

Whigs of the Old Northwest and Texas Annexation, 1836-April, 1844

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Following congressional rejection of the Texas annexation treaty in the spring of 1844, the question of the accession of Texas became one of many campaign issues, and arguments pro and con were absorbed into the rhetoric of the quadrennial presidential race. Annexation proposals prior to the presentation of the Tyler treaty in April, 1844, and the responses to them, however, form a unity which merit examination apart from the events surrounding and subsequent to the treaty itself.¹ This study of these prior proposals is limited geographically to four states of the Old Northwest: Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan. Chronologically, it covers the period 1836 to April, 1844, from President Andrew Jackson's first attempt to acquire Texas to President John Tyler's presentation to the United States Senate of a formal treaty. Topically, it focuses upon Whig reactions in these states and the rhetoric and actions as expressed by their journalists, members of state legislatures, and congressmen. The first section of this study treats of annexation attempts prior to January, 1838, when South Carolina Democratic Senator William Preston presented an annexation resolution to the Senate. Then reactions to the Preston resolution in the Old Northwest, culminating in the Senate vote on Preston's measure, which was taken in June, 1838, are discussed. Lastly, renewed agitation in the early 1840s, following a hiatus of such activity from 1838 to 1842, is studied with a view to seeing what form antiannexation activity took from 1842 until the spring of 1844, and how Whigs of the Old Northwest tended to align themselves on the question.

Except in Ohio and to a lesser extent in Michigan, journalists and politicians of the Old Northwest did not join the debate over Texas annexation until the early 1840s. The *Ohio State Journal*, a Whig organ at Columbus, admitted as early as 1829 that the acquisition of the territory would be very popular in Ohio. Though the editor rabidly dissented with this viewpoint, he attributed such sentiment to fear that Texas might "soon pass into other hands either by treaty or

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¹ For an excellent summary of the negotiations on the annexation of Texas, background to the material covered here, see Eugene C. Barker, "The Annexation of Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, L (July, 1946), 49-74. See also Justin H. Smith, *The Annexation of Texas* (New York, 1911), 52-75; Justin H. Smith, *War with Mexico* (2 vols., New York, 1919), I, *passim*; George L. Rives, *The United States and Mexico, 1821-1848* (2 vols., New York, 1913), I, *passim*.

conquest."² During late 1836 and early 1837 many Ohioans wanted Texas to be an independent republic and even petitioned the national government to extend it diplomatic recognition.³ But by 1837 many from both parties began to question the advisability of extending such recognition unless Texas should first outlaw slavery.⁴

Some Ohio Whig journalists based their objections on partisan and antislavery principles. One Whig editor predicted the "dissolution of the Union" if Texas were admitted because the free states would never consent "to be delivered over to the absolute control of the slave states."⁵ Another, also mindful of the political ramifications, denounced annexation on the ground that the admission of Texas into the Union would throw the balance of power into the hands of the South and "forever destroy the political importance of the free states." He added, almost as an afterthought, that the territory of the United States was already sufficiently extensive and that every addition increased the diversity of interests and the probability of disunion.⁶

Sentiment among Ohioans during the late 1830s was expressed most strongly in the state legislature, which was flooded with petitions against the acquisition of Texas. In late 1837 Whig Otway Curry presented a resolution to the lower house of the legislature which stated that annexation would "certainly and naturally tend to weaken and destroy those bonds of union by which our already Colossal Confederacy" was preserved. Thus, Ohio's senators and representatives in Congress ought to be requested "at all times, and under all circumstances" to oppose it. This was twice tabled without coming to a vote.⁷

On January 5, 1838, Benjamin F. Wade, a caustic antislavery Whig who would soon gain national prominence, presented an anti-annexation petition to the Ohio Senate. A week later he again voiced his strong opposition and condemned Texas because of its "foul blot of slavery."⁸ At the same time several members of the lower house introduced similar petitions.⁹ State Senator Thomas C. Vincent, a Democrat, shortly afterward called for a "legislative protest" against annexation.¹⁰ A month later the legislature adopted a measure similar in content to Vincent's. According to its preamble, this "protest" was a result of popular feeling as expressed in numerous petitions to

² Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, September 24, 1829.

³ *Congressional Globe*, 24 Cong., 1 Sess., 410.

⁴ St. Clairsville *Belmont Chronicle*, January 28, 1837.

⁵ Cincinnati *Gazette*, quoted in Richmond, Indiana, *Palladium*, January 14, 1837.

⁶ Ravenna *Star*, quoted in Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, January 10, 1838.

