

## As American as Antiwar Dissent

By HERBERT MITGANG

The flags waved and the speeches jingled when the United States embarked on its first armed adventure in Asia. Even before the shooting war began in the Pacific the dissenting war broke out in America.

In his message to Congress in 1898, President McKinley justified intervention across foreign waters and borders in the usual cause of endangered American interests, plus "in the name of humanity, in the name of civilization," and to realize our aspirations by war as "a Christian, peace-loving people."

Above all, he and his Vice President despised the writers and campus intellectuals who ridiculed the Stars and Stripes as a banner of neo-colonialism. They were stung by Mark Twain when he told New York clubmen after a massacre of Filipinos that "the white stripes should be painted black and the stars replaced by the skull and crossbones."

To a bellicose friend, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, grandfather of a future Ambassador to South Vietnam, Theodore Roosevelt fumed about national honor and the behavior of effete college men: "The Harvard

Graduates Magazine is now assailing me with the ineffective bitterness proper to beings whose cult is non-virility."

### Enforced Patriotism

The long and even honored tradition of abhorrence to enforced patriotism during unpopular conflicts has been the subject of several lectures at the Massachusetts Historical Society by Samuel Eliot Morison, Frederick Merk and Frank Freidel. These are now printed by the Harvard University Press as "Dissent in Three American Wars." It takes some self-restraint to focus on the War of 1812, the Mexican War and the Spanish-American War - Philippine Insurrection without calling up obvious parallels to Vietnam and the Nixon-Agnew Administration. But one must bite on the bullet of historical objectivity.

The second war with Great Britain at least followed a formal declaration by the House and Senate in June of 1812. Eight of ten New England Senators and eleven out of fourteen New York Representatives voted against it. Congressmen who had voted for the war were branded "hawks." Later, in elections in Massachusetts

and Maine, nearly every Federalist won who ran as an antiwar candidate for Congress.

The war dragged on and the Madison Administration prayed for a victory in the field so that the peace advocates would be proved wrong. The Battle of New Orleans was won—but not before the White House was burned. The myth of victory was so well perpetuated, Professor Morison says, that the American people came to believe they had never been defeated in a war.

There was also a formal declaration of war against Mexico on another May—in 1846—but only after President Polk announced beforehand to Congress that "war exists, and, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of Mexico herself." Despite strong dissent, the Administration forced through a war bill. What especially galled the peace Congressmen was the falsehood that Mexico rather than the United States had provoked the shooting across the Rio Grande.

The editorials in the Eastern press were not appreciated in Washington during the Mexican War. Not when Horace Greeley wrote of President Polk: "Grant the Father of Lies his premises, and he will prove himself a

truth-teller and a saint." The editor said that the country should not vote for war in response to an attack on the flag, which he described as "flimsy rags called banners."

Later, the question of supporting "the boys" frequently came up. Among those faced with the dilemma was Representative A. Lincoln of Illinois. He voted for the supplies but at the same time made antiwar speeches in the House, saying that we had no right to be in Mexico because the war was "unnecessarily and unconstitutionally commenced."

### The Eagle Still Screams

Early in this century, Henry James took a look at the hardships of his time and listened to the speeches in Washington. The novelist saw "the triumph of the superficial, the apotheosis of the raw." In the voices of the Administration, "the Eagle screamed." It still does against opponents of the Vietnam war which by now has become costlier—in casualties, in loss of prestige abroad, in discord at home—than all three of last century's foreign wars combined.

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