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A Pacific Republic: Southern Influence in Civil War-Era California

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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This dissertation presents a qualitative study examining disunion efforts in Southern California in the antebellum and Civil War periods. Through an analysis of the political and social alliances established between transplants from the American South and landowning Californians, this work reveals decades-long efforts to divide California and establish an outpost in the state's southern region where the ideologies of the American South could take hold. This is examined in three periods, beginning in the 1850s when California proved most alluring to Southern migrants and the separationist rhetoric of Southern Democrats gained influence, to the start of the Civil War when separationists called for disunion, through the end of the war as state politics restructured in the aftermath of the national crisis.

As this work demonstrates, from as early as the state's first constitutional convention in 1849, through the start of the war, disunion efforts remained a constant among Southern legislators and their social and political allies. Proposals to create an independent territory in Southern California reemerged annually, nearly finding success

in the eve of the war. With the national division reaching the west, the conversation among many Southern sympathizing Californians turned to secession and the possibility of the state joining the rebellion or becoming independent. While secessionist rumblings continued throughout the war, California's military leaders and political figures appointed by the Lincoln administration ensured the state's continued loyalty, often through extreme measures. Southern Democrat's return to political dominance in postwar Southern California brings the story to a full circle, imposing legislative measures that closely resembled the philosophical positions of Southern legislators, reestablishing the link between the Golden State and the American South.

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Introduction

“We don’t need the state breathing down our necks all the time, micromanaging our lives and trying to push us into a foreign way of living.”¹

On August 3, 2022, San Bernardino County’s Board of Supervisors approved a ballot measure that could lead to the county’s secession from California. Arguing that the county lacked a sufficient allocation of funds from the state to address its many problems, including unhoused and unemployed residents, advocates of the bill sought to present voters with the decision, asking: “Do the people of San Bernardino County want San Bernardino County’s elected representatives to study and advocate for all options to obtain the county’s fair share of funding to and including secession from the State of California?”² With the suggested name of “Empire,” the population of the proposed territory would match or exceed the populations of 15 other states, and its size would surpass multiple states in the country.³ Its approval in the November election demonstrated the frustration felt by residents of the majority Democrat county where the stressors of COVID-19 and the county’s already dire financial situation weighed heavily on business owners and the working class.⁴

¹ Mike Chapman and Keith Ridler, “Why this grass-roots movement wants to merge Idaho with parts of Oregon and Northern California,” *Redding Record Searchlight and Associated Press*, April 15, 2021.

² Christian Martinez, “Could San Bernardino County secede from California? Voters may have a say in November,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 2022.

³ Martin Estacion, “Voters in one of California’s largest counties to decide if it should explore seceding from the state,” *Victorville Daily Express*, August 16, 2022.

⁴ Nathan Solis, “‘California needs to do a better job’: San Bernardino County will study seceding after voters’ OK,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 2022.

Would secession from California actually resolve the issues experienced in San Bernardino County? Or, have its proponents used the concept to exploit the concerns of the voting public? As radical as the “Empire” proposal may be, it is just one of over 220 attempts to divide California in its 173 year history as a state.⁵ Starting as early as 1849, prior to statehood, efforts to split California in two or even three separate parts entered political and social conversations and continued to reemerge in the decades that followed. Often proposed along political lines and citing hot button issues like taxation and government overreach, California’s history of disunion proposals reveal the ideological differences that have long divided residents of the state.

This dissertation examines disunion sentiments in Southern California from 1849 to 1867. Beginning with statehood discussions, continuing through the Civil War, and concluding in the postwar period, this analysis demonstrates how legislators from the American South (hereafter identified as Southerners or Southern legislators) in California advocated for disunion as part of grander schemes to spread Southern Democratic ideology across the Southwest and through the Golden State. Present in communities throughout the state, disunion sentiments gained steam in Southern California where many Southerners lived and where the powerful voting bloc of Californios—as landowning Mexican Americans self-identified—proved receptive to the ideology and social mores of their new neighbors. As this work shows, Southern legislators exploited Californio discontent with the American government in a bid to expand Southern influence in the state, calling on similarities in the Southern and Californio social

⁵ Ibid.

structures and utilizing Californio relationships with working class Mexicans in Los Angeles to gain support for their policies. Free from the restraints placed on states by the federal government, a territory of Southern California would become the new frontier for Southerners, allowing for the legal expansion of slavery into the west, the exportation of cotton to Asia, and the strengthening of Southern political and social influence nationwide.