⁷ Ohio, *House Journal* (1837-1838), 146, 312.

⁸ Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, January 6, 12, 1838.

⁹ *Ibid.*, January 15, 1838.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, January 27, 1838.

the General Assembly. The Whig dominated Ohio Senate adopted it enthusiastically by a vote of 36 to 0, and the House, also Whig, concurred unanimously.¹¹

The strongly worded report which accompanied this resolution was approved by the Senate, but it did not have the same success in the House. The report asserted that admitting Texas was neither consistent with a just treatment of Mexico nor conducive to the safety and happiness of the United States: "So long as war is maintained by Mexico for the reconquest of Texas, it would not comport with the honor of the United States to make any union with her revolted colonies." The report repeated what was becoming a commonplace Whig argument, that the United States was already large enough and that any increase in area would only augment the likelihood of foreign war. Moreover, annexation would weaken the nation in case of a sea war and would drain off troops to outlying areas, thus making it impossible to cope with warlike Indians. Conceding that Congress had the constitutional authority to incorporate new states into the Union, the Senate document denied Congress the right to admit foreign, independent nations.¹²

Although this report was rejected in the House,¹³ its arguments became part of the creed of the opponents of annexation during the following decade. During the 1830s the intellectual arsenal of these dissidents was being stocked, and this rejected document stands out as one of the earliest, clearest expressions of ideas later held as the irreducible minimum of Whig dogma in much of the nation.

Agitation in Congress over Texas annexation stimulated scores of petitions in opposition, from Ohio Whigs and Democrats alike.¹⁴ The national legislature had long been bombarded with antislavery petitions, but as the extension of slavery and annexation became identified, the antislavery advocates began concentrating on Texas. In 1837 Whig Senator Thomas Ewing presented to the upper house of Congress a memorial from his constituents inveighing against even recognizing Texas as an independent republic until it abolished slavery.¹⁵ In the House of Representatives Whigs Patrick Goode and John Allen joined three Ohio Democrats in introducing a dissenting petition bearing over a thousand signatures. Shortly afterwards Con-

¹¹ Ohio, *Senate Journal* (1837-1838), 288-91; Ohio, *House Journal* (1837-1838), 523. The text is contained in full in U.S., *Senate Document* 281, 25 Cong., 2 Sess. According to the Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, October 20, 27, 1837, the Ohio Senate was divided forty Whigs to twenty-two Democrats.

¹² Ohio, *House Journal* (1837-1838), 524.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 525.

¹⁴ U.S., *Senate Journal*, 25 Cong., 1 Sess., 30, 31, 39, 43; *Congressional Globe*, 25 Cong., 1 Sess., 22, 49, 73, 94; *ibid.*, 25 Cong., 2 Sess., 19, 55.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 24 Cong., 2 Sess., 191.

gressman Allen presented to the House a series of similar petitions.¹⁶ In early 1838 Goode, Calvary Morris, and Alexander Duncan with two sympathetic Democrats offered still another protest petition to the House.¹⁷

There was far less concern expressed prior to 1838 over the admission of Texas in the rest of the Old Northwest than in Ohio. In the closing days of 1836 Whig Assemblyman George H. Proffitt introduced in the Indiana House a joint resolution against annexation. It was defeated when the Democrats voted 78 per cent against it, while the Whigs divided evenly. If the Whig majority had voted as a unit, it would have passed; but partisan alignment on the issue was not solid at that time.¹⁸ In the following year Whig Richard J. Hubbard introduced a similar resolution in the lower house of the Indiana General Assembly. Democrat Ebenezer M. Chamberlain attempted to soften the measure by amending it to read "until Texas has established her peace." Whig Thomas J. Evans argued in favor of the measure without the amendment, but Samuel Judah and Joseph G. Marshall, fellow Whigs, fought against it. Reflecting the deep Whig division in Indiana, they insisted that the whole affair was outside the jurisdiction of state legislatures. The resolution was defeated 55 to 42.¹⁹

In their expression of antiannexation feeling through their national representatives, Hoosiers ran far behind Ohioans. Indiana Senator Oliver H. Smith, the only Whig from the Old Northwest in the upper house, presented one petition from his Hoosier constituents to the Senate against receiving Texas into the Union.²⁰ Through Whig Representative James Rariden, a yearly meeting of Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio Quakers sent an antiannexation petition to Congress in late 1837, as did hundreds of Indiana citizens from the east-central portion of the state bordering Ohio.²¹

Much of the Whig press in Indiana was almost silent on the question of Texas admission. The editor of the Richmond *Palladium*, for example, seemed indifferent to the whole affair. In early January, 1838, he reprinted an opposing editorial from an Ohio Whig newspaper and later in the month reported matter-of-factly the introduc-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25 Cong., 1 Sess., 45, 92.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 25 Cong., 2 Sess., 68.

