

WINTER 2004 HONORABLE MENTION

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INSTRUCTOR'S FOREWORD

IN MY CLASS *Writing with a Sense of Urgency: The Rhetoric of the Manifesto*, I asked each student to select a manifesto—from any context: politics, philosophy, the arts—to serve as a focus for essays written throughout the term. Hammad Ahmed chose the *Ostend Manifesto*, a congressional appeal from 1854 soliciting the US to purchase Cuba from Spain, and his procedure for developing his ideas about this text was an ideal realization of the goals of this course. From closely reading the manifesto and analyzing its rhetorical mechanisms to contextualizing the manifesto in light of historically contiguous intellectual mores to ultimately producing the essay before you, Hammad traced a significant line of change, an entire curriculum that emerged from his own very genuine curiosity and eclectic interests.

Apropos to Hammad's investigations, perhaps the most succinct way to describe his treatment of the *Ostend Manifesto* is metaphoric: the text served as a lens of sorts through which various rays of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought would pass. Initially held as a magnifying glass, the *Ostend Manifesto* brought into focus the curious and often overlooked language of science employed in matters of international relations; the more intensely Hammad scrutinized this text, the more it took the form of a prism, refracting the ray of annexationist justification into a panorama of ideas, including Romanticism, Christian theology, Darwinian theory, even eighteenth-century entomology. The argument of "Grafting Cuba onto the American Body Politic: The Intersection of Natural Science and Foreign Policy in the Annexationist Era"—that US political hegemony in the nineteenth century was morally rationalized by a propagandist's measure of scientific discourse—is as prescient as it is historical. If you have ever questioned why we discuss contemporary politics with terms like "healthy economy," "axis of evil," "terrorist cells," or "asymmetrical warfare," you may find the answer in the pages that follow.

—DAVID COLÓN

Grafting Cuba onto the American Body Politic: The Intersection of Natural Science and Foreign Policy in the Annexationist Era

Hammad Ahmed

The mid-nineteenth century in American history has been studied by historians not only to investigate the Civil War, but also to examine the powerful ethos of imperialism and global conquest that began to take form in foreign policy. During the years from 1800 to 1860, the Union, growing geographically and in population, was faced with the prospect of incorporating new territory and future denizens smoothly. Many politicians and thinkers felt the need to expand the border of the country further and further, to encompass a larger demographic and geographic chunk of the world within the United States. At the same time, increased scientific inquiry into the natural world had given rise to theories of nature and biology that challenged and shaped social thought. The antebellum period also was witness to a growing sectionalism in American politics and government, with the opposite poles of North and South split over many issues beyond slavery. With Latin America in close proximity and entrenched in a preexisting system of slavery, issues concerning the purchase, annexation, or conquest of these areas were naturally the source of much debate and discussion. A question that is not often asked is whether the trends in natural science and the debate over expansionism were coincidental, parallel, or perhaps even directly related. The dates of certain key publications are an example of the temporal proximity of the two phenomena. In 1854, the *Ostend Manifesto*, the culmination of years of annexationist intent toward Cuba, was drafted and presented to the American government. Five years later, in 1859, Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, the result of a decades-long search for a natural mechanism of progress and transformation, was published in Britain. This, it appears, was

more than mere coincidence. An analysis of primary documents from this time period suggests that the debate over annexationism mirrored the debate over mechanisms of the natural world. The interplay between social thought and life sciences in the United States of the mid-nineteenth century resulted in a discourse of self-proclaimed religious and natural superiority. Due to the power of this discourse in political rhetoric, justification for and arguments against the annexation of Cuba relied in large part on biological metaphor. To an appreciable and regrettable extent, pre-Darwinian theories of natural science shaped the ideological basis of foreign policy in antebellum America.

