John C. Pinheiro’s *Missionaries of Republicanism: A Religious History of the Mexican-American War* challenges widely-accepted narratives about the antebellum period. During the past forty years, scholars have offered various descriptions of American development during the 1830s and 1840s. Some stress economic issues, particularly the American System of Henry Clay, as defining the politics of the period. Others have reconfigured the old abolitionist critiques, making slavery the predominant explanation for American political development. Another group focuses on “ethno-cultural” issues to explain the politics of the antebellum period. Although these explanations overlap in areas, they generally support divergent understandings of American national growth. Like the ethno-cultural historians, Pinheiro offers an approach that makes nativism, which was particularly virulent from the 1830s through the 1850s, a central, rather than peripheral, feature of American national identity, thus challenging the neo-abolitionist narrative. Pinheiro sees the Mexican-American War as “integral to nineteenth-century American identity as a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant republic” (1). He argues that the issues of race, religion, and republicanism were interconnected during the antebellum era. American nativists “saw Protestantism as inseparable from their country’s identity as a republic” (3). Protestantism and republicanism joined a concept of race (“Anglo Saxonism”) as “inseparable parts of one ideology of American exceptionalism” (14). The debates over the Mexican-American War, the mobilization for war, and the victory over Mexico revealed the ubiquitous nature of anti-Catholic nativism in American politics and emboldened nativists to strengthen their political efforts with the Know Nothing Party of the 1850s.

Throughout the book Pinheiro deftly weaves together the various threads that constitute the story of nativism, tying the events of the 1830s with the Know Nothing movement of the 1850s. Although hopes for a homogenous republic run throughout the Founding era, “anti-Catholicism and nativism began to combine in the 1830s” to combat “the pressures of Irish-Catholic immigration” (6). He identifies Lyman Beecher’s 1835 book, *A Plea for the West*, as shaping various ideas into a coherent ideological whole. Beecher preached that America’s “divinely ordained mission to lead the world” depended on Americans’ responses to westward migration. (6) For Beecher Catholic immigrants threatened the character
of the American republic, even challenging its very existence by sapping “all virtue from its adherents” (17). If Catholics were allowed to settle the American West, the country could not fulfill its divine mission. In 1834, after Beecher preached in Boston, a mob burned the Ursuline convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts (18). Samuel F.B. Morse, inventor of the telegraph, published anti-Catholic screeds in 1835 charging the Jesuits with a plot to undermine the American republic (21). In 1836, Maria Monk’s *Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery at Montreal* sold thousands of copies, appealing to anti-Catholic prejudices by detailing sexual abuse in a convent. Several Protestant ministers fabricated the book, but its enthusiastic public reception revealed the strength of anti-Catholic nativist ideas (28).

Pinheiro points out that these controversies of the 1830s drove the nativists to organize. By the time the congressional debate over Texas annexation arose during the summer of 1844, anti-Catholic nativism was solidly rooted in American political discourse. The arguments for and against Texas annexation borrowed heavily from anti-Catholic, nativist ideas, a point that is not usually stressed in neo-abolitionist narratives (37). Then, two years later, came the War. Pinheiro, echoing Ronald Walters’s argument regarding antebellum reform movements, mentions that nativists learned from the War that “the stakes were just too high to continue relying on moral suasion alone” to make gains. Nativists turned to government to enshrine their agenda into law. Hence, the Know Nothing Party of the 1850s sought legislation to stem the Catholic tide (147).

Pinheiro marshals significant evidence for the importance of anti-Catholic nativism to understanding the Mexican-American War. Arguments for and against the war reflected nativist rhetoric. Those in favor of the war, often borrowing the terminology of the “Beecherite Synthesis,” wished to spread American culture to the benighted—meaning Mexican and Catholic—regions of the West (38). Opponents of the war predicted that the Mexican Catholic population could not be assimilated into the American republic and that attempting to do so would destroy the United States. As the war broke out in 1846, President Polk insisted that the conflict was not an anti-Catholic crusade, thus acknowledging the prevalence of nativist rhetoric concerning the conflict (72). He even appointed two Jesuit priests as unofficial army chaplains, a hugely unpopular move that stoked nativist fires.

