

ABSTRACT

National Interest Over Idealism: John C. Calhoun in British Newspapers

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“National Interest Over Idealism: John C. Calhoun in British Newspapers” is an examination of John C. Calhoun’s treatment in the newspapers of Great Britain and Ireland during the statesman’s career. The thesis concludes that national interest best explained the British and Irish press’s varied attitudes towards Calhoun. For instance, British newspapers tended to praise Calhoun when his foreign policy proposals dovetailed with British imperial interests and tended to denigrate Calhoun when their interests conflicted. Irish newspapers, meanwhile, tended to praise Calhoun, often based on a sense of shared culture heritage.

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NATIONAL INTEREST OVER IDEALISM:
JOHN C. CALHOUN IN BRITISH NEWSPAPERS

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

On April 15, 1865, William Lloyd Garrison strode in triumphal procession past the grave of John Caldwell Calhoun. Nineteen centuries before, Julius Caesar dragged Vercingetorix across the coasts of three continents for over half a decade of public dishonor before unceremoniously ordering him strangled. Almighty and incomprehensible God granted Calhoun a kinder fate. More than a decade and a half after Calhoun died peacefully in his bed, his ideological antithesis merely pronounced the violent execution of Calhoun's ideals as he lay in a marble tomb. Like Caesar, the South Carolinian needed only one name to convey the full force of his personality. As reported in *The Leeds Mercury* (in an article reprinted from a New York newspaper) the slaveocrat's funerary monument bore "the single word, 'Calhoun.'"¹

The relatively gracious New Englander recognized his defeated foe with what might be interpreted as a backhanded compliment. Albeit with a held nose, Garrison tolerated the importation of pagan antiquity into the New World in the form of a southern slavery-based republic--even as he routinely spurned Madison's political principles plucked from the pages of Polybius and Livy. Perhaps more consistently, the devout Bible-reading crusader countenanced the continuation of the divine mercy described in the codes of Christian antiquity. Garrison's epitaph over slavery uttered before the marble

¹ "ABOLITIONISTS IN CHARLESTON." *Leeds Mercury*, May 22, 1865. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 18, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/BB3201612191/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=2ab730a3>.

shrouded corpse of the South Carolinian statesman proclaimed, “There... lies a man whose name is decayed worse than his mouldering form; the one may have a resurrection, the other never!”² The newspapers failed to record whether Garrison judged the soul of Calhoun more likely to enjoy eternal life.

Garrison believed that the name “Calhoun” was too closely linked together with the cognomens “slaveocrat” and “secessionist” (or at least “nullifier”) to achieve the resurrection that Calhoun’s name seemed to enjoy, proceeding from the trumpet call of lost causers and segregationists. Perhaps the abolitionist was right. An epoch Garrison’s prophecy could not predict, an age of iconoclasm, may have proven Garrison’s initial prediction ultimately correct. Like the president who was shot the night before Garrison’s visit, Calhoun was much more than his demise.

Forming an impression of Calhoun’s intentions remains a daunting and thankless task. However, amassing a collection of reporting and commentary illustrating how Calhoun’s rough contemporaries viewed his actions and intentions is more manageable. This study will concentrate on the views of contemporaneous British journalists, such as the ones who wrote the *Leeds Mercury* article mentioned above, who formed the opinions of the British public during Calhoun’s career. Perceptions of Calhoun and opinions of his actions in British and Irish newspapers are generally determined by patriotism and the perceived national interests of the articles’ writers, with idealism, especially British opposition to slavery, taking a backseat.

² Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

John Caldwell Calhoun, the Fledgling Statesman:

“The ambition and selfish policy of the American government are fully developed”

Thucydides claimed that wars are the product of fear, honor, and interest.

Journalists play a very similar role in politics to the role that intelligence officers play in politics by other means. Thus, the British journalists’ small-scale cold war against Calhoun was largely influenced by fear, honor, and interest. While the vast majority of the British journalistic class excoriated slavery and defenders of slavery, this did not entirely explain their general hostility to Calhoun, nor the strange instances when the newspapers of Albion rallied around Calhoun’s banner. The British press generally saw Calhoun as a totem of American geopolitical competition. Many British journalists feared, not without cause, that American power in the Gulf of Mexico would prevent the exercise of British power in that part of the world or even pose a threat to British possessions in the Caribbean. The rarer positive treatments of Calhoun also followed geopolitical interest. Nascent Irish Nationalists praised Calhoun not only as an ethnic cousin but as a thorn in the side of the British Empire. Similarly, British papers hailed Calhoun during the Oregon crisis when British imperial interests paralleled Calhoun’s sectional interests.

Perhaps the first mention of John C. Calhoun in a British newspaper occurred on May 21, 1814, when *The Leeds Mercury* identified him as a member of the United States House of Representatives for South Carolina’s sixth district and a member of the Committee of Foreign Relations. After almost two years of engagement in the War of

1812, Calhoun saw the war as winding down. *The Leeds Mercury* and *The Caledonian Mercury*, both of which ran the same article about Calhoun, concurred.³ An article preceding the Calhoun article in *The Leeds Mercury* titled *PEACE WITH AMERICA* reported that Albert Gallatin and James A. Bayard, two of the Americans tasked with negotiating an Anglo-American peace, had “received... instructions of a most conciliatory nature for the especial convenience of the British ministry.” These instructions recommended Flanders as the location for the imminent Anglo-American peace talks, where the Treaty of Ghent would be negotiated.⁴

The article described Calhoun’s introduction of a bill for the repeal of the Embargo Act of 1813 as a key development in the Anglo-American drift towards peace.⁵ Passed as a wartime measure to eliminate the substantial British revenue accumulated by exporting various industrial goods to America, *the Leeds Mercury* reported the repeal of the Embargo Act as a hopeful sign.⁶ The paradoxical situation of conciliatory concession from a politician who owed his rise to a hawkish willingness to confront Great Britain and equally surprising reciprocal conciliation may be explained by the fact that many Americans had grown tired of the War of 1812. Anticipated as a quick war to restore American honor by swiftly conquering Canada, the conflict transmogrified into an

³ "POSTSCRIPT." *Leeds Mercury*, May 21, 1814. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 2, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/Y3201481393/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=2f3b4d05>; "AMERICAN PAPERS." *Caledonian Mercury*, May 21, 1814. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 2, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/BB3205365499/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=fc5c830c>.

⁴ "POSTSCRIPT." *Leeds Mercury*, May 21, 1814. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 2, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/Y3201481393/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=2f3b4d05>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

embarrassing quagmire exposing the unreadiness of the American military and threatening the American economy once Britain levied a counter-blockade against the upstart republic. In 1814, British policy makers saw the war with America as a sideshow. The abdication of Napoleon allowed them to shift enough resources across the Atlantic to make the war a potentially existential struggle for the United States.

Calhoun did not merit regular retention in the British press until his tenure as Secretary of War for President James Monroe between December 8, 1817 and March 4, 1825. The projection of strength required by this office superseded any image of conciliation that Calhoun might have built up in 1814. For the sake of desperately needed military preparedness, Calhoun even forsook his relatively new free trade principles. After the cessation of Anglo-American hostilities in 1815, British troops no longer directly threatened New Orleans or Washington, D.C. However, Calhoun still felt a Sword of Damocles hanging over the head of the rising republic in the form of an enemy host which could not retreat east of the Atlantic but might be supported by America's enemies in London or on the Hudson Bay.