¹⁸ Indiana, *House Journal* (1836-1837), 66, 73, 236. Party affiliations and divisions have been checked in state journals, *Biographical Directory of the American Congress*, the *Congressional Globe*, and local newspapers. For Indiana see especially Dorothy Riker and Gayle Thornbrough (comps.), *Indiana Election Returns, 1816-1851* (*Indiana Historical Collections*, Vol. XL; Indianapolis, 1960).

¹⁹ Indianapolis *Indiana State Journal*, December 15, 1837, January 16, 1838, quoted in Richmond *Palladium*, July 2, 1845.

²⁰ *Congressional Globe*, 25 Cong., 1 Sess., 22.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 25 Cong., 2 Sess., 27.

tion of the Preston resolution, but in neither case did he make any editorial comment.²²

The acquisition of Texas did not come up in the Illinois Whig press or state legislature during the period 1836-1838. And since there were no Whigs from Illinois in Congress until 1839, there was no activity in this quarter.

In Michigan the official Whig and Democratic organs were loyal to what were fast becoming the national party lines on the subject. Early in the debate over annexation the Whig *Detroit Advertiser*, a strong opponent of annexation, was taken to task by the *Detroit Free Press*, a Democratic organ, for trying to persuade the legislature to adopt an unfavorable position.²³ Like Illinois, Michigan had no Whigs in Congress until 1839. Some Michigan residents employed the services of Vermont Whig Heman Allen to place before the House of Representatives their petitions against annexation.²⁴ The balance of this state's anemic campaign was pressed by Democrat Isaac Crary.²⁵

On January 4, 1838, Senator Preston introduced his resolution calling for the "reannexation" of Texas, as soon as it could be done "consistently with the faith and treaty stipulations of the United States."²⁶ Preston's proposal caused a brief flurry of petitions in opposition from Ohioans. Less than two weeks after the proposal was introduced, eight Whigs and five Democrats from Ohio presented an antiannexation petition to the House of Representatives. Two months later a similar document was offered by largely the same group of men.²⁷ But the excitement did not last long. Except for one other House petition, all the rest of the anti-Texas memorials from Ohio during this time came from Democratic Senators William Allen and Thomas Morris.²⁸

Hoosier agitation in Congress was limited to a few dissenting memorials placed before the House of Representatives. All six Whigs in the Indiana delegation to Congress joined in submitting one of these; unlike Ohio, no Democrats were involved. In early April, 1838, the last Hoosier protests closed that state's activity.²⁹ Oliver H. Smith, still the only Whig Senator from the Old Northwest, completely ignored the issue.

During this period residents of Illinois presented only two petitions to Congress, both protesting the admission into the Union of

²² *Richmond Palladium*, January 14, 20, 1837.

²³ *Detroit Free Press*, January 13, 1838.

²⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 25 Cong., 2 Sess., 64.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 25 Cong., 1 Sess., 83, 85; *ibid.*, 25 Cong., 2 Sess., 28.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 25 Cong., 2 Sess., 55, 76, 96, 98; *ibid.*, appendix, 108, 555-56.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 25 Cong., 2 Sess., 101, 213.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 135, 153, 160, 181, 213, 230, 245.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 181, 291.

any state which permitted slavery.³⁰

The Whig press in Michigan did not respond to the Preston resolution, but the state's lower house declared annexation dangerous to the Union. The measure adopted by the House instructed the Michigan senators and representatives in Congress to vote against it if the matter ever came to a vote.³¹ In March, 1838, the state Senate also passed a series of anti-Texas resolutions, which were in turn adopted by the House.³² Shortly afterward Democratic Senator John Norvell presented these resolutions to the upper house of the national Congress.³³ Later, the Whig editor of the *Detroit Advertiser* was pleased to report that in the congressional elections of 1838 both parties in Michigan screened their candidates to insure that they were opposed to the annexation of Texas.³⁴

