The Controversial Career of George Nicholas Sanders

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THE CONTROVERSIAL CAREER OF
GEORGE NICHOLAS SANDERS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of History
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Melinda Jayne Squires

August 2000
THE CONTROVERSIAL CAREER OF
GEORGE NICHOLAS SANDERS

Date Recommended August 1, 2000

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"Why don't you take a look at George Nicholas Sanders," suggested my thesis director, Robert Haynes, while I searched for a topic. Like most people, I initially asked, "Who in the world was George Sanders?" I read a short biographical entry which piqued my interest, then a little more about Young America, Stephen A. Douglas, and Sanders’ exploits as a Confederate agent. I was fascinated. Displaying outrageous behavior, Sanders left Kentucky and plunged into the world of political and business affairs. This entertaining character weaved in and out of history books, but always in the background. Hence, his life had never been explored in a comprehensive biography. I had found my topic. Uncovering the facts to this mysterious individual’s life became my challenge.

Numerous people aided my quest for truth, and to them I am indebted. Of course, any misrepresentations are my own responsibility. I thank Robert V. Haynes for his guidance, constructive criticism, and unwavering belief in me. I also appreciate Meaghan N. Duff, Marion B. Lucas, and Carol Crowe-Carraco for their insightful suggestions and support. My research would not have been possible without the assistance of many employees at Western Kentucky University. I extend gratitude to Selina Langford and Debra Day in Interlibrary Loan. Not only did they tirelessly fulfill my requests, they also became my friends. I am also grateful to the Graduate Studies and Research office for generously providing me with a research grant. Thanks to the staff at the Filson Club Historical Society in Louisville, Kentucky for their cheerful helpfulness. To Bill Davis of Ghent, Kentucky, I owe a special thanks for his interest in my project and his incredible
generosity of time and knowledge. And to David Moore at Lindsey Wilson College, I extend my appreciation for his sharing his love of history, and for first encouraging me to develop my own.

Finally, moral support is as crucial as scholarly assistance. I wish to thank Charles for his patience and faith. Thanks to my parents, Bill and Jayne, for their ceaseless support and guidance. I am also grateful to my brother Wade and sister-in-law Susan for their continued encouragement. Thank you all for being with me every step of the way.
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George Nicholas Sanders' involvement in regional, national, and international affairs in the mid-nineteenth century significantly shaped the history and unique character of America, as perceived by both Americans and Europeans. Sanders influenced the course of national political events not by idealistic leadership but by active participation.

No one has yet written a biography on George N. Sanders, even though he played a prominent role in the annexation of Texas, Young America, presidential elections, diplomatic affairs, and in the Confederacy. Historians often ignored or slighted him because he tended to wield his influence behind-the-scenes. Hence, Sanders' true significance was often masked by the accomplishments and failures of more notable figures. Nevertheless, through Sanders' own words, as well as the letters and journals of presidents, statesmen, patriots, and family members, Sanders' activities and personality emerges.

Born in Lexington in 1812 and raised in Carroll County, Kentucky, Sanders first entered national politics by organizing a meeting to promote Texas annexation and requesting presidential candidates to express publicly their position on the issue. In 1844, James K. Polk capitalized on this opportunity by supporting annexation and winning the
presidency. Then in 1845, Sanders moved to New York to enter into politics and business. He became a leader of Young America, the progressive faction of the Democratic party, and also editor of the Democratic Review. His goal was to promote Stephen A. Douglas for president in 1852. Instead, Franklin Pierce won the Democratic nomination and ultimately the presidency, and he subsequently appointed Sanders Consul-General to London. In 1854, the Senate failed to confirm Sanders' appointment, voting 49 to 10 against him. His bizarre behavior, acrimonious criticism of political opponents, and close friendship with the European revolutionaries had alienated too many politicians.

During the Civil War Sanders became a Confederate agent. In 1864, after numerous business ventures, he joined the secret service operation in Canada. Sanders was instrumental in organizing the St. Albans raid in Vermont and the abortive Niagara peace conference, two seemingly contradictory projects. Both were designed to achieve a favorable end to the war for the South. Finally, on May 2, 1865, President Johnson issued a $25,000 reward for his arrest in connection with Abraham Lincoln's assassination. The charges were ultimately dropped, but Sanders had probably encouraged John Wilkes Booth, although he was ultimately able to absolve the Confederacy of any blame in the plot.

Sanders possessed vigor and charm, traits which won him many devoted friends. Therefore, he was capable of manipulating other people to achieve his own goals. Although Sanders was largely motivated by self-interest, he was never politically or financially successful. Despite his failures, in the mid-1800s Sanders exerted influence in national affairs, usually in the background of more prominent individuals.
Introduction

On early Tuesday morning, August 12, 1873, as a “terrific storm” raged in New York City, George Nicholas Sanders breathed his last. His wife, Anna, reported that the night before he had “come home to his dinner apparently well as usual, tho he has all the year complained at times of pain which he attributed to indigestion.” But this time George was seriously ill. Although his wife administered mustard plasters to his throat and chest and the doctor bled him, George finally succumbed to heart disease. “His voice was strong almost to the last,” Anna related. Two days later, on August 14, the funeral was held at St. Ann’s Episcopal Church on West Eighteenth Street. From the church his body was taken to Greenwood Cemetery for internment, but since the services were held during the height of the storm, the ladies did not go to the burial site.¹ The gloomy, tempestuous weather was appropriately symbolic for the funeral, considering the tumultuous and stormy life of George N. Sanders.

The energetic sixty-one year old Sanders lived life to its fullest. “From his own vigorous organization, and the hereditary vigor of his constitution, he was hardly past the

climax of his strength, both mental and physical, with many years of usefulness before him,” a contemporary noted. “Great, therefore, was the shock of his unexpected and lamented death. He was still a noble specimen of Kentucky manhood in its best estate.”

Originally from Lexington, Kentucky, Sanders moved to New York City at the age of thirty-three to enter the world of politics and business. Cosmopolitan in spirit, he eventually lived as if the whole western world were his home. Sanders’ story was not a completely happy or successful one. He did not become a notable statesman or a particularly outstanding businessman, but neither was his life void of triumph and importance. Indeed, Sanders' involvement in regional, national, and international affairs in the mid-nineteenth century significantly shaped the history and unique character of America, as perceived by both Americans and Europeans. Sanders influenced American history and character not by idealistic leadership but by active participation.

Sanders’ obituary stated, “Making his first appearance in political life in connexion [sic] with the movement for the annexation of Texas, he remained an ardent and enthusiastic Democrat to the last, but one who had little of the obstinately conservative and retrograde element in him.”2 After moving as a small child to Carroll County, Kentucky, Sanders was raised in the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democratic tradition, learning the fundamental principles of state’s rights, free trade, hard money, and a limited federal government. Until 1843, Sanders played almost no role on the national political scene, but in that year he organized a meeting at a tailor shop in Ghent, in Carroll County, which influenced the upcoming presidential election. By making the Texas annexation

2The *New York Times*, 13 August 1873.
issue a determining factor in the election of 1844 and addressing resolutions to the 
presidential and vice-presidential candidates, Sanders provided James K. Polk the leverage
he needed to win the presidency. Sanders had sampled the exhilaration and importance of
directing national affairs, and he left his native state for New York City in order to reside
in the midst of prominent people and events.

Besides being an action-oriented individual, Sanders possessed other qualities that
defined his character and directed his career. He had a boundless energy which allowed
him to undertake multiple projects and sweep people along with his momentum. His
energy and confidence inspired businessmen to believe in his schemes and entrust him with
the responsibility to fulfill their contracts. Moreover, Sanders possessed a certain
charisma that won him many friends. Through his hospitality, charm, and social graces, he
established a circle of influence that included people of both high and low status. He
conversed easily with presidents, statesmen, foreign dignitaries, and entrepreneurs, as well
as with rogues, soldiers, laborers, women, and the farmers in Kentucky. Yet behind the
charming smile and radiant blue eyes, Sanders pursued an agenda that included outrageous
schemes to achieve personal gain.

Even those who liked Sanders, never completely trusted him. While they admired
his enthusiastic plans and dreamed of the rewards from his success, they were astonished
by the extreme methods that Sanders used and were disappointed by the results which
seemed to always fall short of his promises. Too often he saw reality through overly
optimistic lenses. On the other hand, Sanders' outrageous, often volatile and fanatical,
actions repelled his more conservative critics. Sanders rarely showed subtlety in the
activities he undertook. Consequently, as he zealously reached for success in his political and business endeavors, his own outrageous behavior and lack of diplomacy alienated potential supporters. Finally, he was not always motivated by lofty principles.

While dedicated to the advancement of democratic principles and institutions, Sanders allowed opportunities for personal gain to take priority. He reasoned that principle and profit could co-exist, but he never achieved the ascendancy of his ideals and he was never rich. His selfish actions produced unfortunate consequences in both his professional career and his personal life. Yet despite his conspicuous public life, he always remained a mysterious individual.

Although constantly in the middle of the current political debates, the details of Sanders' roles were frequently elusive, and he never gained prominence personally. He maintained a clandestine character and manipulated other, more prominent people in order to influence the course of prevailing events. He was a better behind-the-scenes organizer than a visionary leader. Also, Sanders could move more freely in the shadows than in the public spotlight, thereby avoiding the consequences of his controversial activities. Nevertheless, he did not always escape responsibility. Sanders' career and personal life were filled with disappointments and hardships, but it was far from dull. "His own [life] was full of eccentricities and adventure," stated the *New York Times*, "and though a strong partisan he made many friends in the Whig and Republican Parties by his generous and social disposition."³

In the late 1840s and early 1850s, after various disappointing business ventures,

³Ibid.
Sanders achieved notoriety as leader of the progressive Young America faction in the Democratic party. In fact, he personified the Young American spirit. Symbolizing youthful nationalism, the Young America movement stood for progress, the development of capitalism, intervention in foreign affairs, “manifest destiny,” and support for the 1852 presidential campaign of Stephen A. Douglas. In late 1851, Sanders bought the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* as a Douglas and Young America organ, hoping to advance his personal agenda by promoting Douglas’ campaign. He believed Douglas was a progressive politician who would, if elected, champion Young America by incorporating the movement’s ideals into his presidential policies. Sanders had always used questionable methods to advance his objectives, and the articles in the *Democratic Review* demonstrated his propensity for extreme, controversial rhetoric. Calling the Democratic party regulars “old fogies,” “vile toads,” “imbeciles,” and “nincompoops,” he further alienated opponents as well as potential Douglas supporters. Partly a result of these activities, Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire won the Democratic nomination in 1852. Ever the faithful Democrat, Sanders contributed his support to Pierce, who eventually won the presidential election. Young Americans were optimistic about their chances of attaining the spoils of office.

Through Sanders’ charisma and network of friends, he was able to benefit from the federal patronage. In 1854, President Pierce rewarded him with the London consulship, a moderate-paying but highly visible post. The appointment was a personal victory for Sanders, as well as for Young America, but the nationalistic movement eventually buckled under the pressure of the sectional slavery debate. Meanwhile in London, Sanders
remained a source of criticism as he became involved in revolutionary activities in Europe. Serving as an United States representative abroad, his behavior lent official sanction to the causes in which he was engaged, an appearance which the American government did not intend. Sanders' London residence was often the site for the gatherings of such notable exiled revolutionaries as Louis Kossuth, Victor Hugo, Giuseppe Mazzini, and Alexander Ledru-Rollin. Sanders' diplomatic pouches also occasionally carried the correspondence of these revolutionaries. “Many were the consultations and weighty the conclusions of those days and nights,” judged a fellow Young American, “devoted to the examination of the situation [with the revolutionaries].” Due to his relationships with these figures and his blatant support of their activities to promote European unrest, in February 1854, the Senate did not confirm Sanders’ appointment. Again, a career setback did not stop Sanders from influencing international affairs.

Although the Senate recalled Sanders after only three months as consul, he remained in Europe to pursue revolutionary intrigues of his own. Addressing an open letter to the French people, he advocated the assassination of Napoléon III. He also sent an equally controversial letter to the President of the Swiss Confederation, urging that Switzerland continue granting asylum to those refugees fleeing from tyrannical European regimes. Sanders influenced prominent American diplomats in Europe to issue the famous nationalistic Ostend Manifesto, proclaiming the intention of the United States government to wrest Cuba away from Spain if that nation would not willingly sell the island. President Pierce and Secretary of State William L. Marcy denounced the aggressiveness of the

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4[William Corry], *Biographical Encyclopaedia*, 539.
manifesto, thereby frustrating Sanders' vision of America's destiny.

Sanders had little time to dwell on this unfortunate turn of events, because in America there were presidential campaigns to organize and sectional conflicts to resolve—all for his personal benefit, of course. In return for Sanders promoting his 1856 presidential campaign, James Buchanan awarded him with the office of Navy Agent for the port of New York. Primarily due to the president's ruinous stance on the Kansas and Lecompton issues, Sanders renounced Buchanan and returned to the camp of Stephen A. Douglas in time to champion the Illinois senator's 1860 campaign. As demonstrated by his transfer of loyalty, Sanders easily revoked his trust in a politician if that person did not follow the course he deemed appropriate. Unfortunately for Sanders, the wrong man from Illinois was elected president. In 1861, when Republican Abraham Lincoln assumed the presidency, South Carolina had already begun the southern stampede toward secession, and the nation quickly plunged into Civil War.

Although Sanders supported the Confederate cause, he still attempted to prevent a war. Corry stated, "In 1859, he foresaw that the political aspect of the United States was full of omens of immediate danger... and did what seemed to him patriotic and advisable to save the country from a trial of physical force." In 1859, he joined in another meeting at Ghent, Kentucky—to promote states rights, a weaker federal government, and free trade—in order to unite the Mississippi Valley on issues other than slavery. He then proceeded to address the Kentucky legislators in Frankfort, urging them to secede. He hoped that by presenting President Lincoln with a united southern front, including the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{5}}\text{Ibid.}\]
president’s birthplace of Kentucky, the South could dissuade Lincoln from using force to prevent their withdrawal, thereby preserving peace. After this plan proved futile, Sanders tried to sell to the new Confederate government a reconstruction plan based on commerce, but it produced the same results. Thereafter, Sanders delved into the southern war effort as an agent for the Confederacy.

Sanders acted in various capacities for the rebel government. Initially he operated as a business agent, negotiating to secure six ironclad merchant steamers and additional army supplies, as well as running a courier service between the South and Europe. In the latter project, Union soldiers captured George’s son, Reid, in the Chesapeake Bay off the Virginia coast and placed him in a prisoner camp. As the conflict progressed, the Confederate war effort deteriorated, and the South pursued more unconventional measures to turn the tide of war. President Jefferson Davis’ administration established the secret service operation in Canada in an effort to divert Union attention away from the South. The rebel government appointed Jacob Thompson, Clement C. Clay, and James P. Holcombe as official commissioners in Canada, while George Sanders became the self-appointed, unofficial fourth member. Acting on his own accord, Sanders worked in conjunction with the commissioners.

Residing in Montreal, Canada, Sanders discovered that his charm worked on Clay and Holcombe, and he manipulated these men to go along with his plans and provide official sanction. In 1864, Sanders arranged the Niagara Peace Conference, whereby the commissioners would undertake negotiations with President Lincoln to arrange peace terms. If peace could not be attained, Sanders still hoped to demonstrate to the nation
that Lincoln did not actually want peace and only wished to crush the South. If he could
represent Lincoln in a negative light, then he might not be re-elected, and the South would
gain another chance to end the war on its own terms, not the Union’s. Sanders, however,
misrepresented the commissioners who, in actuality, did not possess authority to
negotiate. Lincoln dismissed the rebel agents and the peace conference, but this action did
not prevent his re-election. After this project failed and Reid died in the prisoner camp,
Sanders turned to more extreme measures to aid the Confederacy and end the war.

Again, Sanders used other men to facilitate his plans. He had suggested that
raiding northern cities and robbing their banks would be an acceptable form of retaliation,
but Commissioner Thompson rejected this idea. Therefore, Sanders approached
Commissioner Clay. Through Sanders’ urging, Clay verbally authorized Bennett H.
Young to attack St. Albans, Vermont. The raid outraged Canadian and Union citizens,
but Sanders emerged blameless, and the Canadian court released the Confederate raiders.

Sanders’ next scheme did not produce such benign results. On April 14, 1865, five
days after Confederate General Robert E. Lee had already surrendered his army, John
Wilkes Booth assassinated President Lincoln. President Andrew Johnson suspected
Sanders’ involvement in the plot and issued a $25,000 reward for his arrest. But Sanders
escaped capture, and the federal government later revoked the charge. While he did not
directly assist Booth in murdering the president and attacking Secretary of State William
Seward, Sanders most likely supported the plan to abduct Lincoln and later encouraged
Booth’s endeavors. Ultimately, Sanders’ greatest triumph was to absolve the Confederacy
of any blame. He shaped the way people throughout history have understood Lincoln’s
tragic assassination, but he paid dearly for his actions. After Lincoln’s death and the close of the war, Sanders remained in Europe away from his family for eleven years in order to maintain his freedom and earn a living. Then, returning to the United States and residing with his wife and two sons for only a year, he passed away suddenly from heart disease.

It is often difficult to examine a charming, likable man’s life and objectively analyze his contributions to history. Sanders’ individual contributions were not great, but his overall influence shaped America’s course of direction. Perhaps Polk would have won the presidency without Sanders raising the Texas annexation issue at the Ghent meeting, but the Kentuckian did place that issue into the forefront of national consciousness. He helped to define priorities in national policy. As the United States developed into a internationally recognized power, Sanders’ leadership in the Young America movement gave some revolution-ridden Europeans hope. The republican revolutionary leaders saw in Sanders and Young America, the possibility of gaining official recognition as well as financial support. Conversely, European despots perceived both as threats. Nevertheless, Sanders personified Young America and was instrumental in spreading the movement’s ideas to people in the United States, through the pages of the Democratic Review, and in Europe, through his London consulship and relationship with the struggling republicans.

Although Sanders attempted to divert attention from the slavery debate by focusing on foreign policy, he could not stop the force of a conflict so immense. Instead, he chose sides and tried to not only survive the war, but also to profit from it. When his personal fortunes and the southern war effort reached low points, he supported the activities of a man who ultimately assassinated one of the most renowned presidents in
American history. Then he influenced how people, to this day, viewed Lincoln’s murder. Sanders may not have pulled the trigger, but he was important for influencing the national events which became part of American history. The Old South and the Confederacy might be less glorified today if, 135 years ago, they had been held responsible for promoting the abduction and subsequent death of an United States President. For better or worse, Sanders left his mark on American history, and his story should not be forgotten.
Chapter I
"A high responsibility and honor"

Born in Kentucky and resident in New York, he [Sanders] takes a view of the whole country, and is ready to take charge of it too. Not rich, he spends money like a nabob—not poor, he has reared a most interesting family; and at the base of all his apparent recklessness there is good sense, a warm heart, and devotion to his friends.6

In the fall of 1843, when a group of men, later known as the “Mystic Thirteen,” secretly met in a tailor shop at Ghent, in Carroll County, Kentucky, to discuss the annexation of Texas, they could not have imagined that their meeting would affect the history of the United States. Neither could they have predicted that one of them would rise to a level of national and even international prominence. They could not have guessed that he would later host elaborate banquets where champagne flowed freely and gentlemen met to decide issues of great importance. Nor could they have comprehended that he would become involved in fascinating assassination plots in order to exact political change. The man was George Nicholas Sanders, a member of a locally important agricultural and political family, who possessed grand visions and ceaseless energy that would take him far beyond the rural boundaries of Kentucky.

The Ghent meeting was a turning point in the life of George N. Sanders, then thirty-two years old. Born in Lexington, Kentucky, on February 21, 1812, he spent most

6Undated clipping from Philadelphia Press, Scrapbook, Sanders Family Papers.
of his early life at the Sanders estate, known as Grass Hills, in Carroll County. Prior to 1843, George worked primarily in the family business of farming, animal breeding, and horse racing. After the annexation of Texas became a national issue and the Ghent meeting contributed to Tennessean James K. Polk’s presidential victory in 1844, George found his niche in politics and business speculation. Thereafter, George N. Sanders emerged on the national scene in the capacity of everything from a political manager and diplomat to a magazine publisher and business agent. Moreover, he became associated with all types of influential people who, for the most part, seemed to like him, but not to trust him. George’s volatile nature, exaggerated optimism, and wild schemes, drove him into projects that were guided too often by profit rather than principle. Although his family instilled in him firm democratic ideals, he tried personally to benefit from the ascendancy of his principles, often blurring the distinction between the two. His life was a unique blend of a Kentucky heritage, his newfound interest in directing politics and business, and the colorful personality and boundless enthusiasm which he brought to all of his activities. The journey that would take George N. Sanders to Washington and New York, and finally to London and Paris, first began at home in the Kentucky bluegrass.

Lewis Sanders, George’s father, was originally from Virginia, but while a young child, he and his family moved to Kentucky where he eventually became an important businessman. In 1812, he founded “Sandersville” on 500 acres purchased near Lexington in Fayette County, where he later built his home, called Sanders Garden. Lewis established Sandersville to be the center of a large cotton and woolen factory complex, which included a small village for the laborers. Unfortunately, in 1815, Lewis had to sell
his home and business due to the low prices of manufactured goods and the financial machinations of the infamous Aaron Burr. Burr sold Lewis a fraudulent bill of exchange in the amount of $16,000, casting him into debt. In 1823, Lewis proceeded to move his family, including young George, about eighty miles from Lexington to the more rural Carroll County (then Gallatin County), where his wife had inherited 1,200 acres from her father who held a Revolutionary land grant. There Lewis built a new home, Grass Hills. His wife was Ann Nicholas Sanders, daughter of Colonel George Nicholas, Kentucky’s first Attorney General. Nicholas was best known for authoring the state’s first constitution in 1792. Also, his family contended that Nicholas, not John C. Breckinridge, had received from Thomas Jefferson the 1798 Kentucky Resolution in response to the Alien and Sedition Laws. From both sides of his family, George N. Sanders inherited a tradition of action and strong democratic principles.

Lewis Sanders was a notable man in several respects. A biographical narrative described him thus:

His knowledge was various and valuable, reaching every interest in life, and always available for the edification of others. He was fond of discussing political matters, he was a Democrat in his creed, his discourse and intercourse; the same easy and attractive man in all companions. He expended large sums of money to develop Kentucky.8

Although George was educated in private schools, including Dr. Joseph Buchanon’s


8*Biographical Encyclopaedia of Kentucky*, 527.
Select School and Nathaniel Brewer’s school in Owingsville, and later attended Georgetown College in Kentucky, he learned many of his values from Lewis. George also followed his father’s example in business and politics. On July 25, 1816, Lewis hosted at Sanders Garden the state’s first Fair and Cattle Show, distributing silver cups for the best livestock. In 1817, Lewis was the first farmer west of the Allegheny Mountains to import Shorthorn cattle directly from England, and in 1835, he sold this cattle interest to George, who successfully raised and marketed the registered cattle at auctions, mainly in Kentucky and Ohio.9 Father and son also bred thoroughbred horses, Little Turtle being the best known, and were quite active in horse racing. They even established a race track at Grass Hills just beyond their front yard for that purpose. George was constantly at the races, causing a younger brother to remark, “That is all he wants to do.” Moreover, George labored on the farm, performing a multiplicity of tasks involved in raising and harvesting the oats, wheat, barley, corn, and hay crops, as well as other farm duties. While the Sanders owned several slave families and hired other workers for limited periods of time, the majority of the work had to be accomplished by hand. Therefore, the Grass Hills estate provided enough work to occupy the time of owners, slaves, and hired workers.10 But politics also claimed the Sanders’ attention.

Lewis constantly kept abreast of local and national politics, a trait for which

9Historian Thomas D. Clark states that, “This date [1817] stands out in Kentucky cattle history as equally important with the political one of the admission of the Commonwealth to the Union in 1792.” Thomas D. Clark, *Footloose in Jacksonian America: Robert W. Scott and His Agrarian World* (Frankfort: The Kentucky Historical Society, 1989), 121.

George would also later be known. His father kept scrapbooks in which he placed important newspaper clippings, and he was also a moving force behind the mass political meetings typically held in north-central Kentucky at that time. George was also active in the community as a surveyor of McCool's Creek Road, assuring that the road from Grass Hills to Ghent stayed in good condition. Good roads were important to the Sanders because their home attracted prominent men who traveled through the area. The family's visitors, many of them votaries of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, constantly exposed George to the important democratic principles of state's and individual rights, limited government, strict construction of the Constitution, hard money, and free trade.

Added to Lewis' influence was the prestige of his maternal grandfather, George Nicholas, who presented to the Kentucky legislature the democratic expressions of Thomas Jefferson through the Kentucky Resolution. In 1840, South Carolinian John C. Calhoun wrote George N. Sanders that "You are right in regarding it a high responsibility, as well as honor, to have descended from George Nicolas [sic]. Few men, in his generation, rendered greater services to the great cause of constitutional government. His name deserves to be cherished and honored, to the latest posterity." Sanders was conscious of the duty to his ancestors and to his country to preserve the democratic principles of the Revolutionary generation, and he believed he was indisputably right in

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11Ibid., ii, iii, 44, 100, 101; see also Agricultural Papers: Horse Breeding and Pedigrees, Sanders Family Papers.

12Calhoun to Sanders, 6 August 1840, The Political Correspondence of the Late George N. Sanders, Confederate Commissioner to Europe during the Civil War (New York, 1914), no. 24.
this endeavor. Indeed, his sense of duty and righteousness would become a driving force throughout his life, and his confident stance would often bring him into conflict with those who disagreed with him.

Politics and farming, however, were not the only activities that consumed George’s time at Grass Hills. Family and close friends regularly visited each other, and Lewis and Ann Sanders had a large family—three girls and six boys. Hardly a day passed without someone paying a social call on the Sanders. During these visits, popular activities included square dancing (although George did not dance for the first time until he was twenty-one), card games, and conversation. Reading was also a popular pastime.¹³ Because Lewis was an avid reader and subscribed to the magazine *Passion Flower*, George became acquainted with the woman he would marry.

The *Passion Flower*, published in New York by Samuel C. Reid and his daughter, Anna Johnson Reid, at 189 Broadway, was a small, three by four and a half inch magazine issued on the fifteenth of every month. Each issue included pictures of two flowers for coloring or creative inspiration. Approximately 800 people paid five dollars in advance for an annual subscription, with all of their names appearing at the end of the magazine. Notable subscribers were Mrs. Albert Gallatin, Massachusetts Governor Edward Everett, and President of Columbia University William A. Duer. George was an avid reader of the magazine, and he wrote to Anna Reid on one occasion to express how much he enjoyed the publication. A correspondence between the two ensued, whereby he requested one of

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¹³Parker, *Sanders of Grass Hills*, 33; Entry 31 December 1856, Mary Sanders’ Journal, Sanders Family Papers.
her slippers, and she received his formal vestcoat. Then, George, notorious for bizarre behavior, asked Anna to marry him without ever seeing her. She agreed, and they settled upon a wedding date.14

The surprised fathers of the young couple hastily investigated each other's family status and character. Lewis had known nothing of the flirtatious exchanges, but discovered it in time to make a discreet inquiry, satisfying himself of the Reids' respectability. "I could not advise him to take a wife whom he had never seen," Lewis wrote, "on the other hand, I could not see his honor impugned, so I had nothing to say. I felt much concerned, my son taking a wife was of great consideration to me, of the first and most important consequence to him and to my whole family." Lewis was not alone in his concern.