Historical Background

California overflowed with possibilities for white Americans in the decade that preceded the Civil War. As a region that underwent transitions from three world powers in three decades before quickly becoming the destination for a massive international migration, longtime residents of the new American state grappled with the challenges associated with the transition of power throughout the 1850s. The unprecedented wealth and population explosion brought by the California Gold Rush transformed the northern region of the territory into a mining mecca, attracting new migrants and quickly upending the way of life familiar to Californians. Concurrently, change came at a slower pace for Southern California. Without the rapidly increasing population and mining-related prosperity of the north, agrarian southern Californians experienced difficulties adapting to the new American cultural, political, and economic structures. On opposing trajectories, a fissure developed between the two regions, creating a receptive atmosphere for calls to divide California and create a separate territory in the south, calls that loudened as the decade progressed. Backed primarily by politicians from the American

South, these efforts factored into broader schemes to expand Southern influence into the Far West, with California as the most significant prize.

As the group with the most sociopolitical power at the start of Americanization in Southern California, Californios play an important role in this narrative. The origins of Californio culture are rooted in the colonization of the region by Spain in the late eighteenth century when many European, African, Native American, and mixed-race migrants from Mexico settled the territory.⁶ Following Mexico's independence from Spain in 1820, Alta California, as the region came to be known, became a part of the northernmost Mexican territory. Far from the seat of national government, a purely Californian identity developed among the populace who came to distinguish themselves as Californios, a designation that conveyed their pride in the region and a distinction from people from the lower Mexico states.⁷ Land grants given by both the Spanish and Mexican governments dissected Alta California into large *ranchos* that became the nexus of regional communities. These properties included a residence, known as an *hacienda*, gardens, vineyards, and fields, with the majority of the land utilized for cattle grazing.⁸ With large swaths of land in the hands of a limited number of families, and a few towns in between, the California economy depended on cattle for the production of hides and

⁶ The terms Indian, Native American, and Indigenous are used to describe first peoples of California. The use of Indian is in line with the National Congress of American Indians decision to use that name because their legal relations of indigenous nations in the United States are by treaties and executive orders.

⁷ Daniel B. Lynch, "Southern California Chivalry: The Convergence of Southerners and Californios in the Far Southwest, 1846-1866," (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2015), 101; The origins of the Californio identity can be traced to California Governor José Figueroa's 1835 *Manifiesto to the Mexican Republic*, which explained his opposition to the government's efforts to settle former mission lands with small farms and ranches; See Lisbeth Haas, *Conquest and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 36-38.

⁸ Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 8.

tallow. Although ranchers also grazed other animals and grew a variety of crops, they produced few finished products, leaving a dependency on imported materials.⁹

Isolated from the hub of Mexican society, landed political and social leaders in Alta California took pride in their self-identification as Californios, an identifier that distinguished those with financial and political power, as well as a “Spanish” heritage, from their working-class, Mexican counterparts. White migrants who settled in Alta California during this period encountered a society dominated by an emphasis on land ownership and family names. Newcomers who sought to integrate into this system in this early period did so through marriage and trade relations. In addition to *haciendas*, many prominent Californios owned homes in town, which served as political and social hubs for regional inhabitants. In Los Angeles, for example, longtime residents and newly arrived settlers called the city center, known as La Plaza, home. Residents of La Plaza included former mayor Ignacio del Valle, José Antonio Carrillo, Vicente Lugo, Agustín Olvera, and Pío Pico, all of whom also owned vast properties across the region and controlled local commercial and trade enterprises.¹⁰ These city centers became the nexus for political discussion and organization as Californians formulated plans to adapt to American encroachment into their lives.

As Alta California became a destination for great numbers of Americans moving west in the decades following Mexican independence, dueling relationships emerged

⁹ Leonard Pitt, *Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846-1890*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 12.

¹⁰ Carlos Manuel Salomon, *Pío Pico: The Last Governor of Mexican California*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 69.

between Californios and new settlers.¹¹ With tensions rising between the United States and Mexico in the mid-1840s, some Californios expressed frustration by the neglect of the region by the Mexican government and began to believe that Alta California could prosper as an American territory. Concurrently, many of their comrades feared American interference and the resulting challenges of annexation, including the possibility of land loss.¹²

Emboldened by the knowledge that the United States would support a bid for independence by Alta California residents, and encouraged by the presence of United States military officials in the province, many unassimilated Americans in Alta California mutinied in the summer of 1846.¹³ Murdering residents, taking prisoners, and raising a flag of independence, the Bear Flag Revolt, as the incident came to be known, served as an expansion of the Mexican-American War.¹⁴ The Revolt came to an end in a few short weeks with the occupation of California by American forces. The War concluded with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in February of 1848, ceding Mexico's northern provinces to the United States, securing citizenship for Mexican citizens living in the region, and guaranteeing the continuation of land ownership.

¹¹ Salomon, 69, 115.

¹² Robert Glass Cleland, *The Cattle on a Thousand Hills: Southern California, 1850-1880*, (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1941), 34.

