

## Mexican Exiles and the Monroe Doctrine, New York and the Borderlands, 1865

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### ABSTRACT

The meeting of the “Mexican Patriot Club” in the Cooper Institute in New York City on July 19, 1865 gave Mexican exiles a powerful forum from which to exalt the ideal of Republicanism in the Americas, and to hail Mexicans as heroic long-term defenders of that ideal. These exiles sought to shift public sentiment and government policy in the United States in a crucial period mid-1865 when the Mexican Republic led by President Benito Juárez faced the greatest threat from its antagonists and a new threat from its sympathizers. Theirs was a delicate public relations task. They needed to rally support for Mexico’s Republic sufficient both to undermine sympathy for Mexico’s Empire and loosen U.S. neutrality enforcement, yet not encourage the American expansionists then mobilizing to invade Mexico under pretext of rescuing the Republic from the troops of Napoleon III. The exiles’ tactic in this meeting was to rally Americans behind the Monroe Doctrine as a *principle* of pan-American solidarity—a call to conscience rather than a call-to-arms.

Keywords: exiles, patriotic clubs, French Intervention, Monroe Doctrine, expansionism, borderlands

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## RESUMEN

La reunión del Mexican Patriot Club, una asociación de exiliados mexicanos, en el Cooper Institute de Nueva York el 19 de julio 1865 resultó una plataforma poderosa para exaltar el ideal republicano en las Américas y para reconocer a los mexicanos como defensores heroicos de ese ideal. Estos exiliados buscaron cambiar tanto el sentimiento público como la política del gobierno federal de los Estados Unidos durante los cruciales meses del verano de 1865 cuando la República Mexicana, encabezada por el Presidente Benito Juárez, enfrentaba la gran amenaza de sus antagonistas históricos aunada a una nueva de quienes habían sido sus simpatizantes. La suya era una tarea de relaciones públicas muy delicada: necesitaban, por una parte, engendrar apoyo para la República en medida suficiente para socavar cualquier simpatía con las fuerzas imperialistas y para promover el cambio en la política norteamericana de neutralidad; esto, por otra parte, sin acicatear el ánimo expansionista de aquellos norteamericanos que se preparaban, so pretexto de proteger a la república de las tropas de Napoleón III, para invadir el país. En ese afán, la táctica de los exiliados consistió en promover la doctrina Monroe como un *principio* de solidaridad pan-americana —un llamado a la conciencia más que un llamado a las armas.

Palabras clave: exiliados, juntas patrióticas, Intervención francesa, la doctrina Monroe, expansionismo, la frontera

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They endanger, generously, their lives for the common welfare: therefore, accept their aid, and be assured that the Americans [...] will not stain their name by demanding, a shameful reward.

(Joaquin Villalobos, Speaker, *The New York Times* 20 July 1865)

[...] we ought to declare aloud that our most ardent aspiration is for the maintenance of the independence of Mexico, of her republican institutions, and her territorial integrity; and while we desire that all the nations of America may take part in our question, which is their own, we are far from encouraging fillibustering [sic] expeditions, and from attempting the abolishment of our nationality by the United States.

(Francisco Zarco, Club President, *The New York Times* 20 July 1865)

[...] the people of Mexico have got their great enemy where they can take good care of him well enough, if they can only be let alone.

(Joshua Leavitt, Host, *The New York Times* 20 July 1865)

The apparent optimism of Leavitt's remark belied the dire straits of the Mexican Republic on the day of the Mexican exile meeting, July 19, 1865. The Republican cause was failing fast as Maximilian's Empire and Napoleon III's troops gained control of Mexico. Imperial campaigns had shifted to northern Mexico, especially the borderlands along the Rio Grande and Sonora. Much of Tamaulipas was besieged by Col. DuPin's infamous counter-guerrillas with the state's main ports, Tampico and Matamoros, now controlled by Imperial authorities. Moreover, the Imperial cause was gaining new, often armed and seasoned, adherents as former Confederates fled across the border to take advantage of the land grants and even a Cabinet position offered them by Maximilian. Major imperial offensives were launched against Chihuahua and Sonora; Chihuahua fell August 15, Sonora in late September. President Benito Juárez was pressed against Mexico's northern border, at Paso del Norte, poised to flee into the desert. Declaring victory, Maximilian issued the infamous "Black Decree" of October 3, 1865 stripping dissidents of belligerent rights and condemning them to summary execution. The Republic had reached its nadir; the Empire its zenith. In this context of crisis, Mexican Republican exiles convened to articulate their cause in the most prominent public secular forum in the United States, the Cooper Institute in New York.

