



1324 GREENLEAF RD.
WILMINGTON DELAWARE 19805
www.iidstudies.org

WORKING PAPER SERIES

NO. 010/2024

Title: American Foreign Policy through the Founding Era: A comparison of Jefferson's negotiation skills and Polk's hasty and risky stance.

International Institute for Development Studies is a tax-Exempt Research Organization. Registered as a 501(c)3 with the United States Internal Revenue Service. All Grants and Donations are tax deductible according to US laws.

Suggested Citation: Osuagwu, Eze S. (2024). *American Foreign Policy through the Founding Era: A comparison of Jefferson's negotiation skills and Polk's hasty and risky stance*. Int. Inst. for Dev. Studies, Working Paper 010/2024.
www.iidstudies.org/workingpapers

This research paper is the exclusive property of the International Institute for Development Studies.
No unauthorized duplication or publication is allowed.

American Foreign Policy through the Founding Era: A comparison of Jefferson's negotiation skills and Polk's hasty and risky stance.

Eze Simpson Osuagwu*
Helms School of Government
Liberty University
1971 University Blvd, Lynchburg VA 24515
Email: ecosuagwu1@liberty.edu; ezeosuagwu1@gmail.com

*International Institute for Development Studies, Wilmington DE 19805.
Email: ezeosuagwu@iidstudies.org
Phone: +1-302-666-9359

Abstract

This paper argues that Jefferson and Polk disavowed the founding principles of freedom, equality and justice in pursuit of a greater America. The paper further examines America's expansionist foreign policy under these two great American Presidents, drawing from their similarities and differences. While Jefferson applied strong negotiation skills in his approach to purchase Louisiana, Polk was poised to militarism and armed diplomacy in the acquisition of Texas and California, all in hallowed principles of conservative internationalism. Both Presidents succeeded in expanding the size of America from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific coast, in fulfilment of the prophetic "Manifest Destiny". However, the process was in defiance to the fundamental principles and obligations of a Christian America.

Key Words: Armed Diplomacy; Conservative Internationalism; Foreign Policy; Christian Statesmanship; Founding Era.

Introduction

This paper argues that Thomas Jefferson and James Polk were strong expansionists, but their foreign policy ideologies somewhat differ in the sense that Jefferson presents a bold and masterful negotiation skill, whilst Polk's was hasty, risky and negates fundamental democratic principles. America's foreign policy ideologies have been summed into two main traditions; *realism* and *liberal internationalism* by scholars of international relations.¹ While realism is associated with conservative ethos of balance of power in defense of stability among nations, liberal internationalism seeks to spread democracy by dialogue and tolerance (Nau, 2008). Republicans are associated with realism – Nixon, Eisenhower and Ford, and Democrats are typically viewed as liberal internationalists – Kennedy, Johnson and Carter. However, the advent of Ronald Reagan as President marked an ideological shift, when he attacked Nixon's realist containment policies and Carter's liberal international human rights campaign.

Reagan's policies aimed at applying force to spread democracy, which is a combination of both realist and liberal internationalist ideologies.² Reagan succeeded in dismantling the Soviet Union and the United States emerged as the World's sole superpower. Reagan presented a different foreign policy ideological stance rooted deeply in American tradition, which scholars were unable to classify as either realism or liberal internationalism.³ Nau (2008) argues that Reagan carved a new foreign policy tradition – *conservative internationalism*, which combines the deep historical roots of realism and liberal internationalism. Realism draws its inspiration from Alexander Hamilton and Teddy Roosevelt, while liberal internationalists relate to Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt. However, conservative internationalism is linked to the foreign policy conception of Thomas Jefferson, James Polk, Harry Truman and Ronald Reagan, whose prowess of expanding freedom and democracy abroad remains second to none.

