

Craig R. Coenen
Exercise Using Primary Sources

The Ostend Manifesto and Filibustering--the Extension of Manifest Destiny and Changing the Course of the History of the Americas

This is designed for History of the United States to 1865. The exercise will test student ability to read and understand primary-source documents while at the same time introducing them to a more true “American” experience of United States history. This is geared toward first-year students taking the survey class. There are no prerequisites for the course.

Lesson Goals

Students will understand Manifest Destiny as an idea and policy that went beyond the Mexican-American War. They will learn that the 1850s were a critical moment in the relationship of Latin America and the United States. This decade witnessed an effort to forge much closer ties with Latin America. While the effort had a mostly negative result in relations, many in the United States hoped that these efforts would serve as a different approach to the sectional question over slavery and might resolve their internal divisions.

Description

Students will supplement the textbook readings on the subject with primary-source readings. By examining sources from the United States, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Jamaica (and elsewhere), students will look at the pros and cons of filibustering and the Ostend Manifesto from varying perspectives.

Step One

In a class of approximately 24-30 students, I will assign groups of 4-5 students and at the meeting prior to activity will assign each group 2 of the following 6 documents to read:

1. "Appeal to the Inhabitants of Cuba" *La Verdad*, April 27, 1848
2. Mary Seacole's, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* [excerpt]
3. The Ostend Manifesto
4. "Nicaragua Ho," William Walker's the War in Nicaragua
5. Cora Montgomery's, *The Queen of Islands and the King of Rivers* [excerpt]
6. Martin R. Delaney, "Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent," 1854 [excerpt]

(There will be some desired overlap.)

Step Two

In class exercise. When class starts, groups will meet to discuss the following questions:

1. Who wrote the document and why?
2. What is the thesis and what are the main points of the document?
3. How might the document reflect a different sentiment if it were written by someone on the other side of the issue?
4. How did your document alter or propose to alter the political, economic, and social relationship of the United States and Latin America?

After answering the questions each group should write 2 questions to pose to students with the same documents that tie their 2 documents together.

Step Three

Group discussion. We answer the questions for each document, assess the documents against the secondary-source material, and come to conclusions about how relations with Latin America shaped U.S. history in the 1850s.

Questions to Address in Group Discussion:

1. What are the connections between the United States and Cuba?
2. What benefits would be gained if the United States would acquire Cuba?
3. What problems would Cuba and the United States face if Cuba would become fully independent of Spain and the United States?
4. How far must the United States go to try to acquire Cuba? Why?
5. How do the authors of the Ostend Manifesto view the United States acquisition of lands from Mexico in the 1840s?
6. How is the issue of slavery addressed in the documents? Why might it have been left out of the Ostend Manifesto?
7. How do some in Central America and the Caribbean view citizens of the United States in their midst? Why? What fears might arise if filibustering went unchecked?
8. From these documents, what might be the biggest obstacles to United States annexation of Cuba and other Latin American States?

Step Four

Summary/Assessment: Analytical response--due the next class meeting:

Each student should write a 1-page response paper that reflects what was learned from their documents, that answers the questions posed, and what they learned from other documents in the larger discussion.

List of Materials

Primary-sources. Scanned versions of original documents will be placed on an online Add-on shell for the course.

Appeal to the Inhabitants of Cuba

La Verdad, a bilingual newspaper published in New York City by Cora Montgomery (Jane Caneau), placed this article on its front page stating it had been written by a resident of Havana and originally printed in Havana. While most of Spain's American colonies had won independence by the mid-1820s, Cuba remained a Spanish colony with slave labor producing massive wealth through sugar production.

By 1848, slave revolts and the anti-slavery organizing created unrest in Cuba and revolutionary movements across Europe revolutionary inspired some Cubans to advocate for independence from Spain.

Inhabitants of Cuba: A committee of your fellow-citizens address themselves to you on the critical circumstances we are about to meet. Fettered by our barbarous laws, unable to give publicity in this country to our opinions, and deprived of legal means to speak truths that might prevent evils, lead the way to happiness, and make a peaceful revolution, we held in darkness a meeting to deliberate on the saving measures which should be adopted, when, as must inevitably happen, Spain, after the bold example of Republican France, raises the voice of revolution. For the present this is the only medium we find for an appeal-born of our most profound convictions- in the calm voice of reason, to harmonise public opinion, to encourage both the noble and the weak, to intimidate ambitious disorganizers, and lead to a great yet tranquil change in our destiny.