Leavitt's remark was intended not as blithe optimism, but rather as a call to conscience. The purpose of this meeting of Mexican exiles was to win public support in the United States by exalting the pan-American Republican ideal of Mexico's struggle. Yet, as Zarco and Villalobos stated explicitly, the meeting urged Americans to support Mexicans out of solidarity, not out of ambitions to usurp Mexican territory. Mexican exiles called for moral support, "*una cooperación negativa*," as Juárez had called it, that loosened neutrality enforcement in order to permit Mexicans to purchase arms and organize their own expeditions from the United States (Benito Juárez to Matías Romero 26 January 1865, AHMR). Hailed as "the first of the kind," this meeting gave Mexican exiles a powerful forum from which to counter twin dangers: increasing campaigns for U.S. support of the Imperial cause on the one hand, and ironically the threat posed on the other hand by ersatz allies as U.S. expansionists pressed to invade Mexico on the pretext of "rescuing" the neighboring Republic from European monarchy and domestic anarchy. Consideration of Mexican exiles' efforts brings nuance to earlier scholarship that overstates the U.S. role in the triumph of Mexico's Republic and recent scholarship that privileges the American perspective on the Monroe doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. THE EXILES AND THE MEETING

This exile club in New York was the premier such association in the United States, head of a network linking pro-Republican Mexican exiles and Mexican-Americans operating in New York, California, Nevada, and Texas. These clubs sustained close communication and concerted action.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, their activities and analyses reached both broad and elite audiences in the United States. Their resolutions, proceedings, and protests were reprinted in newspapers in both English and Spanish, and were reprinted as Congressional documents whenever the House of Representatives or the Foreign Affairs committee required the State Department to submit its records on Mexican affairs. The *New York Times* published a report on this meeting the very next day (*The New York Times* 20 July 1865).

An imbroglio in 1866 depicts well these exiles' key role in defending Mexico's Republican cause. When Santa Anna lost favor with the Mexican empire and turned up in New York ostensibly to organize an expedition to "save" Mexico despite Benito Juárez's rejection of his offer, it was the New York exile club that registered a formal protest. When Santa Anna then tried to trump opposition by addressing a manifesto directly to the Mexican people from his base in New Jersey, again it was the New York Mexican Club that countered immediately with a five-page denunciation promptly published in newspapers in both New York and California explicitly to deter any adherents to Santa Anna's project. The club's initiative proved to be a crucial stopgap measure pending official response from the Juárez administration. The exiles' quick and thorough campaign to discredit Santa Anna supported Mexico's Minister, Matías Romero, during the months-long delay before he could receive official instruction. Only then could Seward officially decline Santa Anna's request to meet (Seward to Santa Anna 16 August 1866, Executive House Documents 26; Executive House Documents 729).

Thanks to the New York exiles' campaign, Mexican patriotic clubs in California registered their protests against Santa Anna's pretensions. The protests, as subsequently listed in U.S. Congressional documents, occurred as follows: July 29, Protest of Mexicans residing in San Francisco; August 5, Protest of Mexicans residing in New Almaden, California; August 16, Protest of Mexicans residing in San Andres, California; August 19, Protest of Mexicans residing in Virginia City, Nevada; and September 7, Protest of Mexicans residing in San Juan Bautista. They regard themselves as "adhering to the protest of the Mexican Club of New York" in *El Nuevo Mundo* of 29 June 1865. Both of the New York exiles' protests were subsequently published in House Congressional documents as Items #1 and #3 of the many papers regarding this affair. Given that

quick response was required to discredit Santa Anna before financiers and recruits supported his expedition, and that Juárez was virtually *incomunicado*, New York exiles exercised a quasi-official status sufficient to speak on behalf of Mexico's Republic and mobilized exiles across the United States. The New York club members filing the protest in 1866 were virtually the same as those attending the exile meeting at Cooper Institute the previous year. Zarco and Cipriano Roberts served as club officers in both junctures (Executive House Documents 727). The publicity and validation offered across the country by other clubs of Mexican exiles achieved a collective feat akin to a 'crowd-sourcing' of Mexican diplomacy in this period of precarious federal authority in Mexico.<sup>3</sup>

The meeting was held at Cooper Institute, incubator of civic movements for justice and the largest indoor, secular meeting hall in the United States at the time. Lincoln had catapulted himself into Presidential candidacy by delivering at Cooper Institute his famous "Right Makes Might" speech, thereby trumping Republican candidate hopeful, William Seward, on his home turf (Lincoln; *The New York Times* 28 February 1860). Cooper Institute also served as a staging ground for abolitionists, women suffragists, and later for Republicans<sup>4</sup>, labor movements and other mobilizations. Chairing the meeting was Reverend Joshua Leavitt, a prominent champion of Republican ideals. Leavitt was one of the founders of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, defender of the Amistad slaves in 1839, and vocal proponent of Mexico's Republican cause in the 1860s (*Weekly Anglo-African Newspaper* 12 April 1862).

Sixty-five men were listed as "Exiled Mexican Citizens composing the Mexican Club of New York" (*Proceedings* 58-60). These members included some of Mexico's most prominent citizens, including two former Ministers of Relations, Francisco Zarco (also Club President) and Manuel Doblado; two former Ministers of War, Felipe de Berriozabal and Jesús González Ortega; and two former Ministers of the Supreme Court. Fifteen exiles were listed as former governors; twelve others as former deputies. Ten exiles listed both military and political offices, but almost all of the members were prominent military or political figures. Prisoner status also clearly conferred merit given that more than one-third of these members were listed as having been imprisoned by the French.