Samuel Reid, a captain in the War of 1812, also inquired about the family that his daughter planned to join. Henry Clay assured him of the Sanders' respectable connections, and then wrote George, "My acquaintance with you being limited . . . And the object of the enquiry addressed to me being of a very delicate nature, my letter to Capt. Reid was cautious . . . and I should think if the lady be otherwise disposed to accept your hand, she will find nothing in my letter to prevent it."15 Having calmed the fathers' fears, George finally met his fiancé in New York.

On Tuesday evening, December 29, 1836, George and Anna were married. "I think at first George was disappointed in not seeing so perfect a beauty as his imagination

14Parker, Sanders of Grass Hills, 43.

15Clay to Reid, 8 October 1836, and Clay to Sanders, 16 October 1836, Political Correspondence, Sanders, nos. 30, 31.
had pictured, but that soon wore off,” Lewis confided to a daughter prior to the marriage. “She is not beautiful, her eyes are too large and of not a pretty color or expression. She is rather below medium size, but of perfect symmetry [sic] and form.” Lewis continued, “She has good sense, well educated and highly accomplished. Plays and sings with good judgement and fine taste. Converses with great ease in the Italian, Spanish and French languages. I think her a great treasure. She is a favorite of all of their friends, which are numerous and is highly respected.” Anna possessed traits that would later compliment her husband well in their public life together. In the meantime, the newlyweds returned to Kentucky, where they established residence in the Sanders’ Grass Hills home.16

The Sanders family loved Anna, and she and Lewis became especially close. Writing in 1858, after bearing four children—Reid, Virginia, Lewis, and George junior—Anna wrote to her father-in-law, “We have had many pleasant hours of intellectual communion. I learned many valuable things from you, particularly in history and politics which I have endeavored to communicate to my children and I believe you will find no fault in their democracy. The remark has been made more than once by strangers, that George Sander’s family was the only consistent democratic family the speaker had ever met.”17 Lewis continued to influence George’s family, consistently articulating to Anna and the children the importance of democratic principles in history and politics. George

16 Parker, Sanders of Grass Hills, 41-42, 44.
17 Anna J. Sanders to Lewis Sanders, 8 November 1858, Correspondence 1857-1859, Sanders Family Papers; The birth dates for the children were: Reid, October 4, 1837; Virginia Nicholas, March 1, 1841; Lewis, April 23, 1843; and George junior, June 24, 1848. Parker, Sanders of Grass Hills, 101.
soon began a political life where he converted his ideals into action, and his family was devoted to him and his endeavors.

On November 25, 1843, George organized a nonpartisan meeting in Ghent, Kentucky, to promote the annexation of Texas, form resolutions to that effect, and then make plans to ascertain the prospective presidential candidates’ positions on the issue. After this meeting the lesser-known candidate, James K. Polk of Tennessee, became president based on his stance in favor of Texas, the war with Mexico followed, and George N. Sanders emerged from Kentucky to become a recognized, important man of action on the national political stage. One Ghent resident, Roman Browinski, made the preposterous claim that Sanders was responsible for ultimately causing the Mexican War. Nevertheless, the meeting was Sanders’ first contact with several important statesmen who were responsible for directing the affairs of the nation.

In 1836, Texas won her independence from Mexico. Although the Republic applied to the United States for annexation, Congress refused largely due to abolitionist opposition, unrest in the Democratic party, and tense relations with Mexico. The Texas Republic proceeded to operate independently, dispatching foreign diplomats and negotiating commercial treaties with France, Holland, Belgium, and Great Britain. Although many Americans believed that “With her five million acres of cotton and large herds of cattle, she would be a valuable acquisition to the nation,” the debate over Texas annexation was primarily sectional. Northern abolitionists and Whigs opposed annexation because they feared the addition of another slave state, while southerners favored it for the...
same reason. The issue came to a head in 1843, after the Mexicans invaded Texas and the Republic drew closer to France and especially Great Britain. Also, in 1843, Mexican Foreign Minister José Bocanegra proclaimed that his government would “consider equivalent to a declaration of war against the Mexican Republic, the passage of an act of the incorporation of Texas with the territory of the United States; the certainty of the fact, being sufficient for the immediate proclamation of a war.”

Although a war with Mexico was a serious threat, apprehension about European presence in Texas caused congressmen in Washington to re-open the annexation debate. Thus stood the relationship between Texas and the United States in the fall of 1843 when a good southern democrat, George N. Sanders, took action on the Texas issue.

Counting on the strength of popular opinion in favor of annexation, Sanders organized the secret Ghent meeting in order to promote Texas annexation and to make it the decisive issue in the upcoming presidential election. The proceedings of the meeting, held at John J. Stevenson’s small tailor shop, were never published. Hence, the group became known as the “Mystic Thirteen.” A local newspaper later revealed that the mixed group of regionally prominent Whigs and Democrats included Lewis Sanders and George N. Sanders, as well as Lawrence Ashton as chairman, Bartlett Searcey as secretary, John J. Stevenson, Frank Bledsoe, James P. Cox, Henry Ramey, Jr., Sam Sanders, Vernie

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Sanders, William B. Lindsay, Elisha B. Campbell, and Benjamin Jackman. George took
the initiative in creating and presenting the resolutions for approval.

After citing patriotic, commercial, and practical reasons for annexing Texas,
Sanders concluded his presentation with two important resolutions.

Resolved, That we will frown upon any aspirant to the Presidency who
shall prove so recreant to the highest glory and to the best interests of his
nation, as to endeavor to retard the admission of Texas, by entangling it
with any minor considerations of home policy.

Resolved, That a committee of six be appointed by the Chair to
communicate our views to each of the distinguished gentlemen who are
spoken of for President and Vice President of the United States, also those
who are spoken of for next Governor of Kentucky, with a request that they
will make known to us, or to the public, their views as to the policy of
admitting Texas into the United States.

Sanders designated annexation a top priority and made opposition dishonorable.

Therefore, any candidate who responded against annexation might be viewed by the public
as a statesman who did not really care for the “highest glory” or “best interests of his
nation.” He made public opinion an important factor. After the presidential election in
February 1844, Sanders called a second meeting where the “Mystic Thirteen” adopted
additional resolutions in favor of annexation and requested the opinions of other notable

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statesmen. In his typical fashion, Sanders preferred maneuvering behind-the-scenes and using more prominent men, such as James K. Polk in this case, to achieve his own agenda. In this incident, it worked to perfection.

Polk was elected president in 1844, largely because of his stance in favor of annexing Texas, and the Ghent committee forced that issue into the forefront. The presidential and vice-presidential candidates initially contacted were Democrat James K. Polk, Whig Henry Clay, Kentuckian William O. Butler, Lewis Cass of Michigan, New Yorker Martin Van Buren, John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, and Robert J. Walker of Mississippi. Although Walker was not a serious contender for the presidency, he did reply in favor of annexation, and as chairman of the executive committee of the Democratic party he drew up the party platform. Henry Clay, traveling on the presidential campaign trail, was not at home to receive the resolutions, but as a presidential candidate he chose to focus on his American System. Misjudging popular opinion, he addressed the issues of the Bank of the United States, the tariff, and internal improvements, while initially remaining silent about annexing Texas. Clay finally responded to public pressure and sealed his defeat when he stated that he opposed annexation in order to maintain the

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22In August 1844, in the Kentucky gubernatorial election Whig William Owsley defeated Democrat William O. Butler by a small margin of 4,600 votes. In 1840 R. P. Letcher won the governorship by 15,000 votes, while William Henry Harrison carried the state by 25,000 votes in the presidential election. Thus, in 1844 Whig leaders like John J. Crittenden were concerned that Owsley’s marginal victory would influence Henry Clay’s presidential campaign in Kentucky. See Albert D. Kirwin, *John J. Crittenden: The Struggle for the Union* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1962), 179.
harmony of the Union. Polk was the only candidate to respond immediately. Strongly in favor of annexation, he eked out the nomination and was elected president based on the Democratic expansionist platform.

In 1845, when the United States officially annexed Texas, Sanders knew he had accomplished his mission. "He was truly," Anna later wrote, "the first actor in that drama on the National Stage." George had discovered that he liked being in the center of the political arena, and he was good at making things happen. Important men listened to him. He was charming, persuasive, and well-informed, and he realized he could use these talents to manage politics to suit his democratic taste. Sanders also possessed good business sense, and he determined that he could combine political organization and commercial ventures in order to make a living.

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24 Letter from Sanders et al to Polk, 25 November 1843, Correspondence of James K. Polk, ed. Wayne Cutler, vol. VI (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1983), 665; Several months later Sanders wrote to Polk that he had observed solid support for "Polk & Texas" while in Michigan, and he also offered political advice. Sanders to Polk, 12 July 1844, Ibid., vol. VII (1989), 512; see also Sanders et al to Polk, 15 April 1844 and Polk to Sanders et al, 25 April 1844, Ibid., 488.

25 "A Bit of Ghent History," in Kathryn Salyers, "Ghent, Ky."; "The First Meeting at Ghent, 1844," Ibid.; The Ghent Times, 1, 8 March 1901; Robert J. Walker, Letter of Mr. Walker, of Mississippi, relative to the Reannexation of Texas: In Reply to the Call of the People of Carroll County, Kentucky, to Communicate His Views on that Subject (Washington: Globe Office, 1844); Initially John C. Calhoun did not think annexation was an issue between the United States and Texas, but later replied in favor of it. See Calhoun to Sanders, 3 February 1844, Political Correspondence, Sanders, no. 25; Parker, Sanders of Grass Hills, 60-61, 107; Mary Ann Gentry, A History of Carroll County, Kentucky: Containing Facts before and after 1754 (Carrollton, Ky: M. A. Gentry, 1984), 24-25.
A local newspaper narrated how George N. Sanders proceeded to Washington after Polk became president, hoping for a reward for his service. But "There was no Postmaster-Generalship for him, or anything like it." The writer explained, "When he appeared at the White House in his homespuns and jeans breeches, made on Grass Hills Farm, to congratulate the new President, he received the cold shoulder." This encounter may or may not be true, but Sanders did leave Grass Hills to engage in the larger world of politics and business. In 1845, George, Anna, and their three children--Reid, Virginia, and Lewis--moved from Kentucky to New York City. A few years later on June 24, 1848, another son George Nicholas Junior was born. The Sanders family maintained close ties with friends and relatives in Kentucky, and they made many trips back to Grass Hills for visits. After all, when dealing with projects of importance, Sanders found that close family and friends usually made the most trustworthy associates.  

In 1846, Sanders viewed national affairs from his New York City residence and Wall Street workplace. William M. Corry, a friend from Cincinnati, recalled that Sanders immediately "took a leading place among the ablest men of the day as a manager and organizer" of politics. A resurgence of the Oregon territorial question consumed Polk's

26 The Cincinnati Enquirer Sunday Magazine, 19 January 1936; Parker, Sanders of Grass Hills, 101; George N. Sanders to William L. Marcy, 18 October 1853, Despatches from United States Consuls in London, 1790-1906, vol. 23 (Washington, D.C.: The National Archives and Record Service, 1959) proves he moved to New York in 1845, not 1847 as some sources state; The exact date the family moved is not certain, but it appears George went east first, and then sent for Anna and the children. See letter to Mrs. Lewis Sanders from Anna, 9 October 1845, Correspondence, 1844-1846, Sanders Family Papers; As the June Days in France occurred June 23-26, 1848, George N. would not have been present for the birth of his namesake. See Chapter III.

27 [Corry], Biographical Encyclopaedia, 539.
administration at this time, and Sanders delved into the dispute. After President Polk settled the northern boundary issue, the question arose of how to dispose of the land that had been jointly occupied by the United States and Great Britain for many years. Sanders entered the negotiations as an agent for the Hudson’s Bay Company, the British company which owned the rights to the Oregon territory. As the company’s agent Sanders proved to be shrewd and resourceful, but ultimately unsuccessful. Although he had the support of influential congressmen, President Polk and other important men distrusted him. The integrity and territorial rights of the United States were at stake, and Polk believed the nation had invested too much time in settling the Oregon land to make a faulty business decision regarding the final purchasing arrangement.

The Oregon territory had occupied Anglo-American diplomacy for some time. By virtue of the 1818 Convention, the United States and Great Britain jointly occupied the Oregon country for a period of ten years, with the northern boundary established at the 49th parallel from the Lake of the Woods to the Rocky Mountains. On August 6, 1827, the two nations agreed to extend joint occupation indefinitely, but allow either party to abrogate the agreement with one year’s notice. Negotiations continued, during which Great Britain declared ownership as far south as the 42nd parallel, while the United States claimed territory up to 54° 40’. Indeed, the boundary claim issue became part of the 1844 Democratic platform and Polk’s presidential policy and later the slogan of “Fifty-Four Forty or Fight” became the rallying cry for expansionists and Democrats. In 1846, many Americans felt betrayed when Polk backed down from his original stance and agreed to the 49th parallel in a treaty with Great Britain, reaffirming the existing northern
boundary. Although he had earlier abrogated the joint occupation, the ambiguous wording of the treaty left questions as to the possessory rights of the Hudson’s Bay Company and its accessory, the Puget’s Sound Agricultural Company. What was the extent of their holdings? How much authority did they possess over trade and navigation of the Columbia River? What was the territory’s value? Sanders, agent for the Company, would have to settle these questions along with the perspective buyer, the United States government.

In February 1847, Sanders first contacted Hudson’s Bay representative, Sir George Simpson, the overseas governor. Simpson and Sir John Henry Pelly, Governor of the Company, were the two people primarily responsible for policy-making in regard to the Oregon territory. Simpson hoped to sell the Company’s possessory rights to the United States government, but was pessimistic about the prospects, due to the added financial burden of the nation’s war with Mexico. After he met Sanders, however, his optimism returned. Enthusiastic and confident, Sanders approached Simpson, representing a group of private investors who were interested in purchasing the Company’s rights for $500,000, and reselling them to the federal government for a considerable profit. Simpson dismissed this proposal, so Sanders suggested that he could personally fulfill the purchase agreement by the first session of the Thirtieth Congress by using his political connections. “He is a very keen, intelligent, active man and has a good

deal of influence with the Polk administration," Simpson acknowledged, "but is not to be trusted too far." Nevertheless, Simpson was willing to work with Sanders in order to divest the Company of its Oregon claims.

Sanders was motivated by the desire to secure a substantial commission for his services. He rejected Simpson's initial offer as inadequate, because Sanders recognized he would have to share his commission with "A, B, C, D, and E," who had given him their support, as well as with "1, 2, 3, and 4," while leaving at least a twelve to fifteen per cent commission for himself. Therefore, in March 1848, Sanders traveled to London to meet with Pelly and other Company officials to obtain a more lucrative arrangement for himself. The resulting contract, taking effect on April 28, 1848, contained incredible terms. It stated,

... Mr. George N. Sanders shall negotiate the sale of the said property of all kinds to the United States Government for the sum of four hundred and ten thousand dollars,—that Mr. Sanders shall receive 2 1/2 per Cent on the sum above mentioned as Commission, and any excess beyond that Sum for his own use. The Sale is to take place within 12 months or the Contract becomes null and void. The Date of the document is April 26th 1848.

The Company agreed to accept $410,000 in exchange for the rights of Hudson's Bay and Puget Sound Companies. Therefore, if Sanders could obtain the proposed $1,000,000 from the U. S. Government, then with his commission and the excess in price combined, he stood to make $600,250! Sanders and the Company officials agreed to keep silent about the financial arrangements, but later Sanders deceivingly represented the Hudson's Bay Company as the party who would accept nothing less than the "low price" of one million dollars, so that he could receive the larger profit from his initial offer. In addition
to the contract, Sanders demanded that a company representative be present in
Washington with full authority to conclude a deal with the Federal Government, and the
company chose Henry Hulse Berens to fulfil this duty. Simpson's assistant, Duncan
Finlayson, accompanied Berens. Having fulfilled his objective, Sanders optimistically
returned to the United States to confer with his supporters.²⁹

Sanders did, indeed, have the support of influential politicians who were in favor of
obtaining the Hudson's Bay Company's possessory rights in Oregon. They included
Secretary of State James Buchanan and Senators John C. Calhoun, Lewis Cass, John J.
Crittenden, Edward A. Hannegan, Sam Houston, and Sidney Breese. Sanders also
claimed to have the backing of President Polk, but this assertion was untrue. In his diary
Polk wrote, "Mr. Buchanan read a private letter from Sir George Simpson to a friend in
New York [Sanders], offering to sell to a company, or the U. S., all the rights of the
Hudson's Bay company in Oregon, including the right to navigate the Columbia River, for
one million of Dollars. . . . It was the subject of conversation in the Cabinet, but I did not
deem it advisable to take any action upon it, at least for the present."³⁰ During Sanders'
one year contract, Polk did not change his mind, but Sanders still believed he had ample
support in Congress to complete the sale.

As soon as Berens and Finlayson arrived in the United States, Sanders told them to

²⁹ Hunter Miller, ed., Treaties and other International Acts of the United States of
America (Washington, 1937), 1003-1004, 1008; Galbraith, "Influence Man," 161-165;
For greater detail see John S. Galbraith, The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial

³⁰ Milo Quaife, ed., The Diary of James K. Polk, vol. III (Chicago: A. C. McClurg
& Co., 1910), 404-405; Galbraith, "Influence Man," 164.
proceed to Washington immediately, as conclusion of the deal appeared imminent. On August 4, 1848, after the Company’s representatives arrived in the capitol, Sanders reiterated his belief that the Senate would soon approve purchasing the possessory rights to Oregon. Then on August 7, 1848, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations reported:

That the President be requested to extinguish, by purchase, in such manner as he may deem advisable, the rights of the Hudson Bay Company and the Puget Sound Land Company to the navigation of the Columbia River, and all property and other possessory rights held by them in the Territory of Oregon: Provided, That the sum to be given on the part of this Government shall not exceed one million of dollars.

Characteristically, Sanders had allowed his optimism to weaken his perception. On August 11, Sanders’ supporter Edward A. Hannegan, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, brought the issue before a secret session of the Senate, where it was rejected. An unidentified senator moved that a committee be assembled to ascertain the value of the land, buildings, cattle, and other property in Oregon before making a decision, and the topic was not re-introduced before August 14, when Congress adjourned. Sanders had overestimated his support, but he did not give up hope. He still had eight more months to fulfill his contract, and he was not one to sit back and wait for something to happen. Sanders was a man of action.

An issue which hindered Anglo-American negotiations was the right to navigate the Columbia River. The 1846 treaty, in ambiguous terms, conceded the navigation rights to the Company and to Englishmen trading with it, but it was unclear if that right ceased

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31Miller, Treaties, 1008; Galbraith, “Influence Man,” 166-167.
when the Company no longer held possessory rights. Articles II, III, and IV were most
relevant to the debate.

Article II
From the point at which the forty-ninth parallel of north latitude shall be
found to intersect the great northern branch of the Columbia River, the
navigation of the said branch shall be free ad open to the Hudson’s Bay
Company and to all British subject trading with the same, to the point
where the said branch meets the main stream of the Columbia, and thence
down the said main stream to the Ocean, with free access into and through
the said River or rivers, it being understood that all the usual portages
along the line thus described shall in like manner be free and open.

Article III
In the future appropriation of the territory, south of the forty-ninth parallel
of north latitude, as provided in the first article of this Treaty, the
possessory rights of the Hudson’s Bay Company and of all British subjects
who may be already in the occupation of land or other property, lawfully
acquired within the said Territory, shall be respected.

Article IV
The farms, lands, and other property of every description belonging to the
Puget’s Sound Agricultural Company on the north side of the Columbia
River, shall be confirmed to the said Company. In case however the
situation of those farms and lands should be considered by the United
States to be of public and political importance, and the United States’
Government should signify a desire to obtain possession of the whole, or of
any part thereof, the property so required shall be transferred to the said
Government, at a proper valuation, to be agreed upon between the
Parties.\textsuperscript{32}

The vague wording in this treaty bothered some politicians like Secretary Buchanan.

Before he could fully support purchasing the rights to Oregon, Buchanan wanted both
governments to negotiate another treaty, whereby Great Britain specifically gave up its
navigation rights to the Columbia. Lord Palmerston, the British Foreign Secretary,
thought the navigation rights was the only treaty concession that had allowed Britain to

\textsuperscript{32}Miller, \textit{Treaties}, 958-959.
retain her respectability, and he would neither give up the rights nor allow the Hudson’s Bay Company to do so. On the other hand, Buchanan believed that the Senate would not accept the Company’s terms and compromise American sovereignty without the exclusive navigation rights of the Columbia River. The 1846 treaty was indecisive about whether British subjects had the right to navigate the Columbia if the Company sold its rights.

Since the official treaty left the issue unclear, Sanders obtained the services of two prominent attorneys to ascertain their opinions regarding the territorial and navigation rights. He retained Senator Daniel Webster for a $5,000 fee and property lawyer Richard S. Coxe for an unknown amount. Sanders’ goal was to assure Buchanan that it was unnecessary for the British government explicitly to consent to the Company’s arrangements, as well as to persuade skeptical senators that the Company’s possessory rights were valuable and worth purchasing. In answer to Buchanan’s objection, Webster concluded that, “the reservation of the right in the Oregon treaty to navigate the Columbia river, enures to the benefit of the Hudson’s Bay Company alone. The object was not a general grant of privilege to English commerce, or English subjects, generally.” Therefore, as soon as the Company sold its possessory rights, it had, in fact, abdicated full navigation rights to the United States. Although both Webster and Coxe gave unqualified endorsements to the Company’s proposition, the Senate still refused to consider it before adjournment. Consequently, before the next session opened in December, Sanders secured the opinions of other important lawyers and politicians namely John Rose, Louis McLane, Josiah Randall, Edwin M. Stanton, George M. Bibb, and John Van Buren in order to solidify congressional support. Sanders did not reveal how much he had paid for
these opinions, but he reported to Simpson that he had disbursed approximately $10,000 in compensation for legal aid. If Sanders could not conclude the business arrangement in the first session of Congress, he wanted to make sure that he had enough votes before the next session opened in December, even if it meant expending thousands of dollars to gain those votes.33

After Congress reconvened Simpson anxiously awaited Sanders' summons to come to Washington. Sanders assured him it would be before January 10, 1849, but he did not notify Simpson until February 6. Sanders telegraphed, "Special order Thursday certain pass. Come on." Again, Sanders was too enthusiastic, because only ten senators voted in favor of acquiring the Company's possessory rights, while forty were opposed or undecided. Led by Senator Henry S. Foote of Mississippi, the antagonists insisted that Great Britain specifically had to release navigation rights of the Columbia, while other senators argued that the Company's holdings were worthless. Amid accusations of bribery and misrepresentation, Sanders failed to secure a purchase arrangement. Because of his embellishment of the holdings in Oregon and his manipulation of politicians and friends, he also crippled the Company's reputation and its ability to negotiate in the future. The lawyers kept their "legal fees," while Sanders received nothing except criticism.34 Sanders later claimed that he had acted "openly and above board," but Company officials

33Webster to Sanders, 16 August 1848, as cited in Hudson's Bay Company, Extent and Value of the Possessory Rights of the Hudson's Bay Company in Oregon, South of Forty-Ninth Degree (Montreal: J. Lovell, 1849), 9; Galbraith, "Influence Man," 166-167, 170.

34Galbraith, "Influence Man," 171-173.
and politicians in Washington felt otherwise. Simpson, who had always been suspicious of Sanders, criticized his performance as agent for the Hudson’s Bay Company, stating,

Sanders has used very great exertions in this business, but . . . the unfavorable issue of the resolution arose very much from over-confidence on his part, which prevented his being sufficiently attentive at the moment to the importance of having all his friends in the house to support the measure; indeed several gentlemen told me they had little doubt that if Sanders had taken the precaution of collecting the supports of the measure when the Resolution was proposed, it would have been passed.  

Simpson correctly suspected that Sanders had allowed optimism to cloud his judgment. He also believed the political climate had afforded opportunity for success, and that Sanders was just incompetent. Ultimately, Sanders’ own dishonesty prevented him from reaping the fruits of his labor, namely the $600,250 commission. Although President Polk was favorably disposed to possessing Oregon; he was cautious about committing one million dollars from the United States treasury without knowing exactly what the government was buying. Moreover, Polk also distrusted Sanders and his relationships with other politicians. On January 20, 1849, the president recorded in his diary:

At that time the proposition was that the U. S. should pay a round sum of a million of dollars to extinguish all the rights of the Hudson’s Bay company in Oregon. I refused to do so, as I will now refuse, as I told Mr. Hannegan and Mr. Breese, and now repeated to the Cabinet. I stated that I suspected it was a project of speculators who hung about the lobbies of Congress, and whose only object was to make a handsome sum for themselves as the agents of the Hudson’s Bay company. A man named George Saunders [sic] of Ky., I understood at the last session, was in Washington on this business, & represented himself to be the agent of the Hudson’s Bay company. The same individual, I understand, is again in Washington on the same business. From what I have heard of him he is unscrupulous and

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35Ibid., 174; Letter from Sanders, 10 February 1852, in New York Herald, 12 February 1852.
unprincipled. Sanders' involvement with the Hudson's Bay Company was typical of his later exploits. He offended some people, like Polk, by his questionable methods and fascinated others by the likelihood of his success. The latter group he was able to manipulate for his own advantage. On the other hand, he was generally unsuccessful in business endeavors when the motivation was personal gain and when he employed unscrupulous methods.

On April 28, 1849, Sanders' contract with the Company lapsed, and he moved on to more fanatical and controversial schemes. In 1852, he stated, "My agency has long since ended, and I am in no degree interested in this matter more than any other citizen."

The Company did not relinquish its possessory rights to the United States until 1863. Meanwhile, Sanders had more important projects in mind, including lucrative business deals and organizing the Democrats to nominate the proper presidential candidate for the 1852 election. Specifically, Sanders wanted to find a younger, fresher statesmen to lead the prosperous nation, to define the political agenda, and to shape both foreign and domestic political policy. Sanders may have suffered a setback in his career with the Hudson's Bay Company, but he did not allow such obstacles to deter his mission of arranging political events to simultaneously promote his principles and to enlarge his pocketbook.

George N. Sanders' early years in Kentucky laid the foundation for the life of this unique man. Family members, Lewis Sanders and George Nicholas, had instilled in him

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*36Entry on 20 January 1849, James K. Polk's Diary, vol. IV, 302.*

*37The New York Herald, 12 February 1852.*
solid democratic ideals and the sense of duty to promote them. Furthermore, the Sanderses were a family of action, who used their knowledge of current affairs and strong character in order to shape political events and define agendas, not just wait for other people to take the lead. George's rural, southern upbringing also taught him the value of family and close friends, an attribute which made him vulnerable in certain situations. As his father Lewis had realized with Aaron Burr, George Sanders would soon discover that acquaintances could betray his trust, resulting in devastating consequences for his family. Sanders learned much from his ancestors, but he also exhibited a unique personality all his own.