This paper highlights some of the strong and bold steps taken by Jefferson and Polk with a view to understanding either the consequences for statesmanship or the exacerbation of Eurocentric beliefs in Anglo-America domination. Jefferson acquired Louisiana without the loss of any American life, Polk fought the Mexican American War without congressional approval, resulting in the loss of over 13,000 American lives, to annex Texas and the Oregon country, which comprises present day Arizona, Utah, Nevada, California, New Mexico, Wyoming, and Colorado. American foreign policy witnessed a couple of fundamental changes from the founding era through the antebellum period. The crux of foreign policy during the years was to spread the gospel of liberty and freedom across the globe. Freedom connotes the right to free speech and to elect leaders according to democratic values and principles. In the eighteenth century, America's leaders were

¹ Realism looks to the balance of power to defend stability amongst ideologically diverse nations, while liberal internationalism looks to international institutions to reduce the role of balance of power to gradually spread democracy by talk and tolerance.

² See John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of America's National Security Policy During the Cold War*, (Oxford University Press, Revised and Expanded Edition, 2005); and Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History 1974 – 2008*. Harper 2008

³ Proponents of Reagan as a realist and liberal internationalist are, Stelfan Harper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Brookings Institution, 2003).

far more realist and nationalist than international liberalist. The goal of America's foreign policy in the founding era, eighteenth century to be specific, was to garner international support for the independence struggle. George Washington in his valedictory address warned America to beware of its involvement in European matters, to avoid unnecessary interference in its domestic affairs. The understanding behind this warning was to ensure that America remains independent from Europe, since the citizens are largely descendants of white European settlers. As a result, the goal of America's statesmen at the time was nationalistic, to further the expansion and protection of the territory.

Thomas Jefferson laid the foundation for American expansionism for the likes of Polk to follow. Greenstein (2006) observes that early American presidents had no well-established precedents and norms, so they embraced a diverse system of domestic engagement that is bereft of any specific foreign policy ideology. Despite the unique differences between Washington, Adams and Jefferson, subsequent leaders after Jefferson had to follow up on his expansionist ideologies, believing that America is destined to occupy the vast length and breadth from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific coast. This far-flung ambition did not only come to pass but was settled after fifty years of the declaration of independence through the expansionist vision of Jefferson in the Louisiana purchase, and James Polk following suit to increase the size of the United States by about one-third of its original size. Nonetheless, President Polk's annexation of Texas and California at all costs was considered by political opponents as hasty and risky. Hasty in the sense that he did not receive congressional approval to execute the war and risky because over 13,000 American lives were lost in the process.⁴ Pinheiro (2022) remarks that the Mexican American War demonstrates clear evidence of territorial ambition and obfuscation of bad intentions by the Polk administration.

No doubt, there were constraints in the early times, the leadership of presidents in foreign policy and otherwise was complicated by the rudimentary state of transportation. According to Greenstein (2006) it took between four and six days for a letter from New York to reach Boston in Washington's time, and six months was required for an exchange of communications with Europe. White (1958) observed that in the Federalist period, the slowness and uncertainty of transatlantic communication made it necessary for foreign-policy makers to take many of their decisions based on conjecture or probability rather than solid fact. Thomas Jefferson was George Washington's Secretary of State. He perfected Washington's routine to a system of things that work to his advantage.

⁴ Most of the Whigs, chief among them first-term Congressman Abraham Lincoln, accused Polk of violating his powers by illegitimately depicting his reasoning for declaring war. On December 22, 1847, Lincoln issued what came to be called the "Spot Resolutions," in which he asked Polk to provide proof that the violence had, in fact, occurred on legally recognized American soil. Lincoln's resolutions were ignored, and Jacksonians portrayed him as an unpatriotic traitor. Most of the other Whigs were unwilling to aggressively oppose the war, remembering the political fallout that occurred when the Federalists opposed the War of 1812. With manifest destiny fever spreading through the nation, there was a huge swell of nationalism and patriotic sentiment supporting Polk's war. Lincoln's aggressive opposition meant that he lost support from the Whigs in the west, and he resigned from Congress and retired to Illinois. In total, fourteen members of the House and two senators opposed the war, and with legislative support, Polk's declaration of war was official.