The hour of liberty approaches! At the tremendous echo of the falling thrones of Europe, Republicanism stretches her protecting wings over the earth. Revolution cannot falter in her glorious march, which is only opposed by feeble and worn out obstacles, and will overwhelm in her advance the trembling remains of feudalism and monarchy. The severe, upright, and inflexible spirit of the age will make her triumph certain, glorious, and immortal. France in three days overthrew her monarchy; Belgium shakes the throne of her king; Italy moves victorious in all her states, and the magic voice of liberty resounds from her venerated Capitol; Switzerland, relieved from the oppression of the tyrant of France, lifts nobly as ever, her Republican brow. . . . Can Spain rest stationary in the midst of this universal torrent, deaf to the thunder tones of freedom echoing around her? In peace? with such vast evils in her bosom to destroy, such rooted prejudices to extirpate, so many old and deep abuses to reform? Impossible! . . .

Inhabitants of Cuba, we must not delude ourselves; time presses; we must diffuse light through the masses. The immense majority of the judicious and thinking men of the country, whether of native or foreign birth, think with us... We are encircled on every side by free American States, destined ere long to be united in one great confederation. How, except in uniting with them, can we assure our pacific revolution, without bloodshed, reactions, hatreds, or retaliation sufficiently merited and therefore likely to be sufficiently cruel? . . .

If we have drawn a true picture, if you have hearts, if the divine spark of intelligence illumines your minds, if you desire liberty, peace and the individual security of all the inhabitants of this country-safety for yourselves, your interests and your children - weigh these words and propagate this mission of light, liberty and salvation. Away with hatred, forget personal and political offences, the prejudices of nations and of caste and be ready to execute the plan of casting ourselves into the strong, friendly and protecting arms of the Union.

Once more we conjure you; it is our only refuge in this terrible crisis. We cannot resist the revolutionary torrent which agitates the world, it will sweep us on, however reluctant, to independence. In the name of the country we ask of you her salvation, in unity of thought let us all embrace as brothers; let us say "we will it," with energetic voice, and we will conquer peacefully our liberty and our happiness.

Source: *La Verdad*, April 27, 1848

Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands, Mary Seacole (1857)

Born in Jamaica to a Scottish soldier and a free Jamaican woman, Mary Seacole traveled around the Caribbean, Central America, and Europe. In the early 1850s she lived in Cruces, Panama then a part of New Granada, and came into contact with a number of runaway slaves from the U.S., which helped shape her opinion of the U.S.

Terribly bullied by the Americans were the boatmen and muleteers, who were reviled, shot, and stabbed by these free and independent filibusters, who would fain whop all creation abroad as they do their slaves at home...

Whenever an American was arrested by the New Granada authorities, justice had a hard struggle for the mastery, and rarely obtained it. Once I was present at the court-house, when an American was brought in heavily ironed, charged with having committed a highway robbery...Around the frightened soldiers swelled an angry crowd of brother Americans, abusing and threatening the authorities in no measured terms...I believe that the prisoner was allowed ultimately to escape...

I may have before said that the citizens of the New Granada Republic had a strong prejudice against all Americans. It is not difficult to assign a cause for this. In the first place, many of the negroes, fugitive from the Southern States, had sought refuge in this and the other States of Central America, where every profession was open to them; and as they were generally superior men—evinced perhaps by their hatred of their old condition and their successful flight—they soon rose to positions of eminence in New Granada...And in the second and third places, they feared their quarrelsome, bullying habits—be it remembered that the crowds to California were of the lowest sorts, many of whom have since fertilised [sic] Cuban and Nicaraguan soil—and their dreaded schemes for annexation...

It is one of the maxims of the New Granada constitution—as it is, I believe, of the English—that on a slave touching its soils his chains fall from him. Rather than irritate so dangerous a neighbour as America, this rule was rarely supported.

Source: Mary Seacole, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*, 1857.
<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/seacole/adventures/adventures.html>

The Ostend Manifesto (1854)

Following the acquisition of Florida in 1819, U.S. politicians became interested in annexing Cuba for its fertility, mineral wealth, command of the Gulf of Mexico, and proximity to Florida. The Southern slaveholders' desire to extend slave territory spurred the U.S. to attempt to purchase Cuba in 1848, but Spain refused. As the annexation debate continued in the U.S., President Franklin Pierce asked U.S. ministers in Britain, Spain, and France to draft a position paper on why U.S. acquisition of Cuba would be beneficial to those countries. The three ministers met in Ostend, Belgium in 1854 and developed their argument for why the U.S. would be "justified in wresting" the island from Spanish hands if Spain refused to sell. Although the position paper was not meant to be public, Northern politicians in the U.S. demanded that it be published. Dubbed the "Ostend Manifesto," it was immediately denounced in the Northern United States and Europe.

