vote on the treaty was taken on June 8, many Ohioans were well-pleased with their senators, both Allen and Tappan, who had followed the directions of the General Assembly and had voted against the document. The vote tallied thirty-five senators opposed to the treaty and sixteen for. To many the vote showed the unity of the Whigs all but one of whom voted negatively, but to others the vote was evidence of a rising sectional feeling in the United States.<sup>18</sup>

In the weeks following the rejection of the treaty, many people assumed the issue was dead. Little did they realize that the debate on Texas had just begun. In late June of 1844, though, few people had much to say.

Some could foresee that the Texas question had not really been decided and warned that the proponents of annexation would not give up even though the treaty had been rejected. The Cincinnati Gazette noted that South Carolina had threatened to dissolve the Union rather than abandon Texas. The paper went on to urge that the annexation should not become a party issue.<sup>19</sup> But a party issue it did become. The Texas question was not so important in Ohio as in many other states, yet the issue had a great significance for the sectional controversy to come.

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<sup>18</sup>Stanley Siegel, A Political History of the Texas Republic (Austin, 1956), 232. The official vote is in Senate Journal, 28 Congress, 1 session, 438 ff.

<sup>19</sup>The Cincinnati Gazette, June 15, 1844.

#### CHAPTER FOUR. THE TEXAS QUESTION IN THE ELECTION - THE DEMOCRATS.

The connection between the Democrats in the election of 1844 and the issue of Texas annexation is difficult to discern. Most Democrats in order to maintain party harmony seemed to accept the issue forced upon them by the national organization. Ohio Democrats generally tried to avoid discussing Texas whenever possible, or, if made to talk about it, they tried to avoid the slavery argument.

When the Ohio Democrats had held their state nominating convention in January, 1844, they assumed that Martin Van Buren would be the presidential candidate in the fall, especially since they believed that he had been cheated out of the presidency in 1840 by the tricky Whigs. Early in the year John C. Calhoun definitely considered himself in the running for the nomination; however, northern Democrats did not like his thoughts on slavery and states' rights. Lewis Cass also had some supporters in Ohio, among them David T. Disney from Cincinnati, Wilson Shannon, and Thomas Hamer, who were all influential, but not enough so to stop the Van Buren supporters.

Texas had not been an issue at the Columbus meeting in January. The issues most discussed were money, the bank, and the tariff. A positive stand was taken on the annexation of Oregon.<sup>1</sup> The Democrats attempted to express great harmony at the convention, and if they disagreed on many things, they did not admit it. An editorial in the Ohio Statesman said that "...we have been so perfectly overwhelmed with glorious feelings at the harmony and cheering enthusiasm that had prevailed at the Convention..." The editors were impressed by the "...unanimous, harmonious, and determined spirit that carried

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<sup>1</sup>The Ohio Statesman, January 11, 1844.

forward the whole mass collected together. All the little personal or political preferences and differences were merged, buried, overwhelmed in the enthusiasm of the occasion."<sup>2</sup>

Since Samuel Medary, the editor of the Statesman, was head of the Ohio delegation to the national convention, he was very definitely trying to promote party unity. Medary had toured the East and had become a strong supporter of Van Buren. Medary's strength was so great that the Cass followers scarcely tried to fight back at the Ohio convention.<sup>3</sup> Men like Disney, Shannon and Hamer, all good Democrats, were willing to give in rather than break up the party.

Throughout the spring of 1844 Ohio Democrats waited for Van Buren to express his views on the Texas question. When he finally did speak out, in his famous Hammett letter, he was applauded by most of his Ohio supporters.

Early in May word reached Ohio that there was a movement afoot, led mainly by southern Democrats, to dump Van Buren. Eleven prominent Ohio party members wrote a letter saying they intended to remain loyal to the New Yorker.<sup>4</sup> Actually, led by Medary, the Ohio delegation was united at the national convention, but the convention as a whole was known for anything but party unity.

Sectional feeling was so very strong as to prevent the Democrats from choosing a candidate upon whom they could all agree. The two-thirds rule had been successfully pushed by the anti-Van Buren men.

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<sup>2</sup>Ohio Statesman, January 9, 1844.

<sup>3</sup>James C. N. Paul, Rift in the Democracy, 76.

<sup>4</sup>Weekly Ohio State Journal, August 14, 1844. The Democrats who signed the letter were William Allen, Benjamin Tappan, John B. Weller, J. Brinkerhoff, Every D. Potter, H. St. John, William McCauslen, Joseph Morris, James Mathews, E. Dean, and A. Duncan.



Although the annexation of Texas was not debated, the candidates' stand on Texas and slavery was apparently the major deciding factor in the nomination. When it became evident that Martin Van Buren could not be nominated, the Ohio delegation decided to back Silas Wright, a New Yorker with almost the same views as those of Van Buren. Wright, however, was not interested in being the nominee. The next choice of the convention was James K. Polk of Tennessee, and in spite of the fact that the Ohio Democrats were not enthusiastic about his candidacy, they did support him.<sup>5</sup>

The Ohio Democrats were unusual with so much unity in their delegation and loyalty to their candidate. Even a Whig campaign paper noticed the loyalty.<sup>6</sup> Two weeks after the convention was over the paper commented on the faithfulness of the Ohioans to Van Buren.<sup>7</sup>

The Whig reaction to the Democratic nomination was as expected. Responsible Democrats were called on not to let the nomination stand, especially since the Texas issue had been the "all-engrossing consideration" in the choice.<sup>8</sup> The Weekly Ohio State Journal stated that Polk's nomination was

like a funeral knell. Despair and dismay have taken hold of them Democrats and is written upon every lineament of their woe-begone visages. The meeting in this city on Monday last, under the circumstances, was a most signal failure. The applause was all force-work, and only those who were in the dark, with a few exceptions, even attempted to raise a cheer.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Edgar Allen Holt, "Party Politics in Ohio," 89-90.

<sup>6</sup>That Same Old Coon (Dayton, Ohio), May 25, 1844.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., June 8, 1844.

<sup>8</sup>The Daily Atlas, June 8, 1844.

<sup>9</sup>Weekly Ohio State Journal, June 12, 1844.

