

## Manifest Destiny's Fortunes in the Western Pacific: The First and Last United States Consul to Guam, Samuel J. Masters, 1854–1856

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Writing to Secretary of State William Marcy in fall 1855, the first and only United States consul to Guam, Samuel J. Masters, reflected on two frustrating years. The New York-based sea captain endured a typhoon, a shifty secretary, and, most tryingly, struggles with two consecutive Spanish governors. The colonial administrators and Masters had clashed over the treatment of U.S. sailors, his credentials, and even over permission to repair his rented home's roof. Amid these travails, Masters identified one unambiguous and heartening reality: Guam would make an excellent U.S. acquisition.



Samuel J. Masters served as the first and last U.S. consul to Guam from 1854 to 1856.

In case our difficulties with Spain are not settled and a war should occur, I would strongly recommend that this island should be at once taken possession of, as it is a very favorite port of the whaling fleet to visit

These islands are rich and beautiful with commodious harbors, the population of Guam is about 9,000 three fifths of whom are women and children, the capital, Agaña, contains 6,000 inhabitants, with many fine public and private buildings, the arsenal contains 2,000 stand of arms and twenty or thirty small cannon. The two forts in the town are dismantled and have no guns, if they had they would be of but little account.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Masters to Marcy, Nov. 22, 1855, Masters Papers, 1854–1856, University of Guam-Micronesia Area Research Center Pacific Collections (UOG-MARC) (hereinafter MP). The file of the Masters Papers collection at the UOG-MARC on Samuel Masters's career in Guam consists of a photocopy set of Despatches from United States Consuls in Agaña, Guam, 1854–1856, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group (RG) 59, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). It includes copies of all Masters's despatches from Guam, his letters of recommendation for the post in Guam and a previous consul position in Georgetown, British Guyana, his memoir, and miscellany related to his family history.

Masters's description of the Spain's Western Pacific colony as vulnerable and desirable for conquest accurately represents the foreign policy priorities of the expansionist Franklin Pierce administration and the Democratic Party's Young America wing. His brief tenure in Guam illustrates that Manifest Destiny, as it was understood in the first half of the 19th century, did not end at the North American Pacific coast. Located 1,200 miles east of the Philippines and roughly the same distance north of New Guinea, the Mariana Islands were literally a world away, and known in the United States primarily to American whalers. Guam is the largest island of the Mariana archipelago at 212 square miles, and the most populated. It was also home to the Spanish colonial administration. Masters sought a post there because he and the Pierce administration had identified Guam as critical to U.S. economic, ideological, and strategic interests at a moment when expansion at the expense of the Spanish Empire seemed possible.<sup>2</sup>

Revolutions in the first decades of the 19th century ended Spanish rule in the Americas, with the exceptions of Puerto Rico and Cuba. They also weakened Spain's hold on its Pacific colonies. In 1811, Mexican revolutionaries in Acapulco seized the silver bound for Cavite, Philippines, effectively closing the centuries-old galleon trade that had funded, among other things, the annual subsidy for the administration of the Mariana Islands. King Ferdinand VII acknowledged the striking new reality and two years later ordered the galleon trade to cease. Spain no longer governed Guam from Mexico City, with immediate authority over the Mariana Islands transferred to Manila, in the Philippines. In 1817 Spain reduced the annual subsidy to the Mariana Islands but not the number of administrators and soldiers. The empire needed new revenue sources to maintain its Pacific possessions, and for that reason, Spain opened Guam to foreign trade and a handful of foreign residents. By far the most significant portion of this trade was provisioning British and American whalers. It was a lucrative if risky enterprise that brought commercial vessels from foreign rivals and rowdy sailors to Guam.<sup>3</sup>

This paper builds on Dirk Ballendorf and William L. Wuerch's compelling 1991 article on Masters's stop in Guam. Ballendorf and Wuerch offer a rich account of

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<sup>2</sup> The standard survey of Guam is Robert F. Rogers, *Destiny's Landfall: A History of Guam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011); for the Marianas, Don Farrell, *History of the Mariana Islands to Partition* (CNMI Public School System, 2011); though now out of date, a still insightful overview is Laura Thompson, *Guam and its People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).

<sup>3</sup> The annual subsidy did not arrive in the Marianas from 1810 to 1816, Rogers, *Destiny's Landfall: A History of Guam*, 86–89; Marianas governors in the 19th century relied on foreign whalers' spending, and sometimes the labor from imprisoned sailors, to fund operations in Guam, Dirk Anthony Ballendorf and William L. Wuerch, "Captain Samuel J. Masters, US Consul to Guam, 1854–56: Harbinger of American Pacific Expansion," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 2, no. 3 (1991): 316.

Masters's consular activities, the whaling industry, the 19th-century fortunes of Spain's Pacific Empire, and the complex relationships between Guam's indigenous CHamorus, Spanish authorities, and foreigners.<sup>4</sup> Their portrait nonetheless makes a less-than-persuasive case that Masters's career in Guam represented, as the article's subtitle claims, a "Harbinger of American Expansion in the Pacific." The authors ignore mid-19th century U.S. politics generally, and the expansionist designs of the Democratic Party and the Pierce administration, specifically. Excluding domestic politics obviates insight into Masters's wider expansionist goals and motivations, and leads the authors to the improbable conclusion that the Pierce administration's failed efforts to acquire Spanish Cuba in the 1854 Ostend Circular were likely actions that Masters, a loyal Democratic partisan and expansionist who expressed contempt for Spanish leadership in Guam, would have disproved of.<sup>5</sup>

Compounding this absence, Ballendorf and Wuerch rely mainly on Masters's recollections from his 1872 memoir, *Sketches of Travel*, instead of his contemporary communications with Spanish authorities and the State Department. For example,

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<sup>4</sup> Ballendorf and Wuerch, "Captain Samuel J. Masters," 306–26; The indigenous people of the Mariana Islands, the CHamoru, likely first arrived and settled the archipelago 3,500 years ago. Pre-contact population was estimated at 40–50,000 on Guam alone. Magellan's expedition stopped in Guam in 1521 and foreshadowed efforts to conquer the Marianas in 1688. Over the next 30 years, war, forced relocation of CHamorus to villages, and disease reduced the population to under 4,000 by 1710. The population recovered by 1855 to around 8,000, in part, as soldiers from Spain, New Spain, and the Philippines, as well as convicts from the Philippines, produced children with CHamoru women. In 1855, over 80% of Guam's population lived in the principal town of Agaña. See Francis X. Hezel, "From Conquest to Colonization: Spain in the Mariana Islands," *Journal of Pacific History* 23:2, (1998): 137–55; see also Laura Thompson, *Guam and Its People*, 30–43.

<sup>5</sup> The Ostend Circular was the culmination of the Pierce administration's attempts to acquire Cuba. In April 1854 Pierce commissioned three U.S. ambassadors in Europe, James Buchanan (Britain), John Mason (France), and Pierre Soulé (Spain), to offer Spain \$130 million for Cuba. The commissioners believed European bondholders of Spanish debt could pressure the new and financially strapped government in Madrid to accept a sale. Buchanan and Mason provided assurance that the British and French would not interfere with U.S. annexation. The commission concluded that if Spain refused to sell, the United States "shall be justified in wresting [Cuba] from Spain." Pierce, meanwhile, prepared to ask Congress for a wartime appropriation upon Spanish refusal, and at least until fall 1854, also appeared willing to let eager American filibusters accomplish the same end. The growing sectional crisis over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, however, made any war for Cuba politically fraught. One of the circular's stated reasons for acquiring Cuba—to prevent the island's so-called "Africanization" if Spain abolished slavery—made it difficult to win over Northern expansionists. The commission's militant despatches arrived on a disastrous election day in 1854 for national Democrats as anger over Kansas split the party in the North. Pierce then gave up on Cuban annexation and discouraged filibusters, see Robert May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire: 1854–1861* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 69–76; Spensor Ivor, *The Victor and the Spoils: A Life of William Marcy* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1959), 324–30.