...the Union can never enjoy repose, nor possess reliable security, as long as Cuba is not embraced within its boundaries. Its immediate acquisition by our government is of paramount importance, and we cannot doubt but that it is a consummation devoutly wished for by its inhabitants.

The intercourse which its proximity to our coasts begets and encourages between them and the citizens of the United States has, in the progress of time, so united their interests and blended their fortunes that they now look upon each other as if they were one people and had but one destiny. Considerations exist which render delay in the acquisition of the island exceedingly dangerous to the United States...

It is certain that, should the Cubans themselves organize an insurrection against the Spanish government, and should other independent nations come to the aid of Spain in the contest, no human power could, in our opinion, prevent the people and the government of the United States from taking part in such a civil war, in support of their neighbors and friends.

But if Spain, deaf to the voice of her own interests, and actuated by stubborn pride and a false sense of honor, should refuse to sell Cuba to the United States, then the question will arise: What ought to be the course of the American government under such circumstances?...

The United States have never acquired a foot of territory except by fair purchase, or, as in the case of Texas, upon the free and voluntary application of the people of that independent state, who desired to blend their destinies with our own.

Even our acquisitions from Mexico are no exception to this rule, because, although we might have claimed them by right of conquest in a just war, yet we purchased them for what was then considered by both parties a full and ample equivalent.

Our past history forbids that we should acquire the island of Cuba without the consent of Spain, unless justified by the great law of self-preservation. We must, in any event, preserve our conscious rectitude and our own self-respect.

Whilst pursuing this course we can afford to disregard the censures of the world, to which we have been so often and so unjustly exposed.

After we shall have offered Spain a price for Cuba far beyond its present value, and this shall have been refused, it will then be time to consider the question; does Cuba, in the possession of Spain, seriously endanger our internal peace and the existence of our cherished Union?

Should this question be answered in the affirmative, then, by every law, human and divine, we shall be justified in wresting it from Spain, if we possess the power; and this upon the very same principle that would justify an individual in tearing down the burning house of his neighbor if there were no other means of preventing the flames from destroying his own home.

Under such circumstances we ought neither to count the cost nor regard the odds which Spain might enlist against us. We forbear to enter into the question whether the present condition of the island would justify such a measure. We should, however, be recreant to our duty, be unworthy of our gallant forefathers, and commit base treason against our posterity, should we permit Cuba to be Africanized and become a second St. Domingo, with all its attendant horrors to the white race, and suffer the flames to extend to our own neighboring shores, seriously to endanger our actually to consume the fair fabric of our Union...

We have already witnessed the happy results for both countries which followed a similar arrangement in regard to Florida.

Yours very respectfully,

James Buchanan
J. Y. Mason
Pierre Soulé

Source: *House Executive Documents*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., Vol. X, pp. 127-136
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/hns/ostend/ostend.html>

Nicaragua Ho!

A New York humorous newspaper published these song lyrics in January 1856, shortly after William Walker, a U.S. citizen, seized control of the Nicaraguan Presidency. In May 1856, U.S. President Pierce recognized Walker as the legitimate government of Nicaragua. Expansionists in the U.S. advocated for annexation of Nicaragua pointing to Texas and the War with Mexico as precedents for such action. The lyrics refer to William Marcy the secretary of state under President Pierce, John McKeon an opponent of the filibusters, and the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty that protected Central America from colonization.

I guess, my Fillibustering pals, that these United States of ours,
Tho' pretty large, ain't big enough for all these jolly mates of ours.
We ain't got room enough to spread; — our eagle's mighty pinions,
Are clipped and fastened to his sides by Pierce and his cuss'd minions.
Chorus — Row, row, row!
My jolly Fillibusters, won't we have a glorious row!

It's no use trying to stop us boys when we are on our muscle,
With so'thin' or another we are bound to have a tussle;
And, if Marcy thinks the British are too strong, to make amends, let's all,
Go and lick the Nicaraguans, who haven't got no friends at all.
Row, row, row!
My jolly Fillibusters, won't we have a glorious row!

They may issue proclamations for to stop our expedition,
But when we go, we shan't request the President's permissions.
Central America we're bound to take, by gol there's nothin' shorter,
And get lots of cash and glory with brave General William Walker
Row, row, row!
My jolly Fillibusters, won't we have a glorious row!

Now, spite of Pierce, and John McKeon, and Clayton Bulwer treaties
And tho' cruising in them waters they say a British fleet is,
We'll get to Nicaragua yet, thro' all these storms and breakers,
And take possession of our Farms and our two hundred acres.
Row, row, row!
My jolly Fillibusters, won't we have a glorious row!