While the British had not succeeded in dealing the USA a killing blow, London still had opportunities to harm American interests west of the Mississippi. As the United States expanded into the West, Calhoun had to face the threat of the indigenous people who already lived on the American frontier. An article titled *United States* in a Scottish newspaper, *The Aberdeen Journal*, published on February 10, 1819, revealed that Secretary Calhoun's War Department issued a report on "Indian affairs" which suggested that President Monroe might create a monopoly company "to exclude altogether

foreigners from trading with these tribes.”⁷

Provided with “sufficient capital” and limited to a span of activity of twenty years, *The Aberdeen Mercury* accused this hypothetical company of representing an American attempt “to strike a blow at the British Fur trade in Canada, which is of so much importance to this country.” *The Aberdeen Mercury* tacitly admitted the existence of the threat of Indigenous Americans to the USA, and even that the British Empire supported that threat. The article recapitulated Calhoun’s position, stating that he “entertains the opinion that the influence of the North-west and Hudson’s Bay Companies among the Indians, may be successfully opposed.”⁸

The Aberdeen Journal article closed rhetorically resolving the Anglo-American dispute in the West with an endorsement of competition (in this case between two state-backed monopolies) and its salubrious effects on trade and the consumer. *The Aberdeen Mercury* asserted a British right to counter American influence among the tribes, but it also conceded that the Americans were also in their right to counter British influence on the continent. From this conflict, *The Aberdeen Mercury* predicted that the most efficient state-backed monopoly would triumph in the fur trade and its efficiency would then benefit the consumer. The article contended that, through competition, “the public will ultimately gain” and that at the very least, Calhoun’s mercantilist and potentially saber-rattling report proved to be a benefit to the British by putting their merchants “on their

⁷ "United States." *Aberdeen Journal*, February 10, 1819. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 2, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/BA3215444334/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=99f2306>.

⁸ *Ibid.*

guard.”⁹

Multiple British newspapers ran a story which originally appeared in the American *National Intelligencer*, a Washington, D.C. based paper which usually supported Jeffersonian Republican administrations such as the Monroe Presidency in which Calhoun served. The article mentioned an American military expedition to the mouth of the Yellowstone River, which flowed into the Missouri.¹⁰

By the time the article was written, an American hunting party attached to the expedition had already been attacked by a force of indigenous Americans. The *Intelligencer* article acknowledged predictions, based on historical evidence, that an expanding continental power such as the United States would probably invite a war from a coalition of tribes on the fringes of the expanding territory (i.e., the Missouri River). *The National Intelligencer* conceded that these predictions were probably accurate, but it also noted with irony that the probability of this hypothetical war was increased by “the undue influence possessed by the British traders over the Indians.”¹¹

The National Intelligencer opined that by organizing the expedition to the mouth of the Yellowstone, Calhoun evinced “a forecast of character highly creditable to [the] secretary.” *The Newcastle Courant*, which reprinted *The National Intelligencer*’s article on July 13, 1819 with a brief but excoriating preamble, disagreed. *The Newcastle Courant*, established in August of 1711 in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne on the border of

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "AMERICA." *Newcastle Courant* [1803], July 3, 1819. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 2, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/Y3206566766/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=448bfbc9>.

¹¹ Ibid.

Northumberland and Durham, largely eschewed party politics and vehemently opposed American independence during the Revolutionary War.¹² *The Newcastle Courant* continued this tradition of opposition to the United States by stating that *The Intelligencer*'s treatment of Calhoun's expedition "exhibits a fine trait of *republican morality*, and shews that the aggrandising and rapacious spirit of the United States is insatiable."¹³ The Conservative *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, published in Truro, also reprinted *The National Intelligencer*'s article on June 26, 1819, about a week before *The Newcastle Courant*.¹⁴ In introducing the American article, *The Royal Cornwall Gazette* expressed sentiments similar to those of his northern countryman, writing, "the ambition and selfish policy of the American government are fully developed."¹⁵ The contrast between *The National Intelligencer* and *The Newcastle Courant* demonstrates the fact that, even at this early date, Calhoun's career proved a source of controversy in Britain. In particular, controversy over Calhoun laid bare splits in the British public about the value of maintaining and expanding the British Empire. The more pro-American columnists in *The Caledonian Mercury*, who reprinted the article uncritically, found themselves in sympathy with the populist politicians of Jefferson's Republican Party and viewed Calhoun as a worthy avatar of audacious Republican dynamism.¹⁶ *The National*

¹² *Newcastle Courant* [1803], n.d. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 2, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/pub/1ZUB/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN>.

¹³ "AMERICA." *Newcastle Courant* [1803], July 3, 1819. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 2, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/Y3206566766/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=448bfb9c>.

¹⁴ *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, n.d. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 2, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/pub/2FXJ/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN>.

¹⁵ "UNITED STATES OF AMERICA." *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, June 26, 1819. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 2, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/R3211363856/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=9269d43c>.

¹⁶ "AMERICAN PAPERS." *Caledonian Mercury*, June 24, 1819. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed

Intelligencer even went so far as to say that any potential conflict between the USA and the Indigenous Americans would be likely caused by Britain's mercantile imperial interests in the region. *The Royal Cornwall Gazette* and *The Newcastle Courant*, on the other hand, opposed Calhoun's expedition to the Yellowstone, deprecating Calhoun's character on the grounds that these provocations would selfishly imperil British interests.¹⁷

John C. Calhoun was largely absent from the British political conversation between 1825 and 1832. The misfortune of occupying the vice-presidential office often had that effect on a politician during the nineteenth century. In 1824, Calhoun appeared on lists of fifteen presidential candidates published in various British newspapers including *The Trewman's Exeter Flying Post* and an advertisement for a three-volume account (complete with illustrated plates) of an exploratory expedition to the Rocky Mountains ordered by Calhoun when he was the Secretary of War published in multiple papers including the London based *Morning Post*.¹⁸ The tsunami that was the 1824 election made hardly a splash in the Sceptered Isle. *The Aberdeen Journal* published a piece on March 23, 1825 mentioning that John Quincy Adams, whom the article described as "esteemed... an able statesman, and a good scholar." Elected president by

January 24, 2021). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/BB3205377560/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=bbaac562>.

¹⁷ "UNITED STATES OF AMERICA." *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, June 26, 1819. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 2, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/R3211363856/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=9269d43c>.

¹⁸ "FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE." *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post*, May 30, 1822. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 2, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/Y3200658365/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=93147305>; "Multiple Classified ads." *Morning Post*, May 31, 1823, [1]+. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 2, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/R3209766849/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=5eb7a2fc>.

the House of Representatives, despite the fact that he received fewer electoral votes than did Andrew Jackson, the elevation of Adams prompted cries of “corruption” from the Democratic party. The article reported that William H. Crawford finished in third place but neglected to explicitly detail the so-called corrupt bargain. Almost as an afterthought, the last sentence read: “Mr. John C. Calhoun is elected vice-president.”¹⁹ With those eight words, Calhoun practically disappeared from the public consciousness of Great Britain for the next eight years.

The Aberdeen Journal published a similarly terse account of Andrew Jackson’s rise to the presidency and Calhoun’s reelection as vice-president published April 1, 1829.²⁰ With Calhoun shunted into an office where he could neither obstruct British imperial objectives nor successfully promote free trade, English newspapermen found few reasons to mention the vice president. They were more likely to mention the great South Carolinian in connection with actions he undertook as Secretary of War. The previously mentioned advertisement in *The London Morning Post* provides an example of this tendency. Published while Calhoun was vice-president, this newspaper included an advertisement for a three-volume illustrated account of the exploratory expedition to the Rockies which Calhoun organized as secretary of state.²¹ Presumably, American

¹⁹ "Postscript." *Aberdeen Journal*, March 23, 1825. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 2, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/BA3205629142/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=b9ea50ab>.

²⁰ "FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE." *Aberdeen Journal*, April 1, 1829. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 2, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/BA3205632903/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=e89cf2b3>.

²¹ "Multiple Classified ads." *Morning Post*, May 31, 1823, [1]+. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 2, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/R3209766849/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=5eb7a2fc>.

westward exploration intrigued the British, as the defeat of Napoleon nine years earlier had deprived Europeans of true adventures stories closer to home. Another example comes from an issue of *The Dublin Freeman's Journal* from November 9, 1831, which focused on reform movements around the world. The newspaper published a claim that as the Secretary of War, Calhoun “had the issue of spirits prohibited to the army of the United States” under the headline “ORIGIN OF TEMPERANCE SOCIETIES.”²²

Then, in 1832, Calhoun rocketed back into the British consciousness due to the South Carolina Nullification Crisis. Several British newspapers focused on Governor James Hamilton. Hamilton exerted much more actual control of what transpired in South Carolina, and they favored sensationalist predictions of civil war between the twelve thousand strong “State Guard” which the governor reportedly wanted to raise to repel a hypothetical Jacksonian invasion of the state. An article published in *The Times of London* on January 7, 1833, under the heading *Private Correspondence*, offered several paragraphs of predictions that nullification would inadvertently lead to the dissolution of the United States, possibly after bloody internecine conflict. Nevertheless, that same article trumpeted Calhoun as “the father of South Carolina nullification” and “the leading man in the south.”²³

²² "REFORM.-THE MINISTRY." *Freeman's Journal*, November 19, 1831. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed January 18, 2021). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/BC3204508799/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=a0363251>.

