



CENTER for CONGRESSIONAL
and PRESIDENTIAL STUDIES
SCHOOL of PUBLIC AFFAIRS



NATIONAL
ARCHIVES
NATIONAL HISTORICAL
PUBLICATIONS
& RECORDS COMMISSION



**The Correspondence of
Zachary Taylor
and
Millard Fillmore**

The Correspondence of Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore is a project of American University's Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies. It aims to render primary sources in antebellum US history accessible to students, teachers, scholars, and the general public. To that end, the project's editors are locating all extant letters written by or to the twelfth and thirteenth presidents from 1844 to 1853, the decade preceding and including their administrations. In the coming years the editors will publish approximately 1,100 letters, with explanatory annotations, in three print and digital volumes. Volume 1 is due out in 2025 or 2026. This work is made possible by generous support from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, The Summerlee Foundation, the Watson-Brown Foundation, The Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, Delaplaine Foundation, Inc., and the William G. Pomeroy Foundation. For more information, see www.taylorandfillmore.org or follow the project on Twitter at @ZTandMF.

Primary Source Analysis on Texas Annexation

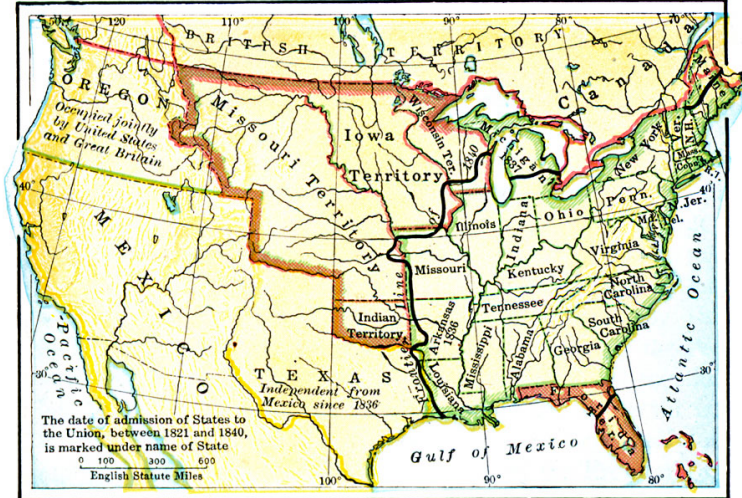
As the Taylor-Fillmore project continues work on its first volume, it is releasing this teaching guide containing four letters for use in eleventh or twelfth grade courses in US history. One of the key topics of US history in the 1840s is the annexation of Texas, which became a US state in 1845. Millard Fillmore, a lawyer and teacher from the Buffalo, NY, area, had served in Congress in 1833–35 and 1837–43; he would become vice president in 1849 and, upon the death of President Zachary Taylor, would become president in 1850. Though a private citizen in the mid-1840s, Fillmore corresponded with politicians and others about Texas. His letters reveal the issues dividing Americans over annexation and the larger question of slavery.

Teachers can use these letters, with the accompanying introductions and assignments, to lead students in a primary source analysis. By reading the original words of Americans engaged in the debate over Texas annexation, students will learn both about the questions that divided Americans before the Civil War and about the value of primary sources for understanding the past. The analysis, as indicated in the guidance at the beginning of each of the three assignments, can be conducted over either two or three classroom sessions. Teachers who have feedback on this guide are welcome to contact Michael David Cohen, editor of the Taylor-Fillmore project, at mdcohen@american.edu.

Reading Assignment 1: As homework, students will read the following two letters from 1844, before the US annexation of Texas, including the introductions. Then, in class, the teacher will help them to analyze the sources through a discussion guided by the questions that follow.



Millard Fillmore, salted paper print by Frederick De Bourg Richards, [1853–60], [Library of Congress](#).



The United States, the Republic of Texas, and northern Mexico in 1840, from S. E. Forman, *Advanced American History* (New York: Century, 1919), private collection of Roy Winkelman/[Florida Center for Instructional Technology](#), University of South Florida.

