1. Early American expansionism

The conquests of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines are always described in tracts dealing with American imperialism as a new turn, representing a break with the old traditions of American policy. If one understands by imperialism a policy of expansion dictated by capitalist interests, this view does not quite hold water. Shortly after its ‘liberation’, as soon as it felt its strength growing, the Union began attempts to expand its territory by all possible means – not only through annexation of territories that remained outside the confederation but also through diplomatic intrigues, the purchase of large areas, military provocations and even filibustering expeditions undertaken in peaceful times. The purchase of Louisiana – which then included the Mississippi basin and Missouri – from France for 15 million dollars was followed by the purchase of Florida in 1819, skilfully exploiting Spain’s distress, and by the first preparations for the conquest of Cuba. The Pearl of the Antilles aroused the Yankees’ exploitative instincts not just recently, but already back then.

1. [Cunow 1902. The subtitles have been added by the editors of this volume.]
In 1823, the then Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams, wrote to the American minister at Madrid: ‘It seems scarcely possible to resist the conviction that the annexation of Cuba to our Federal Republic will be indispensable to the continuance and integrity of the Union.’

But, because Cuba proved to be a goal momentarily unattainable, the Florida purchase was followed by expansion of the United States to the Pacific coast; an expansion marked by the bargaining with England over the Oregon region, the fomentation of the Texan landowners’ attempts to secede from Mexico, the provocation of Mexico into war and, after its defeat, the annexation of Texas, California, New Mexico and the Northern part of Sonora to the Union’s territory. The young republic had hardly taken possession of the Pacific coast when it already began to look out to the Pacific Ocean for new acquisitions, and, in 1852, it dispatched Commodore Perry in an expedition to Japan that opened up that land to American trade through the treaty of 1854. At the same time, under the leadership of James Buchanan, the American diplomats in London and Southern planters’ ruthless agents resumed the intrigues for the acquisition of Cuba, which, failing all other methods, they hoped to attain through an audacious invasion. And Buchanan actually knew how to instigate the American diplomats in Paris and Madrid, because in 1854, at the Ostend Conference, they submitted to the American government a plan for the seizure of Cuba. The following year witnessed William Walker’s

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2. [Morse 1898, p. 131.]
3. [In 1846, under a treaty with Britain, the United States gained possession of the Pacific coast between the 42nd and 49th parallels. The Republic of Texas successfully seceded from Mexico in 1836. In 1845 Texas joined the United States as a full-fledged state. The Mexican-American War (1846–8) broke out in the wake of the 1845 US-annexation of Texas.]
4. [James Buchanan (1791–1868), Democratic American politician, was the fifteenth President of the United States (1857–61). He served as minister to the Court of St. James (Britain) from 1853 to 1856, during which time he helped to draft the Ostend Manifesto.]
5. [The Ostend Manifesto was a secret document written in 1854 by US diplomats at Ostend, Belgium, describing a plan to acquire Cuba from Spain. On orders from US Secretary of State William L. Marcy, three US diplomats (minister to Britain James Buchanan, minister to France John Y. Mason, and minister to Spain Pierre Soulé) devised a plan to purchase Cuba, for $120 million, for the United States. Further, if Spain were to refuse the offer, the manifesto suggested that America would be ‘justified in wresting’ Cuba from Spain. The document was then sent back to the US State Department, but news of it leaked out and it was soon made public. The aggressively worded document, and Soulé’s advocacy of slavery, caused outrage among Northerners who felt it was a Southern attempt to extend slavery. American free-soilers, just recently stirred by the Fugitive Slave Law passed as part of the Compromise of 1850,