This paper discusses the similarities and differences in the foreign policy stance of Thomas Jefferson and James Polk with a view to constructing their foreign policy ideologies to reflect a conservative internationalism.⁵ The paper is presented in five sections; the second reviews the foreign policy stance of Thomas Jefferson, and the third section discusses James Polk unique approach to expansionism, the fourth section presents a comparative analysis of both President's foreign policies and the fifth section concludes the paper.

Thomas Jefferson and America's Foreign Policy

Jefferson was an astute follower of the political ideals of John Locke, Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton. He single-handedly wrote the Declaration of Independence and founded the University of Virginia, among his many achievements apart from being the third President of the United States after John Adams. He was appointed Secretary of States by George Washington, appointed Minister to France to replace Benjamin Franklin. Jefferson was an ardent supporter of democratic ideals. He advocated freedom of speech, promoted self-determination, cultural uniformity and education of all males of the commonwealth (Crockett 2012). Jefferson acknowledged organized religion and has always claimed that it should be factored into political life. He encouraged reason over supernatural revelation to make inquiries into religion. Above all, he believed in a creator God, an afterlife, and the truth of religion as loving God and neighbors (Davis 2003). However, he had controversially renounced the Christian philosophy of Trinity, denying Christ as the son of God. In the 1800 campaign for the presidency of the United States, Federalists attacked his religious beliefs claiming he was an atheist and not worthy of running a Christian America. Jefferson countered the allegation and praised Christianity in his inaugural address. His private life was very complex; he owned over 600 slaves and was even suspected of fathering the child of his former slave (Pinheiro 2015).

Jefferson supported a colonization plan of transporting freed slaves back to West Africa, which was highly impracticable. In his foreign policy, Jefferson adopted the expansionist philosophy of making America great both in physical size and military might (Spalding 2010). He nurtured a democratic-republican political principle of engaging the world through diplomacy with a strong show of military power if necessary. According to Presidential historian Greenstein (2020), he was the most influential figure in the first half a century of the American republic, and succeeded by presidential adherents James Madison, James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, and Martin Van Buren.

According to Katz (2003) Jefferson embraced the Lockean concept of political economy – the claim that private property is a natural right. This statement is very controversial; a view that was widely accepted is that Jefferson excluded private property from his concepts of rights, clearly differentiating from Locke. Although Jefferson favors Locke's idea of "the pursuit of happiness" through "life and liberty," he deliberately omits estate in the Declaration of Independence. While Locke views property as a natural right, Jefferson opposes its accumulation as a fulfillment of human endeavor. The thesis of Katz (2003) is that the anti-capitalist elements of Jefferson's thought do not derive from premodern aspects of his thinking but rather from his reading of Locke's political economy. President Thomas Jefferson in his second inaugural address deployed

⁵ Force as a parallel resort and essential component of diplomacy. The resolve to apply force instead of continued negotiations to achieve a foreign policy objective. Political pundits argue that force can only win the war but cannot win the peace. Therefore, conservative internationalists give equal weight to both force and diplomacy.

the considerable powers at his disposal to induce Native Americans to cede land: purchase, force, ruse, bribery, and persuasion. Though the instruments of policy were variable, the goal was for Indians to give up their land or face expulsion, if not extermination (Greenstein 2010, Jones 2020). In the end, the most promising strategy was to integrate Indians into American culture through a policy of assimilation.