SCIENCE AND ITS UNDERESTIMATED IMPORTANCE IN ANTEBELLUM SOCIETY

The notion that science played an appreciable role in American society at the beginning of the eighteenth century was not heavily accepted, especially due to the impact of Alexis de Tocqueville's insistence on the "American indifference to pure sciences" (Kohlstedt 445). Ideas of American reliance on common sense and distrust of scientific theory in the early nineteenth century often clouded a fuller understanding of the interplay between science and society at the time. If biology were to influence the politics of expansionism, however, it would be necessary that science have an impact on imperialist ideology, worldview, and philosophy. More active research into this period, especially from the 1970s, shows that newer models of the interplay are more accurate than the traditional "expert-amateur" dichotomy that posits the separateness of the scientific and public spheres. From this research, it appears that "[t]he public became involved with scientific activity in a number of ways and can rarely be described as indifferent to science or as inevitably naïve about the ambiguous potential of scientific and technological change" (Kohlstedt 447). This is corroborated by statistics and files taken from governmental agencies assigned to support and document research. For example, "support for the Charles Wilkes Exploring Expedition in the late 1830s is only one indicator of successful scientific (and commercial) lobbying for public support of research, in this case the geophysical and natural sciences" (Kohlstedt 450). Even this early, citizens and politicians both recognized the social utility of the natural sciences, and were willing to allocate money to sponsor such causes. What makes these statistics even more difficult is the amount of scientific sponsorship that remained undocumented. According to Kohlstedt, there was a notable trend of ambiguous recordkeeping. She cites that a certain researcher, Dupree, "went on to investigate financial support in

his *Science in the Federal Government* and demonstrated that substantial money was available to certain departments and bureaus although rarely identified specifically as ‘support for science’ (Kohlstedt 445). Undocumented funds introduce a definitive wrinkle into the fabric of information that we have concerning scientific inquiry in this time period, but it is safe to assume that federal funding was significant for this branch of science and that this reflected a social recognition of its legitimacy and worth.

Kohlstedt further argues that the underestimation of antebellum society’s recognition of science is simply a result of a modern bias. “Our own contemporary concern about the apparent conflict between science and society has tended to obscure the liaisons that were provided by periodicals, public lectures, and amateur societies. Close scrutiny ... indicates that the public was not as naïve nor the scientists as self-serving as previously contended” (Kohlstedt 453). Science was evidently interconnected with the public at large and cannot be dismissed as the circumscribed efforts of an elitist few.

But where do the life sciences fit into this picture? It is conceivable that this discipline was given disproportionately low support in comparison to the sciences in general. Peter J. Bowler’s lectures, *Biology and Social Thought from 1850 to 1914*, answer this question in part. He explains that even before Darwin, naturalists were postulating and publishing mechanisms of growth and teleological development. Bowler describes that “[i]n his *Philosophie Zoologique* of 1809, Lamarck suggested that a progressive transforming force drove successive generations of living things steadily further up the scale of organization” (Bowler 9). His argument is that these theories had an impact on thought not merely constrained to the scientific world. With regard to the transformative hypothesis, he argues,

Despite much initial opposition, these ideas forced both scientists and non-scientists to rethink their attitude toward transformism. The critical question was *continuity*: radicals and conservatives were both beginning to think in terms of patterns unfolding by natural causes in the course of geological time, but where the radicals wanted a model of continuous development to support their calls for social reform, conservatives opted for theories with distinct cycles of development so that the cause of change remained unrelated to everyday activities. (Bowler 11)

This idea is of crucial importance in the context of the annexationist rhetoric to be analyzed. Bowler’s claim is first that the emerging papers and work concerning natural development resonated with non-scientists, which agrees with the arguments made by Kohlstedt. Furthermore, Bowler illustrates that a single theory can be manipulated to serve the political and social agendas of certain groups, in this case liberals and conservatives. That these groups

recognize their vested interest in biological theory is significant, but that they use this theory to support their more or less opposed worldviews is a clear indication that biology itself is not enough to cause directed social movements; society must be willing and ready.

POLITICAL ORGANICISM AND THE ENTRANCE OF BIOLOGY INTO SOCIAL DISCOURSE

America was indeed receptive to the ideas that the life sciences were promoting. In fact, rhetoric of the Romantic era, especially in response to historical events, generally followed a trend of moving away from the mechanical images of the Enlightenment worldview and toward an organic metaphor of history and the unfolding of God's scheme (Conser 115). An established strain of organic metaphor was latent as early as 1789, when Joseph A. Huntington wrote a discourse relating the state of the thirteen colonies to that of a body. Very similar to the kind of rhetoric to be analyzed in expansionist documents, Huntington's text posits that "[a]s the health of the body natural depends upon the proper functions, union, and harmony of the parts, so does that of the body politic" (13). The existence of an explicit analogy between the collective government and a living body in this document decides that America was no exception to the rule of organicism in the Romantic view of history.