²³ “Private Correspondence.” *The Times of London*, January 7, 1833. *The Times* (Accessed January 18, 2020). <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/archive/article/1833-01-07/5/4.html?region=global#start%3D1831->

CHAPTER THREE

Statesman of the South:

“With an earnestness and a force never before displayed”

Though *The Times of London* article designated Calhoun as a statesman of great ability, the piece held a very cynical view of Calhoun and his motives in bringing about the Nullification Crisis. The article alleged that underneath Calhoun’s official objectives, “there are concealed many secret, personal, ambitious reasons which no man ventures to divulge.” *The Times of London* partially rehearsed the falling out between Andrew Jackson and John C. Calhoun and his replacement as vice president by Martin Van Buren. The article informed its readers that otherwise Calhoun “would have occupied the same position which Mr. Van Buren now does.” Insinuations all in place, *The Times of London* asserted that Calhoun “went to work, and gave to birth to a most violent measure of state opposition to the tariff laws” with the sole object of conspiring against Van Buren, the “heir-apparent” as *The Times* called him, from winning the 1836 presidential election.²⁴

As evidenced by the intrigue sniffing and conspiracy spinning of *The Times of London*, British newspapers dismissed the political principle of state’s rights which Jackson and Calhoun battled over during the Nullification Crisis. Rather, they tended to characterize the political conflict as a power struggle between factions wrapped up in a thin veneer of principle. *The Times of London* identified Calhoun’s veneer of principle solely with the belief that tariffs were too high, oversimplifying Calhoun’s theory that the

²⁴ Ibid.

federal government of the United States could not pass laws which fell disproportionately upon the heads of the inhabitants of one section of the union.²⁵ Uninterested in the constitutional question at stake, British newspapers tended to see the Nullification Crisis merely as a question of public order. *The Salisbury and Winchester Journal* opined that “it is a most fortunate thing for America that General Jackson was re-elected President” because Jackson was far more popular in the south than his alternative, Henry Clay, and Jackson’s sectional popularity kept Calhoun’s nullification theory from spreading and taking the section by storm.²⁶

Given the economic advantages of unfettered Anglo-American trade, it is strange that Calhoun’s nullification theory did not find more purchase in Great Britain. At least, it is curious that no one in Great Britain seems to have been willing to champion American nullification, regardless of whether they believed the theory to be good for America as a whole. However, there might have been something that the British would value more than the profitable Anglo-American trading relations: the honor of the United Kingdom. The United States had only pursued its separation from the United Kingdom two generations previously and had fought a war with Britain more recently. At least some British people willingly indulged in wishful thinking, hoping for dissolution for the country which had so unwisely and ungratefully broken away from the freest state in the world up to that point. It was high time that the United States collapsed under its own

²⁵ "London." *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, January 21, 1833, 2. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 3, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/EN3219066584/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=d3f46823>.

²⁶ "London." *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, January 21, 1833, 2. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 3, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/EN3219066584/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=d3f46823>.

weight in the absence of a connection to the mother of parliaments. A Conservative writing in a *Leicester Journal* article published on September 14, 1832, posits this explicitly, arguing that the powder keg of the Nullification Crisis was born from the same disrespect for tradition which led to American Independence. This seems odd, given that nullification came to be practiced in South Carolina, perhaps the most conservative state in the union. *The Leicester Journal* observed “It would be hard, however, to prove that Carolina has not the same right to detach itself from the Union that the Thirteen States had to detach themselves from the Mother Country,” perhaps with *schadenfreude* or a thinly veiled desire to see the United States unravel as just recompense for embarrassing Britain in the late eighteenth century.²⁷

Just as the Nullification Crisis continued to define Calhoun in the minds of his countrymen for the rest of his life and beyond, the crisis continued to hover over Calhoun’s reputation on the other side of the Atlantic. Over a decade later, on May 30, 1846, *The Dublin Freeman’s Journal* published an article written by the paper’s New York correspondent detailing the start of the Mexican American War. Calhoun participated in a debate on the senate floor over whether Congress should empower President Polk to prepare for war, including authority to recruit volunteers and the construction, acquisition, and provision of warships, as well as the allocation of ten million dollars for Polk’s use. Calhoun spoke against these extraordinary measures, reported the correspondent, “with an earnestness and a force never before displayed by

²⁷ "The American Constitution." *Leicester Journal*, September 14, 1832, 4. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 3, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/CL3241152543/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=db5da493>.

him, not even during the memorable nullification struggle.”²⁸

²⁸ "FROM OUR NEW YORK CORRESPONDENT." *Freeman's Journal*, May 30, 1846. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 3, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/Y3204557838/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=1dc0d110>.

CHAPTER FOUR

Calhoun, Texas, Oregon, and England:
“No doubt that gentleman would prefer peace to war”

The mainstream nineteenth century British press, centered in Great Britain proper and characterized by patriotic feelings and a belief in the justice of their empire, generally viewed Calhoun as an enemy to Britain’s imperial interests in the Caribbean and the area which is today the American Southwest. This enmity emerged clearly in the multilateral diplomatic struggle over the fate of the newly independent Texan Republic and the war between Mexico and the United States which grew out of the conflict.

During the period in which the short-lived Lone Star Republic enjoyed political independence, many mainstream Texan politicians schemed unsuccessfully for union with the United States. However, despite a modicum of popular support in the United States national interest in preserving peaceful relations with Mexico worked against annexation until John Tyler seized upon the issue to revive his failing administration. Prior to the Tyler gambit, Texan diplomats cunningly cultivated a potential alliance with Britain to make admission to the Union seem necessary for American security. Texan officials entered into talks with the British Empire, asking Royal Britannia to mediate a lasting peace with Mexico. Less than sincere in its petition for support from the dominant great power, Texas hoped to instill anxiety in American policy makers that Texas might join Britain’s informal empire. In hopes of motivating America with the dread that the Lone Star Republic might become an Argentina or a China on the Gulf of Mexico, Texans entered into negotiations with Britain. To some extent, it worked. Policy makers

in the United States worried that the United Kingdom sought to impose the old world calculus in the Americas, upsetting the nascent balance of the new world. Partially motivated by an interest in upholding the Monroe Doctrine, the embattled President Tyler unilaterally offered Texas admittance into the Union on the last full day of his presidency on the advice of his Secretary of State, John C. Calhoun.²⁹ Incoming President James K. Polk opted against renegeing on Tyler's agreement with Texas, securing Texan admission as the twenty-eighth state of the Union.

British diplomats felt understandably betrayed by Texan *realpolitik*, and this sense of ill-use manifested itself in contemporary newspaper accounts in Britain. *The North Wales Chronicle*, a daily newspaper founded in 1807 and surviving to the present day. The newspaper claimed to be the only paper published in northern Wales, and it may also have been published in England. Like other newspapermen, the publishers of *The North Wales Chronicle* viewed themselves as part of a moral crusade for the good of mankind. *The North Wales Chronicle* editors set forward a declaration of principles, writing that "The press is a powerful instrument for good or for evil. We wish to see the good for the suppression of the evil. We admire and uphold the Freedom of the Press; we despise, abhor, and would control its Liberty when that liberty [degenerates into a force for evil]."³⁰

The Chronicle's self-conception as a force for unalloyed good at all costs led the paper to speak out against slavery and to generally support the British Empire, which

²⁹ Wilentz, Sean. 2008. *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*. W.W. Horton and Company. New York. 577.