Certain other traits bear mention. A few prominent exiles, notably Matías Romero, José Godoy, and Juan Navarro, were currently serving as official representatives of Juárez' government posts in the United States. Writers also enjoyed prominence. Four editors were identified: Pedro Santacilia, José Godoy, Joaquin Villalobos, and

Pantaleon Tovar. José Rivera y Río was listed as “Poet, Author, Colonel, Deputy, and prisoner at Puebla”. The club president, Francisco Zarco, was also listed as a public writer. Certain details were glossed in this list. For example, included as Mexicans were prominent Tejanos, José María Carvajal and Angel Navarro. Carvajal was also identified as “Professor of Languages,” with no reference to his military service.<sup>5</sup> Santacilia was also Cuban-born and Juárez’ son-in-law. Finally, the list of attributes obscured internal divisions and personal ambitions then rife among Mexico’s Republican exiles.

This was a very distinctive class of exiles in that they expressed no interest in negotiating a place for themselves in the host country. Their discourse attested to a fixation on the notion of “return” to the homeland certainly, but their repatriation depended solely upon the military triumph of their cause. This was not a triumph contingent upon liberating from outside quiescent compatriots, but rather the reverse—a rallying of quiescent foreigners to support their struggling confreres in the throes of war. Above all, these exiles saw themselves as active political and military men, vital to the well-being of their homeland. They concerned themselves with U.S. affairs primarily in order to win public and government support for Mexico and to counter threats. Exiles did so in this meeting by addressing four key points: they recast the Mexican struggle not as chaos but as Republican defense, they linked Imperialists to Confederates, they urged a principled endorsement of the Monroe Doctrine to cool expansionist ardor, and they challenged Secretary of State Seward’s strict neutrality. The exiles took risks given that these points repudiated popular American beliefs, long-standing U.S. government policy, and even Romero’s pet initiatives.

## 2. EXILES RECAST PERCEIVED CHAOS IN MEXICO AS HEROIC REPUBLICAN STRUGGLE

Perhaps the first task of the meeting was to defend the defenders—to exalt Mexicans as heroic to counter contempt. A racist paradigm of Mexicans as incapable of self-governance and guilty of plunging Mexico into chaos had been promulgated to legitimate the Imperial project originally and had gained currency since. One of the speakers framed his entire speech as a direct challenge to the New York Times’ position that Mexicans did not deserve liberty.

Leavitt opened the meeting by gesturing to “the band of Mexican patriots” sharing the platform with him and hailing “the heroism and devotion with which they have maintained this long struggle against the overwhelming power of France.” The meeting closed with the adoption of Resolutions which included:

Resolved, that our cordial respect and deep sympathy are due to the people of Mexico in their present sufferings, under the oppressions of Europe, for their heroic endurance and persevering courage in defence of their national liberties, and for their patriotic sacrifices in the cause of American independence.

Individual speakers likewise defended Mexico against charges of chaos. The very first point made by the first speaker, Zarco, showed that Mexico was not chaotic, but rather growing “great by her cruel martyrdom, as Poland, Hungary, and Italy have done, and does not show herself to be ungovernable and anarchical.” He argued that on the contrary, the “monarchical party has been the element of disorder, and of the agitations of Mexico.” He concluded his sweeping history of a half-century of Republican vs. Conservative struggle, “this insane and wicked minority has been the constant element of the disorders of Mexico” (“Proceedings” 14).

Joaquin Villalobos likewise recast apparent chaos as heroic struggle, but did so by underscoring its Republican pan-American nature. He referred to Mexicans as “a people that, in defending their cause, are consciously defending the cause of the whole American continent.” But this speaker, who throughout his address directly contested the New York Times’ anti-Mexican bias, further exalted Mexicans’ heroism by emphasizing their dire lack of resources, “A people that, in spite of their want of every implement of War... fighting France, Austria, and Belgium at the same time, without any other resources than their heroic efforts, and aided by God only” (“Proceedings” 31).

Colonel Manuel Balbontín opened his address by confronting the alleged unworthiness of Mexicans, “It has been generally believed that the political commotions which our Republic has often experienced, were the effect of the bad character of the people, and their incapacity for self-government” (“Proceedings” 34). His defense, like Zarco’s, was to narrate Mexico’s history since independence as a series of attacks by the Conservatives against the republic in order to reinstate their colonial privileges. He concluded, “The friends of independence, justly alarmed by the labors of their adversaries, opposed necessary resistance; and hence resulted that gigantic contest which has lasted half a century, the misfortune of two generations, retarding the splendor and weakening the virility of a people who are destined to be one of the powerful champions by whom, at no remote day, the final battle is to be fought between European despotism and American liberty” (“Proceedings” 35). In that conclusion, he likewise underscored the pan-American pro-Republican nature of the struggle and heralded an eminent denouement.

Exiles' defense of Mexico and Mexicans countered dangerous propaganda then circulating prominently in New York and being reprinted throughout the United States. The *New York Times* had been publishing monthly reports from a pro-Empire correspondent based in Mexico City whose July 31 column advocated U.S. recognition of Maximilian. The *Times* heightened the pressure on Mexico by publishing on the front page on July 4, 1865 —the first Independence Day celebration after the Civil War— an exhaustive analysis (2 pages long) of the Monroe Doctrine, arguing that the French did not violate the Monroe Doctrine and legitimating the Intervention by condemning Juaristas (*New York Times* 4 July 1865: 1-2).

Only one week before this meeting, a pro-Empire paper distributed in New York had published a long speech made by Felix Arroyo, who styled himself “Minister of the Empire” even though the U.S. government had not accepted his credentials. He condemned those fighting along the Rio Grande, accusing them of “plunging into anarchy a huge region deemed pacified.” He also condemned Mariano Escobedo, one of the exiles present at the Cooper Institute meeting, who later led the liberation of the Rio Grande from Imperial forces (*L'ère Nouvelle* 10 July 1865).

