

# New World Liberalism and Our Ever-Elusive North American Identities\*

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## ABSTRACT

When we understand our histories and identities in terms of the transnational forces that shaped our nationalist frameworks, we discover substantial precedent for North American identities and cultural spaces. During and immediately after the War of 1848, U.S. and Mexican liberal nationalists unsuccessfully crafted transnational identities in non-fiction essays and editorials. The historical overlap of Mexican and U.S. American New World liberalism, defined as it is by awkward and uneven parallelisms, modifies common assumptions about histories of liberal nationalism and national-identity formation. North American identities have arisen in strategic contexts defined by experiences of double-(un)consciousness, disjunction, fracture, and paradox.

**Key words:** liberalism, neoliberalism, New World liberals, race, postmodernism, North American identity, American 1848, U.S.-Mexican War, Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

## RESUMEN

Al entender nuestras historias e identidades en términos de fuerzas transnacionales que han constituido nuestros modelos nacionalistas, descubrimos un precedente importante respecto de las identidades norteamericanas y los espacios culturales. Durante e inmediatamente después de la guerra de 1848, algunos liberales mexicanos y estadounidenses forjaron sin éxito identidades transnacionales en ensayos de no ficción y editoriales. El traslape histórico del liberalismo del Nuevo Mundo de México y Estados Unidos, caracterizado por extraños y desiguales paralelismos, ha modificado los supuestos comunes sobre las historias del liberalismo nacionalista y la formación de identidades nacionales. En Norteamérica estas últimas surgieron en contextos estratégicos definidos por experiencias de doble (in)conciencia, disyunción, fractura y paradoja.

**Palabras clave:** liberalismo, neoliberalismo, liberales del Nuevo Mundo, raza, posmodernidad, identidad norteamericana, América en 1848, guerra México-Estados Unidos, Tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo

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IN "NEW WORLDS, New Jerusalem: Reflections on North American Identities," published in the January-June 2010 issue of *Norteamérica*, Phillip Resnick asks questions that are increasingly on our minds in this post-NAFTA, globalized region where we live: "Does North America, in the deeper cultural, historical, metaphysical, or political sense exist? And if it does—in more than its trade-driven NAFTA form—what might this North American identity consist of?" Resnick suggests that we might begin to recognize an inherent North American identity in turning to the "greater sense of overlap and parallelism" between "congruent experiences and unifying links in the three countries' historical development" (2010: 16). In this essay, I return to just such a quintessential encounter in the United States and Mexico's historical development (the U.S.-Mexican War and the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo) to explore the deep historical resonances that have given us not one but many North American identities-in-flux.<sup>1</sup> As opposed to national identities, which have been marked by notions of cohesion and conformity, North American identities at any given time and place can only be apprehended through divergence rather than convergence, fracture instead of unification, and geopolitical topologies as opposed to historical chronologies.<sup>2</sup>

Before turning to the published writings of New World American liberals, I define my use of the terms "New World liberalism" in the U.S. and Mexican context and my investment in postmodern theories of identity-formation. In the next section, I explore the overlapping, and often contradictory, vocabularies used by Carlos María Bustamante, Margaret Fuller, Mariano Otero, and Frederick Douglass to defend their transnational liberal political philosophies and to de-legitimize the U.S. military invasion of Mexico. These transnational texts by U.S. and Mexican liberal intellectuals, written during and immediately after the war, shed light on the inherent contradictions of transnational identity formation in North America: the "geopolitics of knowledge" within U.S. and Mexican nationalism via the formation of the borderlands, as well as the New World liberal intellectuals' troubled embrace of a global

<sup>1</sup> This article focuses on U.S. and Mexican manifestations of new world liberalism, to the exclusion of Canadian engagement with liberal nationalism. The research presented here is based on my doctoral dissertation entitled, *Re-Reading the American Renaissance in New England and in Mexico City*. I believe that many of the assertions and provocations of my bi-national focus would also be compelling in terms of a topological comparative analysis of nineteenth-century Canadian liberal nationalism, which I will not explore in this particular essay.

<sup>2</sup> I will elaborate further on the postmodern theories that inform this definition of identity-in-flux, but the issue of geopolitical topologies vs. historical chronologies is an important distinction, as it structures my analysis and my engagement with bi-national history. "Topology" is a mathematical term that has been applied in postmodern cultural theory to describe movement or connectivity across time and space, as well as the study of a single feature across processes of transformation. As opposed to formulating a comparative history of New World liberalism in the U.S. and Mexico along a historical chronology, I read New World liberalism in terms of a geographical topology: mapping cultural vocabularies of liberal nationalism in the nineteenth-century Americas across the structures of inequality mapped onto the Americas by Western colonial powers and perspectives and, since 1848, across the Mexican-U.S. borderlands.

ethic in the context of his or her nation-state (Poblete, 2003: 32).<sup>3</sup> In the third section, I turn to Henry David Thoreau's reaction to the Treaty of the Guadalupe Hidalgo in his essay, "Civil Disobedience," in comparison to Luis de la Rosa's contemporaneous pastoral description of his travels from Mexico City to Washington, D.C. to sign the final terms of the treaty. Thoreau and De la Rosa exemplify the discontents of the nineteenth-century New World liberal intellectual's transnational vision wherein a supra-national, cosmopolitan identity formation coexisted with a deep sense of isolation and dislocation. I argue that such dislocation and failure mark a legacy of New World liberalism and prefigures the stark paradoxes of transnational, neo-liberal economic systems.

The terms "liberalism" and "neoliberalism" always invoke confusion and a sense of profound imprecision that is both inherent and unavoidable. Any attempt to deal with the historical and socio-political complexity of both terms is beset by nationalist hagiographies, weird regional and temporal shifts in meaning, and polemical political alliances and connotations.<sup>4</sup> My comparative analysis of nineteenth-century New World liberal intellectuals in Mexico City and in New England has much in common with Domenico Losurdo's account in *Liberalism: A Counter-History* of liberalism as a Western European movement that has always been beset by and blinded to the inherent paradox of its simultaneous birth with racial chattel slavery in Western European systems, wherein liberalism in practice has been as much about "dis-emancipation" as emancipation (2011: 301). In this essay, I trace the contradictions, paradoxes, and failures across a collision/collusion of inequalities in both the Mexican and New England manifestations of liberalism as a detailed re-vision of the bi-national history of paradox and failure that Losurdo places at the heart of the Western European philosophical tradition.

Galvanized by a utopian promise for human progress to be realized in the Americas, New World liberal intellectuals are defined by their investment in Western

<sup>3</sup> I take this now well-known and useful concept from Walter D. Mignolo's essay, "Capitalism and Geopolitics of Knowledge: Latin American Social Thought and Latino/a American Studies," published in an anthology of essays edited by Juan Poblete, *Critical Latin American and Latino Studies* (2003). In *The Idea of Latin America*, a book-length analysis, Mignolo's scholarly focus is a transnational recovery of the indigenous histories and cultures that have been undermined by the liberal nationalisms that I study here. He summarizes liberal nationalism as a colossal failure: "Republican and liberal ideas and ideals took the place of what did not happen: the critique of colonialism and the building of the decolonial project that would be neither republican nor liberal. The failure lasted almost one hundred and fifty years and shaped the socio-economic as well as the intellectual history of 'Latin' America" (Mignolo, 2005: 67).

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent description of the shifty vagueness of both terms and the significance of the obscured historiography or "conceptual fog" around liberalism and neoliberalism, see Geoff Mann's review of the recent translation of Domenico Losurdo's book *Liberalism: A Counter-History* (2011) in the January 2012 issue of *Antipode* (Mann, 2012: 265). He concludes his essay by calling on scholars to "attend to liberalism again in light of our current modes of life and death," our current manifestations of the "community of the free" and those excluded from it (269). This essay attempts to do just that.