³⁰ *North Wales Chronicle*, n.d. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed January 18, 2021). <https://link.gale.com/apps/pub/1ZUC/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN>.

committed itself to combatting the Trans-Atlantic trade in Africans the same year that *The North Wales Chronicle* came into existence. The newspaper reported favorably on abolitionist meetings in Wales as early as 1828, and after Britain outlawed slavery throughout its empire, the newspaper continued to support worldwide abolition of slavery.³¹

In its issue published May 21, 1844, *The North Wales Chronicle* chastised the leaders of the short-lived Republic of Texas as well as John C. Calhoun, seizing on the South Carolinian as the sole common thread in the American Texan annexation movement and a suitable pro-slavery bogeyman. *The North Wales Chronicle* accused Calhoun and other pro-annexation politicians of paranoia. The article points to correspondence by the recently-deceased Tyler cabinet member, Abel P. Upshur, Calhoun's immediate predecessor as secretary of state. This "long correspondence [which had been] published" accused the British government of conspiring with abolitionists in England and the American north and exercising influence on the government of Mexico "to procure the abolition of slavery in Texas," despite the fact that this conspiracy theory was denied by the British foreign secretary, Lord Aberdeen.³² *The North Wales Chronicle* seems understandably bitter over the perceived injury of Texas escaping from Britain's imperial orbit to join England's chief strategic adversary in the region. This is

³¹ "CARNARVON ANTI-SLAVERY MEETING." *North Wales Chronicle*, August 21, 1828. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed July 7, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/BB3200853722BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=f17c4f6f>.

³² "THE CHRONICLE." *North Wales Chronicle*, May 21, 1844. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed July 10, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/BB3200870078/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=4c6a7587>.

compounded by the added insult of the deceptively positive diplomatic relations between Texas and Britain at the same time that Texas was intending to join the United States and even suspecting Britain of conspiring against Texas with Texas' enemies.

The North Wales Chronicle reserved its most strident criticism for John C. Calhoun himself. *The North Wales Chronicle* faulted Calhoun for distorting a declaration by Lord Aberdeen in which the foreign minister said, "Great Britain desires, and is constantly exerting herself to procure the general abolition of slavery throughout the world." Calhoun characterized this statement a bald-faced confession "of the desire of Great Britain to see slavery abolished in Texas," despite the fact that Aberdeen's declaration was accompanied by the claim that they would not interfere directly or unduly with slavery in Texas. Rather, the British foreign minister pledged that the UK would leave Texas "fully at liberty to make their own unfettered arrangements... both in regard to the abolition of slavery and to all other points." *The North Wales Chronicle* compared Calhoun unfavorably to his fellow *triumvir*, Henry Clay, who, though he had not seen the text of the treaty between Texas and the United States, objected to the principle of it.³³

Similar denunciations of Calhoun as an unreconstructed warmonger could be found in *The Times of London*, one of Britain's most prestigious newspapers. The December 30, 1845 issue of *The Times* ran an article published under the pen name "A Genevese Traveller." The Traveller quotes Calhoun as "opposed to the surrender of 'one inch of territory,'" causing the author to remark that he was glad that Calhoun was not the

³³ Ibid.

chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs.³⁴

Sometimes, however, criticism of Calhoun as a slaveholder is conspicuous only by its absence. *The Times of London* included no criticism of Calhoun as a slaveholder, perhaps perceiving that it was not relevant to American land acquisitions in the Pacific Northwest. However, many British papers not only ignored Calhoun's slaveholding, they praised the senator from South Carolina. Despite the abolitionist character of its editors, *The North Wales Chronicle* exhibited a quasi-tribalist loyalty to the British Empire and their fellow abolitionists in its government, which superseded their own anti-slavery principles. The article ignores Calhoun's slave holding, as well as his crusading commitment to preserving and expanding the Southern peculiarity. Neither does *The Chronicle* criticize Lord Aberdeen for carving out an exemption for Texas, abridging his abolitionist principles to tacitly countenance slavery in Texas. Instead, the article accepts Aberdeen's exception and pillories Calhoun for failing to accept the foreign minister's concession to Texan slave holding.³⁵

Instead, *The Chronicle* criticizes American annexation of Texas on the grounds of natural borders and imperial power politics. *The North Wales Chronicle* lamented the "great sensation in Paris" created by the news of Texas annexation. To the French, the American diplomatic victory over Britain in the Gulf of Mexico solidified the United States as a potential strategic ally in the field of great power competition and as a useful

³⁴ "American Affairs." *The Times of London*, December 30, 1845. *The Times* (Accessed January 18, 2020). <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/archive/article/1845-12-30/6/2.html>

³⁵ "THE CHRONICLE." *North Wales Chronicle*, May 21, 1844. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed July 10, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/BB3200870078/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=4c6a7587>.

tool for “directing a powerful blow against the best interests of Great Britain.” *The Chronicle* further complained that Texas is “geographically as well as territorially disjointed from the United States by the Rocky Mountains and by a sort of desert inhabited by numerous wild animals.”³⁶

Despite Calhoun’s opposition to British interference in Texas, Calhoun did not resist the expansion of the British Empire *per se*. Calhoun’s fundamental political concern was the necessity to preserve slavery, and his attitude towards Royal Britannia was contingent on that principle. Calhoun considered British expansion into the Oregon Country advantageous for American slavery, so Calhoun supported that expansion.

Pleasantly surprised that the often recalcitrant Calhoun would willingly support British interests in such a contested issue, elements in the British press praised Calhoun for justice in international relations and, like a later politician, for securing peace in his time. The April 23, 1846 issue of *The Dublin Freeman’s Journal* sheds light on how the British public viewed Calhoun during his involvement in the Anglo-American dispute over Oregon. Founded in 1763 as a “mouthpiece of rule from London,” *The Freeman’s Journal* evolved throughout the nineteenth century into a more Liberal paper, championing left wing causes, more frequently criticizing the British government, and advocating for Home Rule.³⁷

With a strong, if fading, support for the London government, combined with its nascent Irish nationalism, the Dublin paper expressed a strong inclination towards

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *Freeman’s Journal*, n.d. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed July 16, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/pub/1ZTL/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN>.

Calhoun during the Oregon crisis. An article called *America-Oregon. Policy of Mr. Calhoun. Prospects of the United States*, published on April 23, 1846, *The Dublin Freeman's Journal* pointed out John C. Calhoun's Irish heritage. After calling him "one of the first statesmen of America" and asserting that he was "very prominently before the British public, but not more prominently than his great abilities and his vast influence deserves," the article mentions Calhoun's father, Patrick Calhoun, an Irish emigree. With a flourish of wistfulness, the article claimed that living in America afforded Calhoun "that space and verge for greatness which Ireland has been so scantily able to furnish to those of her sons who cherished any sentiment of patriotism."³⁸

The Dublin Freeman's Journal praised Calhoun for his efforts to preserve peace between the United Kingdom and the United States throughout the dispute over Oregon. Calhoun "always maintained the abstract right of his country to the whole [Oregon] territory," the article explains. Calhoun was committed to peace, the journal explained, because he believed that time "was the friend of America, and would by the quiet progress of events would place the whole of the territory in her hands if only she had temper, firmness, and patience to await its slow but certain operations." Quoting Calhoun as describing America's policy as "wise and masterly inactivity," *The Dublin Freeman's Journal* asserted that Calhoun's turn of phrase was controversial when first uttered, but soon became "celebrated."³⁹

During the Oregon crisis, Calhoun often found favor by dint of not being James

³⁸ "AMERICA-OREGON." *Freeman's Journal*, April 23, 1846. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed July 16, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/Y3204557337/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=04647c15>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

K. Polk, whom the British public perceived as an inveterate war monger. *The Freeman's Journal* remarked favorably on Calhoun's role as secretary of state during the early days of Polk's administration, when the South Carolinian statesman "conducted the first negotiation of Mr. Polk's cabinet, with Mr. Pakenham [the British envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to the United States of America]."⁴⁰ Before this, as the *Berrows Worcester Journal* pointed out in its January 1, 1846 edition, Calhoun and Pakenham corresponded by letter five times between July 22, 1844 and July 12, 1845, which the journal claimed "was characterized by great ability on both sides."⁴¹

Generally, the British public considered this negotiation to be more fruitful than the subsequent correspondence between Pakenham and James Buchanan, Calhoun's successor. *The Freeman's Journal* explained Buchanan's ascendancy as secretary of state by remarking that the new cabinet member had views "favourable to a more dashing policy [which] were considered to be more in accordance with the views of the president."⁴² *The Berrows Worcester Journal* assertively declared negotiation between America and Britain dead, accusing Buchanan of offering Pakenham less than Calhoun originally offered, while declining offers more generous than the ones Pakenham originally made.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "AMERICA." *Berrows Worcester Journal*, January 1, 1846. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed July 17, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/R3214880508/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=e0432737>.