Pinheiro notes that “evangelicals and expansionists . . . saw Mexico as a nation destined to fall before a great Anglo-Saxon Protestant advance” (86). The attitude affected army recruitment. Some recruiters stressed anti-Catholicism as a reason for joining the army while others hinted at
opportunities for plundering the supposed riches of the Mexican Church. Cases of soldiers sacking churches and convents in Mexico demonstrated the strength of this appeal (122–24). Prominent newspaper editor John L. O’Sullivan stressed sending “missionaries of republicanism” to convert the Mexicans to Protestantism and good government, even through racial “amalgamation” (88).

Pinheiro examines the literature on Mexico that exploded in popularity during the 1840s and suggests that the many anti-Catholic distortions of Mexican society shaped popular opinion in the United States. Unsurprisingly, the experiences of many American soldiers during the military campaigns strengthened their “preexisting religious, political, and racial assumptions” (115). Pinheiro considers a number of soldier memoirs to make his point. The anti-Catholic nativist rhetoric shaped the reality American soldiers saw and then, as they returned from the war, influenced their views about religion and politics at home (125). Political nativism strengthened as Americans witnessed the failure of the political revolutions in Europe in 1848. Republicanism and Protestantism needed saving (149–50). Europeans had failed; it was up to those exceptional Americans to preserve freedom in the world (172).

While many current narratives place the issues of slavery and race in the center of the story of the Mexican-American War, Pinheiro demonstrates that anti-Catholic nativism was intertwined with the slavery issue. He argues that during the antebellum era race was a “malleable term.” It was used, he shows, to discuss “everything from ethnicity and religion to nation, language, and skin color.” Even “racialist comparisons were expressed primarily as Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism, with its concomitant anti-Catholicism and filial piety” (39). Pinheiro examines the opinions of abolitionists toward the war to make his point. William Lloyd Garrison, for example, opposed the war but characterized Mexico using the anti-Catholic rhetoric of the Beecherite Synthesis (134). The Liberator noted that the United States could bring good from an evil war by converting Mexicans to Protestantism (134–35). The Tappan brothers, whose fortunes funded many abolitionist endeavors, supported the war on anti-Catholic nativist grounds (94–95). For Pinheiro the battle over the character of the territory gained from Mexico was more than simply a question of slavery or freedom; it involved the religious rhetoric of the Beecherite Synthesis as well.

Pinheiro makes a convincing case for the importance of anti-Catholic nativism to understanding the War and its effects. The book could have spent more time linking the arguments about slavery in the West to the arguments about republicanism and Protestantism. Scholars have long
demonstrated that much of the opposition to slavery in the territories was also about excluding black people from the West. Pinheiro notes the connections between Catholics and blacks in nativist rhetoric but needs to examine in more detail the connections between these arguments (39–40, 49, 93, 111). Doing so would have connected better the nativist movement to the politics of slavery during the 1850s. That being said, Pinheiro’s book deserves a wide reading and should change the way that historians understand the effects of the Mexican-American War.

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The Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. is one of the world’s great libraries. I once read (many years ago, so it may no longer be true) that the person about whom the most books were written in the library collection was Jesus of Nazareth; and the second largest number of books was about Napoleon I. So, why should we notice yet another Napoleon biography? The answer is that there is an important new source: Since 2004, the Fondation Napoléon has been gradually publishing the entire surviving correspondence of the French emperor. The previous edition of correspondence was published in 1857 under Napoleon III, the emperor’s nephew; it was not comprehensive, and its composition was distorted to serve the political purposes of the ruler. Roberts’s use of this collection of letters results in a more understanding and sympathetic picture of the emperor than the standard portrayal in the English-speaking world. Usually, Napoleon is depicted as a vain, self-aggrandizing tyrant, if also a military genius and skilled politician. When the mass of letters that he wrote (and he wrote a huge number, on many topics) is analyzed, we see, through Roberts’s clear and well-organized prose, the often reasonable political motives for what had appeared to be ego-centric acts, such as his assumption of the imperial title and his coronation. We see the emperor’s mercy towards potential assassins, wounded enemies on the battlefield, and disloyal collaborators. We see his care for his wives, indulgence toward incompetent siblings, respect for worthy adversaries, and generosity to mistresses. We also see a man of the Enlightenment: intelligent, practical, energetic, and a professional military officer who achieves supreme executive and legislative power and views