European philosophies of liberal nationalism, a fundamental orientation toward the future, and New World/Old World narratives of “American exceptionalism.” I use the expressions “New World liberalism” and “New World liberal intellectual” as umbrella terms for the assortment of specific, varied, and divided nationalistic cultural movements across the Americas that self-identified or self-consciously affiliated with eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century European liberal philosophy. If not always optimistic in tone, the New World liberal intellectual always engaged the shared questions of his/her intellectual community within that which Ralph Waldo Emerson described as the optative mood of the age, characterized by a shared although not uncritical belief that the institutions of a sovereign nation-state held the most promise for the realization of pre-defined progressive ideals such as liberty and equality, progress and order, and justice and peace. These New World liberal intellectuals engaged their optative national projects under the explicit burden of differentiating the American liberal project from the supposed decadence and colonialism of Western Europe. As opposed to the political and cultural myths built upon their canonized words, the realities of these American *letrados*<sup>5</sup> were defined by multi-lingual, multivalent, often antagonistic struggles for power, resources, and influence in and among the nation-states and imperial centers of the nineteenth-century Euro-Americas.<sup>6</sup>

In Mexico City, the political factions that developed after the independence of 1823 were divided between self-described Conservatives and Liberals. Although Mexican and Latin American historians have increasingly shown that the differences between the two groups are not as stark as they have seemed, scholars like Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo, Érika Pani, and Charles Hale have given us a useful overview of the ideological positions of the Liberals (themselves divided into various ideological positions). Classical Mexican Liberalism, as a political manifestation, was founded upon the central ideal of a free individual, unrestrained by a government or corporate body and equal to fellow individuals under the law. *Los liberales* understood the constitutional government’s role as limited to the protection of individuals from despotism. They believed that individual freedom could only be realized in a society where institutions were governed by legal conformity, and, by and large, they embraced a modified *laissez-faire* economy where social and economic development hinged upon an individual’s interest insofar as it was attached to their ownership of personal

<sup>5</sup> Men of letters. [Editor’s Note.]

<sup>6</sup> One of the most obvious examples of the imbalance of cultural and political influence in the Americas, as mapped by Western European colonial powers was U.S. American cultural provincialism. The Mexico City intellectuals were demonstrably more aware of their New England peers than vice versa. They traveled to the United States on diplomatic missions and on forced and/or voluntary exiles when opposition governments were in power. New York City was also host to a broad and deep Spanish-speaking community, where Cuban Néstor Ponce de León owned an office and Spanish-language library on Broadway.

property.<sup>7</sup> The Liberals defined themselves against a “Conservative” position which they characterized as irrationally loyal to the Catholic Church, in support of a strong central government and/or monarchy, and in favor of a European intervention in order to ensure stability in the face of indigenous rebellions and, in 1848, the U.S. conquest of Northern Mexican territory. The clash between these two factions of *letrados* was bitter, violent, and very complex; it played out across the century in three major conflicts: the War for Independence in 1823, the Reform Wars from 1858 to 1861, and the French Intervention from late 1861 until Benito Juárez’s triumphant return to the capital city as its Liberal leader in 1867.

Furthermore, many Mexican Liberals traveled to the United States for various periods of exile, visiting New Orleans, San Francisco, New York City, and Boston. They idealized the United States, often measuring the extent of their *desencanto* or “disenchantment,” in Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo’s words, against the perceived prosperity of an increasingly powerful United States (1992: 18).<sup>8</sup> Érika Pani, in *El Segundo Imperio: Pasados de usos múltiples* (The Second Empire: Multipurpose Pasts), describes the influence of Mexican liberalism on nationalist historical narratives as “un proceso largo, azaroso, e imprescindible” (a long, winding, indispensable process), in which the Restored Republic in 1867 functions as a “parteaguas” (watershed). In nationalist historical narratives the Reform operates as a departure point from which Mexico’s nineteenth-century national liberalism has been read as “el destino inevitable y providencial de la nación independiente” (the inevitable and providential destiny of the independent nation) (Pani, 2004: 24-25).<sup>9</sup> Whereas the Mexican Liberals claimed the title for themselves as a political, ideological, and even military affiliation, U.S. American writers have been most explicitly labeled as “liberals” posthumously by disciplinary and national histories.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This summary is paraphrased from the introduction to Charles Hale’s *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (1989), in which he summarizes his decade of scholarship on the Liberals of Mexico.

<sup>8</sup> In *En pos de la quimera: Reflexiones sobre el experimento constitucional atlántico* (In Pursuit of the Illusion: Reflections on the Atlantic Constitutional Experiment), José Antonio Aguilar Rivera suggests that the recent historical revision of the chronologies in political theory that defines the U.S. Constitution as republican in nature actually places the liberal constitutions of the *Hispanoamericas* as the region “donde el liberalismo obtuvo su primer gran triunfo” (where liberalism achieved its first great victory) (2000: 204). Contrary to consensus timelines of new world liberalism such as that expressed in Louis Hartz’s *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1991), the development of U.S. liberalism occurred after the Spanish-American nation-states had begun their liberal national projects in earnest.

<sup>9</sup> Pani seeks to interrupt this narrative of national destiny by illustrating the deep Mexican and liberal collaborations and concerns of the Emperor Maximiliano’s reign immediately preceding Benito Juárez’s Restored Republic of 1867.

<sup>10</sup> Various examples of usage from online searches of the term in nineteenth-century popular journals such as the *North American Review*, *American Whig Review*, and *The Atlantic Monthly* include: a “liberal education,” a topic of much debate; a “liberal” action which connoted a certain freedom or even excess in comparison to assumed norms; and a “liberal” character, which was often used as a compliment of someone’s general respectability and/or their democratic code of ethics.

Nineteenth-century U.S. American liberalism was predominately a regional manifestation of Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture based in and around the north-eastern states. Via the controversies over a slave economic structure in the South, the U.S. Civil War, the post-war Reconstruction period, and expansionist interventions across the Americas, the U.S. Northern Liberals also gained an ideological monopoly on the national history and hegemonic identity of the United States as a nation-state.<sup>11</sup> Under the onus of national reunification in the Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction period, U.S. Northern Liberals, such as William Prescott, John Lloyd Stephens, and Fanny Calderón de la Barca, successfully aligned themselves with the Southern white elite by establishing a structure of two-tiered ethnic whiteness that served political and cultural interests at home and abroad: White Anglo-Saxon, Protestants (the proverbial “WASP”) as superior to descendents of the Spanish empire and Catholics.

Anna Brickhouse describes in *Transamerican Literary Relations and the Nineteenth-Century Public Sphere* how several U.S. liberals (in particular, the artistic and intellectual elite among them known as the Transcendentalists) “wrote critically about the U.S.-Mexican War while they formulated a language of sublime transcendence exceeding national borders and often serving the ends of U.S. imperialism” (2004: 26). In this essay, I focus on “the language of sublime transcendence exceeding national borders” in these trans/nationalist essays as profound, bi-national instants of rupture, failure, and disjunction. Although such rhetoric certainly has and continues to fuel the powerful discourse of U.S. American exceptionalism and the related “ends of U.S. imperialism,” this essay seeks to expose the mutual paradoxes and disconnects at the core of U.S. American transcendentalist and Mexican liberal transnational aspirations –a contradictory emptiness at the heart of New World liberalism.

To return to Resnick’s provocative essay, the nineteenth-century New World liberal intellectual as a transnational “North American identity” does *not* fit into the modern theories of static or nationalist identity that underwrite Resnick’s aforementioned questions. New World liberal intellectuals, in all their complexity and influence, are only discernible via postmodern, postcolonial theories of identity that privilege inherent instabilities, doubleness, and contradictions. The common denominator of all postmodern theory can be summarized as the assumption that identity –and knowledge for that matter– is a human and social construction that only exists in a situated, contextualized reality. Jacques Derrida, Frederick Jameson, and Roland Barthes are

<sup>11</sup> National chronologies of U.S. American liberalism as a political manifestation often point to the transition from republican political models of society, or Jeffersonian democracy, to Jacksonian democracy, which stressed possessive individualism, *laissez-faire* economics, and universal male suffrage (exclusively for those men legally defined as white). The Whig Party, formed in 1833 and fractured by 1856 over the expansion of slavery, propagated a platform in explicit opposition to Jacksonian politics and policies –but one that also aligned itself with liberal ideals and would further modify and establish the hegemonic dominance of U.S. American liberalism at home and abroad.

just a few of the postmodern theorists who have articulated theories of identity (national, religious, political) as ephemeral, cultural constructions. In line with Chela Sandoval's articulations of postmodern identity within the globalized conditions of late capitalism, emergent North American identities take form via a "differential consciousness" or unconsciousness, wherein "identity" functions as "the monadic unit of power via subjectivity capable of negotiating and transforming power's configurations" (2000: 114). New World liberal intellectuals employed a nascent and strategic "North American identity" in the mid-nineteenth century, one that was marked by its effervescence in the face of nationalist, imperialist, and racist contexts.