Beginning with the 1843 meeting in Ghent and continuing, Sanders developed a taste for managing political and business affairs on the national scene. He possessed the enthusiasm and the charisma to make things happen, but he also had a volatile nature which created controversy and conflict with people of differing opinions. He failed to fulfill his contract with the Hudson's Bay Company, and although he moved on to larger projects and experienced some personal success, falling just short of his goals would be a recurring theme in his life. As long as he allowed personal gain to motivate his activities, Sanders could not achieve ascendency of his principles. Yet Sanders enjoyed life. He had an insatiable desire for champagne and the company of good friends, and he relished the successes he did achieve.
Chapter II
“Progress of Democracy vs. Old Fogy Retrograder”

Fogyism is a generic term, derived from two Greek words—phogos, a fog or cold in the head, and ismos, a donkey. A Fogy, therefore, is a fog-brained donkey, or a donkey with a perpetual cold in his head.  

It was a triumphant celebration, held at the Astor House in New York, on the evening of August 26, 1853, in honor of the energetic, radical, and ever-optimistic George Nicholas Sanders, leader of the Young Americans. The New York Times called it a “highly interesting and cordial festivity.” Members of both the Democratic and Whig parties were present, including several Congressmen, newspaper editors, and other government officials. The celebrants raised toasts and made speeches—all in the name of progress.

The highlight of the evening’s festival was a farewell to George N. Sanders, whom President Franklin Pierce had recently appointed as Consul-General to London. The appointment was more than a personal accomplishment for the native Kentuckian; it was a victory for all of Young America, for it symbolized acceptance of the movement which Sanders advocated. While one guest, Governor Howell Cobb of Georgia, acknowledged that he was one of the “old fogies,” he still professed “great respect for Young America.”

Unfortunately for Sanders, success was fleeting, as both his consulship and


Young America proved short-lived.

Young America was primarily a slogan and a sentiment. While different people used the label in order to convey different meanings, above all it symbolized youthful nationalism. Most notably Young America was identified with a progressive group within the Democratic party, who rose to prominence between 1849 and 1853. A group largely based on transient objectives, rather than transcendental ideals, its leaders were reformers, politicians, wire pullers, organizers, and financiers; not idealistic statesmen who led by the magnetism of their vision.40

George N. Sanders played a pivotal role in this democratic faction in a variety of ways; he was a behind-the-scenes political organizer, editor of the Democratic Review, businessman, and diplomat. Sanders was quite active, but he chose someone else to lead the movement to prominence. He worked tirelessly to achieve the group's immediate object, securing the presidency for Stephen A. Douglas in 1852. Sanders considered Douglas a young statesman who embodied Young American ideals and who would champion the movement through legislative and diplomatic channels. Unfortunately, the outcome of this endeavor was symbolic of Sanders' life, he knocked success off the shelf in his attempt to grasp it. Sanders possessed a vision for Young America, but as a result of his own extreme nature, he alienated most Americans instead of inspiring them. The failure of Young America mirrored that of its dedicated protagonist, for without a defined

40Siert F. Riepma, “Young America: A Study in American Nationalism before the Civil War” (Ph.D. diss., Western Reserve University, 1939), 3; see also David B. Danbom, “The Young America Movement,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 67 (June 1928): 294.
agenda or a nationally prominent leader, Young America remained just a part of national jingoism, a sentiment. The *New York Herald* best explained the ambiguous concept:

> Little Douglas is not Young America . . . nor is George Saunders [*sic*] . . . On the contrary, Young America is the elastic, vigorous, active progressive spirit of the American people, which looks forward, and marches forward . . . and goes onward with the progress of the age . . . Young America is at once progressive and conservative upon the constitution, State rights, and the principles which bind the Union together. Young America believes in the durability and expansion of the Union—that we have spread, are spreading, and must continue to spread, the mantle of our delightful institutions over contiguous territories and islands, for some time to come.41

Sanders merely latched on to the progressive nationalistic concept which had begun, in some form, several years earlier.

Edwin de Leon, a South Carolina journalist and later American Consul to Egypt, originated the phrase “Young America” in a commencement address to South Carolina College in 1845. He noted that there were nationalistic groups like Young Germany, Young England, and Young France, so why not a “Young America”? After all, America was “towering above his continental brethren in statute.” De Leon urged the audience of young Americans to steer the nation’s course toward fulfillment of its glorious destiny. “Nations, like men, have their seasons of infancy, manly vigor, and decrepitude; our young Giant of the West stands now in the full flush of exulting manhood, and the worn-out Powers of the Old World may not hope either to restrain or impede his onward progress.” The United States was a nation in its prime, and no Old World power could stand in the

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41*The New York Herald*, 14 April 1852.
way of its progress.\textsuperscript{42}

The United States was no longer an infant nation, conceived and raised under the direction of such founding fathers as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. It had matured, grown immensely in population, and many Americans besides de Leon recognized its growing prosperity and strength. Everywhere people were aware of a certain nationalistic and progressive spirit. Americans witnessed the effects of progress daily. The steamboat and the textile machine surpassed their predecessors, while Christianity and democracy supplanted paganism and monarchy.\textsuperscript{43} Although America had progressed beyond the Revolutionary generation, one aspect of its heritage had not changed. The United States was still conscious of its special destiny, to serve as an example of a successful democratic republic, thriving and economically prosperous and without the corruptive Old World influences. “Attempt not,” a Young American stated, “to stop it in its onward career; for as well might you command the sun not to break through the fleecy clouds.”\textsuperscript{44}

International affairs brought America’s destiny into focus. Victory in the Mexican War, “one of the grandest and least expensive [wars] known to military history,” convinced Americans of their power and piqued their interest in participation in foreign

\textsuperscript{42}Edwin de Leon, \textit{The Positions and Duties of “Young America”} (Columbia, SC: A. S. Johnston, 1845), 14, 25; also note the chauvinistic tone of Young America rhetoric, Riepma, “Young America,” 123.


\textsuperscript{44}Pierre Soulé’s speech in the \textit{Congressional Globe}, 32 Cong., 1st sess., appendix 353-354.
affairs. When the European revolutions of 1848 were defeated, however, Young Americans were no longer content to sit back and serve as an example to countries who remained inattentive. The path toward fulfillment of America's destiny lay in actively aiding the suffering people crushed by despotism. Did not Americans once suffer the same fate under the monarchical heel of Great Britain? Indeed, intervention abroad was necessary to preserve America's own unique institutions from corruptive influences. The Mexican War prompted the spirit of nationalism and the European revolutions provided the occasion for progressive action.

This feeling of progress, nationalism, youth, and destiny manifested itself in the slogan of "Young America," and during the 1830s and 1840s this slogan took many forms. Notable persons such as Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson, as well as lesser known individuals, expressed the slogan's ideas in poetry, prose, and oratory. While the main ideas behind the label remained constant, the specific paths toward progress and perfectibility tended to diverge. For example, George Henry Evans adopted the name Young America! for his newspaper, dedicating it as the "Organ of the National Reform Society" or the Agrarian League. Under his direction the newspaper emphasized westward expansion and the need for homestead legislation to secure free land.

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for settlers. The implementation of these acts would result in lessening the woes of the unemployed, greatly aggravated since the 1837 depression. In another vein, Hermann Kriege, a German political refugee, came to New York in 1845 and began a German and American socialist group named *Jung Amerika*. Kriege's ideas differed sharply from other groups using the "Young America" label, as he brought with him the revolutionary mentality of Karl Marx and Young Europe. 46 While the "Young America" slogan embraced different meanings, its principle ideas of progress and youthful nationalism remained constant, and in 1852 it became solely identified with the Young America faction in the Democratic party. 47

George N. Sanders, the colorful and cosmopolitan leader of Young America, emerged to provide a degree of order, unity, and meaning to the movement. He became the spokesman, organizer, and the spirit behind Young America. Sanders not only urged American involvement in the European revolutions, but he also participated in the street-fighting of June Days in France and helped to construct barricades. His presence in France was the result of a deal with George Law, a New York financier and steamship businessman, whereby they purchased 144,000 antiquated muskets from the U. S. War Department for the purpose of reselling them. The muskets were made obsolete by the army's adoption of the new percussion lock which replaced the steel and flint lock. "I

46 Riepma, "Young America," 7, 59, 66-67; Evans' *Young America!* (New York, 1845-) was a Saturday weekly, previously named the *Working Man's Advocate*. It advocated freedom of the public lands, free soil, free labor, and prohibition of state debt and paper money. Evans was a reformer.

47 Danbom, "Young America," 295.
went to Europe to dispose of these arms to the republicans there,” Sanders stated in 1852, “but before the arrangements could be definitively effected,” events “had defeated the patriot cause. The arms are still unsold.” Moreover, Sanders responded to critics who believed he had broken national neutrality laws, defending his right as a private citizen of a neutral country to sell arms to a foreign belligerent. He also justified his involvement in the musket deal, citing the acquiescence of the U.S. government, “The purchase by us was notorious[,] . . . to export and sell them to European patriots.”

There is evidence that Sanders had in his possession a sample of Colt's revolvers to offer for sale, as well. It is quite possible that Sanders proposed to sell the arms to French republicans whom he had met the year prior during the Siege of Paris.

Maunsell Field, an American lawyer and author, related a humorous episode about Sanders occurring in spring 1848 after they met on the steamship to England during his European trip to sell the arms. Sanders and George W. Kendall, editor of the New Orleans Picayune, went to the opera in London one night, where “they purposely made the most uncouth remarks, and asked the most absurd questions of those who happened to be seated near them. A well-intentioned but officious Cockney wine-dealer came to their rescue.” Sanders and Kendall unmercifully joked with the man during the performance, telling “the most marvelous stories of American savagery,” and then asked him to dine

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48 The New York Herald, 12 February 1852; Letter of Introduction from James Buchanan to the United States Diplomatic Agents and Consuls concerning George N. Sanders, March 8, 1848, The Political Correspondence of the Late George N. Sanders, Confederate Commissioner to Europe during the Civil War (New York, 1914), no. 16; Curti, “Young America,” 35, 41; see also Merle Curti, “George N. Sanders—American Patriot of the Fifties” South Atlantic Quarterly (January 1928): 79-87, for the specific movements of Sanders during the Young America period.
with them afterward. Field continued:

They related to him the most horrible stories of Indian butchery until his very hair stood on end. About 2 o'clock in the morning they began a war dance, accompanied by the most hideous howlings, when suddenly, brandishing some of Sanders' sample revolvers, they chased the now thoroughly 'demoralized' Briton from the house. The noise which the tormentors made, added to the shrieks of alarm uttered by their victim, aroused every body in the hotel, and came near resulting in the summary and ignominious rejection from it of those who had created the disturbance.

The next day the two pranksters apologized to their victim, and they ended upon "terms of the most cordial and affectionate friendship." This anecdote was typical of Sanders, jovial, outrageous, and bordering on self-destructive, while always in the midst of a business deal or conflict.

A contemporary of Sanders, the lawyer and editor William M. Corry from Cincinnati, described his life as,

... one incessant action. He was constantly on his feet, moving in every direction, and by instinct toward his friends, and for their co-operation in the striking and useful objects, principally political, which absorbed his mind. His house, his hand, his purse, were theirs. ... He required little sleep, but strong meat and drink, although rarely guilty of excess. The vitality and volume of the man were gigantic, and seemingly inexhaustible. ... He could find his man and make his statements, his argument, and his propositions in the shortest possible time, surpassing all men in his force, clearness, distinctness, and point. ... At a dinner table, either private or public, he was a fine host, and was greatly devoted to Champagne, for which he spent thousands while living in New York.

As far as Sanders' physical appearance, Corry noted that,

A smile habitually lighted his face; his voice was winning and yet penetrating. ... His great trunk, and still greater head, with its powerful

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49 Maunsell B. Field, Memories of Many Men and of Some Women (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1874), 37, 42-43; Henry Labouchere to Lord Northbrook, April 23 (no year), Political Correspondence, Sanders, no. 130.
features and massive weight of disheveled hair; his radiant blue eyes; his pleasant smile and speech; his familiar gesture and his cordial welcome, put all . . . at ease.\textsuperscript{50}

Sanders was blessed with a certain charisma. His good friend Nathaniel Hawthorne once remarked that “some men possessed a kind of magnetic influence over him which he could not resist, however it might lead him.”\textsuperscript{51} Sanders was one of these men. Conversely, those who crossed the volatile Kentuckian and those who saw through his winning smile became his most bitter of enemies.

Sanders brought energy, (often unrealistic) optimism, influence, and a voice to Young America, a movement generally composed of men from the new states. Although there was not a definite membership list, advocates of Young America included Sanders, Corry, Senator Pierre Soulé of Louisiana, South Carolinian Edwin de Leon, editor John L. O’Sullivan, Senator David Yulee of Florida, Robert J. Walker of Mississippi, Tennessee Representative William H. Polk, Senator William Gwinn and Representative Edward C. Marshall of California, Robert F. Stockton of New Jersey, and several New Yorkers, including capitalist George Law, Representative Daniel E. Sickles, businessman Dean Richmond, and James J. Roosevelt. Midwest supporters included Wisconsin Senator Isaac P. Walker, Representative William Allen and editor Samuel Medary from Ohio, and

\textsuperscript{50}[Corry], \textit{Biographical Encyclopædia}, 540; Sanders did, indeed, have a large head, his hat size was 7 7/8, “George N. Sanders” in Genealogy, Sanders Family Papers.

\textsuperscript{51}Waldo H. Dunn, \textit{The Life of Donald G. Mitchell} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1922), 257; The dinner party was held 30 April 1854 at the Willard Hotel in Washington. Mitchell, an office seeker, noted the date and Hawthorne’s comment in his diary. See also Nathaniel Hawthorne, \textit{The Letters}, 1813-1843, ed. Thomas Woodson, et al., vol. XV (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984), 57-58.
five gentlemen from Illinois—Senator James Shields, Representative and later Senator
William A. Richardson, Senator Sidney Breese, Representative John Wentworth, and of
course, the “Little Giant” Stephen A. Douglas. Out of this group, however, Sanders and
Douglas were the most influential to Young America.52

From this distinguished group arose the substance and vigor of Young America. They primarily represented the western ideals of “manifest destiny,” and the development of capitalism—all in the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian tradition of democracy. In relation to domestic policy, Young Americans tended to favor state’s rights, low taxes, hard money, popular sovereignty for territories, and direct election of President, judges, and senators.53 They also tended to oppose re-establishment of the Bank of the United States.54

Capitalistic pragmatism and the perfectionistic benevolence common before the Civil War, however, tempered this traditional democratic stance. But as many of the domestic issues were old sources of political conflict and Young Americans were all about the “new,” they turned instead to fresh issues, primarily foreign affairs. In so doing, they determined to supplant the long term issues of the Democratic party and also the party regulars—the old fogies. To Young Americans, the old fogies represented all that was wrong with the Democratic party.

In foreign affairs the old fogies and the Young Americans were diametrically

52Danbom, “Young America,” 294-295; Riepma, “Young America,” 128.

53“George used to say . . . he had to take up Popular Sovereignty to keep out Know Nothingism [a nativist political party].” W. M. Corry to Lewis Sanders, 25 February 1858, Correspondence 1857-1859, Sanders Family Papers.

54Danbom, “Young America,” 300.
opposed. The elder statesmen tended to favor isolationism, citing George Washington’s presidential farewell address and the Monroe doctrine, while their younger brethren favored an active role of intervention in order to spread democratic institutions and protect American interests. For example, author and politician Thomas R. Whitney expressed the typical old fogy stance, arguing that, “although our sympathies must, and will, ever be with those who struggle against oppression, it is neither our policy nor our duty to involve ourselves in their affairs, to jeopardize our peace, or embroil our nation.”

On the other hand, Sanders and Young America, through the Democratic Review organ, re-interpreted Washington’s and Monroe’s visions and concluded that “The whole history of the United States is a history of progress; physical, geographical progress; intellectual, moral, civil, social, and political progress.” Sanders argued that “Neutrality . . . is the weak resort of weak nations” which arose “from craven timidity, and end[ed] in self-degradation of the most humiliating character, sacrificing the interests of our artisans and merchants, and, in fact, of every class of our citizens.” Pierre Soulé of Louisiana added:

To insist . . . our interests, our wants, our rights, our obligations . . . should remain what they were sixty-five years ago, is to scorn the teaching of our judgement, and to belie the wisdom of God. Suppose . . . that Spain chooses to transfer Cuba to a foreign government, would we stand still? Suppose England were to exercise . . . her dictatorship over the Central American republics, would we stand still? Suppose Russia should reissue her ukase of 1821 . . . would we stand still? No sir; we would not--we could not.  

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Young America's views were cosmopolitan in nature, advocating the need for expansion and intervention in order to protect American interests, while the elder Democrats followed the strictly constructed ideals of their predecessors.

Sanders, cosmopolitan himself, publicized the Young American movement both at home and abroad, and through his efforts he reconciled the efforts of business speculators, sympathizers of European republicans struggling for liberty, and those who desired American expansion. He shaped those efforts into a movement which brought many personal agendas into communion. It was Sanders who gathered the movement's various sentiments and activities and formed them into a concrete set of political ideas with a definite goal. It was Sanders who purchased the Democratic Review and turned it into an organ for Young America and Douglas' nomination. And it was Sanders who organized, through backstairs politics as well as widespread publicity, the movement to elect Stephen A. Douglas president in 1852. As one historian notes, Sanders "truly had a significance out of proportion to his accomplishment, not only in his reflection of the spirit of his times but in his idea of Young America." Sanders organized and proclaimed the Young American ideas, while depending on the Little Giant to implement those ideas.

Sanders remained a man of action and vision, but allowed others to lead the way

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56The European "democratic republicans" were the revolutionaries and ordinary citizens who wanted to supplant the monarchical order with institutions composed of elected representatives chosen by the citizenry. This concept should not be confused with the republican philosophy that was giving way to liberalism in the United States after the Revolutionary War. See Steven Watts, The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

57Riepma, "Young America," 70, 73; The various letters in Political Correspondence, Sanders attests to Sanders' cosmopolitan spirit.
both in politics and business; hence, he never quite arrived as a national figure or rich man.

While he enjoyed some prosperity and recognition, he never achieved total success. Yet he was influential and significant in his own right. A newspaper article stated,

George is a character. He is a “whole team,” and a steam train to boot. His intellect is always at work. He sees everybody, knows everybody, and talks to everybody high and low. He has little veneration for great men. He would ask Chief Justice Taney to take a drink, and criticise Washington, were he living, to his face . . . he takes a view of the whole country, and is ready to take charge of it too.  

As Sanders was in many ways the spokesman for Young America, his personal character symbolized the movement he endorsed. So while he worked behind the scenes as an agent for other men, he never received full recognition for his work. However, he was the object of much of the antagonism which befell great men, attracting opposition through his own merit.

Sanders defended the actions made in several of his business schemes, as he likewise had to defend the musket deal contrived with George Law. His own involvement in business speculation allowed him to bring capitalistic interests under the wing of Young America. To Sanders idealism and profit were compatible and did not lessen the sentiment for struggling republicans. If some money could be made while aiding oppressed people, then what of it? Also, business speculation meant progress to Young

58 An undated clipping from the Philadelphia Press in the Sanders Family Papers; Riepma, “Young America,” 72-74.

Americans as the United States moved toward its destiny as a world commercial power. Thus, business, arms, and intervention were closely intertwined for Sanders and Young America. Not only did Sanders defend himself against allegations of improper behavior in the musket deal and the Hudson’s Bay Company but he also justified other questionable business dealings.

In 1850 Sanders was involved in a scheme to organize a subsidized steamship line between America and Africa, stopping at the European ports on the return voyage and benefitting several interests. The “Ebony Line” would help ameliorate the slavery issue by colonizing free blacks in Liberia, thereby attracting support from benevolent perfectionistic societies, colonization societies, and southern slaveholders who feared the threat that free blacks imposed to their system of control. Since the steamship line also had the purposes of suppressing the slave trade by helping the merchant marine and the navy in the Atlantic, exploiting the African continent’s resources, and serving as a mail and freight carrier, patriots and capitalists alike supported the scheme. Sanders’ antagonists, however, believed he placed too much emphasis on the expected commercial benefits, making its purpose unconstitutional as a federally subsidized line.

“We had an unquestionable right to propose the plan,” Sanders stated. “We did so, because we believed the undertaking was honorable and useful, and might be

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60 A letter from William M. Evarts, Acting District Attorney, to Daniel Webster, Secretary of State, on April 28, 1851, proves that Sanders and John L. O’Sullivan were arrested for breaking the neutrality laws in an attempt to sell the antiquated muskets to Cuban filibusterers. The court found Sanders and O’Sullivan not guilty. Daniel Webster, The Papers of Daniel Webster (Hanover, N. H.: University Press of New England, 1974), 365-366; Sanders’ letter on February 10, 1852 claims the muskets were still unsold and that he had not acted illegally. New York Herald, 12 February 1852.
profitable.” He also knew, as did other businessmen, that the Ebony Line was impossible without the support of private capitalists. Therefore, newspapers speculated that Sanders and New York financier and steamship businessman George Law had formed another partnership. Law denied the charge that he was involved with the line, but certainly some steamship entrepreneur would profit. The Ebony Line scheme, like the musket deal, was characteristic of Young America. Business interests (steamships) were aligned with progress and benevolence (commerce and colonization), while the people involved formed political friendships. For instance, the slaveholders of Virginia, home state of Douglas’ 1852 running mate R. M. T. Hunter, allied themselves with the steamship interests of New York, with which presidential candidate Douglas was identified. Thus, the “Ebony Line” scheme symbolized both the practical and idealistic endeavors of George N. Sanders and Young America, but it too failed to achieve success.  

61Riepma, “Young America,” 79-81; see Sanders’ letter in the New York Herald, 12 February 1852; In his letter to the French people Sanders’ expressed similar views remarking that colonization would introduce “the germ of American civilization into the bosom of Ethiopia” and emphasizing that “It is the first instance of colonization for beneficence and not for gain.” George N. Sanders, Letter to the People of France (London, 1854). The letter shows that political ideas of Young America were the same as its primary spokesman; George Law’s letter denying any involvement with the “Ebony Line” in the New York Herald, 9 February 1852. Based upon Law’s past business activities and his relationship with Sanders, his denial may or may not have been true. Politicians and journalists widely accepted Law’s involvement to be the case; In Congress those who supported the project used the same arguments as Sanders, most notably Pierre Soulé, Henry Clay, and Frederick P. Stanton, Congressional Globe, 31 Cong., 1 Sess., 521; 31 Cong., 2 Sess., 246-247, 503, 574, 595, 623, 811, appendix 200-204; Letters to George Nicholas Sanders, Special Collections Department, Margaret I. King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky. A letter in Sanders’ possession on African trade from W.D. Porter, naval lieutenant, to Mr. [Frederick] Stanton, Chairman of the Committee on Naval Affairs in the House of Representatives, January 13, 1850, probably concerned the proposed line and its purpose of exploiting African resources. Sanders would have been familiar with the arguments in the debate, as he had many contacts and
Sanders not only had to unite the capitalistic interests behind Young America, but he also had to attract the interventionists and annexationists. Since he worked within many circles and knew many people, and actually participated in these nationalistic endeavors, he was the perfect person to channel their activities into the Young American movement. Underlying Sanders' efforts was the spirit of "manifest destiny." "Young America believes in the durability and in the expansion of the Union--that we have spread, are spreading, and must continue to spread, the mantle of our delightful institutions over contiguous territories and islands, for some time yet to come." Thus "manifest destiny" became Young America's rallying cry.

Known for coining the phrase "manifest destiny" in 1845 in the United States Magazine and Democratic Review, John L. O'Sullivan was an early forerunner of Young America. He expressed his support for the annexation of Texas, fearing that "other nations have undertaken to intrude themselves . . . for the avowed object of . . . checking the fulfilment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions." Even after the United States had acquired territory in the Southwest (including the present states of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, and California) and the Oregon country, Young Americans wanted more. They believed the United States had natural boundaries, like the Pacific Ocean or the North American continent, designed by Providence or God.

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was an active lobbyist. The Naval Affairs Committee approved the line, but it did not pass the House.

62 The New York Herald, 14 April 1852.
America's population was quickly growing—it was only natural—that the country should extend to those natural boundaries. Added to the "manifest destiny" spirit were the sentiments of nationalism, confidence, and ambition. "It is clear to all men of sober discernment," wrote New York Herald's James Gordon Bennett, that the United States "must soon embrace the whole hemisphere, from the icy wilderness of the North to the most prolific regions of the smiling and prolific South." Bennett expressed a popular sentiment, but Horace Greeley's New York Tribune took it one step further, declaring the "manifest destiny" movement would spread "until all Europe is one great and splendid Republic . . . and we shall all be citizens of the world." The Tribune's bold, idealistic statement was impractical, so the majority of Young Americans concurred with Judge Douglas that America's "manifest destiny" was limited to this continent, both North and Central America.63

Young Americans began to eye Mexico around 1848 and believed the doctrine of state's rights would allow their southern neighbor to happily coexist as a part of the United States, while retaining their way of life. Their less-confident opponents disagreed and speculated that such a culturally and racially different people could not be happily annexed. While Young Americans considered annexing Mexico, it was primarily Cuba, the pearl of the Antilles, that glittered like a jewel to Young Americans with expansion in

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their eyes. To Young Americans, “manifest destiny,” as stated by a Philadelphia newspaper, meant expansion “East by sunrise, West by sunset, North by the Arctic Expedition, and South as far as we darn please.” Yet on this issue, as on others, Young Americans were disunited in their motivations for desiring Cuba.

Young Americans, like other residents of the states they represented, tended to favor the annexation of Cuba for selfish, personal reasons. Southern supporters desired a new slave state, capitalistic or nationalistic reasons motivated Northerners, and proponents everywhere argued the safety of the Union could only be preserved if Cuba became a star in America’s flag. For instance, George Law, owner of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, received in 1851 a government contract to carry mail to Cuba and thereafter advocated Cuban annexation as Spanish ships at Havana continually harassed his line. Louisiana Senator Pierre Soulé’s motivation was nationalistic; he felt that it was America’s “manifest destiny” to annex Cuba, an island practically appended to Florida. Later Soulé, along with George N. Sanders and others, would play an important and controversial role in Spanish-American diplomacy during the 1854 Ostend Conference.

Although the United States official stance was that it would not seize Cuba, the government refused to condemn private filibustering, a fact that had not gone unnoticed.

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65See Chapter III for details concerning the Ostend Conference.
by European nations. American filibusterism occurred when private individuals violated international neutrality laws in order to overthrow the “backward” governments of other nations and introduce American republican institutions. Filibusters at one time saw Mexico, Cuba, and Nicaragua as targets for conquest, and felt themselves justified in their endeavors. Two of the more famous but unsuccessful filibuster expeditions were Narciso López’s (numerous) attempts to take Cuba between 1848 and 1851 and the notorious William Walker’s initially successful acquisition of Nicaragua in 1855. While outwardly denouncing these expeditions, the U. S. government and private individuals like Sanders and Law favored a successful takeover and were ready to offer assistance.