¹³ Dale L. Walker, *Bear Flag Rising: The Conquest of California, 1846*, (New York: Tom Dougherty Associates, LLC, 1999), 65, 115; In the fall of 1845, United States Secretary of State James Buchanan sent a secret message to Thomas O. Larkin, an American consul in Alta California, offering aid in the event that Alta California asserted its independence from Mexico. The scheme gained support from Americans expatriates, as well as Californios who were disenchanted with Mexico's treatment of the region. With the start of the Mexican-American War in 1846, Secretary of War William Marcy issued orders for a dragoon regiment to take New Mexico and California.

¹⁴ The Mexican-American War, April 1846-February 1848, fulfilled President James K. Polk's agenda of American territorial expansion, which also included the addition of the Oregon Territory and the Republic of Texas to the United States.

The annexation of what became the American West had wide-ranging consequences for California's inhabitants. Left to establish their place in the new American social and political systems, many Californios felt abandoned by Mexico and like "strangers in their own country," while others welcomed the improvements that the American government might bring.¹⁵ Despite hope in the promise of American annexation, in reality, Californios had much to lose in the new regime. Operating in a system where a few families consolidated status and power, the Californio lifestyle under Mexican rule did not easily adapt to American social and economic systems. As newly minted citizens, Californios spent the first years of the American period navigating the political system in a bid to solidify their positions of influence.

As landowning residents grappled with the shift to American rule, working class Mexicans, Native Americans, and people of mixed-race ancestry became especially vulnerable. Serving as the labor source for the local cattle industry operated through Californio *ranchos*, these groups relied on Californio relationships for employment, support, and political representation. Wage-earning Mexicans encountered displacement, first on the gold fields then in the communities where they lived and worked, resulting in many choosing to make their way south to Mexico, while others remained and continued to foster relationships with Californios.¹⁶ The introduction of American views on race and social status resulted in a reinterpretation of where people fit socially in California society.

¹⁵ Francisco P. Ramirez, "Los Californios," *El Clamor Público* (Los Angeles, CA), April 26, 1856, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>. Translated from Spanish.

¹⁶ David Hayes-Bautista, Cynthia L. Chamberlain, et. al, "Empowerment, Expansion, and Engagement: *La Juntas Patrioticas* in California, 1846-1869," *California History* 85, No. 1 (2007): 4.

Likely drawn to the smaller population and quieter way of life that likened the region to the more rural existence found in the American South, many Southerners made Southern California their new homes in the early years of the American era. By no means the only region from which migrants came to California, the South did have a large representation in Southern California, with pockets of Southerners settling throughout the area. Communities like El Monte became hubs for newly arriving Southerners and Los Angeles's Plaza became an even more diverse international community. Bringing with them their social values and political ideals, many of these residents formed bonds with Californios who shared similar social customs.

As the new state developed in the antebellum period, California's Southern Democratic Party controlled the state legislature, with a Democratic faction known as the Chivalry, or Chivs, gaining prominence in Southern California among Californios and transplants from the American South. An allusion to chivalric knights of the Middle Ages in Europe, the Chivalry brought together similar aristocratic social orders of both Californio landowners and migrants from agrarian American states.¹⁷ Together, these groups shared principles relating to "masculine honor, land ownership, and social order" and opposed the more federalist ideals of the Whigs and later the Republican Party.¹⁸ As the decade progressed, Chivalry Democrats controlled the state legislature, passing regressive laws that curbed the rights of non-white residents in California and built the

¹⁷ Lynch, "Southern California Chivalry: The Convergence of Southerners and Californios in the Far Southwest, 1846-1866," 24.

¹⁸ Daniel B. Lynch, "Southern California Chivalry: Southerners, Californios, and the Forging of an Unlikely Alliance," *California History* 91, No. 3 (2014): 60.

framework for a Southern-friendly state with state division at its heart. Southern California Chivs served as the driving force behind the disunion movement.¹⁹

The separationist movement that flourished in California in the decade leading up to the Civil War became a persistent feature of the annual legislative discourse in the State Assembly and Senate. Appeals to divide the state and create an independent territory out of Southern California were put forth for a variety of social and political agendas, aided by mutually beneficial alliances between Southern California landowners and a faction of newly arrived settlers pursuing success in the new American frontier. The spirit of disunion took hold in California's southern region where landowners felt increasingly isolated and overlooked by the more populous and prosperous north, and where a high concentration of migrants from the American South sought to impose their social and political views. Serving as a precursor to a secession movement at the outbreak of the Civil War, California disunion efforts of the 1850s set the tone for the rhetoric and division that threatened the tenuous bond of longtime residents of California to the United States.