Nationally, great dissension existed among the Democrats, and some of the dissension affected Ohio. But if Ohio Democrats were divided on other issues, on the Texas question they remained outwardly loyal to Polk. The activities of Calhoun and the southern Democrats were generally overlooked by the party members in Ohio. The discord Ohio Democrats were aware of was that in New York state. There the Texas issue was debated loudly and openly. There the anti-slavery forces were exceptionally strong.<sup>10</sup>

The opposition was quick to accuse the Ohio Democrats of suffering the same problems as their New York counterparts. But the Ohioans were aware of having troubles on the money and banking issues, not on the Texas question. Nevertheless, the Democratic leaders were accused of having "been compelled to take the Whig ground on some of the leading questions of the day."<sup>11</sup> The Cleveland Herald really hit at the Democrats on annexation:

This question is matter of continued dissension among the Loco Foco ranks. Some of them are not willing to swallow a measure which they know is against the interests of the nation, while others, who stick at nothing so it is a party measure, are not only willing to uphold the measure, but insist upon all members of the party doing likewise...We really congratulate the Loco party on the harmony apparent in their ranks.<sup>12</sup>

Some Democrats found it easy to accept the issue as long as it did not interfere with other issues like the tariff, internal improvements,

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<sup>10</sup> Justin H. Smith, The Annexation of Texas, 310-312.

<sup>11</sup> Weekly Ohio State Journal, May 15, 1844.

<sup>12</sup> The Cleveland Herald, August 1, 1844.



or the independent treasury.<sup>13</sup> The opposite reaction to acceptance was to urge forgetting the whole thing.<sup>14</sup> Most common, however, was for Democrats to say nothing. This course of action frustrated their opponents, especially in the Western Reserve where annexation was very unpopular. The Western Reserve Chronicle often tried to goad the Democrats into speaking. In an article reprinted from the Ohio Star the editors of the Star noted that the Democrats were shrinking from discussing the Texas question. The subject was mentioned at only two meetings the editors knew of and David Tod seemed to be neatly avoiding the topic. People should face up to the fact, the article stated, that if they vote Democratic, they vote for annexation.<sup>15</sup>

The Chronicle itself asked, "Why is it that the Democrat is silent on the subject of the annexation of Texas to the union?" The paper accused the party press and David Tod of being afraid to speak on the issue in the North. "Here, then, is the reason why the party press, and party leaders, maintain such a marked silence on the subject; they know the project is infamous, and should be acouted by every honest man, but they dare not separate from their party ties and oppose it."<sup>16</sup>

In many cases the Chronicle was right. One such case was that of a nearby newspaper, the Cleveland Plain Dealer. The problems the Plain Dealer had in adhering to the Democratic platform were many and required that paper to do a complete reversal on its Texas stand. In March 1844 the Plain Dealer reported rumors of the completion

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<sup>13</sup> Holt, "Party Politics in Ohio," 83. Citing letter from Parry to William Allen, May 16, 1844, Allen MSS. IV.

<sup>14</sup> The American Union, May 16, 1844.

<sup>15</sup> Western Reserve Chronicle, July 9, 1844.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

of a treaty with Texas. Negotiations were, in the opinion of the editors, too hasty. The treaty would be a "usurpation unparalleled in the history of free Government" and might lead to dissolution.<sup>17</sup> The Plain Dealer, in the spring of 1844, was very concerned about the extension of slavery and saw the Texas controversy primarily as a sectional battle.

A month later the Plain Dealer enunciated its main objections to annexation. The first, and most important, was that annexation would extend slavery. People should not use expansionist arguments, it said, because then those like the Plain Dealer who favored adding Oregon would be placed in an uncomfortable position concerning Texas. Another objection was to the question of reannexation. It was true that the United States had once claimed part of Texas in the Louisiana Territory, but those claims had been nullified when the government recognized the independence of Texas. Therefore, legally, the United States had no claims to this area.<sup>18</sup>

After the national convention the Plain Dealer changed its stand radically in order to support Polk and his stand on annexation. Now different arguments were used. The paper pointed out that Britain was interested in Texas too and that the United States should act quickly if it wanted to act first. The paper said, in addition, that it liked the argument offered by the late minister to Mexico that Texas would start producing cotton. Her markets would force prices

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<sup>17</sup>

The Plain Dealer (Cleveland, Ohio), March 27, 1844.

<sup>18</sup>

Ibid., April 17, 1844.

<sup>19</sup>

Ibid., July 24, 1844.

down in other areas, and thus, indirectly, deal a mortal blow to slavery.<sup>19</sup>

By September the Plain Dealer was wholeheartedly supporting annexation. It expressed admiration for George Bancroft, Democratic candidate for governor of Massachusetts and a strong annexationist, and even called him "purely American." In the same article the paper emphatically stated its position. "We sincerely believe that the admission of Texas, and Texas as a slave territory, will hasten the period for the final and peaceful extinction of slavery in the American Confederacy."<sup>20</sup>

During the summer of 1844 Democrats held many meetings throughout the state in order to stir up enthusiasm for their candidate in the coming election. At many of these meetings the principal speaker did not even mention Texas. Often when the group passed resolutions, annexation was ignored. Occasionally the Texas question was brought out in the open before the Democrats, but almost always, discussion of other issues took precedence over the Texas question.

Several gatherings held in central Ohio illustrate the inconsistencies of the Democrats on the importance of Texas. Lewis Cass, on a speaking tour of the state, attended a Democratic rally in Delaware late in September. He spoke at the meeting, his main topic being Clay's inconsistencies and the problems Great Britain could cause the United States.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., July 24, 1844.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., September 18, 1844.

<sup>21</sup> Ohio Coon Catcher, September 21, 1844.



