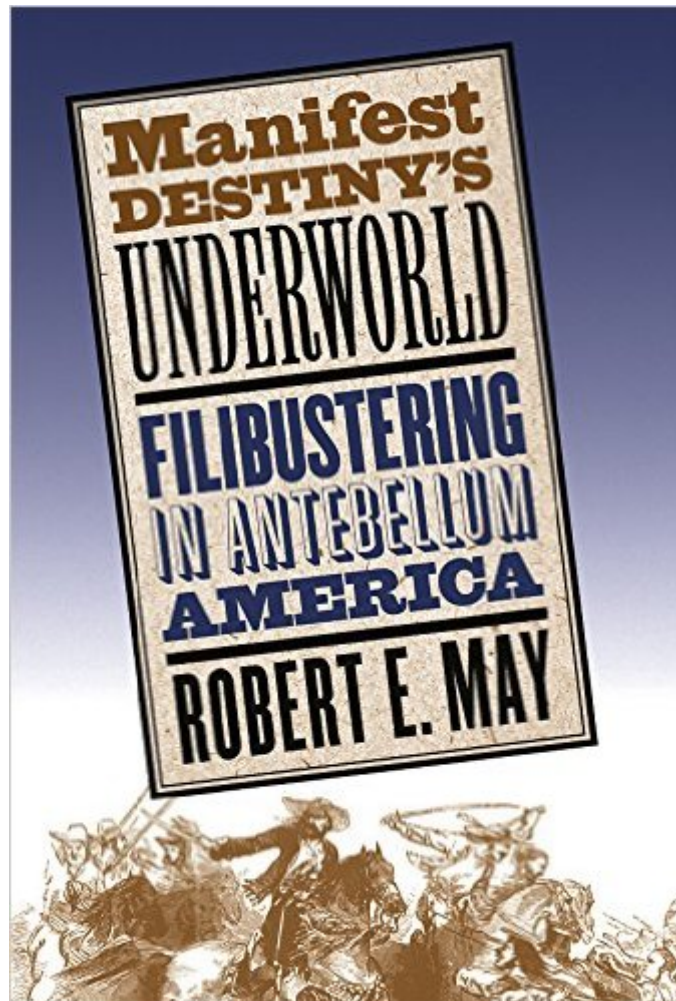


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Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering In Antebellum America



Synopsis

This fascinating study sheds new light on antebellum America's notorious "filibusters--the freebooters and adventurers who organized or participated in armed invasions of nations with whom the United States was formally at peace. Offering the first full-scale analysis of the filibustering movement, Robert May relates the often-tragic stories of illegal expeditions into Cuba, Mexico, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and other Latin American countries and details surprising numbers of aborted plots, as well. May investigates why thousands of men joined filibustering expeditions, how they were financed, and why the U.S. government had little success in curtailing them. Surveying antebellum popular media, he shows how the filibustering phenomenon infiltrated the American psyche in newspapers, theater, music, advertising, and literature. Condemned abroad as pirates, frequently in language strikingly similar to modern American denunciations of foreign terrorists, the filibusters were often celebrated at home as heroes who epitomized the spirit of Manifest Destiny. May concludes by exploring the national consequences of filibustering, arguing that the practice inflicted lasting damage on U.S. relations with foreign countries and contributed to the North-South division over slavery that culminated in the Civil War.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Manifest Destiny's Underworld, a book written by Dr. Robert E. May of Purdue University, offers an in depth look at mid-19th Century filibusters. Dr. May first gives a detailed history of the filibusters. First, he details the origins of the name and then describes the roots of filibustering. Then, he details all the prominent attempts to filibuster. He goes on to explain why Americans filibustered, why the

United States government was unable to stop the filibusters, and the logistics involved in financing a filibuster attempt. Lastly, he deals with the consequences of the filibuster movement; specifically, how it affected United States foreign policy and the War Between the States. Dr. May's goal in writing this book was to give the filibuster movement its proper place in history. He thought that too few historians had studied what the filibuster movement was, who was involved, how it came about, and its consequences. Dr. May wished for people to get a better understanding of the filibusters and what they meant in the history of America. Dr. May did an excellent job in making his arguments and conclusions. Every time he makes a proposition, he backs up the statement with numerous facts. At the end of the book are 107 pages of notes, showing the amount of detail Dr. May gave to the book. I had always thought filibusters sought the expansion of slavery, and were few. This book taught me how widespread the filibuster movement was, and how much United States officials hated it. I never before realized how much the filibuster movement affected antebellum life in America.

Americans have always had a longing for the frontier. There's something intellectually satisfying about adventuring into a region which remains relatively pristine, free of the civil society that modern institutions create. "Great men," or those men who liked to fancy themselves great, were attracted to the places in the Americas that remained legally and politically vacuous. Dreams of financial gain, political power, or adventure attracted a rough-hewn sort of leader. Those leaders are the subject of this book. As was the case with their post-Civil War western brethren, most of these leaders' actions were illegal and, at times, atrocious. They enjoyed blurring the line between what was considered lawful and what was considered criminal, because it allowed them to exploit the legal void created by this instability. Many a filibuster became the head of his own puppet state, and many were celebrated as heroes for their exploits even if they were little more than gangsters. So here you have your Jesse James and Wyatt Earp of an earlier generation, but more than just the names changed. The Antebellum and post-war Americas, particularly within the United States (of course) were vastly different places. Before the Civil War, the post-Spanish republics were very weak because their social and political institutions had lost the unifying elements of Church and Monarchy. The United States, however, was enormously powerful, benefitting from vast foreign immigration and industrial development. Ambitious Americans had a "big attitude" about what they believed they could do, anywhere the winds would carry them. This book is, more than anything, about Manifest Destiny run amok.

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