With the support of many prominent Californios, Southern Democrat-driven state division proposals reoccurred regularly throughout the antebellum decade, continuing until the onset of the Civil War when the national secession movement took precedence. Controlled politically by Democrats and populated by a healthy percentage of people from the American South, calls for California's secession posed a real threat to military

¹⁹ Lynch, "Southern California Chivalry: The Convergence of Southerners and Californios in the Far Southwest, 1846-1866," 97.

officials in the state and federal legislatures. How Southern-sympathizing residents would express their support of the rebellion and where Californios would fall in the California secession debates became some of the most significant factors for governmental officials to consider, setting in motion a shift that altered the social and political fabric of Southern California for the duration of the war.

Methodology

This work studies these issues in three separate sections, from the late 1840s and 1850s when California proved most alluring to Southern migrants and the disunionist rhetoric of Southern Democrats took hold; to the start of the Civil War when separationists called for secession; through the end of the war as state politics restructured in the aftermath of the national crisis. As this structure demonstrates, the ideological roots of disunion in California originated in the antebellum era through the work of Southerners to divide the state and create a separate territory in Southern California, and continued to thrive well into the postwar period as leaders in the Democratic Party reasserted their dominance of the state legislature and an apologist stance on the Southern insurrection came to prevail in American popular memory. As a powerful voting group in the early years, longtime California residents became significant allies for Southerners in their bids for political dominance. These alliances, from their origins in the state's Mexican period through the ruptures that formed during the war, provide the framework for these discussions, as do important considerations such as race, class, and politics.

While both California and the Civil War are the focus of numerous works of historical and sociological analysis, the role of Californio-Southerner relationships in disunion schemes in California in the antebellum and wartime periods have elicited less in-depth scholarly inquiry. Although scholars of the state during that pivotal period often include the possibility of secession during the war as an interesting historical anecdote, few devote significant time to understanding the correlation between the figures behind these plans, their motivations, the steps taken to initiate disunion, and the consequences of those actions. Recent historical works by Kevin Waite, Leonard L. Richards, and Glenna Matthews, have incorporated secession as a part of their broader narratives of Civil War California, leaving many unanswered questions of the scope of the movement and its consequences. By focusing on this issue specifically, this work brings to light strategies implemented by key figures to gain support for disunion and secession in California before and during the war.

In order to understand this more fully, an analysis of the development of Californio-Southerner alliances is necessary. As important contextual elements to this narrative, discussions of these intercultural relationships focus on the racial and social negotiations required to rationalize marital unions and business partnerships between the groups, and the dissolution or weakening of these alliances once American sociopolitical structures took precedence. Scholars such as Andrew Gibb, Maria Raquel Casas, Leonard Pitt, D. Michael Bottoms, and Tomás Almaguer, have ably examined these topics through a broader lens of interactions between white migrants and the ruling Californio class, but have neither included a regional focus, connecting the American South to Southern

California, nor provided a link to broader efforts to expand Southern influence in to the region. By scrutinizing these issues specifically, a picture materializes of mutually beneficial relationships between members of an emerging power seeking to ensure their political and social might, and a declining power who struggled to maintain their relevance in a changing world.

While these themes can apply to interactions between Californios and Southerners more generally, the regional emphasis of this work is of particular significance for two reasons. First, while many works purport to tell a story of Californians as a whole, Northern California, its residents, and the development of its communities, is often emphasized over the southern region in discussions of the Mexican and early American periods. The slower rate of change experienced by Southern Californians as American rule gained in prominence is a crucial element to understanding the willingness of many Californio landowners to accept and adopt Southern Democratic ideology, including efforts to divide the state. Second, the region attracted many Southern transplants in the first decade of Americanization, some of whom allied themselves with Californios, and a majority of whom identified as Southern Democrats and came to support the Southern rebellion when the secession crisis began. Many in this group openly encouraged discontent among their neighbors, Californio and Southern transplant alike.

The Southern Californian emphasis is also appropriate given the region's place in proposals for state division. Southern California and its inhabitants played a central role in the nearly annual proposals to the state legislature to split the state and create an independent territory out of the southern portion. Exploiting existent social divisions

between residents of the northern and southern regions, as well as concerns by Southern Californians related to the implementation of American governmental systems, Southern legislators spent the first decade of Americanization working toward disunion while their counterparts in the United States Congress sought ways to expand Southern influence into the West. Advocating for the expansion of American landholdings in the Southwest, the creation of a transcontinental railroad from the Southern states to the Pacific Coast, and the introduction of systems of enslavement in the new states and territories, for members of congress from the Southern states, an independent Southern California opened up unquestionable opportunities for the expansion and ultimate continuation of Southern culture.²⁰