A meeting in Columbus shows the opposite Democratic stand on Texas. At an August 21 gathering Dr. Edson Olds of Circleville was the speaker. He was not in party favor; therefore, not many people attended the event. However, Dr. Olds' speech is interesting. It was clearly against annexation and admittedly because of the slavery issue.<sup>22</sup>

In northern Ohio a Democratic convention was held on June 25. Among the speakers were Tod, Wentworth, and Disney, but none of them spoke about Texas; instead they discussed banking and the Duncan bill, a proposal to hold presidential elections on the same day throughout the country.<sup>23</sup> At a Steubenville meeting in July the Democrats passed eleven resolutions, but not one mentioned the subjects of annexation or Texas.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, not all Democratic speakers and audiences were hostile or indifferent to the topic of annexation. Thomas Hamer, speaking at a rally in Columbus at the Market House said that he, like Polk, was for the move if it could be done with honor, without war, with the consent of the people, and on just and fair terms.<sup>25</sup> Also in the capital city the Young Men's State Central Committee took a strong stand for annexation on the eve of the national election.<sup>26</sup>

Some Ohio Democrats found they could accept annexation more easily

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<sup>22</sup> Ohio State Journal, August 22, 1844.

<sup>23</sup> Cleveland Herald, July 6, 1844.

<sup>24</sup> The American Union, July 11, 1844.

<sup>25</sup> Ohio Statesman, September 18, 1844.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., October 21, 1844.



if it were done somewhat as Thomas Benton had proposed; that is, dividing the area into both free and slave states. At a Democratic meeting on the Western Reserve on August 26, John Brough was the main speaker. He was for annexation if it could be done as Benton suggested, but in telling the audience this, he did not say that Benton's proposal had already been rejected.<sup>27</sup> Brough had taken the same position earlier when he and another Democrat were debating Moses Corwin and Alfred Kelley in West Jefferson. During the debate another Democrat had stated<sup>28</sup> his personal opposition to annexation while declining to speak for his party.

The governor of Ohio from April to December 1844 was a Democrat who said nothing about Texas. Thomas W. Bartley had been a Van Buren supporter and was strongly against the bank. He had lost the nomination for governor in 1844 to David Tod. Furthermore, his father was running for governor as the Whig candidate. With all these factors against him, Thomas Bartley decided to stay out of the campaign.

One very vocal Democrat in the campaign was Thomas Hamer. Hamer was not much in favor with the regular party Democrats in Ohio. He had earlier fought bitterly with Medary on some of the bank issues and in the first months of 1844 he had been a strong supporter of Cass. Hamer, however, remained loyal to the party on the Texas question.

In the eastern part of the state Edwin M. Stanton, a young man then, had much trouble reconciling himself with the Democratic stand on Texas. "Stanton wanted to hold back the slavery issue as much as

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<sup>27</sup>Western Reserve Chronicle, September 3, 1844.

<sup>28</sup>Ohio State Journal, June 18, 1844.

possible. Issues of banking and currency remained paramount in Ohio politics, where most Democrats chose to treat the questions of slavery and its extension as dangerous and distracting measures."<sup>29</sup> Stanton had toyed with the idea of working with the Liberty Party, but decided his best interest was to remain with the Democrats. He campaigned vigorously for Polk, and in November the Democrats carried Steubenville and Jefferson County.

To David Tod, the Democratic nominee for governor, the Texas question was of little consequence. The main problems confronting Ohioans, in his opinion, were those of banking and the currency. Tod's speeches always dwelled on these subjects; only rarely did he even refer to annexation. On July 23 Tod did speak about the topic. In a speech in Chillicothe Tod said he considered annexation a matter more of "expediency than principle, on which Democrats might differ."<sup>30</sup> Annexation was constitutional as far as he knew and should be accomplished some time when it would not compromise the honor of the United States. Tod apparently did not care what was done about Texas, yet he adhered to the party line on the question of annexation.

When the results of both the state and national elections became final, the Democrats found themselves in an unpleasant situation. They had not carried Ohio for Polk and, indeed, Whigs controlled the executive and legislative branches of the state government. Publicly

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<sup>29</sup>Benjamin P. Thomas and Harold M. Hyman, Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln's Secretary of War (New York, 1962), 31.

<sup>30</sup>Tri-Weekly Cincinnati Gazette (Cincinnati, Ohio), August 3, 1844.

<sup>31</sup>Ohio Statesman, November 13, 1844.

the Democrats urged party members to gather their forces for the next election.<sup>31</sup> Annexation, to them, was a dead issue in that it would probably be accomplished by the Polk administration.

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<sup>31</sup>Ohio Statesman, November 13, 1844.

## CHAPTER FIVE. THE TEXAS QUESTION IN THE ELECTION - THE WHIGS.

During the election of 1844 the Ohio Whigs faced fewer problems than did the Democrats. The Whigs were more certain of their positions regarding state issues. The Whigs were much more united on the Texas question than were their opponents because of the relative simplicity of being completely opposed to a measure as compared with the different degrees and reasons for advocating a move like annexation.

The Whigs had had no trouble selecting a presidential candidate. In 1842 and 1843 Henry Clay had worked hard to ensure his own nomination, and when the convention was held in 1844, Clay had no serious opposition. His biggest problem was in maintaining harmony within the ranks of a party which was, like the Democrats, split along regional lines on any national issue. And in this year when a question involving slavery was to be discussed, sectionalism was particularly strong.

Henry Clay was a shrewd politician. Forced to make some statement about the Texas question, Clay wrote his Raleigh letter at the same time that Van Buren's Hammett letter appeared. Few Whigs were antagonized by Clay's advocating delay on annexation. The big problem Clay could not overcome, the problem that cost him many votes, was his unwillingness to leave well enough alone. As the campaign progressed into the summer, the nominee felt obliged to speak again in order to win more votes in the South. The Alabama letters said that he had no personal objections to annexation. The letters proved a disaster among northerners and antislavery people, and even alienated the nominee's cousin, Cassius M. Clay.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Clement Eaton, Henry Clay and the Art of American Politics (Boston, 1957), 175-176.



The Whigs had more difficulty selecting a candidate to run for governor of Ohio. The early favorite among Ohio Whigs was David Spangler, but when he was offered the nomination at the state convention, he declined. Next the convention considered David Fisher but also with negative results. Finally Mordecai Bartley was chosen to run for governor. Bartley followed party lines on the Texas question, and although he did not mention the topic often, he was opposed to annexation.