Millard Fillmore and Texas Annexation, Part 1

When Mexico declared its independence from Spain in 1821, it included Texas. Over the next fifteen years, about thirty thousand White people from the United States immigrated into Texas, many of them bringing Black people whom they enslaved to work on farms. In 1836 these US-born Whites declared Texas's independence from Mexico. They soon asked the United States to annex it. US and Texan diplomats signed an annexation treaty in April 1844, but the US Senate, which must approve treaties, rejected it on June 8. The major parties then were the Democrats and the Whigs; most Democrats in the Senate voted for the treaty, most Whigs against it.

Despite the defeat, efforts at annexation continued.

Millard Fillmore was at that time a lawyer in Buffalo, NY. A former congressman, he would become vice president in 1849 and, upon President Zachary Taylor's death, would become president in 1850. As a private citizen in the mid-1840s, he was not actively involved in the annexation process. But fellow Whigs did consult him about it. In this letter, he replies to an invitation from Whigs in Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties, NY, to attend a gathering on Independence Day. He discusses Henry Clay and Theodore Frelinghuysen, the Whig Party's nominees for president and vice president, and the debate over Texas. He mentions "the American system," Clay's

proposal for federally funded roads and canals, a national bank, and high tariffs (taxes on imported goods) to protect US manufacturers from foreign competition.

Note: Text surrounded by carets, ^like this^, was inserted by the writer after he initially wrote the letter.

Text with a strikethrough, ~~like this~~, was struck out, erased, or overwritten by the writer.

MILLARD FILLMORE TO ABRAHAM J. LYON ET AL.¹

Gentlemen,

Buffalo, June 22^d 1844.

I am honored by the receipt of your favor of the 17th. instant inviting me to attend a mass meeting of Whigs at Rushford on the 4th. day of July next, and regret that a previous engagement to attend a similar meeting on that day at Geneseo will deprive me of that pleasure.

Never having attended a political meeting either in Allegany or Cattaraugus Counties, it would give me great pleasure to be present at your place and witness the gathering of the Whigs on the anniversary of the Birth day of our nation. The whig spirit of '76 gave us Independence ^& freedom^ and the Whig spirit of 1844 must maintain that independence and freedom, or the blood of the Revolution was poured out in vain. We have well tried and faithful candidates for the first and second offices in the gift of the nation. Henry Clay as a statesman and patriot stands preeminent- He is the acknowledged father of the American system, the avowed, ~~open~~ advocate of a protective ~~system~~ ^tariff^, and the open opponent of the annexation of Texas- And at this time when budding treason insists on extending the slave territory ~~of the Union~~, and if it can not, threatens dissolution of this glorious union, we want such a man to stand at the helm of state- a man who has no sectional feeling, but who goes for the country, the whole country and nothing

¹ Addressed to Lyon and nine others members of the "Committee of correspondence."

but the country. Such a man is Henry Clay and Mr. Frelinghuysen is a worthy associate.

I therefore look forward with confidence to a triumphant whig majority in Allegany and Cattaraugus. I trust that I shall not be disappointed.

Accept the assurance of my respect and esteem & believe sincerely your friend & fellow citizen

Millard Fillmore

Autograph letter signed, draft. State University of New York, Oswego. Microfilmed in Lester W. Smith, ed., *Millard Fillmore Papers* (Buffalo, NY: Buffalo & Erie County Historical Society and State University College at Oswego, 1975), reel 10.

Most Northern states, by the 1840s, had ended slavery. Most Black Americans, however, remained enslaved in the Southern states and in Washington, DC. George Watterston, a Washington Whig and the former head of the Library of Congress, had this letter printed and sent to multiple people including Fillmore. He discusses the slavetrading business of the brothers Thomas and William H. Williams and mentions James K. Polk and George M. Dallas, the Democratic nominees for president and vice president. As he notes, at this time residents of the nation's capital could not vote in presidential elections.

GEORGE WATTERSTON TO MILLARD FILLMORE

DEAR SIR:

WASHINGTON CITY, OCTOBER 19, 1844.