The most successful disunion attempt in California came on the eve of the Civil War in 1859, but ultimately became overshadowed by the national secession crisis. The war brought up the same issues of national loyalty, political allegiance, and identity within California as it did in the rest of the nation. As the westernmost state in the Union before the war, California held tremendous political, social, and military importance for the warring parties as the war began, with both the federal government and rebel leadership recognizing its strategic importance. With its coastal access, mining riches, and Southern sympathizing legislature and congressional representatives, ensuring control of the Golden State played an important role in the Lincoln administration's plans for adjudicating the war in the early months of the conflict. Here again, the situation in

²⁰ Important recent academic entries into this discussion include Kevin Waite's *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire* (2021).

the state's northern region has taken precedence in works analyzing the war, with John W. Robinson's *Los Angeles in Civil War Days, 1860-1865* as the rare example of a monograph focusing exclusively on Southern California during that period.

While the political prominence of Democratic secessionists in California posed an undeniable threat to the United States during the conflict, many scholars have dismissed their efforts citing the state legislature's repudiation of disunion in 1861 as the death knell of their crusade. By examining the work of political, religious, and military figures who supported secession, an illustration of the challenges secession efforts presented to California's fidelity to the Union merges, challenges that federal authorities raced to address as the conflict progressed. As historian Durwood Ball noted, "The Lincoln administration faced three strategic problems in the west when the Civil War began: guaranteeing California's loyalty to the Union, checking any Confederate lunge to the Pacific Coast, and keeping the principal roads in the west open to commercial and immigrant traffic."²¹ With its many attributes, the loss of California to the rebellion would have been devastating to the administration's ability to end the rebellion. While relationships between many Californios and Southern migrants shifted once the war began, these bonds proved crucial to the establishment of Southern Democratic power in the state, setting the stage for the white supremacist policies enacted in the decades that followed.

²¹ Durwood Ball. "Liberty, Empire, and Civil War in the American West" in *Empire and Liberty: The Civil War and the West*, ed. Virginia Scharff and Carolyn Brucken, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 69.

The political and social maneuverings that characterized the movement in California can be best understood through the statements of political leaders on disunion. The declarations of figures such as outgoing California Governor, John B. Weller, who voiced his support for an independent “Pacific Republic” as early as January 1860, provide important insight into the evolution of Californians’ sentiments on secession and independence. Subsequent secessionist statements by both of the state’s congressional representatives, Charles L. Scott and John C. Burch, and its senators, William M. Gwin and Milton Latham, further illustrate the extent of extremist views among elected officials in positions of power. Followed by face-saving retractions, such brazen expressions of radical thought by public figures demonstrated loyalists’ tenuous hold in California. The news media also entered the fray, publishing editorials in support of secession, with the editor of the *Union Democrat* of Sonora writing bluntly, “The auctioneers’ bell-ringer of San Francisco, i.e. the *Alta*...takes us to task for daring to express the opinion that the true policy for California to pursue, if dissolution should take place, would be to form a separate, independent government—a Pacific Republic.”²² Such divisive rhetoric from policy makers and journalists deepened the divisions among Californians as is revealed the overt and covert actions of the primary figures involved in spreading disunion in the state.

Intervention

²² Albert N. Francisco and N.P. Turner, “One Paper for a Pacific Confederacy,” *Union Democrat* (Sonora, CA), January 12, 1861.

To put this work in the proper historical context, it is necessary to understand how scholarship on the Civil War era and California has developed over time. For many scholars of the Civil War, the Far West, including the states of California and Oregon and the territories of New Mexico and Utah, far from the center of power and with few military engagements, represented a minimally impactful addendum to the larger narrative of rebellion and reunification. Similarly, many historians focusing on California approached the war years as a brief interruption in the broader story of the state's development in the nineteenth century, dismissing the importance of disunion efforts, normalizing the influence of Southern-sympathizers from the ante- to the postbellum periods, and minimizing the roles of non-white groups, including Californios, Mexican Californians, African Americans, and Native Americans, in those efforts.

In order to reveal the connection of California's non-white residents to Southerners' larger plans for western domination through disunion, it is important to gain a clear understanding of the motivations of and responses to those who worked to make disunion a reality. Personal correspondence, memoirs, handbills, political speeches, and other written works about the state, its residents, observers, and ideological stance, help paint a picture of the Golden State during this critical period. As these sources reveal, through their attempts to bring secession to California, separationist figures became a beacon of hope for like-minded Californian residents throughout the war and continued to advocate for southern ideology, culture, and values, which included the enslavement of over four million African Americans.