Source: *Young Sam*, January 1856, 67.

**Excerpt from *The Queen of Islands and the King of Rivers*,
Cora Montgomery (1850)**

Writing under the pen name Cora Montgomery, Jane Cazneau, the daughter of a New York Congressman with investments in Texas, took up the cause of U.S. annexation of Cuba in 1850 with her book The Queen of Islands and the King of Rivers. Jane Cazneau was a strong supporter of Manifest Destiny and advocated for the annexation of all of Mexico after the Mexican-American war. She made her name as a journalist and lobbyist and although from upstate New York, supported the expansion of Southern slavery.

Cuba seems placed, by a finger of a kindly Providence, between the Atlantic and the Mexican seas, at the crossing point of all great lines of our immense coasting trade, to serve as the centre of exchange for a domestic commerce as extensive as our territory, and as free as our institutions. It is only after careful study of the incredible extent and variety of the products of our thirty States, with all their grades of climate, and in the whole circumference of their natural and manufactured wealth,... that the importance of Cuba, as a point of reception and distribution, can be fairly understood. If her matchless harbors were not locked up by foreign jealousies,... it would be worth a round purchase sum to our traders...

Whenever the trembling, restless Seal of the Gulf drops from the nerveless finger of Spain, there will be some envy in Europe, but little open resistance made to its passing into the grasp of our Eagle. When this republic assumes the charge, Europe will retire from this continent, and thenceforth on all our coasts we will ask nothing but our steam marine, and the splendor of our flag, to command the respect of the world for our commerce...

If she [Cuba] becomes really independent, the whites, who are but little inferior in numbers to the blacks, will maintain the ascendancy by their superior intelligence, and slavery will probably be abolished by slow degrees.

If the United States receive her, humanity will at least rejoice over the suppression of the slave trade, and a mitigation of the horrors of the Spanish system of servitude...

All the territory now held in common [United States lands obtained from Mexico]—sufficient in area to make forty of the largest states—must inevitably come in free, with or without the interference of Congress... To balance this wide domain of free soil, there is but a comparatively small band of States along the extreme South, and to which the Island of Cuba can make no frightful addition...

The non-slaveholding States would show a most ungenerous sectional spirit if they object to the addition of Cuba to the political weight of the South, for her vote will not give the South an even, much less controlling voice.

Source: Cora Montgomery, *The Queen of Islands and the King of Rivers*, 1850.

<https://archive.org/details/queenislandsand01montgoog>

Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent

In August 1954 a group of African Americans who believed they could not achieve equality within the U.S. held a National Emigration Convention in Cleveland, OH in August. The following is an excerpt from the manifesto presented at the convention, "Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent" written by Martin R. Delaney, an abolitionist, physician, journalist and advocate for the emigration of African Americans to the West Indies and Central or South America.

There is but one question presents itself for our serious consideration, upon which we must give a decisive reply: Will we transmit, as an inheritance to our children, the blessings of unrestricted civil liberty, or shall we entail upon them, as our only political legacy, the degradation and oppression left us by our fathers?

Shall we be persuaded that we can live and prosper nowhere but under the authority and power of our North American white oppressors; that this (the United States) is the country most, if not the only one, favorable to our improvement and progress? Are we willing to admit that we are incapable of self-government, establishing for ourselves such political privileges, and making such internal improvements as we delight to enjoy after American white men have made them for themselves?

No! Neither is it true that the United States is the country best adapted to our improvement. But that country is the best in which our manhood, morally, mentally, and physically, can be best developed; in which we have an untrammelled right to the enjoyment of civil and religious liberty; and the West Indies, Central and South America present now such advantages superiorly preferable to all other countries.

That the continent of America was designed by Providence as a reserved asylum for the various oppressed people of the earth, of all races, to us seems very apparent. . . .

We would not be thought to be superstitious when we say that in all this we can "see the finger of God." Is it not worthy of a notice here, that while the ingress of foreign whites to this continent has been voluntary and constant, and that of the blacks involuntary and but occasional, yet the whites in the southern part have decreased in numbers, degenerated in character, and become mentally and physically enervated and imbecile; while the blacks and colored people have steadily increased in numbers, regenerated in character, and have grown mentally and physically vigorous and active, developing every function of their manhood, and are now, in their elementary character, decidedly superior to the white race? So, then, the white race could never successfully occupy the southern portion of the continent; they must, of necessity, every generation, be re-peopled from another quarter of the globe. The fatal error committed by the Spaniards, under Pizarro, was the attempt to exterminate the Incas and Peruvians, and fill their places by European whites. The Peruvian Indians, a hale, hardy, vigorous, intellectual race of people, were succeeded by those who soon became idle, vicious, degenerated and imbecile. But Peru, like all the other South American States, is regaining her former potency, just in proportion as the European race decreases among them. All the labor of the country is performed by the aboriginal natives and the blacks; the few Europeans there, being the merest excrescences on the body politic, consuming drones in the social hive.