Ballendorf and Wuerch include a version of the quote that opens this article, but it comes from Masters's 1872 memoir. The quote in the memoir closely follows Masters's 1855 letter to Secretary of State Marcy, but the memoir version omits the letter's singular recommendation that the United States should seize Guam. Ballendorf and Wuerch also seem to have lacked or ignored Marcy's instructions to Masters. While the State Department never explicitly advocated subversion, it did urge Masters to be vigilant toward the Spanish authorities and advised him to aggressively defend American sailors' rights.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, the section of Masters's memoir describing his 1853 activities as a police magistrate in the Hawaiian whaling port of Lahaina leaves out important details present in Masters's correspondence, which make clear that Masters was a well-known and well-connected annexationist.<sup>7</sup> Excluding political context and relying on memories reconstructed more than a decade after the events obscures understanding both of Masters's political significance and the U.S. desire for Guam. In Ballendorf and Wuerch's telling, Masters was an overextended consul who nonetheless "tried to do his duty" as best as he understood it.<sup>8</sup> This article asserts that Masters's understanding of his duty was shaped by a belief in Manifest Destiny in the Pacific. The Pierce administration's provocative use of the State Department to advance territorial expansion at the expense of the Spanish Empire in the Caribbean put Spanish authorities in Guam, Manila, and Madrid on alert. Planting the American flag in Guam would have been consistent with Masters's and the Pierce administration's understanding of duty.

Masters was typical of a certain kind of 19th-century United States Pacific consul who was far from home and largely free of oversight and displayed a tendency to overstep the bounds of his position. While U.S. presidents during the early national period posted a handful of ambassadors to foreign capitals, they posted scores of consuls abroad, many to ports unknown to most Americans but important to the nation's maritime commerce. Unlike ambassadors, consuls were not diplomats; their duties were confined to promoting American commerce and protecting American citizens. State department rules were explicit: consuls were "not to enter into any contentions that can be avoided . . . with the authorities of the country in which they reside" and were to "scrupulously to abstain from all participation, whatever, direct or indirect, in the political concerns

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<sup>6</sup> Ballendorf and Wuerch, "Captain Samuel J. Masters," 306, 312, 326, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592299108405838>; Samuel J. Masters, *Sketches of Travel* (Auburn, NY: 1872), photocopy at UOG-MARC Pacific Collections, University of Guam, provided by the Whitney Library, New Haven Colony Historical Society, New Haven, Connecticut (hereinafter, Masters, *Sketches*); U.S. Department of State to US Consul Guam, Oct. 25, 1855, Consular Instructions, 1785–1906, Vol. 19, 396–7.

<sup>7</sup> Ballendorf and Wuerch, "Captain Samuel J. Masters," 307–8; Masters, *Sketches*, 47; Masters to Armstrong, Sept. 8, 1853, MP.

<sup>8</sup> Ballendorf and Wuerch, "Captain Samuel J. Masters," 323.

of the countries to which they are appointed.”<sup>9</sup> In actuality, as Lindsay Schakenbach Regele has argued, many consuls did not follow the written rules. Regele has argued that U.S. consuls in the new republics of Spanish America became influential conduits who connected U.S. business interests to local markets. They shaped the conditions by which American businesses, primarily in textiles and armaments, forged economic and political relationships marked by inequality between nations and growing hostility, particularly between the United States and Mexico.<sup>10</sup> Peter D. Eicher has shown how consuls in Pacific ports, with little guidance or oversight from the State Department, stretched the rules prohibiting them from politics. Two different consuls in Tahiti in the 1830s, prior to the establishment of the French Protectorate, threatened local leaders with the prospect of an American warship arriving in Papeete. They hoped to compel the island’s government to compensate Americans for assaults and loss of property. Unlike similar instances in Mexico, where consuls could depend on U.S. naval support, Eicher explains that the United States Navy would not have dispatched a warship to Papeete, claiming that Tahiti was too distant from American strategic interests in the Pacific and too firmly under French influence.<sup>11</sup>

Masters was posted to an even more remote and lesser-known Pacific port, but he did not have to wait years to receive instructions from the State Department, and he proudly welcomed an American warship to Guam’s Apra Harbor, suggesting that there was something about Guam that made the island of particular interest to the Pierce administration. Masters stands out from his consular peers in the Pacific<sup>12</sup> not because he was unusually aggressive or played fast and loose with the rules. Rather, his propensity to seek conflict with the Spanish governors occurred in a political moment when a particularly aggressive faction of advocates of territorial expansion held power in the United States, and there was an emerging understanding that the Western Pacific was economically and strategically important to the United States. State Department instructions encouraged Masters to challenge the Spanish governor over mistreatment of American sailors, which Masters was eager to do. Indeed, unlike the Pacific

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Peter D. Eicher, *Raising the Flag: America’s First Envoys in Faraway Lands*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 223–24.

<sup>10</sup> Lindsay Shackenbach Regele, *Manufacturing Advantage: War, the State, and the Origins of American Industry*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019). For U.S. consul William Taylor’s request for a warship to compel Mexican authorities, see p. 131.

<sup>11</sup> Eicher, *Raising the Flag*, 227. Eicher researched U.S. officials in the ports of Canton, China; Bangkok, Siam Papeete, Tahiti; and Shimoda, and Edo, Japan, as well as the North and South American Pacific ports of Monterey, pre-1848 Mexico, and Valparaiso, Chile.

<sup>12</sup> Consuls in the Americas could be much more aggressive than Masters. See the remarkable story of U.S. consul Joel Poinsett in Argentina and Chile commanding a Chilean battery of artillery against Peruvian royalists, Eicher, *Raising the Flag*, 115.

consuls Eicher documented, Masters and the State Department maintained, despite the inherent difficulties in 1850s overseas communications, a relatively voluminous correspondence. Additionally, though Masters or any other American representative likely would have continued to have been of use to American shipmasters and sailors, the State Department declined to post a replacement after Masters quit the post in 1856. Masters's departure, significantly, coincided with the Pierce administration's decision post-Ostend and post-Kansas-Nebraska, to abandon territorial expansion. Rather than merely servicing the whaling fleet, it seems Masters and a U.S. consular position likely served political ends. The decisive influence of the expansionist Young America wing of the Democratic Party in the 1852 election of Pierce and the president's determination to acquire Cuba in the Caribbean, even at risk of war with Spain, and the growing desire, as illustrated by Commodore Matthew Perry's mission to Japan, for an American outpost in the Western Pacific,<sup>13</sup> provides the best explanation for Masters's appearance and behavior in Guam.

Masters came to Guam from Hawai'i, where he had been a police magistrate and annexationist. Promoting himself for the Guam consular post, he highlighted his partisanship and views on Manifest Destiny, past consular experience in British Guyana, familiarity with the whaling industry, and his awareness of the United States' compelling strategic interests in the Western Pacific. Consuls were expected to simultaneously promote U.S. economic interests and protect U.S. citizens, which produced a natural tension when mediating disputes between shipmasters and sailors. Cooper Briton Busch has described 19th-century U.S. consuls in whaling ports as existing on a continuum in which at one end were those who were sympathetic to sailors' complaints of breach of contract, including flogging and other cruel treatment, and at the other end those who stood with the shipmasters.<sup>14</sup> Masters's correspondence tells of deserters and mutineers and the

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<sup>13</sup> Perry advised the Pierce administration to annex the Ryukyus Islands for familiar commercial, strategic and ideological reasons, but while waiting for instructions from Washington, he justified his fleet's close watch on Okinawa to protect American citizens. This resembled Masters's request year later in Guam, "under the surveillance of the American flag, upon the ground of reclamation for insults and injuries committed upon American citizens . . . to be held under such restraint, until the decision of my government shall be known, whether to avow or disavow my acts," quoted in Earl Swisher, "Perry's Imperialism in Relation to America's Present-Day Position in the Pacific," *Pacific Historical Review* 16, no. 35 (Feb. 1947), 35.