Indeed, slavery played a significant, although often silent, role in the work of Southern transplants to revolutionize California and the American Southwest in the antebellum and wartime periods. As the root cause of the national secession crises of 1850 and 1860, American chattel slavery occupied an important place in the development of the Golden State, as evidenced by the various examples of enslavement recently revealed by historian Jean Pflaetzer, that demonstrate the unfree nature of the state at the time.²³ Examined together with pro-slavery legislative measures, such as fugitive slave acts and the legalization of the subjugation of Native Californians, and the statements of its pro-slavery political leaders, the state's status as a de facto extension of the American South is brought to light. The connection between the extension of slavery into the west and the efforts of California's Southern legislators cannot be ignored when Southern California's placement in disunion proposals is considered.

Californio's complicated racial structure and relationship with systems of discrimination and exploitation also factor into this narrative. Operating in a more racially stratified society than their white American counterparts, Californios's self-identification as Spanish provided an important distinction from their Native American and mixed-race Mexican counterparts, despite the fact that many shared the same ancestral heritage. The proximity to whiteness provided by the Spanish origins became significant in the personal and professional partnerships formed between members of the

²³ The Compromise of 1850 was a series of legislative measures to placate the warring pro- and anti-slavery factions in the United States Congress, which famously included the addition of California as a free state; Jean Pfaetzer's *California, A Slave State* (2023) demonstrates the wide-spread trafficking of enslaved persons into California in the antebellum period, including the maneuvers implemented by enslavers to manipulate enslaved laborers to accompany them to a state where they would legally be considered free.

two group, particularly in the Mexican and early American periods. That distinction also proved important in the passage of white supremacist laws that targeted non-white residents, including Native American, working class Mexicans, and African Americans in the state. Californio complicity in the oppression of Native Californians, exploitation of landless Mexicans, and disregard of Black residents served as a dogmatic link to newly arriving white Americans, particularly those from the South.

Perhaps the most significant link between the two groups became the adoption of Southern democratic ideology by Californios. Based on similar seigniorial social structures, many Californios came to identify as Democrats, joining the Southern Democratic faction known as the Chivalry, or Chivs, led by Senator William M. Gwin, a slaveholder from Mississippi. Chivs came to dominate state politics throughout the decade and supported the political campaigns of Californio candidates, particularly in Southern California, where they continued to hold significant political and social sway. Democratic politicians, including Californios, advocated for disunion throughout the antebellum period and openly promoted secession once the war began. Although many of the political and social alliances between Democrats severed or weakened once the war began, the deep rootedness of Southern Democratic viewpoints continued well into the postwar period.

While some of the state's Southern sympathizers were chastened during the conflict, the years after the war proved a fertile breeding ground for a revival of Southern Democratic ideology, with regressive laws and social standards that mirrored the Reconstruction policies of the states in the American South. This return to Southern

Democratic control solidified with the return of former Senator William M. Gwin, who spent the war years fighting to ensure the continuation of Southern culture, including petitioning Napoleon III for the establishment of an American colony in Sonora, Mexico for discontented Southerners during France's attempted coup d'état in that country, much to the displeasure of American governmental officials.²⁴ His reappearance in California in 1866 and return to a position of influence among state politicians is emblematic of the political sway held by former secessionists in Reconstruction-era California.²⁵

Another significant factor considered in this analysis is how the Civil War has been studied historically. The conflict has traditionally been understood as three separate geographic regions: the Eastern Theater, Western Theater, and Trans-Mississippi Theater. The Eastern Theater was comprised of the states of Virginia and Maryland, where the defense of Richmond, the capital of the so-called Confederacy, served as the focal point of military operations. The area experienced many of the most highly scrutinized battles and campaigns of the war, including Antietam, the bloodiest day in American history, and Gettysburg, the most significant incursion of the war into the loyal northern states. The Western Theater included the states in rebellion from Virginia to the Mississippi River, including Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, and North Carolina, as well as the neutral state of Kentucky. Success in the region arguably

²⁴ French forces invaded Mexico in 1862 under quickly took control of Mexico City, forcing Mexican President Benito Juarez and his supporters to flee to the north. Concerned by the possibility of French support for the Confederacy, President Lincoln's Secretary of State William Seward refused to openly condemn French actions, despite many entreaties by representatives from representatives of the Mexican government under President Juarez. Paris gained a large community of Southern expatriates during the war and many rebel sympathizers appealed to the French Emperor Napoleon III to support the Southern cause.

²⁵ After the failure of his Mexican colony scheme, Gwin fled Mexico and arrived in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he was arrested for his treasonous actions against the United States.

ensured success in the overall war, isolating the political center of the rebellion from the majority of its supporters. Finally, the Trans-Mississippi Theater encompassed Arkansas, Kansas, the rebelling states of Louisiana and Texas, as well as the neutral state of Missouri and “Indian” Territory, an area that later became the state of Oklahoma.