The Louisiana Purchase in 1803 was the most significant outcome of the foreign policy of President Thomas Jefferson. The Louisiana Purchase extended the United States territory across the Mississippi River. This opportunity opened America for greater economic success. Louisiana was acquired after a strong negotiation with France. In 1801 Jefferson waged war against the Barbary pirates over access in the Mediterranean Sea. Thomas Jefferson came to power determined to limit the reach of the federal government, but his foreign policy desire was without bounds and his political philosophy was couched around his expansionist tendencies (McCormick 2014). The first major foreign policy challenge he had was tackling the Barbary of North Africa. For over a century, Western nations paid bribes to the Barbary states that later became Morocco, Algeria, Tunis and Tripoli (Libya) to protect sea going vessels from attack by pirates. In 1801, the Pasha of Tripoli raised his demand. Jefferson refused to accept and constituted a strong military confrontation against the Barbary states, especially Tripoli. He applied armed diplomacy on the one hand while using negotiations to allay the fears of other Barbary leaders. This was the first militaristic attempt to reach a foreign policy agreement by the United States (Gibson 2000, Myers 2017). However, the war ended with only one last payment of tribute to Tripoli and that was it. This action was the beginning of the building of a strong Naval force for the United States.

Another major foreign policy stride for Jefferson was the Louisiana Purchase, which doubled the size of the United States. In 1800, Jefferson learned that Spain was secretly trying to cede Louisiana to France, he sent words to his Ministers to negotiate the purchase of the Port of New Orleans and possibly West Florida. He took these steps as a strategy to protect the American farmers in the Ohio River Valley to give them unfettered access through the Gulf of Mexico to the Mississippi River. The river was key for the agricultural productivity of the region. Before the French takeover of Louisiana, Spaniards had closed the Mississippi River in 1802, Jefferson acted swiftly by negotiating with Emperor Napoleon to calm his desire for world domination, knowing that it would not be comfortable for the growth of America. Fortunately for Jefferson, Napoleon needed funds to finance the growing hostility with England, so he offered to sell the territory to Jefferson, from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. The offer was for a price tag of \$15 million for 828,000 square miles (roughly 4 cents per acre), doubling the size of the existing United States (Ferguson 2006). Jefferson had to set aside his strict and idealistic position on the constitution with respect to the purchase of a foreign territory and Congress had to approve the purchase within five months of deliberations. Setting up a twenty-five-man team to survey and explore the territory, the adventurers. It took about two and a half years to traverse the entire length of 8,000 miles, from the Missouri River, across the Continental Divide, and down the Columbia River to the Pacific before retracing their steps to St. Louis.

Shortly after the Louisiana Purchase, Napoleon declared war on Great Britain. America became the middleman trading weapons and merchandizing goods. Between 1803 and 1807, total US exports increased from \$66.5 million to \$102.2 million. United States became transshipment centers for European bound goods, American reexports quadrupled during the period, rising from \$13.5 million to \$58.4 million. Unfortunately, after a short while England and France outlawed trading with the United States. British navy was seizing American ships bound for Europe because British sailors were jumping ship to join American merchant ships (Ferguson 2006, Katz 2003).

In 1807, the British Warship *Leopard* fired shots at American naval frigate *Chesapeake* leaving three American soldiers dead because the ship refused boarding orders and as a result there were cries of war and retaliation. To this effect, Jefferson banned all British ships from entering U.S. ports. Jefferson also ordered all the governors to prepare for a call to war with at least 100,000 militiamen and a suspension of trade with Europe.

Jefferson figured that a complete trade embargo would be disastrous for France and England since they both depend on US agricultural imports. By 1808, the embargo had boomeranged against the American economy plummeting from \$108 million to \$22 million. Until the last months of Jefferson's administration, Congress repealed the Embargo Act in 1809 shortly before Jefferson left office (Crockett 2012).

Regarding the Indians, Jefferson had adopted the assimilation policy in line with his Enlightenment thinking. He incorporated the American Indians into a "civilization program" of making Europeans out of native Indians. He signed a peaceful treaty to facilitate the education of Indians into adopting European styled farming techniques instead of traditional peasant farming (Wilsey 2017). Although some Indian tribes rejected his policies of assimilation, but a majority of them were in support and followed the adoption of European culture and agriculture. Jefferson believed that it would be better for Indians to assimilate European culture than to use force of arms to push them to isolation. Some scholars argue that Jefferson's policy of assimilation was a pretext to seize lands from the natives (Jones 2020; McCormick 2014).