<sup>14</sup> When a shipmaster discharged an American sailor in a foreign port, the U.S. consul had the authority to collect three-months wages from the shipmaster. Two-thirds would revert to the sailor when he engaged a vessel to take him home, while the consul kept one-third for maintaining a fund for other sailors' medical treatment and passage home. For their troubles, consuls collected 50 cents per discharge plus 2.5 percent of the three months wages, see Briton Cooper Busch, *Whaling Will Never Do for Me: The American Whaleman in the Nineteenth Century* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 63.

difficulties American shipmasters faced, suggesting that he was on the shipmasters' end of this spectrum. Significantly, when Masters defended American sailors, it was when the abuse came from Spanish authorities. Masters's career in Guam was defined by conflict with the Spanish governors in ways that parallel more well-known incidents in the Caribbean, like the Spanish seizure of the U.S. vessel *Black Warrior* in Havana Harbor in early 1854. In both Guam and Cuba, American officials presented Spanish lawlessness as evidence of the danger Spanish misrule posed to U.S. citizens and interests and a justification for war.

### **Young Americans: Expansion, and Partisan Politics at Midcentury**

Masters was a Democrat and inclined toward the party's most aggressive proponents of Manifest Destiny: Young America.<sup>15</sup> In writings that span decades, his career emerges as part of a collective effort to advance the United States' influence across the Caribbean and Pacific, in tandem with hazy notions of the superiority of Western civilization. In Guam, Masters's dispatches to the secretary of state advanced a bellicose posture toward the Spanish authorities, whose arbitrary and cruel governance, he believed, threatened American commerce and individual sailors' rights. Such evaluations of the Spanish Empire were common among midcentury Americans and an effective cudgel for those advocating for U.S. seizure of Spanish Cuba. While public support for the Mexican War had soured before peace came in 1848, the belief remained potent that the entire Western hemisphere, and points farther west, were destined to be American states and territories.<sup>16</sup>

Democratic presidents from James Polk to William Buchanan identified expansion as a primary goal of their administrations. In Congress, advocates of Manifest Destiny led Democratic majorities for much of the 1850s. Further, the Mexican War had

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<sup>15</sup> Masters and his letter writers highlighted his partisanship to Secretary of State William Marcy, Masters to Marcy, Aug. 26, 1853; Newcomb to Marcy, Nov. 12, 1853, MP. Young America was a Democratic Party reform movement led by a core of New York writers and newspaper editors who in the 1840s and 1850s advanced "foreign expansion, pro-democracy intervention in other countries, research and innovation, and economic growth." Young America's internationalism, Whiggish view on federal power, and its advocacy for reform put the movement at odds with Jacksonian agrarianism and represented a clear challenge to aging party leaders. See Yonatan Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party*, New York (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 6; the movement took its name from the 1844 Ralph Waldo Emerson speech, "The Young American," reprinted in *The Dial*, and an 1845 Edwin de Leon commencement address at South Carolina College. William T. Kerrigan "Young America! Romantic Nationalism in Literature and Politics, 1843–1861" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1997), 2, 65.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Burge, *A Failed Vision of Empire: The Collapse of Manifest Destiny, 1845–1872* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022), 3, 172.



encouraged filibusters, or military adventurers, to seize power in parts of Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, and Hawai'i. While presidents, the armed forces, and the State Department at times acted to curtail filibusters, these men acted with the tacit approval of much of the Democratic Party and the often-enthusiastic support of party-affiliated newspapers.<sup>17</sup> Among other effects, filibustering's disruptions created potential openings into which the respectable advocates of expansion waited to insert themselves. Midcentury hostility between the United States and the Spanish Empire threatened or, for Young America, promised war. The 1852 election, won by Young America champion Franklin Pierce, appeared to represent a popular mandate to accelerate territorial expansion.<sup>18</sup>

Masters was not a filibuster. He was a ship captain, naturalist, temperance supporter, a State Department official, and an advocate of reform and science. He couched expansion within a progressive rhetoric consistent with the East Coast intellectual leaders of Young America. No populist either, Masters assisted Spanish authorities in Guam in locating American sailors who had deserted or mutinied. In a revealing episode from his memoir, Masters recounts how the alcoholic English ship captain who took him to Manila in the summer of 1854 contacted him weeks later after surviving a shipwreck. The captain requested a letter of commendation from Masters to vouch for his character to his employers. Masters declined, not because the captain's drinking endangered passengers, but rather, he explained, "I sympathized with Captain Browning, but could not in justice to the underwriters nor to the owners of the ship accede to his wishes."<sup>19</sup> Masters saw himself as a pillar of American respectability in the Pacific, a man who could tame the rowdy Americans manning whaling vessels when they came onshore in far-flung ports. This quality also made him, in his and the Pierce administration's view, capable of defending those same citizens' rights from arbitrary Spanish power and of raising the level of civilization across the Pacific. In Guam, Masters was a well-placed tool.

Descending from a New York state family with deep roots in the local elite and longstanding connections to the national Democratic Party, Masters received his

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<sup>17</sup> Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 119–21.

<sup>18</sup> For Pierce's commitment to Young America, see Roy Nichols, *Franklin Pierce: Young Hickory of the Granite Hills* (Newton, CT: American Political Biography Press, 1958, 1993), 220–223, 303, 330; Pierce and Nathaniel Hawthorne became friends while at Bowdoin College, and Hawthorne wrote Pierce's campaign biography in which he noted that even as a 16-year-old, in an ideologically divided student body, Pierce was drawn to the "progressive, democratic parties," Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Life of Franklin Pierce* (Ohio State University Press, 1852), <https://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/nh/fp01.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Masters, *Sketches*, 56.



first State Department post in 1845, when President James K. Polk appointed him U.S. consul to British Guyana. By then, he had two decades' experience sailing on commercial vessels in the Caribbean and Mediterranean.<sup>20</sup> While consul in Guyana, Masters moonlighted as a correspondent for the expansionist *New York Herald*, then under the editorship of James Gordon Bennet. Consul Masters soon faced a crisis that endangered his position. In 1847, a group of local Georgetown merchants demanded the State Department withdraw him. Two American merchants, Charles Benjamin and Alexander Duff, accused Masters of publicly defaming them by claiming they were insolvent, which threatened to ruin their reputations and business.<sup>21</sup> While Masters's memoir provides considerable detail on Georgetown society and his scientific pursuits in Guyana, it ignores this conflict, though the dispute constituted a significant portion of his consular dispatches to Secretary of State James Buchanan.<sup>22</sup> In his memoir, Masters claims he made an entirely positive impression on Georgetown society, so much so that a group of British enthusiasts provided financial support for a series of scientific voyages up the Berbice River to locate its source. His dispatches to Buchanan, however, claim that he was not feeling well, and he requested six months away from his consular duties to recuperate.<sup>23</sup> In any case, Masters reconstructed his expedition in his memoir from published accounts he had contributed to Bennet's *New York Herald*. Masters highlighted his scientific rigor, sense of awe, and natural command over the one African American and four indigenous men who were his servants and guides.<sup>24</sup> Brian Rouleau has shown how American sailors abroad created a popular literary genre that mixed adventure, scientific discovery, and imperial expansion in a seamless whole. While modest, Masters's contributions to this genre place him in the company of men like Richard Henry Dana, Jr., whose widely read descriptions of California in the 1830s generated curiosity and interest in annexation.<sup>25</sup>

Masters's South American adventures ended in 1849 when Whig President Zachary Taylor recalled him. Masters's memoir falsely claims that he resigned following the

<sup>20</sup> Ballendorf and Wuerch, "Captain Samuel J. Masters, US Consul to Guam," 306–7.