Furthermore, the inherently unequal, paradoxical, and divergent nature of North American identities, then and now, is a product of New World liberalism itself. Within their liberal nationalist agendas, the transnational idealism of the New World liberal intellectual never took shape beyond the relatively circumscribed public sphere in which these writers moved. The co-existent cosmopolitanism of U.S. and Mexican nationalists, both inherent to and unresolved within Western European liberal philosophy, has long since been buried within the iconographies of the separate national histories. When we understand continental histories, geographies, and identities in terms of the transnational forces that ultimately shaped our nationalist histories, geographies, and identities, we discover substantial precedent for "North American cultural spaces" and "North American identity[ies]" (Resnick, 2010: 28).

## NEW WORLD LIBERALS AND THE AMERICAN 1848

The rhetorical *performance* of a cosmopolitan North American identity was a vibrant and significant model for nineteenth-century liberal nationalists in the United States and Mexico by the mid-nineteenth century. Each of these intellectuals employed the ideal of "America," the geo-politics of the "New World," and European-based economic and political liberalism to posit a bi-national cosmopolitan identity that might intercede in the supposed national allegiances and identities of their readers. Many of the non-fiction essays I discuss in the following pages are addressed to both an audience of monolingual readers within the same national community *and* an imagined like-minded global intelligence of sorts that extended through and beyond national, racial, and linguistic boundaries. This cosmopolitan, idealized audience existed in strategic variations but never coalesced like the national imagined communities tied to print media, cultural and state institutions, and legalized identities.<sup>12</sup> The transnational

<sup>12</sup> See Benedict Anderson's influential analysis of national identity and cultural in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).

imagination of the American *letrado* (man of letters), rather, was a useful abstraction—a rhetorical and politicized tool within the international print sphere, a power play within the international, racially charged diplomatic sphere, and a humanistic dream within intellectual and reform circles.<sup>13</sup> In this section, I demonstrate that these authors’ articulations of themselves as New World liberal intellectuals represent strategic, geo-politically situated performances of transnational identity in the context of concurrent and often contradictory regional and global discourses around statehood, race, and citizenship.

This selection of texts also foregrounds “the American 1848” as a key example of the current transnational scholarship that is already responding to Resnick’s generalized lament for “*lieux de mémoires*” (realms of memory) that might establish a “North American cultural ensemble” (2010: 28). The “American 1848” is a phrase created by Chicano and U.S. American scholars to allude to the parallel bi-national experiences of the U.S.-Mexican War and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in the midst of escalating tensions over the practice of slavery in the United States and the international revolutionary fervor across Europe. It describes a particularly acute, historical moment for those who were (and are) conscientiously thinking and writing as continental/hemispheric-Americans.<sup>14</sup> New World liberals in New England and in Mexico City were especially engaged by the stark dichotomies emerging from the populist and liberal movements in Europe and the U.S. federal government’s military actions in Mexico.

In May 1846, General Mariano Arista’s cavalry had skirmished with General Zachary Taylor’s troops, which President Polk had ordered to press below the agreed-upon boundary of the Nueces River into disputed territory along the Rio Grande/Río Bravo. President Polk’s decision to declare war was internationally controversial, and, within the United States, the polemic divided predominately along regional and political lines: much of the South supported what was seen as a territorial necessity in order to preserve the slave-states’ power while many Northerners called it an incendiary move to add new slave-owning territory to the U.S. The Mexican government struggled to amass the money, weapons, and men to fight the U.S. military invasion, and they were particularly beset by regional intrigue and infighting during and after the war. By September 1847, U.S. troops occupied Mexico City under military rule,

<sup>13</sup> In fact, by and large an intellectual elite with access to publications, political clout, and the ear of the nation—however few, regionalized, ephemeral, and/or divided those ears might be—, New World liberal intellectuals from the northern U.S. and from Mexico City often had more in common with each other than with the would-be national citizens they so self-consciously sought to “educate” through their publications.

<sup>14</sup> Responding to the nationalist disciplinary chronologies built around the Civil War, which glossed the war with Mexico and the European revolutions of 1848 as secondary to that master narrative, scholars like José David Saldívar (1997), Shelley Streeby (2002), Larry Reynolds (1998), and Michael Rogin (1983) have called for a renewed understanding of the significance of the American 1848 to New England and U.S. American nationalism.



and over the next six months the polemical terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo were hammered out amid dissent on both sides of the border.

The conflict put acute pressure on the idealism of New World liberals in greater New England and in greater Mexico City –arguably the cultural and political centers of the countries’ nascent nationalist movements– to define their political and ethical loyalties. Within the geo-political stakes of national and state sovereignties in flux, Carlos María Bustamante, Margaret Fuller, Mariano Otero, and Frederick Douglass negotiated the vocabularies of European liberal philosophy and its rhetorical implications in the supposed “New World” that modified the national loyalties of romantic liberalism toward an ultimately unrealized transnational subjectivity in service of their specific regional interests. Bustamante and Fuller articulated simultaneous appeals for reader-subjects who might judge the ethical and political validity of the U.S. presence in Mexico from a transnational, liberal perspective. Otero and Douglass, on the other hand, both directly engaged the race-based assumptions of fellow New World liberals that fueled pro-war sentiment in the U.S., arguing for a shift in the U.S. American liberals’ interpretation of liberal rights as exclusive to Anglo-Americans in the United States. Both authors responded to Anglo-Saxon liberalism in an uneven but parallel set of contradictory, idiosyncratic negotiations with the inherent paradoxes of romantic and national liberalism.

Mexican Independence Liberal, Carlos María Bustamante, and New England intellectual Margaret Fuller reacted to the U.S. invasion of Mexico from quite similar platforms of emotionally acute ideological outrage: the U.S. was violating an ethical, moral, and political code as a vanguard, New World liberal nation.<sup>15</sup> According to his final public self-portrayal, Bustamante spent his last days devastated by the fact that the United States government, that republican model he had admired and publicly lauded in his fight for Mexican independence from Spain, had turned its back on its principles and according to his dire predictions, would conquer and subjugate Mexico.<sup>16</sup> From Fuller’s perspective in Italy, steeped in the cause of Italian revolutionary

<sup>15</sup> Bustamante and Fuller are not obvious interlocutors. Bustamante was 74 years old in 1848, the year he died. Margaret Fuller, on the other hand, was 39 in 1848. She was living in Italy, having just given birth to her son with Italian revolutionary officer Ossoli, and working sporadically as a foreign correspondent for the *New York Tribune*.

<sup>16</sup> Upon his death Bustamante likely believed that Mexico would be colonized and subjugated to the United States, just as “the nation” had been conquered by Spanish conquistadors in 1521. As we will see across these readings, the future of Mexico *as a nation* was very much up for grabs and heavily debated in both the U.S. and Mexican public spheres. Liberal Mexicans in the capital blamed General Santa Anna’s divisive and self-serving leadership, in addition to his shady treaty-dealings with the Republic of Texas in 1842 (a contributing cause of the U.S. invasion). Conservatives blamed the Liberals and the state of anarchy in postcolonial Mexico. To crudely sketch the post-war state of mind in the capital, Radical Liberals suspected a U.S. protectorate was the nation’s only hope, Conservatives turned to a Spanish or European monarchy, and Moderates often looked to France for possible protection and stability.

Mazzini's struggle for a nationalized Italian Republic, the U.S. conflict in Mexico was a "wicked War" (Fuller and Steele, 1992: 409). In her published letters in *The New York Tribune*, Fuller repeatedly juxtaposed the United States' fall from grace with the holy destiny of the European national movements, where "the same arguments in favor of the spoliation of Poland" echo the arguments in favor of "the conquest of Mexico" (Fuller and Steele, 1992: 409).<sup>17</sup> Suddenly, the United States was on the wrong side of a cosmic political destiny.

In one of the most quoted passages from her *New York Tribune* correspondence, dated April 19, 1848, Fuller expressed her modified U.S. Americanism from the transatlantic vantage point of Italy's beleaguered national movement.

My friends write to urge my return; they talk of our country as the land of the future. It is so, but that spirit which made it all it is of value in my eyes, which gave all of hope with which I can sympathize for that future, is more alive here at present than in America. My country is at present spoiled by prosperity, stupid with the lust of gain, soiled by crime in its willing perpetuation of slavery, shamed by an unjust war, noble sentiment much forgotten even by individuals, the aims of politicians selfish or petty, the literature frivolous and venal. In Europe, amid the teachings of adversity, a nobler spirit is struggling, –a spirit which cheers and animates mine. I hear earnest words of pure faith and love. I see deeds of brotherhood. This is what makes my America. (Fuller and Fuller, 1874: 326-327)

By first claiming her credentials as a patriot, as a believer in the United States as "the land of the future", she then builds a rhetorical bridge to a fundamental modification of herself as an "emigrant": the U.S. American identity and destiny is not grounded in New England's liberal cultural norms, nor geographic territory, but rather, a political and philosophical solidarity based in a cosmopolitan identity that bridges regional, linguistic, racial, national, and cultural geographies.<sup>18</sup> By configuring herself as a patriot-emigrant informant, Fuller shifts the shared definitions of "America"

<sup>17</sup> When the revolutionary movement disintegrated in the face of Napoleon's French troops by the end of 1849, Fuller and Ossoli were stranded as political and societal fugitives and forced to return to Fuller's home in New England. En route, in 1850, Fuller, Ossoli, and their child drowned in sight of the New York shore, and not unlike Bustamante, Fuller died unconvinced of the vivacity of the republican, liberal idealism to which so much of her published work was devoted.