The mixed reaction to the Preston resolution in the nation as a whole was nowhere better illustrated than in the United States Senate. On June 14 the Senate voted 24 to 14 to table the measure. This vote reflected only slight partisan division, but a clear sectional pattern emerged. Six of the seven states unanimously against annexation were free states; the seventh, Delaware, was a border slave state. All five unanimous supporters were slave states, with only Missouri on the border.³⁵ Twenty-five per cent of the nation's senators abstained; by percentage, twice as many were Whigs as were Democrats. Seventy-five per cent of the Whigs and sixty per cent of the Democrats cast their ballots against the Preston resolution. At this time the Senate delegation from the Old Northwest contained seven Democrats and one Whig. Five of the Democrats were against the resolution, while the single Whig, Smith of Indiana, joined the other two Democrats in abstaining.³⁶

After the defeat of the Preston resolution, the argument over Texas annexation subsided throughout the nation. Agitation further decreased following Secretary of State John Forsyth's second rejection of the proposal and coincident with the accession to the Texas presidency of Mirabeau B. Lamar, a confirmed opponent of annexa-

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 146, 184.

³¹ Michigan, *House Journal* (1838), 107-108.

³² Michigan, *Senate Journal* (1838), 343; Michigan, *House Journal* (1838), 405-406.

³³ *Congressional Globe*, 25 Cong., 2 Sess., 318.

³⁴ *Detroit Advertiser*, October 10, 1838.

³⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 25 Cong., 2 Sess., 453. The vote was on a motion to table the resolution. A yes vote to table, then, was a vote against the measure, which, technically, never came up for a vote. Although a number of states were divided in their votes on the Preston resolution, states which voted solidly for or against the measure reflected the sectional pattern.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 448, 454. His presence in the Senate chamber two days before and one day after this vote was taken indicates that he was probably not away at the time.

tion.³⁷

There was little mention of the annexation of Texas in the nation's newspapers, state legislatures, or congressional delegations for the four years following the defeat of the Preston resolution; but the issue did not die completely, least of all in Ohio. The Whig editor of the *Cincinnati Gazette* lamented in June, 1838, that the "decisive vote of the Senate" had not "closed the discussion in the House."³⁸ The defeat of the measure did not lure the Ohio opponents into abandoning their vigilance. In January, 1839, citizens of Ashtabula County requested that their state legislature take a definite stand against annexation.³⁹ The following month, Whig Representative Alexander Harper presented to the lower house of Congress two Ohio petitions against it.⁴⁰

Democratic Senator Thomas Morris addressed the Senate on February 9, 1839, on the contents of several memorials expressing opposition to the admission of any territory which permitted slavery and signed by constituents of both parties from Ohio as well as Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania.⁴¹ Texas was not mentioned directly in this speech, but it showed that in the minds of many Ohians the question of Texas annexation was inseparably linked to the extension of slavery.

The Whig journalists and politicians of Indiana were almost silent on the controversial annexation question immediately following the defeat of the Preston resolution, but the issue surfaced briefly in Illinois. Democratic Assemblyman John Calhoun of Sangamon County presented a series of resolutions—which came in response to proposals that the state legislature take a stand against annexation—to the lower house of the General Assembly. Calhoun insisted that the legislature not go on record with such a protest. His proposals were tabled twice without coming to a vote, but the General Assembly did not make the anti-Texas, antislavery protest that he opposed.⁴²

Renewed interest in the annexation question in late 1841 and

³⁷ In his inaugural address, on December 9, 1839, Lamar said: "I have never been able to perceive the policy of the desired connection, or discover in it any advantage either civil, political, or commercial, which could possibly result to Texas." Mirabeau B. Lamar, *Inaugural Address, Texas Miscellaneous Pamphlet* no. 12, quoted in H. H. Bancroft, *History of North Mexican States and Texas* (2 vols., San Francisco, 1889), II, 314-15. But when Sam Houston became president of Texas for the second time, in late 1841, he let it be known that he was still interested in annexation. Isaac Van Zandt, *Texas charge d'affaires* in Washington, to G. W. Terrell, December 23, 1842, George P. Garrison (ed.), "Diplomatic Correspondence of the Republic of Texas," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1907* (2 vols., Washington, 1908), II, 633.

³⁸ *Cincinnati Gazette*, June 20, 1838.

³⁹ *Columbus Ohio State Journal*, January 23, 1839.

⁴⁰ *Congressional Globe*, 25 Cong., 3 Sess., 203.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, appendix, 167-75.