⁴² "AMERICA-OREGON." *Freeman's Journal*, April 23, 1846. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed July 16, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/Y3204557337/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=04647c15>.

⁴³ "AMERICA." *Berrows Worcester Journal*, January 1, 1846. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed July 17, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/R3214880508/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=e0432737>.

The same newspaper further excoriated Polk, claiming that his warmongering exterior represented a mere facade for political cowardice. *The Worcester Journal* admitted that Polk did not wish for war between America and Britain but claimed that Polk's "cringing and accommodation to party... will speedily put the matter out of his own control."⁴⁴ Calhoun, by contrast, appeared a veritable peacenik according to *The Dublin Freeman's Journal*. In *AMERICA-OREGON*, *The Journal* claimed that Calhoun would assiduously avoid a war with the United Kingdom because it would "bring England into an alliance with Mexico for the undoing of his work and the reconquest of Texas."⁴⁵

AMERICA-OREGON, the aforementioned *Dublin Freeman's Journal* article, admitted that Calhoun "has views on other subjects which have an important bearing on his policy with regard to Oregon." The paper acknowledged Calhoun's slave holding and commitment to the South's peculiar institution in its characteristically soft spoken way. *The Dublin Freeman's Journal* recapitulated Calhoun's view of the balance in the Union between slave states and free states, writing that "Belonging to a slave state, he desires to maintain a paramount- he himself would only say a fair- influence in the confederation for the southern section of the Union." In similarly mincing language rife with negations reminiscent of the dreaded "not un-" formation, the article admitted that Calhoun recently pushed for Texas annexation solely to bolster the slave holding bloc in the United States senate without heed to how the move would affect American relations with Mexico or the

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ "AMERICA-OREGON." *Freeman's Journal*, April 23, 1846. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed July 16, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/Y3204557337/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=04647c15>.

European powers.⁴⁶

This equivocal admission, buried in the fourth paragraph of *AMERICA-OREGON*, proved a far cry from other treatments of slavery and slave holders in *The Dublin Freeman's Journal*. Perhaps the perpetuation of human bondage in the United States was more abstract and removed from British imperial interests. On June 27, 1840, by contrast, *The Journal* applauded an anti-slavery meeting held in Exeter Hall, denouncing slavery as “guilt, cruelty, and oppression were inseparable from the continuance of slavery.”⁴⁷

The Dublin Freeman's Journal, more clear cut, described Calhoun's other preconceived opinion shaping his Oregon policy, a political ideology far more popular with the British elite and eminently consistent with Britain's imperial policy: free trade. *AMERICA-OREGON* extolled Calhoun as “superior to any who advocates in England the doctrines to which, on the other side of the Atlantic, he has devoted his life... in disinterestedness, enthusiasm, and ability.”⁴⁸

The general British public's preference for Calhoun over Buchanan or Polk also finds voice in articles from *The Belfast News-Letter*, the eponymous Ulster city's first newspaper. Dating back to the mid eighteenth century, *The News-Letter* leaned Conservative, catering to the landowners and merchants who made up the Protestant elite

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "BRITISH AND FOREIGN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY-GRAND MEETING AT EXETER HALL." *Freeman's Journal*, June 27, 1840. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed July 17, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/BC3204528446/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=ee3bf629>.

⁴⁸ "AMERICA-OREGON." *Freeman's Journal*, April 23, 1846. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed July 16, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/Y3204557337/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=04647c15>.

of northern Ireland.⁴⁹

In *ENGLAND AND AMERICA-THE OREGON QUESTION*, published on January 20, 1846, the Ulsterite paper decried the “gasconade” of a bevy of American warmongers in Congress including Stephen A. Douglas, but repeated the familiar praises of the peace loving Calhoun. *The Belfast News-Letter* stated approvingly “We place confidence in the wisdom and pacific disposition of the greater intellects of the American legislature, such as Mr. Calhoun and Mr. Webster.” The article denounced Polk’s establishment of military bases in Oregon Country south of the 42nd parallel as tantamount to a declaration of war on Britain, and the newspaper praised Calhoun for speaking against that militarization or, as the article put it, “appeasing the just indignation of the British minister.”⁵⁰

At least some members of the American foreign pol took notice that Calhoun and his sentiments found favour with much of British public opinion during the Oregon Crisis. One such diplomat, Elihu Burritt, leveraged this perception in an attempt to repair frayed Anglo-American relations. On April 18, 1846, *The Leicester Chronicle* published a letter to the editor entitled *THE OREGON QUESTION* written by Burritt in which he calls himself a “believer in the unity, and common and glorious destiny, of the Anglo-Saxon race.”⁵¹ After a brief introduction, he quoted at some length speeches from

⁴⁹ *Belfast News-Letter*, n.d. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed July 17, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/pub/1ZSX/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN>.

⁵⁰ "ENGLAND AND AMERICA-THE OREGON QUESTION." *Belfast News-Letter*, January 20, 1846. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed July 17, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/Y3202344778/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=a282acbb>.

⁵¹ "THE OREGON QUESTION." *Leicester Chronicle*, April 18, 1846. *British Library Newspapers*

Calhoun as well as another statesman, Reverdy Johnson, a congressman from Maryland. Through this, as Burritt wrote, the Yankee diplomat hoped to demonstrate “that even our legislators feel the strength of those bonds of brotherhood which are drawing together the great Anglo-Saxon nations.”⁵²

Burritt hailed Calhoun saying that he was “a friend to... human civilization, to human progress and advancement.” and opposed to war on principle. Calhoun specified this dislike of war into an abhorrence of war with Britain in particular. Praising the British Empire for ushering in the “remarkable... peace which followed the Battle of Waterloo,” Calhoun extolled the advantages of relatively unfettered trade between foreign countries (England and America in this case). Calhoun described the benefits of Trans-Atlantic free trade as a “jubilee,” which might have sounded ironic to Calhoun’s human property. Calhoun explicitly argued that the British global economic order was too valuable to trade for a cold wet wilderness on the Pacific Coast. When contemplating exclusion from the benefits of international trade, Calhoun rhetorically asked, “shall we incur a result like that for Oregon?”⁵³

Perhaps Mr. Burritt’s quotations were not offered in vain. The opening lines of *The Leicester Chronicle*’s America portion of their “Foreign Intelligence” segment, published on May 2, 1846, read “The news brought from the United States... has calmed the apprehensions lately entertained of a war on the Oregon question.”⁵⁴

accessed August 1, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/R3213082751/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=eca89c07>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ "FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE." *Leicester Chronicle*, May 2, 1846. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 1, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/R3213082873/BNCN?u=>

The “news” probably referred to the moderate congressional resolution on April 23 calling for President Polk to end the joint occupation of Oregon: “*Resolved*, That nothing herein contained is intended to interfere with the right and discretion of the proper authorities of the two contracting parties to renew or pursue negotiations for an amicable settlement of the controversy respecting the Oregon territory.”⁵⁵ *The Leicester Chronicle* credited this decrease in tensions to “the trade and commerce of both countries” and stated that further debate in Washington is “considered very lightly of in mercantile circles.”⁵⁶

The Leicester Chronicle’s recourse to mercantile interest to explain the peace secured by the submersion of the Oregon Crisis mirrors Burritt’s quotation of Calhoun’s ode to globalism. Perhaps Burritt influenced the newspaper’s liberal stance that commerce leads to peace. The article does credit its stance to nameless “well-informed men in America.”⁵⁷ Perhaps Burritt was merely savvy enough to recapitulate an argument of a prominent American statesman similar enough in sensibilities to the English that his peace dove globalism would be accepted. Whichever interpretation is correct, Calhoun’s Anglophilic free trade philosophy was perfectly suited for the task of soothing tensions between Britain and America.

txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=6cdaef56.