<sup>21</sup> Jacob Broom to Buchanan, April 15, 1847, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Georgetown, Demerara, British Guyana, April 1847, Consular Correspondence, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59, NARA, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/212008826>; John L. Adams, April 27, 1847, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/212008826?objectPage=192>.

<sup>22</sup> Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Georgetown, Demerara, British Guyana, 1847–49, Consular Correspondence, RG 59, NARA, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/212008826>.

<sup>23</sup> Masters to Buchanan, May 3, 1847, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Georgetown, Demerara, British Guyana, 1847–49, RG 59, NARA, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/212008826?objectPage=219>.

<sup>24</sup> An address delivered by Captain Samuel J. Masters of Greenwich, New York, before the parents and children at the Academy Hall, Cambridge, New York, Dec. 23, 1879, 1–2, MP.

<sup>25</sup> Brian Rouleau, *With Sails Whitening Every Sea: Mariners and the Making of an American Maritime Empire*, Illustrated edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 27.

1848 election. His contemporary correspondence, however, reveals just how much he desired to remain at his post, and that even years later he harbored bitterness at his removal.<sup>26</sup> In 1850, Masters returned to the United States for two months before sailing for California. The memoir is the only source for this period of Masters's life, and it is cryptic. Masters claims he went to California, via Panama, not for gold but for his own, mysterious purposes. Whatever those may have been, he claims he failed to achieve them, and by 1852, he had sailed farther west, this time to Hawai'i. In Honolulu, Masters met New York physician Wesley Newcomb and bonded with a fellow conchologist (snail and shell enthusiast). Dr. Newcomb helped Masters get a government post as a police magistrate in the busy whaling port of Lahaina on the island of Maui.<sup>27</sup>

In Lahaina, as Masters recounts, he served as a righteous magistrate who joined with other like-minded American citizens "to keep all evil-doers within the pale of the law."<sup>28</sup> In his correspondence, we learn that chief among these evildoers were other Americans—rum sellers. In his 1853 correspondence to Richard Armstrong, the American missionary and minister of public instruction of the Kingdom of Hawai'i, Masters relays his suspicion that Americans in the rum trade had lobbied the governor of Maui to remove him from his post. Masters further accused his enemies of holding public meetings to agitate native Hawai'ians "into a fever heat to remonstrate against annexation and, if necessary, to take up arms against it." He claimed that the rum sellers cynically exploited annexation fears to pass resolutions against reformers like Armstrong and Judd Garrit. Masters connects order and American-guided reform to annexation and suggests that rum sellers and their clientele of American sailors were more likely to support the monarchy's status quo than were American reformers like Masters.<sup>29</sup>

In Hawai'i, the reformers maintained that Hawaiian commerce and security would be advanced under American influence and eventual rule. The weak monarchy, without assistance from dedicated reformers like Armstrong, was unable to control American sailors, protect American rights, or improve the islands.<sup>30</sup> Masters's identity as a reformer and Democrat reflects a shift in midcentury Democratic

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<sup>26</sup> Masters, *Sketches*, 41; Masters pleaded with the new Whig Secretary of State John Clayton to remain at his post in Guyana, Clayton, Dec. 14, 1849, MP; Masters later wrote to Marcy that Taylor removed him from the Guyana post "purely on political grounds," Masters to Marcy, Jan. 21, 1854, MP.

<sup>27</sup> Masters, *Sketches*, 47.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Masters to Armstrong, Sept. 8, 1853, MP.

<sup>30</sup> Arrell Gibson, *Yankees in Paradise: The Pacific Basin Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 354.

Party politics in which an almost Whiggish strain of moral righteousness appeared among the urban and middle-class men of Young America that mixed social progress with territorial expansion. In 1849 a Whig newspaper in Masters's native New York advocated Hawaiian annexation. Orderly annexation was the best insurance against a violent and chaotic end to Hawaiian self-rule. In 1851 filibusters from San Francisco arrived in Honolulu aboard *Game Cock*,<sup>31</sup> and King Kamehameha III and his cabinet requested the U.S. Navy to keep the warship USS *Vandalia* in port that winter to protect against his overthrow.<sup>32</sup> The following year, 4,000 rioting American sailors briefly took control of Honolulu, raising higher fears of filibuster violence.<sup>33</sup> That same year, New York investors offered King Kamehameha III \$5 million to agree to annexation. In July 1853, shortly after Masters had departed Lahaina for Guam, the American commissioner in Honolulu advised Secretary of State Marcy that Kamehameha III would seek annexation himself.<sup>34</sup> Though a seeming opponent of riotous sailors and the men who fueled their outrages with rum, Masters and the reformers shared with their rougher compatriots the conviction that the monarchy's weakness threatened American rights and commerce and stood in the way of national destiny. As Rouleau observes, "there was a diplomacy of the elite, with its elaborate dress, niceties, and kowtowing, and, there was a diplomacy of the roughs, where fists finalized matters."<sup>35</sup> Both diplomacies were evident during Masters's career in Hawaii and Guam and, in retrospect, the two seem more complementary than antagonistic.

### Seeking a Guam Posting

At the start of 1853, just weeks into his position as police magistrate, Masters wrote to fellow New Yorker and new Secretary of State William Marcy to make himself available for a Pacific consular post. While Masters said he could ably serve as a new U.S. consul in Hilo and open that port up to American whalers, he claimed that he could render a more critical service to his country,

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<sup>31</sup> Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 241–42.

<sup>32</sup> Gibson, *Yankees in Paradise*, 325.

<sup>33</sup> Rouleau, *With Sails Whitening Every Sea*, 102–4.

<sup>34</sup> In 1842 the United States sent a diplomatic representative to the Kingdom of Hawai'i with the title of commissioner. In 1854 Commissioner David L. Gregg drew up an annexation treaty with the monarch's support and sent it to Washington where Marcy received it warmly; events in Hawai'i turned contrary to U.S. annexation when King Kamehameha III died and his successor withdrew the treaty. See Rhonda Hackler, "'Earnest Persuasion but Not Peremptory Demand': United States Government Policy toward the Kingdom of Hawai'i, 1820–1863," *The Hawaiian Journal of History* 42 (2008), 55, 60–63.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

in the port of Guam Ladrone or Marion [*sic*] Islands, which bids fair to become a port of considerable importance to the American commerce more especially if Com. Perry succeeds in negotiating a favorable treaty of commerce with the Japanese. The Ladrone Islands lying in the track of ships bound from India to Japan and during the last year not less than one hundred American whale ships touched there for supplies.<sup>36</sup>

Linking the 1853 arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry's gunboats in Edo Bay in Tokyo with America's commercial interests and Guam's favorable Western Pacific location, Masters hinted at Guam's promise as a potential U.S. possession.<sup>37</sup> He understood Guam and Apra Harbor's importance to American whalers. The rise of the American whaling industry in the first half of the 19th century coincided with administrative changes in Spain's Pacific Empire.<sup>38</sup> As its South American possessions began winning independence, Spain in 1825 began opening its Pacific ports to international commerce.<sup>39</sup> An 1825 decree organized a port service in Guam's Apra Harbor, with regulations arriving in 1828 to meet the growing British whaler demand for provisions. By the 1850s, American whaling ships outnumbered the British. Whaling ships in Guam took on food and firewood at Apra and water further south at the village of Umatac. They paid colonial authorities' tonnage and anchor dues, and made minor repairs, while sailors, during the month or so away from the masters' control, spent or bartered with locals, but also frequently brought disease and disorder.<sup>40</sup> For their part, American shipmasters preferred Guam because Spanish authorities' vigilance and control prevented desertion and riotousness.<sup>41</sup> Masters, with his experience in shipping and recent stints in Hawai'i and California, also likely appreciated the potential of expanding Pacific commerce beyond whaling.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Masters to Marcy, Aug. 26, 1853, MP. The contrast with the version of his appointment in the memoir is notable. In 1872, Masters claimed that far from specifying Guam, he merely asked for a "consulship at some Pacific port and in due time I received a commission as US Consul to the Ladrone Islands," Masters, *Sketches*, 49.