James Polk and the American Expansionism

James Polk was the 11th President of the United States from 1845 – 1849, under his tenure the United States increased in size by more than one-third. In President Polk's America the foreign policy was designed to favor territorial expansion beyond the Mississippi River, irrespective of how the goal was achieved. Polk was a proponent of armed diplomacy, where negotiation fails (Cutler 1995, Greenstein 2010). He was hellbent on expanding American territory from coast to coast, including the Oregon territory and California. Nau (2013) described Polk as one who exemplified the main attributes of conservative internationalism; ability to spread democratic values with disciplined clear priorities.

In general terms, Polk was considered a racist, if not worse when one is compelled to look at the role he played in the genocide that decimated native Americans and their lands. Polk was ardent follower of Andrew Jackson, both democrats from Tennessee (McCormick 2014, Pinheiro 2020). Polk was a very unknown person when he contested for the Presidency in 1844, but his expansionist policy for the annexation of Texas made him the candidate of choice. Polk was a core champion of Manifest Destiny – a belief that America is destined to expand across the North American continent from coast to coast – the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. The Mexican American war under Polk presidency was considered by Ulysses Grant as the most unjust war ever waged by a stronger nation against a weaker nation (Pinheiro, 2022). The war was hasty and according to Abraham Lincoln there was a land grab designed to extend the institution of slavery southwards.

James Polk was a Jeffersonian/Jacksonian, who emerged from obscurity, though as congressman and Speaker of the House of Representatives from Tennessee, to be elected President in 1844. Polk's foreign policy interest revolved around the desire of the United States to expand

across the coasts of North America. On inauguration, Polk had four cardinal goals to accomplish: reduce tariffs, re-establish the Independent Treasury System, acquire New Mexico and California from Mexico, and obtain some or all of Oregon Country (Pinheiro 2020). All four goals were largely achieved before the end of his tenure. Polk is deemed to be one if not the only president who fulfilled all his promises to the American people in just one term of presidency. The biggest political story in America at the time was territorial expansion. Following the writings and teachings of historians like John L. O'Sullivan (1813 – 1895) who preached a special form of Christian nationalism, that it is the "Manifest Destiny" of America to span the entire coast of North America. The teachings of O'Sullivan were embraced by Polk, and the term Manifest Destiny was adopted in 1845 as a basic concept of American expansionism. O'Sullivan criticized the intrigues of European powers like Britain and France as they sought to undermine the relationship between Texas and the United States (Wilsey 2017). O'Sullivan advocated in favor of the annexation of Texas, accused Europe of thwarting the fulfilment of the Manifest Destiny of the United States to spread across the continent allotted by providence for the free development of the growing population.

Before President Tyler left office, he sent a joint resolution to Congress for the annexation of Texas. The resolution requires a simple majority vote in both houses, rather than the two-thirds majority in the Senate that is normally required for a treaty. Congress passed the joint resolution a few days before Polk's inauguration in March 1845 (Crockett 2012). Texas joined the Union as the fifteenth slave state in December 1845. There was no war that followed as threatened by Mexico, however when Texas moved its militia into the disputed territory west of the Nueces River, staking a claim to the Rio Grande as its southern border, Mexico quickly responded by breaking diplomatic relations with the United States.

In the 1844 campaign for the US presidency Polk had pledged to conclude the boundary dispute of the Oregon Territory with Britain, once in office he quickly moved to fulfil that promise. The region was jointly occupied by Great Britain and the United States since 1818, but Polk had wanted the west coast of North America solely for the United States, possibly including Mexican controlled California. At the end, Polk agreed to secure the boundary at the 49th parallel comprising the entire present-day Oregon, Idaho and Washington, as well as the full control of the Columbia River (Pinheiro 2020). Britain had offered to support the independence of Texas in favor of the abolition of slavery in the entire area. And has been negotiating heavily for the purchase of California from Mexico. Before settling the Oregon question, Polk had favored armed diplomacy as a consequence by moving troops into the North of the Rio Grande. Polk equally sent a special envoy to Mexico to discuss the US offer to buy California as well as settling disputed border claims within the territory.