Although the Far West and California have traditionally been included in the latter region, in actuality they existed as separate entities, lacking a formal role in broader discussions of the conflict and its consequences, despite their political and social significance before, during, and after the war. While scholarship centering the region and its role in the conflict has often been treated as an outlier by many students of the Civil War, recent studies have revealed California’s role in Southern legislator’s efforts to expand their influence into the South and have emphasized the importance of controlling the Golden State for both the federal government and rebel leadership.

Chapters

“The Pacific Republic: Disunion in Civil War California” is divided into three parts and is composed of five chapters, with an epilogue focusing on the long-lasting consequences of the war in California. Part I: Dividing California examines the antebellum period from California’s annexation in 1848 through 1858, just as warmongering rhetoric began to boil to the surface on a national scale. Focusing on separationist movements and the related political and social alliances in Southern California, this section demonstrates how separationist oratory, the efforts of settlers from the American South in positions of prominence, and discontent among many long-time California residents throughout the 1850s, foreshadowed war-time attempts to link the

state to the secession movement, either as an independent nation or as a part of the broader Confederate cause. Part I provides necessary background for understanding the political and social unrest in the state as the war loomed on the horizon.

Chapter 1, *Unexpected Alliances* details the origins of the encroachment of white Americans into Southern California in the 1840s and continuing throughout the 1850s. Through its analysis of the multicultural alliances formed between the newly arrived migrants and Californios in Southern California, this chapter seeks to demonstrate the way members of the two groups came together. Through marital bonds, business partnerships, and political coalitions, the alliance between Southerners and Californios required reevaluations of race and social status, as well as common bonds over shared social structures and ideological stances. Of particular significance is the introduction of Chivalry Democrats, or Chivs, as they came to be known, who represented the pro-slavery faction of the state's Democratic Party. Finding prominence in Southern California, the group sought division as a means of introducing slavery in the agricultural south. Chivs formed strategic alliances with influential southern Californians, many of whom felt disillusioned with the new American regime, to gain support for their disunion efforts.

Chapter 2: *Negotiating Statehood* focuses on separationist efforts from statehood in 1850 through 1858. This period set the stage for acceptance of secessionist thought, establishing a familiar lexicon for disaffected Californians, and allowing the fomentation of the social and political influence of settlers from the American South, many of whom advocated for the introduction of slavery in the region. Proposed on a nearly annual basis

throughout the 1850s, supporters of dividing the state lobbied for the creation of an independent territory in Southern California where regional legislation would allow for the continuation of an agrarian system based on disparities in class and wealth that mimicked the social structures prevalent in the American South with the ultimate goal of introducing formal systems of enslavement to the region.

Part II: A Pacific Republic looks at California from the Pico Act of 1859, the first successful legislative effort to divide California, through the start of the war in 1861 as state military leaders struggled to temper secessionist efforts, and continuing through the end of the war in early 1865. This section focuses on the motivations of warmongers, the allegiances of those who sought to divide the state in the antebellum period, the plans of figures who sought to bond the state to the Confederacy, and the efforts of advocates of forming an independent nation on the western coast of the United States. By differentiating between the secessionist rhetoric of politicians and the actions of disunionists, this section discusses the influence of such defiant perspectives and the response by public and private Californians to these recurring efforts as the war progressed and finally reached a conclusion.

Chapter 3: Disunion Politics examines the Pico Act, the only semi-successful effort to divide California, and the shift from state division to national secession in the lead-up to the Civil War. Public advocacy for secessionism within the California State Legislature in the period preceding the war and calls to create an independent nation on the Pacific Coast are discussed. As early as January of 1860, ten months prior to the presidential election and fifteen months prior to the start of the Civil War, California's

outgoing Democratic Governor John B. Weller used the occasion of his last message to the state legislature to advocate for the state's independence from the United States. California's two Representatives and Senators and other influential social residents followed suite, creating an atmosphere where Californians considered national disunion even prior to the beginning of the secession movement in the American South.

Chapter 4: Rebels in California examines the efforts by the federal government, military officials, and political leaders to quell secessionist activities in the state throughout the war. From the formation of militia groups to plans by secret societies and groups of Confederate sympathizers, rebels in California proved frustrating for military officials who expended significant resources to foil these efforts and prevent future disunion schemes. Secessionist rhetoric by Democratic newspapers and political figures led to the enactment of problematic policies that suppressed the rights of individuals through detainment and the threat of imprisonment.