⁴² *Illinois, House Journal* (1838-1839), 62, 323.

early 1842 coincided with several events: the succession of Sam Houston to the presidency of Texas, the accession to office of two pro-Texas secretaries of state, Abel P. Upshur and John C. Calhoun, and the presidency of John Tyler, who reportedly spoke often and favorably of annexation.⁴³ Not until Texas suffered severe reverses in her war with Mexico, in 1842, and not until rumors reached the Old Northwest that Tyler was planning to annex Texas, did Whig editors in that section leap into action again.⁴⁴

The editor of the Columbus *Ohio State Journal* again led the Whig attack. He sympathized with the Texas claim to independence, but wrote: "We do not want Texas, nor do we want to extend the Union in any direction."⁴⁵ Recognizing the partisan as well as the sectional aspects of the controversy, he explained that as a party the Whigs were opposed to the acquisition of Texas. Since the territory of the United States was already too extensive, he feared that "the days of the Republic" would be numbered by increasing it even more. The editor further accused Tyler of trying to annex Texas in order to gain southern support in the fast approaching presidential election and referred to his "scheme" as a measure "fraught with evil aspects of the continuance and tranquility of the Union."⁴⁶ He said that annexation was nothing more than a Tyler conspiracy to secure to the slaveholding South additional strength in the national government. It was an "unhallowed plot" to destroy the political balance of the Union and to subject the free states to the domination of slaveholders. "*The Union cannot and will not survive the annexation of Texas six months,*" he predicted.⁴⁷

Another Ohio Whig journalist condemned the New York *Union*, the Tyler organ, for its illogical argument that self-preservation demanded annexation and compared Tyler's negotiations with Texas to Burr's notorious conspiracy.⁴⁸ Thomas Corwin, a powerful antislavery Whig of Ohio, agreed with the party organ that the area of the nation was already "sufficiently extended and cumbrous" without purchasing or accepting any more territory.⁴⁹ He viewed the project as a "darling object" of southern Democrats supported by subservient

⁴³ Abel P. Upshur to Isaac Van Zandt, October 16, 1843, U. S., *House Document* 271, 28 Cong., 1 Sess., 37; Van Zandt to Upshur, October 19, 1843, *ibid.*, 37-38.

⁴⁴ Z. T. Fulmore, "The Annexation of Texas and the Mexican War," *Texas Historical Quarterly*, V (July, 1901), 35. The Washington, D. C., *National Intelligencer* gave Texas impoverishment and her inability to wage successful warfare against Mexico as reasons for widespread interest in annexation, quoted in *Niles' Register*, LXIV (May, 13, 1843), 173. The New Orleans *Picayune*, January 23, 1844, spoke of Texas desire for annexation and fear of a "new and formidable Mexican invasion" in the same editorial, quoted in *Cincinnati Gazette*, February 3, 1844.

⁴⁵ Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, March 16, 1842.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, November 5, 1842.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, November 9, 1842.

⁴⁸ *Cincinnati Gazette*, November 7, 1842.

⁴⁹ Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, March 16, 1842.

northerners of the same party.⁵⁰

By early 1843 nearly all the Whigs in the Old Northwest had become confirmed opponents of Texas annexation, and Joshua Reed Giddings of the Western Reserve had emerged as one of their leading spokesmen. His views on the question were adopted in resolutions passed at a bipartisan, anti-Texas meeting in Jefferson, Ohio, in the summer of 1843. Following this, the Whig editor Henry Fassett of the *Ashtabula Sentinel* warned that the people of the free states did not "sufficiently apprehend" the danger that was growing out of efforts of the slave states to admit Texas.⁵¹ In a letter to the *Sentinel*, written the following spring, Giddings said that many members of Congress viewed the annexation of Texas as tantamount to the dissolution of the Union.⁵²

In late 1843 the Whig journals of Ohio stepped up their attack against the admission of Texas. In a lengthy editorial the editor of the Columbus *Ohio State Journal* reminded his readers that the Constitution made no provision for the United States to hold foreign territory. Still less did it provide for "incorporating foreign nations into our Union." He repeated a favorite Whig theme, that the project would without a doubt "eventuate in dissolution of the Union."⁵³

The Whig editor of the Cincinnati *Gazette* became at this time one of the most rabid antiannexation spokesmen of the Old Northwest. Recognizing the growing partisan alignment on the question, he wrote, with some hyperbole: "The Whigs unitedly—earnestly—in and out of Congress, have opposed this annexation."⁵⁴ He asserted confidently that nothing would come of the activity to annex Texas.⁵⁵ On March 22, exactly one month before Tyler presented to the Senate a treaty to annex Texas to the United States as a territory that would subsequently become a state, this editor condemned the acquisition of Texas on the grounds that it would probably lead to war with Mexico, that it was contrary to the national interest, that it was unconstitutional, and that it would establish the dangerous precedent of acquiring territory by conquest.⁵⁶ The Cincinnati *Gazette* thereafter carried almost daily editorials against annexation. It criticized President Tyler because he had "by the wrong exercise of a doubtful constitutional power *clandestinely* sought to accomplish an object against the spirit and honor of the Nation, against the peace and interest of the people,

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, September 14, 1842.