Just as the Whigs were doing to them, the Democrats tried to show the public how the issue of annexation was splitting their opposition into two camps. The Democrats, too, tried to imply that a split on the national level meant a split on the state level. The Ohio Coon Catcher, Democratic campaign paper from Columbus, was very forthright in pointing out that the northern and southern Whigs did not agree on the Texas question.<sup>2</sup> Another Columbus paper called attention to the difference between northern and southern Whigs, saying that the Texas issue would split them into two camps. Then the Democrats could act as mediators for the new parties.<sup>3</sup> But if the Democrats expected to see any dissension among Ohio Whigs on the Texas question, they were to be disappointed. The Ohio Whigs remained firm and united against the annexation of Texas.

Whigs were especially numerous on the Western Reserve. There little doubt existed as to the advisability of leaving Texas alone.

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<sup>2</sup>Ohio Coon Catcher, August 24, 1844.

<sup>3</sup>Ohio Statesman, March 22, 1844.

One observation expressed the sentiments of most Whigs on the Western Reserve when it approved the manly stand taken by the party against Texas and for the "union as it is."<sup>4</sup> Another observer stated the popular reason for opposing annexation: "Though the North has no right to interfere with slavery as it now exists in the Southern portion of the Union, it has a right to vote and protest against the admission of additional slave states and territories."<sup>5</sup> In that area of the state the extension of slavery and the annexation of Texas were discussed together very openly.

The issues of slavery and Texas were used to advantage by the Whigs, when, in September, Robert Walker's circular was distributed throughout Ohio. The pamphlet was issued through the Democratic Association at Washington originally to be used in Georgia in order to influence the people in that state to vote Democratic. Headlined "THE SOUTH IN DANGER! READ BEFORE YOU VOTE," it was intended to show the antislavery leanings of northern Whigs and their aversion to annexation. The Whigs obtained copies of the circular and distributed them in Ohio just before the state election and that which turned people from the Whigs in Georgia influenced them to vote for the Whigs in Ohio.<sup>6</sup> The quantitative influence of the circular is difficult to calculate. The significance lies more in the use of the slavery

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<sup>4</sup>Western Reserve Chronicle, June 4, 1844.

<sup>5</sup>The Cleveland Herald, June 17, 1844.

<sup>6</sup>Charles Sellers, James K. Polk; Continentalist (Princeton, 1966), 150-151.

argument at a time when many were trying to quell a potentially explosive topic.

The Clay forces began to rally on the Texas question before their leader was even nominated. On March 30 the Warren Central Clay Club met to protest annexation because, it was claimed, the Union was big enough already and nobody had the power to add a foreign state. Also, they said, the move would increase slavery and bring war with Mexico.<sup>7</sup> The secretaries of the club, Leicester King, Jr., J. E. Glover, and Charles R. Hunt, strongly backed the stand taken by the club.

Annexation was a topic at most of the Whig rallies and meetings throughout the summer. The Whigs had an advantage over the Democrats who had taken unpopular or confusing stands on the money issues and, as a result, the Whig arguments were more popular in many ways. A common theme used by them about Texas was that the issue had been forced on the Democrats who did not like it much, but had to accept it. Unfortunately, for the Democrats, that argument seemed to be true.

In 1844 the Whigs conducted a fairly sober campaign. There was none of the ballyhoo of the previous presidential election which had put William Henry Harrison in the White House. Of course, the Whigs could not totally abandon the techniques that had worked so well and therefore they did conduct some loud rallies, parades, etc. One parade had banners for every topic, the one on annexation being "The Union before Texas."<sup>8</sup> At another Whig meeting banners saying,

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<sup>7</sup>Western Reserve Chronicle, April 2, 1844.

<sup>8</sup>The Scioto Gazette, August 8, 1844.



"Annexation - but not Texas" were carried by the "patriotic ladies."<sup>9</sup> That meeting, held at Newton Falls on August 15, was highlighted by Joshua Giddings' attack on the Liberty Party.

A very popular speaker in Ohio was Thomas Ewing who spoke in every county in the state extolling the Whig point of view on any and every topic. One of his favorite arguments concerning the Texas question was, again, that the issue had been forced on the Democrats by the southern leaders of the national party.<sup>10</sup> Ewing was in touch with Clay at various times during the campaign and some people think he advised Clay to keep his Texas stand simple by not writing what were to be the Alabama letters.<sup>11</sup>

Shortly before the elections the Whig State Central Committee wrote a public letter urging the rejection of Polk on the basis of his stand on annexation. The letter portrayed Polk as irresponsible while Clay was presented as a highly moral and wisely cautious candidate. Whigs were told by the committee not to let up on the Texas question until the election was secure.<sup>12</sup>

In Ohio the election was secure for the Whigs, but their victory in that state meant little in the face of a national victory for the Democrats and Polk. Mordecai Bartley, the Whig candidate, became

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<sup>9</sup> Western Reserve Chronicle, August 20, 1844.

<sup>10</sup> The Daily Atlas, July 13, 1844.

<sup>11</sup> Paul I. Miller, "Thomas Ewing, Last of the Whigs" (Columbus, 1933), unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 195.

<sup>12</sup> Ohio State Journal, October 17, 1844. Signing the letter were J. Ridgeway, R. Neil, J. A. Lazell, F. Stewart, W. Armstrong, J. L. Bates, L. Heyl, C. H. Wing, C. F. Schenck, and W. Dennison, Jr.



governor of Ohio. His inaugural address on December 3 mentioned Texas briefly to urge the Ohio legislature to issue a "clear and direct note of remonstrance" against annexation.<sup>13</sup>

On the Western Reserve Whigs continued to speak against annexation. Joshua Giddings, a prerepresentative to Congress, spoke whenever he could. Benjamin Wade was temporarily removed from public office, but he campaigned for Clay in the election. Other Whigs continued to work against the influence of the Democrats and the Liberty Party.

