Prologue

> A great soldier and patriot, Simón Bolívar serves as an inspiration to all the peoples of the western hemisphere. Through turbulent and frustrating times, he had the vision to see that the unity of the Americas could be achieved . . . Bolívar's letter from Jamaica on September 6, 1815, poignantly expressed his dream of a union "with a single bond that unites its parts among themselves and to the whole." With this aim in mind, he convoked the Congress of Panama in 1826, which signaled a decisive step toward the system of cooperation we enjoy today . . . On this occasion, we in the United States join with our hemispheric friends to remember the great hero whose ideals bind us closer together. Bolívar, more than any other figure in the history of the western hemisphere, understood that, while we are citizens of separate countries, we are members of one family in the new world – we are Americans.

So proclaimed Ronald Reagan when he designated July 24, 1983 through July 23, 1984 as the "Bicentennial Year of the Birth of Simón Bolívar, hero of the independence of the Americas."[1] From the perspective of nearly twenty years, of course, the proclamation is rife with political ironies, beginning with the US invasion of Grenada the following October and, some months later, the initiation of the Reagan administration's covert funding of the war in Nicaragua that would be revealed during the Iran-Contra scandal. The same president who here touts "Bolívar's ideals of Pan Americanism, based on independence, solidarity, sovereignty, as well as the right of all nations to live in peace" was at that very moment engaging through the CIA in a military resistance against a sovereign government in Nicaragua and, less directly, in funding government-sponsored death squads in El Salvador. In its ebullient invocation of the 1826 Congress of Panama, the proclamation embeds more distant historical ironies as well. In fact, no US representative attended that historic conference, the first international congress held in the American hemisphere. And if it had been up to Bolívar himself, the US government would never even have been invited to send its emissaries.[2]

The purpose of the Congress of Panama was to form a hemispheric political coalition foresworn to defend its member states against imperial threat from Europe, particularly Spain, and to liberate the remaining Spanish American colonial territories, notably Cuba and Puerto Rico.[3] Over the course of ten sessions, the representatives of the Congress produced a written constitution of thirty-two articles, the Treaty of Perpetual Union, League, and Confederation. Article 27 prohibited the slave trade. Representing a large portion of the North and South American continents, running from California to Peru, the Congress marked what many historians have regarded as the first flourishing of a hemispheric consciousness. Today's Organization of American States traces its ancestry to this momentous meeting, citing it as a precedent for modern world organization more generally. The two emissaries assigned to represent the United States at the Congress, however, never reached their intended goal. One fell ill en route and died before his arrival in Panama; the other feared for his health and stayed in the United States until after the conference had adjourned. Though seemingly random, these misfortunes – events tied to seasonal weather and disease – in fact have much to tell us about the way we have long organized our dominant narratives of US literary history: as part of a discrete national story rather than an international anthology of conversing and competing contributions. As I relate them here, however, the three decades of literary production that followed the 1826 Congress of Panama are inextricable from the US failure to attend it – and from the larger cultural crisis that this failure both embodied in the moment and inaugurated for years to come.

The years leading up to the Congress of Panama witnessed the emergence of the first internationally recognized authors from the United States as well as an initial burgeoning of hemispheric thought within the national imagination. As Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant, and James Fenimore Cooper gained acceptance at home and abroad as the first widely respected national writers, a generation of US intellectuals simultaneously began to identify the revolutionary history of the United States with the histories of the Latin American states that had recently gained or were still fighting for their independence from Spain. In the political realm, such hemispheric consciousness registered itself most famously in the Monroe Doctrine, first formulated in 1823. Despite its overriding unilateral character, the Monroe Doctrine marked the earliest development of a US foreign policy within a hemispheric framework, one that specifically claimed to defend the sovereignty of the new and imminent Latin American republics from European imperial threat. Our contemporary understanding of this

doctrine, of course, is inseparable from the ways in which US administrations have invoked it in outlining Latin American policy to suit national economic ends. In its original incarnation, however, the Monroe Doctrine represented a vast departure from a foreign policy that had previously been defined by its isolationism. So radical was the paradigm shift it marked that some Latin American historians have even suggested (though probably inaccurately) that one of the principal influences upon James Monroe and John Quincy Adams in drafting the doctrine was in fact a Colombian envoy, Manuel Torres, who visited Washington during the early 1820s on a mission to advise the two US statesmen on the benefits of a hemispheric, inter-American cooperative system.[4]