Exiles faced contempt not only from their enemies, but also from their allies. American Consul General in France, John Bigelow, likewise deemed Mexicans ungovernable and cast aspersions on their Republic. In a letter to Seward dated at the same time as the exile meeting, Bigelow said, “The Spanish race in our hemisphere will require for many years a much more centralized government than we can offer them under our present constitution, and, therefore, it is hardly worth our while, under pretext of defending republican institutions, to get ourselves into a war” for Mexico, to which Bigelow contemptuously referred as one of the “*soi-disant* republics” (Callahan 68).

### 3. EXILES LINKED IMPERIALISTS TO CONFEDERATES

Once Mexican exiles had established that Mexico's struggles were not signs of chaos, but rather evidence of a heroic people defending the Republic from European monarchies, they turned to identify another great threat to the Republic —the Confederates. Exiles condemned collusion between Confederates and Imperialists and denounced it as threat to both the U.S. and Mexican Republics.

All four speakers and the chairman accused Napoleon III of complicity with the Confederates. Indeed they condemned all European monarchies (Russia notably excepted) as siding with the rebels against the Republics of Mexico and the United States. José Rivera y Río condemned Napoleon III as having “expected the hour for recognizing the new [Confederate] government, and giving it the aid of his overrated

power” (“Proceedings” 23). Rivera y Río extended his analysis of the antagonism beyond France and the Union to pit all European monarchies against all republics, “The domestic contest of this country, like that of Mexico, which was sustained more than four years, was agitated by Europe. It was the desperate resistance of the thrones, at the sight of the severe majesty of republics” (“Proceedings” 25).

Villalobos cited the Marquis de Boissy as having desired the ruin of both the Union and the Confederates in order to destroy the U.S. Republic. He cited the Marquis as having declared: “in the French Parliament that he rejoices in the civil war in America, and who prays to God that both contending parties may be irretrievably ruined”. Villalobos also claimed that French navy-yards supplied ships to the “fratricidal war” (“Proceedings” 31). Likewise, Zarco referred to European sympathies with the Confederacy in contrast with Mexican Republicans’ support of the Union (“Proceedings” 17). Leavitt had framed the meeting by suggesting that:

Both the invasion and the rebellion were parts of one grand conspiracy of the upholders of absolutism in Europe and the upholders of slavery in the United States, to make common cause and strike a united blow against republican liberty on the American continent, in the hope of rendering arbitrary power more secure in both hemispheres. (“Proceedings” 8-9)

It was not merely to curry favor with their Unionist supporters that the exiles associated the French Intervention with the Confederate rebellion. Though they acknowledged the Union triumph, they did not lionize it. Exiles’ condemnation of the Imperialist-Confederate alliance was driven instead by a real and mounting threat. Spring and summer 1865 marked an influx of Confederates to Mexico to offer their support to the Empire. The menace was multifaceted, widely-publicized, and involved high-ranking Confederates. The New York press had been reporting the ambitions of William Gwin, one of California’s first two U.S. Senators, to settle Confederates in Sonora (Gwin 594). California newspapers were publishing reports from their correspondents in Sonora of the influx of pro-Maximilian Confederates, many associated with Gwin. The San Francisco Bulletin reported on June 27, 1865 that “Jeff Davis sympathizers” had been coming to Sonora since before the surrender keen to get “some fat office under the ubiquitous Gwin.”

The Empire was gaining strength from Confederates, especially along the borderlands of Tamaulipas and Sonora, the hottest zones of conflict in this period. On March 25, 1865, Gwin wrote Napoleon that he was “willing to return to Mexico, to put my plan of colonization in to operation in Sonora, provided the French troops occupy the State and aid me in my enterprise. If an arrangement can be made with the

Emperor Maximilian to extend this plan of colonization to the States of North Mexico (Sonora, Sinaloa, Durango, and Chihuahua), first the interest, then the principal of the debt due from Mexico can be paid off” (Gwin and Coleman 515). Four days later, French troops attacked Guaymas, the major port of Sonora. In early April, Gwin left for Mexico with a letter dated March 31 from Napoleon to Bazaine. On May 22, 1865 the republican forces that had been concentrating to defend Guaymas suffered a bitter defeat, “Desastre de La Pasión” despite superior numbers.

Imperial General Tomás Mejía controlling northern Mexico along the Rio Grande also welcomed Confederate exiles. When Major General Philip Sheridan arrived in Texas, he found that most rebels had fled to Matamoros, taking their weapons and valuables, including such prominent Confederates as Richard King (Monday and Vick 129-30). By May 2, General Kirby-Smith commanding the Trans-Mississippi division of the Confederate army wrote to express his desire for Confederates to enter into agreement with the Mexican Empire “for mutual protection” from their common enemy and promised Maximilian that 9,000 Missourians and 10,000 other Confederates “would gladly rally around any flag that promises to lead them to battle against their former foe” (Kirby Smith to Rose 2 May 1865, United States War Department). In early summer, a force of 1,000 armed Confederates, the infamous “Unsundered” brigade commanded by General Jo Shelby, marched into Mexico to offer their swords to Maximilian (Edwards). By September 1865, a pro-Empire/pro-Confederate newspaper, *The Mexican Times*, was established, edited by Henry W. Allen, former Confederate governor of Louisiana, funded by Maximilian to promote immigration, primarily among Confederate refugees (Hanna and Hanna 223-224). General Grant likewise feared that Confederates would join the French and threaten the U.S. (Hardy 66).