<sup>37</sup> Masters to Marcy, Aug. 26, 1853, MP.

<sup>38</sup> For surveys of the American whaling industry see, Elmo Paul Hohman, *The American Whaleman: A Study of Life and Labor in the Whaling Industry* (New York: Longman's Green and Co., 1928), and more recently, Lance E. Davis, Robert E. Gallman, and Karin Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan: Technology, Institutions, Productivity and Profits in American Whaling, 1816–1906* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). For a concise, local angle, see Richard G. Doty, "Guam's Role in the Whaling Industry," *Guam Recorder* 2, no. 4, (1972), 20–27.

<sup>39</sup> Gibson *Yankees in Paradise*, 142.

<sup>40</sup> Doty, "Guam's Role in the Whaling Industry," 22–23.

<sup>41</sup> Busch, *Whaling Will Never Do for Me*, 93.

<sup>42</sup> For how expanding commercial networks shaped the post-1848 economic and demographic development of California, Australia, Hawai'i, China, and the Pacific, see Mae M. Ngai, *The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes and Global Politics*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2021), 47, 352.



A view of the southern village of Umatac, ca. 1830–33, where whalers in Masters's time took on water.

Assembling an impressive collection of letter writers, Masters inundated Secretary of State Marcy with commendations.<sup>43</sup> The letter writers noted Masters's knowledge of whaling, past consular experience, scientific accomplishments, and ability to advance Manifest Destiny. Emphasizing this last point, a letter signed by dozens of ship captains noted that Guam lay an average of 1,800 miles from Japan, China, and Southeast Asia or, as they put it, “within striking distance” of the U.S. Navy. The letter continued:

With the annexation of Texas, we lost forever our self restraining power. Westward the star of Empire holds its way. Ladrones must become the stepping stones of progress, the Sandwich Islands already feel the beneficial pressure.

The shipmasters concluded noting the excellent harbor at Apra and the fact that “the island of Guam (Perhaps the group) May be obtained from Spain on terms, large perhaps with reference to it's [*sic*] superficial extant, but of no account in reference to it's [*sic*] intrinsic value.”<sup>44</sup>

Masters's friend and fellow conchologist Newcomb, who had been instrumental in getting Masters installed as police magistrate in Lahaina, offered what he called “a

<sup>43</sup> The letters of support span the period from August 1853 to February 1854, MP.

<sup>44</sup> Hogan, et al., to Marcy, Jan. 1854, MP.

stranger recommendation” for the sea captain. “Science is already indebted to him,” Newcome wrote. Combining science and national mission, Newcomb continued, “the Ladrones are yet almost a terra incognita to the Naturalist. . . I am sure that his energy and perseverance will bring to our acquaintance the fauna of this interesting region and I doubt not would greatly aid in giving a higher character to American scientific discoveries.”<sup>45</sup> The letter confirmed Masters’s scientific bona fides, and suggests a Young America linkage between scientific progress and national greatness.

### **Unable to Hoist the Consular Flag: Masters’s Struggles in Guam**

What did the first and only U.S. consul in Guam accomplish during his 16 months on the island from fall 1854 to spring 1856? His correspondence shows that much of his activity was routine. He took care of ill sailors, kept their money safe while they were onshore, assisted ship captains and Spanish authorities in tracking down deserters, and represented sailors who ran afoul of the law. In his memoir, however, Masters appears as a Pacific version of James Fennimore Cooper’s deerslayer. He observed CHamoru cultural ways, tramped across the mountains in central and southern Guam, killed scores of deer, and fit in the occasional “conchological expedition.” Any contributions Masters made to science, however, are lost.<sup>46</sup>

Importantly, Masters’s struggles with the Spanish governors of the Marianas stand as the most notable aspects of his tenure. In summer 1854, the Spanish captain-general in Manila approved Masters’s request to continue to Guam, but as a commercial agent, not a consul. Masters never learned that the captain-general had ordered the governor of the Marianas, Don Pablo Perez, to encourage the American to depart as soon as possible. The official document from Madrid recognizing Masters as consul, the exequatur, never arrived. Historians Ballendorf and Wuerch presume it was never intended to,<sup>47</sup> but in fact, Madrid denied the State Department’s application for an exequatur, something the State Department learned only after Masters had departed Guam.<sup>48</sup>

The adversarial relationship turned hostile when Don Felipe de Maria de la Corte y Ruano Calderon replaced Governor Perez. An energetic officer and educated modernizer, De la Corte received his commission in June 1853, a month before

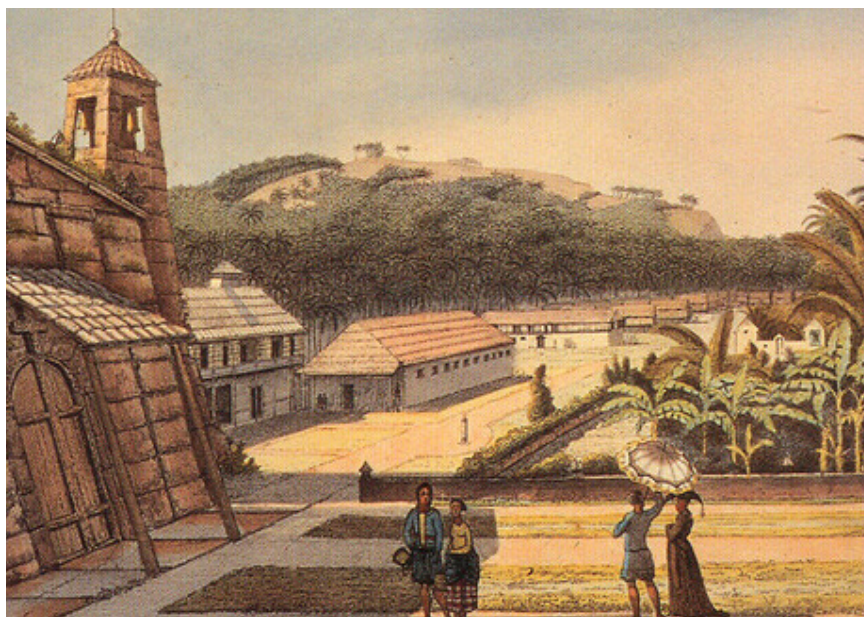
<sup>45</sup> Newcomb to Marcy, Dec. 14, 1853, MP.

<sup>46</sup> Masters, *Sketches*, 71; Ballendorf and Wuerch, “Captain Samuel J. Masters,” 318.

<sup>47</sup> Ballendorf and Wuerch, “Captain Samuel J. Masters,” 310.

<sup>48</sup> The instructions note that Madrid had not approved the exequatur because, as de la Corte had often reminded Masters, Spain did not typically recognize foreign consuls in colonial ports. U.S. Department of State to US Consul Guam, April 21, 1856, Consular Instructions, 1785–1906, Vol. 22, 590–1, RG 59, NARA.





The Plaza de España in Agaña, ca. 1815–18, as it appeared during the Russian Kutzebue expedition and as Samuel J. Masters would have found it in 1854.