It would be all too easy to take this period's hemispheric rhetoric of cooperation and commonality at face value, though in fact the enthusiasm for inter-American revolutionary solidarity ostensibly embodied in the Monroe Doctrine emerged in large part from US interests in the opening of Latin American markets. It is precisely this disjunction between the hard-nosed economic policy engineered by the nation's political class and the hemispheric idealism registered in the US public sphere that makes this brief period such an intriguing context for the rise of the first internationally recognized writers. In 1823 the editor of the prestigious *North American Review*, Jared Sparks, wrote to the US State Department requesting information about the newly formed Latin American governments and the status of the other colonies' ongoing revolutions for independence from Spain. "Dare you enter that labyrinth of history?" responded an official from the State Department. "I confess to you, I would not undertake to get and give a distinct view of events in South America, since 1805 . . . It must be a task of Hercules."[5] Sparks, however, was undeterred, and published a wide-ranging selection of articles on Latin America and the Caribbean during the 1820s, including reviews of recent travel books about Colombia and the "progress of South America in the career of revolution, independence, and liberty"; articles on the history of colonial Spanish Florida and Mexico; essays covering Alexander von Humboldt's writings about Latin America, US Minister to Mexico Joel R. Poinsett's *Notes on Mexico*, and the Ecuadorian writer Vicente Rocafuerte's *Ensayo político*, published in New York; a highly positive review of an 1816 autobiography by the Haitian writer and political strategist Baron Vastey, who had served under Toussaint Louverture during the Haitian Revolution; and an article on a volume of *New Spanish Grammar, Adapted to Every Class of Learners* by Mariano Cubí y Soler, in which Sparks noted that "[n]ext to our own language, the Spanish will be likely at a future day to become the most important in this country . . . a desirable,

if not essential acquisition to our men of business, as well as to scholars and politicians."[6] In July of 1824 Sparks announced to the readership that future issues of the *North American Review* would be devoted to giving "as full and minute a view of the revolutionary history of South America, as the nature of our work will admit" – "a subject . . . much less understood in this country than its merits deserve, or than our interests as a nation would seem to require."[7] Praising the spread of liberty in South America for its ostensible reenactment of the struggle for political independence in colonial North America, Sparks detailed the arrival of the first printing press in Chile, which he attributed to three US travelers who had allegedly carried the machine to that country directly from New York in 1811, so that they might sell it to the "Patriots."[8]

But if Sparks's editorial touts the *North American Review*'s "high praise and confidence" in South American independence, bespeaking a widespread spirit of inter-American alliance, it also contains the seeds of a cultural anxiety that already attended precisely such hemispheric thinking: as Sparks put it in the same article, "our neighbors may become our rivals."[9] The same issue contains a review of Lydia Maria Child's 1824 novel *Hobomok* that praises the author's "considerable talent" while noting "a very considerable objection to the catastrophe of this story," which centers on an interracial marriage between white and Indian characters – "a train of events not only unnatural but revolting, we conceive, to every feeling of delicacy in man or woman."[10] The inter-American sensibility that Sparks was attempting to foster could not coexist for long beside the Anglo-Saxonist obsessions that would soon determine much of the US public sphere's relation to the wider hemisphere. As the future senator and Secretary of State Edward Everett had already scoffed during 1821, also writing for the *North American Review*, "That Buenos Ayres and Mexico are part of our continent may suggest fine themes for general declamation and poetry is true," but in the political realm, he warned, "We can have no well-founded sympathy with [Latin Americans] . . . a corrupt and mixed race of various shades and sorts of men." Asserting "the well-known degeneracy of the superior race in such a mixture of blood," Everett charted the typology and nomenclature for various kinds of racial *mestizaje* in Latin America.[11] Less than a decade later, Everett's older brother, the writer and diplomat Alexander Hill Everett, would begin a long correspondence with the influential Cuban intellectual Domingo del Monte, who sent him information about literature and racial politics in Cuba that the elder Everett would publish under his own name in the blatantly imperialist *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*.