<sup>18</sup> In August 1849, Fuller asked her readers to evaluate and then act on their relationship to their fellow spiritual-Americans, i.e., Italians across the ocean: "Do you owe no title to Heaven for the privileges it has showered on you, for whose achievement so many here suffer and perish daily?" She then goes on to concretize the means of solidarity available to readers in the United States: "send money, send cheer" and "acknowledge as the legitimate leaders and rulers those men who represent the people" (Fuller and Steele, 1992: 433). In another 1849 dispatch she even translates her U.S. American rhetoric into Italian, "Send, dear America! to thy ambassadors a talisman precious beyond all that boasted gold of California. Let it loose his tongue to cry, 'Long live the Republic, and may God bless the cause of the people, the brotherhood of nations and of men –equality of rights for all.' *Viva America!*" (Fuller and Fuller, 1874: 387).

from its New England provincialism to a transnational New World ideology of liberal progress and legalized egalitarianism.

Fuller's Americanism is often read as a precursor to the cultural imperialism that the United States exercises in today's globalized systems of mass media and transnational corporations. At a time when nativist sentiments predominated in her greater New England print community, Fuller was seeking to persuade her audience that to be more fully "American," one must expand the vision of *a common good* beyond the cultural and territorial borders of the United States. The fact that Bustamante also expresses a sense of personal betrayal by the U.S. invasion of Mexico and its complete disregard for Mexico's earnest if fractured independence movement suggests that to uphold U.S. liberal and democratic institutions as a beacon of sorts was to strategically shift the geographical and cultural location of "sovereignty" and "rights" away from Anglo-American modes of dominance toward New World modes of coalition. Bustamante makes his similar, almost simultaneous appeal from Mexico City as it was occupied by U.S. troops.

On the title page of his book, *El Nuevo Bernal Díaz del Castillo, o sea historia de la invasión de los Anglo-Americanos en México* (The New Bernal Díaz del Castillo, or A History of the Anglo-American Invasion of Mexico), Bustamante quotes a scripture from Apocalipsis: "Escribe lo que ves" (Write what you see) (1994: 3).<sup>19</sup> Positioning himself as an eye-witness in the services of future historians, Bustamante addresses the "ciudadanos americanos" (American citizens) in the United States based upon the potential for, and the dire loss of, an assumed commonality in democratic principles. He revises the United States' official version of the boundary disputes between Texas and Mexico in the form of several rhetorical questions: "Yo quiero que francamente digáis, ciudadanos americanos, ¿si hasta aquí encontráis algo que echar en cara a México?"; "Podrís negar esto, ciudadanos americanos, si no estáis ciegos, ¿no confesaréis que México ha sufrido cual ninguna otra nación?" (I want you to frankly say, American citizens, whether up to now you have anything to throw in Mexico's face.... You might deny this, American citizens, if you are not blind. Will you not confess that Mexico has suffered unlike any other nation?); and finally, "quiero ahora que juzguéis estos sucesos con un corazón mexicano y confeséis: ¿quién ha sido el país agresor?" (I now want you to judge these events with a Mexican heart and confess: who has been the aggressor country?) (1994: 4-11).<sup>20</sup> Bustamante makes a personal appeal

<sup>19</sup> Bustamante's epigraph also sums up Margaret Fuller's personal and professional argument to her readers in greater New England, the reason they should continue to read her in spite of the infamy associated with her name by 1849 –i.e. as an eyewitness, foreign correspondent, and *not* as a wayward woman who had overstepped the bounds of polite society as even many of her dearest friends and family had begun to see her.

<sup>20</sup> Even the title of the book is, in part, directed at northern U.S. American readers. As Juan Carlos León puts it in the "Prologue" to the 1994 printing, "el título mismo ... sugiere un símil... que puso en entredicho la visión misma que sobre los norteamericanos se tenía como defensores de la libertad" (the very title... sug-

to “ciudadanos americanos” (American citizens) –suggesting to them that the only reason they were invited into Texas in the first place was because of that laudable, supposedly democratic orientation from whence they came– to place themselves in the Mexicans’ shoes. He invites a cosmopolitan empathy from which the U.S. American citizen, self-identified as such, might “judge” with a “Mexican heart.” What is the overlapping significance of the fact that in 1848 Fuller chooses to place “America” in Italy and Bustamante suggests that U.S. American citizens might judge their own country with a “Mexican heart”?

Both Fuller and Bustamante attempt to modify their readers’ self-identification with New World liberalism in the context of New World liberalism’s own paradoxical, contradictory loyalties. In a political system structured around the efficacy and sovereignty of the modern nation-state, the identity-formation of national citizens was paramount. Romantic liberal culture throughout the Americas across the long nineteenth-century is replete with poems, stories, essays, songs, and novels that reinforce notions of national belonging and national obligation. And yet, Fuller, as a quintessential nationalist writing as a native Anglo-American New Englander, and Bustamante, as a quintessential nationalist writing as a Mexican War of Independence hero, structure their emotive appeals in defiance of the exclusive national identities that dominated the print spheres in both countries. Both authors articulated a fractured transamerican or New World identity tied to a set of universal rights that existed in rhetorical tension with their expressed national allegiances. Fuller’s geographical displacement of “America” to European shores is an important example of U.S. nationalism’s notable capability for rhetorical travel. Even as her U.S. American patriotism demonstrated this well-known imperial prowess of a hegemonic U.S. American cultural imagination, her patriotic displacement of U.S. American values also represented a conscientious insertion of a transnational common good in the context of the U.S. violation of Mexican sovereignty. On the other hand, Bustamante’s rhetorical address to U.S. American citizens, in a Spanish-language text published in Mexico City and not likely to reach the eyes or ears of many actual U.S. Americans, is most notable for the erasure of “Mexican citizens” as its direct interlocutors. Both authors’ approximations of North American identities were deeply inflected with and finally eviscerated by the nationalist contexts in which they wrote. Their emotive approximations of just such a North American identity-in-solidarity ultimately fell far short of the transnational political and economic realities, as well as the transamerican racial dynamics within national systems, which underlay the conflict of the War of 1846.

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gests a simile...that brings into doubt the image that North Americans had of themselves as defenders of liberty) (Bustamante, 1994: XLI). The Anglo-American “invaders” are the new conquistadors betraying Mexico’s independent and native sovereignty as it mythological originated from the Aztec “nation.”

Mariano Otero and Frederick Douglass explicitly engaged the racial underpinnings of the economic and political justifications of the U.S. American war with Mexico. Otero addressed his Liberal and Moderate peers in Mexico City in the widely read essay that he published anonymously in 1848, “Consideraciones sobre la situación política y social de la república mexicana, en el año 1847” (On the Political and Social Situation of the Mexican Republic in the Year 1847) (Vega Vera and Morales Becerra, 1995).<sup>21</sup> Otero framed the essay as a rational contradiction to the racist logic of the “hombres ligeros” (shallow men), who “en algunos periódicos extranjeros, se califique al pueblo mexicano como un pueblo afeminado, y como una raza degenerada, que no ha sabido gobernarse ni defenderse” (in some foreign newspapers classify the Mexican people as an effeminate people, and as a degenerate race that has not been capable of governing or defending itself) (Vega Vera and Morales Becerra, 1995: 765). Frederick Douglass published several contemporaneous editorials in 1848 in his abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star*, to prophetically warn of the inevitable “downward career” of a U.S. America that had lost its moral compass, citing the bloody war with Mexicans in Mexico as an extension of the racist violence that characterized the tolerance of slavery in the United States (Douglass and Foner, 1950: 295).<sup>22</sup> Although neither explicitly makes claims in such terms, the identity-formation of “white Americans” in the United States functions as a shared, overlapping critical object in both essays. Otero and Douglass challenge the assumption that “white [U.S.] Americans” had a “special talent for freedom,” and each draws upon a comparative history of civilizations to suggest that Mexico is, in fact, qualitatively no different than the United States, or the Saxons, or any other nation among nations (Streeby, 2002: 172).