Still, organic metaphor in the Romantic era is not the same as its counterpart in the annexationist, antebellum era. Huntington's rhetoric, for example, has an overtly religious slant not so easily apparent in the discourse of superiority of the 1850s. He fervently writes, "God has formed and arranged the whole in his own wisdom and goodness, and all is right, perfectly right; and well might the Creator say of his as it came out of his own hand, *All is very good*" (Huntington 6). In addition, the metaphor drawn in the 1789 text restricts itself to a metaphorical discussion of federal and state governments in relation to a neutral body, while annexationist rhetoric also incorporates land and people, gender and race. The point is that there was a paradigm shift within this particular type of rhetoric and its use in politics from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries; Romanticism like Huntington's was, in this sense, a conducive incubator for the introduction of the logic and rhetoric of natural science into social thought.

Walter Conser's analysis of the antebellum scholar Philip Schaff (fig. 1) is an example of how the utility of organicism changed in this time. "In language that drew on his roots in European romanticism Schaff depicted

human history as a 'living organism' and 'as the struggle of centuries to actualize in full the deep meanings of life'" (Conser 114). This is not surprising.



Fig. 1: Philip Schaff. Engraving by J.J. Cade (Conser 104).

What is worth noting is that "Schaff's principle of historical development recognized a hierarchical ordering of societies and groups, one that not only distinguished differences but also normatively ranked them" (Conser 115). His schema easily allows for his own society to occupy the topmost niche. The statement is inflected with self-proclaimed superiority, and illustrates the transformation of organicism from Huntington's time. One might wonder if this is merely an atypical example, not representative of the mainstream. Though some have argued that his type of organicism faded out, it appears that Schaff's thesis was neither evanescent nor atypical.

Many scholars have assumed that organicism lost its appeal, novelty, and utility with the end of the Romantic period. According to Theodore Bozeman, scholars appear to have lost interest in organicism after the "romantic" gave way to the industrial and imperialist. He contends that "[s]eldom noticed by historians are the frequency and enthusiasm of southern recourse to explicitly organic images for the expression of social and political ideas" (565). Of course, his research focuses primarily on the southern states of the Union, which were, as previously mentioned, sociologically dissociable from their northern neighbors. Though not representative of the entire United States, the South was the largest supporter of annexationism, which means that it is a region of special interest to this thesis. Bozeman cites specific examples of these bodily metaphors; for example,

Thornwell ... could describe the "healthy" social process as "like the vigor of a healthful body, in which all the limbs and organs perform their appropriate functions. ..." Similarly, a basic image of society in the writings of Virginia radical George Fitzhugh was the "human hive." "Society," he insisted, "is a work of nature and grows. Men are social like bees." (565)

His work clearly establishes the importance of organicism in southern rhetoric, but more importantly gives this tradition an interesting and illuminating

basis. Despite other claims that Romanticism was the primary source of organicism, he contends that “[n]ineteenth-century organicism, which became prominent long before Darwin, represented a continuation of the Enlightenment stress upon the ‘natural’; whatever was ‘natural’ was ‘right’” (566). Since the Enlightenment promoted scientific inquiry and rationality in opposition to Romantic irrationality, Bozeman implies that the particular strain of rhetoric extant in the antebellum South was concerned more with reason and the logic of morality than with aestheticism and religious faith.

THE SYNTHESIS OF THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE

This is not to say that God did not play a role in the antebellum worldview. On the contrary, it was precisely the interplay and tension between the divine world and the natural world which ultimately resulted in the discourse of superiority of the time. William Longton’s theory that, at this time, “Theology, social thought, and scientific interpretation all drew upon each other for sustenance and direction” (Longton 118) echoes other scholars’ ideas that the “Science vs. God” dichotomy created ripples in the surface of social thought. Still, Longton’s argument is nuanced, in that he does not necessarily pit these constructs against each other antagonistically, but rather in a sympathetic way: “That nineteenth century writers placed such great importance on the harmonization of theology, science, and social theories suggests that it was their harmonization rather than any one of them alone that was crucial to the satisfaction of ideological needs” (118). In other words, divinity and science led to a sociological synergy. This means that the aforementioned increase in funding for natural scientific research, in combination with the preexisting metaphor of history and governments as organic, resulted in a cycle of self-aggrandizing thought characteristic of the time.