Commodore Perry's arrival in Edo Bay, and Madrid charged him with increasing the value of the often-neglected Marianas. In communications with superiors in Manila and as shown in a later magisterial study of the Marianas, de la Corte displayed an understanding of Masters's and the United States' threat to Spain.<sup>49</sup> De la Corte and Masters kept up a regular and dysfunctional correspondence, with the governor frequently reminding the American that he was not a consul and must remove the seal from all communications. By Masters's final months in Guam, the relationship had grown so toxic that despite its nonrecognition of Masters as consul, Madrid reprimanded de la Corte for his disdainful treatment of the American.<sup>50</sup> This reprimand, however, came after Masters had already departed and, more significantly, after the public disclosure of the Ostend Circular had led to the collapse of the Pierce administration's Caribbean ambitions. The Masters–de la Corte relationship, however, did not begin with mutual rancor. Masters noted the change in the governorship positively and wrote the State Department that Spain's

<sup>49</sup> Michael Clement, "Chinchuli: Indigenous Chamorro Reciprocity as Resistance to Colonial Development under Governor Felipe de la Corte (1855–1866)," conference paper, CLASS Annual Research Conference, University of Guam, March 2023.

<sup>50</sup> National Historical Archive of Spain, *Incidente por el motín de la tripulación de una fragata angloamericana*, Ultramar 435, Exp. 19, <http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/show/2353795?nm>.



new man was a welcome change. Still, he complained to the secretary of state that de la Corte, like his predecessor, forbade him from “hoisting my consular flag.” The greatest area of contention was over Spanish treatment of American sailors.<sup>51</sup> Secretary of State Marcy sent pointed instructions that Masters’s primary interest in Guam was to protect American sailors against Spanish abuse and to intervene when any violation of American rights was reported.<sup>52</sup> Specifically, Masters was to investigate, with the assistance of the U.S. navy, the abuse of sailors from the wrecked *Sarah Moers* while they were housed on the island in 1854. The otherwise obscure incident in the Western Pacific mirrors the February 1854 Spanish seizure of the U.S. steamer the *Black Warrior* in Havana Harbor for failure to comply with harbor regulations. That incident produced calls for war in the Democratic Party press and agitated filibusters in Louisiana and elsewhere in the South. Pierce weighed how the incident, and growing Spanish fears over federal or filibuster intervention, could be leveraged to compel Spain to sell Cuba. Even before the *Black Warrior* incident, Marcy had dispatched agents, with bellicose instructions, to Cuba to investigate rumors as to the possibility of emancipation of enslaved Cubans there, which American filibusters in the South violently opposed.<sup>53</sup>

In Guam, July 1855 marked the high point of Masters’s tenure when Commander John Pope and the USS *Vandalia* arrived in Apra Harbor. Marcy had lamented that Masters had arrived in November 1854 and therefore had not been present when rescued American sailors from the wrecked *Sarah Moers* had been in Guam. Upon their return home, the sailors accused then-Governor Perez of imprisoning and flogging them. The State Department launched an investigation and charged Masters as consul with overseeing it. The State Department had provided Masters with extracts of sailors’ testimony. Marcy had requested the Navy to dispatch Pope, commander of the Eastern Squadron, to Guam to conclude the investigation with Masters and de la Corte.<sup>54</sup> Following a lengthy correspondence between Masters, de la Corte, and Pope that summer, the USS *Vandalia*, flagship of Commodore Perry’s East India Squadron appeared, and the stage was set for Masters to admonish the governor.<sup>55</sup>

The *Vandalia* had a battery of 20 cannons and a crew of 200, which Masters was keenly aware would likely be enough to seize the island. He joined de la Corte

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<sup>51</sup> Masters to Marcy, June 5, 1855, MP.

<sup>52</sup> State to Guam, Oct. 24, 1854, Consular Instructions, Vol. 19, 397, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>53</sup> May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, 43–44, 54–55.

<sup>54</sup> State to Sec. of the Navy, Oct. 24, 1854, Consular Instructions, Vol. 19, 398–99, RG 59, NARA.

<sup>55</sup> State to Sec. of Navy, Oct. 24, 1854, Consular Instructions, *Ibid.*



The USS *Vandalia* arrived with Commander John Pope in Apra Harbor on July 6, 1855, to investigate the alleged mistreatment of American sailors the previous year.

in welcoming Pope and other American naval officers to the governor's palace and seems to have relished his enhanced diplomatic role. While de la Corte had refused to accept Masters's credentials, Pope insisted on the consul's presence, and the American commander's view, supported by cannons and marines, carried the day. As in Hawai'i in 1851,

the U.S. Navy dispatched the *Vandalia* to a Pacific Island the United States deemed unruly and commercially significant. In this instance, the goal was not to intimidate would-be filibusters but to impress upon Spanish authorities the primacy of American citizens' rights, and to elevate Masters to de-facto consul. As things turned out, the investigation into the *Sarah Moers* did not reveal new information, but Masters believed it nonetheless confirmed a valuable truth, as he explained to Commander Pope:

Could one of our national vessels occasionally visit this island, it would have a most beneficial effect and keep up the good understanding that now exists with the present authorities of the islands.<sup>56</sup>

Masters had earlier expressed to Marcy the same belief, in nearly the same language, that an American warship docked in Apra during the winter months when whale ships gathered in Apra Harbor would have a salutary effect on the Spanish governor and protect Americans.<sup>57</sup> Marcy echoed Masters's words, again in nearly identical language, telling the secretary of the navy that "the occasional exhibition of a United States vessel at the Ladrones and the neighboring groups may prevent hereafter the commission of violence on the persons and property of American citizens who visit these islands."<sup>58</sup> The Pierce administration seemed receptive to what was a not uncommon desire of 19th-century consuls in distant ports for U.S. warships to protect American sailors in Pacific islands and correct the misbehavior of local authorities.

<sup>56</sup> Masters to Pope, July 24, 1855, MP.

<sup>57</sup> Masters to Marcy, March 10, 1855, MP.

<sup>58</sup> State to Sec. of Navy, Oct. 25, 1854, Consular Instructions, Vol. 19, 398, RG 59, NARA.

Commander Pope's report of the investigation is a straightforward description of the conference with de la Corte. Pope requested that former Governor Perez face punishment for the floggings but did not demand it. De la Corte countered that the American sailors had been punished according to Spanish laws. Pope's report, apparently without irony, explained that "I stated that this mode of punishment had been abolished in my own and most other countries and it was hoped that it would not be hereafter resorted to."<sup>59</sup> Other than this indirect evaluation of Spanish backwardness, Pope seemed uninterested in passing judgment on Spanish rule, much less overturning it. The *Vandalia's* departure, however, led to the steady deterioration and ultimate collapse of the Masters-de la Corte relationship. Without an American warship in the harbor, Masters struggled.

Masters's standing was soon tested with the arrival of the whaling ship *Jireh Perry* and its 12 mutinous sailors. Captain George Lawrence, Jr., had recommended Masters to the State Department for the Guam post, and Masters was eager to see the captain's authority restored.<sup>60</sup> The close cooperation between Masters and the governor unraveled when Masters pushed against Spanish rules concerning the hiring of local laborers. Masters commended de la Corte for taking decisive action and imprisoning the munity's ringleaders.<sup>61</sup> When Masters followed Captain Lawrence's request for two CHamoru men to fill out the crew of the *Jireh Perry*, De la Corte resisted, citing Spanish law, before relenting. Spanish governors of the Marianas had been reluctant to allow CHamoru men to leave the island, fearing the loss the labor and the tax revenue able-bodied men provided. Masters had enough advantage to persuade the governor.