Only one week before the exile meeting, on June 10, 1865, a newspaper in Philadelphia reported that Kirby-Smith had sold “all the rebel artillery” in his division to the Imperialists and fled to Mexico.

*Duke Gwin* [italicized in the original] has bewildered thousands of disconsolate rebels, and Mexico is becoming to the United States that land of refuge which in former years we successively in Arkansas, Texas, California and Kansas. All the turbulent, reckless and desperate spirits whom the late war has left idle upon our hands, are moving southwest to the land where the next great struggle seems likely to take place between republicanism and despotism. (*North American* 10 June 1865)

The paper also reported that a pro-Maximilian expedition had attempted to sally forth from San Francisco (*North American* 10 June 1865).

In summation, the Confederate threats in Sonora affected those Mexican exiles at the Cooper Institute meeting, such as Godoy, who were helping mobilize Californios and others in California to defend the Republic. The Confederate threat was greatest for those along the Rio Grande as confederates joined the ranks of the dreaded counter-guerrillas then punishing Juaristas in Tamaulipas. This was the very zone in which some exiles present at the meeting, notably Carvajal and Escobedo, had been fighting and would soon return. The Cooper Institute meeting gave them a forum to condemn Confederate alliance with Imperialists at a time when even Union officers and politicians had contemplated joining with Confederates to defend the Monroe doctrine.

#### 4. EXILES ENDORSED THE MONROE DOCTRINE AS A CALL TO CONSCIENCE, NOT AS A CALL-TO-ARMS

Having established their heroism, the Republican nature of their cause and its importance for all Republics in the Americas, and by linking Confederates to Imperialists, the exiles could appeal for the help they needed. That help was decidedly an endorsement of the Monroe doctrine, but out of principle, not out of ambition. The meeting had opened by rejecting the logic of U.S. expansionists who sought to use the Monroe Doctrine as a pretext to seize Mexico. Quoting from a pamphlet that claimed that, “the only alternative of the French rule in Mexico is for us to take the country ourselves, and that this is the real import of the Monroe Doctrine”, Leavitt categorically rejected this interpretation, countering that Monroe’s was a doctrine “of humanity, of beneficence, and not of grasping selfishness” (“Proceedings” 9).

Zarco’s address, from the opening sentence to his conclusion, emphasized the importance of U.S. *moral* support for Mexicans’ struggle to save the Republic, not for military intervention. “These expressions of sympathy will not be sterile: they will bear to the defenders of Mexican independence a great moral force, the support of opinion” Zarco’s conclusion explicitly hailed U.S. moral, not military, support:

the mere interest which you manifest for our fate will encourage the Mexicans to persevere in their glorious enterprise [...] the Government of the United States has done much, by not recognizing as the work of the Mexican people, the insane erection of a throne by foreign invaders. You might do much, if you would persist in requiring that your Government shall continue to observe the same worthy conduct.

Moreover, Zarco explicitly rejected filibustering expeditions or any other threat to Mexico’s sovereignty by the United States, as is evident in the quote which opened

this paper. To further undermine any American expeditions motivated by political aspirations, he stated: “Neither do we pretend even to look for the interference of this great country in our institutions, or in our interior regime” (“Proceedings” 19-20).

José Rivera y Río did endorse U.S. armed intervention, but out of principle, unmotivated by territorial or political gain:

Grant may yet be the LaFayette of Mexico, the Garibaldi of this continent. [...] Let him be the avenger of his brethren of America, and immortalize the administration of Johnson by a prowess worthy of his illustrious predecessor. If the unfortunate Abraham Lincoln has emancipated a race, let this successor of the bloody victim proclaim the inviolability of America, and be the vigorous defender of the Monroe principles. (“Proceedings” 26)

He did offer a reward, but of a kind offered by the U.S. to its newcomers, not rule over Mexico or usurpation of territory. “A numerous emigration would find there the kindest hospitality, the dearest social enjoyments; and, after a few years, every family an enviable patrimony” (“Proceedings” 27). Rivera y Río’s conclusion said nothing of armed U.S. intervention or emigration, instead calling for moral solidarity:

The friendship of the American people and government, their strong sympathies with the cause of Mexico, the alliance which common danger should form, and the identity of principles, all encourage the hope that the invasion of France is near its end. (“Proceedings” 27-28)

Colonel Manuel Balbontín likewise addressed directly the threat of armed intervention. He endorsed it, but on principle, without recompense, condemning the Imperialists for alarming Mexicans by:

announcing to them absorption by the United States, and urg[ing] them to conform to the semblance of government which they have wished to give them, because they know that the Mexican people love their independence, and desire neither to change masters nor to have a master. (“Proceedings” 39).