The results of the election marked the end to much of the overt opposition to annexation. Many Whigs, as will be seen, decided that annexation was now to be accepted with Polk as President. One Whig newspaper, however, constantly appealed to its readers in November and December 1844 not to abandon party principles and not to give in so easily. Since it was rather obvious that the opponents of annexation could place no hope in the President, they had to turn to the Senate. "We must be American in spirit and in fact, rallying around our own glorious flag, our national institutions, our home industry, our true interests, and honor, and resolutely discarding English, French, and Texas influence, act as becomes an independent people."<sup>14</sup> Later The Daily Atlas appealed to Whig unity in urging the people to stop worrying about the next election and to work immediately for the Whig principles.<sup>15</sup> By January the Atlas changed its plea to include all North-

erners holding

<sup>13</sup>The Daily Atlas, December 5, 1844.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., November 15, 1844.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., November 23, 1844.

erners holding the same views. The editors of the paper, in their desperation, boldly accused the government of adding territory to "fortify the institution of slavery and spread its influence."<sup>16</sup>

Actually the Ohio Whigs fared very well in the election and could look forward to manipulating activities within the state. But all they could do regarding the ultimate annexation of Texas was to send resolutions to Congress protesting the move.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., January 11, 1845.

## CHAPTER SIX. THE TEXAS QUESTION IN THE ELECTION - THE LIBERTY PARTY

The influence of the Liberty Party on the Texas question in the 1844 election was neither unexpected nor surprising. As that party was formed to oppose the spread of slavery, it definitely did not advocate adding Texas to the United States. But in Ohio and other states where anti-Texas sentiment was strong, the Liberty Party could not muster enough votes to assure its continued existence. The main result of the Liberty Party was to split the anti-Texas votes in certain areas and to allow the Democrats to be victorious. Although the party included some very talented men in Ohio, the organization itself was weak. One Liberty man seldom knew what another was doing or saying.

James Gillespie Birney was the presidential candidate selected in 1844, as in 1840, by the party. Birney visited Ohio frequently and some of his relatives lived in this state. The candidate, however, spent most of his time in Michigan and New York. Birney disapproved of annexation. It is significant that, in a letter explaining his views on the subject, he left the slavery argument until last, and then mentioned it without much comment. His chief arguments were that annexation was unconstitutional and the United States was large enough already. He even suggested that Texas be reunited with Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

Much of the strength of the Liberty Party was in Cincinnati and southwestern Ohio. Birney's son, William, wrote him occasionally

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<sup>1</sup> Dwight L. Dumond, ed., Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857, II (New York, 1938), 787-789. letter from Birney to William E. Austin, David Shields, and James Clarke, February 23, 1844.

appraising him of the situation there. In March 1844 William wrote to his father, "The Texas excitement has been tremendous in this city," and that at Texas meetings the Liberty supporters came out best.<sup>2</sup> William was always very optimistic when he wrote to his father.

The scene in Cincinnati was not exactly tranquil for the Liberty men. A certain basic disagreement existed among the antislavery men as to whether they could be most effective as a separate political unit or simply as a pressure group to exert influence on the already existing parties. The publisher of the Philanthropist, Gamaliel Bailey, Jr., disagreed with Birney's political approach. The Birneys were very sensitive to Bailey's condemnation and were not hesitant to assume an unfriendly stance toward Bailey and also toward Salmon P. Chase and Samuel Lewis.<sup>3</sup> William Birney was especially bothered by the disagreement with these men and after the election accused Bailey of open hostility toward the Liberty nominee.<sup>4</sup>

In all cases the Liberty men sought peaceful solutions to the Texas question. They had earlier tried to reach an agreement with England when Lewis Tappan was sent there to see if he could secure a loan for Texas with the idea in mind that Texas would be more likely to remain independent if she had some assurance of economic stability.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 803. letter from William to James G. Birney, March 28, 1844.

<sup>3</sup> Betty Fladeland, James Gillespie Birney: Slaveholder to Abolitionist (Ithaca, 1955), 219-220.

<sup>4</sup> Dumond, Birney Letters. 893. letter from William to James G. Birney December 28, 1844.

<sup>5</sup> Henry H. Simms, Emotion at High Tide (Baltimore, 1960), 190.



Liberty men also tried to secure help from the antislavery people in England. But those and other attempts in England failed because that country did not wish to become involved in what she considered the internal affairs of another country.

The threat of dissolution of the Union was not an acceptable solution to the Liberty Party. The party linked the idea of dissolution to the Southerners, and, therefore, wanted nothing to do with it.

The Liberty Party, as is the case with most third parties, lacked organization, and this defect was very noticeable in Ohio as elsewhere. Much confusion existed as to the exact nature of Birney's views on Texas. Birney received several letters like the one from Richard H. Brackin of Hartford, Ohio. Brackin had recently witnessed a debate between Joshua Giddings and Judge King in which Giddings asked King what Birney's views were and King could not respond. This all looked bad for the Liberty Party, wrote Brackin, and if the situation repeated itself, many voters would turn to Clay to escape the confusion.<sup>6</sup>

Birney, himself, was the subject of many attacks. Because of his past, he was still accused of being a slaveholder. He was also accused of being a Romanist because his third son, Dion, had left home to attend St. Xavier college in Cincinnati.<sup>7</sup>

But what hurt Birney the most were his unwise associations with

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<sup>6</sup>Dumond, Birney Letters, 828. letter from Richard H. Brackin to Birney, July 31, 1844.

<sup>7</sup>Fladeland, Birney, 238.

the Democrats. Knowing the chances to be extremely narrow of his ever being elected president, Birney allowed himself to be nominated by the Democrats for a seat in the Michigan state legislature. Both parties used this turn of events to proclaim a lack of conviction by Birney and his party. The real blow to the Liberty Party, however, came from a forged letter, the so-called Garland letter. Supposedly signed by Birney, it proclaimed the candidate's devotion to the Democratic party and said that he was and always had been a Democrat. It was circulated in the states where the Liberty Party was strongest, and because Birney was known to favor Polk to Clay, many people believed the letter.