By the mid-1820s, a mere three years after the promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine, the cultural ideal of hemispheric affiliation seemed on the verge of extinction. When President John Quincy Adams, a gradual convert from isolationist to hemispheric foreign policy, entreated Congress to send diplomatic representatives to Bolívar's 1826 Congress of Panama, his partisan opponents invoked the rhetoric of racial contagion, complaining that he had caught "Spanish American fever" from his chief advisor, the ardent pan-Americanist Henry Clay.[12] The debates on this proposed "Panama Mission" – which fill three volumes of the Congressional Record by themselves – make clear the extent to which racial politics and the issue of slavery played into its ultimate failure. Staunchly opposing Adams's proposal to send representatives to the Congress, Senator Robert Y. Hayne of South Carolina warned that the newly independent Latin American republics "have proclaimed the principles of 'liberty and equality' and have marched to victory under the banner of 'universal emancipation.'" "You find men of color at the head of their armies, in their Legislative Halls, and in their Executive Departments," Hayne warned on the floor of the Senate. A significant part of the political anxiety surrounding the imminent Congress arose from its avowed interest in the liberation of Cuba and Puerto Rico from Spain, which even Clay vehemently opposed, because it would mean the immediate abolition of slavery in a key region of the triangular trade sustaining the US economy – a region that had already seen the demise of Haiti as the most lucrative slaveholding colony in the hemisphere.

The free status of Haiti constituted yet another controversy surrounding the upcoming Congress and its agenda. Haiti's embodiment of the perceived threat of slave insurrection overlay a deeper and less tangible problem for US proponents of the peculiar institution: the very fact of Haitian independence suggested that contemporary racial ideologies would inevitably be understood and addressed in international rather than purely domestic contexts. In opposing US participation in the Congress, Hayne warned against "touch[ing] the question of the independence of Hayti" with what he called the "Revolutionary Governments" in the Americas – "whose own history affords an example scarcely less fatal to our repose." "They are looking to Hayti, even now, with feelings of the strongest confraternity," intoned Hayne, "and show, by the very documents before us, that they acknowledge her to be independent."[13]

Hayne was in fact mistaken on this last pronouncement, for no American government granted diplomatic acknowledgment of Haiti until much later in the century. His rhetoric nevertheless reveals much about Haiti's

powerful place within an inter-American dialogue on slavery and race. And such a hemispheric conversation, from the senator's point of view, held the potential for dangerous cross-cultural threats to what he called "our dearest interests . . . our rights in that species of property" known as slaves. For Hayne, even to consider the issue of slavery within such a context was to render permeable (or to admit the permeability of) the borders of the United States as well as the racial categories upon which its national identity depended. Like a number of other senators, Hayne insisted that the subject of "Hayti" – and the topics of abolition and racial equality that the Haitian republic then represented to the rest of the world – should not be addressed within any international context, and in particular within any inter-American frame: "There is not a nation on the globe with whom I would consult on that subject, and, least of all, the new Republics." Issues of race and slavery, Hayne emphasized repeatedly, "must be considered and treated entirely as a DOMESTIC QUESTION."[14]

In the face of such opposition, the congressional debates over the Panama Mission lasted for nearly five months, holding up Adams's appointed US representatives for so long that they faced a dangerous season for travel when they were finally approved to attend the conference. That one died en route of fever and the other was too afraid of disease to leave in time for the meeting can thus be attributed in part to those senators and congressmen who objected to the international American model of affiliation and negotiation the conference represented. In this sense, the failure of US representatives to attend the Congress in Panama marked the de facto ascendance of a predominantly national frame of cultural analysis over an inter-American one.

It is surely no coincidence that the triumph of "domestic" over hemispheric thought converged with a cultural moment that also witnessed the beginnings of literary nationalism: the first period in which US writers came to be understood as national figures, with the potential to win recognition not only at home but abroad, and thus to secure the place of the country's literature in a Western agonism formerly limited to more venerable traditions. But if Europe represented the obvious point of reference for measuring the new development of a national literature, the demise within the United States of a potential *inter*-American system of political relations – one that might account for and mediate the state-sanctioned interactions of coherent and discrete national entities – soon gave way to a kind of *trans*american literary imaginary within the US public sphere. Fraught with the cultural anxieties and desires that attested to a larger crisis of national identity, this imaginary was from the beginning riddled with

the contradictions and rhetorical impasses attending a nation whose geographic borders were expanding even as its imagined racial borders were narrowing and calcifying. The writers emerging from this cultural milieu sought alternately to solidify and to signify across the unstable boundaries of nation and race within a New World arena characterized precisely by its transnationality: by the overlap and simultaneity of different national claims upon territories as well as upon literary texts and traditions.