Specifically, a discourse of self-proclaimed natural superiority emerged from the fusion of the sciences and theology. This seems to have been the easiest and most convenient direction for thinkers to venture. Joseph LeConte, a prominent naturalist of the mid-nineteenth century in America and the focus of Bozeman’s study, was one of the many academicians exemplifying this logic. “LeConte expressed the comforting result: ‘Geology most distinctly declares the superior dignity of our Time-world, and of our race’” (Bozeman 570). Such an explicit sentiment citing a proof of superiority in geology is only the tip of the iceberg; many of the models of superiority were highly elaborate.

A common element to almost all theories of natural superiority was the

belief in a teleological principle of biological development. In the case of antebellum South Carolina, this was a twofold hypothesis. “First it was affirmed that events in the organic world described a course under God’s control and that some final end awaited all life” (Longton 124). In this sense, a divine will was *purposefully* guiding the slow changes and transformations that had given fish gills and Africans dark skin and knotted hair. “The second proposition was that living beings possessed certain essentially changeless characters which gave them their definition” (Longton 124). This premise allowed for generalizations across species or across races.

Within this intellectual context, many analogies and connections from the natural world to the social world were possible. Scientists drew a fascinating relationship between the total history of the world and an individual life history: “The nature of this relationship was that the ontogenetic development of any individual representative of a given vertebrate species was determined by the phylogenetic history of vertebrates” (Longton 124). In the same way that primitive ancestors of a given life form slowly gave rise to modern flora and fauna, a single creature’s life would mirror, in a greatly accelerated way, that transformation. This theory stemmed from many natural observations, especially that fetuses all started from an ambiguous cell mass and slowly differentiated and transformed into a specialized organism (fig. 2).

Even children’s books contained lessons concerning the natural world, expounding upon theories of teleological development. For instance, “*McGuffey’s Fifth Reader*, which first appeared in 1844, contains many articles with a religious emphasis. ... There was one lesson on ‘the scale of animal existence,’ which indicates the concept of the ‘scale of being’ was carried over into the teaching of young people” (Smallwood and Coon 227). If children’s



Fig. 2: John Southall’s eighteenth century entomological text, found in George Washington’s library. The two insect life cycles show gradual differentiation from a basic form (Smallwood and Coon 128).

minds were absorbing scientific theories of transformative superiority, the adult mind was likely steeped in them.

THE SYMBOLIC BASIS OF CUBAN ANNEXATION

These scientific theories and their social resonance are closely related to the United States' relations with Cuba in the years leading up to the drafting of the *Ostend Manifesto*. The annexation of the island became an increasingly important issue as the nation slowly approached its Civil War. This was not a coincidence. Support for annexation was undoubtedly a function of the disagreement over slavery between the North and South (Cuba's was an economy heavily dependent on the slave trade) and was in many ways a sectional conflict. Nevertheless, to say that sectionalism was the sole factor in the debate is a grave oversimplification. The slave states were decidedly split over the issue, as were the Northern states.

Josef Opatrny traces the annexationism issue on both the Southern and Northern fronts, arguing that economics was a major component of the disagreement. His theory that revenues from "tobacco, meat, sugar, and flour" (Opatrny 27) incited the greatest support for expansionism is corroborated by congressional debates. Congressmen like Southern representatives W.W. Boyce and E.W. Chastain, two strongly opinionated orators, cited statistics and tariff rates in their speeches to promote their ideas (see *Cong. Globe*, 15 Jan. 1855, 91–94 and 192–195, respectively). Though both promoted slavery, they were in disagreement over the economic advantage of the annexation. While citing the same tariff statistics and using the same economic principles, either side was arriving at varying conclusions as to the actual benefit of bringing Cuba into the Union. Southerners saw that their control of the sugar market would increase if they annexed the tropical island, but they also recognized that the price of sugar would drop. In this way, the economic advantage was ambiguous and could not have constituted a central aspect of the argument. The slave argument was also secondary to the totality of the question, because some felt that Cuba was on the verge of undergoing a slave revolt, and that annexing it would not necessarily be an expansion of slave territory (Urban 40).