The state convention of the Liberty Party was held in Columbus on February 7. Leicester King was nominated for governor. The real campaign, though, did not begin until June, with most of the efforts of the party being concentrated in southwestern Ohio and on the Western Reserve. King was helped in the campaign by W. H. Brisbane, Milton Sutliff, Thomas Morris, William Birney, and others,<sup>8</sup> but their help was not enough. Thomas Morris was still influential in Ohio, even though he lived only until December, 1844. One month before he died he wrote and addressed a memorial to the Ohio General Assembly protesting the addition of Texas to the Union.<sup>9</sup>

The relationship of the Liberty Party to the other parties in Ohio centered mainly around the issue of the annexation of Texas. Both major parties tried to win the votes of the Liberty men. Strangely

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<sup>8</sup>Theodore Clarke Smith, The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest (New York, 1897), 73.

<sup>9</sup>B. F. Morris, The Life of Thomas Morris, 340.

enough, the Liberty men were more receptive to the Democrats in spite of the fact that the Democrats advocated annexation. The chief consideration of the Liberty men was that Clay owned slaves. The Liberty Party probably took more votes from the Whigs since the Whigs were against annexation and the extension of slavery and could ignore Clay's personal connection with slavery on this issue.

Both sides indulged in appeals to the third party. In Cincinnati the Liberty men were urged to vote for Clay because Clay was less decidedly for annexation.<sup>10</sup> Often Whigs accused the Democrats and Liberty men of collaboration, but whether the accusation changed any minds or not is doubtful.

When the votes were counted in the November election, the Liberty Party's best showing was in northeastern Ohio, but even so, the votes for that party were not numerous. The combined vote from Ashtabula, Lake and Cuyahoga counties was less than 1,000. Trumbull County had the most Liberty votes - 738. In Hamilton County the Liberty vote was only 298. In the Ohio presidential vote, the Democrats finally received 149, 127; the Whigs, 155, 091; the Liberty Party, 8,082.<sup>11</sup>

After the election the Liberty men suffered many acrimonious judgments made by those who did not like the results. Liberal people were repelled by the Liberty intolerance for any view but their own. Practical people were angry at the Liberty loyalty to Birney when, by

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<sup>10</sup>Cincinnati Gazette, October 24, 1844.

<sup>11</sup>W. Dean Burnham, Presidential Ballots 1836-1892 (Baltimore, 1955), 676-696.



voting for someone else, they might really have influenced the annexation of Texas.<sup>12</sup> The Cincinnati Gazette bitterly reviewed the election, saying that if the Liberty Party had supported Clay, annexation would at least have been postponed, but the Liberty Party was so opposed to one man that they let their dislike be stronger than the achievement of stopping the spread of slavery.<sup>13</sup>

Birney's own assessment was as follows:

It was Mr. Clay's indecision about the admission of Texas that defeated him. His letters, even if they were not so intended, made many of his friends believe that he was undecided. From his supposed waverings on the subject he lost the votes of many that were opposed to the annexation of Texas as well as those who were in favor of it. That in either event Texas would have been in the Union now appears very certain to me, as I believe it does to many others, though a decided party man might express himself differently.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Smith, The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest, 80.

<sup>13</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, March 13, 1845.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest, 84. letter to the New York Tribune, quoted in the National Era, March 11, 1852.



## CHAPTER SEVEN. THE JOINT RESOLUTION.

The failure of the treaty of annexation to pass the Senate in June 1844 did not close the door on annexation. Congress could resort to another measure, the joint resolution, which was to be used with success in the months following the election. The election of Polk served to swing some support in favor of annexation because many people considered the victory by the Democrats a mandate for taking Texas. Debates on the joint resolution were mainly along party lines, and those Ohioans who did not follow party stands were thought of, not as forecasters of the future, but as mere renegades from the organization.

Debates on annexation resumed in December 1844 when it became evident that those wanting Texas were making renewed attempts to secure the area for the United States. As soon as it became aware of the joint resolutions in Congress, the Ohio General Assembly became the scene of its own debates, speeches, and resolutions. Ohio proved loyal to its northern and Whig majorities by sending resolutions to Congress voicing disapproval of the resolution debated there.

In the Ohio House of Representatives the resolution against annexation was introduced by Benjamin S. Cowan on December 9. The resolution protested annexation on the grounds that (1) it was unconstitutional, (2) it would involve the United States in a needless war with Mexico, (3) it would make the United States liable for the debts of Texas, (4) it would make everyone responsible for the extension of slavery, and (5) it would upset the balance in favor of the slave states.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Ohio, XLIII  
(Columbus, Ohio), 40.

This resolution was passed only after much bickering. Many representatives tried to offer their own resolutions, but these proposals were either rejected or tabled. One resolution representing the other side of the question was introduced by Jacob Flinn of Hamilton County. It approved of annexation and said that the question of slavery ought not to affect the issue. Flinn's motion, like many others, was indefinitely postponed.<sup>2</sup>

The Senate of Ohio also had to contend with various controversial resolutions. One which caused much furor was the Perkins resolution which was disposed of quite easily. It stated that if Congress annexed Texas, that body was doing something illegal, and Ohioans would have no obligation to follow it in uniting with Texas. The resolution further protested annexation and even slavery itself.<sup>3</sup> The Ohio Senate turned down the resolution on December 9, but found itself the focus of much attention on that particular measure.

The actual resolution protesting annexation was passed later during the month by a vote of 19-15.<sup>4</sup> Congressmen from Ohio read the resolution before the United States Senate and House of Representatives in January.

In Columbus the action of the Ohio Senate aroused dissatisfaction in some of the press. Throughout December the Ohio Statesman accused

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>3</sup>Journal of the Senate of the State of Ohio, XLIII (Columbus, Ohio), 33.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 103. Those voting "yea" were Messrs. Anderson, Barrere, Coddington, Cox, Crouse, Eckley, Gabriel, Hastings, Kelley, Kelley, Osborne, O'Ferrall, O'Neal, Perkins, Powell, Quinby, Van Vorhes, Wetmore, and David Chambers, speaker.

the Whigs in the Senate of disunity, a theme left over from the election. The Statesman exaggerated somewhat when it said, "Judging from what seemed to be the situation and feelings of the Whig party, we do not believe they will remain very warmly united in opposition to the annexation of Texas."<sup>5</sup>