In early 1852 Young Americans and expansionists established the Order of the Lone Star, originating in New Orleans and spreading northward. To some citizens the secret Order of the Lone Star “smacks of powder, piracy, and plunder,” and that sentiment was not surprising considering a few of its members: George N. Sanders, Stephen A. Douglas, George Law, David Yulee, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Daniel Delavan of Tammany,

66 Danbom, “Young America,” 297; A Sketch of Events in the Life of George Law (New York: J. C. Derby, 1855), 44-45, explains the Crescent City affair, an altercation between Spanish ships and Law’s mail steamship; Amos A. Ettinger, “The Proposed Anglo-Franco-American Treaty of 1852 to Guarantee Cuba to Spain” Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 13 (1930): 149, 167-168. Spain requested aid from France and England in order to protect Cuba, but President Fillmore declined to sign a tripartite treaty and couched all correspondence in terms which left the door open for American annexation.

and Thomas D. Reilly of the Democratic Review. The New York Herald stated:

Now, we venture to say that no man will or can dispute the strength and terrible import of a secret revolutionary organization, numbering among its fifteen thousand members in the United States such an imposing catalogue of capitalists, military chieftains, lawyers, statesmen, and politicians. . . . Here we have men to furnish the sinews of war, including cash, steamers, munitions and provisions, and muskets and artillery.

Although the order professed to "endeavor . . . to diffuse throughout the world the principles of liberty and republicanism . . . to comfort and aid the weak--to cheer and sympathize with the oppressed," the public recognized through its thinly veiled preamble that the order had one object: "the liberation of Cuba." One newspaper explained that while the order was not engaged in Cuban filibusterism, "when a people, convenient of access, shall rise to assert their rights in battle array, the sons of the Lone Star will be apt to give them 'political, financial, and material aid.'"68 As for Sanders, officers of the federal government arrested him in 1851 for violating neutrality by attempting to sell those muskets to the Cuban filibusterers, which he was not able to sell to European revolutionaries in 1848.69 Again, Sanders actively participated in the expansionist and annexationist endeavors and was able to bring these interests under the banner of Young America. Finally, Sanders united the interventionists, already in a frenzy with the expected arrival of Louis Kossuth in the United States, with the cause of Young America.

As revolution consumed Europe in 1848, events in Hungary especially captured America’s attention. In 1849 Russian and Austrian armies crushed that country’s

68 The New York Herald, March 27, May 11, 30 August 1852.

69 Webster, Papers of Daniel Webster, 365-366.
revolution and restored control to the Hapsburg rulers east of Vienna; Governor Kossuth was sent into exile. Without fully understanding the ethnic conflict, Americans translated the situation into a quest for liberty and republicanism. Thus, when Kossuth—revolutionary leader, Hungarian exile, and charismatic statesman—toured the United States between December 1851 and July 1852 seeking financial and material aid for his fellow countrymen, American interventionists took up his cause. Ignited by Daniel Webster’s famous letter to Austrian chargé Baron Chevelier Hulsemann, Americans were reminded of their special role in the world and embraced Kossuth as the focus for their mission.70

While Americans held numerous parades and banquets in Kossuth’s honor, his presence did not please everyone. Noninterventionists, of course, disliked the country’s stance in welcoming the Magyar and blamed Kossuth for misusing the almost two hundred thousand dollars donated to the Hungarian cause. In addition, many southerners felt intervention was “a two-edged sword” that “cuts on both sides.” Southerners believed their slaves to be “the happiest class of the African race in the world,” but feared that foreign nations would follow America’s example and interfere to aid the African race. To abolitionists Kossuth symbolized the cause of oppressed people everywhere. Thus, a clash between North and South over slavery was again an issue as both sides saw Kossuth’s visit through the lenses of their own sectional self-interests.

On the other hand, Sanders and company did everything they could to aid the Hungarian rebel, and newspapers once again suspected Sanders and Law of selling their muskets to Kossuth. Both men denied the charge, but openly expressed a willingness to

70Spencer, *Louis Kossuth*, 1, 22-23; Riepma, “Young America,” 87-88.
make a deal with the exile. Sanders became close friends with the revolutionary, and, ever the optimist, he offered to purchase for Kossuth “the best & fastest going steamer in the U.S. mercantile marine” and to “arm her, man her, fit her, & steam her.” Law suspiciously advertised, at about the same time, that he had for sale “the fastest steamships in the world . . . fully armed and equipped, with cannon that will reach farther than any now in use, and manned by men that cannot be captured by any on earth.” When Kossuth learned that Sanders could not follow through with “any of those expectations, you so kindly entertained,” he then asked for a loan. As illustrated by the offer to Kossuth, Sanders’ generous nature, optimism, and sympathy for the “oppressed,” often made him promise more than he could deliver. Nevertheless, he recklessly continued scheming with revolutionaries, businessmen and politicians, in his attempts to unite Young America behind Stephen A. Douglas.

Douglas, too, jumped on the Kossuth bandwagon. In his famous speech at the Congressional banquet for Kossuth on January 7, 1852, with the upcoming presidential election in mind, the Little Giant reiterated his belief in popular sovereignty and expressed his vision for America. “We should make it our fixed principle of action to recognize the independence of every republic the moment it is established.” Amidst the applause Douglas continued, “We should establish commercial intercourse, and also diplomatic

71The Illinois State Register, 12, 17 February 1852; The New York Herald, 4, 7, 9, 12 February 1852; Riepma, “Young America,” 130; Two letters from Kossuth to G. N. Sanders, “Editor of the Democratic Review,” 21 June 1852 and 11 July 1852, Political Correspondence, Sanders, nos. 93, 94; The Sanders family were friends with the Kossuths, as well as with Mr. and Mrs. Francis A. Pulszky, Hungarian writer and patriot, who accompanied Kossuth to America, ibid., nos. 129, 170-179.
relations with such governments. It may be that the exercise of this right will give offence to the crowned heads of Europe.72 Sanders and other Young Americans were elated at Douglas’ speech. Here was the statesman destined to lead their movement in the name of nationalism and progress. By this point, Sanders had already endorsed Douglas as the leader of Young America, and thus, he united the varied interests of the movement into a concerted coalition consisting of interventionists, capitalists, expansionists, annexationists, and youthful progressive nationalists.

When the energetic George N. Sanders took a stance, he worked for its success intensely and wholeheartedly, but often to an extreme. Thus in 1851 when he decided upon the Little Giant as the Democratic nominee for president, he proceeded to purchase the old United States Magazine and Democratic Review (thereafter known as simply the Democratic Review) to serve as the Young America and Douglas organ.73 The same combination of enthusiasm and extremism which made him a valuable organizer and motivator, also alienated many would-be Douglasites and further antagonized political opponents. By personally and unapologetically attacking the old fogy candidates through the pages of the Democratic Review, Sanders ruined Douglas and his presidential campaign platform based on sectional conciliation.

Believing the 1852 presidential election should be about progressive and national

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72 The Illinois State Register, 5 February 1852.

issues that transcended sectional interests, both foreign and domestic, Douglas was the perfect candidate to represent Young America. Only thirty-eight years old himself and still vibrant and charismatic, he appealed to the youth. Free from obvious sectional ties, he stood for a united Democratic Party with a nationalist agenda that benefited all Americans. A proponent of railroads and commerce, he advocated progress. Moreover, he was politically astute and freely promised supporters the spoils of office. Yet Douglas did not embrace the Young America label, for the movement remained independent of its chosen candidate and the Little Giant strove to remain free of any label other than Democrat. Unfortunately for the candidate, and despite his protests, Douglas became associated with Young America, the actions of the volatile Sanders, and the bombastic words of the Democratic Review.

In the beginning of their acquaintance, Douglas and Sanders clearly held each other in the highest esteem. Sanders supported his campaign and offered advice, and Douglas responded that “I have great confidence in your judgement & discretion.” Later he wrote to Sanders, “I like your letters, for you do not flatter me, but write just what you think. I profitt [sic] more by your letters than any I receive.” But he was quick to clarify, “By this you must not infer that I adopt all your views, for I am not yet fully convinced that you do not know how to make a mistake in politics.” Douglas also wrote to his running mate Robert M. T. Hunter of Virginia that “He [Sanders] is invaluable to us & will remain here [New York] as the point where he can do most.” Sanders continued to be Douglas’ New York contact, but he traveled wherever his talents were useful.

34Riepma, “Young America,” 95-97.
journeying to his home state of Kentucky to quash support for favorite son William O. Butler and promote Douglas. Although Sanders' involvement was not proven, the Kentucky legislative assembly passed a resolution which tarnished Butler's name. Sanders reported that he had "accomplished his mission."

After returning to New York he continued to promote Douglas by purchasing the Democratic Review in late 1851. Exactly how Sanders acquired the money to purchase the magazine was not clear, but he asked Douglas for the funds in December 1851. Douglas replied on the 28th of the same month, "In regard to the Review," he wrote, "I would gladly let you have the money, but I don't know where to get [it]. . . . I will try to raise it however if absolutely necessary." Originaly begun in 1837 by John L. O'Sullivan, the first number in the new series under Sanders' direction appeared in January 1852.  

Douglas was filled with consternation by Sanders' attempt to "help" the campaign.

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75Letters from Douglas to Sanders, April 11, July 12, and 28 December 1851 in Political Correspondence, Sanders, nos. 40, 42, 44; see also Johannsen, Letters of Douglas, 215-216, 228 233-234. Douglas to R. M. T. Hunter, May 6, 1851, ibid., 218; Sanders disliked Butler because the latter declined to support his father, Lewis Sanders, in a Kentucky political election. Success for Douglas was proven when the Louisville Democrat placed his name on their masthead. Roy F. Nichols, The Democratic Machine, 1850-1854 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923), 89; Some transaction accounts of the magazine's purchase attribute George Law with providing the funds, but sound evidence is sketchy. Riepma, "Young America," 170.

76 Between the period of the magazine's purchase and first issue publication, Kossuth fever abounded, and Sanders was busy offering the Hungarian an armed ship and working for Douglas in Kentucky. It appears that while Sanders wrote very little in the magazine, he directed its policy and encouraged "energy" and "fire" in the articles. Thus, he was generally given the credit or the blame for what was written. Thomas Devin Reilly, an Irish exile from the 1848 revolution, was his chief assistant. Riepma, "Young America," 170, 172.
The leading article, "Eighteen-Fifty-Two and the Presidency," presented a view of the type of presidential administration needed in 1852 and what issues should take the foreground. In the spirit of "manifest destiny," the article advocated "intervention for non-intervention" in order to protect American interests from foreign encroachment. Moreover, the 1852 election should show to European nations that American sympathies were with the republicans throughout the world. The election should also redeem the transgressions of the last four years under the "imbecility" and "Quaker policy" of the Fillmore administration, when the United States acted subserviently toward foreign nations and suffered indignities at their expense. Since America was no longer a weak, infant country, it should proclaim its republican ideals and defend them with war, if necessary. The article warned the old fogies that,

The statesmen of a previous generation, with their personal antipathies, and their personal claims, with personal greatness or personal inefficiency, must get out of the way. A new generation of American statesmen, of men who have fitted to the eternal principles of democratic right, the exigencies of the time . . . have sprung up with open field before them, to guide to a triumphant success the great party of the great democratic republic of the world.

The democratic nominee should be "a new man, a statesman of sound democratic pluck" who could bring "young blood, young ideas, and young hearts to the councils of the Republic." Further, the United States needed a man unidentified with either section, who has lived and thought for the whole; who has administrative tact and personal amenity sufficient to concentrate the great democratic party north, south, east and west, into one indomitable, invulnerable, American power; and to guide this party, so united, and with it the destinies of the Republic, to their just position and development.
Reeling from the sectional crisis only temporarily quelled by the Compromise of 1850, and suffering from the subsequent disharmony with the Democratic party, the Review found the solution for the country’s ills in a new presidential candidate who would rise above sectional differences. Old fogies, with their baggage of old grudges and promises, were ineligible. Thinly veiled, the magazine implied that these old fogies included General Lewis Cass of Michigan, William O. Butler and John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky and New Yorker William L. Marcy. It was well known to observers, despite Sanders’ innocent protestation, that Stephen A. Douglas was his choice for the Democratic nomination.

Even the Little Giant, who was not attacked by the Review, expressed to Sanders his appreciation of friendship, but he also warned him that other people would “hold me responsible for the assaults made by you upon their favorites. . . . You may tell me in reply as you have done on a former occasion that you are a free man and have a right to do as you please, and that I had better mind my own business. This is all very true & would do very well if nobody was to be effected by your acts but yourself. But when your active support of me leaves the world to suppose that I instigate these assaults, I submit to you whether my appeals to you to desist ought not to be respected.” Undeterred the bizarre editor responded, “Don’t be scared, I hope to turn the tables on all our enemies . . . I shall endeavor to take my full share of the responsibility of the contest off your shoulders.” Douglas confided to a friend that “Our friend Sanders is a noble fellow and a man of

remarkable vigor of intellect, but I fear he lacks the requisite prudence to conduct the Review safely at the present time.” He was right. The personal attacks did not cease, and despite Sanders’ oath of acting independently, Douglas’ campaign suffered with every attack.

If surprise greeted the fiery articles in the Review’s first number, hostile indignation resulted from subsequent issues. Indeed, arousing hostility was Sanders’ aim. “The more fire the better,” he wrote, “as we intend to make the times hot.” He previewed to Douglas that “I shall make an attack on Genl Butler more terrific than was ever made against mortal man before. I’ll finish him . . . don’t be scared it will not be thunder, but it shall be an earthquake.”78 As promised a February article declared General Butler a “no-policy statesman” and a “walking ‘comedy of errors’” whose “logic [was] very antiquated and old-maidish.” The Review spared no man deemed to be an old fogy from its blistering attacks. It characterized Governor Marcy as a “spivined, wind-blown, strained, ring-boned nag” who should “go home to rural pasture, to preserve his equine attributes a little longer, and not make an ass of himself.” It also held him responsible for the democratic party disunion. General Cass clearly understood old fogyism because he “calmly, thoughtfully, and philosophically applied it to himself.” As for Breckenridge, the Review lamented “Alas, poor fogy!”

The magazine generally proclaimed old fogies to be “drones,” “vile toads,” “elderly

78Douglas to Sanders, 10 February 1852, Political Correspondence, Sanders, no. 46; see also Johannsen, Letters of Douglas, 239-240; Sanders to Douglas, 3, 9 February 1852, ibid., 240; and Douglas to Caleb Cushing, 4 February 1852, ibid., 237-238. Sanders to Cushing, [January 1852], quoted in ibid., 361.
and incompetent good-for-nothings,” “imbeciles,” “nincompoops,” as well as “beaten old fogy hacks.” An article in the April issue even offered advice on how to recognize an old fogy:

1st. If a solemnly fat old gentleman, or a sententious, dogmatic, and owl-like, or supercilious, vain, namby-pamby young one, ask you to define him the phrase, “old fogy,” lend him sixpence to buy a pocket looking-glass. 2d. The gentleman who owns the party, who has claims upon the country, who has served the country for scores of years and never got a reward... You may stake your head on it, he is an irredeemable and eternally lost “old fogy.” Refer him to the undertaker; or, if violent, have him taken care of in a lunatic asylum. 12th. The old gentleman who becomes violently indignant at, and is threatened with apoplexy on reading the Democratic Review. Lord! have mercy... get him to read General Cass’s, or Mr. Buchanan’s, or Gov. Marcy’s, or General Butler’s, or Mr. Blank’s old letters of promise. He will come around presently.79

The article listed fifteen ways one could recognize an old fogy.80 Douglas did not find these characterizations amusing, rather he desperately feared their effects on his campaign. “If those attacks are repeated my chances are utterly hopeless,” he stated. While still professing friendship, Douglas politely pleaded, “I therefore again request you to make no more attacks upon anybody; but if you must assail others, also assail me with them, and at the same time select somebody else as your candidate and bend all your energies to elect


80Other periodicals joined in the old fogy comic portrayal with cartoons and rhetoric. For example, “Having by nature no vitality except suction, he consequently never dies, because he is always in office.” Lantern, vol I, January-June 1852, 103.
him."\(^1\) With a friend like Sanders, who needed political opponents!

Debates in Congress even focused on the course of the *Democratic Review*. On March 3, 1852, Breckinridge rose to defend his fellow Kentuckian General Butler against the *Review*’s attacks, and on March 10, William A. Richardson of Illinois took the floor to denounce Douglas’ involvement with the magazine. Richardson cited Douglas’ protest against the article on Butler and read George N. Sanders’ reply:

**ASTOR HOUSE, (N. Y.) Feb. 20, 1852**

*SIR: I am happy to inform you that your telegraph came too late to save your friend General Butler; and candor compels me to say that, had it came in time, it would not have changed a word of the article. We know the man; and the Review would be treacherous in its duties to the party, if it failed to expose his delinquencies.

The foggy atmosphere of Washington makes cowards of you all, and the sooner you understand that you cannot direct the columns of the Review, the better.

GEO. N. SANDERS

Richardson, either unknowingly or deceivingly, further stated that Douglas had no knowledge that Sanders was contemplating purchasing the *Democratic Review* or even knew of its purchase until he saw the notice in the New York papers.\(^2\) Alas, the *Review*’s words could not be unwritten, and Sanders crushed the very object for which he worked. By personally attacking the other candidates, he destroyed Douglas’ platform of party unity and sectional conciliation, creating an animosity toward the very man he strove to

\(^1\)Douglas to Sanders, 15 April 1852, *Political Correspondence, Sanders*, no. 47; see also Johannsen, *Letters of Douglas*, 246-247; *The Lantern* portrayed Sanders in a cartoon as the “Democratic Samson Slaying the Old Fogies,” where he, wild-haired and bare-chested, slew the old fogies with the *Democratic Review* while an alarmed Douglas looked on in the background. *Lantern*, vol. I, January – June 1852, 197.

\(^2\)John C. Breckinridge’s speech in *Congressional Globe*, 32 Cong., 1 sess., appendix 299-303; William A. Richardson’s speech in ibid., 710-715.
promote. As a result, he also began the dissolution of the Young America movement.

While Sanders continued to denounce old fogyism as a "horrid and vile phantom . . . a grim and blowing spectre, its hoary hair streaming with the small devils of every political vice, a male gorgon; with legs lean and skinny, dangling on our sides, and fists like harpies claws," and to triumph Douglas as "very democratic, very Young American, and very go-ahead," it was too late to salvage Douglas' prospects for the presidency. The New York Herald correctly recognized the situation, "Sanders . . . is buried himself in ruins. He has, by his blind impetuosity, killed Judge Douglas against his own consent, and in spite of himself." The Sanders-Douglas alliance strained against the Little Giant's protests and Sanders' bitterness. "Politicians are all cowards and you [Douglas] are at the head of the list. I am sick." Thus at the eve of the Baltimore Democratic convention, the fate of Douglas and Young America hung precariously in the balance.

Douglas' friends, however, still believed he possessed the strength and support to carry the Democratic nomination at the Baltimore convention opening Tuesday, June 1, 1852. Indeed, encouraging news came from Florida to Maine to California, adding to Douglas' belief that if not chosen as the primary candidate, he might still become a compromise candidate between Cass and Buchanan. When the Democratic convention convened, Young America was out in full force, and momentum seemed to flow toward

83 In Washington, D. C. a "jollification" between Democrats of all sections in the country encouraged Douglas' goal of uniting the Democratic party. New York Herald, 20 March 1851.

Douglas. He remained nervous, however, and advised his supporter David Yulee to "Tell all our friends to keep cool--& not to become restive--or brag or bet on the result, and to do nothing to irritate anybody & to speak well of everybody." He explained, "This caution will be necessary to many of my ardent young friends."85

Yet as the delegates cast ballots the tides began to turn, and the old fogies together worked tirelessly against the Little Giant. Finally, it appeared that all three of the primary candidates--Douglas, Cass, and James Buchanan--were unacceptable and that a new man must be found. Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire emerged as the Democratic party's nominee, and all factions were content with the surprising choice. "He is a new man," proclaimed one newspaper, "untrammelled by any ties or promises--and will be acceptable to all the factions and sections." Douglas immediately sent a congratulatory telegram. Young Americans were triumphant even though their first pick was not chosen, because at age forty-eight Pierce had beaten the old fogies and would surely represent progressive ideas. "General Pierce is a good man and a young man--a representative of 'Young America,' but a discreet one--a man of modesty and decision of character," was the general feeling. The old fogies, too, were pleased because the extreme faction of Douglas with his young rowdies were quieted with the setback. Meanwhile, the Whigs nominated the Mexican War hero, General Winfield Scott, and since both parties considered him a weak candidate, Pierce's ultimate success seemed inevitable.

While there was no doubt that Sanders and the Democratic Review handicapped

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Douglas, in retrospect, the cause for his defeat was also due to the fact he had entered the race very early and too eagerly, an unseemly course for a candidate in 1852. Nevertheless, a supporter surmised that the distinction of “universal good feeling” which Douglas possessed was hence forth “gone from him, and forever.” Douglas, of course, was disappointed with the loss and a friend consoled him by writing that, “Pierce is President-Elect, as you this day would have been but for some indiscreet (or pretended) friends.” As for Sanders reports stated that he was not “quite so much of a friend to Douglas, as he used to be.”86 Thereafter, Sanders turned the course of the Review toward supporting Pierce, young and quite competent of living up to the magazine’s ideal, while personally contemplating the spoils of office.87

Pierce’s victory did, indeed, become a reality in 1852, and through Sanders’ best efforts of wire pulling and manipulating, he achieved a federal appointment, receiving the diplomatic post of Consul-General to London. Although Sanders’ success, attained in defiance of a determined old fogy opposition, represented victory for Young America and resulted in the farewell dinner at the Astor House in August 1853, the political movement was in decline. It had always failed to acquire a defined set of transcendent political ideals, and after the defeat of Douglas, the “Young America” label began to resort back to a generic term symbolizing youth, nationalism, progress, and American destiny without attachment to a particular group. Hence, Young America remained a part of jingoism.

86Ibid., 363-370, 373; The New York Herald, 6 June 1852.

87For Sanders’ support of Pierce see “Eighteen Fifty-Two, and the ‘Coming Man,’” Democratic Review XXX (June, 1852): 481-492.
For a brief time, however, Sanders borrowed the name and ran with it.

The importance of George Nicholas Sanders, with his energy, cosmopolitan spirit, and vision, lay in his personification of Young America and his ability to transform the slogan into a recognized faction of the Democratic party, promoting the presidency of Douglas in 1852. He made Young America significant by actively participating in and attempting to unite the activities of business speculation, intervention, and expansion, and by emphasizing the common spirit of “manifest destiny,” progress, and sympathy for the struggling republicans. He gathered these activities and sentiments into a movement and then gave them a voice through the *Democratic Review*, gaining recognition both at home and abroad. Although his herculean efforts failed to form a permanent and clearly defined movement, Sanders was significant for providing Young America with spirit and a level of unity. In 1853 he had not yet given up hope for Young America. At his diplomatic post in London, Sanders continued to advocate intervention and sympathy for the republicans, but now he had a forum closer to the action.
March 1853 was an opportune time for Franklin Pierce to assume the presidency. Winning the election by a vast majority of both Democrats and Whigs, he presided over a seemingly united Democratic party and a prosperous nation that eagerly awaited guidance from its progressive president. Indeed, Pierce’s 1853 inaugural address included a bold foreign policy, emphasizing land and commercial expansion, complimented by a stronger army and navy. “The policy of my Administration,” Pierce stated, “will not be controlled by any timid forebodings of evil from expansion.” Furthermore, the acquisition of certain “possessions” (alluding to Cuba) might in the future be “essential for the preservation of the rights of commerce and the peace of the world.” Pierce’s first presidential message pleased George N. Sanders and other Young Americans, and they looked with anticipation toward the spoils of office. They were not to be disappointed, as Pierce sought to placate all factions and sections by an even distribution of federal patronage.89

88 The New York Herald, 19 November 1853.

89 James D. Richardson, Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1902, vol. V (Washington: Bureau of National Literature and Arts,
Although in June 1853 Sanders ultimately received the recess appointment of Consul-General to London, the announcement created public controversy. Sanders’ extreme and volatile nature, recently exemplified in the Democratic Review articles, was still fresh in the minds of his old foe patients. Moreover, to his more conservative contemporaries, placing Sanders in the midst of European revolutionaries seemed an invitation for a diplomatic disaster. On the other hand, his friends rejoiced at his appointment because it “indicated a disposition on the part of the Government to give that energetic and fearless Democracy which Mr. Sanders [sic] represented its proper weight in the guidance of our foreign relations.” In the end Sanders deflated his friends’ optimism. Residing only a matter of months in London, Sanders’ radical and self-destructive tendencies again ruined his prospects for personal success, as he freely and selfishly engaged in European revolutionary activity and participated in schemes to acquire Cuba from Spain. As a result the Senate rejected his appointment.

While Sanders’ diplomatic career ended in 1854, the interventionist and expansionist issues which he championed continued to warrant attention. Other domestic matters, however, soon took the foreground. The slavery issue would not die, as both the North and South fought over the Union’s balance of power between slave and free states.

1907), 198-199; Pierce satisfied Young America by promoting expansion, and he placated the Constitutional Unionists by upholding the Compromise of 1850. Pierce also appeased southern state’s righters by favoring strict construction of the Constitution, and he acknowledged the Whigs by addressing economic interests. George F. Milton, The Eve of Conflict: Stephen A. Douglas and the Needless War (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934), 94.

Aggravated by the debate over slavery’s extension in Nebraska and “Bleeding Kansas,” the 1857 decision in the legal case of Dred Scott, and finally the 1860 election of “Black Republican” Abraham Lincoln, civil war loomed over the nation. No compromise, not even popular sovereignty which Douglas and Sanders advocated, could stop the tide of war, and all that remained was to choose sides between North and South. The impending conflict consumed the nation’s attention, pushing aside Sanders’ crusade for intervention and expansion. Yet Sanders was prepared to enter the domestic foray, participating in the conflict as enthusiastically as he had in other political activities and creating more controversy and personal grief. After Pierce’s victory in the presidential election, however, sectional concerns were not primarily on his mind.

In early 1853 Sanders made the transition from magazine editor to federal office-seeker, optimistically supporting President Pierce while sustaining the interests of Young America. Sanders reported in the *New York Herald*,

> I gladly pass the reins into the hands of Frank Pierce, satisfied that young America, as well as the whole nation, will find in him a single-hearted and high-minded representative, and an energetic and sagacious leader. Since the election I have held the *Review* only till it could be put into faithful and able hands, which will give an intelligent support to the incoming administration. For myself, I feel that I have done in a year the work of an ordinary life time, and may be allowed a little holiday. The “fogies” must not, however, flatter themselves that they have got rid of me.