Even though the significantly abolitionist North would have wanted to prevent the admittance of further slave territory to the Union, statistics cited in the same congressional debates reveal that some Northerners saw an economic advantage to be gained in the annexation. Northern shipping interests saw the high Spanish tariffs as an obstacle to their profit-earning ventures,

and many consumers felt that the price of Southern sugar and cotton was too high (Opatrny 114). Thus both the North and the South were home to opposing viewpoints.

The fact that the splits not only occurred along sectional lines but also within the national sections underscores the idea that the North and South, and the annexationist and anti-annexationist camps, agreed on many key principles: they all shared a similar view on military strategy, agreeing that Cuba was a weakness to Spain as a maritime colony, the United States had need of a naval base, and the African race ought not to seize control of the island. In addition, most were averse to the idea of Britain or France annexing Cuba (as expressed in both the *Ostend Manifesto* and Boyce's counterargument).

The issue was apparently functioning on a different plane than that of mere sectionalism and economics. There was a symbolic value to the act of annexation, and a philosophical dimension that was not often explicitly addressed in congressional debate halls. Orators like Boyce and President Franklin Pierce constructed a vision of the American nation, and their knowledge of and position on natural science informed their constructions. It is valid to say that constructions of the nation as body had previously been used to achieve political aims. Huntington had, for example, implied in his 1789 discourse that the political body would not agree well with additions when he wrote, "[W]e should shudder at the thought of any alteration in the number [of our appendages], we justly account a great loss, and to have one superadded would be altogether disagreeable to us" (7). He uses the metaphor of the body politic as a natural body in this case to argue that annexations to a nation are as disagreeable as annexations to a human body. The annexationists and anti-annexationists of the 1850s must have recognized the convenience of the organic metaphor as not only a clever rhetorical strategy but as a means of appealing to the emerging ideology of superiority dictated by scientific theories. Playing upon the trends in social thought, politicians and politically active individuals began to incorporate aspects of natural science into their arguments.

TRACES OF NATURAL SCIENCE IN ANNEXATIONIST RHETORIC AND POLICY

Primary source documents prove to be the best source material in demonstrating the relationship between foreign policy and natural science. Specifically within the written and spoken rhetoric in this time, there is a

great deal of organicism and biological metaphor. Articles and letters published in antebellum newspapers give particular insight into the biological discourse researched by Bozeman, Longton, and others. A certain opinion expressed in the *New York Times* of October 21, 1851, proclaims “that to the Great Democracy, keen of eye, strong of hand, firm of will, resolute of purpose, ready to seize and liable to defend, belong the gifts that Providence reserves not for decrepit and debauched tyrannies” (n. 32). Clearly an argument for annexation, this letter’s verbiage is particularly interesting. The “Great Democracy” of America is metaphorically a very healthy, fit body with eyes, hand, and a will. Spain, on the other hand, is not only decrepit but debauched! This language invokes age and morality, elements uncharacteristic of Romantic-era organicism. To justify the seizure of Cuba, the author implies that Spain is incapable of managing the colony because it is elderly and weak; a more developed, naturally superior America has the right to take Cuba for its own since Providence has guided the progress of its chosen nation. Although this argument does not directly utilize the biological ethos, it does illustrate that the organicism of antebellum rhetoric was a conduit for natural science to enter politics, especially as the issue rose to greater national importance; as such, the preexisting organicism was convenient for annexationists and anti-annexationists alike.

One of the great symbolic questions appears to have been that of America’s national age, and its state of development. Representative W.W. Boyce of South Carolina argued in Congress that “[o]ur commerce has never been disturbed from Cuba; and if we have never been disturbed in the *infancy* of our power, what have we to fear in its *maturity*?” (*Cong. Globe*, 15 Jan. 1855, 91, emphasis mine). While he argues that America has crossed the threshold of economic vulnerability, his statement also implies that Uncle Sam ought not to engage in behavior typical of younger and more easily governable nations. Boyce warns that annexing Cuba will weaken America, for enemy countries strike not in the “heart” but in the “extremities.” That America has finally become “compact, solid, massy” means that no one can “wound her severely” (*Cong. Globe*, 15 Jan. 1855, 91). The implication is that the American body is on the verge of becoming unwieldy and must halt growth. On the other hand, the *Ostend Manifesto* uses the same analogy to argue the opposite point of view: “[Cuba] belongs naturally to that great family of States of which the Union is the providential nursery” (*Ostend* n.pag.). For the writers of the *Ostend Manifesto*, America is a nation still burgeoning, still able to accommodate expansion and national development. In the two sides of this analogy, we hear an echo of Bowler’s idea that radicals and conservatives debated over the continuity of natural development. For Boyce, the

cycle theory of growth likely informed his view that unchecked growth would lead to decay and natural decline. Pierce and the authors of the *Ostend Manifesto*, in turn, implicitly utilize the continual development model to argue that America, perpetually an undeveloped infant, can continue to grow.