As far as the public was concerned, the debate over annexation was becoming less animated. Few meetings were held about the Texas question while the joint resolution was being discussed. Most newspapers seemed to have acquired a rather fatalistic attitude about Texas. Some still declined to believe that the members of Congress were in earnest. The anti-annexationist Cincinnati Gazette appealed to nonpartisanship and morality to stop the move while simultaneously reassuring its readers that no immediate danger of annexation existed.<sup>6</sup>

Several strong Whig papers capitulated rather than add to the discord in the country. The Western Reserve Chronicle said that it would be folly to resist the move now, even though annexation was still repulsive. "We shall deprecate, in the strongest terms, this act of robbery and bad faith, and submit with as good a grace as possible to the 'powers that be'."<sup>7</sup>

The Ohio State Journal also urged the opponents of annexation to acquiesce. After denouncing the southern tactics of using the move to widen the breach between the North and the South, the Journal stated:

It behooves the patriot, the Unionist, to look at this question seriously, solemnly. Sever the ties that have bound together, thus far, the destinies of these States and made them powerful, prosperous,

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<sup>5</sup>Ohio Statesman, December 24, 1844.

<sup>6</sup>Tri-Weekly Cincinnati Gazette, December 12, 1844.

<sup>7</sup>Western Reserve Chronicle, December 18, 1844.



and peaceful, and you launch upon an unknown ocean,  
along whose shores will, we fear, soon be strewn  
the shattered and dismantled wreck of American  
Liberty.<sup>8</sup>

Ohioans in the United States House of Representatives contributed considerably to the debate over the joint resolution. Both Democrats and Whigs spoke their views on the Texas question. The Ohio Whigs were not so voluble as their opponents, however, and gave only two speeches of any length in the Texas debates early in 1845. One Whig, E. S. Hamlin elected from Lorain but who moved to Cleveland in 1844, based his complaints about annexation on the position that the Constitution said nothing about the addition of territory to the United States or about the legality of slavery itself. In addition, annexation would seriously threaten the stability of the Union.<sup>9</sup>

The other Whig speech was one by Joshua R. Giddings delivered on January 22. Giddings did not add any new arguments to those already aired many times. He stressed that the extension of slavery was economically unsound for the whole country and scoffed at the hope of fellow Ohioan John Weller to extend democratic institutions to Texas. How could Texas be democratic, Giddings asked, when slavery existed there?<sup>10</sup>

The resolution from the Ohio General Assembly denouncing annexation was presented in the House by Daniel Tilden on January 22.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Daily Ohio State Journal, January 27, 1845.

<sup>9</sup>Appendix to the Congressional Globe, Containing the Debates and Proceedings, 28 Congress, 2 session; 373-378.

<sup>10</sup>Joshua R. Giddings, Speeches in Congress (Cleveland, 1853), 140.

<sup>11</sup>Congressional Globe, 28 Congress, 2 session, 175.



At the same time Tilden introduced another resolution from Ohio urging Congress to annex Oregon as soon as possible.<sup>12</sup>

In the debates over the joint resolution in the House, the Democrats from Ohio obviously were not of a single mind. Many shades of difference existed as to how Texas should be admitted and even as to whether she should be admitted at all. John B. Weller caused some concern among Ohio Democrats with his plans in December 1844 to accept Texas as she was then, her boundaries to be decided later.<sup>13</sup> Weller wanted the United States to have Texas regardless of the slavery there, and he later stated that the vote for Polk was a mandate for annexation.<sup>14</sup>

Other Ohio Democrats spoke in favor of the joint resolution. Ezra Dean told the House of Representatives that it was both constitutional and desirable to annex territory. Even if slavery existed, the addition of land was necessary for progress.<sup>15</sup> Alfred P. Stone agreed that the move was constitutional and hoped that Virginia and Maryland would become free states when all the slaves moved to Texas.<sup>16</sup>

The big thorn in the side of the Ohio Democrats was Jacob Brinkerhoff, representative from the Mansfield area. In spite of the party's concerted efforts, Brinkerhoff wanted nothing to do with the annexation of Texas. Probably his strong anti-slavery stand most influenced his thoughts about Texas, but he had given little indication

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<sup>12</sup> Congressional Globe, 28 Congress, 2 session.

<sup>13</sup> Justin H. Smith, The Annexation of Texas (New York, 1941), 327.

<sup>14</sup> Congressional Globe, 28 Congress, 2 session, 118-9.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 189.

in 1844 that he was about to become a party dissident. In the presidential election he had supported Polk. He had at the time acquiesced for the sake of expediency, in the Democratic stand on Texas.<sup>17</sup>

Brinkerhoff used many arguments to circumvent the fact that his reason for disliking annexation was that the acquisition of Texas would mean the expansion of slavery. He thought that the United States should not have to assume the debts of Texas and that too much attention was being paid to Texas and not enough to Oregon. He believed that England was not really a threat and that lame ducks in Congress were considering the issue when actually they had no right to do so. He did not trust Tyler nor the committee on foreign affairs in the House because, he thought, they were all Southerners with ulterior motives.<sup>18</sup>

Brinkerhoff stated his views in a strong speech in the House on January 13. He contended that Ohioans had voted for Polk, not because of his stand on annexation, but because of his stands on the bank and tariff questions. The speech received great approbation from the northern Whigs. One paper noted, "It spoke the sentiments and feelings of the honest Locos of the North. The New York Democrats were greatly pleased....But the Southern leaders would blow his brains out if he were a Southern man."<sup>19</sup> The Cleveland Herald thus approved of Brinkerhoff's stand as did Joshua Giddings who wrote to J. A. Briggs, "Brinker-

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<sup>17</sup> Wendell W. Blauser, "The Congressional and Political Career of Jacob Brinkerhoff, 1843-1855" (Columbus, 1938), unpublished M.A. thesis, 19.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 20-23.

<sup>19</sup> The Cleveland Herald, January 18, 1845.

hoff made a bold first rate speech....He spoke like a freeman and an independent freeman. The blood hounds of the party are let loose upon him" and are attempting to keep him in line.<sup>20</sup> The same pressure that had been applied by the national party leaders to Ohio Democratic newspapers, to state officers, and to Ohio's U. S. Senators was successfully applied to Brinkerhoff, but he never could condone slavery, and in following years, he was to apply himself with even more energy in the endeavor to halt its spread.