There is here in Washington a Slave Jail, or "Negro Pen," as it is called, the property of a man named Williams, (^Partner of^ the ~~same~~ man who was recently fined and imprisoned in New Orleans for importing into Louisiana, contrary to law, slaves who had been convicted of criminal offences,) and the place wherein he confines the negroes bought by him for shipment to New Orleans. He is exclusively a negro trader; that is his vocation, in which he is engaged so

largely as to require him to *own* a jail, and the vessels in which his living cargoes are transported southward. His establishment, situated at the corner of Maryland avenue and Seventh street, has been heretofore as unobtrusive as such a place ought to be. Citizens knew what it was, and while they regretted that such a place should be in their midst, they reconciled themselves to its existence from the knowledge that, though a degrading fact in itself, it was an inevitable incident to a sad domestic institution, the evils of which they recognized, but saw no remedy for, except in greater and more criminal evils. Strangers might have passed the place unnoticed or merely wondering what misanthrope could have planned and inhabited so gloom^ey a dwelling. *Now* this slave depot, this mockery of the Capitol, within full sight of which it stands, grown insolent in hope of extended trade and increased gains, has dared to challenge observation, to rear a tall staff above the walls of its cells, and to append thereto the *Slave-trader's banner*, bearing, in most conspicuous letters, the names of "POLK AND DALLAS." Of course these names! What other could *he* inscribe upon *his* flag, or even over the doorway of his prison? *Texas* is his *Tariff*—*Polk & Dallas* are his *Protection*. He, a clear sighted man of business, knows this very well, and as he has already grown rich in his trade, desires of course, and strives for the success of that party whose policy will enable him to grow richer. He has bet very largely, too, upon the success of *his* candidates. Several thousands, it is said, are required to cover his investments in this way. Of course he will not grudge hundreds to secure these investments, and can, and will, and *does* spend money freely to promote this end. *The identical dollars, profits of his loathsome traffic, are active electioneering dollars for Polk & Dallas and Texas.*

We, who are used to slavery, born in its midst, are saddened and sickened by many of its features, and our hearts would gladly turn to the philanthropist who should propose the practicable, effectual, and truly benevolent remedy. We sincerely hope that *northern* votes at least will not be instrumental in perpetuating this revolting slave traffic among us, who have no votes

for President, and no Representation in Congress. We despise the Slave-trader. Throughout all the South he is a marked man. The *gentleman* does not shake hands with him. The *gentleman's son*, from his very infancy, associates the idea of most unapproachable infamy with the term "Negro-buyer." That is our nursery term. By "gentleman" we mean the man whose heart from the beginning of his life is taught to beat proudly in consciousness that its impulses are honest and honorable. Even *we*, used as we are to all this, are indignant that this place should presume to flaunt its banner to the common gaze, making proclamation of the misfortune we would, for decency's sake, conceal; *and yet more*, that this *Negro-buyer* should have dared, as he has done, *to associate with his own peculiar banner, EVEN UPON THE SAME STAFF WITH IT, the flag of our common country.*

"Flag of the free heart's hope and home"!!

Now, sir, as a zealous Whig, earnest in that cause identical with right and the country's honor, we urge you to use the facts herein imparted, with all possible advantage to that cause. Trifling as they may seem, and in themselves perhaps may be, yet they are *not trifling* as indices of the character of our opponents' cause, and the degrading alliances by which it is supported. Impress, not only upon every abolitionist within your reach, but upon every moderate man who does not deem *slavery a good and blessed thing*, that by voting for *James K. Polk*; or for *any other man* than *Henry Clay* for the Presidency, he is directly, or indirectly, participating in an insult to his country's flag, *extending the limits of slavery* beyond the bounds contemplated by that compact by which fair men of the South are willing strictly to abide, and aiding to put dollars in the pockets of those who live and *thrive* upon the abuses of our most sad abuse and greatest misfortune.