In addition, one of the mutinous sailors, William Martin, had been placed in a hospital for foreign sailors. Governor De la Corte considered Martin, ill or not, a prisoner and prohibited him from entering the principal town of Agaña. Assured by Masters and the hospital's British physician that he would not, in fact, face any penalty, a recovering Martin entered Agaña, and the military guards imprisoned him. De la Corte refused to release Martin and prevented Masters from visiting him. The governor accused Masters of overstepping his bounds as a commercial agent and responded that even if Madrid had recognized him as consul, he would still lack the authority to interfere in internal legal matters. In response, Masters lectured the governor on international law, basic humanity, and

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<sup>59</sup> Pope to Joel Abbot, Aug. 2, 1855, MP.

<sup>60</sup> Hogan, et al., to Marcy, Jan. 1854, Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Masters to de la Corte, Aug. 27, 1855, Ibid.



CHamorus laboring in the garden of the Spanish governor's palace, Agaña, from a painting by Louis Choris during the Louis Freycinet expedition, 1817–19.

American rights.<sup>62</sup> In letters home to the secretary of state, Masters sounded a theme familiar to midcentury Americans of Spanish lawlessness and cruelty. The notion that Spanish despotism was both distinct and antiquated had for decades been a common feature in American seafarers' accounts, one often overlaid—as it was with Masters—with sympathy for Spain's oppressed subjects.<sup>63</sup>

Governor de la Corte increasingly viewed Masters as an irritant and a danger, particularly in an era of filibusters. De la Corte reported to Manila that even after Masters had left Guam, military guards continued to confiscate Protestant bibles that Masters and his secretary had allegedly distributed to CHamorus. It seems reasonable that these bibles were among those that a 20th-century American missionary claimed Spanish authorities had burned in the main square of Agaña in 1856.<sup>64</sup> Masters never discussed evangelism in Guam, and so the governor's complaint is an intriguing hint as to Masters's ambitious goals. Given his experience and associations in Hawai'i, it would not be surprising

<sup>62</sup> Masters to de la Corte, Oct. 3, 1855, *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Rouleau, *With Sails Whitening Every Sea*, 88.

<sup>64</sup> The Records of the Spanish Government in the Marianas, 1678–1899, reel 3, 327, UOG-MARC; The evidence that the Spanish burned Protestant bibles comes from a history written by an American missionary of the first Protestant congregation in Guam, see Francis Price, "Lights in the Shadows in Guam," in *Pacific Islanders, from Savages to Saints: Chapters in the Life of Stories of Famous Missionaries and Native Converts*, ed. Delavan L. Pierson (New York: Funk and Company, 1906), 242; see also Nicholas Goetzfridt, "Whaling Influence in the Marianas," *Guampedia*, <https://www.guampedia.com/whaling-influence-in-the-marianas/#:~:text=Whaling%20ships%20provided%20CHamoru%20men,from%201848%20to%201855%2C%20complained>.

that Masters believed American Protestantism would have a bracing effect on Guam's CHamoru inhabitants and initiate a switch in imperial loyalties. In his memoir, Masters accused Catholic priests in Guam of seizing one-third of the island's agricultural production. This charge appeared following a passage lauding Protestant missionaries, "who at the period of their own lives, have carried even into these barbarous regions almost unknown to the world, the doctrines of peace and virtue."<sup>65</sup> Masters would have understood that de la Corte would have seen the American Protestant's bibles as subversive, and their distribution the act of a rival authority, not a consul or commercial agent.

While Masters believed the threat of the *Vandalia* had stayed de la Corte's tyrannical inclinations, the subsequent treatment of William Martin proved that lawlessness would return without gunboats in Apra harbor. Masters wrote:

[He] still insists on the right to flog American seamen at the public whipping post. . . . Such abusive and arbitrary treatment . . . ought not be tolerated by any free and independent government, nor do I think that I, as Consul of the United States, can quietly submit to this without compromising the honor of our flag and the dignity of our nation.<sup>66</sup>

Masters lamented the disastrous effects absolute power had on the governor's character, telling Secretary of State Marcy, "You will notice that he [de la Corte] is following in the footsteps of his predecessor by usurping the unjust, cruel, and arbitrary power to the oppression and unwarrantable imprisonment of American seamen without assigning any just cause or excuse whatsoever."<sup>67</sup> De La Corte's education and energy, qualities Masters had earlier commended him for, had not exempted the governor from the corrupting nature of Spanish rule. For Masters, only a change in authority could remedy this sad situation.

A conflict between the United States and the Spanish Empire did not occur in 1855. The belligerent Ostend Manifesto, far from advancing the annexation of Cuba, produced scandal in the United States. Following passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, many Americans in the northern states, including Democrats otherwise supportive of territorial expansion, interpreted the State Department's maneuver for Cuba not as Manifest Destiny but the insidious machinations of a corrupt slave power. Concentrated in the South, annexationists claimed seizing

<sup>65</sup> Masters, *Sketches*, 70, 72.

<sup>66</sup> Masters to Marcy, Nov. 22, 1855, MP. In this remarkably long letter, Masters also suggests, luridly and falsely, that Governor de la Corte was keeping secret a recent discovery of gold mines.

<sup>67</sup> Masters to Marcy, Nov. 22, 1855, MP.

Cuba or detaching it from Spain was necessary to prevent the British from forcing Spain to abolish slavery in Cuba. The potential for “Africanization” in Cuba, they argued, represented an existential threat to the institution of slavery in the United States, one that required federal, or failing that, filibuster action.<sup>68</sup> Pierce sought to unify a rapidly dividing Democratic Party, and in his end of the year address, he excised Young America rhetoric, minimized the ongoing tensions with Spain, and disavowed the activities of filibusters against Mexico.<sup>69</sup> Masters, for his part, made plans in early fall 1855 to leave Guam, burning what bridges remained between him and the governor in an fiery note in which he states his intention to depart Guam. He accused de la Corte of a lack of basic human compassion in refusing Masters’s permission to repair his rented home’s roof following a September typhoon in the middle of the rainy season.<sup>70</sup>

While awaiting passage to Manila in early 1856, Masters relayed a harsh message to Marcy that de la Corte was now imprisoning Americans accused of mutiny, trying their cases on his own, and forcing the imprisoned men’s shipmasters to pay all expenses. Masters had earlier in his tenure assisted the governors in finding deserters, but by the end, he had become the defender of the roughs, regretting that American power could not be deployed to discipline the out-of-control governor of a backward empire.<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion

Masters sailed to Manila in April 1856, leaving little recorded evidence of his work. Yet, his brief tenure illustrates the growing American influence in the region. Masters’s path to Guam—through Panama, California, Hawai’i, China, and the Philippines—reads as an itinerary of the United States’ Pacific ambitions. Masters made the post in Guam his first choice and appeared on the island at the same month that other State Department officials met in Ostend to fashion a rationale for seizing Cuba. As a would-be consul, he expressed disgust at Spain’s colonial rule, called for shows of American force to curb Spanish excesses, and strongly advised seizing the island. As in Guyana, he had proved sufficiently resilient under adverse circumstances, holding on as consul, officially or not, for 16 months. The stubborn and righteous American succeeded in both irritating and alarming Spanish authorities in Agaña, Manila, and Madrid.

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<sup>68</sup> Robert May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire*, 57

<sup>69</sup> Franklin Pierce, Second Annual Message to Congress, Dec. 4, 1854, The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/second-annual-message-8>

<sup>70</sup> Masters to de la Corte, Oct. 11, 1855, MP.

<sup>71</sup> Masters to Marcy, Feb. 6, 1856, MP.