FEMINIZATION AND EROTICISM

The question of how developed America was as a national body is only one of many biologically informed arguments in the imperialist discourse. Sometimes, the arguments for the seizure of Cuba are disturbing to a modern audience. For example,

[O]ccasionally southerners got so carried away by their own rhetoric about Cuba that their prose became erotic: “[Cuba] admires Uncle Sam, and he loves her. Who shall forbid the bans? Matches are made in heaven, and why not this? Who can object if he throws his arms around the Queen of the Antilles, as she sits, like Cleopatra’s burning throne, upon the silver waves, breathing her spicy, tropic breath, and pouting her rosy, sugared lips? Who can object? None. She is of age—take her, Uncle Sam!” (May 7)

One understands immediately that the metaphor of states as individual with personalities and biological qualities was more than mere phraseology and wordplay. There is a certain threshold between artfully convincing rhetoric and ideological discourse, and eroticism in the annexationist argument crosses that threshold. This example, taken from an antebellum issue of the *Louisville Courier*, contains much biological baggage. There is the idea that America is a dominant male with a right to court and claim his bride; also, we see that Cuba is yearning for Uncle Sam’s love—that is, his domination—and this is related to the biological advancements in female anatomy, as documented by Carolyn Sorisio. Specifically, due to the 1843 discovery of spontaneous ovulation, scientists compared women to animals in estrus (Sorisio 31). This evidence of increased female fertility resonated with male members of society so that “[p]roponents of racial Anglo-Saxonism had a ‘boundless faith in the reproductive capacity of the white American people’ and connected ‘commercial penetration and population growth’ to America’s future global domination” (Sorisio 30). Cuba, as the feminine beauty of the Antilles, represented to some politicians the future of the state in her potential of economic “penetrability” (a likely sexual metaphor) and fertility.

The feminizing of Cuba appears in multiple contexts. The *Ostend Manifesto* uses diction that implies the femininity and weakness of other countries. It warns that governing Cuba is “paralyzing her [Spain’s] energies”

and that failure to comply with the terms of the manifesto could “give birth” to complications. This attribution of physical infirmity in relation to womanhood stemmed from craniometry (fig. 3) and other “pseudosciences” which posited that women were naturally weaker than men (Soriso 35).

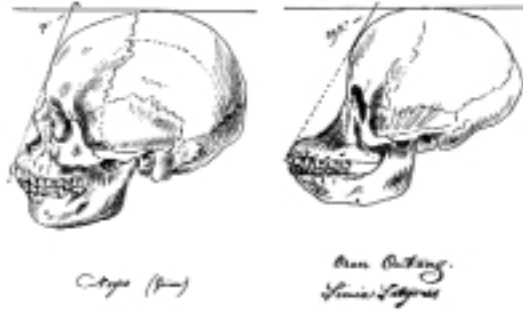


Fig. 3: Ink drawings found in the manuscript lectures of Prof. William Dandridge Peck, 1823. Craniometry (Smallwood and Coon 305).

Furthermore, the authors subtly eroticize their relationship with the island nation when they describe that past “intercourse” with Cuba necessitates a “consummation” in which America will “embrace” Cuba within its boundaries. In this case, some saw Cuba as the scientific female, perpetually fertile and vital. Clearly, the biological symbolism of annexation was not shallow.