⁵¹ *Ashtabula Sentinel*, September 30, 1843.

⁵² Joshua R. Giddings to *Ashtabula Sentinel*, March 14, 1844, printed in *Ashtabula Sentinel*, March 23, 1844.

⁵³ Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, November 11, 1843.

⁵⁴ Cincinnati *Gazette*, October 21, 1843.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, January 16, 1844.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, March 22, 1844.

against Humanity itself."⁵⁷

Between the years 1839 and 1843 there was some but not much concern in the state legislatures of the Old Northwest over the controversy.⁵⁸ This was especially true until December, 1843, when Whig Senator Abraham Van Vorhes of the Ohio legislature moved that his state formally instruct its senators and representatives in Congress to oppose annexation. His resolution was rejected, with all the Whigs supporting and all the Democrats opposing him.⁵⁹ Offered as an amendment to a bill in no way related to the Texas issue, his resolution illustrated the obstructionist tactics resorted to by the opposition.

When ex-Governor Thomas W. Gilmer of Virginia published a letter in early 1843 favoring annexation, Giddings and other anti-slavery congressmen decided to issue a public warning of the danger facing the nation. Giddings' friend, Seth M. Gates, wrote a tract, which was then signed by twenty-one members of Congress, denouncing the proposed acquisition of Texas as a scheme of slaveholders executed in order that "*the undue ascendancy of the slave-holding power in the government*" should be "*secured and rivetted beyond all redemption.*" Those who signed the tract accused slaveholders of migrating to Texas in order to foment revolution and maintained that annexation was merely the last stage of their conspiracy, which had two objects: "*The perpetuation of slavery and the continued ascendancy of the slave power.*" The acquisition of Texas would be of no advantage to the United States; it was unconstitutional and would lead to the dissolution of the Union. The signers advised the citizens of the free states to reject it; otherwise, they would be accessories to a criminal act—the "*irremediable perpetuation OF AN INSTITUTION . . . regarded as an evil and a curse.*"⁶⁰

When Congress convened in December, 1843, the antislavery forces intensified their agitation, which reached the boiling point in the early months of 1844.⁶¹ On January 22, 1844, Giddings presented a protest petition from his home state and one from New York asserting that if Texas were allowed to join the United States, the Empire State should unite with Canada.⁶² Giddings introduced a hitherto unmentioned element in the Texas battle. "It is feared enough Sena-

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, March 23, 1844.

⁵⁸ U. S., *Senate Documents* 215, 219, 28 Cong., 1 Sess.; U. S., *House Document* 21, *ibid.*; *Congressional Globe*, 28 Cong., 1 Sess., 175-76. *Niles' Register*, LXV (December 16, 1843), 241; *ibid.*, LXVI (March 23, 1844), 54-55.

⁵⁹ Ohio, *Senate Journal* (1843-1844), 73.

⁶⁰ The text is contained in full with a partial list of the signers in the Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, May 25, 1843, the Washington, D. C., *National Intelligencer*, May 4, 1843, and the Richmond *Palladium*, June 17, 1843.

⁶¹ Congress was inundated with antislavery and antiannexation petitions. *Congressional Globe*, 28 Cong., 1 Sess., 179, 428, 497.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 174.

tors hold Texas script," he wrote, "which will rise in value as an incident of annexation, to secure the passage of the treaty."⁶³ Other Ohioans employed the services of Michigan Whig Senator William Woodbridge to petition the national government to reject all efforts to acquire Texas on the ground that the measure involved "in its consequences not only the happiness and safety of the country, but the integrity and perpetuity of the Union itself."⁶⁴

The Richmond *Palladium*, one of the major Whig papers in Indiana, was late in taking a stand on the controversy and virtually ignored the issue until the early 1840s, after which its editor quoted a number of editorials from other papers without commenting on them. In the fall of 1843, for example, he quoted the South Bend *Free Press*, which stated, with only slight exaggeration: "The Northern Whigs, as a body, are openly . . . against the annexation of Texas to the Union, which would form ten more Slave states, and thus give that interest a preponderance in both branches of Congress."⁶⁵ In December, 1843, the *Palladium* reprinted an editorial from the New York *Tribune* opposing the project, but again no comment.⁶⁶ After President Tyler's annual message to Congress in the same month, this editor's sarcasm reflected his opposition to Tyler and his growing antagonism toward Texas. The President had concluded with the words: "The only desire which I feel in connection with the future is and will continue to be to leave the country prosperous and its institutions unimpaired."⁶⁷ The Indiana editor suggested that if Tyler had followed the words "leave the country" with "and I'll go to Texas," millions of his fellow citizens would have rejoiced, and tens of thousands would not have cared at all.⁶⁸