⁵⁵ United States., Miller, D. Hunter. (19311948). *Treaties and other international acts of the United States of America*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O.. 120

⁵⁶ "FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE." *Leicester Chronicle*, May 2, 1846. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 1,2020).<https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/R3213082873/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=6cdaef56>.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*.

CHAPTER FIVE

Calhoun, Texas, Oregon, and Ireland: “I must rank him amongst the advocates of war”

Though not all pro-Calhoun writers may be indicted with ethnic sympathy, many of the newspapers which lauded Calhoun the loudest were Irish. *The Dublin Freeman's Journal* pointed out that John C. Calhoun was the son of an Irish immigrant. In an age of dawning nationalisms across Europe, perhaps these complimentary treatments of Calhoun had more to do with his family's roots on the Emerald Isle than with the policies of the Palmetto State politician.

In addition to *The Dublin Freeman's Journal's* celebration of Calhoun's Irishness, several other Irish newspapers during the mid-nineteenth century expressed admiration for their ethnic kin who made good by crossing the Atlantic, both from pro-Britain and anti-Britain perspectives. Irish nationalist newspapers often spun complex conspiracy theories in which the British Empire played the villain and courageous American politicians of Irish descent rose up to stop Albion's quest for world domination.

The same Irish newspapers that inclined towards Calhoun, at least in part because of their common heritage, tended to support other American politicians from Ireland to the same or even greater degree. Looking back on the Nullification Crisis almost two decades later, the New York correspondent for *The Dublin Freeman's Journal* sided with the Scotts-Irish Andrew Jackson against Calhoun.⁵⁸ *The Cork Examiner*, for instance,

⁵⁸ "AMERICA." *Freeman's Journal*, January 11, 1850. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 3,

praised Jackson for his role in setting in motion Texas' long slow trek towards statehood in their May 20, 1844 issue. Fondly bestowing upon Jackson the familiar epithet "Old Hickory," *The Cork Examiner* also praised his fellow Scots-Irish Tennessean president, James K. Polk, comparing him favorably to the politicians of the British Empire. *The Cork Examiner* assumed as a matter of first principles that the American president must be correct when his pronouncements contradicted the talking points of the British ruling class, whom they judged both mendacious as well as belligerent. *The Cork Examiner* willingly believed a statement from James K. Polk asserting Britain's warmongering intentions because, "Who shall place a limit to the aggressive ambition of England?"⁵⁹

The Cork Examiner supported America's annexation of Texas, primed to accept James K. Polk's rationale for doing so at face value, provided that Polk's sentiments were suitably anti-British. Parroting Polk, *The Cork Examiner* defended American statehood for Texas as its only option save for induction into the British Empire. The fire eating Irish newspaper described the choice facing American policymakers as "whether England should have upon the southern portion of the continent of North America a territory which should serve her for the purpose of aggression against the States, and of gradual absorption of the South American republics."⁶⁰ The repeated use of "England" to refer to the Empire, rather than Britain or the United Kingdom, further evidenced *The Cork Examiner's* nationalist tendencies. Irishmen who identified with Britain would tend to be

2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/Y3204576998/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=de200ddf>.

⁵⁹ "Annexation of Texas." *Cork Examiner*, May 20, 1844, 2. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed July 30, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/GW3222128686/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=3f4099be>.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

annoyed by the common mistake of using the more exclusive word “England” as a synecdoche for the four nations of the British Isles and their imperial possessions. The Irish nationalist, on the other hand, would be more inclined to see himself as separate from the true power brokers in London, despite the fact that “Ireland” appears in the country’s name, “The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.”

The Cork Examiner’s Irish Nationalism and its feeling of kinship with American politicians of Irish heritage, especially Calhoun, is even more evident in an issue published on January 19, 1846. *The Cork Examiner* predicted war between the United States and the United Kingdom over the Oregon Territory. The title of one article asks, already presuming that an Anglo-American clash is imminent, “WHERE SHALL THE BATTLE BE FOUGHT?” The answer: “It appears that Canada has already been struck out as the probable ground for the collision of the Belligerent powers.”⁶¹

AMERICA_WAR_RETRIBUTION, another article in the same issue, similarly prophesied a coming war over Oregon, claiming that America, bolstered by the high ideals of 1776, was too proud to cede an inch of Oregon. *The Cork Examiner* also predicted that Irish-Americans and American Repealers (those in favor of scrapping the parliamentary act which added Ireland to the United Kingdom) would lead the vanguard in the crusade against British influence on the Pacific Coast. For instance, the article mentions William Allen, chairman of the senate committee on foreign relations, and Stephen A. Douglas, making the Ensign Chekov-esque claim that both these men were

⁶¹ "America-war-retribution." *Cork Examiner*, January 19, 1846, 2. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed July 31, 2020).<https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/GW3222142945/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=da8efa64>.

Irishmen.⁶²

Furthermore, *The Cork Examiner*, willing to depart from much of the mainstream British perceptions of Calhoun's involvement in the Oregon question, imagined the great South Carolinian of Irish extraction as a tacit supporter of war with Britain's evil empire. *The Cork Examiner* mentions an article written in *The Morning Chronicle* by the moderately liberal London newspaper's Philadelphia correspondent. That correspondent claimed that there would not be war between the United States because Calhoun was an active proponent of settling the Oregon dispute on peaceful terms. *The Cork Examiner* agreed that Calhoun was not a warmonger, asserting that "no doubt that gentleman would prefer peace to war," but on the other hand "that peace should be founded on conditions entirely on the side of America."⁶³

After rejecting the analysis of *The Morning Chronicle*, *The Cork Examiner* found a strange bedfellow: A Genevese Traveller, the anti-Calhoun, pro-Empire writer for *The Times of London*. *The Cork Examiner* praised *The Times* for providing, through Traveller, analysis of Calhoun's Oregon position which best reflected the sentiments of the Irish newspaper. Even Traveller, as *The Cork Examiner* quickly pointed out, does not believe Calhoun to be looking for war in the instance of the Oregon dispute. However, the Irish writer subsequently quoted Traveller's speculation concerning the consequences if President Polk demanded that the Anglo-American joint occupation of Oregon cease immediately. Traveller rhetorically asks, "Will [Calhoun] consent to arbitrate? No. Will

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

he consent to an equitable division of territory? No, for his language is ‘Not one inch of Oregon must be ceded... I must rank him amongst the advocates of war.’” *The Cork Examiner*, too, ranked Calhoun among the advocates of an Anglo-American showdown, and they felt proud to have an ethnic cousin stand up to Britain on the other side of the Atlantic. As the Emerald Isle nationalists hoped and believed, America would fight and America would be right.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER SIX

Slavery and Death: “The great error of his life”

During the mid-nineteenth century, British newspapers occasionally predicted war between the two great centers of Anglophonic civilization on opposite banks of the Atlantic, as if they had never even heard of The Special Relationship. These were generally not firebrand nationalists praying for an apocalyptic end to the British Empire or liberation for its submerged peoples such as *The Cork Examiner* might hope for, but rather patriotic Englishmen cognizant of the tensions between Britain and America and eager to punish the upstart Trans-Atlantic nation. One such potential *casus belli*, tinged with conflict between the slave-holding republic and the abolitionist empire, was the Creole Affair. The Creole was a brig transporting around one hundred and fifty slaves from Richmond to New Orleans in late 1841 when the ship’s human cargo rose up and violently took command of the ship. This small-scale slave uprising became a source of tension between Britain and America when the ship arrived in Nassau, a port in the Bahamas and a British possession.⁶⁵

Published January 22, 1842, and printed under the heading *AMERICA AND THE SLAVE TRADE*, a *Yorkshire Gazette* article denounced the United States and Calhoun. The Gazette deplored America’s retention of the once universal, then peculiar, institution and Calhoun’s personal involvement in defending slavery in particular. Subtly present

⁶⁵ Jervy, Edward D., and C. Harold Huber. "The Creole Affair." *The Journal of Negro History* 65, no. 3 (1980): 196-211. Accessed July 31, 2020. doi:10.2307/2717095.

even in the title of the article, *The Yorkshire Gazette* used the incident as a jumping off point to make a larger statement. While certainly true that selling slaves between Richmond and New Orleans qualified as slave trade, the term deliberately harkened back to the trans-Atlantic slave trade in which Africans were kidnapped for sale in the Americas. This intuitively inhumane practice had been uncontroversially condemned on both sides of the Atlantic long before slavery itself was banned in the United States or the British Empire, having been outlawed in both those states in 1808. The title of the article, while technically true, evoked a practice which had already died out prior to the Creole Case.