INDEPENDENCE AND SELF-GOVERNANCE AS BIOLOGICAL MARKERS

Though the preceding arguments clamored for hasty acquisition, some citizens proposed an alternative version of annexationism. In their opinion, Cuba would be worthy to enter the Union if the country were able to secure independence from Spain. An editorial in the *New York Times* of 1851 argues that Cuba ought to free herself of the tyranny of Spanish oppression and thus demonstrate her candidacy for entry. The manifesto explains, “We are rich enough, strong enough without her. After she has thrown off the yoke of Spain, we shall annex her” (n. 17). This position that a nation must be independent in order to join the United States mirrors certain arguments inherent to the life sciences, and the question of how to determine how alive something is. According to Longton, “The single most telling test, applicable to groups and individuals alike, involved the entity’s capacity to govern itself, to sustain liberty” (132). This logic asserts that Cuba, to join the organic system that was America, had to demonstrate vitality, both symbolically and literally, by declaring independence from a mother country.

If independence was such a crucial factor in determining the “aliveness” of entities, it is no wonder that Cuba received such morbid publicity in the

organicist discourse. The manifesto of the Lone Star Junta, published in the *New York Times* in 1852, states that “[w]hile she remained uncultivated, depopulated, and poor, she suffered all that it is possible to for men to suffer, from ignorance and misery. By-and-bye she reached a certain state of civilization and aggrandizement, by which she learned her rights and her strength, and aspired to Independence” (n. 340). The authors of this manifesto characterize Cuba as lacking vitality due to her dependence. When analyzed in the context of Longton’s statement that, in antebellum thought, “Civilized societies were ordinarily understood to depend on primitive antecedents, as of course men could not exist without first having been children” (Longton 128), this manifesto’s language illuminates the transformist idea that countries, like people, evolved and “grew up” (“aggrandizement”) and experienced a need for independence. Once Cuba became sufficiently mature, the United States would be justified in taking “her,” just as was evident in the erotic rhetoric of the *Louisville Courier*.

A speech that combines many of the idiosyncrasies of this annexationist rhetoric is Elijah Chastain’s congressional address of 1854. Toward the end of his speech, the Georgian declares,

England knows what nature, and nature’s God has done for that western *Eden*. Rich in all the varied productions which spring forth spontaneously from her soil—salubrious in climate—exhaustless in her natural resources—she needs but the influence of American institutions ... to raise her to a condition that would challenge the admiration of the world. Under her present rotten and despotic system of Government—her industry paralyzed—her spirit galled and broken—her sons enslaved, and her soil neglected, it is almost incredible that she could retain even a breath of commercial vitality. (*Cong. Globe*, 15 Jan. 1855, 195)

Like the members of the Lone Star Junta, Chastain constructs a Cuba with little “vitality” and “spirit” as a consequence of dependence on Spain. His words also claim that America can help Cuba in “her” development and aggrandizement, and raise “her” to a superior state of being, much as a parent or teacher would raise a child. The mention of “nature and nature’s God” is also significant; it is a rhetorical marker that places Chastain’s speech within the discourse of biology and theology.

THE TRANSITIVITY OF NATURAL LAW, HUMAN LAW, AND NATIONAL LAW

These constructions of nations as living entities meant that natural laws could be applied to them. In fact, it was a rather common technique in the

foreign policy of mid-nineteenth century America to make logical appeals to natural and universal “laws.” The extent to which these laws were a result of advancements in life sciences is difficult to tell, but it seems important that politicians should model the government on observations of the natural world. Senator O.R. Singleton’s speech reflects this trend; he observes, “It seems to be one of the immutable laws of nature, that when we have lost the respect of our peers, we soon forfeit our own self-esteem, and are hurrying on to a state of degradation and dependence, to end in imbecility and slavery” (*Cong. Globe*, 14 Jun. 1854, 933). To a modern audience, it seems quite extreme to suggest that imbecility and slavery are the necessary result of a nation’s losing its international esteem. By drawing a relationship between “dependence” and “degradation,” he seems to be resorting to the same principle that others used, namely the biological idea underlined by Longton that higher life forms were more capable of independent action. His recourse to the “immutable laws of nature” in his speech contextualizes his ideas in the biological rhetoric. The *Ostend Manifesto* is no exception to this pattern of logical appeal. One of the basic ideas in the document is that “[s]elf-preservation is the first law of nature, with States as well as with individuals” (*Ostend* n.pag.). Indeed, self-preservation was one of the many mechanisms under study in the natural sciences, as evidenced by the fact that Darwin’s theory of natural selection operates mainly on the self-preservation principle. Following the logic that natural law is God’s law, and that the dynamics of nature operated on a competitive system of instinctual preservation, politicians saw no reason why this logic could not be applied to the political body. As well, this statement in the *Ostend Manifesto* claims that the same laws that apply to individual humans in society can be applied to nations as a whole. This transitivity of human law and national law was equally important to naturalist Joseph LeConte. That society operated according to the mechanisms of individual human nature and morality was not mere philosophical conjecture in his case—LeConte held the idea on the level of scientific law (Bozeman 579). Other policymakers in the American government referred to this principle in their speeches. Singleton’s speech continues, “I have found no better standard by which to measure national wrongs, than that which I have suggested, and which I have adopted for the government of my own actions” (*Cong. Globe*, 14 Jun. 1854, 933). Using the same scale of judgment as would be used to judge a person is an implicit analogy between the state’s position and the individual’s position in society, and Singleton identifies himself as a LeContian thinker in this case.

The *Ostend Manifesto* makes a comparable claim. To justify annexation, the authors write, “By every law, human and divine, we shall be justified in

wresting it from Spain if we possess the power, and this upon the very same principle that would justify an individual in tearing down the house of his neighbor if there were no other means of preventing the flames from destroying his own home” (*Ostend* n.pag.). Of course, this statement victimizes America and legitimizes the imperialist seizure by which it is so tempted. Still, a recourse to the self-preservation principle as applied to national action echoes the thought of LeConte and other natural scientists who were publishing their ideas prior to this.

On the opposite extreme was political cartoonist Nathan Currier. His cartoon entitled *The Ostend Doctrine* (fig. 4) curtly demonstrates why the laws that govern individual action in the natural, competitive world should not be expanded to the social world. He also demonstrates that the politicians are not even following their own analogy; if indeed they applied their own personal codes of morality to the seizure of Cuba they would be no more than common brigands, represented by the crowd accosting the aristocratic figure (a caricature of Franklin Pierce).



Fig. 4: Political Cartoon from 1854. Currier, Nathan. The “Ostend Doctrine.” Library of Congress Prints and Photographs online. <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3a11678>>.

Despite Currier’s visual protest, the swelling tide of political law mirroring biological law continued to soak into foreign policy and annexationism. In the words of Bowler, “By the 1850s a new initiative on the subject of trans-

formism would be welcomed by those who believed that God governed the world by law rather than by miracle" (12). To discover the divine laws, one would have to uncover natural laws. Applying these to politics was merely the next logical step in creating a "superior" America.

A PRELUDE TO DARWIN

The utility of science did not end with the end of Cuban annexationism, as evidenced by the firm hold on society that eugenics and social Darwinism had after the publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859. American society, it seems, was particularly receptive to these ideas, because "Darwin provided an initiative to a public that had already been conditioned to think of evolution as the unfolding of a purposeful trend toward a morally significant goal" (Bowler 12). Scientific theories cannot function unless society is ready to accept them, and in this case Darwin was able to publish his hypotheses at a very propitious moment.

His evolutionary arguments were introduced in an era when biology was growing as a scientific field, with the theories of Lamarck, Gray, Buffon, Agassiz, and others making waves in the scientific pool. A steady teleological development and purposeful transformism toward a higher state of being characterized the scientific outlook of these antebellum thinkers. While people were incorporating these ideas with those of Christian religion to arrive at a worldview in which America and the Anglo-Saxons were naturally superior, the question of Cuban annexation was under debate in the government. Though superficially a question about sectionalism and economics, the annexation was largely a philosophical and symbolic issue. Rhetoric and logic from primary sources including congressional speeches, newspaper editorials, political cartoons, and the *Ostend Manifesto* itself reveal that, ultimately, the issue was informed by the aforementioned trends in social thoughts vis-à-vis natural science and theology. Thus, even before Darwin, the imperialist ethos encouraged by biological thought led to further biological developments, thereby completing the cycle of politics and science.

This is an important point for politicians, scientists, and the general public. Though some envision scientific inquiry as detached from social events and cultural phenomena, this research emphasizes the continuity of science and society. Furthermore, it describes a mechanism by which the life sciences in particular have been able to influence legislation and foreign policy in an era that many consider a tragic chapter in the annals in American history. Understanding how the public perception of science has resulted in

regrettable international incidents reminds us that science can be a legislative tool, one not to be used lightly. ◆

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