We append the advertisement of the "establishment." Even now, under its "*Democratic*" flag, it is driving a thriving business, as you may judge from the fact, of which we are informed by a most respectable and credible eye witness, that, on Wednesday morning last, a "gang" (that's

the term) of sixty were marched out from its cells to the wharf, for shipment to New Orleans, via Alexandria. We were not told that these joined chorus with their keepers in huzzas for *Polk and Dallas*.

“NEGROES WANTED.—I wish to purchase any number of negroes for the New Orleans market, and will give at all times the highest market price in cash for likely young negroes. Those wishing to sell, will find it to their interest to call at my establishment, corner of Seventh street and Maryland avenue, where myself or agent can be seen at any time.

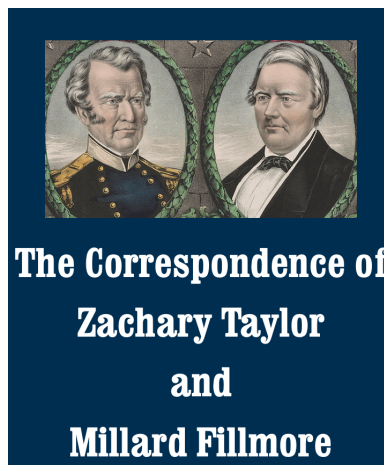
“Communications promptly attended to.

“THOS. WILLIAMS.”

☞ *The above facts are true as stated.*

Geo Watterston Cor. Sec. Washington City Clay Club.

Printed circular signed with autograph emendations. State University of New York, Oswego. Microfilmed in Smith, *Millard Fillmore Papers*, reel 10.



CENTER for CONGRESSIONAL
and PRESIDENTIAL STUDIES
SCHOOL of PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Questions for Classroom Discussion:

1. In Fillmore's and Watterston's views, what major issues divided Americans in 1844?
2. What do these letters reveal about the political positions of the Whig and Democratic Parties at the time? Where did each party stand on the issues you identified in the previous question?
3. What campaign methods did Americans use back then? In what ways did campaigning for president in 1844 resemble or differ from campaigning today?
4. Why did some Americans want to annex Texas? Why did others oppose it?
5. What criticisms did Fillmore and Watterston make about slavery? Whom did they think it hurt? Did they consider it morally wrong or want to abolish it?
6. These letters feature the words of only two individuals (plus a third whom Watterston quotes). How much can they tell us about Americans' opinions more broadly? In other words, which groups' perspectives do these letters reveal? Which groups' do they not reveal? How could we learn those people's perspectives?

Reading Assignment 2: As homework, students will read the following letter from 1845, after Congress had approved annexation. This time they will begin the source analysis themselves. As part of their homework, they will answer the questions following the letter with several sentences each. The writing assignment need not be graded, but will form the basis of a discussion led by the teacher.

Millard Fillmore and Texas Annexation, Part 2

Texas became a central issue in the presidential election of 1844. James K. Polk, the Democrat, supported annexation; Henry Clay, the Whig, opposed it. After Polk won, outgoing president John Tyler insisted that the voters wanted Texas. He still could not get the Senate to approve a treaty, which required a two-thirds majority. He therefore convinced Congress to approve annexation by a regular law, known as a "joint resolution," which required only a bare majority. By the time Polk took office in March 1845, Congress had done so; all that remained was for the Texas government to accept the offer. In this letter, opponents of annexation share their concerns with Fillmore and seek his help to stop the process. They discuss Article II, Section 2 of the US Constitution, which provides that "The President . . . shall have Power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur."

STEPHEN C. PHILLIPS ET AL.¹ TO MILLARD FILLMORE

Sir,

Boston June 25. 1845.

The Convention of the People of Massachusetts opposed to the Annexation of Texas, which was held in Faneuil Hall on the 29th January, appointed a Committee of Correspondence, in whose behalf we address you.