The Yorkshire Gazette claimed that American intransigence *vis-a-vis* slavery might very well lead to war: “the probability of peace being preserved between this country [Great Britain] and the United States consequently decreases.” *The Yorkshire Gazette* clearly expressed abolitionist sentiments. The article reported that the American consul “insisted that the remaining slaves... were the *property* of a merchant in Louisiana, and that the British authorities ought not to allow them to land, but deliver them up to their rightful *owner!*” [emphasis in original]. *The Yorkshire Gazette* reported that Calhoun insisted “upon the payment [by the British] of the full price of the slaves!!” The indignation over the appalling phenomenon of property in man manifests itself not only in diction but in italics and superfluous exclamation points.⁶⁶

When the Creole Affair came to the floor of the senate for debate, Calhoun (along

⁶⁶ "America and the Slave Trade." *Yorkshire Gazette*, January 22, 1842, 6. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 1, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/JE3230847822/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=524881e3>.

with the Louisiana Whig senator Alexander Barrow) demanded compensation for the Louisiana slave owner. *The Yorkshire Gazette* condemned Calhoun for “violent language.” and quoted a bellicose declamation far more hawkish than anything Calhoun uttered during the Oregon Crisis. Though, surely, Calhoun’s remark would have pleased many contemporary Irish journalists, under different circumstances. *The Yorkshire Gazette* quoted Calhoun as saying, “if Great Britain refused to do them justice, he looked to every man who had an American heart to raise his voice and arm against such tyrannical insolence and oppression.”⁶⁷

The Yorkshire Gazette claimed an admirable history of abolitionism stretching back years before the Creole Case. On February 24, 1838 the northern newspaper published an article under *SLAVERY AND THE SLAVE TRADE*, reporting favorably on an anti-slavery speech by Lord Brougham given before the British House of Peers. His call for the elimination of slavery in the places throughout the world where the iniquitous institution endured into the late 1830s won the endorsement of *The Yorkshire Gazette*, editorializing that “all good men... must heartily desire the speedy attainment of those objects [the worldwide abolition of slavery] at which his Lordship aims.”⁶⁸

However, this article in praise of Lord Brougham’s humanity admits some nuance. In the first paragraph, *The Yorkshire Gazette* calls slavery “that most difficult and interesting question,” rather than a contention in the fashion of hardliners that the only element necessary to solve a moral problem is moral rectitude. The article went on to

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ "Slavery and the Slave Trade." *Yorkshire Gazette*, February 24, 1838, 2+. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 1, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/JE3230837962/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=01a3caed>.

write that the admirable Lord Brougham “mars his project by the intemperate zeal and impolicy of his advocacy. He seems to think that all the world must be made to bend to the British sense of right.” *The Yorkshire Gazette* denounced Brougham’s radical stance of immediate abolition through force to be tantamount to a declaration of war on countries all over the world, especially the deceptively weak Kingdom of Portugal.⁶⁹ *The Yorkshire Gazette*’s treatment of this speech as overly radical seems relevant to the Creole Case in that Brougham’s address aimed at eliminating slavery in the United States.⁷⁰ Furthermore, *The Yorkshire Gazette* expressed admiration for statesmanlike compromise from politicians such as the formidable Duke of Wellington.⁷¹ Presumably, they favored compensation for emancipated slaves, as such was offered to slave owners throughout the empire in 1833.

The Yorkshire Gazette’s treatment of Calhoun during the Creole Affair exists at the other side of the spectrum from its treatment of Lord Brougham in 1838. The common thread resolving the apparent paradox between the two articles rests in *The Yorkshire Gazette*’s interest in preserving the British Empire and the lives of its people. Though *The Yorkshire Gazette* clearly abhorred slavery and waxed indignant over the classification by Calhoun and other Americans of some human beings as property, the true critique of Calhoun is his thinly veiled call to arms against the slave harboring

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Brougham and Vaux, Henry Brougham. *Immediate Emancipation : the Speech of Lord Brougham in the the House of Lords, on Tuesday, February 20th, 1838, on Slavery and the Slave-Trade*. London: printed for the Central Emancipation Committee, 1838.

⁷¹ "Slavery and the Slave Trade." *Yorkshire Gazette*, February 24, 1838, 2+. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 1, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/JE3230837962/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=01a3caed>.

redcoats in Nassau. Mirrored in their treatment of Lord Brougham, the real argument against him is his effective saber rattling, even against the third-rate powers who still traded slaves.

However, Calhoun received support in some circles, particularly his old Emerald Isle partisans at *The Cork Examiner*. An article titled *IMPORTANT FROM AMERICA* published in that newspaper on February 11, 1842, ignored the relevance of human bondage to the Creole Case. The newspaper mentioned “murder and mutiny on board of the Creole brig,” but did not emphasize that the mutineers were slaves seeking their freedom. Presumably, readers would have known that the Creole affair involved a slave ship. *The Cork Examiner* used the word “slave” twice in the last paragraph, but only to observe that “the *slave* holders in several of the southern states are uniting for the purpose of public demonstration” and then “all the representatives from these *slave* holding states are to act in concert and join manfully in the hue and cry against Great Britain. [emphasis mine]”⁷²

If *The Cork Examiner* was not trying to hide the ball from its readers, then it certainly did not forcefully remind them that their heroic cousins in America were engaged in brutal practices which had been excoriated and banned in the hated British Empire nearly a decade before. Rather, *The Cork Examiner* focused on the Irish-American John C. Calhoun and his “manful” resistance to the English oppressors. The article praised Calhoun’s rhetorical prowess and paraphrased him demanding of President

⁷² "Important from America." *Cork Examiner*, February 11, 1842, 1. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 2, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/GW3222110964/BNCN?u=txshradc2488&sid=BNCN&xid=e323a5f6>.

Tyler “what steps had been taken to redress the wrongs done to American citizens, and the insult perpetrated against the American flag.” Ever mindful that the true enemy of any story is Great Britain, *The Cork Examiner* also paraphrased Calhoun’s contention that failure to hold England accountable “must tend to fortify the pretensions of Great Britain, in direct hostility to the rights of the United States.”⁷³

John C. Calhoun died on March 31, 1850. The news did not cross the Atlantic for a few weeks. Before ships brought word that Calhoun was dead, newspapers reported that he was dying. On April 6, 1850, *The London Political Examiner* reported at the end of an article called *SLAVERY AND THE TARIFF IN AMERICA*, that Calhoun “was not expected to survive many days.” Unbeknownst to them at the time, Calhoun was already dead. *The London Examiner* stated succinctly that “The death of Mr. Calhoun at such a moment will prove an irreparable loss to his party.”⁷⁴ This is a colder analysis over the death of a man than one might expect, which may be explained by the fact that Calhoun was not dead yet or by the fact that *The London Examiner* tended to pursue radical politics until around 1865.⁷⁵ The body of the article bears this out, contending that slavery is only of limited economic viability and describing the South as “those states who fatten on slavery.”⁷⁶

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ "THE POLITICAL EXAMINER." *Examiner*, April 6, 1850. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 3, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/BB3201002237/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=242de9e8>.