The racist logic behind the war was loud and clear in the northern United States. Massachusetts, a Whig stronghold at the time, was most vocally opposed to the invasion and the terms of the treaty.<sup>23</sup> Emerson, who publicly criticized “the political culture that supported the war,” is well-known for having recorded the ugly language

<sup>21</sup> Signed by multiple authors but understood to be predominately written by moderate Liberal Mariano Otero, “Consideraciones” is a penetrating analysis of the causes for Mexico’s widely proclaimed failures in the face of U.S. territorial expansion. The essay is commonly attributed to Otero exclusively, but Escalante Gonzalbo suggests that he likely shared authorship with a more anti-clerical and scathing writer. For the purposes of clarity, I refer to Otero as the representative author.

<sup>22</sup> Frederick Douglass founded *The North Star* as an abolitionist paper in December 1847 in Rochester, New York. Its motto reads, “Right is of no Sex - Truth is of no Color - God is the Father of us all, and we are all brethren” (Douglass and Foner, 1950: 295). It was circulated to more than 4,000 readers in the United States, Europe, and the West Indies.

<sup>23</sup> Fuller, Douglass, and Thoreau respond to the New England “Conscience” Whigs’ definition of an anti-war stance, as much or more than they respond to the pro-war camp. Support for the war was divided along partisan and sectional lines, which explains why the Mexican War has been historically –and until recently, exclusively– categorized as a precursor of the U.S. Civil War. Most Democrats and the southern and western Whigs (known as the “Cotton” Whigs at the time) supported the war and the ultimate indemnity of Mexican territory as appropriate measures.

broadly used to describe Mexico and Mexicans during and after the war: "The United States will conquer Mexico, but it will be as the man swallows arsenic, which brings him down in turn. Mexico will poison us" (Emerson, 1909: 306). This excerpt is often read as a statement sympathetic to the widespread anti-imperialist Anglo-Saxonist fears of racial miscegenation and as a critique of the hypocrisy of the war under the banner of U.S. American freedom—a combination that was all too common in anti-imperialist circles.<sup>24</sup> Theodore Parker was an even more outspoken anti-war and anti-slavery activist, and his arguments for peace evoked an explicit racialist logic wherein the United States might eventually control the continent due to the "steady advance of a superior race...by being better than Mexico, wiser, humaner, more free, and manly" (Streeby, 2002: 169-170). Parker and Emerson are representative of dominant and influential fears that any appropriation of Mexican territory was culturally, economically, and politically undesirable based on the Anglo-Saxonist marking of Mexicans as racially degenerate.

Otero explicitly responds to the racist assumptions of these "hombres ligeros" in the North, while also addressing any sympathizers they may have found among Mexican intellectuals and statesmen. Unlike the shallow men who had made such damning generalizations, Otero positions his own argument as a disinterested, scientific, and factual treatise on Mexico's current moment in the context of a global, liberal-political ethic. Mexico must be judged by an objective assessment of the supposedly universal factors necessary to establish a prosperous civilization. Mexico is not effeminate or degenerate, but rather the heir to a particular colonial history and an indigenous population that had proven especially challenging to the liberal onus of national cohesion, political democracy, and economic progress. Otero's essay confronts the discourse of Anglo-Saxon superiority, so inherent to U.S., British, and German liberal thought, in order to argue for a more cosmopolitan, structuralist view of nation-states, in which Mexico's national challenges are not perceived in terms of racial degeneracy, but rather as universally compatible problems of human civilization articulated across diverse cultures and geographies. Similar to Kirsten Silva Gruesz's observation that U.S. American poet William Cullen Bryant actually took some comfort "at having southern 'neighbors' in the overwhelming task of 'civilizing' America," Otero and many moderate liberals argued that the liberals of New England were their most obvious and necessary allies in the task of civilizing the new world (Gruesz, 2002: 56). Frederick Douglass also exposed the war's racialist logic and the violence that logic seemingly

<sup>24</sup> Anna Brickhouse addresses this pervasive paranoia about racial hybridity in the United States via Nathaniel Hawthorne's and Francis Calderón de la Barca's fiction and William Prescott's reliance on the so-called Black Legend in his book *Conquest of Mexico* (Brickhouse, 2004). Kirsten Silva Gruesz also addresses the transamerican racial anxieties of the period in her excellent monograph, *Ambassadors of Culture: Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (2002).

justified, but he appealed to a cosmopolitan or transnational humanism that offers an important precursor to today's discourse of human rights.<sup>25</sup> The tensions and collusions between the two intellectuals' discrepant interventions in the transamerican racial dynamics during the American 1848 reveal the overlapping and contradictory contours of each man's transnational and national identities with regard to the racial politics of liberal nationalism in the nineteenth-century Americas.

Otero built his counter-argument (in part, to the aforementioned assertions of the shallow men in the United States, who had found sympathetic ears in Mexico) upon the insight that Mexico's economic, political, and social conditions in 1847 derived from an "enorme desproporción" (enormous disproportion) of wealth (Vera Vega and Morales Becerra, 1995: 766). The legacy of Spanish colonialism and the structure of Mexico's economy were its downfall, not some inherent weakness in Mexicans defined in terms of both the racialized and gendered slander. In his view, the fundamental cause of Mexico's startling military loss was the instability caused by the clergy, military, and government bureaucracy's constant threats to the personal wealth of the relatively few men of the "raza blanca y mixta" (white and mixed race) who worked in agriculture, factories, mines, commerce, and the arts (Vera Vega and Morales Becerra, 1995: 766).<sup>26</sup> Otero's refutation of Anglo-American racism argues for an alternative definition of "whiteness," albeit one that still depended upon the racialized exclusion of Native American peoples and cultures from Mexico as a liberal nation-state. Otero dismisses all indigenous peoples, the majority of Mexico's total population, as "una familia aparte de la raza blanca y mixta" (a family apart from the white and mixed race) and opines that three-quarters of the indigenous peoples "no les ha llegado tal vez la noticia de haberse hecho la independencia" (may not have received the news of independence having been won) (Vera Vega and Morales Becerra, 1995: 767). Misreading the hyper-sensitivities and deep structural foundations of Anglo-American racism in 1848, Otero articulates an argument for bi-national sympathy based on the perception of Mexican mestizos as equal world citizens in relation to the "white race." Otero appeals to the shared cosmopolitan worldview and the economic

<sup>25</sup> In both the U.S. and Mexico, the relationship between the U.S. American conflict over the spread of economic and political systems of slavery into the western half of the North American continent and the invasion of Mexico was glaring and apparent. Douglass's engagement with the bi-national ramifications of racism and racist interpretations of liberal legal-based categories such as "individuals" and "citizens" present a trenchant cultural analysis of the relationship between imperial and domestic federal polices within the American 1848.

<sup>26</sup> These relative few felt no obligation to a nation-state apparatus that did not protect them or their property. Yet as the only *potential* able-bodied citizens in the Liberal vision of a viable nation-state, they represented the only likely candidates for a cohesive nation of citizens. The majority of white and mixed-race men, in the absence of economic security, had dedicated themselves to the insidious or ineffective pursuits of the clergy, military, government-bureaucracy, law, and medicine, resulting in personal investments in Mexico's *status quo* political economy that was weak at best and corrupt at worst.

philosophy –with its emphasis on citizen-property-owners– of new world liberalism to re-draw the boundaries around “whiteness” in the racialized hierarchies of New World liberal intellectuals in the Americas.

Listing a number of the slogans that could be heard in the “general outcry” of “the people” caught in “the bewildering meshes” of “the office-seekers, demagogues, and political gamblers,” Douglass and Foner also expose “the present, cruel, and iniquitous war with our sister republic” as nothing less and nothing more than yet another expression of “Anglo Saxon cupidity and love of dominion” (1950: 292). The list makes the same point that Otero makes in Mexico: the racist rhetoric behind the war is hypocritical, irrational, and shallow.