As was to be expected, the joint resolution was passed by the House in late January, the Ohio Whigs voting against it and all the Ohio Democrats but two voting for it. The Plain Dealer noted that annexation "has been disposed of by the House in a manner highly creditable to the immediate representatives of the people."<sup>21</sup> A rival paper in Cleveland did not agree. It printed a letter from E. S. Hamlin saying the vote was a blot upon the honor of the United States. The letter, said the paper, was an "expose and commentary on the extraordinary conduct of a majority of the House in regard to the admission of a slave-cursed Foreign Government..."<sup>22</sup> Most Ohio residents were not quite so upset about the move in late January and February as the latter point of view would indicate.

In the Senate both Benjamin Tappan and William Allen were active during the debates on the joint resolution. Many had become weary of

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<sup>20</sup> Joshua Giddings to J. A. Briggs, January 15, 1845, Joshua Giddings Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

<sup>21</sup> Plain Dealer, February 5, 1845.

<sup>22</sup> Cleveland Herald, February 4, 1845.



the subject in the Senate, especially since it had been one arousing heated arguments the previous spring. Thomas Hart Benton, one of the most outspoken of the anti-annexationists, had been greatly subdued by January 1845, most likely by the pressures of the Democratic party to bring him back in line.<sup>23</sup> The Ohio senators were also settling into the party lineup, even in the face of disapproval from home. In order to conciliate the General Assembly, Allen did introduce the resolution which stated Ohio's disapproval of annexation.<sup>24</sup>

Benjamin Tappan was in a position not many people would envy during the debates on the joint resolution. He had just been defeated for reelection to the Senate by Thomas Corwin, a Whig. Tappan's family, well-known abolitionists, strongly urged him to vote against the resolution. The family expected the senator to follow their wishes because they all generally thought alike on this topic. The Ohio General Assembly, passed negative resolutions on annexation, and expected Tappan to follow. But Tappan astonished everyone by voting for the resolutions which he thought Tyler or Polk would push through sooner or later.

Even though pressure from home was strong, William Allen was a party man. His decision was less difficult to make and did not really surprise anyone in that he was supporting Polk all along. Speculating on the votes of the two senators The Scioto Gazette thought that Tappan would vote against the resolution. So for Allen it said, "Our own opinion is that he is one of those politicians who

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<sup>23</sup>Smith, The Annexation of Texas, 336-7.

<sup>24</sup>Congressional Globe, 2 Congress, 2 session, 171.



will go with their party though it goes to the Devil."<sup>25</sup> The probable votes of the two senators was the subject of some concern all over Ohio.

The passage of the joint resolution by the Senate at the end of February and the ensuing executive approval brought to an end the debate over whether or not Texas should be annexed. Although acceptance of the proposal from Texas did not come until July, everyone knew that the area would agree. Therefore, the immediate concerns over the move were for what would happen as a result of the United States making the outright offer to annex Texas.

Reaction from the Ohio Democrats was mainly one of relief that they would no longer have to debate the issue. They generally were happy about annexation, but not about extending slavery and felt that even though slavery was extended, it was consoling to know that now the Negroes could be closer to people of color in the Southwest and Mexico.<sup>26</sup>

To those who were unhappy about the passage of the joint resolution, the logical result would seem to be war. The Daily Atlas of Cincinnati at first thought that the result of the "incurable wound" the Union had received would be war with England and then dissolution.<sup>27</sup> Later the Atlas revised its thinking and expected Mexico to declare war to preserve her honor.<sup>28</sup> In Cleveland

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<sup>25</sup>The Scioto Gazette, February 6, 1845.

<sup>26</sup>Plain Dealer, March 12, 1845.

<sup>27</sup>The Daily Atlas, February 26, 1845.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., March 22, 1845.

people were not so fearful of war. War and business failure might not immediately follow, claimed a Whig paper, but the American name had been fouled in the eyes of Christian nations.<sup>29</sup>

Other Whigs tended to be very cautious as to what the next move would be. Most wanted deliberation and caution. Blame was occasionally placed upon the power of the Executive for being strong enough to push an unpopular measure through Congress.<sup>30</sup>

Above all, the calls for dissolution of the Union almost ceased to exist. By March of 1845 most of the people of Ohio came to accept the annexation of Texas whether they liked it or not.

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<sup>29</sup>Cleveland Herald, March 7, 1845.

<sup>30</sup>Cincinnati Gazette, March 6, 1845.

## CHAPTER EIGHT. CONCLUSION.

The question of Texas annexation in 1843, 1844, and 1845 was a much bigger question than anyone at the time dared to admit. Annexation was only one topic in a series of events which were ultimately to divide the country. While many Ohioans were able to face the topic squarely, the majority were willing to consider it only as one of the numerous subjects of debate in the state and in the nation that year.

Geographically, annexation was a much more popular topic in certain areas. The subject was discussed somewhat along a line passing through Ohio from northeast to southwest to include the Western Reserve, Columbus, and Cincinnati, the two areas at the end becoming more heated over the Texas question than Columbus ever was. These areas coincide with the strength of the Liberty Party.

The Liberty Party was less afraid than the two major parties to tackle the subject because they had little to lose. The Whigs discussed annexation with some frequency, too. Since both these parties took a stand against annexation, a popular stand in Ohio, they could afford to discuss the move with some regularity. The Democrats, on the other hand, avoided the subject as much as possible. Their stand was so unpopular that many of them did not like it and tried to let others forget that they stood for annexation.

Only occasionally did any of the discussions on annexation in Ohio include the slavery argument. When people talked about slavery, they very seldom argued about whether or not it should exist, although that aspect of the question was implied. People were hesitant to bring to the surface a topic of which they were

really afraid. Instead, the point of argument was usually the extension of slavery with the advisability of permitting slaves in new areas added to the United States.

Therefore, the scope and impact of the debates over annexation were limited by the desire to avoid the deeper conflict which Ohioans knew an open discussion of the Texas question would bring. In the ensuing years, as more and more individuals and organizations explored all the aspects yet implied in the Texas question, the nation would find itself torn apart. Ohioans, however, were not ready for that in 1844 and 1845.



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