Though Indiana Whigs opposed annexation, few felt the urgency that consumed their Ohio brethren. In March, 1844, one Hoosier Whig, Calvin Fletcher, an early Indiana settler and a leading citizen of Indianapolis, admitted in his diary: "Texas annexation gives me some gloomy apprehension." A week later he wrote: "The subject . . . makes some stir among the people in various states but great apathy prevails here."⁶⁹ This apathetic attitude was further illustrated by the Richmond *Palladium* which quoted the New York *Sun*, in passing: "Negotiations for annexation are now pending between

⁶³ Giddings to Ashtabula *Sentinel*, March 22, 1844, printed in Ashtabula *Sentinel*, March 30, 1844.

⁶⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 28 Cong., 1 Sess., 510.

⁶⁵ Richmond *Palladium*, October 21, 1843.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, December 8, 1843.

⁶⁷ James D. Richardson (ed.), *Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (11 vols., Washington, 1911), III, 2, 125.

⁶⁸ Richmond *Palladium*, December 13, 1843. This issue quotes an editorial in the New York *Express* which questioned the constitutionality of annexation.

⁶⁹ Calvin Fletcher diary, March 25, 31, 1844 (Indiana Historical Society Library, Indianapolis).

the President of the United States and the President of Texas." The strongest statement that the *Palladium* editor could bring himself to make on the matter was that it was clear that the United States would not accept the Texans.⁷⁰

In December, 1843, Whig James A. Foley introduced into the Indiana lower house a joint resolution against the annexation of Texas. When Democrat Willis A. Gorman moved for rejection, the Democratic House gave him its overwhelming support by a sharply partisan vote. The Whigs voted 87 per cent against, while the more numerous Democrats prevailed with their 85.5 per cent support. Five Whigs and six Democrats crossed party lines, while only one Whig and two Democrats failed to vote.⁷¹

Throughout the late 1830s and early 1840s Illinois Whig journalists and politicians showed very little concern over the Texas question. The Illinois Whig press was late in assuming a consistent anti-annexation policy. When the strongly partisan Alton *Telegraph* printed six principles of political faith drawn up by Illinois Whigs as they looked ahead to the election of 1844, neither the politicians nor this Whig journalist mentioned Texas.⁷² By December, 1843, this editor was willing to take a strong stand against annexation, but in the same month a local Whig convention called to define party policies failed to mention the subject.⁷³

Much of the independent press in Illinois was more hostile before the introduction of Tyler's treaty than was the regular Whig press. The Jacksonville *Illinois Statesman*, for example, agreed with much of the Whig press elsewhere that the nation was already large enough.⁷⁴ Another independent editor, parroting the Whig party line, predicted that annexation would result in war with Mexico or even disunion.⁷⁵ Others contented themselves with the old objection that the area of slavery would be extended.⁷⁶

Illinois Whigs ignored the issue even when there were excellent opportunities to speak out. In late 1843, for example, several local Whig conventions in Illinois gave the Whigs of that state an occasion for rapping Tyler's policies in general and annexation in particular. The delegates to the state convention in Chicago which endorsed Henry Clay and John Davis of Massachusetts as presidential and vice presidential candidates passed eleven resolutions expressing their

⁷⁰ Richmond *Palladium*, March 1, 1844.

⁷¹ Indiana, *House Journal* (1843-1844), 100.

⁷² Alton *Telegraph*, March 25, 1843.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, December 30, 1843.

⁷⁴ Jacksonville *Illinois Statesman*, July 31, 1843. Compare Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, March 16, November 11, 1842, and Cincinnati *Gazette*, March 22, 1844.

⁷⁵ Galena *Advertiser*, April 5, 1844.