“Vigorous prosecution of the war!”–“Mexico must be humbled!”–“Conquer a peace!”–  
“Indemnity!”–“War forced upon us!”–“National honor!”–“The whole of Mexico!”–“Our  
destiny!”–“This continent!”–“Anglo Saxon blood!”–“More territory!”–“Free institutions!”–  
“Our country!” (Douglass and Foner 1950: 293)

Quoting Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, Douglass warns, “it seems as though ‘justice has fled the brutish beasts, and men have lost their reason’” (Douglass and Foner, 1950: 293).<sup>27</sup> By focusing on the slogans and demagoguery of those same “shallow men” that Otero rhetorically opposes, Douglass also refutes the racial logic behind the war. Instead of offering an alternative logic based upon the boundaries of racial privilege, however, he appeals to a sense of universal equality in the face of the racial hypocrisy generated by the war and its uneasy peace.<sup>28</sup>

Douglass suggests that if “our fellow countrymen” “conquer” and “subdue” Mexico, the nation will be “reduced to a condition little better than that endured by the Saxons when vanquished by their Norman invaders” (1950: 295). As the previously quoted U.S. Americanist scholar, Shelley Streeby notes, “By identifying Mexicans with the freedom-loving Saxons to whom the expansionists often compared themselves, Douglass challenged the premise of racial Anglo-Saxonism that white

<sup>27</sup> Douglass also identifies the religious justifications for the war as an “infernal” factor in this racialized and militarized version of national liberalism. He describes overhearing “a conversation between two persons of apparent gentility and intelligence” in which the “main argument in favor of the war was the meanness and wickedness of the Mexican people.” Douglass expresses outrage that the man “gave it as his solemn conviction, that the hand of the Lord was in the work! That the cup of Mexican iniquity was full; and that God was now making use of the Anglo Saxon race as a rod to chastise them!” Douglass exclaims, “We are, in the hands of the great God, a rod to chastise this rebellious people! What say our evangelical clergy to this blasphemy?” (Douglass and Foner, 1950: 295).

<sup>28</sup> Although Douglass’s critique of the Anglo-American racialist logic is more implicit than Otero’s, his argument is in many ways much more piercing. In her overview of the popular and “high culture” literary responses to the war, Streeby describes Douglass as going “further than any other U.S. commentator in condemning racial Anglo-Saxonism” (2002: 171).



Americans had a special talent for freedom" (2002: 172). Whereas Otero's argument is based on the validity of a comparative political economy and ethic as applied to the Mexican nation-state, Douglass draws upon the New World liberal codes of honor to argue for a transnational morality that condemns imperial military action as well as the U.S. American domestic slave-based economy.

Otero's appeal to a cosmopolitan ethic based on an identification of an exclusive propertied class as the future leaders of Mexico is primarily directed at Mexico's liberal intellectual elite in direct response to the sense of national crisis occasioned by the U.S. American invasion. Douglass's cosmopolitan ethic, on the other hand, is directed to the New England elite in the hopes of drawing a visceral connection between the anti-war sentiment and the slavery question. These different rhetorical tactics, both couched in claims of eminent national crisis, demonstrate a very different understanding of the stakes of Anglo-Saxon dominance within the discourse of liberal nationalism on the continent. Whereas Otero's transnational counter-argument to the Anglo-Saxonist "hombres ligeros" of the United States appeals to the "well-educated" hearts of a cosmopolitan elite (not unlike Fuller and Bustamante's more emotive appeals), Douglass's editorials concretely testified to the bodily and violent consequences of the nation's "wicked career" whose "road be ditched with human blood, and paved with human skulls" (Douglass and Foner, 1950: 295). Douglass evokes the violence done to Mexican bodies, and by inference African-American bodies, in order to reorient the patriotism of his readers toward a transnational function of empathy and mutual identification, akin to today's discourse of universal equality and human rights.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that Douglass's rhetorical articulation of a bi-national identity/solidarity reads as the most familiar and/or resonant argument today. Phillip Resnick concludes the aforementioned essay about North American identities with a compelling aside about the overlapping histories of the U.S., Mexico, and Canada: "Most pertinent of all has been the congruent experiment in forging new societies in the new world –albeit as a result of conquest and displacement of indigenous peoples" (2010: 29). Fuller, Bustamante, Otero, and Douglass were all engaged in the New World liberal experiment to "forge new societies in the new world," and all New World liberal intellectuals, to varying degrees, participated in the "conquest and displacement of indigenous peoples." However, as a freed slave and an outspoken advocate for African slaves in the Americas, Frederick Douglass experienced first hand the consequences of the conquest and displacement of indigenous peoples in the name of New World societies –for enslaved Africans in the Americas, this displacement occurred as violent removal from their ancestral lands on the African continent to the Americas. The "differential consciousness" explicit in Douglass's transamerican discourse functions as a profoundly implicit and, at times unconscious, doubleness,

differentiation, and contradiction for the other authors in this study. In the next section, I delve more deeply into the implicit dislocations and contradictions of a North American identity/solidarity as it existed in tension with nationalist and racialized conceptions of liberal subjectivity. Henry David Thoreau and José de la Rosa expose in their narrative non-fiction essays the paradox that so many articulations of a North American New World liberal identity inevitably met with during the American 1848.

## GLOBAL VISION AS LOCAL DISLOCATION

Arguably, each of the essays we have looked at so far might be read as a different articulation of the bi-national “concord, harmony, and mutual confidence” to which the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo so facetiously alluded in 1848. As opposed to the fractured but sincere gestures of individuals like Bustamante, Fuller, Otero, and Douglass, the preamble of the treaty reads as blatant international farce, an infamous example of Margaret Fuller’s label for U.S.-based international diplomacy: “another name for intrigue” (Fuller, Bean, and Myerson, 2000: 16).<sup>29</sup>

The United States of America and the United Mexican States, animated by a sincere desire to put an end to the calamities of the war which unhappily exists between the two Republics and to establish Upon a solid basis relations of peace and friendship, which shall confer reciprocal benefits upon the citizens of both, and assure the concord, harmony, and mutual confidence wherein the two people should live, *as good neighbors* have for that purpose appointed their respective plenipotentiaries.

[Los Estados Unidos Mexicanos y los Estados Unidos de América, animados de un sincero deseo de poner término á las calamidades de la guerra que desgraciadamente existe entre ambas repúblicas, y de establecer sobre bases sólidas relaciones de paz y buena amistad, que procuren recíprocas ventajas á los ciudadanos de uno y otro país, y afianzen la Concordia, armonía, y mútua seguridad en que deben vivir, *como buenos vecinos*, los dos pueblos han nombrados á este efecto sus respectivos plenipotenciarios.]<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Signed in February 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded to the United States 55 percent of Mexico’s territory in return for a sum of money roughly equivalent to a year’s worth of Mexico’s annual budget (Meyer y Sherman, 1991: 351). It extended the boundaries of the United States by over 525 000 square miles to the South and Southwest in what Frederick Douglass would call “our blood-bought possessions” (1950: 109).

<sup>30</sup> The “American Memory” site within the Library of Congress online materials includes an excellent digital copy of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in addition to several other significant historical resources from the “Mexican War” as it is called on the site. The grammar and accents are from the Library of Congress’s online transcript of the ratified treaty. The emphasis in the language, “as good neighbors,” is mine.

I read Thoreau's emphasis on structures of neighborliness as civic duty in "Civil Disobedience" as a distinctly New England-placed response to the vapidness in the language of the ostensible peace ratified by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. I juxtapose his imaginative gesture toward bi-national solidarity with Luis de la Rosa's *Impresiones de un viaje de México a Washington* (Impressions of a Journey from Mexico to Washington) (Rosa, 2002), published with W.G. Stewart's press in New York City in 1849.<sup>31</sup> De la Rosa's slender travel narrative situates Thoreau's gesture toward bi-national solidarity in "Civil Disobedience" in conversation with the sensibility of a Mexican New World liberal intellectual who was much more closely and pragmatically invested in the shared futures of the two nation-states. Whereas Thoreau's interest in bi-national neighborliness is ideological and moral, De la Rosa's appeal is born of his delicate post-war personal and political situation as one of the signers of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Both their essays (Thoreau's as political philosophy and De la Rosa's as pastoral-political memoir) describe a sense of dislocation from their local communities in inverse relation to the narrators' investment in bi-national solidarity. The narrators of both texts map unresolved contradictions that were common across much of New World liberal intellectual expression. The expression of solidarity with imagined transnational peers functioned in direct correlation to a sense of isolation from local people and circumstances. As their essays reflect, the New World liberal enterprise carried within it an acute contradiction between liberal nationalism and liberal humanism that these authors were unable to resolve. The "differential consciousness" that Chela Sandoval describes as a central experience of marginalized peoples across the Americas operates in these essays as a sublimated "differential unconsciousness."