Had we no other claims than those set forth in a foregoing part of this address, they are sufficient to induce every black and colored person to remain on this continent unshaken and unmoved.

But the West Indians, Central and South Americans, are a noble race of people; generous, sociable and tractable, just the people with whom we desire to unite, who are susceptible of progress, improvement, and reform of every kind. They now desire all the improvements of North America, but being justly jealous of their rights, they have no confidence in the whites of the United States, and consequently peremptorily refuse to permit an indiscriminate settlement among them of this class of people, but placing every confidence in the black and colored people of North America.

The example of the unjust invasion and forcible seizure of a large portion of the territory of Mexico is still fresh in their memory; and the oppressive disfranchisement of a large number of native Mexicans, by the Americans, because of the color and race of the natives, will continue to rankle in the bosom of the people of those countries, and prove a sufficient barrier henceforth against the inroads of North American whites among them.

Upon the American continent, then, we are determined to remain, despite every opposition that may be urged against us.

You will doubtless be asked, and that, too, with an air of seriousness, why, if desirable to remain on this continent, not be content to remain in the United States. The objections to this, and potent reason, too, in our estimation, have already been clearly shown....

Now, fellow-countrymen, we have done. Into your ears have we recounted your own sorrows; before your own eyes have we exhibited your wrongs; into your own hands have we committed your own cause. If there should prove a failure to remedy this dreadful evil, to assuage this terrible curse which has come upon us, the fault will be yours and not ours, since we have offered you a healing balm for every sorely aggravated wound.

Source: *Report of the Select Committee on Emancipation and Colonization*, Government Printing Office, 1862, pp. 51-52 and 59.

Sample Smaller-Scale Project—All in-class

Course Title: US History to 1865

Class Topic: The Ostend Manifesto and Filibustering--the Extension of Manifest Destiny and Changing the Course of the History of the Americas

Lesson Goals: Students will understand Manifest Destiny as an idea and policy that went beyond the Mexican-American War. They will learn that the 1850s were a critical moment in the relationship of Latin America and the United States. This decade witnessed an effort to forge much closer ties (good/bad) and gave many in the United States hope that a different approach to the sectional question might resolve these issues in the US, and might have altered the economic, political, and social course of their histories.

Description: Students will supplement the scant textbook readings on the subject with primary-source readings. By examining sources from the United States, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Jamaica (and elsewhere), students will look at the pros and cons of filibustering and the Ostend Manifesto from these varying sources.

Step One [10-15 minutes]: Background presentation and discussion on Manifest Destiny and sectionalism in the United States.

Step Two [15-20 minutes]: Break class into groups of three and assign each group three documents to read answer the following questions.

The documents are:

1. Mary Seacole's, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*
2. The Ostend Manifesto
3. Cora Montgomery's, *The Queen of Islands and the King of Rivers*.

Questions to discuss:

1. Who wrote the document and why?
2. What is the thesis and what are the main points of the document?
3. How might the document reflect a different sentiment if it were written by someone on the other side of the issue?
4. How did your document alter or propose to alter the political, economic, and social relationship of the United States and Latin America?

Step Three [15-20 minutes]: Whole group discussion. We answer the questions, assess the documents against the secondary-source material, and come to conclusions.

Step Four (not to be completed as part of this exercise): Summary/Assessment: Analytical response--due the next meeting will be a 1-page response paper that reflect what each student learned from their documents and answers to questions and what they learned from the larger discussion.

Questions to Address:

1. What are the connections between the United States and Cuba?

2. What benefits would be gained if the United States would acquire Cuba?
3. What problems would Cuba and the United States face if Cuba would become fully independent of Spain and the United States?
4. To what extent must the United States go in trying to acquire Cuba? Why?
5. How do the authors of the Ostend Manifesto view the United States acquisition of lands from Mexico in the 1840s?
6. How is the issue of slavery addressed in the documents? Why might it have been left out of the Ostend Manifesto?
7. How do some in Central America and the Caribbean view citizens of the United States in their midst? Why? What fears might arise if filibustering went unchecked?
8. From these documents, what might be the biggest obstacles to United States annexation of Cuba and other Latin American States?