Unfortunately, the negotiations with Mexico failed and Mexican troops crossed the Rio Grande to kill eleven American soldiers. As a result, Polk requested a declaration of war from Congress and by May 1846 both nations were at war. Most Whigs opposed the war, Abraham Lincoln a first-term Whig congressman from Illinois, condemned the war as "unconstitutional" and challenged the President to show Americans where Mexicans had shed American blood. This unpopular move by Polk figured into his decision not to run for a second term. Within seven months of the declaration of war, the United States ran over the Mexican Army on its own soil and declared victory.

Under Polk leadership there was evidence that most of the bills were initiated by the Executive arm of government, like the Jackson era. However, throughout Polk's political career he fostered a good relationship with Andrew Jackson the acclaimed founder of the Democratic

party which evolved from Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republican party. Polk won the election in 1844 against Tyler with a very slim margin. Polk strongly believed in the Monroe Doctrine that prohibited European intervention in the western hemisphere (Mead 2017). Therefore, Polk worked to remove any European nation from the territory and lay claim to the entire area of the United States.

In 1846 Polk provided safe passage into Mexico for a former Mexican warlord who has been overthrown in a Palace coup in 1844 and exiled in Cuba. General Antonio López de Santa Anna. Commander of Mexican forces at the Battle of the Alamo, Santa Anna was a man hated by Texans and distrusted by his own countrymen. He promised Polk that he would make peace on American terms in return for a payoff of \$30 million. When Santa Anna arrived in Mexico City, however, the new government named him supreme commander of the army and president of the republic (Ferguson 2006). He immediately raised a new army and marched north in early 1847 to attack Zachary Taylor's force at Monterrey. Taylor, a Whig, was suspicious of Polk and his political intrigues. Surprisingly, Taylors' five-thousand-man American army had defeated Santa Anna's fifteen-thousand-man Mexican army at Buena Vista on February 22, 1847, in a fierce battle commanded by young Jefferson Davis. The news of Taylor's victory reached the United States and Whigs started mentioning him as possible candidate for the presidency.

With Mexico in the defeat by America, Polk started negotiating the terms of Mexican surrender with a new government, having overthrown Santa Anna after his defeat at Mexico City. To this end, Polk took advantage of the situation to wring any possible concession from the government in Mexico, some Whigs even called for the annexation of the entire Mexico, but Polk was only interested in California. In February 1848, America signed a Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which authorized U.S. payment of \$15 million for California and New Mexico and named the Rio Grande as the Texas border. Polk submitted the Treaty to Senate for approval and after a short debate, the Treaty was approved on March 10, 1848, by a vote of thirty-eight to fourteen. Surprisingly, the opposition came from Democrats who wanted more Mexican territory and Whigs who wanted none. Mexico ceded one-third of its territory to the United States, increasing the size by one-fourth. The Mexican cession now comprises of the present-day states of Arizona, Utah, Nevada, California, much of New Mexico, and portions of Wyoming and Colorado. Polk created the Department of Interiors before leaving office as President to manage the vast new lands acquired from Mexico.

Similarities and Dissimilarities of Jefferson and Polk

There is no doubt that the expansionist policies of Jefferson and Polk strengthened the United States economically and physically. Jefferson's foreign policy interest sprang from his diplomatic missions in France and a reflection of his feelings and acquaintances with the French to enable the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. In the same vein Polk has pushed for the annexation of Texas, in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the establishment of the Oregon Territory. The Louisiana Purchase opened new economic opportunities for the United States. New Orleans was part of the purchase resulting in the opening of the Mississippi River from the ocean. The Treaty of Hidalgo negotiated and signed under Polk presidency greatly improved economic conditions in the United States with the inclusion of California. Gold was found in California in 1848. If the treaty was not completed the Gold would have belonged to Mexico. Polk also pushed for the annexation of Texas to strengthen the economy of the United States. As we can see Texas

contributes close a trillion dollars to the United States economy annually. These expansionist policies had helped to provide new economic opportunities for the United States.