Confident of Pierce’s abilities, the energetic Sanders determined he could best serve the democracy in another capacity (although it was not one of leisure as he stated), but he was ever watchful of the “old fogies” who slowed his progress. He was particularly opposed
to the old fogy, like the future secretary of state, who stood directly in his path.\footnote{The \textit{New York Herald}, 7 February 1853; To both his friends and the public, Sanders became known as a slayer of old fogies after the 1852 presidential fight. \textquoteleft Like Hotspur, he can finish a dozen or so [old fogies] before breakfast, and think nothing of it.,\textit{ibid.}; \textquoteleft I expected to hear from you all the political gossip of the day . . . but having already killed off all the ‘old fogies’ you are now doubtless reposing upon your laurels.	extquoteright\rightskip=0pt\rightskip=0pt plus 1fil\rightskip=0pt minus 1fil James Buchanan to Sanders, 7 March 1856, \textit{Political Correspondence, Sanders}, no. 20; The \textit{Washington Sentinel}, established by Beverly Tucker, continued many of the \textit{Review’s} arguments, urging “intervention for non-intervention,” the annexation of Cuba, and promoting the Pacific Railroad and a stronger navy. Riepma, “Young America,” 308-309.}

In the spring of 1853 Sanders and the Young American office-seekers championed nationalistic issues, and their prospects for success were promising. With a “discreet” Young America president and the chance to influence foreign affairs directly through diplomatic positions, they began to maneuver for Pierce’s favor. Young Americans experienced a definite setback when the president nominated several Democratic party regulars to his Cabinet, including leading old fogy William L. Marcy of New York as secretary of state. Sanders realized Marcy, who he had disparaged in the pages of the \textit{Democratic Review}, was a definite obstacle to his obtaining patronage. In early 1853 from his headquarters at the New York Astor House, Sanders diligently worked against Marcy by promoting public disapproval, urging politically influential gentlemen to obstruct the appointment of his enemy. He even held several interviews with Pierce about his selection, but to no avail. Although the president believed Sanders a “most sensible man,” he disregarded the Kentuckian’s advice by appointing Marcy to his cabinet. The \textit{Journal of Commerce} correctly foreshadowed that President-Elect Pierce would have to depend on the “prudence and firmness” of his new cabinet in order to “control the aggressive spirit of its own citizens, or they will place the relations of the country on a new and
dangerous footing with some of the principal nations of the world." Pierce also satisfied Sanders’ wishes by appointing several Young Americans to lesser posts.\textsuperscript{92}

Sanders felt betrayed by the president’s selection of the new “premier,” or secretary of state, and Pierce personally had to invite him to an interview. At this meeting Sanders “spoke boldly against Marcy & warmly supported Pierre Soulé, William Corry and others of his wing of the party,” suggesting that Soulé be given a diplomatic post in Paris in order to be present during a possible uprising against Louis Napoléon. Meanwhile, Marcy and his friends maneuvered against Sanders, presenting him as a man who was “too lazy to shave and clean himself and out and out a blackguard.” The struggle over spoils was ironic since the former editor had recently denounced any interest in patronage. According to Sanders, “The term ‘Progressive,’ and ‘Young America,’ have been adopted merely to distinguish the living, working party, from the mere spoilsmen.” Nonetheless, a position abroad held practical implications for fulfilling Young America’s agenda and aiding his European republican friends. Idealism and pragmatism met, and Sanders found they were compatible.\textsuperscript{93}

Pierce was receptive to Sanders’ charm, and the two formed a close relationship. Nathaniel Hawthorne noted that, “Frank [Pierce] was as free and kind . . . but his public attentions to me were few and by no means distinguished . . . while such people as George

\textsuperscript{92}The \textit{New York Journal of Commerce}, 29 December 1852.

\textsuperscript{93}The \textit{New York Herald}, 6 June 1852; Curti, “Young America,” 48; see also Curti, “George N. Sanders,” 85; Riepma, “Young America,” 270-271; For Sanders’ sentiments on the spoils of office see the \textit{New York Herald}, 7, 22 February 1853.
Sanders &c. were invited to dinner, and made much of. Yet Sanders feared his enemies' influence. "The fact is they are afraid to trust me," he complained. Ultimately, with Pierce's favor and the support of Corry, Caleb Cushing, George Law, and Edwin de Leon, Sanders received the London consulship. His friend, Pierre Soulé, had written him, "You Mr. Sanders are to be provided according to all appearances; that is certain," and with a postscript, "... and a sweet kiss to young America."

Other Young Americans were similarly rewarded. Soulé was appointed minister to Spain, and Americans and foreigners alike saw this event as a nod toward expansionism and Cuba. Likewise, Solon Borland, an ardent expansionist in the spirit of Soulé, became minister to Nicaragua and the other Central America states. O'Sullivan, originator of the phrase "manifest destiny," headed to Lisbon as minister, while De Leon, who introduced the "Young America" name, received the consulship at Alexandria, Egypt. E. Felice Foresti, an Italian patriot in New York who was supported by Sanders, Cushing, and Law, received an appointment to Genoa. Also, Pierce appointed Sanders' banker friend


95Letters from Pierce to Sanders, 1853, *Political Correspondence, Sanders*, nos. 160-163; Riepma, "Young America," 273; Soulé to Sanders, 22 July 1853, Pierre Soulé Papers, 1850-1901, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

96By July 18, 1853 most of the civil and diplomatic appointments had been made. Spencer, *Victor and the Spoils*, 231; Riepma, "Young America," 273-277; *New York Herald*, 9 April 1853; *New York Tribune*, 11 April 1853.

97Letters from Foresti to Sanders, *Political Correspondence, Sanders*, nos. 56-59.
August Belmont as chargé to The Hague, while New Yorker Daniel Sickles became Minister James Buchanan’s secretary at London, an appointment that would prove quite useful to his neighbor Sanders. All in all, Young Americans favoring expansion and intervention victoriously celebrated these appointments, and the future prospects were bright for putting their ideals into action. On the other hand, conservatives like Marcy were apprehensive and feared the potential repercussions of such an extreme group representing the United States abroad.

While Young America diplomats generally tempered their radical natures, Sanders and Soulé were two exceptions. They proved Young America would not be content with timid expansionism or anything less than total embracement of the cause of republicans struggling against despotic rule. Senator Robert Toombs of Georgia agreed with Sanders’ ideals. “I concur with you in the necessity of giving every aid & comfort to the Republicans of Europe,” he wrote, “I do not suppose we have a representative in Europe who would not acknowledge any de facto Republic the moment it was established in any country in Europe. If we have he should be instantly recalled.” Toombs’ statement expressed a typical Young America sentiment, but while the Young America ideals of expansion, intervention, progress, and sympathy for republican patriots were still popular,

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Belmont was not considered a Young American, but he was friends with Sanders and not unfriendly to Young American ideals. Irving Katz, *August Belmont: A Political Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 28-29; Sanders wrote to Pierce and also spoke to him on behalf of Belmont. Belmont to Sanders, 21 March 1853, *Political Correspondence, Sanders*, no. 4; Curti, “Young America,” 48.

Later historians of the Pierce administration characterize Sanders and the other appointees as “dashing and bizarre diplomats, . . . undiplomatic, or worse,” and “hotheads . . . wild-eyed expansionists.” Hawthorne, *Letters, 1813-1843*, 58.
the movement was no longer associated with a recognizable group. After 1852 until its death in about 1856, "Young America" was a label used to describe different people, ideas, or sentiments. The Democratic Party's Young America had not possessed an idealistically transcendent foundation strong enough to withstand the sectional pressures of slavery, and so the democratic faction faded. To ardent radicals like Sanders and Soulé, Young America was more than a sentiment, and there was work to be done in its name.100

"The editor [Sanders] is a man of genius, but of the most radical and progressive character. He is not only a Young American in principle, but a red republican in feeling," judged one newspaper editor. Since "red republican" was the name given to his European revolutionary friends like Louis Kossuth and the Italian patriot Giuseppe Mazzini, Sanders did not deem the term insulting. In a newspaper article written after his consulship, Sanders explained that the republicans arrogantly retained the name "red" as Americans "haughtily called ourselves 'rebels' in our 'red' struggle with the lion of Great Britain." Sanders embraced the boldness and progressiveness behind the name. Consorting with his exiled "red republican" friends consumed much time during his consulship in London, and his home on Weymouth Street practically became their headquarters. Indeed, it was his active involvement in the European revolutionary cause that prompted controversy from his more conservative critics. Even Sanders' nephew and secretary, Cary Smith, noted, "I

100Toombs to Sanders, 13 June 1854, Robert Augustus Toombs, 1810-1885, The Filson Club Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky; Riepma, "Young America," 278, 291-292.
am afraid the people will think he meddles too much in politics.” Sanders handled his consulship duties adequately, but it was his interventionist activities, designed to aid the cause of republicanism, that produced trouble for Sanders.

On November 24, 1853, Sanders assumed the duties of the London consulate, replacing Thomas Aspinwall. Although Marcy determined to have an active hand in directing the duties of American diplomats, Sanders often ignored the secretary of state and did little more than report news regarding lighthouses and commercial laws. Surprisingly, in June 1853, Marcy cheered Young America by issuing his popular “dress circular.” The circular suggested that American diplomats should appear at court in “the simple dress of an America citizen,” thereby spurning the trappings of monarchy. Young Americans were pleased with the expression of confidence in democratic America in front of the Old World monarchical order. Despite Marcy’s concession to nationalism, Sanders generally believed that concerning foreign policy, “What ought not to be done is exactly what he will do.” Marcy’s old fogy policy clashed with Sanders’ progressive agenda of attaining Cuba at all costs, engaging in business ventures on the side, and aiding the


102Sanders to Marcy, 24 November 1853, Despatches from United States Consuls in London, 1790-1906, vol. XXIII (Washington: The National Archives); Hawthorne, Consular Letters, 1853-1855, 22, 52; Spencer, Victor and the Spoils, 234; Letter dated 5 April 1855 entitled, “Ex-Consul Sanders to the Democracy on Secretary Marcy,” undated clipping, Scrapbook, Sanders Family Papers; The appointment as Consul for the U. S. in London, signed by Queen Victoria and Lord Clarendon, 22 September 1853, Political Correspondence, Sanders, no. 188; Passport issued to Sanders from Secretary of State Marcy, 31 October 1853, ibid., no. 143.
republican patriots.

Through his "boundless hospitality and rabid republicanism," Sanders became fast friends with the liberal and revolutionary figures of Young Europe, most of whom were in exile in England. Sanders was especially close with Louis Kossuth, but other acquaintances included the Italians Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi; Alexander Ledru-Rollin, Louis Blanc, and Victor Hugo of France; and also Stanley Worcell and the Hungarian Francis Pulszky. Kossuth and Garibaldi met for the first time at the consul's home. Sanders also entered the company of such English Parliamentary leaders as Joseph Hume, Richard Cobden, Milner Gibson, Austen Layard, and John Bright. Sanders' popularity and charisma with this group of gentlemen provided the opportunity for him to explain the South's viewpoints and to express his acceptance of a new revolutionary movement in Europe. He performed many favors for the exiles, and, ever the businessman, he also attempted to supplement his consulship income of $15,000 by selling Law's muskets. To the red republicans Sanders represented active support for their cause, and they hoped his Senate confirmation would result in a more aggressive American policy of foreign intervention. To the radicals Sanders was "the soldier for the cause of mankind," and they highly regarded his friendship.103

103John B. Castleman, Active Service (Louisville: Courier-Journal Job Print Company, 1917), 135; Sometime between 1849 and 1853 Sanders helped Garibaldi when the latter was exiled from Italy and working in New York. Garibaldi later wrote that he appreciated the help of "generous men (sympathizing in soul with my unhappy land) of whom you are the model." Garibaldi to Sanders, 16 February 1854 and 11 April 1854, Political Correspondence, Sanders, nos. 61-62; see also Georg Brandes, Creative Spirits of the Nineteenth Century (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, Inc., 1967), 436-437; Webster Tarpley, "Lord Palmerston's Multicultural Human Zoo," (introduction to the panel on "Lord Palmerston's Multicultural Zoo" at the Schiller Institute's conference on
Kossuth, especially, depended on Sanders’ support in order to help the exiles, and he was quite aware of the political climate in the United States and elsewhere. Prior to Pierce’s election, he inquired of Sanders, “whether the Democratic candidate for the presidency sympathises with the Republican movement in Europe.” Kossuth saw American involvement in the Crimean War as pivotal to the republicans’ crusade, and later he wrote to Sanders, “I hope to God the policy of President Pierce will be anti-Russian and anti-Austrian. . . If America is to be raised by Gen. Pierce to the proud position of ‘a power on earth.’” Kossuth hoped Sanders would use his influence to urge the American diplomats in Constantinople to intervene in the diplomatic battle between England and France. After American representatives did nothing, Kossuth asked incredulously if the American government would “allow the Black Sea to become a ‘Russian lake,’ or leave it to England’s protection?”

Sanders also tried to help Kossuth secure and outfit a ship, so the Magyar and his supporters could travel to Constantinople. Sanders’ letter of November 15, 1853, printed in the New York Herald, insisted that Kossuth’s representative had been publicly received at Constantinople. “The Porte made no secret of the fact,” he reported, “that unless Austria withdraws her armies from her frontiers, or England and France shall accede to his


104 Kossuth to Sanders, 21 June 1852 and 13, 24 December 1853, Political Correspondence, Sanders, nos. 93, 97, 102.
demand for his guaranty of the neutrality of Austria, that Kossuth will be invited to
Constantinople and placed at the head of a strong division to march on Hungary.”

Therefore, Kossuth needed transportation. Sanders acted as an advisor and procuring
agent for Kossuth, but he was unable to fulfill their plan for a ship due to insufficient
funding. Kossuth responded, “God knows how anxiously I have waited for a letter from
America, nothing came, I am sick from excitement & disappointment. No assistance from
no where.” Sanders was “on most intimate terms” with Kossuth, but his active
involvement in the Hungarian’s affairs and the fact that the Americans were still suspicious
of how Kossuth had used the money donated to him, cast distrust on Sanders’ relationship
with the exile. Sanders’ secretary and nephew Cary Smith wrote, “Kossuth now is too
unpopular with the Americans, for Uncle to wish both of their names to appear in the
same article.” This particular affair with Kossuth was another example of how Sanders
both ideistically and materially supported the patriots’ endeavors, and how Americans
were suspicious of the conspicuous and enthusiastic way in which he interfered in foreign
affairs.

Sanders made matters worse for himself by inviting the revolutionaries even closer
into his circle. On February 21, 1854, Sanders and his wife, Anna, hosted for their radical
friends a dinner party that was much discussed in the United States. Guests included the
liberal and revolutionary figures Kossuth, Garibaldi, Mazzini, Ledru-Rollin, Russian

105 Curti, “Young America,” 50-51; Kossuth to Sanders, 13 December 1853,
Political Correspondence, Sanders, no. 102; Parker, Sanders of Grass Hills, 78-79;
Demonstrated in the affairs of Kossuth and Koszta, some Americans believed the nation
was helping foreign patriots to its own detriment. New York Herald, 19 November 1853.
Alexander Herzen, German Arnold Ruge, Felice Orsini of Italy, Blanc, Worcell, Pulszky, and Sir Joshua Walmsley of the Liverpool Police. Even James Buchanan, the American minister in London, was present for the auspicious occasion. “Sitting next to Mrs. Sanders at table,” Buchanan later wrote, “I asked her if she was not afraid the combustible materials about her would explode and blow us all up.” In a letter to President Pierce, Buchanan noted that Sanders “certainly has made a good & useful officer; & his influence is great with the leaders of the revolutionary party from the different Nations of Europe now assembled in London.” Yet Buchanan was also conscious of his sensitive political position. In a report to Secretary of State Marcy he explained the revolutionaries were “all evidently much pleased that I was neither ashamed nor afraid to meet them. However indiscreet it might be for me, as American minister, to invite any of them to my house, I should feel myself degraded as an American citizen to have refused the invitation of a friend, simply because men who have suffered in the cause of liberty were to be present.” But it was Sanders, not the exiles, who became the spokesperson for the republicans that night, raising the toast, “To do away with the Crown Heads of Europe.”

This famous dinner was more than a social occasion. Attaining Cuba remained one of Sanders’ objectives, and the dinner united Young America and Young Europe in a plan proposed by Kossuth and Ledru Rollin to satisfy the interests of both groups. If Young Spain could carry out a revolution in Madrid (while the superpowers were involved in the Crimean War), then Cuba might gain its independence, paving the way for American

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annexation. And as the initial revolution spread to other areas in Europe, Young America would then support Young Europe’s goal by influencing the American government to recognize the fledgling republican governments. Again, Sanders’ extreme optimism outran his practical judgment. Generally, United States citizens were simply not that concerned with the European patriots’ cause, and Buchanan attended the dinner as social etiquette, not to extend official sanction to the revolutionary plan. While the primary objective was ultimately unrealized by the dinner guests, Sanders did unite the different elements which composed Young Europe.107

The English leaders were not pleased with Sanders’ radical activities while on their soil and neither was the United States Congress. Therefore, on February 14, 1854, after only about three months in London (and unbeknownst to Sanders at the time of his dinner), the Senate rejected Sanders’ consulship appointment by a vote of twenty-nine to ten. Sanders and his friends were taken aback by the unexpected news. Hawthorne wrote of his “regret and mortification,” while Soulé expressed his displeasure with the Senate’s “more than childish opposition,” adding that, “There will not be a true Democrat throughout our whole land who will not deplore and bitterly condemn that you were not returned to a post which you filled with so much distinction.” President Pierce sent assurance of his continued friendship to the ex-consul and confided to Buchanan that he would not hasten to send a new nomination to the Senate. Even the London Leader printed that “the decision of the Senate has been received with regret.” Another notable expression of sympathy came in a composite letter dated March 1, 1854, from Kossuth, Riepma, “Young America,” 321-322.
Mazzini, and Ledru-Rollin. While they were personally concerned for Sanders, his rejection had a deeper meaning. "That is a hard and mischievous blow at the prospects of that democracy just at this moment . . . it will cause great rejoicing in all despotic quarters." To the exiles Sanders' rejection was a blow against the very principles of republicanism.\(^\text{108}\)

Sanders was bitter. He attributed his recall to personal hostility and to the machinations of his enemies, Lewis Cass, Marcy, Jesse Bright, and John Forney. Moreover, he vociferously blamed his old friend Douglas for working against him. Douglas retorted, "In the prossecution [sic] of your cherished purposes of revenge, you shall ascertain the true state of the facts and shall know who assailed you and who stood by you & defended you to the last, you will feel more fortification and chagrine at having written your unkind letter to me than I did in reading it." Indeed, Robert Toombs was disappointed with Sanders, "If what I have heard of your expressions be true you have done Douglas great injustice, this is as far as I can go, but you will some day find it out.

\(^\text{108}\)One newspaper speculated that Pierce would not even send Sanders' appointment to the Senate, but if he did, Sanders would most likely be "guillotined." Frankfort Daily Commonwealth, 12 January 1854; The New York Herald, 29 January and 14, 15 February 1854; The New York Times, 15 February 1854; Sanders to Marcy, 6 March 1854, Despatches from United States Consuls in London; Hawthorne to Sanders, 11 May 1854, Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Letters, 1853-1856, ed. Thomas Woodson, et. al., vol. XVII (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1987), 217; Soulé to Sanders, 21 August 1854, Pierre Soulé Papers; Buchanan to Pierce, 7 April 1854, Moore, Works of Buchanan, vol. IX, 177-178; Article in London Leader printed in Louisville Democrat, 6 April 1854, Scrapbook, Sanders Family Papers; "The Revolutionary Leaders to Mr. Consul Sanders," undated clipping, ibid. This sympathetic letter was generally not well-received in America. The Herald wrote, "Noisy braggarts, fanatic socialists, and blood-thirsty disciples of Robespierre, are no better suited to lead public opinion here than to lead insurgents in Europe. New York Herald, 12 April 1854.
He is a friend of yours.” Douglas was one of the ten senators who had voted for Sanders’ confirmation. Actually, his rejection was a result of his own extreme pronouncements in the Democratic Review and his involvement with the European revolutionaries, further driven by Augustus C. Dodge, Bright, Cass, and a few southerners who feared the repercussions of Sanders’ style of intervention in their own lives.109

There were inconsistencies in the Senate’s rejection of Sanders, reinforcing his suspicion of personal machinations. The Herald generally agreed with the Senate’s decision, but noted “what a glaring inconsistency there is in rejecting Sanders and confirming O’Sullivan, Soulé, [Robert] Owen, Belmont, [John Y.] Mason and others, who are every way as unfit to represent the country abroad as Mr. Sanders!” Other men described as Young Americans or radicals were appointed and approved, so why then, the writer queried, did the Senate reject Sanders and not the others? For instance, the newspaper compared his actions with Soulé’s in Spain, “The Senate confirmed Mr. Soulé as our ambassador to Madrid, though his fillibustering propensities were well known, and his reputation as a duellist did not need the affair with the [French ambassador] Marquis de Turgot to establish it on a firm basis.” Soulé labored diligently to secure Cuba, even to the extent of promoting revolutions in Spain, while committing several other errors of judgment. Likewise, as one newspaper stated, “Mr. Daniels as chargé to Sardinia . . . certainly has been writing home far more objectionable letters than those ascribed to

109Riepma, “Young America,” 317; Douglas to Sanders, 27 March 1854, Political Correspondence, Sanders, no. 48; see also Johannsen, Letters of Douglas, 299; Toombs to Sanders, 13 June 1854, Robert Augustus Toombs, 1810-1885.
Although the Senate denied Sanders the consulship, he remained in London temporarily fulfilling his consulship duties and undeterred in his crusade for European republicanism. He wrote two letters designed to rouse sentiment against monarchies, which particularly upset the conservatives both in Europe and America. The first in August 16, 1854, was to the President of the Swiss Confederation, urging continued asylum in Switzerland for the patriots who were fleeing from European despots. In a second letter, dated October 4, 1854, and addressed to the People of France, Sanders subtly urged the assassination of Louis Napoléon or at the very least proposed hostile rebellion. “Let us but see that you have still the virtue and the courage to strike once more for the Republic,” Sanders wrote, “and one universal acclamation from America shall cheer you on. . . . Strike and though you fail a hundred times, we will applaud you at every fresh trial!” Sanders’ friend William Corry termed it “an extraordinary assassination letter.” Victor Hugo took this occasion to praise Sanders, “When you write, sir, it is your soul that writes, a soul elevated and free. . . . My admiration rises to affection for you . . . say the truth to all, to enslaved France.”

Daniel Sickles, Young American and secretary of the London Legation, proved useful on this and other occasions, when he allowed Sanders access to the Legation’s dispatch bags. Sanders used the diplomatic pouches in order to convey the Swiss and French letters (apparently without Buchanan’s knowledge), as he had used the bags to carry items for the exiles and his own personal correspondence in the past. While

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Buchanan agreed with the content of the French letter, he objected to the Legation’s improper use of the diplomatic seal on the letters. Use of the stamp on this correspondence would suggest official sanction, thereby intimating that the United States government promoted revolution, which it did not. Sanders did not seem to be oblivious to this fact. Contrary to his aim, controversy and criticism, not war, resulted from his Swiss and French letters. American critics believed that as consul Sanders represented the United States and, therefore, he should behave more moderately by not inciting European revolutions. Foreign critics disliked Sanders interfering in their affairs and promoting unrest. Nevertheless, the fact remained that Sanders no longer represented the United States.

On September 18, 1854, Robert Blaine Campbell of Texas officially replaced Sanders as consul, but he did not immediately return to the United States. Although Sanders had failed to maintain his consulship and to incite European revolutions for the dual purpose of aiding the republican patriots and hastening Cuba’s annexation, he still

111 George N. Sanders, _To the President of the Swiss Federal Council_, London, 1854; George N. Sanders, _Letter to the People of France_, London, 1854; [Corry], *Biographical Encyclopaedia*, 539; Hugo to Sanders, 31 October 1854, _Political Correspondence, Sanders_, no. 82; Curti, “Young America,” 48; Buchanan to Forney, 14 December 1854, Moore, _Works of Buchanan_, 283-284; Buchanan to Mason, 18 December 1854, ibid., 287; Buchanan to Marcy, 22, 27 December 1854, ibid., 289, 293-296; Although critics wrongly accused Sanders of prompting Victor Frondé’s assassination attempt against Napoléon, on August 17, 1854 he did deceivingly vouch for Frondé’s American citizenship so that he could be issued a passport as Bearer of Despatches. Traveling to Lisbon and Madrid as an agent for Ledru Rollin, Frondé worked for the revolutionary cause, but placed the United States in danger by attempting to involve the nation in the revolutions of Europe by acting under an American passport. Buchanan was unaware that Frondé’s passport was issued in his name. Buchanan to Marcy, 27 December 1854, Moore, _Works of Buchanan_, vol. IX, 292-293.
hoped that Young America’s agenda might yet be realized. This hope rested on the Ostend Conference between Soulé, Buchanan, and Mason, Ministers to Spain, England, and France, respectively.

Encouraged by Marcy’s instructions to Soulé that if Spain declined to sell Cuba, “you will then direct your efforts to the next most desirable object which is to detach that island from the Spanish dominion and from all dependence on any European power,” the ministers met to plan strategy for attaining the island. They assembled at Ostend, Belgium, on October 9-11, 1854, and then moved to the more remote location of Aix la Chapelle, Prussia. The ministers adopted a loose definition of the term “detach,” thereby producing on October 18, 1854, the fiery Ostend Manifesto. The document listed the reasons why the United States should purchase the island and end the “forced and unnatural connexion between Spain and Cuba.” These arguments were not new, but the manifesto also justified “wresting” Cuba away from Spain if her officials were not willing to sell the island to the U.S. Indeed, according to the ministers, attaining the island was imperative for maintaining American security and certainly America’s commercial interests would benefit. The manifesto was a blatant expression of aggressive expansionism, prompted by Sanders and Soulé, and one that the Pierce administration was not quite willing to make.113

112It was widely reported that “the sole condition upon which Mr. Soulé consented to accept this mission was, that he should go over to Queen Isabella and her premier, Roncali, with a carte blanche on the Cuba question.” The New York Herald, 9 April 1853.

113Campbell to Marcy, 18 September 1854, Despatches from United States Consuls in London; Ettinger, Mission of Soulé, 340; In 1848 when the United States offered $100 million for Cuba, Spain replied that “Sooner than see the island transferred to
As for Sanders' involvement, one contemporary newspaper reported, "[Sanders] had a great deal more to do with getting up the Ostend Conference than any or all of the Plenipos who signed the famous Manifesto." Moreover, William Corry stated, "It is quite probable that it was the urgency of Mr. Sanders that pushed Mr. Buchanan and encouraged Mr. Soulé, at Ostend, to manifest the determination to appropriate Cuba at all hazards, and with no respect for national law as hitherto accepted." The Ostend Manifesto certainly reflected Sanders' expansionistic spirit and extremism and was consistent with Young America's ideals.\textsuperscript{114}

Although Marcy had initially encouraged the acquisition of Cuba, he denounced Soulé and the manifesto's bellicose message. Moreover, what was intended as a report to the U. S. State Department became in reality a public announcement to the world. Several European nations also criticized America's belligerent pronouncement, and France went so far as to block Soulé from entering the country on his way back to Spain. Thwarted in his journey, the chagrined minister headed to London where he stayed with the sympathetic Sanders, and where the exiles celebrated him as "one of their Messiahs."\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{114}"One More Unfortunate," undated clipping, Scrapbook, Sanders Family Papers; [Corry], \textit{Biographical Encyclopaedia}, 539; Historians concur with Sanders' involvement. Winks states that Sanders "helped goad James Buchanan into signing the Ostend Manifesto." Robin W. Winks, \textit{Canada and the United States, the Civil War Years} (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1960), 275; see also Bruce Catton, \textit{The Coming Fury} (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1961), 256.

After Soulé learned of Marcy's rebuttal and President Pierce's concurrence, he resigned at once, blaming the secretary of state for the administration's betrayal. Marcy complained, "Our diplomatic character in Europe, which I acknowledge with shame, is now miserable low, has been damaged by the Legation at London more perhaps than by any other, though Soulé has inflicted deep wounds on it. The disrepute of this thing falls with the greatest weight upon my department and it is the result of the conduct of men who are my enemies and against whose appointment I made a strenuous opposition."