In "Civil Disobedience," Thoreau argues that the citizens of Massachusetts are obligated by their professed principles of individual sovereignty and liberty to act against a war that was initiated in the people's name by the Polk administration in violation of Mexico as a sovereign nation. The citizens of Massachusetts are further obligated to take action because the war of conquest is an explicit bid to extend the representation

<sup>31</sup> Ignacio Altamirano makes note of De la Rosa's book in a brief review of travel volumes by Mexican authors: "Don Luis de la Rosa, que tenía cualidades para cultivar el estilo descriptivo, no las desplegó en su pálida y breve narración de viaje a los Estados Unidos" (Don Luis de la Rosa, who had the talent to cultivate the descriptive style, did not display them in his pale, brief narrative of a voyage to the United States). Emmanuel Carballo, editor of the 2002 publication of De la Rosa's book, suggests that Altamirano disparaged it because he was never able to forgive De la Rosa for "haya sido el cerebro del convenio de paz de Guadalupe Hidalgo firmado con los invasores norteamericanos" (having been the brain behind the Guadalupe Hidalgo peace agreement signed with the U.S. invaders) (Rosa, 2002: viii). Although I hesitate to confirm De la Rosa's status as the "brain" behind the peace treaty, I do agree with Carballo's assessment that this slender volume has much more to offer in the way of literary style and historical interest than Altamirano's condemning statement suggests.

and therefore voting power of slave states in the United States, further violating the individual sovereignty of African-American slaves. Thoreau figures this particular relationship of “good” citizenship in solidarity with others as that of a “good neighbor,” where individual rights are not authorized by the nation-state but rather affiliated across the already entrenched nineteenth-century boundaries of race and nation (Thoreau and Howorth, 1981: 652). The Massachusetts citizen’s ostensible over-identification with the state not only threatens Thoreau’s well-known hyper-individualism, it obscures another moral code: a transnational and personalized ethics of the citizen-neighbor.

Thoreau explicitly includes the fugitive slave, the Mexican prisoner of war, the Indian, the tax collector, and all of the townspeople in Concord as his citizen-neighbors. He then suggests that the state is not just a “brute force, but partly a human force,” one that is based on neighbor-to-neighbor relationships that can only be reckoned with directly as neighbor-to-neighbor(s): “I please myself with imagining a State at last which can afford to be just to all men, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor” (Thoreau and Howorth, 1981: 659). Neighborliness, as dramatized in Thoreau’s local relationships in “Civil Disobedience,” but also as evoked in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, bespeaks a relationship between citizens that, in fact, both includes and supersedes national citizenship and identity.

Luis de la Rosa’s travel narrative is also deeply invested in the ideal and the act of good neighborliness, on both a national and personal level.<sup>32</sup> Appointed as the plenipotentiary and extraordinary delegate to the United States, in October 1848, De la Rosa journeyed north to Washington, D.C. in what amounted to an involuntary, diplomatic exile for an unspecified period of time.<sup>33</sup> It was an ignoble appointment, perhaps assigned to distance him from the Mexican Liberals who hoped to evade any responsibility for the terms of the treaty by laying the blame for the territorial loss exclusively on Santa Anna’s poor leadership. Not incidentally, De la Rosa was one of the Mexican representatives who signed the Protocol of Querétaro amendment to the treaty, which marked the official consummation of the treaty’s failure as a document with any in-

<sup>32</sup> De la Rosa had offered the principal address at the Independence Day celebrations in Mexico City in September 1846. Over the course of his career he served as a minister of state in various roles, as a local senator in Zacatecas (his native city), as a senator to the General Constituent Congress in 1856 (the year in which he died), a candidate for the presidency, and a frequent contributor to the Liberal newspaper, *Siglo XIX* (Nineteenth Century). In addition to *Impresiones*, he wrote “Utilidad de la literatura en México” (Usefulness of Literature in Mexico) for *El Ateneo Mexicano* (The Mexican Athenaeum) (1844-1846) and a small volume of prose-poems entitled *Miscelánea de estudios descriptivos* (Miscellaneous Descriptive Studies), published in 1848.

<sup>33</sup> Many Mexican statesmen traveled to the United States explicitly to observe and published their observations. For example, Manuel Payno officially visited New York City and Philadelphia to study the U.S. penitentiary system, and unofficially to report on the annexation of Texas and the political climate at the behest of President Herrera in 1845. Payno published several articles about his trip and wrote a travel narrative, published posthumously.

tention of promoting and facilitating peace between the neighboring nations (and quite literally, the “new” neighbors in places such as California Alta where U.S. Americans were already rushing in search of gold).

In spite of the inauspicious treaty process and the pervasive racist rhetoric of the “hombre ligeros” in the United States, De la Rosa’s commitment to the tenor of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo is apparent in his prose (although he never directly mentions the reason for his diplomatic visit). In long, descriptive passages about the Mexican and U.S. American landscape as seen from his riverboat, De la Rosa translates the rhetoric of reconciliation into relatively innocuous but uncanny palimpsests of the two national territories. It is a weird mixture of romanticized, universal sublime emotion and clear-cut delineations of national ownership and title. The stunning mountains surrounding Mexico City are first and foremost Mexican and the breathtaking mountains of Virginia are above all, U.S. American. The Mississippi River is beautiful, but not as beautiful as the Xalapa River of Veracruz, Mexico. Even the limits of the ocean are nationalized in his border-crossing narrative. At a moment when the territorial boundaries of the two nations had been re-drawn on a massive scale, when Mexican mountain ranges, rivers, deserts, and peoples had suddenly been appropriated as U.S. American, De la Rosa repeatedly reminds his readers of the distinction between the two countries. A differential (un)consciousness about territory, landscape, and national boundaries underlies the narrator’s more overt conciliatory and polite tone.

His cosmopolitan appreciation of strange lands and beauty as he travels by river—always from afar, always in transit—offers him the safe and liminal space in which to imagine a mutually respectful relationship between the neighbor nation-states and their governing elite.<sup>34</sup> De la Rosa promises his readers, figured as his friends back home, that “sin duda que este viaje les proporcionará muchos deleites y conocimientos muy importantes para los progresos de la civilización en México” (without a doubt, this voyage will provide them with many delights and knowledge very important to the progress of civilization in Mexico) (2002: 3). Just before arriving in Washington, D.C., this bi-national attention to territorial details and geographical compatibilities leads the narrator to offer his own comparative, bi-national history. Passing by Mount Vernon on “Day 24” of the journey north along the Potomac River, De la Rosa takes note of stately buildings on the Washington estate which “han traído a mi memoria el nombre de Hidalgo, caudillo de la independencia de mi patria, y cuyo destino ha sido tan

<sup>34</sup> A narrative strategy of humility allows him to safely insert these opinions about the deeply shared past and futures of the neighbor republics. Claiming to have studied “sin cesar este país de actividad, de movimiento y vida” (ceaselessly this country of activity, of movement and life), De la Rosa suggests that he is far from knowing it well and will leave any serious book about the United States to “profundos estadistas y grandes escritores” (profound statesmen and great writers) (2002: 7).

diverso del de George Washington" (which have brought to mind the name of Hidalgo, caudillo of my homeland's independence, and whose destiny was so different from George Washington's) (2002: 82). The stateliness of Mount Vernon brought to mind the stark contrast between Washington's Revolutionary War and Hidalgo's Independence movement, which ended with Hidalgo's head publicly displayed on a pike. De la Rosa then goes on to suggest that the future vitality or destruction of U.S. American and Mexican independence is mutually assured.

Si México por sus disensiones hace inútil el holocausto de su magnánimo caudillo; si los Estados Unidos por un sentimiento de ambición y por falsas ideas de gloria olvidan las lecciones de moderación y de virtud que les dejó recomendadas su ilustre fundador, entonces estos dos pueblos se habrán extraviado. (2002: 84)

[If Mexico's dissensions render the sacrifice of its magnanimous caudillo useless, if the United States, because of ambition and false ideas of glory, forgets the lessons of moderation and virtue recommended by its illustrious founder, then these two peoples will be lost.]

De la Rosa, like Bustamante, Otero, and many of his Mexican Liberal peers, did not hesitate to employ the rhetoric of America's republican, democratic destiny *both* as it applied specifically to the United States as model nation and as it applied to a New World liberal order to be imposed upon the so-called disorder, often figured as savage and backward, of the post-colonial nation.