By the appointment of such a Committee it was the design of the Convention to provide for immediate communication with the opponents of Annexation in this and other States, as soon as any emergency should be deemed to require a general consultation. The passage of the Joint Resolution providing for the admission of Texas as a new State into the Union upon terms, which, if they should be accepted by Texas, will await only the legislative action of the next Congress to be carried into effect, furnishes the occasion upon which we shall be expected to

¹ Written by Phillips and signed by him, Charles Allen, and Charles Francis Adams.

commence the performance of our duties.

In view of this proceeding of Congress- we take it for granted that you agree with us that the Constitution has been violated, that the reserved rights of the States and the People have been interfered with and subverted, and that a compact with a foreign nation for an unconstitutional object has been undertaken in a mode in which the treaty-making power cannot be exercised. We presume that you will estimate as we do the design and effect of the measure—that you feel the blow which has been aimed at the rights of the Free States—that you will foresee the political consequences which must result from the preponderance of the Slave-holding States in the Senate, and from the unlimited extension of the right of representation in the House of Representatives and the Electoral Colleges—and that, in such an attempt to increase to an incalculable extent and to prolong for an indefinite period all the evils of Slavery, you will discern a sure prognostic of National degeneracy and disgrace.

If the Annexation of Texas were already consummated—if it did not necessarily^{ily} await the further action of Congress—if the voice of the People might not yet be heard in remonstrance against it,- we should feel that we could only consider and ask you to consider the last alternative of submission to a violated Constitution and the will of its violators, or an effort to obtain, at whatever hazard, that Constitutional guaranty of Liberty unalloyed with Slavery, which alone can secure to the country of ~~the~~ our Fathers the spirit and substance, and not merely the form of a Republican Government. But the work is not wholly done. It is yet in the power of Congress to retrace its steps; and the mortifying fact that the country has been brought into its present dangerous position by the votes of the Representatives of the Free States makes it certain that the People of the Free States, if they will even now arouse themselves, and act together and instruct their Representatives, have it in their power to preserve the Constitution and the Union inviolate. We make it our first duty therefore to appeal to them for this object, and to implore

^them to consider^ the magnitude of the issue which they may and must decide.

With this brief explanation of our views and purpose, we take the liberty of addressing you for the sake of asking your advice and co-operation. We desire to be informed of the present state of opinion and feeling in your State, and to receive all the suggestions in regard to a course of immediate and general action throughout the Free States which you may be pleased to communicate to us. If it be practicable, we deem it important that arrangements should be made for holding a series of popular Conventions, at which the subject in all its aspects can be fully discussed, and which will afford to the People an opportunity, in the most suitable and effective manner, to declare their will, and to exhibit their spirit and strength. We wish also to secure the aid of the Press throughout the Free States in favor of the cause, and of whatever movement may be resolved upon. As much as this must be done, if any thing is attempted; and as soon as we can be assured that those whom we address are prepared to co-operate with us, we will proceed to take such preliminary measures, as, in their judgment, may be properly expected of us.

Hoping to receive from you an early answer to this communication, we remain, very respectfully, Your friends and fellow-citizens,

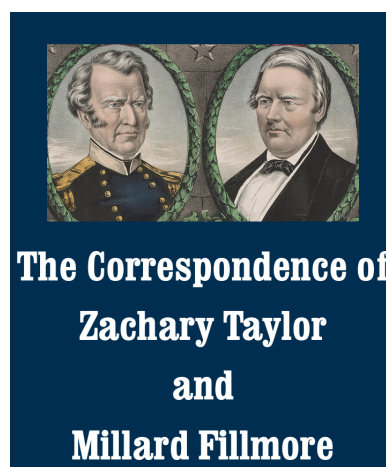
S. C. Phillips.-

An answer may be addressed to the Committee, under cover to Hon Daniel P. King, M. C. South Danvers, Massachusetts.

Autograph letter signed. State University of New York, Oswego. Microfilmed in Lester W. Smith, ed., *Millard Fillmore Papers* (Buffalo, NY: Buffalo & Erie County Historical Society and State University College at Oswego, 1975), reel 10. From Fillmore's autograph endorsement: received July 1.