Marcy was, of course, speaking of Sanders, Sickles, and Soulé. Although many Americans desired Cuba, popular opinion did not support the Ostend Manifesto. Charles Jared Ingersoll of Philadelphia wrote that while the United States should acquire Cuba, "it must not be either by money or bullying." Likewise, one newspaper wrote of Soulé, "We wanted an ambassador there, we have sent a matador."

Sanders and Soulé failed to reach their objective of acquiring Cuba by any means possible, the former primarily through revolutionary tactics, the latter by revolutionary and diplomatic means. Thus, events dashed the hopes of Young America, and the two men returned to the United States defeated. Disheartened as he was, Sanders did not seek a life of idleness upon his return in December 1854. On the contrary, he delved into

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116 Spencer, Victor and the Spoils, 336; Soulé wrote Sanders, after the latter's rejection by the Senate, but before the Ostend Conference that, "It makes me sore at heart to see the weakness of the administration . . . I shall have to leave also, as I will never consent to remain where I can neither maintain my dignity and character nor vindicate the insulted honor of the Government." Soulé to Sanders, 21 August 1854, Pierre Soulé Papers.

117 Spencer, Victor and the Spoils, 334; Ettinger, Mission of Soulé, 399; The New York Herald, 22 October 1854.
business speculation and reorganization of the Democratic party since Young America was no longer a recognized faction. Pierce, by letting Cuba slip from his grasp, had proven himself an old fogey, forcing the Democrats in 1856 to seek another progressive candidate. Sanders had to decide who he was going to try to make the next president.

Angry at Douglas and disappointed with Pierce, Sanders gave his support to James Buchanan for the Democratic nomination. After all, Buchanan had displayed a Young American spirit at the Ostend Conference. "To separate Mr. Soulé & the Ostend Conference from Mr. Buchanan," claimed Sanders, "would be a political impossibility." Buchanan, himself, wrote that he "continue[d] to be entirely satisfied with our report." Journalist John Forney even speculated that Sanders was going to set up a "campaign paper" for Buchanan, a charge which the latter denied.

Buchanan was also an acceptable choice for the mainstream Democrats. Absent in England during the stormy debates surrounding slavery and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Democrats saw Buchanan as "available" and capable of uniting the party. As a result, the Democratic party nominated him in June 1856 at the Cincinnati convention, and he was later elected president, defeating Republican John C. Frémont and American Know-Nothing candidate Millard Fillmore. Sanders proved "the most active man in meeting difficulties and making arrangements" during Buchanan's campaign, primarily because in this "crisis in his political career" he hoped for a renewed interest in the republican movement abroad. He utilized the newspaper columns in order to espouse his views and elect Buchanan. Immediately after Buchanan's election, office-seekers scrambled for
patronage, and Sanders was no exception.\footnote{Riepma, “Young America,” 342-343; Buchanan to Marcy, 22 December 1854, Moore, \textit{Works of Buchanan}, vol. IX, 289; Forney to Buchanan, 14 December 1854, ibid., 283; Letters from Sanders “To the Democrats of Virginia” and “To the Democracy of Virginia on the Hon. R. M. T. Hunter and the Higher Law,” undated clippings, Scrapbook, Sanders Family Papers.}

In April 1857, President Buchanan rewarded Sanders with the appointment of Navy Agent in New York. Like Sanders’ relationship with Douglas, the two had an amiable beginning. On September 1, 1857, Sanders telegraphed his father, Lewis, to purchase the “best saddle horse in Kentucky” for Buchanan as a present from Lewis and the Kentucky Democrats. However, Sanders and Buchanan soon parted ways as a result of disagreements over the administration’s policies. One newspaper stated, “Sanders never agreed with J[ames] B[uchanan] on any part of his public policy. He fought him on Lecompton, stood by Walker and Stanton, and has absented himself from his office nearly all the time.” The Kansas Lecompton constitution proved a volatile issue which split Buchanan and Sanders’ relationship, North and South, as well as the Democratic party ranks.

Sanders was in Kansas during the Lecompton constitutional convention proceedings between October 19 and November 8, 1857, where Robert J. Walker frequented his house near Leavenworth. Walker, the Kansas territorial governor, and Frederick P. Stanton, the secretary, were committed to overseeing a fair constitutional convention for the territory, a stance which they believed President Buchanan supported.
At issue was the status of slavery in the territory. The Lecompton convention, composed primarily of the proslavery faction and officially recognized by the federal government, proposed a constitution which the antislavery Topeka convention refused to recognize. Although the majority of the territory was against slavery, the proslavery faction attempted through corrupt elections and other unjust practices to protect slavery in Kansas and control the territorial government. Each convention considered the other as spurious and revolutionary. When the Lecompton constitution made its way to Congress for confirmation, the heated debate split the Democratic party along sectional lines.

President Buchanan made matters worse by not supporting Walker’s commitment to a fair constitutional vote and by accepting the Lecompton constitution in order to appease the Southern slaveowners in his cabinet and in Congress. Thus, Buchanan expected the question of slavery in Kansas which had “for some years occupied too much of the public attention” to “speedily pass away.” The injustices in Kansas and the president’s

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119 Although slavery took the foreground, a majority of people who settled in Kansas were “land-hungry pioneers who valued peace and prosperity for themselves above either slavery or freedom for the Negro.” Sanders also speculated in Kansas land. Since he and Walker were friends and the territorial governor “had a weakness for grandiose and questionable speculative ventures,” it is probable that he and Sanders were in collusion. See article in Philadelphia Press, undated clipping, Scrapbook, Sanders Family Papers; see also David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), 298, 300.

120 Southerners in Buchanan’s cabinet included Howell Cobb of Georgia, Virginian John B. Floyd, Aaron V. Brown of Tennessee, and Jacob Thompson of Mississippi. Buchanan also depended on prominent southern Congressmen like William R. King of Alabama, John Slidell and Judah Benjamin from Louisiana, as well as James Bayard of Delaware. Jesse Bright, a slaveowner from Indiana, also associated with Buchanan. Moreover, 112 out of his 174 electoral votes came from the South. Potter, Impending Crisis, 204, 213, 214.
subsequent action incensed Douglas, the Illinois senator and champion of popular
sovereignty who believed the people of Kansas should decide in a fair election. Douglas
and Buchanan became bitter rivals, and Sanders having supported Walker, found himself
in a familiar position as a partisan in the Douglas camp.121

Sanders campaigned for Douglas’ 1860 presidential nomination, even though he
was still acting as Navy Agent in New York. “I see from the papers,” wrote a friend,
“you have been busy . . . and have finally arranged who you are to make President.” In
April 1860, Sanders canvassed the country to ascertain the level of support for the Little
Giant, and by the summer he reported to the unofficial campaign headquarters opened in
New York by Virginia editor A. D. Banks. Yet Douglas remained aloof; lessons of the
1852 election had taught him not to appear too eager or involved in his own campaign.
He also kept an eye on Sanders, recalling quite well the ex-editor’s destructive behavior
only eight years earlier. One New York editor snidely remarked that Sanders’ activities
involved “the moral suasion of stewed oysters, Virginia ham and Bourbon whiskey,” and
in the use of these articles he was “without a peer.” Indeed, the optimistic Kentuckian
probably found his charisma and hospitality useful as one of the “self-constituted
committee of seven,” whose duty it was to raise money for Douglas’ campaign. Other
members included Chairman August Belmont, financier John Jacob Astor, George Law,

121Lewis Sanders to Joe Sanders, 6 September 1857, Correspondence 1857-
1859, Sanders Family Papers; G. N. Sanders to Uncle Ned, 28 September 1857, ibid.;
Philadelphia Press, undated clipping, Scrapbook, ibid; Roy F. Nichols, The
Disruption of American Democracy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 122,
126; Potter, Impending Crisis, 313.
Henry Stebbins, Edward West, and politician Dean Richmond of New York. Sanders soon learned, however, that supporting Douglas carried its risks.

Working as a Buchanan appointee, but supporting Douglas for president did not bode well for the Kentuckian. Douglas and Buchanan were bitter opponents as a result of the Lecompton controversy, and in 1860 both men held presidential aspirations. Therefore, President Buchanan's advisors, most notably Senator John Slidell of Louisiana, urged the wholesale removal of Douglasites from federal offices in order to cripple the Little Giant's campaign. Influential men would be less likely to support Douglas if their jobs were at risk. Some friends inquired of Sanders whether he felt "comfortable about the neck," yet he also had "hosts of warm true hearted friends, who will make a stand for him unto death." Despite the threat of losing his job, he brazenly continued working on Douglas' behalf.

The Democratic convention gathered on April 23, 1860, in Charleston, South Carolina. In 1856 at the Cincinnati convention the northern Democrats accepted the location of Charleston as a compromise measure with the South, but four years later the choice did not seem quite so wise. By then the sectional conflict was at a crisis point, and southern slaveowners were hostile over any compromise toward slavery or their way of life. Instead, they pushed for the protection of a federal slave code. Although men like

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Douglas and Sanders favored popular sovereignty as the best way to save the Union and as a solution to whether a state or territory should be slave or free, southerners disliked a plan that might bar a slaveowner from any place he wished to live or jeopardize his property. On the other hand, northern abolitionists and free soilers disliked popular sovereignty because it allowed slavery to continue and possibly expand. Opponents attacked Douglas on both fronts, but his popularity kept his presidential prospects alive, and Sanders employed his usual energy and optimism.¹²⁴

In Charleston Sanders was highly conspicuous, welcoming Douglasites and generating support from his headquarters at the famed lawyer Reverdy Johnson’s house. A contemporary in Charleston described Sanders as “a burly, piratical-looking person,” a bundle of energy who smoked cigars “with furious, incessant whiffs.” He remained confident, insolently telegraphing President Buchanan that the convention delegates would surely nominate Douglas on the first ballot and that the president should offer his support. “I rely on your patriotism,” Sanders concluded. The telegraph, which Sanders sent collect, cost the president $26.80! Meanwhile, the Democrats failed to nominate Douglas on the first ballot, and sectional differences continued to plague the convention. The delegates had initially agreed to decide on a party platform before balloting for the nomination, but their agreement ended at that point. Concerning the slavery issue, Southern ultras stood by the Dred Scott decision, which protected slave property in the

new territories, but Douglas men held fast to popular sovereignty and favored letting the territories decide for themselves the status of slavery. Reaching a stalemate, southern states rapidly began to withdraw from the convention,125 forcing the remaining delegates to reconvene in Baltimore on June 18, 1860, where Douglas was finally nominated as the Democratic candidate.126

While Sanders had remained untouched for many months by Buchanan’s removal of Douglasites from office, on June 30, 1860, the outgoing president finally had enough of Sanders’ insolence and dismissed him as Navy Agent. One newspaper wrote, “Mr. B[uchanan] has at last plucked up courage to remove George Sanders. Why he has not done it months ago remains a profound mystery.” The Philadelphia Press described the irrepressible Sanders, “George laughs heartily at Mr. Buchanan’s hesitation in this matter. He has absolutely courted and defied him to remove him. . . . He has lived here among the politicians, speculated in Kansas lots, and went to Charleston, from which he sent very expensive telegraphs to his Chiefs, and then to Baltimore, where he led the rebels in the convention, and fought the Administration parasites all through the sittings of that body. . . . So much for George N. Sanders.” Yet another newspaper stated, “The rings, the


curling hair, the graceful snub of his nose. . . . I can hardly understand, looking at him, what his influence is; but George Sanders is a gentleman of force of character, and has exercised a control over National affairs within the last five or six years."\(^{127}\) Sanders used other men to carry out his agenda, as demonstrated by his relationships with Buchanan and Douglas. Despite his deft political management, he caused his own demise as Navy Agent by wholeheartedly opposing Buchanan. Yet the surprising point is not that he personally failed, but rather that other people continually sought his influence despite his failures. Buchanan had welcomed the support of Sanders and Young America in 1856, and Douglas was pleased when he returned to his fold in 1860. Many prominent gentlemen simply found irresistible Sanders' charisma and enthusiasm and his ability to exude influence, confidence, and capableness. The *Louisville Journal* correctly summarized Sanders' abilities, intellect, and true character, "In New York, London and Washington, some greater man places himself at George's disposal for the special utterance of *his* ideas. What a magician is George Sanders!"

By 1860, slavery was the dominant issue in the United States, and all political questions revolved around it. The slavery issue meant death for Young America, as its members could neither avoid the issue nor unite on an alternative. The domestic policies of slavery usurped the foreign policies of intervention and expansion, issues which Sanders

so ardently and passionately advocated. Slavery also shaped the business and political dealings that consumed Sanders’ life after the consulship. President-making became much more difficult when he had to confront sections and factions that absolutely would not compromise over slavery. Yet Sanders seemed to thrive amidst the activity and controversy, confidently charting his own course toward what he perceived as personal aggrandizement through either federal patronage or business speculation. But the Civil War drew nearer. After Republican Abraham Lincoln was elected president in November 1860, South Carolina became the first of several states to secede between December 1860 and March 1861 and Civil War became reality. Sanders chose to side with the South, a choice he did not make timidly or without forethought. He jumped into the Confederate cause as enthusiastically as he had joined Young America and president-making. Unfortunately, he was to experience similar results. Through his own fanatical and controversial activities, Sanders became embroiled in dubious schemes that even his fellow Confederates were to question. He ultimately caused hardship for himself and his family, while leading a life of virtual exile after the war.
Chapter IV

“To create the Union was God-like -- to destroy it is Devilish!”

To Andrew Johnson, President of the United States: Your proclamation is a living, burning lie, known to be such by yourself and all your surroundings, and all the hired perjurers in Christendom shall not deter us from exhibiting to the civilized world your hellish plot to murder our Christian President!128

On the evening of April 14, 1865, after more than four years of bloody civil war and only five days after the Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered his army, John Wilkes Booth fatally shot President Abraham Lincoln at Ford’s Theater in Washington City. On May 2, 1865, the new President Andrew Johnson offered a reward for the arrest of Booth, as well as George Nicholas Sanders and several other alleged conspirators. On April 26, Booth was finally captured and killed, and beginning May 13, eight of his associates stood trial for directly conspiring with Booth in Lincoln’s assassination. Then on November 24, of the same year Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton revoked the charge against George N. Sanders.129

While these facts are an indisputable part of Lincoln’s tragic assassination story, the role of Sanders and the Confederate government in that assassination plot was less obvious. Did Sanders conspire with Booth and other Confederates, namely those agents

128The New York Tribune, 8 May 1865.


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in Canada, under sanction of the rebel government, to murder the Union president?

Historians do not agree. Ultimately the court decided he had not, but the politically savvy and charming Sanders could have also engineered that decision. While conclusive evidence of Sanders' involvement is elusive, the available evidence strongly suggests an association between Booth, Sanders, and the Confederates. Perhaps the more important question is not if Sanders was involved, but rather, why in 1865, after striving for peace between North and South since 1860, he believed abduction or assassination of the president were acceptable alternatives to end the war. Three factors—the death of George's son, Reid, in 1864 in a Union prisoner camp, the status of the withering Confederacy beginning in the same year, and Sanders' propensity for fanatical action in order to bring about a desired end—are all keys to understanding his involvement in the plot against Lincoln.

Although Sanders supported the Confederacy for idealistic reasons, he also favored what was pragmatically advantageous for himself, most notably business speculation. Therefore, while he selfishly engaged in business deals that he perceived would benefit himself and the South, Union soldiers captured his son Major Reid Sanders and placed him in a prisoner camp where he subsequently died. After Reid's death Sanders was less active in business ventures, planning more violent schemes in collusion with the Confederate commissioners in Canada. In early June 1864, Confederate President Jefferson Davis had sent agents to Canada in order to promote activities that would split the Northern forces between two fronts. Although Sanders was not an official commissioner, he assumed "unofficial" responsibility in Canada, taking initiative in
organizing covert activities, while using other people to achieve his goal of ending the war at any cost. Even prior to the war Sanders had advocated southern ideals and peaceable alternatives to war, first through popular sovereignty, and then through a mutually beneficial reconstruction of the Union based on commerce.

As early as 1859, Sanders participated in another meeting at Ghent in Carroll County, Kentucky, which seems to have originally been the idea of his friend William M. Corry. The meeting focused on preventing the eminent civil war by suggesting possible solutions that would transcend the sectional lines of slavery. Corry wrote to George's father, Lewis, that he desired "active assistance especially among the young men of Kentucky." He suggested,

A Carroll County meeting perhaps:- such as one as set the Texas ball in motion. I have written a set of states right resolutions and argumentative report on the principles they set forth with respect to the federal system, and sundry encroachments thereof in State Rights. You will carefully send these documents and understand that to redeem the country and to restore the Constitution, we must have an inter state understanding all over the M[ississippi] Valley.

The Ghent committee met on November 5, 1859, in the same tailor shop where they had first assembled in 1843. The committee adopted resolutions later identified with the "New Mississippi Valley Movement," an effort which generally promoted less concentration of power in the hands of the federal government. "Our basis," Corry explained, "would be free trade, low duties, strict construction of the Constitution (states rights) and much greater economy for army and navy and P[ost] Office." This basis would "establish the
community if not material interests in the Mississippi Valley.” In other words, the Ghent committee attempted to transcend the slavery issue by showing how the interests of the Mississippi Valley, composed of Kentucky and its neighboring states to the South and West, were similar despite their divergent views on the “peculiar institution.” State’s rights and free trade were the common interests that connected the Mississippi Valley, and by uniting they hoped to prevent an armed conflict.

At this meeting in Sanders’ hometown, William B. Lindsay (George’s brother-in-law) acted as chairman, and Dr. S. S. Scott, Captain Jack Leathers, and Lewis Sanders were the primary speakers. Although the 1843 meeting on Texas annexation was a success, the second meeting at Ghent yielded no definite results. Thereafter, Sanders proceeded to Frankfort, the Kentucky capital, in order to address the legislators about secession. He argued that Kentucky should secede along with the other southern states, so that the South would have a united front. This tactic, he believed, could possibly forestall the North from using force to reunite the Union against a solidified opponent, thereby allowing the South to withdraw peaceably. This tactic, of course, came to naught, but it demonstrated Sanders’ involvement and influence in national affairs, the

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130 Corry to Lewis Sanders, 26 March 1859, Correspondence 1857-1859, Sanders Family Papers.

131 “George N. Sanders,” Genealogy, ibid.; Parker, Sanders of Grass Hills, 91; [Corry], Biographical Encyclopaedia, 539; In the 1859-1860 term the Kentucky legislature did not consider Sanders’ plan, passing instead a resolution denouncing secession and refusing to comment “upon a question which is yet . . . an abstraction.” Kentucky General Assembly, Journal of the House of Representatives of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, 1859-1860 (Frankfort: Kentucky Yeoman, 1860), 905.
wide scope of his vision, and his attempts to maintain peace. It was also a small part of Sanders’ much larger plan to direct the course of the war.

In the *Sequences of Southern Secession*, written just prior to the 1860 presidential election and addressed to the Republicans of New York, Sanders acknowledged that the nation was “in the throes of dissolution.” He argued that the North could not possibly force the South to remain in the Union with any degree of success. A united South could command a larger volume of resources than the North, because southern states would save money ordinarily spent on a large federal government, while simultaneously generating large profits by exporting cotton. “A Southern confederacy,” Sanders concluded, “is thus a very practicable thing . . . To create the Union was God-like -- to destroy it is Devilish!”\(^{132}\) Adopting Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas’ views, Sanders believed that state’s rights and free trade would sustain a joint venture between the southern Confederacy and the United States, but their practical solution to preserving the nation through commercial reconstruction proved unrealistic. The Civil War was primarily an ethical battle over slavery, ill-disguised by state’s rights rhetoric, but Sanders and Douglas refused to recognize the moral aspect of civil war. By advocating reconstruction based along commercial lines and ignoring the ethics of slavery, their plan proved unappealing to either geographical section because both possessed strong feelings on the presence of slavery in the United States.\(^{133}\) One newspaper deemed the project “ghastly

\(^{132}\) George N. Sanders, *George N. Sanders on the Sequences of Southern Secession*, New York, 30 October 1860.

\(^{133}\) For more information on the political debate on slavery prior to the Civil War see Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: Wiley, 1978); and
and blood-bedabbled with civil war." Insurmountable odds, however, did not deter the ebullient George Sanders.

Although in January 1861, Sanders expressed a belief that since the South would not compromise, then "Instantaneous war [was] inevitable," the native Kentuckian still traveled to Montgomery, Alabama, as a spokesperson for Douglas and the commercial reconstruction plan. Sanders purposefully chose the location, as southern delegates assembled in that city on February 4, for a Confederate convention that would construct a new constitution and government. The delegates elected Howell Cobb President of the Confederate Congress and Alexander H. Stephens the floor leader, both of whom were from Georgia. As debate got under way, the delegates were conscious that Washington leaders believed the Confederate states threatened to secede in order to affect a political agenda and, once fulfilled, the states would rejoin the Union. The delegates disavowed any intention of reconstruction, an alternative the rabid secessionists violently opposed, rendering Sanders' efforts ineffectual. Sanders and Douglas practically designed the commercial reconstruction plan, but it was unappealing to southerners who idealistically and ardently favored secession.

The ideas behind Douglas' commercial plan, likely proposed to the Montgomery delegates by Sanders, included two republics, joined by a commercial compact and

Potter, *Impending Crisis.*


135.During the months of March and April while in Montgomery, Sanders also served as a correspondent for the *New York Tribune*. Stuart, "Operation Sanders," 157.
indissoluble except by mutual consent. Regulations regarding trade, tariffs, patents, and copyrights would be the identical in the North and South, and would be overseen by a composite council made up of representatives from each state. Moreover, neither republic could alter territorial boundaries without the consent of the other. Douglas believed the plan would preserve the advantages of the old united nation, while the two independent republics would serve their own geographically unique interests. In the end, the southerners at Montgomery vociferously opposed a commercial union with people whom they considered the tyrants and abolitionists of New England. Instead, they proceeded to organize a Confederate government on their own terms and beyond northern interference, inaugurating Jefferson Davis as their president on February 18, 1861. In his inaugural speech Davis purposefully stated that the new Confederate government was permanent. Therefore, when Abraham Lincoln assumed the United States presidency less than a month later, he faced an already divided nation.  

Once Sanders' efforts at preventing war proved futile, he then turned his full energies toward projects that supported the southern war effort. He stood behind the South's mantle of state's and individual rights and a limited federal government, basic Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democratic ideals that his father, Lewis, had taught him while growing up in Kentucky. Shortly after the Montgomery convention, on April 15, 1861, George lost his father. "On this day our dear noble Father left us for another and better

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country,” a relative recorded in a journal. Sanders continued his father’s democratic tradition in his own unique way. Characteristically, he joined the southern cause by mixing democratic idealism with business practicality in order to help the South while simultaneously increasing his own pocketbook. This time Sanders was to discover that the two were not always compatible.

In the summer of 1861, while in Nashville, Tennessee, Sanders proposed the first of a number of projects to Jefferson Davis’ Confederate administration. He offered to serve as a Confederate agent in various business enterprises, as well as in an advisory capacity. Initially he marketed weapons in conjunction with his friend Arnold Harris and his cousin Beverley Tucker. He wrote Colonel Philip Dandridge that, “I shall write to Bev. [Tucker] on gun and financial matters to-day,” while offering Dandridge military tactical advice. In addition, Sanders advised Confederate President Davis how to use cotton as a source of credit with Europe. In the spring of 1862, he received a chance to use this idea when the Confederate government gave him a contract to procure six armed ironclad merchant vessels, designed to penetrate any federal blockade.

“The plan itself is worth a fortune as a perfect self-protecting freight transport and war vessel counting for the first time all in one,” Sanders boasted. He agreed to initially provide the entire funding for construction, in exchange for one-third of all prize money

137 Entry on 15 April 1861, Mary Sanders’ Journal, Sanders Family Papers.

138 An example of how Sanders mixed commerce and democratic idealism in national affairs can be found in Address of George N. Sanders to the Democracy of the Northwest, Baltimore, 8 January 1862. Sanders analyzes how the North crippled the southern economy through tariffs and concludes that it was due to the northern representatives’ “wholesale abandonment of State and individual rights.”
taken. In addition, the Confederate government would eventually pay for the vessels in cotton certificates. But first Sanders had to cross enemy lines in order to get to England and Scotland to purchase the ships. On July 11, 1862, he left Richmond, Virginia, on his way to Canada.  

For his jaunt into northern enemy territory, Sanders assumed the role of a poor Welsh coal miner. After safely reaching the Canadian border, he approached the United States Provost Marshal before crossing the suspension bridge into Canada near Niagara Falls. He stated that he was going to work on his brother's farm across the border, but he had neither a pass nor the funds to cross. He was dressed quite shabbily and carried tools in one hand and a bag secretly filled with valuable government papers and money in the other. The marshal, taken in by the miner's air of poverty and sincerity, allowed him to pass. When Sanders reached Canadian soil, he quickly headed for the Clifton Hotel at Niagara Falls where the clerk initially refused to let him register because of his poor appearance. The sight of a few bills changed his mind, and Sanders registered under his reversed initials S. N. G. "Few men are better known in the North than Mr. Sanders," reported one Canadian newspaper, "and yet by the simplest of disguise he escaped recognition." Sanders' career as a Confederate secret agent had begun.

A northern newspaper editor discovered and reported Sanders' exploit across the

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139 Sanders to Dandridge, 29 October 1861, O.R. ser. I, vol. 52, part ii, 187; George N. Sanders, Appendix to the Life and Times of Duncan K. McRae (Raleigh: Standard Print, 1864), 6, see Sanders' memoranda in United States Navy Department, War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies (Washington, D. C., 1921), ser. II, vol. 2, 220. These volumes will be cited hereafter as O.R.N.
border en route to Europe and surmised that this event was quite injurious to the Union.

We regard this as one of the most important movements made by the Confederates to injure the Union cause in Europe. . . . He [Sanders] has a large head well-stocked with brains; has no modesty to interfere with a great project; is cool headed and even tempered; understands thoroughly the strong, as well as the weak points of the Confederacy cause and has great persuasive powers of conservatism. He is well calculated to do our cause mischief with the class of Europeans who are and have been our staunchest friends. We should have agents, by all means in Europe, who can counteract his influence.\textsuperscript{140}

The writer speculated that Sanders planned to influence his liberal and revolutionary friends to commit their support to the South, a supposition based upon the fact that he had advocated southern ideals as early as 1854 during his London consulship. Although Sanders' main objective was to purchase the six ironclad ships rather than to engage in Confederate diplomacy, his presence in Europe did allow him indirectly to influence past acquaintances such as British parliamentarians Milner Gibson and Richard Cobden.\textsuperscript{141} The northern newspaper article also proved that his contemporaries recognized the influence he held with public officials both at home and across the Atlantic.