The Spanish ambassador in Washington marked Masters's departure from the Marianas with a celebratory note to Madrid, reporting that the would-be consul was "never to return." Events in the Western Pacific seemed to suggest Masters's exit was part of a favorable trend for the Spanish Empire, one that included the collapse of the Ostend "junta" and the recent loss of Democratic Party control in the House of Representatives.<sup>72</sup> The United States, the most direct threat to Spain in the Caribbean and the Pacific, was, if only temporarily, in retreat. Governor De la Corte hoped the brush with the Americans might goad Spain into reforming its Pacific colonies. Like Masters, he identified Guam as a critical transit point for a Pacific empire. Gold rushes in California and Australia, steamships, and mass migrations were transforming the Pacific Basin. Imperial redemption was possible if Madrid recognized the fortune it had long possessed in the Mariana Islands and reformed the colonial administration accordingly. He criticized both the Church and Chamoru traditions of reciprocity, which obligated Chamorus to perform communal labor and reciprocal gift giving, preventing a cash economy and producing what he called a "savagely independence."<sup>73</sup> Like Masters, he accused corrupt governors of stalling and even reversing Guam's development. Stagnation and cost overruns had left the Marianas vulnerable to foreign intriguers like Masters. He argued, however, that "the Marianas should be an important settlement and cannot help but being so." The island's precolonial population, which de la Corte estimated at 40,000 compared to the 8,000 when he arrived, suggested the untapped potential for intensive agriculture and export. Additionally, Guam's location and its deepwater harbor at Apra had yet to be fully exploited. De la Corte noted how China, the Philippines, French Polynesia, California, and Australia all came together in a "thick network of shipping lines with their communications." De la Corte imagined Guam as a central node, a Spanish Hong Kong, with warehouses overflowing with goods from across Southeast Asia, ships radiating out in all directions, and wealth pouring in for the island's industrious 100,000 inhabitants, with Chamorus augmented by migrants from the Caroline Islands. "This tie," de la Corte said of Guam "is presented as such a brilliant point that it appears a dream."<sup>74</sup> De la Corte's energies in 1856 and beyond, however, were largely directed toward mitigating the devastating effects of a smallpox epidemic brought to the island by American whalers.<sup>75</sup> Commerce from American whaling would decline in the 1860s as new fuels replaced whale oil and fewer American ships stopped in Apra Harbor. De la Corte's imagined future for the

<sup>72</sup> National Historical Archive of Spain, *Regresso a Estados Unidos del agente commercial de ese país en las Marianas*, Ultramar, 435, Esp. 24, <http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/description/2353845?nm>.

<sup>73</sup> Felipe de la Corte y Ruano Calderon, *Descriptive and Historical Report on the Marina Islands*, UOG-MARC, 1970 (1875), 47.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>75</sup> Rogers, *Destiny's Landfall*, 89.



Mariana Islands suggests less Spanish imperial revitalization, and more a kind of wishful thinking against the changing economic and political realities of the 19th-century Pacific.<sup>76</sup>

Late in life, Masters also reflected on his overseas adventures, but instead of looking to an imagined future, he pined for a past when he believed in “so charming an illusion” as those he entertained in his youth.<sup>77</sup> Manifest Destiny in the Americas and the Pacific, as Masters understood it, had indeed proved illusory when he died in 1880. Whether 19th-century visions of the Marianas were illusion or dream, American and Spanish officials made ambitious plans for Guam and the Western Pacific, and both empires envisioned a future of sweeping change. Putting Masters and de la Corte in context illustrates how both were possessed of a vision of a modern, progressive empire in which Manifest Destiny seems less distinctly or uniquely American. Masters’s presence and work in Guam helped lay the foundations for turn-of-the-century American imperialism in the Pacific. In 1898 a new generation of American imperialists pushed for war with a relatively weaker Spain. Masters’s emphasis on U.S. naval power and Guam’s strategic location previewed Guam’s post-1898 political status, in which the U.S. Navy exercised complete control of the island up until the 1941 Japanese invasion. Likewise, the progressive elements of Masters’s Young America ideology, as illustrated by his warnings of the dangers of Spanish misrule and cultural defects stemming from Catholicism, reappeared in the Naval governors’ commitment to authoritarian modernization programs from 1899 to 1941 and again from 1944 to 1950 that were frequently characterized by paternalism and hostility to CHamoru culture. For the half century in which the Department of the Navy held ruled Guam, governors expelled clergy, established an English-only education system, and maintained a rigorous public health administration that doubled as surveillance regime.<sup>78</sup> As in 1854, in 1898 Cuba was the stated goal of the war with Spain, but the opportunity to seize parts of Spain’s Pacific Empire, was a less publicized if equally valuable one to the McKinley administration, as it had been with the Pierce administration.

Masters can be understood as one of those agents largely unsuccessful in his own

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 88–107.

<sup>77</sup> An address delivered by Captain Samuel J. Masters of Greenwich, New York, 9, MP.

<sup>78</sup> For the Naval governors’ objectives in creating an American-style education system in Guam, see Robert A. Underwood, “American Education and the Acculturation of the Chamorros of Guam,” (Ph.D. diss, University of Southern California, 1987), 139–148, for the CHamoru response, see same, 160–177; for the Navy’s efforts to establish Western medicine in Guam and CHamoru resistance, see Anne Perez Hattori, particularly the conclusion, *Colonial Disease: US Navy Policies and the Chamorros of Guam, 1898–1941* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 189–205.

time, like filibusters William Walker in Nicaragua and Alexander Bell in Ecuador, but whose adventures and official efforts represented the ambitions of an opportunistic and expansionist United States.<sup>79</sup> Like consuls in the Spanish American republics and those in the Pacific, Masters interfered in local politics and threatened American military intervention. He was ideologically committed to Manifest Destiny and did not require secret orders—only the occasional mild prodding from State—to contest Spanish authority. He was content to labor in his role and wait for the right moment—a war in the Caribbean, an unforgivable outrage perpetrated against American sailors, the arrival of an American warship—to activate American conquest. That such a moment failed to arrive makes him seem inconsequential. Masters’s brief career in Guam, however, as his Spanish adversaries understood, reveals the extent of the United States’ emerging geographic ambition and an enthusiastic, if perhaps ramshackle, approach to territorial acquisition. His career also illustrates a complementary relationship between the aggressive and respectable advocates of American empire. Masters needed rowdy Americans in port for his political ambitions more than they needed him to protect them from Spanish authority. Finally, Masters and the Pierce administration’s focus on a Western Pacific Spanish colonial port that was obscure to most Spaniards, let alone Americans, indicates something of the importance of the region to the U.S. government in the years following the Mexican War. The acquisition of a Pacific coastline, the growth of steam transport, and the coming rise of industry and powerful states in Asia spurred American leaders to acquire territories in the Western Pacific. There is a direct line from Matthew C. Perry to Alfred Thayer Mahan calling for U.S. control of the Western Pacific to advance American security and prosperity. As a succession of 21st-century United States presidents stress the need for a “pivot to Asia,” it is clear to the people of Guam that it is in their home that the United States has pivoted and will continue to do so.<sup>80</sup> Reflecting on Masters’s brief career in Guam shows the deep connection stretching from Manifest Destiny of the mid-19th century to current debates about American power and federal policy in the Pacific.

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*Picture credits:* Samuel J. Masters, village of Umatac, Plaza de España, garden at Spanish governor’s palace, from the Collection of the Richard F. Taitano Micronesian Area Research Center; USS *Vandalia*, Harper’s Weekly, Wikipedia

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<sup>79</sup> See May, *Manifest Destiny’s Underworld*, 39–43.

<sup>80</sup> For how Guam figures into U.S. power projection in the Pacific and its effects on the people of the island and region, see Ken Gofigan Kuper, “Living at the Tip of the Spear: Guam and Restraint,” *Responsible Statecraft*, July 21, 2020, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/author/kgkuper/>.