On the domestic front the expansionist policies of Jefferson and Polk also strengthened the United States. The biggest contribution of expansionism was increasing the physical size of the United States. The Louisiana Purchase and the land granted from the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo amounted to twenty-three percent and fourteen percent of the present day continental United States, respectively. In fulfillment of the “Manifest Destiny” which sprang from the founding principle of moving to a New World to take possession of the promised land. The Founding Fathers believed that the movement to the new world was ordained by God and the exercise thereof was to the fulfilment of their destiny. According to Pinheiro (2015), Jefferson, Jackson, Polk and expansionist theorists believed in the supremacy of the white race and specifically the Anglo-Saxon stock. As a result, they promoted a brand of Christian philosophy that favored the acquisition and usurpation of personal property and military superiority to subdue others.

Though Jefferson did not profess any faith in organized religion, his Episcopalian upbringing was tuned towards Protestantism. Like Jefferson, Polk’s upbringing was accustomed to the protestant ethics of hard work. They both embraced the notion that it was God’s command that man should increase and multiply and take dominion over the earth. They believed that the entire length and breadth of the American continent was given by God. Wilsey (2017) condemned this racist theory embraced by Jefferson, Polk and other Jacksonian theorists about the inferiority of other races. He argues that it was hypocritical for American statesmen to think that it was manifest destiny to possess the entire continent or take by force any territory and at the same time profess Christianity. In support of Wilsey (2017) the Bible commands in Deuteronomy 2:5 (King James Version), “Meddle not with them; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a foot breadth; because I have given mount Seir unto Esau for a possession.” The Lord warned us not to meddle with the land and possession of others without an agreement. It is noteworthy that the religious integrity of Polk and Jefferson is questionable (Osugwu, 2023).

Nevertheless, the concept of “Manifest Destiny” as theorized by O’Sullivan has two sides: the practical and the religious. On the practical aspect they believed that the annexation of territories in the south and in the west of the borders of the country could alleviate the problem of slavery. Some political leaders thought the southern expansion would lead to the dispersal of slaves into Latin America through the West, and this will eventually hasten the demise of slavery in the United States leaving behind an all-white America (Spalding, 2010). The other religious theory claims that it was a dominion mandate given by God in Genesis 1:28 to “be fruitful and multiply and subdue the earth and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and every other living thing that moves on the earth.” Unfortunately, the racist view of the dominion mandate lurked behind Andrew Jackson’s 1830 justification for the removal of Native Americans from their homes in the South with the mandate of transforming the savage hunters to civilized Christian people, was embraced by Polk and other Jacksonians.

In the broad sense the manifest Destiny doctrine was used to promote a restrictive American Christian Nationalism that no longer saw Christ as the savior of mankind as portrayed in the scriptures but a democratic liberator and a source of true civilization (Osugwu, 2023). O’Sullivan saw Christ as an exemplar of human progress, the champion of liberty, and an enemy of tyranny and oppression, that would realize the inconceivably glorious result of the coming of the kingdom of God upon the earth.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that Jefferson and Polk embraced similar principles of American expansionism. They were engulfed in the spirit of the enlightenment era. A core proposition of this era was the supremacy of the white race and the idea that European settlers have come to civilize the other peoples of the western hemisphere with Christianity and commerce.

However, Polk completely differs from Jefferson in the approach to resolving issues diplomatically. While Jefferson was very diplomatic and employed armed confrontation when diplomacy fails, for example in solving the problems with Barbary pirates of North Africa, Polk was quick to action in the use of force. He adopts a military strategy at the least umpteenth time. In the acquisition of Texas, Jefferson negotiated and never fired a gunshot to achieve the feat. Nonetheless, Polk's foreign policy was swift, rash and easily provocative. Although Polk was considered very successful in his achievements within a very short time, his Jacksonian approach was entrenched in the pool of segregation and isolationism.