The exiles’ high-profile condemnation of expansionism was critical because in this immediate post-Civil War period, expansionists were emerging as a major political force in the United States. Montgomery Blair and Secretary of the Interior Harlan were reported as urging armed intervention. Among those rumored to be planning armed invasion of Mexico were General Ulysses Grant (who soon thereafter pressed for annexation of the Dominican Republic) and General William Rosecrans. Harper’s Weekly reported in May 1865 that when Rosecrans visited the Representatives’ Hall at the State House in Boston he had faced reports that he was gathering a force of 20,000

men for the invasion of Mexico to enforce the Monroe doctrine (*Harper's Weekly* 29 July 1865).

Prominent U.S. civilians and politicians had also pressed Mexican authorities to concede territory in exchange for support. Juárez had already refused to alienate national territory in a letter to Romero dated December 22, 1864, yet he reiterated his refusal again in January 1865 when Romero had passed along the request of some potential supporters that Mexico “offer part of the national territory to obtain the needed aid.” Juárez ordered Romero not only to not support these ambitions, but indeed “to counteract them [by] working to dissuade their authors” (Juárez B. to M. Romero 26 January 1865, AHMR). The New York exiles sought to accomplish that very task in the meeting at the Cooper Institute.

The urgency of that task is clear from the mass recruiting of New York residents and the nefarious ambitions of the recruiters. The *New York Times* reported in May 1865 that Col. W. H. Allen was registering up to 400 men per day for an alleged “Mexican Emigration” scheme, in an office where an old veteran intoned the glories of Americans during the Mexican-American war. The organizers claimed to be raising an army of 70-100,000 to march to Sonora, soon thereafter to be ceded to the United States —“a step which will naturally be followed soon by the extension of the area of freedom [...] down to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec or thereabouts”. The paper reported that New York’s french newspaper was taking Allen’s recruitment seriously. Yet another recruiting office was operating at no. 144 Second-street and No. 35 Third-avenue that likewise claimed to have taken down 400 names the day before and also anticipated the annexation of Sonora. The report concluded that “in New-York City alone a regiment a day can be formed who are ready to join a filibustering expedition to Mexico” (*The New York Times* 12 May 1865:8).

Whether or not the Cooper Institute meeting succeeded in deterring expansionists, certainly their views did find echo in major media shortly thereafter. Ten days after the meeting, *Harper's Weekly* likewise condemned filibusterers cloaking their ambitions in the Monroe Doctrine:

The Monroe doctrine, as it is popularly preached, is merely the infamous doctrine of the Ostend Manifesto —that we may do as we please with our neighbors, even to absorbing them. [...] we naturally find that the advocates of ‘Manifest Destiny’ and of filibustering are ardent friends of the Monroe doctrine. (*Harper's Weekly* 29 July 1865)

Again, one month after the Cooper Institute meeting, *Harper's Weekly* condemned both the French Intervention and bellicose American generals and citizens:

We neither defend nor justify the French operations in Mexico. [...] it is enough to say to France, as the Government has already said and repeated, that the United States watch with interest and sympathy the fortunes of their neighbors. France and the world understand what that means. There is no occasion for the American people or for American generals to threaten or defy. We have long indulged the bad habit of loud boasting, while the finger of the world was pointed at us in scorn for our fatal inconsistency of principle and practice. But now that from the fiery cloud we emerge purified, erect, and with irresistible power, our truest honor and dignity demand that we put away childish things. (*Harper's Weekly* 26 August 1865)

## 5. EXILES SOUGHT RELAXED ENFORCEMENT OF U.S. NEUTRALITY

Exiles endorsed neutrality in order to check expansionists, yet loosen its enforcement enough to secure supplies necessary to sustain their own struggle. Resources for defense became critical during this summer of 1865 as the Empire strengthened and the Republic weakened. Above all, the exiles called for arms and military supplies from the U.S., though some sought to organize expeditions as well.

Villalobos developed the theme at length in his address:

Nevertheless, neither courage nor determination to fight are the only conditions to carry on a war; the supply of arms and of other implements of war must be at hand, in order to lead to a successful campaign; and, unhappily, the state of destitution brought forth by the French invasion, and the want of arms in our army, do not allow us to drive away the invader. To accomplish this end, we must obtain some aid, some support, a direct or indirect protection, and neither this aid nor this protection can come from any other people than from the people of the United States. ("Proceedings" 30)

Villalobos also addressed directly the threat of U.S. expansionism, giving the most impassioned defense of principled armed intervention by Americans: "There are men who exert themselves to show my countrymen that your armed intervention in their behalf would be dangerous, that the United States would go to Mexico impelled by selfish motives, and that the price of the aid asked for would be the loss of our nationality." Villalobos countered with the example of citizen fire brigades in New York where Americans risked their lives to help save others, "then after having extinguished the fire, every one of these heroes returns home, without demanding any other reward than the proud consciousness of having performed his duty. Fear nothing —absolutely nothing— from such a people." Villalobos assured his compatriots that Americans would help without exacting recompense ("Proceedings" 33).

Col. Manuel Ballbontín resorted to apocalyptic rhetoric to exhort the loosening of neutrality to permit supply:

There phalanxes of men are seen fighting almost naked, emaciated and debilitated by hunger, miserably armed —often with only clubs and stones— frequently routed, but yet invincible; while their brethren, the free men of America, have not given them even the least assistance —not a musket, nor even a cartridge. (“Proceedings” 38)

His last paragraph pitched a piteous —and gendered— appeal for arms:

Americans! On the other side of the Rio Grande is a sister nation whom they are murdering; and that nation needs arms to defend themselves. In the convulsions of agony, they turn their supplicating looks to the American people, who are great, who are powerful, and who have arms in superabundance. They ask them for muskets and for cannon to defend their banner, which is spotted with their blood. Will they be refused by the sons of Washington and Lincoln? (“Proceedings” 39)

The exiles’ challenge was important because neutrality was being enforced by Seward’s military subordinates in a manner prejudicial to Mexico. General Frederick Steele, commanding Union forces along the Rio Grande, was obstructing Republican General Juan Cortina while simultaneously consorting with Imperialists and Confederates in Matamoros. His dealings exceeded strictest military protocol, including an *almuerzo campestre* where he hobnobbed with Imperial General Mejía and Minister Luis Robles, and a fandango on a steamboat at which he reported “the best families of both sides” attended (Steele).

Steele was also corresponding during this period with his old friend Ernest Masson. Steele had befriended Masson during his stint with the U.S. occupation of Mexico City in 1848. In his 4 page letter, addressing Steele as “dear friend”, Masson thanked him for the salutations sent to him by Steele through Robles. He devoted the rest of the letter to championing the Emperor, and condemning the Juaristas, “half of the dissidents, are only robbers, who are very pleased with any revolution, to have the occasion to steal in all directions (Steele diary 12 August 1865).

The meeting of exiles in New York correlates with a marked shift on the ground in U.S. military dealings with Republican forces fighting in Mexico. Of the only two sites where the U.S. military was operating along the Mexican border in 1865, Rio Grande and Sonora, the Rio Grande was the most important. 10,000 U.S. troops were stationed along the river in summer of 1865, under strictest orders of neutrality. Sheridan ordered Steele on July 7, 1865 to: “Annoy the French authorities as much as you can [...] without provoking actual hostilities or without making it too apparent”. This matter of neutrality was the sole domain in which Steele could not exercise discretionary power as Sheridan repeated to Steele, “I gave you authority [...]

to settle questions arising on the Rio Grande [...] but not to include those questions [...] [that] will be decided upon by the authorities at Washington” (Sheridan to Steele 12 July 1865).

These neutrality orders severely limited the efforts of local Republican leaders to procure arms for their forces. Cortina had had some success, but the Union generals did not support him at first. In April 1865, Mifflin Kenedy described Matamoros as in a state of siege with no communications except from the mouth of the river by water, reporting that “40-50 of Cortina’s men had dashed into the town’s market square the night before, killing five or six men” (Monday and Vick 130). In June, Cortina had captured the steamship, “Señorita” and parked it on the Texas side near his mother’s ranch, confiscating 35 bales of cotton estimated at \$10,000 being shipped for a French company. But Union generals obstructed him for nearly a month. On July 11, Sheridan was still instructing Steele, “It will not do to let Cortinas [*sic*] sell cotton on our side at present.”

A major change in policy along the Rio Grande occurred soon after the exile meeting in New York. Within the week, Sheridan was permitting passive support of Cortina. On 25 July, he wrote to Steele:

since my letter forbidding the sale of the cotton captured by Genl Cortinas, [*sic*] other information has reached me in reference to the cotton, and I consider that there will be no impropriety in permitting him to dispose of it. You will therefore notify him that he can dispose of the cotton without interruption.

Two weeks later, Sheridan’s support had shifted from passive to active. By August 7, 1865, Sheridan wrote to Steele, “If you have not yet delivered the artillery to Cortinas do so at once. I presumed that my orders would have been obeyed but I understand that the artillery has not yet been turned over.” And by late August, Sheridan had become a vocal champion of Cortina, defending him from accusations made by his enemies. Sheridan affirmed that he accepted Cortina as a belligerent and not a bandit and defended him against accusations that he acted out of self-interest:

Cortinas [*sic*] is the only man I have known who is fighting the enemies of his country and de Leon has little modesty in the charges he makes [...] He says Cortina does not share the spoils [...] I have no doubt but that it takes all he can make to keep his own band up. In fact, I know it must. (Sheridan to Steele 22 Aug 1865)<sup>6</sup>

Apparently, the non-compliance of which Sheridan accused Steele prompted the latter’s transfer because by October 20, 1865, Steele reported that he had been

relieved from further duty in the Military Division of the Gulf by order of Maj Gen Sheridan. His brother, John Steele, writing on letterhead of the 38th congress, reported that he had incurred the displeasure of the Radicals (John Steele to Frederick Steele 31 October 1865). General Steele was relieved of his post just as Escobedo sent official communication on October 19, 1865 of his imminent arrival on the Rio Grande to commence hostilities.

Strict neutrality had likewise posed many disadvantages for exiles based in California. One of the exiles at the meeting, Felipe de Berriozabal had reported in January 1865 to General Ogazón, another New York exile, that General Plácido Vega's shipment of arms from California had been stopped in San Francisco (Berriozabal to Romero 22 January 1865, AHMR). One week before the meeting, Vega tried again, wiring Romero that he had received a large shipment of arms and requesting funds (Vega to Romero 13 July 1865, AHMR). Another New York exile, Lt. Col. Juan Keats, was trying to ship emigrant recruits from California to Mexico.