The complexities of literary transamericanism are nowhere more clearly exemplified than in the 1826 historical novel *Jicoténcal*, written in Spanish, authored (possibly) by a Cuban exile, published in Philadelphia, and focused on the Conquest of Mexico.[15] Appearing in the same year as the Congress of Panama, *Jicoténcal* stages the paradoxes of transamericanism on two levels: as a primary order of transnational contradiction between colonial settlement and indigenous sovereignty, and as a secondary order of ambiguous racial identities, literary crossings, and individual itinerancies between the Caribbean, Mexico, and the United States. In the years that followed the novel's publication and the failure of Adams's Panama Mission, nineteenth-century US writers registered in numerous ways the various transamerican historical narratives and literary inheritances that could never be contained within Senator Haynes's proposed "Domestic Question": from stories of revolution in Saint-Domingue to tales about mysterious emigrants from the francophone West Indies; from poetic speculations about the annexation of Mexican territory to essayistic visions of an anglophone literary purity defined by its own manifest destiny; from specters of slave revolt in Cuban-set fictions to overt narrative aspirations for that "finest and most fertile" of the West Indian islands and the slave-trading port of Matanzas.

By 1856, the year that saw the official formation of the antislavery Republican party, a literal crisis of transnationalism waited around the corner, less than a decade away: the secession that made two nations, Union and Confederate, exist simultaneously within one. The North–South divide remains firmly entrenched as the organizing principle of nationalist literary histories, but the confederacy in fact often imagined itself quite beyond the territorial borders of the nation: in relation to and as the potential seat of a Greater South, a slaveholding empire that might encompass Cuba, the Caribbean, the southern hemisphere in its entirety. Seen in this light, the Civil War becomes not the inevitable fulcrum of the national literary and historical trajectory, but one in a long series of transamerican crises in the national definition of the United States. After the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo renamed over a third of Mexico as US territory,

and after the filibuster William Walker attempted in 1856 to colonize first Mexico and then Nicaragua with the US government's sympathies behind him, the Continental Treaty signed in Chile that same year by representatives of three Latin American nations would now identify the United States as the primary threat to the wider Americas. The European imperial powers opposed by the Congress of Panama had been displaced by an enemy from within: as the Haitian poet Pierre Faubert put it, also in 1856, this northern "Republic, supported upon slavery,/dreams, greedy, of your flowered fields!"

In the thirty years separating the Congress of Panama from the Continental Treaty signed in Chile lie the seeds of a largely untold story about a period that was crucially formative of the literatures of the United States. The story survives in more than one language and in more than one collective memory. It can be recovered only through a lens comprised of more than one national or regional literary tradition. The following chapters tell only part of this story – a selective part, inevitably: the hemispheric genealogies I attempt to uncover here are determined by the particular authors, archives, and languages it references, and even more by its deliberately limited geographic scope, which encompasses Mexico and the Caribbean (to the exclusion, for example, of South America and Canada) as the main focal points in a history of emerging US imperialism. Yet the writers inhabiting this era of cross-cultural affiliation and competition offer us a starting point for telling other parts of the story. Even as new modes of nationalism swept across the Americas, these writers traced within their works the twisted routes of travel and exile, of slave trade and slave revolt, of literary transmission and diplomatic exchange, and in the process revealed the transamerican contingencies and contradictions shaping the uncertain contours of their different historical moments.