Arriving in London, England, on September 1, 1862, Sanders encountered problems with the English capitalists who were financing the vessels, forcing him to return to Richmond only nineteen days later for official instructions. Due to the fledgling Confederacy's instability, the capitalists were willing to purchase the cotton certificates at only eight cents per pound instead of the going-rate of twenty cents. Prior to leaving

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{140} "George N. Sanders in Canada," article copied from Canadian newspaper, August 26, Genealogy, Sanders Family Papers.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{141} Parker, Sanders of Grass Hills, 102-104; see Sanders' memoranda, O.R.N., ser. II, vol. 2, 220.}
London, however, Sanders outlined the initial organization of a courier service for official documents between the Confederacy and Europe. On October 28, 1862, his courier contract was made official, with his sons playing prominent roles in the operation. In the South Major Reid Sanders would direct three fast-sailing schooners to deliver dispatches to agent Lewis Sanders at Halifax, Nova Scotia, and then the schooners would proceed to Europe. The Confederate government compensated George Sanders for managing this service in the amount of $600 a month for two semi-monthly trips.142

Passing through Halifax on the return voyage, Sanders also inquired about the demand for naval stores there, turpentine and rosin for example, and decided it would be lucrative for him to market other goods in exchange for naval store scrip (much like his plan to use southern cotton as payment for goods). He expected to receive hefty commissions from this type of business transaction. He did not have to wait long to fulfill this newly concocted plan. After concluding his business in Richmond, Sanders secured on December 1, a contract with North Carolinian Governor Z. B. Vance. According to the agreement, Sanders would purchase army supplies, items like muskets, shoes, and wool cloth, for North Carolina in exchange for naval store scrip. Colonel Duncan K. McRae, a former acquaintance of Sanders, acted as Governor Vance’s emissary and proved to be a thorn in Sanders’ too-trusting side.

Due to northern naval encroachment into the Chesapeake Bay, Sanders abandoned his favorite route out of Dividing Creek, Northumberland County, Virginia, and decided

upon the longer, but safer course through Matamoras, Mexico. On December 14, Sanders left Richmond and did not arrive in London until the first week of March 1863, “traveling 8,000 miles at enormous expense, and at great personal deprivation.” McRae, who had already arrived there, was waiting on Sanders to proceed with their contractual arrangements. Ultimately, the merchant vessels deal fell through due to funding problems, while McRae caused considerable turmoil with the North Carolina contract. Basically McRae attempted to take over Sanders’ contract for his own personal gain, while misleading Governor Vance and terminating Sanders’ services.

On June 20, 1863, McRae informed Sanders that he had canceled his contract with North Carolina, citing a letter from Vance in which the governor had used language “peremptory in their nature.” Sanders responded, “The meanest Governor of the meanest Yankee State would repudiate the interpretation you place upon Gov. Vance’s letter.” He later wrote, “This came upon me like a thunder clap from a sky in which I had not imagined a cloud to exist.” Sanders sent for his son, Lewis, to travel to London in order to assist with his business correspondence. “I do nearly all of his writing now.” Lewis related, “I have written 20 or 30 pages of foolscaps in the last day or so and in the last three weeks quite enough to make a respectable book.” As a testimony to the strength of their family relationships, when George requested his presence, Lewis willingly went overseas to help fight McRae, whom he believed was out to “swindle father.” In the end, North Carolina received her army supplies, and McRae restored Sanders’ contract, but McRae also cheated Sanders out of his proper commission and slandered his name. In response to the latter insult, Sanders addressed an epistle, reminiscent of his Democratic
Review days, explaining the entire situation.

Although the ex-Colonel may play the braggart, and sycophant toward others, he shall not make me the scape-goat for his disloyalty to the Confederate government, and by bawling out thief! thief!! divert attention from himself to others. . . . the illustrious ex-Colonel is now playing the sycophant to keep out of the way of those hated Yankee bullets, else he would slay as many of them as Samson slew of the Philistines with his favorite weapon, the jaw-bone of an ass; Don't be shocked, Colonel, at the mention of your kindred.143

In attempting to earn a profit while aiding the South's war effort, Sanders ultimately failed. The initial contract with North Carolina, the courier service, as well as the merchant vessels project all remained unfulfilled. He also naively allowed McRae to violate his trust. Although Sanders could be erratic, he valued family ties and friendships dearly, often trusting too easily and reacting violently when betrayed. During the entire ordeal with McRae, however, Sanders had risked more than profit. His son, Reid, sat in a Union prisoner camp as a result of his father's exploits.

On December 14, 1862, when northern forces in the Chesapeake Bay forced Sanders to travel to Europe via Matamoras, Sanders had already twice attempted to sail from Virginia aboard his schooner Vivid, also known as Lone Star, first from Northumberland and then from Matthews County. He, along with the Confederate

143Sanders, Appendix, McRae, 6-10, 17, 26, 31, 33, 37, 44; Lewis to Uncle [Joseph Sanders], 23 July 1863, Correspondence 1863-1869, Sanders Family Papers; Stuart, "Operation Sanders," 157-158; Criticism also surrounded Sanders' concurrent contract for ironclad vessels, and his wife helped defend him. Jefferson Davis responded to Mrs. Anna J. Sanders on June 11, 1863, that "Nothing was further from my purpose than to question your husband's motive, I had no reason to do so . . . I hope will relieve him of any imputation against his honor so justly dear to you." Political Correspondence, Sanders, no. 37; see also Jefferson Davis, Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist, His Letters, Papers and Speeches, vol. VII (New York: J. J. Little & Company, 1923), 511-512.
dispatches in his possession, narrowly escaped the northern enemy on the first attempt on
November 3, while the Federal revenue cutter Hercules captured Major Reid Sanders.
Reid had his father's full power to continue arrangements for the iron-plated ships and
also to manage the dispatch service in Europe. On December 8, the Union officers at Fort
McHenry, Baltimore, freed Reid by exchange. He immediately traveled to Charleston,
South Carolina, upon his father's suggestion, purchased a fast vessel, the sloop Mercury,
and on January 3, 1863, disembarked from that port. Union vessels coincidentally lurked
nearby to seize the Mercury, and Reid became a captive of the Union government a
second time, being imprisoned at Fort Warren in Boston harbor. Federal officers also
seized the important dispatches on board, and the Confederacy terminated its contract
with the Sanders' courier service.  

Situations are not always as they seem, and such was the case with Reid's capture.
George and the Confederate dispatches were actually the targets of Arnold Harris, Jr. (or
Arnold G. Harris), a Federal naval officer and spy, who was instrumental in Reid's
capture. He was the nephew of Sanders' friend Arnold Harris, Sr., who was present with
Sanders in 1861 in Nashville. Harris junior schemed to use the trust between two old
friends in order to trick George, but Reid was the one who ultimately suffered. Posing as
a private for the Confederacy, Harris gained Reid's trust, most likely by using the old
friendship between their elder relatives, and then helped Reid to purchase and even

144 George Sanders to Judah P. Benjamin, 13 December 1862, O.R.N. ser. II, vol. 3,
627; Richmond newspapers later ridiculed Reid for allowing the dispatches to land in
enemy hands, but he was again tricked as Arnold Harris, Jr. took the tin case holding the
dispatches from the mailbag. Reid did throw the mailbag overboard, but not the
command the *Mercury*. Finally, Harris secretly notified the Federal navy of Reid’s location, placing himself once more in the Union’s bosom when they captured the sloop with both men on board. Back in the Union fold, Harris urged, “What I wish is to see the Secretary of the Navy and get permission to carry out the remaining part of my project, viz., the capture of George N. Sanders, which I am confident that I can accomplish, together with all the documents that are in his possession.” Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles approved Harris’ plan, but he was unable to fulfill the objective and the wrong Sanders remained in prison.\(^{145}\)

Throughout 1863 and 1864, Reid’s plight, like the Confederate forces, did not look promising. His worried mother, Anna J. Sanders, attempted to comfort him through a note which unfortunately he never received, it being filed in the U. S. War Department instead of delivered to her son. “My dear Boy,” Anna began, “Your friends here are greatly relieved by the statement that you were deprived of all responsibility of the care of your papers, by your being betrayed and tied by the crew.” She attempted to salve Reid’s pride, wounded by the betrayal of Harris, but Anna was also a woman of action. She consulted and wrote letters on numerous occasions to important Confederate officials, including President Davis, urging that Reid’s name be placed at the top of the list for prisoner exchanges. Her request proved impossible to fulfill, for on September 8, 1864, Secretary of War James A. Seddon informed Anna that “attempts have been made for the exchange of Major Sanders, and those attempts have failed. The efforts of the commissioner of exchange for this purpose have gone as far as the policy of the

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Government would permit.” So while Reid nobly bided his time in a Union prisoner camp as a result of his father’s business connections, past exploits, and current schemes for profit, George went about his business in Europe until early 1864 when several events altered the course of the Civil War.

In the summer of 1863, with the Union victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg, the Confederacy experienced more than military setbacks. These defeats meant that foreign aid and intervention would not be forthcoming, because European rulers were not willing to risk friendly relations with the U. S. Federal government in case the southern Confederacy proved transient. Thereafter, the South explored all options in order to reverse her gloomy present status and bring about a positive conclusion to the war. The Confederate administration decided to pursue a renewed peace movement with the object of defeating Lincoln in the 1864 presidential election and an increased operation with the Confederate secret service in the North. Not surprisingly, Sanders was in the middle of both endeavors.

On April 27, 1864, the Confederate government named three official commissioners, as well as numerous subordinates, to direct clandestine activities in Canada. Jacob Thompson of Mississippi and former U. S. Secretary of the Interior was in charge, aided by former U. S. Senator Clement C. Clay of Alabama and James P. Holcombe, a law professor at the University of Virginia. Kentuckian William W. Cleary

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146Anna to Reid, 3 February 1863, quoted in Stuart, "Operation Sanders," 192-193; Anna to Jefferson Davis, 25 August 1864, O.R., ser. II, vol. 2, 679; see also Colonel R. Ould to Davis, 3 September 1864, ibid., 679-680; and James A. Seddon to Anna, 8 September 1864, ibid., 787-788.
served as secretary to the commissioners. On May 6, the group departed on a fast blockade runner, the *Thistle*, from Wilmington, North Carolina, and proceeded to Bermuda under pursuit by a Union gunboat, and from there headed to Halifax aboard the British steamer *Alpha*. Arriving in Halifax on May 19, the Confederate commissioners split, an act representative of their entire mission, for they could not conduct successful clandestine activities without organized, concerted action. Thompson made his headquarters at Queen’s Hotel in Toronto and deposited the bulk of their funds in the Bank of Ontario, while Clay and Holcombe established residence in St. Catherine’s at Niagara Falls. At the same time, Sanders arrived in Canada on June 1, after somehow being advised of the Confederacy’s new agenda, he too went to St. Catherine’s and there he discovered two new acquaintances, Clay and Holcombe, with whom to share his plans. An attempt to secure Reid’s release from prison could have been part of his agenda. A contemporary also present in Canada, John B. Castleman, later wrote of Sanders:

It was not long before there came upon the scene a strong visionary, persistent man in the ubiquitous George N. Sanders. In my experience of a long life, accustomed to dealing with men, I have known no counterpart of

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Thompson spent the majority of his time conspiring with the Copperheads and the president of the Sons of Liberty, Clement L. Vallandigham. The Sons of Liberty was the inner circle of the secret Order of the American Knights, composed of men in the northwestern states who opposed President Lincoln and the war and who were willing to resort to violent measures to achieve an end to the war. Thompson attempted to use this group to free Confederate prisoners, cripple the North’s infrastructure, and disrupt the Democratic Convention in Chicago. Their activities became known as the Northwest Conspiracy, but they were largely unsuccessful, due to the group’s inflation of strength and confidence. Working for Thompson, Thomas Hines and John B. Castleman were prominent military leaders in these endeavors with the Sons of Liberty. See Wood Gray, *The Hidden Civil War: The Story of the Copperheads* (New York: The Viking Press, 1942); see also George F. Milton, *Abraham Lincoln and the Fifth Column* (Washington: Infantry Journal, 1943).
this very unusual man. Commissioner Clay soon yielded entirely to his influence, most men were swayed by his plausible theories, and he was a constant menace to the interests for which the Confederate commissioners were made responsible. He controlled Mr. Clay, he dominated, while he was there, Mr. James P. Holcombe.\textsuperscript{148}

Characteristically, Sanders manipulated other men in order to espouse his own ideas. Therefore, Sanders was in a prime position to influence policy, without being in the spotlight and having the responsibility of an official commissioner. He did not allow his unofficial status to hinder his plans.

Sanders' involvement was highly visible and influential, but small in comparison to the vast Confederate operation in the North. The Confederates in Canada possessed several different objectives designed collectively to hinder the Union by weakening northern support of the war. Activities included raids into the northern United States, promotion of insurrection and Confederate propaganda, efforts to free Confederate prisoners, exploitation of the federal monetary system, the distribution of misleading information, and ultimately the plan to abduct President Lincoln and absolve the Confederacy of responsibility. Sanders participated in only a few of these endeavors, but in early 1864, he primarily promoted the peace movement.\textsuperscript{149}

Like the northern Copperhead Democrats who promoted peace because they disliked Lincoln's uncompromising commitment to a war for the liberation of slaves, Sanders also favored peace for selfish reasons. With his eye toward the 1864 presidential

\textsuperscript{148}Castleman, Active Service, 132-133, 134-135; William A. Tidwell, April '65: Confederate Covert Action in the Civil War (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1995), 127, 129-130.

\textsuperscript{149}Tidwell, April '65, 107.
election and the war referendum it would symbolize, Sanders set about manipulating other men, namely the official commissioners, in order to promote a peace movement that would injure Lincoln’s prospects. If Sanders could help demonstrate to a war-weary country that Lincoln was not sincere in his desire for peace and that the president only wanted to negotiate with the South on his own terms, then Lincoln might not be re-elected and the South might have another chance to achieve a favorable and peaceful end to the war. After first inviting many influential northern men, such as New Yorkers Dean Richmond and Washington Hunt, to Canada to discuss with Clay and Holcombe the prospects of peace and the status of the country, Sanders employed the proffered services of William “Colorado” Jewett in order to organize a peace conference at Niagara Falls.150 Jewett, described by a contemporary as “an irresponsible and half insane adventurer,” was also an acquaintance of Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, peace advocate, and later emissary of President Lincoln at the peace conference. On July 5, 1864, Jewett wrote Greeley,

> In reply to your note, I have to advise having just left Hon. George N. Sanders, of Kentucky, on the Canada side. I am authorized to state to you, for our use only, not the public, that two ambassadors of Davis & Co. are now in Canada, with full and complete powers for a peace, and Mr. Sanders requests that you come on immediately to me, at Cataract House, to have a private interview, or if you will send the President’s protection for him and two friends, they will come and meet you. He says the whole

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150In a letter to President Davis dated 7 March 1865, Sanders played the innocent by disclosing his intention of uniting the northern and southern democrats in a peace movement, while blaming Jacob Thompson for rebellious activities in the Northwest. “Mr. Thompson would not enter into my views; he had no confidence in political movements; he believed in nothing but stirring up rebellion and revolution in the Northwest.” *New York Herald*, 8 July 1865.
matter can be consummated by me, you, them, and President Lincoln.\textsuperscript{151}

First of all, Sanders possessed no authority to organize a peace conference, let alone include himself in the proceedings. Although he later stated that “I was not cooperating with him [Holcombe] or Mr. Clay in their mission, but they with me in mine,” Jefferson Davis refuted this claim. “I have no recollection,” he wrote, “of my having sent to you, ‘authority to negotiate [sic] for peace.’” Holcombe later criticized Sanders’ role in the negotiations, “There were serious objections to this association [with Sanders], but believing Mr. Sanders to be a sincere and zealous friend of the Confederacy, thinking that on this occasion his peculiar talents might render him useful in acquiring the information we desired, and feeling that if the safe conduct was tendered, his wishes on this subject would be entitled to some consideration, we permitted the note to be sent without correction.”\textsuperscript{152} Sanders had definite plans for how the course of the war should proceed, and he did not allow the small matter of official authorization deter him, for he had two official commissioners as friends who could carry out his plans. Sanders’ charm, energy, confidence, and persuasive abilities empowered Clay and Holcombe to assume the role of diplomats, even though they knew they had no explicit authorization to act in that capacity. Even if Sanders also knew it, the misrepresentation produced the intended result. Nevertheless, Greeley contacted President Lincoln with the peace conference

\textsuperscript{151}Jewett to Greeley, 5 July 1864, quoted in Edward C. Kirkland, \textit{The Peacemakers of 1864} (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), 68.

In Greeley's July 7 letter to the president, he pleaded for a serious consideration of peace. "I venture to remind you that your bleeding bankrupt, almost dying country also longs for peace; shudders at the prospect of fresh conscriptions, of further wholesale devastations, and of new rivers of human blood." He listed the possible conditions for peace and concluded "it may save us from a northern insurrection," a perceptive statement considering Sanders' true objective. Lincoln responded that, "If you can find any person anywhere professing to have any proposition of Jefferson Davis, in writing, for peace, embracing the restoration of the Union and abandonment of slavery, whatever else it embraces, say to him he may come to me with you." After a volley of messages among Sanders, Greeley, and the president, Lincoln finally determined that Greeley, along with his private secretary, John Hay, would proceed to Niagara Falls to meet with the Confederate commissioners.\footnote{Horace Greeley, \textit{The American Conflict: A History of the Great Rebellion in the United States of America, 1860-65}, vol. II (Hartford: O. D. Case & Company, 1867), 664-665; James M. Callahan, \textit{Diplomatic History of the Southern Confederacy} (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1964), 228-229; Severance, "Peace Conference," 84-87.}

Greeley remained at the International Hotel on the American side of the Falls and the Confederates at the Clifton House in Canada, while Hay acted as the liaison. Between Sanders misrepresenting the true authority of Clay and Holcombe and Greeley withholding Lincoln's conditions for an acceptable peace, Hay soon realized that negotiations could not proceed. Both sides were misled. In actuality, the Confederate commissioners were not accredited, and they were unaware of Lincoln's predetermined and inflexible peace.
terms. In a letter dated July 18, 1864, Lincoln issued his famous “To whom it may concern” message.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: Any proposition which embraces the restoration of peace, the integrity of the whole Union, and the abandonment of slavery, and which comes by and with an authority that can control the armies now at War against the United States, will be received and considered by the Executive Government of the United States, and will be met by liberal terms on other substantial and collateral points, and the bearer or bearers thereof shall have safe-conduct both ways.\(^{154}\)

On July 20, Hay and Greeley crossed into Canada to deliver this message to the Confederates. Sanders, a “seedy looking Rebel” with graying whiskers and a “flavor of old clo,” ushered the visitors to Professor Holcombe. Then on July 21, Holcombe and Clay replied to Lincoln in a letter which they sent via Jewett (who immediately gave a copy to the press), since Greeley had already returned to New York. The following excerpt demonstrates the commissioners’ exasperation:

Instead of the safe-conduct which we solicited, and which your first letter gave us every reason to suppose would be extended for the purpose of initiating a negotiation in which neither Government would compromise its rights or its dignity, a document has been presented which provokes as much indignation as surprise. . . . Addressed “to whom it may concern,” it precludes negotiation, and prescribes in advance the terms and conditions of peace. It returns to the original policy of “no bargaining, no negotiations, no truces with rebels, except to bury their dead, until every man shall have laid down his arms, submitted to the Government, and sued for mercy.”\(^{155}\)

Sanders’ conference failed to attain peace, but was it totally unsuccessful? In July 1864,

\(^{154}\)Kirkland, *Peacemakers*, 81.

the Confederate army seemed well-situated, but the country was tired of war. With the
upcoming Chicago Democratic convention, Sanders hoped to place President Lincoln in
an awkward position over the peace issue. He wanted either to demonstrate Lincoln's
weakness or to prove that the president was not sincerely interested in peace. Lincoln's
"To whom it may concern" letter fulfilled Sanders' goal, because the president appeared
insincere about offering the South acceptable peace terms. Although Sanders intentionally
misrepresented the commissioners' authority to negotiate, in the end they emerged as olive
branch bearing victims. In late August 1864, the Democrats assembled in Chicago and
nominated George B. McClellan on a platform which attacked Lincoln's war policies, but
this event was not enough to win the election. The effectiveness of Sanders' peace tactics
failed as Lincoln defeated McClellan handily, receiving 212 out of 233 electoral votes.156

At this point a tragedy struck the Sanders family, one that had a serious affect
upon George's own life. While he had twenty-one year old Lewis by his side in Canada,
on September 5, 1864, Reid died as a prisoner at Fort Warren in Boston harbor. "Our
poor dear Reid died the death of a Christian," his brother Lewis wrote, "and seems to
have had all the care & attention possible to be obtained in prison. His long imprisonment
& the hopeless chances of exchange seems to have worn out his body. I have some the
letters he wrote while in prison. They are full of the noble spirit & high honor which he
ever maintained."157 Thereafter, George N. Sanders had a personal reason to be angry


157 Lewis to Joe Sanders, 12 October 1864, Correspondence 1863-1869, Sanders
Family Papers.
with the North, and his subsequent actions reflected this hatred. Before Reid’s death he was primarily involved in nonviolent commercial ventures and promoting a peace movement to cause political change, but afterward, his actions assumed a more malevolent character. His intense emotions were the result of a deep regard for familial relations, but perhaps it also arose out of a sense of guilt. After all, it was due to George’s business ventures and personal connections that the Union officers had captured Reid. A little more than a month after his son’s death, George engineered a scheme which he believed to be justifiable retaliation for northern aggression.

Thompson had previously rejected Sanders’ idea of freeing 2,500 Confederate prisoners at Johnson’s Island, in Lake Erie, for the purpose of attacking Buffalo, New York, and robbing the city’s banks. Thompson, as leader of the commissioners, obeyed the Confederate government order to respect Canada’s neutrality and to “neither command nor permit destruction of private property, nor injury or annoyance to non-combatants.” Consequently, Sanders approached the more unsuspecting Clement C. Clay with the idea of attacking the United States border cities in order to divert Union attention from the South. Thompson’s refusal of the plan and Clay’s acceptance was one example of the problem of commissioners residing in different locations. It worked to Sanders’ advantage, however, when Clay supported his idea and contributed to the project about $2,000 of the Confederate funding in his control. The first objective of Sanders’ scheme was to raid St. Albans, the largest border-town in Vermont, on October 19, 1864. It was the first in a planned series of attacks on several United States cities. Thus far, Sanders had only acted in an advisory capacity concerning military maneuvers, but his life and the
southern war effort had reached a nadir. He believed a paramilitary raid on St. Albans was a legitimate act of war, privately in response to Reid’s death, but primarily in retaliation for William Tecumseh Sherman’s and Philip Sheridan’s devastating military campaigns on southern soil.\textsuperscript{158}

Even without the specific authorization to do so, Clay gave verbal permission to Lieutenant Bennett H. Young to organize a raiding party against St. Albans, with the intention of terrorizing its inhabitants and awakening the Yankees to the threat on the northern front. Robbing the banks, supposedly, was a supplemental activity to Clay, but one that the actual raiders took more seriously. On October 19, the Confederate raiders swooped down on St. Albans and proceeded to set fire to several of the buildings, shoot-up the town with the result of one fatality, rob the National, Franklin, and St. Albans Banks of about $200,000. Then about half of the men, including Young, promptly got themselves arrested by the Canadian authorities. Removed to the jail at St. Johns, Quebec, prisoner Caleb Wallace, telegraphed Sanders, “We are captured. Do what you can for us.”\textsuperscript{159}

After the imprisoned rebels contacted Sanders, he obtained counsel for the fellow Confederates with official funds, while Lewis Sanders attended to the prisoners’ comfort by providing wine and a variety of edible delicacies. In order for the raiders to gain


asylum in Canada, it was essential for the defense counsel to prove they had acted under official orders from the Confederate government. On the other hand, if the Canadian court determined they acted as private citizens, then the rebels could be extradited under the Webster-Ashburton Treaty to the United States to stand trial for robbery, arson, assault, and murder. The *St. Albans Messenger* was of the opinion that “No one should go on such an expedition without the necessary credentials; if he does, he is nothing more than a brigand, and will be so legally regarded.” Once the prisoners were transferred from Quebec to Montreal, Judge Charles J. Coursol of the Court of Quarter Sessions ruled that the rebels needed some type of proof to show they had acted officially before he could grant asylum. As Commissioner Clay had given only verbal instructions, it was necessary for the Confederates to fabricate the evidence. Although Thompson had opposed the raid, he refused to abandon his compatriots. He sent a message to the Confederate War Department in Richmond requesting the necessary backdated documentation. Sanders, too, sent word to Richmond, and it was his letter that ultimately produced the evidence the raiders needed to secure their freedom: Young’s commission, the enlistment records of his associates, and instructions from Secretary of War James A. Seddon. Meanwhile, thanks to Sanders, all was not quiet in Canada during the trial proceedings.\(^{160}\)

In order to get the trial moved from St. John’s to Montreal, Sanders and his associates had generated the rumor that General John A. Dix was expected to invade Canada, seize the prisoners, and bring them to trial in the United States. Of course the

Canadians were outraged at the possibility of an incursion on their soil, and so on October 27, Judge Coursol yielded to the public’s outcry by transferring the trial to Montreal. The rumor also elicited sympathy for Lieutenant Young and the Confederates who were trying to prevent a similar invasion of their rights. Sanders had realized that a trial held at a greater distance from the border where Confederate sympathy ran higher, would provide a better chance for a fair and favorable outcome.\(^\text{161}\)

The charismatic and ever-smiling Sanders was also highly visible throughout the proceedings, testifying on February 11, 1865, and speaking freely to the press or anyone who would listen. In his typical fashion Sanders, who had engineered the raid through Commissioner Clay, personally denied any involvement. “He [Clay] informed me that he directed the raid, and gave the order for it,” Sanders testified, “I knew nothing of the St. Albans raid or any other raid. The first information I had of it was after it occurred.”\(^\text{162}\) Who could prove him wrong? He covered his tracks by moving in the shadows and manipulating other men. Sanders was also friendly and charming, and many people wanted to believe him, unaware that he possessed a darker side.

Even though Young and his gang were imprisoned, Sanders intended to fulfill the mission of creating terror in Canada and the northern part of the United States. According


to the *Messenger*, Sanders “has ‘dashed his water’ freely in connection with oysters on the half shell, and has invited his friends to partake of similar refreshment in the towns of St. Albans and Burlington at some future day.” Moreover, the newspaper found the debonair yet devious Sanders to be quite knowledgeable about politics and war policy.

He [Sanders] stated substantially that the late attack on St. Albans was merely the starting point, the inauguration of a system of warfare which should carry desolation all along the frontier. But for him, Buffalo would, long since, have been reduced to ashes. . . . He says there are 20,000 men in Canada, eager and prepared to enter upon these raids upon the frontier, and that towns would be burned and pillaged, and, furthermore, that the men now on trial would not be given up, and if the refusal for the application of extradition caused war, what did they care? Their object was accomplished.\(^{163}\)

Sanders displayed his usual energy and intellect throughout the trial, using the dinner table as well as more extreme scare-tactics in order to accomplish his goal. Yet like his previous activities, he did not achieve a successful outcome. Although the Superior Court of Lower Canada dismissed the rebels after ruling that they had indeed acted with official Confederate authorization, the St. Albans raid and Sanders’ rumors created an adverse effect. Instead of scaring the inhabitants of Canada and the northern United States into clamoring for federal protection, the raid and subsequent trial generated some fear, but they primarily created outrage and indignation because of the Confederacy’s abuse of Canadian neutrality.\(^{164}\) In early 1865, alternative methods for influencing the war, like the St. Albans raid, proved ineffective, and the devastating contest on the battlefield gave no


\(^{164}\)Winks, *Canada and the United States*, 306.
hope to the South. Also, the Confederate army suffered from clothing and food shortages, declining morale, and lack of manpower due to desertion and capture. Dixie had two alternatives, she could surrender or resort to last-chance desperate measures. On April 9, 1865, Confederate General Robert E. Lee by surrendering at Appomattox chose the former, while John Wilkes Booth opted for the more desperate measure.