Likewise, the Californio Battalion violated neutrality to aid the Republican cause in Mexico. The Union battalion, comprised mostly of Mexican-Americans, had braved an overland march across the desert in the summer to Fort Mason on the border with Sonora (California Adjutant General). They arrived in early September, soon after the Republican governor of Sonora, General Pesquera, had fled across to Arizona. Captains Pico and Jimenez led an unauthorized expedition of some thirty men of Company A two days' ride into Mexico and charged a major town, Magdalena, that had been taken by the Imperialists. Pico declared to the municipal authorities that, as an American officer, he did not recognize the Imperial government as the crowd in the plaza cheered him. During the week-long stand-off, pro-Republican town residents hosted the Californio officers and men. Not until Mexican Independence Day, September 15, did they return to Fort Mason (*San Francisco Bulletin* 8 July 1865).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Though simple causality cannot be asserted, certainly neutrality loosened after the meeting. Sheridan authorized Cortina's use of confiscated french cotton to buy arms, thereby permitting a strengthening of Juaristas along the Rio Grande in time for Escobedo to return to Mexico from New York and coordinate with Cortina a major offensive in October 1865. Likewise, Californios' defense of Sonora, which constituted an unauthorized invasion of Mexico by Mexican-American Union soldiers, went unpunished.

Moreover, looser neutrality did not unloose upon Mexico the expansionist ardor then prevailing. The U.S. military threat along the Rio Grande, at its peak before the meeting, ended abruptly within a month after the meeting. The *New York Times* reported on August 20 that Sheridan had received orders from the Secretary of War to disband “all the white forces that he can dispense with” which his friends claimed would disappoint him because he had been “spoiling for a fight with the usurpers in Mexico.”<sup>7</sup> But the President was inclined to “leave to Mexico the fighting of her own battles.” Indeed, President Johnson’s state of the union address in December 1865 endorsed a principled Monroe Doctrine, but without deploying American troops.

The press also relented finally. By September 16, 1865, the *New York Times* that had been so hostile to Mexicans before the exile meeting published a piece that effectively endorsed the views articulated in the meeting. It countered those who were trying to “work up public sentiment” in favor of Maximilian, endorsed the Monroe Doctrine, hailed Mexicans and their Republican cause, defined the threat to Mexico as likewise a threat to the United States, but did not advocate U.S. armed intervention. From its article on July 4<sup>th</sup>, U.S. Independence day, condemning the Mexican Republican cause, to its article on September 16<sup>th</sup>, Mexican Independence day, endorsing the Mexican Republican cause, the *New York Times’* shift reflected, and in turn contributed to, a larger shift in American public and official sentiment.

In the critical period after the meeting, neutrality enforcement loosened, military and expansionist ardor cooled, and the press warmed to Mexico’s Republican cause. The exiles endorsed an alternative version of the Monroe Doctrine as disinterested and principled, and felicitously, that version gained strength. Certainly the Cooper Institute meeting of the New York Club can be regarded as one of the strategies that Mexican exiles used to discourage actively any Americans seeking territory in exchange for aid, thereby working to promote the very outcome that President Juárez had urged.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The role of U.S. diplomacy, particularly the statecraft of Secretary of State Seward, bore great explanatory weight for decades among scholars drawing most heavily on the diplomatic record, notably Callahan and the Hannas, *Napoleon III and Mexico: American Triumph over Monarchy*. Thomas Schoonover's influential work on Mexican diplomat, Matías Romero also gave primacy to diplomacy, including Seward's policy. Robert Ryal Miller acknowledged the role of "Mexican agents," in securing funds, arms shipments, and recruits in the U.S., but the role of Americans remained paramount in his analyses. Likewise, scholarship on the Monroe doctrine has emphasized the U.S. perspective with little analysis of exiles' efforts to influence it. This is particularly true of older scholarship, Dexter Perkins, for example. Murphy's recent analysis of the Monroe doctrine focuses on U.S. imperialist assumptions underpinning the "hemispheric imaginings," though she acknowledges the contrary views of Mexican exiles and their American allies.

<sup>2</sup> For the fullest and most recent scholarship on the *juntas patrióticas* in California and mining communities in the Nevada, see Hayes-Bautista.

<sup>3</sup> The "Mexican Patriotic Club" of San Francisco also gave a formal address on 24 December 1865 expressing approval of Juárez' decree of November 8 declaring an extension of his term as president until new elections could be held. The clubs in Napa, Marysville and elsewhere in California likewise expressed approval, according to a communication from Romero to Seward, dated February 1, 1866 and appearing as item #5 in Executive documents published by order of the House of Representatives during the First session of the 39<sup>th</sup> Congress. Mexican exiles' role appears elsewhere throughout the more than 500 dossiers of executive documents printed by order of the House of Representatives related to the Mexican Republic and the French Intervention.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Sumner addressed young Republicans at the Cooper Institute in November 1867.

<sup>5</sup> Stout's recent book on filibustering represents Carvajal as a filibusterer who invaded Mexico and threatened its sovereignty.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the reprimands for "undue friendliness toward the French" drawn from Grant Papers and Sheridan papers from the Library of Congress, see Richter 207.

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller discussion of the desire of Sheridan and Grant to involve the U.S. in war against the French in Mexico, including Grant's secret orders to his army to prepare for war in defiance of Seward's policy, see Hardy.