⁷⁶ Jacksonville *Illinois Statesman*, March 4, 1844.

views on a number of major political issues, yet they completely ignored this timely question.⁷⁷

There was very little activity in the Illinois legislature prior to the presentation of the Tyler treaty. Early in 1843 Robert W. Glass, Whig assemblyman of Macoupin County, introduced into the lower house a favorable resolution which was consigned to the limbo of the committee on counties.⁷⁸ This was the extent of the controversy in the Illinois legislature, but the paucity of activity at this level did not reflect a lack of anti-Texas feeling in the state as a whole. Most northern Illinois Whigs were opposed, but others broke with their party and supported the measure out of fear that if the United States did not annex Texas, England would.⁷⁹

The principal Whig paper in Michigan remained in firm opposition to annexation. The editor of the *Detroit Advertiser* objected to the inevitable extension of slavery that would follow, condemned annexation as unconstitutional, and expressed fear that southern dominance in Congress would make the North a "hewer of wood and a drawer of water for the South."⁸⁰ It was a political matter, he warned, and unscrupulous Democrats would spare nothing to retain political power; they would use threats, promises, and money to overawe the voters.⁸¹

In conclusion, objection to the acquisition of Texas in the Old Northwest prior to 1842 was largely bipartisan and was based primarily upon antislavery principles, though the argument that the United States should not become too large was gaining currency. Ohio led the region in opposing annexation as well as in antislavery sentiment. Indiana and Illinois showed less concern with the issue, while Michigan tended to follow Ohio in both opinions.

Definite signs of political division, however, were seen in the Old Northwest very early, especially in Ohio. This emergence of partisan alignment, though never clear cut during the years 1836-1842, was reflected in the vote on the Preston annexation resolution of 1838. In the Old Northwest the Whigs were generally against annexation, but so were many Democrats, out of fear that this measure would extend the area of slavery or give the South the preponderance of political power in Congress. In objecting on the ground that the nation was already large enough, the Whigs were most inconsistent, since they fought alongside Democrats for the acquisition of Oregon while at

⁷⁷ *Niles' Register*, LXV (December 30, 1843), 279; *ibid.*, LXV (January 6, 1844), 293.

⁷⁸ Illinois, *House Journal* (1842-1843), 349.

⁷⁹ *Springfield Illinois State Register*, January 3, 1844.

⁸⁰ *Detroit Advertiser*, May 15, September 20, 1843.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, November 9, 1843.

the same time opposing that of Texas.⁸²

Whigs of the North and Old Northwest were not alone in opposing Texas annexation; as the price of party division on so vital an issue became apparent to southern Whigs, many of them also moved to the opposition. Their action was almost entirely partisan.⁸³ Some gladly rejected "immediate annexation" in the spring of 1844 just to defeat it as a Tyler-Calhoun measure.⁸⁴ Others no doubt realized as did Henry Clay that if the issue were to drive antislavery Whigs into the Liberty party, the Whig party would be destroyed.⁸⁵ Loyal Whigs everywhere must have known, too, that if Texas joined the Union it would be as a Democratic state.

The Texas issue forced partisans from different sections to re-evaluate their political stands. It was a time for taking political and sectional stock, a prelude to realignment. And the Old Northwest, with its varied pioneer backgrounds, evenly balanced political divisions, proslavery and antislavery elements, and pro-Texas and anti-Texas partisans, did not reflect a section united on the major issues of the day.

⁸² Ohio Whigs feared loss of control of Congress to the South if Texas joined the Union, but they joined northern Democrats in insisting upon expansion "through the securing of definite title to the Oregon country." Eugene H. Roseboom and Francis P. Weisenburger, *A History of Ohio* (New York, 1934), 219-20. The Indiana legislature pressed for the annexation of Texas by joint resolution of Congress. Whigs and Democrats alike demanded that Congress take swift and decisive action to get all of Oregon for the United States. Indiana, *House Journal* (1843-1844), 311-14. The Illinois legislature passed resolutions in favor of the "occupation and settlement of the Oregon Territory." *Congressional Globe*, 28 Cong., 1 Sess., 339.

⁸³ Kentucky Whigs followed Henry Clay in opposing annexation. His position was spelled out in detail in a letter to John J. Crittenden in December, 1843. Clay denounced Tyler for introducing an unnecessary issue into what promised already to be a turbulent campaign. He argued that the United States was already large enough and that annexation was impractical because of the war between Mexico and Texas. Henry Clay to John J. Crittenden, December 5, 1843, Mrs. Chapman Coleman, *The Life of John J. Crittenden* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1871), I, 207-10.

⁸⁴ *Lexington Observer and Reporter*, June 26, 1844; Arthur C. Cole, *The Whig Party in the South* (Washington, 1912), 109-11.

⁸⁵ Henry Clay to John J. Crittenden, December 5, 1843, Coleman, *Crittenden*, I, 207-10.