Analyze this primary source by answering these questions in 2–5 sentences each:

1. Why did Phillips and his associates oppose the US annexation of Texas?
2. What criticisms did they make of slavery? How did their opinions about slavery resemble or differ from those of Fillmore and George Watterston?
3. How far were they willing to go to oppose annexation or slavery? What were they willing to sacrifice?
4. What does this letter tell us about newspapers (“the Press”) in the 1840s? What role did newspapers play in politics?



CENTER for CONGRESSIONAL
and PRESIDENTIAL STUDIES

SCHOOL of PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Reading Assignment 3. This short assignment can be completed either immediately after the discussion of the previous assignment or on the next day. Students, in class, will read this letter from 1848, after annexation had been completed and Fillmore had been nominated for national office. In discussion, they will consider how this letter impacts their understanding of the earlier ones.

Millard Fillmore and Texas Annexation, Part 3

Texas did agree to annexation, and opponents such as Stephen C. Phillips failed to prevent it. In December 1845 Texas became a US state with slavery legal. But the debate over slavery continued for another fifteen years, until the Civil War. One factor in the debate was the Underground Railroad, a network of Black and White Americans who helped enslaved Blacks escape into free states or into Mexico or Canada, both of which had abolished slavery. In 1848 Fillmore got national attention when the Whig Party nominated him as vice president. In this letter to Nathan K. Hall, his former law partner and a Whig congressman, Fillmore responds to an assertion during the campaign that he has participated in the Underground Railroad. His misspells the name of Benjamin Ogle Tayloe, a Whig who lived in Washington, DC, and enslaved Blacks on plantations in Virginia and Alabama.

MILLARD FILLMORE TO NATHAN K. HALL

Dear Hall,

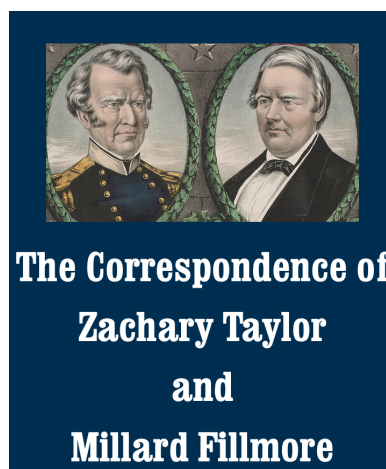
Albany June 15" 1848.

I have received a letter from my esteemed friend, Benjamin Ogle Taylor, Esq, of Washington, saying that a vile story had been circulated there, "that if I did not by my means, I countinanced the getting of greasy negroes into Canada," and he seems to think there should be some authentic contradiction of it.

Really the charge seems to me to be too infamous to justify a denial. You know its falsity in fact and inference, and I should as soon think of denying the charge of robbing a hen roost. If I have lived thus long without acquiring character enough to repel such a charge, then I have lived in vain, and my friends have made a most egregious mistake in presenting my name for the Vice Presidency. I hope you will see Mr Taylor, who has doubtless acted from the best of motives, and state to him the falsity of such a charge. Truly Yours,

Millard Fillmore

Autograph letter signed. State University of New York, Oswego. Microfilmed in Lester W. Smith, ed., *Millard Fillmore Papers* (Buffalo, NY: Buffalo & Erie County Historical Society and State University College at Oswego, 1975), reel 12. Addressed to "~~Benjamin~~ Ogle Taylor, Esq."



CENTER for CONGRESSIONAL
and PRESIDENTIAL STUDIES

SCHOOL of PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Questions for Classroom Discussion:

1. Fillmore denies that he helped Black Americans escape to Canada. Do you believe him? If so, why did someone make the false assertion? If not, why did Fillmore deny the truth?
2. What do the campaign assertion and Fillmore's denial suggest about voters' attitudes toward slavery, Black Americans, and the Underground Railroad?
3. Are Fillmore's opinions in this letter consistent with those in his letter to Abraham J. Lyon et al. in 1844? Does this letter from 1848 either help you to interpret or change your interpretation of any of the letters from 1844–45?
4. What other sources might help you to answer these questions or to understand the events discussed in the letters?