Both Presidents defied the principles of freedom, equality and justice in their dealings with "outsiders" in pursuit of a foreign policy that is centered on Eurocentrism and utter disregard for the Christian values, which our Founding Fathers professed.

References

- Crockett, David A., (2012). The Historical Presidency. The Perils of Restoration Politics: Nineteenth-Century Antecedents. *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 42, No. 4 (December).
- Cutler, Wayne (1995). Jackson, Polk, and Johnson: Defenders of the Moral Economy. *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, Nashville 54(3), Fall (1995): 178.
- Davis, Derek H. (2003). Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation Metaphor. *Journal of Church and State*. 45(1), 5-14.
- Ferguson, Thomas (2006). Beyond Their Means? The Costs of Democracy from Jefferson to Lincoln. *The Journal of the Historical Society* VI:4. December.
- Gibson, Alan (2000). Ancients, Moderns and Americans: The Republicanism-Liberalism Debate Revisited. *History of Political Thought* 21 (Summer): 261-307.
- Greenstein, Fred I. (2010). The Policy-Driven Leadership of James K. Polk: Making the Most of a Weak Presidency. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 40(4).

- Greenstein, Fred I., (2006). Presidential Difference in the Early Republic: The Highly Disparate Leadership Styles of Washington, Adams, and Jefferson. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*; September. 36, 3.
- Issitt, Micah L. (2020). *Opinions Throughout History: Presidential Authority*, Chapter 8: Manifest Destiny, James K. Polk, Grey House Publishing, Washington DC United States.
- Jones, Steve. (2020, February 11). *What Was Foreign Policy Like Under Thomas Jefferson?* Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/foreign-policy-under-thomas-jefferson-3310348>
- Katz, C. (2003). Thomas Jefferson's Liberal Anticapitalism. *American Journal of Political Science*, 47(1), 1-17. doi:10.2307/3186089
- McCormick, James. (2014) *American Foreign Policy and Process*. 6th ed. Boston: Cengage.
- Mead, Walter Russell (2017). The Jacksonian Revolt. *Foreign Affairs*, Hudson Institute. January 20.
- Myers, Bryant. (2017). *Engaging Globalization: The Poor, Christian Mission, and Our Hyperconnected World* (Mission in Global Community). Grand Rapids: Baker Academic,
- Nau, Henry R. (2008). Conservative Internationalism. *Policy Review*, 150, August & September, 3-44
- Nau, Henry R. (2013). *Conservative Internationalism: Armed Diplomacy under Jefferson, Polk, Truman, and Reagan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press,
- Osuagwu, Eze Simpson (2023). Christian Statesmanship as a Panacea for Social Policy Constraints on Differing Political Ideological Fronts. *Cogent Social Sciences* 9:2
- Pinheiro, John C. (2015). *Missionaries of Republicanism: A Religious History of the Mexican-American War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pinheiro, John C. (2020). James K. Polk: *Foreign Affairs*. UVA Miller Center. Downloaded 7/23/2020 <https://millercenter.org/president/polk/foreign-affairs>
- Pinheiro, John C. (2022). The Mexican-American War and American Just-War Thinking. *Fides et Historia* 54:2, (Summer/Fall 2022): 23 – 40.
- Spalding, Matthew (2010). America's Founders and the Principles of Foreign Policy: Sovereign Independence, National Interests, and the Cause of Liberty in the World. *The Heritage Foundation*, October 15.
- Weisman, Charles A. (1994). *A Handbook of Bible Law – Foreign Relations*, 3rd Edition

White, Leonard D., (1958). *The Federalist: A Study in Administrative History*, 1789 – 1801. New York, Macmillan.

Wilsey, John D. (2017). “Our Country Is Destined to be the Great Nation of Futurity”: John L. O’Sullivan’s Manifest Destiny and Christian Nationalism, 1837–1846. *Religions*. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary