

James Buchanan Considers the Annexation of Texas



ABOUT THE SOURCE Texans declared their independence from Mexico in March 1836 and became an independent republic after defeating the Mexican army. Texans then wanted to join the United States. Americans were divided over the issue. Some politicians liked the idea of expanding U.S. territory. However, many northern leaders objected because slavery was legal in Texas. They feared that annexing the republic would increase the political power of the slave states. In 1844 James Buchanan, senator from Pennsylvania, wrote a letter to Edward Gazzam about the Texas issue. Gazzam was also a politician from Pennsylvania.



*As you read note Buchanan's opinions about the annexation of Texas. The following word may be new to you: **dominion**. You may want to use a dictionary to look it up.*

Washington

February 3, 1844

I have thought of writing to you for some days on an important subject; but have been prevented by pressing business. It is highly probable that the question of the admission of Texas into the Union may force itself or rather be forced upon the consideration of Congress before the close of the present session. In my judgment it would be far better for this Country that Texas should remain an independent State if this were possible. But suppose that this cannot be & that it should be satisfactorily established that we must either admit it or see it pass under the **dominion** of Great Britain; - what ought then to be done? This is the question & a very grave question it is. It may be a choice of evils; but which is the least? I should be very glad, if, at your leisure, you would favor me with your views upon this subject as well as inform me, what, in your opinion, would be the wishes of the people of Western Pennsylvania. Can any evils which might result from its admission be equal to those which would most probably result from having Great Britain our neighbors along our Southwestern frontier?

Source: The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, The Collection, New York Historical Society

Expansion Leads to Conflict**Biography**

Adams eventually broke with the Whigs. He believed the party needed to take a stronger stand against the expansion of slavery. In 1848 Adams joined with others who shared this view to form the Free-Soil Party. Adams chaired the party's first convention and was nominated as the party's candidate for vice president. Adams campaigned with presidential candidate Martin Van Buren on a platform of "Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor, and Free Men." They were soundly defeated in the election of 1848.

In 1858 Adams ran for Congress as a Republican and was elected. During his second term, he was named Minister of England by President Lincoln. From 1861 to 1868, he served as ambassador to Great Britain, working to maintain British neutrality during the Civil War. Adams resigned from his post in 1868 and returned to America. British newspapers and political leaders praised his service.

In 1872 friends convinced Adams to seek the Republican nomination for president. Adams was barely defeated. In 1876 he was again unsuccessful as a candidate for governor of Massachusetts. In later years, Adams served as an overseer of Harvard University. He revised the two-volume biography of John Adams and finished the *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of his Diary from 1795 to 1848*. Charles Francis Adams died in Boston in 1886.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. **Define** What was the Free-Soil Party?

2. **Draw Conclusions** Why was British neutrality important during the Civil War?

ACTIVITY

Charles Francis Adams came from a family of powerful and influential Americans. Read excerpts from the writings of John Adams, Abigail Adams, or John Quincy Adams. Select one to read to the class. Then discuss how the values of his father and grandparents are reflected in the life of Charles Francis Adams.

Expansion Leads to Conflict

Primary Source

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. How would you describe Buchanan's position on the annexation of Texas?

2. What did Buchanan believe might happen if the U.S. did not annex Texas?

3. What did Buchanan want Gassam to do? Why do you think Buchanan asked Gassam to do this?

Activity 3**Document-Based Activity**
The Second Great Awakening**DOCUMENT 4**

Before You Read The following words in the document below may be new to you: *execrate*, *intemperance*, *lazar*, *ardent*, *proscribed*. You may want to use a dictionary to look them up.

We execrate the cruelties of the slave trade—the husband torn from the bosom of his wife—the son from his father—brothers and sisters separated forever—whole families in a moment ruined! But are there no similar enormities to be witnessed in the United States? None indeed perpetrated by the bayonet—but many, very many, perpetrated by intemperance.

Every year thousands of families are robbed of fathers, brothers, husbands, friends. Every year widows and orphans are multiplied, and grey hairs are brought with sorrow to the grave—no disease makes such inroads upon families, blasts so many hopes, destroys so many lives, and causes so many mourners to go about the streets . . .

We have heard of the horrors of the middle passage—the transportation of slaves—the chains—the darkness—the stench—the mortality and living madness of woe—and it is dreadful. But bring together the victims of intemperance, and crowd them into one vast lazar-house, and sights of woe quite as appalling would meet your eyes . . .

The commerce therefore, in ardent spirits, which produces no good, and produces a certain and an immense amount of evil, must be regarded as an unlawful commerce, and ought, upon every principle of humanity, and patriotism, and conscience, and religion, to be abandoned and proscribed.

—Lyman Beecher, Presbyterian minister
Six Sermons on Intemperance, 1827

1. How does Lyman Beecher compare intemperance with the slave trade?

2. What change is Beecher calling for?