Officials in the Confederate government had considered abducting President Lincoln throughout the long campaign. In 1865, especially, the Confederacy suffered greatly from a lack of soldiers, as 23,000 of its men languished in prison. If the rebels could kidnap Lincoln and demand freedom for the Confederate prisoners, then they could renew the fight and perhaps end the war nobly. As freeing the prisoners was a primary aim of the commissioners in Canada, the abduction scheme fit into their operation. Although they did not plan to kill Lincoln, a thin line separated abduction from assassination. After Booth murdered President Lincoln, however, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt insisted that the Confederate agents in Canada had conspired to assassinate, not abduct, the president. Three witnesses were prepared to testify in support of this assertion. What would they say?165

On October 18, 1864, just one day before the St. Albans raid, Booth arrived at the St. Lawrence Hall in Montreal, Canada. When Sanders returned to Montreal after aiding the captive raiders, he checked into the same hotel as Booth. Sanders occupied room 169, 169

while Booth was given room 150. Witnesses in the assassination trial stated they saw the two men together at the hotel. Although evidence explaining the Booth and Sanders relationship is incomplete, Sanders’ past radical activities should be taken into account.

He was a sincere and dedicated advocate for republican governments, and he was not afraid to use extreme action in order to achieve a desired end, especially when he believed he was right.\( ^{166} \) He consorted freely with revolutionary figures abroad, even urging the assassination of France’s Napoleon III!\( ^{167} \) Moreover, Sanders had lost his son to the Union army and that army’s commander-in-chief was ultimately responsible.\( ^{168} \) Sanders also had a winning way with people, and they often were swayed by his charm and

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\( ^{167} \)See Chapter III for information concerning Sanders’ activities as consul in London. See also Sanders, *Letter to the People of France*, London, 1854.

\( ^{168} \)Further influential, yet circumspect, evidence is found in *The Diary of a Public Man*. First published in 1879, in the *North American Review*, the unknown author purported first-hand knowledge about the activities of President Lincoln, as well as other prominent men, during the winter of 1860-1861. Because the author was anonymous and reported events could not be concretely collaborated, the diary can not be taken wholly as truth; however, neither can it be totally discounted. On February 28, 1861, in Washington, the diarist noted, “The worst stories about the intended incursions into Washington, and the like, all originate with men like George Saunders, [sic] of New York, and Arnold Harris, of Tennessee, . . . men who came into my mind because . . . they have been telling wonderful stories of conspiracy and assassination, from the hotel porches, to anybody who will listen to them for weeks past.” An outrageous idea spoken offhandedly in 1861 could have easily been more feasible in the desperate times of 1865. See *The Diary of a Public Man: An Intimate View of the National Administration, December 28, 1860 to March 15, 1861* (Chicago: Abraham Lincoln Book Shop, 1945), 54; An investigation of the mysterious diary can be found in Frank M. Anderson’s *The Mystery of “A Public Man”: A Historical Detective Story* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1948).
optimism. Booth could have easily succumbed to Sanders' suggestion to eliminate Lincoln for the good of the South. Witnesses believed there was ample cause to suspect Sanders' involvement with the actor. Although he was not one of the eight persons tried for directly aiding in Booth's plan to murder President Lincoln, Vice-President Andrew Johnson, and Secretary of State William Seward, Sanders might have influenced Booth in other ways. During the trial of the conspirators, additional clues would emerge concerning the involvement of Sanders and the Confederacy.

On May 2, 1865, President Johnson issued the proclamation:

Whereas, it appears from evidence in the Bureau of Military Justice that the atrocious murder of the late President Abraham Lincoln, and the attempted assassination of the Hon. William H. Seward, Secretary of State, were incited, concerted, and procured by and between Jefferson Davis, late of Richmond, Va., and Jacob Thompson, Clement C. Clay, Beverly Tucker, George N. Sanders, William C. Cleary, and other rebels and traitors against the Government of the United States harbored in Canada. Johnson offered a $25,000 reward for the arrest of Sanders, with similar rewards for the others named, if they were captured "within the limits of the United States." Sanders remained in Canada, but his friend, William M. Corry, noted, "And yet who can escape from this mercenary generation with a reward of $25,000 on his head?" In fact, Sanders

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169 The eight persons who were accused for directly conspiring with Booth were David E. Herold, George A. Atzerodt, Lewis Payne, Michael O'Laughlin, Edward Spangler, Samuel Arnold, Mary E. Surratt, and Samuel A. Mudd. Their role in the assassination plot will not be examined, for their actions did not involve Sanders. For further information see Theodore Roscoe, The Web of Conspiracy: The Complete Story of the Men who Murdered Abraham Lincoln (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959).

barely escaped. On August 5, 1865, a group of men attempted to abduct him in Montreal and whisk him to Washington in order to collect the reward. Sanders’ presence in neutral territory outside of the United States did not deter money-hungry individuals from attempting to arrest him. The kidnaping attempt failed, because Sanders discovered the plan two days earlier and then submitted to the abduction in order to catch the men in the act. Sanders could not legally be arrested while he remained in Canada, but he did not stay there for long.171

Nor was Sanders’ wife and daughter, Anna and Virginia, safe from seizure in Lynchburg, Virginia. On May 4, 1865, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton ordered that “Mrs. George N. Sanders and her daughter . . . Should be arrested and vigorously searched, and also their trunks, apartments, &c.” The object of Stanton’s interest was papers or letters that could be used to implicate George with involvement in Lincoln’s assassination. The soldiers’ findings insinuated, but did not prove his treacherous activities.172

Meanwhile, the trial of Booth’s conspirators had commenced in Washington, and witnesses presented evidence implicating Sanders. On May 26, 1865, Henry Finnegass of Boston, former officer in Massachusetts and Louisiana regiments, testified about a conversation which he had overheard between Sanders and Cleary from about ten feet away. Finnegass had been in Montreal at the St. Lawrence Hall on February 14 or 15, 171

171Corry to Mrs. [Mary] Sanders, 10 May 1865, Correspondence 1863-1869, Sanders Family Papers; New York Tribune, 4 May 1865; New York Times, 8 October 1865.

1865, and according to him, Cleary had stated, “I suppose they are getting ready for the inauguration of Lincoln next month.” Sanders responded, “Yes: if the boys only have luck, Lincoln won’t trouble them much longer.” Then Cleary queried, “Is every thing well?” Sanders replied, “Oh, yes! Booth is bossing the job.” Finnegass swore that he had not known either of the men personally, but had seen them testify at the St. Albans raiders’ trial.  

Finnegass’ character was later assailed and his memory could have been faulty, but it was also quite possible that his testimony was completely factual. Further evidence supported his testimony. During February 1865, the trial for the St. Albans raiders was taking place. Sanders usually resided in Montreal, location of the St. Lawrence Hall. Also, on February 6, an “H. Finnegass” registered at the St. Lawrence, while William Cleary registered there only four days later. Thus, independent evidence sustained Finnegass’ statement.

Sanders’ whereabouts during the waning months of the conflict were unknown, but after Booth shot Lincoln on April 14, 1865, federal prosecutors believed they had enough evidence to charge Sanders, his compatriots in Canada, and the Confederate government with conspiring to assassinate, not just abduct, the president. The conversation overheard by Finnegass more likely referred to Lincoln’s kidnaping than to


his murder. Nevertheless, the prosecutors attempted to blame the Confederate officials for the assassination. Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt believed that “it is deemed very apparent that the main feature of this plan, which purported to contemplate only the kidnaping of the President, was a mere pretext employed to draw into the enterprise those who otherwise would have hesitated to engage in it.” Ultimately he failed to prove his claim due to George Sanders’ machinations. Thereafter, history acknowledged Sanders’ explanation that Booth acted alone, without official Confederate sanction. One historian firmly asserts, “It was the most important and most successful clandestine operation undertaken by the Confederate secret service apparatus in Canada.”

During the assassination trial Charles A. Dunham (alias Sandford Conover or James Watson Wallace) was key to the prosecutor’s case of blaming the Confederates in Canada. During 1864 and 1865, Dunham was often in Canada and was willing to testify for the prosecution about the rebel agents’ activities during that time. Unfortunately, Dunham was a notorious liar. In February 1865, he had testified as “Wallace” in defense of the St. Albans raiders on the same day as Sanders, but in May he was in Washington as “Conover” swearing about Confederate intrigues in Canada. Moreover, he garnered eight other witnesses to falsely testify in support of his stories. In 1866, during the congressional hearings concerning the assassination, the Judiciary Committee exposed “Conover” and the other witnesses as perjurers, and thereafter, the federal government’s case against the Confederates crumbled. Another witness, Dr. James B. Merritt, was also


176Testimony of Sandford Conover in Poore, Conspiracy Trial, vol. 3, 115-143.
proven to be a perjurer, and when Richard Montgomery, a New York man who was
friendly to the Union but served as a courier for the South, testified against the agents in
Canada, the Confederates represented all of the witnesses as liars. Montgomery, like
Finnegass, may have been telling the truth, but the case had already been tainted. What
was Sanders’ role in this deception?

The true extent of Sanders’ role in the cover-up of Confederate activities may
never be clear. There is a record that on May 29, 1865, W. W. Daniels contacted
Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, stating that he had met George Sanders in Montreal only
a few days earlier. Daniels thought him knowledgeable about the assassination trial
proceedings in Washington, and Sanders told him that he had sent witnesses to
Washington in order to testify in those proceedings. Standing on its own, this letter
proves little. Added to the activities of Dunham, however, it takes on greater significance.

Dunham was in Canada during the 1864 Niagara peace conference, he testified on
the same day as Sanders during the trial for the St. Albans raiders, and he claimed to have
known Sanders. After he testified in May 1865, in the conspirators’ trial in Washington,
Dunham went to Canada where he met George and Lewis Sanders. On this trip some of
the Confederates in Canada accused him of betrayal, and Dunham responded that someone
was falsely using his name to implicate him. He agreed to sign a statement to that effect:

I never gave any testimony whatsoever before the said court-martial at
Washington City... That I never went under the name of Sanford
Conover. That I never had any confidential communication with Mr.

177 Holt to Stanton, 15 December 1866, O.R., ser. II, vol. 8, 976-978; William
Hanchett, The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983),
73, 77-80.
George N. Sanders, Beverly Tucker, Hon. Jacob Thompson, General Carroll of Tennessee. . . [T]he evidence of the said Sanford Conover personating me is false, untrue and unfounded in fact.\textsuperscript{178}

William H. Carroll, an ex-Confederate general, remembered that prior to Dunham signing the statement (as "Wallace"), George Sanders and Dunham conferred for fifteen or twenty minutes alone.\textsuperscript{179} Thus, the two men had an opportunity to plan the strategy Dunham would undertake when he appeared again before the prosecutors in Washington. Together with Daniels' testimony and the fact that all of Dunham's actions thereafter served to demolish the federal case against Jefferson Davis and the Confederates in Canada, Sanders' involvement seemed certain.

The Confederates continued to capitalize on the damaging effects of Dunham and the other witnesses' suspect testimony. First published in the \textit{Montreal Evening Telegraph} and later printed as a handbill, the rebels issued a statement revealing "Conover's" role in the unjust trial proceedings, including "Wallace's" oath. "The testimony of one of these witnesses, Sanford Conover, is given its quietus by the affidavit of James Watson Wallace . . . We are informed that other affidavits corroborative of his testimony will be published hereafter, and also depositions disproving the statements made by Merritt and Montgomery." Perhaps Sanders could not resist adding, "The Federal prosecutors of these charges may possibly strive to avoid the effect of this affidavit of Wallace's by urging that they have been egregiously imposed upon by Sanford Conover

\textsuperscript{178}The \textit{New York Times}, 10 July 1865.

and will perhaps allege that the whole affair is the result of an ingenious and deep laid
conspiracy by Mr. Sanders and his confreres to deceive, mislead, and entrap, gull and then
expose them [the witnesses].”

After they printed a handbill, the Confederates produced
a pamphlet in which each witness’ testimony was examined and then disproved. The
Confederate propaganda campaign left a deep impact. While the federal government
adhered to its belief that the Confederates were responsible for Lincoln’s death, the effects
of Dunham’s perjury conviction and Confederate propaganda served to recreate history--
Booth had acted alone without Confederate involvement.

As long as Lincoln’s murder was fresh on every American’s mind, Sanders and his
associates, especially his constant companion Beverley Tucker, were not safe from public
accusations. In April 1865, the New York Times proclaimed that, “The whole thing was a
gigantic conspiracy--traceable, we do not doubt, to the rebel agents in Canada, of whom
Sanders is one of the most reckless and unscrupulous leaders and who cloak their hellish
designs under pretended negotiation for peace.” Likewise, the New York Herald stated,
“In consideration of the fact that he [Sanders] was permitted to subsist on the secret
service fund of the rebel government he appears to have entered into the scheme which,
originally intended for the capture, culminated in the assassination of the President.” The
New York Tribune added that, “It would be for the good of the country if they [Sanders
and Tucker] would only leave it, and I hope to see them get ‘notice to quit.’”

\[180\] Tidwell, April ’65, 153-154.

\[181\] The New York Times, 19 April 1865; New York Herald, 5 May 1865; New York
Tribune, 12 May 1865.
and Tucker followed this last suggestion and soon left the continent.

On May 4, 1865, Sanders and Tucker wrote a joint letter to President Johnson in which they called his proclamation a “living, burning lie,” accused him of killing Lincoln for political purposes, and then challenged him to summon a court-martial to prove their guilt. The two rebels desperately attempted to clear themselves. Johnson did not respond to this stunt, and so their names remained tainted and the reward for their arrest in force. They had to leave the continent secretly in order to earn a living and maintain their freedom.182

In a touching letter, daughter Virginia Sanders wrote from Montreal about George’s predicament, “It seems to me his life has been one long trial. . . . However he looks young and handsome and the sunny face is more dimpled than ever.” She continued, “Father’s passage is taken for Europe for tomorrow, he will put it off another week if he can, it is like death to him to go and leave us as we are, but there seems no other choice to get along.” Family had always been an important part of George’s life, but now because of reckless activities, he was forced to leave them behind. “Lewis has grown up very handsome, it is amazing to see how proud Father is of his looks,” Virginia continued, “he rigged him out in a fine over-coat before he left declaring he would do that if it broke him.” On November 3, 1865, George wrote his brother Joseph, “I seem to be forced either to go to Europe or starve, this is the only logic which could have prevailed upon me to go. The trip is painful to me at best, and doubly so as I am obliged to leave

182 Provost Marshal of Portland, Maine, to Stanton, 27 April 1865, O.R., ser. II, vol. 8, 517; Corry to Mary Sanders, 10 May 1865, Correspondence 1863-1869, Sanders Family Papers.
Anna sick in bed and Virginia herself not very well... Today I leave at five o’clock for England.”

Virginia’s husband, Dr. Lewis G. Contre, surgeon and later Confederate captain, was a Union spy who deserted his wife when his true identity was discovered. Virginia was pregnant, without a husband, when her father left home. She would not be alive when he returned, having passed away only sixteen days after giving birth to a baby girl. Sanders may ultimately have exonerated the Confederacy and cleared his name, as President Johnson revoked the reward for Sanders’ arrest on November 24, 1865. But as a consequence of his own misdirected principles and devious ventures, the family he loved was left alone while he spent eleven years virtually in exile.

Sanders’ actions during the Civil War were motivated by family circumstances, as well as personal gain. He stood behind the South because he believed in the principles of state’s rights and limited government, but he also supported the Confederacy in his own pragmatic way. He primarily supported the peace movement and served as a Confederate agent in commercial ventures, two seemingly contradictory paths. But both were designed to promote the South’s policies and to produce a profit. It is difficult to determine which was more important to Sanders. Like his past endeavors, he manipulated those people in

183 Virginia to Mary Sanders, 26 October 1865, Correspondence 1863-1869, Sanders Family Papers.

184 For information concerning Lewis Contre see Stuart, “Operation Sanders”; and David Humphreys, Heroes and Spies of the Civil War (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1901), 13-22, 146-158; Although Virginia’s hometown newspaper reported that she died of a “broken heart,” her Aunt Mary Sanders’ journal does not mention that cause when recording the news of her death. See the Carrollton Democrat, 8 July 1871; and Entry on 9 April 1866, Mary Sanders Journal, Sanders Family Papers; George to Joseph Sanders, 3 November 1865, ibid.; O.R., ser. I, vol. 49, part ii, 1116.
his confidence and ultimately produced hardship for himself and others.

Reid’s fate and the diminishing southern war effort changed Sanders’ attitude. Thereafter, he became more involved in violent projects which he perceived as justifiable retaliation toward the North. Confident and charming, Sanders remained behind the scenes using other men to fulfill his agenda, while refusing to accept any blame for himself. John B. Castleman, a military officer present in Canada, later noted that while he and the commissioners were “at times very reticent in discussing in his [Sanders’] presence any matter of moment,” they were “exceedingly fond of him personally.” Sanders’ charisma was irresistible, and people feared his outrageous schemes, while they were simultaneously drawn to him. Just as he had influenced Douglas, Pierce, and Buchanan in the past, he manipulated Commissioners Clay and Holcombe and finally Booth to carry out his ideal course of action.

While Sanders was always amidst controversy and conspiracy, he was never in the forefront. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the exact level of his involvement. Considering his past attitudes and proclivity for extreme and often violent action, his involvement in the St. Albans raid and Lincoln’s assassination was not surprising, although details remain unknown. Nonetheless, Sanders was well-informed about all manner of political events, he knew and spoke with people in high and low places, and he always attempted to adjust situations to advance his principles and benefit his pocketbook. While he may not have personally benefited from success, he influenced how people perceived the nation and the political events that occurred. The concealment of the Confederate involvement in Lincoln’s death was his final achievement and Booth alone was left to bear
responsibility for the "hellish plot to murder our Christian President."
Epilogue

"One of Her Sons"

[Mr. Sanders] is one of the noblest and most generous and high-hearted of men, and, whether in his own country or in Europe, he has been the favorite and the peer of the master-spirits, and exerted an important influence upon public affairs. Kentucky is proud to acknowledge him as one of her sons.

On November 3, 1865, when George N. Sanders left his family in Montreal, Canada as a result of Lincoln’s assassination and President Johnson’s reward for his arrest, his family never expected George to be gone for eleven years. Indeed, in the summer of 1866, less than a year after his departure, Anna postponed a trip to Kentucky, because she was afraid her husband might return in her absence. In 1867, she speculated that after the presidential election he might “come back if the sky in Washington is clear next November.” One year later, George junior wrote that the family “expect[s] [his return] now before a great while.” But, in the next year he surrendered hope of an early reunion, “Father has not yet returned and has not determined definitely how soon he will come,” he dejectedly wrote. Finally in 1872, George rejoined his family in New York, only to live a year longer.

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185 The Louisville Democrat, 23 January [no year], clipping in Scrapbook, Sanders Family Papers.

186 Anna J. Sanders to Joseph Sanders, 26 March 1866, Correspondence 1863-1869, Sanders Family Papers; Anna to her niece Anna Sanders, 25 September 1866, ibid.; George N. Sanders, Jr. to Joseph, 16 July 1868, ibid.; George, Jr. to Joseph, 8 August.
After fleeing to Europe to avoid arrest, the irrepressible Sanders did not hide from the world, but instead renewed his usual schemes with the revolutionaries who revered him. In the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Europe, the liberals toasted his charm, cheered his spirit, and understood better than Americans that the fulfillment of political ends often required extreme and sometimes violent action. Little detail is known, however, about his daily life there.

In March 1866, Sanders was in London where he reported that he had “good prospects of making some money.” He hoped that an appeal to the Hudson’s Bay Company to render compensation for his past services would pay off, but the Company failed to comply. Then during the summer he traveled to Italy, because he wanted to be at “the seat of war,” fighting against Austria on the side of Prussia and Italy. By October of the same year he was in Paris, and Confederate General Pierre G. T. Beauregard wrote Lewis that his father was “looking very well & was hopeful of obtaining some important contract for the repairs & manufacture of arms. He says he will return to the U. S. as soon as he can be assured of his freedom from arrest.”

But Sanders remained in Europe, and in 1870, he joined the French republicans in the Franco-Prussian War. Sanders’ friend and biographer, William Corry, wrote:

> During the tragical siege of the French capital he was there, deep in the counsels of the advanced democrats. What a Titan he was in such scenes

1869, ibid.

of revolution, danger, and destruction; the friend of Mazzini, of Garibaldi, of Kossuth, of Ledru Rollin, and now within the very inner circle of still younger, more ardent democrats! He is said to have been reticent of the part he acted in that scathing time; but he lived up to the intensity of the crisis. He devised plans of defense against the Prussians—the inner circular railways for the trenches. Before leaving Paris he had a popular ovation at the Hotel de Ville, and his carriage was drawn by enthusiastic friends, probably the residents of the most democratic quarter of the city, which history has found so famous for devotion to human rights and progress, and for heroic war against hereditary offices and privileged orders. Mr. Sanders was of a very strong constitution, both mental and physical. He could endure any fatigue, face any labor or danger, with a degree of bonhomie which none could surpass.  

Exemplified by Corry’s narration, the Civil War in the United States had not dampened George Sanders’ spirit! Although his family anxiously awaited his return to New York, Sanders delved into business speculation and the European political wars which he hoped would further democracy. Although he was often selfishly motivated, he could also throw himself wholeheartedly into the fight for democratic institutions and individual freedom against oppression and hereditary rule. Reminiscent of when his grandfather, Colonel George Nicholas, introduced the Kentucky Resolutions against the Alien and Sedition Laws, George N. Sanders continued the tradition of democrats who ardently upheld personal rights and liberties over government encroachment. Yet while his ancestors served as role models, George was unique in the way he advanced his principles and rationalized his actions and in the amount of energy he expired in the process. He truly had a colorful personality all his own.

In 1872, when Sanders at last rejoined the family, his character appeared to have mellowed. After all, he was sixty-one years old and had just returned from a long,  

188[Corry], Biographical Encyclopaedia, 540.
eventful journey abroad. On June 14, 1872, he wrote his brother, Joseph, "I reached here Monday after an absence of eleven years." He proceeded to join his sons, Lewis and George junior, in their law practice, an humble plan for a man who usually dreamed of wild schemes. On August 12, 1873, little more than a year later, George N. Sanders died as a result of heart disease at his 321 East Seventeenth Street, New York City residence.189 Thus died a famous, or some people might say infamous, man whose image soon retreated into the shadows of history.

William Corry assessed Sanders in the following fashion:

His ways were as winning as his unostentatious talents were remarkable; and no man has acquired more friends, or retained them so warmly and universally. Politically, his life was hardly a success; as, to a great extent, the dogmas he labored to establish went down with the Southern Confederacy.190

Sanders strove most of his adult life to advance democratic ideals, while enriching himself through countless commercial ventures. In the two main themes of his life, politics and business, Sanders ultimately failed. As Corry noted, Sanders' basic democratic beliefs crumbled with the Confederacy. Added to the defeat of his principles, on March 10, 1866, while he was in London, Sanders filed for bankruptcy, citing a total debt of £10,323.191 What, then, had he accomplished?

Wealth was not the measure of this man. While Sanders never achieved the


190[Corry], Biographical Encyclopædia, 540.

191The Globe (Toronto), 24 March 1866.
widespread fame or fortune he craved before his death, his life was meaningful for other reasons. His keen intellect, boundless enthusiasm, and social charm placed him in the center of events, and few people were unfamiliar with the stocky, blue-eyed, curly-haired, cigar-puffing Kentucky native. On the regional level, Kentuckians knew Sanders as a farmer, animal breeder, horse racer, and descendent of prominent democratic ancestors. Most important, by calling the meeting at Ghent, in Carroll County, and by sending his proposed resolutions to notable politicians, Sanders managed to place the Texas annexation issue before the voters in the 1844 presidential election. James K. Polk of Tennessee capitalized upon this opportunity by adopting a stance strongly in favor of annexation. After the Sanders family moved to New York in 1845, George immersed himself in national affairs.

In the 1840s the United States experienced great prosperity. Americans were improving technology, boosting the economy, expanding the nation’s boundaries, and proclaiming that their nation was morally superior to the monarchical Old World. Sanders united all of these national characteristics and sentiments into Young America, a slogan that he made synonymous with the progressive wing of the Democratic party. Moreover, he purchased the Democratic Review to give a voice to Young America and to promote Stephen A. Douglas’ 1852 presidential campaign, but in the end his overzealousness only crippled Douglas’ chances. Nevertheless, through the pages of the Democratic Review Sanders defined the election issues, attempted to determine the outcome, and ultimately affected the way Americans thought and felt about their nation. The United States had a special destiny which it ought to fulfill through expansion, commercial progress, and
intervention in foreign affairs.

When Franklin Pierce became president in 1852, Sanders seized his chance to influence international relations. President Pierce gave him a recess appointment as consul in London, and Sanders used this forum to share with political leaders and other Europeans his democratic principles. Also, he took this opportunity to support his exiled revolutionary friends and their crusade for republicanism. Through his extreme activities at his post in London, Sanders tried to redirect America’s foreign policy, while simultaneously influencing the way many Europeans perceived the United States. The Senate allowed Sanders only a limited time at the London consulate, rejecting his nomination when it came to the floor only three months later. Shortly thereafter, when the Civil War erupted, Sanders found another cause to consume his energy.

Sanders’ activities during the Civil War were numerous and widespread. Initially, he was a moderately successful Confederate commercial agent. Then in 1864, he operated in collusion with the Confederate secret service in Canada. Although Sanders had organized the unfruitful Niagara peace conference, he seemingly contradicted his previous policy by encouraging violent schemes in order to bolster the diminishing southern war effort. Sanders did not directly participate in John Wilkes Booth’s assassination plot, but he probably encouraged the actor in his wild ideas. Sanders’ greatest triumph, however, occurred during the assassination trial and beyond. The federal government attempted to place the blame for President Lincoln’s death on the Confederacy, but ultimately accused Booth and eight of his associates instead. As a result of Sanders’ machinations, a series of the prosecution’s witnesses were discredited, and then Sanders’ rebel associates dispersed
Confederate propaganda that further disproved any involvement. Consequently, Sanders influenced a tragic event in American history by perpetuating the belief that the Confederacy had nothing to do with Lincoln's death.

George Nicholas Sanders was an important figure in American history. He was often ignored by historians because he tended to wield his influence at dinner parties and smoke-filled rooms, leaving few traces. Hence, one may initially see his results, but not his maneuvers. But Sanders does not necessarily deserve to be lauded for his contributions. He was not a wise leader, guided by high morals and noble ideas to make a difference in the world. Some of his pursuits were worthwhile, aiding the European republicans for instance, but in most of his activities he employed unscrupulous tactics and was motivated by personal financial gain. Sanders' life was not prosperous, but neither was it dull or insignificant. George Nicholas Sanders demonstrated that the important political events in American history were not solely directed by its favorite sons. Rather there was always a person of action, behind the visionary leader, who mysteriously influenced the course of events.
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