⁷⁵ *Examiner*, n.d. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 3, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/pub/1ZTK/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN>.

⁷⁶ "THE POLITICAL EXAMINER." *Examiner*, April 6, 1850. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 3, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/BB3201002237/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=242de9e8>.

The death of Calhoun received more respect from Irish newspapers. On April 17, 1850, *The Dublin Freeman's Journal* published an article from one of their correspondents in Liverpool who reported that news of the recently predicted death of Calhoun came east on the steam ship Niagara. Respect for Calhoun is evinced in the reports of his death as “melancholy intelligence” and the claim that Calhoun’s passing “had cast a sad gloom over the capital.” *The Freeman's Journal* reported that Calhoun died an easy death and retained “all the functions of his able and comprehensive mind” until the end. The article rehearsed the honors paid to Calhoun by his colleagues in Washington, such as “brilliant panegyrics” from Webster and other senators, as well as a suspension of all business in the city in Calhoun’s honor.⁷⁷

The obituary offered a generous account of Calhoun’s public career, casting the Irish American in the best light possible. *The Dublin Freeman's Journal* mentioned his tenure as a South Carolina state legislator, his membership in Congress as both a senator and a representative, and his executive branch posts as Vice President, Secretary of War, and Secretary of State. *The Journal* omitted one of the most influential, complicated, and, in British eyes, discreditable episodes in Calhoun’s career, glossing over nullification with only an oblique recount of Calhoun’s offices “In December 1832, he resigned [the vice presidency], and was elected a senator from South Carolina.” *The Dublin Freeman's Journal* failed to mention the circumstances which accompanied Calhoun’s resignation (unlike in English newspapers). Perhaps *The Journal* doth protest too much, eulogizing

⁷⁷ "AMERICA." *Freeman's Journal*, April 17, 1850. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 3, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/Y3204578397/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNsuN&xid=855b9ced>.

him with a generous summary of Calhoun's career: "For forty-two years he was in active political life, and *served his country faithfully during the whole of that period.*" [emphasis mine]⁷⁸

Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper remembered Calhoun fondly in an obituary published April 21, 1850. The article recalled the recent difference of opinion over slavery's expansion into California, an important debate which Calhoun took part in only a few months before his death. *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper* speculated that Calhoun's death could tip the debate, either demoralizing the slaveholders or energizing them "as with a voice from the tomb." Like *The Dublin Freeman's Journal*, *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper* also neglected to mention nullification. *The Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper* excused Calhoun's support for slavery. Noting that the entire northern United States stood unanimously against the westward expansion of the peculiar institution, the newspaper conceded that "all are convinced that he was fully persuaded of the sound policy and justice of the cause which he so ably and earnestly advocated, and in which he was supported by all the slave states." Like *The Dublin Freeman's Journal*, *The Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper* reviewed the numerous governmental positions held by Calhoun and added "it will be remembered that he was opposed to a rupture with Great Britain on the Oregon question."⁷⁹

The Caledonian Mercury, in an article published on April 22, 1850, proved much more willing to criticize the deceased statesman. After a perfunctory cataloging of

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ "FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE." *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, April 21, 1850. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 3, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/BC3206195262/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=4758fcf3>.

Calhoun's offices, the obituary highlighted his advocacy for slavery, referred to in the article as "the great error of his life." *The Caledonian Mercury* remembered that Calhoun's last speech before congress advocated for the expansion of slavery into California. The newspaper declared, "It is not easy to determine whether, in this crisis of her affairs, America has gained or lost by the death of Mr. Calhoun." Softening in its conclusion, the final sentence labelled Calhoun a man of many virtues and a few great faults, while calling Calhoun "a statesman of which [America] ought to be, is, and ever will be proud."⁸⁰

The article noted that "the two sections of the union are arrayed against each other" and perceived that the North and South would not easily reach a satisfactory compromise. *The Caledonian Mercury* described Calhoun as the head of "a violent and sectional party in the south that regarded the union as a secondary consideration to the maintenance of slavery." *The Caledonian Mercury* did not directly mention the Nullification Crisis, but the allegation of disinterest in preserving the Union echoed British criticisms of Calhoun's conduct during South Carolina's showdown with the federal government. *The Caledonian Mercury* optimistically reasoned that the passing of Calhoun represented a demise of disunion sentiment in American politics. In the absence of a great guide such as Calhoun, the paper incorrectly predicted, southern political sentiment "will very soon rally... around the standard of the Union."⁸¹

The Times of London expressed a similar opinion in an April 17, 1850, in its

⁸⁰ "LONDON GAZETTE." *Caledonian Mercury*, April 22, 1850. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 3, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/BB3205462615/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=8b4e701c>.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

coverage of the debate over California statehood. *The Times* characterized Calhoun as “the most powerful champion possessed by the slave States” and “one of the most able and celebrated men in the Senate, and justly commanded the high respect even of those whose views were farthest opposed to his own.” The article also stuck in the knife, wondering aloud “whether his wonderful energy has been on the whole beneficial to [southern] interests.” Obviously with the Nullification Crisis in mind, *The Times of London* remembered Calhoun as committed to disunion. Praising Calhoun as an eminent man, *The Times of London* described the late statesman’s guiding principles as “the peculiar doctrine... that the Constitution was a mere treaty, from the conditions of which any State might separate herself, if desirable to the inhabitants.” Allowing that this opinion was “honestly entertained and earnestly advocated,” *The Times of London* nevertheless concluded that “fortunately for the prosperity of the Union, [Calhoun’s constitutional theory] has not been the general opinion.”⁸²

After a wave of obituaries, Calhoun began to disappear from the British consciousness altogether. Although there were reports of a medium who claimed a capacity to commune with the spirit of the great southern statesman in 1853, they were met with amused skepticism.⁸³

Mostly, Britain’s own geopolitical, political, and economic interests determined

⁸² “The United States.” *The Times of London* April 17, 1850. *The Times* (Accessed January 23, 2021) <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/archive/article/1850-04-17/8/1.html?region=global#start%3D1850-03-30%26end>

⁸³ “Our Library Table.” *North Wales Chronicle*, July 22, 1853. *British Library Newspapers* (accessed August 3, 2020). <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/BB3200882235/BNCN?u=txshracd2488&sid=BNCN&xid=1441c60c>.

British newspaper coverage of John C. Calhoun. When Calhoun's preferred policies benefited British imperial interests, in Oregon for instance, Calhoun found himself lionized in the British press. *The Leicester Chronicle*, for instance, praised Calhoun during the Oregon crisis both for his territorial policy and his economically beneficial advocacy of free trade between Britain and the United States. Conversely, Calhoun was a *persona non grata* when his policy towards Texas imperiled British dominance in the Gulf of Mexico. Calhoun also played a totemic figure to various sub-communities of British people. In 1819, the radical *Caledonian Mercury* conjured Calhoun as a representation of America's bold experiment with republicanism, though it turned against him by the time he died. The more conservative *Newcastle Courant* viewed him similarly and considered him a negative figure. Irish newspapers tended to praise Calhoun in the light of their own ethnic solidarity. After nearly a millennium of subordination to London, the spectacle of a leading Irish statesman across the ocean rallied Irish papers to Calhoun's cause. Irish support for Calhoun included everything from moderate Liberal praise of Calhoun to outrageous conspiracy theories casting him as the hero of a covert plot to violently avenge the abuses of Britain in the New World. Only when Calhoun opposed Scots-Irish heroes such as Jackson and Polk could he find himself cast as the villain in Irish newspapers. Through all these views and interpretations of Calhoun runs the specter of the South's peculiar institution. When British papers fired upon Calhoun, slavery was the ammunition nearest to hand. When they praised Calhoun, slavery proved conspicuous by its absence in the conversation. The abolitionist press could sometimes fall prey to nationalist interest, such as when *The North Wales Chronicle* criticized

Calhoun for his apparent unwillingness to accept a compromise which would allow slavery in Texas. However, abolitionists still proved to be the most committedly anti-Calhoun segment of the British population.

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