This book argues that transamerican literary relations throughout the nineteenth century, and particularly so during the thirty-year span covered in the following chapters, came to assume a central role in reshaping the public spheres of cultural production and political commentary in the United States and other parts of the American hemisphere. As I hope to show, the formation of the American Renaissance that continues to organize so many literary-historiographical narratives of the nineteenth-century United States, whether through reinscription or multiculturalist revision, might more accurately be reconfigured as a *trans*american renaissance, a period of literary border crossing, intercontinental exchange, and complex political implications whose unfamiliar genealogies we are just beginning to

discern. The history of US literary culture and its hemispheric genealogies that I attempt to document here brings the work of mainstream writers and intellectuals, from William Cullen Bryant to Frederick Douglass, into dialogue with a range of other American texts, from recently "recovered" US hispanophone writings to the little-studied francophone strands of African American literary history to works written and published outside the United States itself. Drawing on a range of genres from Cuba, Mexico, and the francophone Caribbean, the book traces the genealogical narratives embedded within literary traditions that share a legacy of colonialism, slavery, and indigenous "removals." In their relations to a number of geographical sites and literary works across national and linguistic boundaries, the clusters of writings treated here point to a culturally and historically broader conception of the term "America" than the nationalistic and anglophone sense prevailing in all but the most recent studies of the period. Viewed from such an angle, the writers addressed in this study begin to appear as important players in a period of hemispheric literary transmission that included extended cultural dialogue between the United States and other American sites, from Mexico City to Havana to Port-au-Prince. Attempting to recover and account for the international and hemispherically American dimensions of the so-called American Renaissance, this book resituates some of the defining decades of US literary history within a cross-cultural and multilingual conversation about race and colonialism, slavery and rebellion, imperial desire and anxiety, the nature of historical narrative, and the power of literary revisionism as a hemispheric practice of affiliation and contestation.

With occasional forays into preceding or succeeding decades, the five main chapters trace a roughly chronological history of literary production within a number of competing American public spheres of the nineteenth century. This history's locatedness within a particular geopolitical arena – circumscribed by the United States, the Caribbean, and coastal and metropolitan Mexico – allows individual chapters to focus on key sites of response to an emergent US imperialism while affording a certain degree of precision regarding the changing nationalist obsessions with the foreign characterizing the three decades under consideration, from the hispanophilia of the 1820s to the prolific and confused discourse on Haiti in the 1850s. The introduction begins with the transamerican imaginings of two figures who in their own ways centrally shaped the national literary self-consciousness of the nineteenth century. Walter Channing, influential man of letters and frequent contributor to the *North American Review*, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, a close friend and cohort of Channing's son, the

renowned abolitionist William Ellery Channing, both promoted a kind of racial and linguistic purity in the national literature while remaining steadfastly blind to the hemispheric anxieties that were already proving instrumental in their own visions of this literature's emergence. Yet as I go on to suggest, even some of the most centrally influential writers in this period – Cooper, Hawthorne, Bryant, Douglass, Melville, Stowe, and numerous others – were not simply thematically influenced by emergent hemispheric sensibilities, but also embedded within an international network of literary cultures and lines of influence that provide crucial ways of understanding and delineating their character as national writers. The chapter thus offers a preliminary overview of a number of familiar US writers in relation to an array of contemporaneous authors – most of them writing in Spanish and French, and many of them living and writing in Cuba, Mexico, and the francophone Caribbean, as well as in exile communities in Paris and the United States – who defined a particular transnational literary arena (one of many, it goes without saying) within which the cultural work of the American Renaissance might productively be understood. The diachronic, genealogical relations I propose among texts from widely divergent national and linguistic traditions illuminate just a few of the many strands of transamerican and transatlantic exchange shaping this formative period of US literary history.

Chapter Two explores the murky origins and later nationalist appropriations of what some scholars have classified as the first hispanophone historical novel of the American hemisphere, *Jicoténcal*, published anonymously in the northeastern United States in 1826. Reading *Jicoténcal* against and through its anglophone contemporary, *The Last of the Mohicans*, I examine the novels' very different relationships to the early historiography of the Americas, attending to what this contrast suggests about their opposing views of inter-American relations in the 1820s. After a speculative excursus on the possibly collaborative authorship of *Jicoténcal*, I turn to a lineal descendant of both novels, William Hickling Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843), to explore its place within a profound shift in hemispheric rhetorics that occurred between the 1820s and 1840s. This shift is registered in the arguments about the nature of national and historical understanding informing the literary-historical and fictional representations of the Mexican Conquest explored throughout the chapter. The chapter as a whole proposes the controversial national status of *Jicoténcal* as a point of departure for imagining the hemispheric genealogies of nineteenth-century US literature explored in subsequent chapters of the book.