Both De la Rosa and Thoreau, however, articulated interventions that were always already limited as deferred ideals. Like the bi-national appeals by Fuller, Bustamante, Otero, and Douglass, Thoreau's and De la Rosa's attempts at bi-national solidarity double back as empty gestures. Their articulations of bi-national solidarity remain nothing more—and nothing less—than their own monolingual, reflexive reactions to their experienced national crisis. This doubling back is most poignantly apparent in the textual distancing and displacements that each narrator enacts in the name of bi-national neighborliness. De la Rosa and his family journeyed by carriage, boat, steamboat, and train through war-torn Mexico and up through the rivers of the U. S. South. From the banks of Montgomery, Alabama, De la Rosa observed, "En esta república, mientras un viajero extranjero está contemplando la naturaleza o admirando las bellas perspectivas, la mayor parte de los nativos del país están haciendo *dollars*" (In this republic, while the foreign traveler contemplates nature or admires the beautiful prospects, the great majority of the country's natives are making dollars) (2002: 52). De la Rosa has an aesthetic purchase on the new lands because he is a foreigner. Writing as a Mexican, in the name of Mexico's national future, De la Rosa's insights are dependent on his role as a foreigner. In fact, given the delicate and precarious moment in his personal

career, De la Rosa *only* has a voice as a traveler on a river, a narrator in an in-between space that is significantly, neither Washington, D.C. nor Mexico City.<sup>35</sup>

Embedded within "Civil Disobedience," the narrator Thoreau also figures himself as a foreigner when, during his one night in prison, his thoughts "travel" to a far country and he leaves the county jail a stranger to his neighbors in Concord, Massachusetts.

It was like traveling into a far country, such as I had never expected to behold, to lie there for one night. It seemed to me that I never had heard the town-clock strike before, nor the evening sounds of the village, for we slept with the windows open, which were on the inside of the grating. It was to see my native village in the light of the Middle Ages, and our Concord was turned into a Rhine stream, and visions of knights and castles passed before me. They were the voices of old burghers that I heard in the streets. I was an involuntary spectator and auditor of whatever was done and said in the kitchen of the adjacent village-inn—a wholly new and rare experience for me. It was a closer view of my native town. I was fairly inside of it. I never had seen its institutions before....I began to comprehend what its inhabitants were about. (Thoreau and Howorth, 1981: 652)

Thoreau imagines himself a visitor in a foreign land and displaces his narrator spatially and temporally to a medieval village. Old Europe, with her knights and castles, displaces both the New England village of Concord and Mexico. This imaginative distancing results in a profound disassociation from the sounds and citizens of home. In the morning, when Thoreau walks out of the village prison, he sees his "good neighbors and friends" anew as "a distinct race from me by their prejudices and superstitions, as the Chinamen and Malays are" (Thoreau and Howorth, 1981: 653). Thoreau's formula for a new kind of citizen and state, a neighborly citizen and a neighborly state, ultimately leaves him with a profound feeling of distance from the "commoners" of his town. In the end, his ethical theory of "good neighborliness" leaves him out in the cold.

The notion of a transnational or bi-national identity as a displaced identity is nothing new. After all, we think of bi-national citizens and movements in terms of "exiles," "Diasporas," "expatriots," and "immigrants." Thoreau's narrator, on figurative and philosophical levels, and De la Rosas's narrative voice, from his geographical and political moment, highlight the inherent dislocations of transnational identification in the context of New World liberal nationalism. Like Margaret Fuller as an "emigrant-patriot" and Bustamante's U.S. American citizen with a "Mexican heart," the nar-

<sup>35</sup> De la Rosa's travel memoir stands out as a distinctly bi-national text: the slender volume was published in Spanish by a New York-based press. Addressed to fellow Mexican elites, arguably De la Rosa could perhaps only find a publisher in the relatively small and isolated bi-national print milieu in New York City.

rators in both De la Rosa's and Thoreau's essays demonstrate the doubleness, and the related instability, of North American identity in terms of the New World liberal emphasis on nation-states as supreme purveyors of cultural, social, political, and economic cohesion. All six of the bi-national interlocutors I have presented in this essay first and foremost predicted the U.S.-Mexican War as an example of the ethical failure of New World liberalism that would ultimately lead to the political and/or social dissolution of their respective nation-states. Quite to the contrary, the rise of liberalism as the dominant political and socio-cultural paradigm in both the U.S. and Mexico by the end of the nineteenth century relegated these paradoxical, contradictory, and unstable articulations of bi-national identity and solidarity to the margins of North American experience and perception.

### THE "FAILURES" OF NEW WORLD LIBERALISM AND NORTH AMERICAN IDENTITY

On the one hand, given the on-going lack of sustained cultural contact and communication between New England and Mexico City—as opposed to the more significant instances of political, economic, and military collaboration—these texts continue to bespeak the failures that they initially articulated. All three of the above anti-war witnesses from New England (Fuller, Douglass, and Thoreau) attempted U.S.-Mexican bi-national solidarity through imaginative gestures that were not realized and were ineffectual in establishing what Ignacio Ramírez would later imagine as a potential "intellectual cataclysm" between the two regions and cultures (1984: II, 387). In *Failure in Mexican Literature and Identity*, John A. Ochoa describes failure as "a fissure, a crack that at once defines and reveals weakness and threatens the larger structure." When we read failures as fault lines, "they afford the opportunity of laying bare the seams, the unseen continuities of form and of history" (2004: 5). Re-reading through these inter-textual juxtapositions, we begin to see an "unseen" continuity across the New World liberalisms of New England and Mexico City.

This unseen continuity, marked as it by failures/fissures, foreshadows the emergence of our ever-elusive North American identities in the twenty-first century. In his 2010 essay, Phillip Resnik concludes his reflections on North American identity with an open-ended speculation:

It remains to be seen whether the sense of new beginnings that has presided over the forging of each of the North American states can lead to an enhanced feeling of cultural and political North Americanness in the twenty-first century. And whether a sense of solidarity



transcending national boundaries and narrow economic interests can be engendered on the North American continent. (2010: 29)

Reflecting upon the histories of New World liberalism in the United States, in Mexico, and across the two nation-states' development, I would like to revise Resnick's speculative tone. Indeed, we can see that the sense of new beginnings that motivated the liberal nationalists in their respective regions did approach "enhanced feelings of cultural and political North Americanness" in the name of a "sense of solidarity" that "transcended national boundaries and narrow economic interests," but we can also see that these enhanced feelings and approximations of solidarity were disrupted by the same New World liberal-national vision that engendered them. It was an abortive birth.

As Resnick accurately points out, the "most pertinent" example of North American historical, cultural, and political congruency is the "experiment of forging new [liberal] societies...as a result of conquest and displacement of indigenous peoples" –or, the historical topologies of New World liberalism in the Americas (2010: 29). Many Chicano/a writers and theorists have grappled with the inequalities, violence, challenges, and possibilities that have resulted from the star-crossed "sense of new beginnings" and the ensuing dominance of New World liberalism (as romantic nationalism by the end of the nineteenth century and as free-trade neo-liberalism by the end of the twentieth century). In the aforementioned *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval argues that "the first world subject" in the increasingly globalized conditions in which we live must "enter the kind of psychic terrain formerly inhabited by the historically decentered citizen-subject: the colonized, the outsider, the queer, the subaltern, the marginalized" (2000: 351). She argues that this "oppositional/differential consciousness" developed by the historically decentered citizen-subject for her/his survival has become an essential mode of agency for *all* citizen-subjects in the context of twenty-first century massive globalization and late capitalism. Another Chicana theorist, Gloria Anzaldúa, similarly imagines/predicts that the "future will belong to the *mestiza*... because the future depends upon...breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm...on the straddling of two or more cultures" (1987: 102). Our ever-elusive North American identities are available to us as coalitional, differential, and oppositional modes of cultural and political agency that have already been tested out, exercised, and practiced by marginalized peoples across the centuries, and across the Americas.

Based on the overlapping vocabularies and (in)congruencies of New World liberalism in the U.S. and Mexico that I have traced here, I believe that "North America" does indeed "exist" in a "deeper cultural, historical, metaphysical, or political sense" in so far as its existence is oppositional, contextual, and always in flux (Resnick, 2010: 15).

The American 1848 proved to be one such moment in history, when New World liberal intellectuals strategically claimed North American solidarities and affinities in the name of the liberal ideals of equality, sovereignty, and human rights. Furthermore, the inherent fractures, paradoxes, and dualities of these New World liberal intellectuals' bi-national positions played out in the form of robust, hegemonic nationalisms and the rise of neo-liberal economics across the twentieth century. Reflecting in history that which the economic migrants of the twenty-first century are witness to every day, North America does not exist "in more than its trade-driven NAFTA form"; rather, it exists in a constantly shifting, dialectic, and necessary response to it.

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