Part III: Aftermath of Disunion focuses on the consequences of secessionist efforts and how California politics evolved in the years following the war. Chapter 5: Reconstructing California Politics explores the challenges Californians encountered in reunifying their communities once the war came to an end. While the Union Party maintained control of the State Legislature in 1865, that power waned as Californians embraced the regressive, discriminatory messaging of Democratic politicians, eventually culminating in the election of 1867 where a newly unified Democratic Party returned to power in California. Rather than embrace the socially and politically progressive philosophies of the Reconstruction era, post-war California politics reverted to racially

motivated radical ideologies of the antebellum period. As this section demonstrates, the disunionist principles of the antebellum and war periods evolved in the postwar era, keeping California a hotbed of radical thought into the last decades of the nineteenth century and shaping how the war would be remembered by Californians for generations.

Lastly, an epilogue titled *The Long Shadow of the Civil War* examines the evolution of American memory of the conflict, from the Reconstruction-era through the end of the nineteenth century and beyond. Focusing on the development of the myth of the Lost Cause, which transformed popular perceptions of the war from an insurrection to a conflict instigated for supposedly noble motives, this concluding section discussed the various physical manifestations of the ideology within the state of California. As the state with the highest number of monuments to the Confederacy outside of the American South, the evidence of California's long-established connection to the rebellion remained apparent well into the twenty-first century through the place names, school mascots, statues, and nostalgia groups that served to legitimize the conflict and perpetuated notions of white supremacy for generations of Californians.²⁶

²⁶ In the wake of recent calls to remove physical manifestations of the Lost Cause, public and private efforts resulted in the removal and replacement of monuments and memorials to the rebellion throughout California; See Kevin Waite, "Op-Ed: California finally sweeps away most of its tributes to the Confederacy. What took so long?", *Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 2020. Accessed November 11, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-09-20/california-confederacy-monuments-fall>.

Chapter 1

Unexpected Alliances

“It was not for the native Californians we were making this Constitution;
it was for the great American population.”²⁷

At the turn of the decade in 1850, California represented the American frontier. As the destination for the largest international migration in the history of the world and on the brink of becoming the newest state in the Union, California boomed with possibilities for newly arrived settlers, while creating an uncertain future for longtime residents. The influx of migrants resulting from the Gold Rush transformed Northern California from a sparsely populated, distant Mexican outpost into a fast-growing destination for would-be miners and entrepreneurs. Simultaneously, agrarian southern Californians experienced difficulties adapting to the new American cultural, political, and economic structures, resulting in feelings of vulnerability and exposure that became easily exploitable open wounds in the decade that followed. Long simmering discords between residents of the state’s northern and southern regions became magnified, creating a deeper division that newly arriving American settlers utilized to their advantage.

To many landowning southern Californians of Spanish and Native heritage the rapid Americanization in the state’s northern region, where white settlers quickly began to outnumber nonwhites, signified a repudiation of the uniquely Californian culture that

²⁷ J. Ross Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, In September and October, 1849*, (Washington, D.C.: John T. Towers, 1850), 11, <http://www.loc.gov/resources/calbk.196>.

emerged during the period of Mexican rule. Cleaving to their way of life in face of unstoppable change, Californios formed strategic social and political alliances with newly influential Southern migrants in an attempt to ensure the continuation of their own influence and power.²⁸ Finding commonalities in their shared ideas of honor and chivalry, these groups worked together in the decade that followed to maintain political and social dominance through the creation of what historian Daniel Lynch described as “forged hybrid hierarchies of race, class, and gender.”²⁹ Negotiating racial, cultural, and political issues, the tenuous alliance forged by this multiethnic grouping created a new world order for Southern Californians that emphasized the values and traditions of the American South.

The foundation for these interracial dealings dated to the period before the United States’ annexation of the region that became the American West. Beginning in the 1830s and 1840s, American transplants began ingratiating themselves into Mexican California society. Forging partnerships through business, marriage, and cultural assimilation, American expatriates in the region gained the social and political power to become accepted associates of the influential class of Californios. At the time of the Bear Flag Revolt (1846) and Mexican American War (1846-1848), many among this immigrant group supported annexation, setting the stage for the complex social negotiations that followed in the first decades of Americanization. As the region transformed from a

²⁸ As noted by Anne Farrar Hyde, “building relationships helped Native, Anglo, and mixed-blood people to protect their interests in a changing world.” (See Anne Farrar Hyde, *Empire, Nations, and Families: A History of the North American West, 1800-1860*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 48.

²⁹ Daniel Lynch, “Southern California Chivalry: Southerners, Californios, and the Forging of an Unlikely Alliance,” 60.

Mexican territory to an American state, quickly in the north because of the Gold Rush, and at a much slower pace in the south, interethnic relationships developed that challenged perceptions of racial and ethnic identity.

Unsurprisingly, race played a significant role in the establishment of such relationships. From the time of Spain's colonization of the western hemisphere, the term "Spanish" held positive connotations, becoming a synonym for "white" and an antonym for "Indian." As the racial makeup of social elites in Spanish territories changed through miscegenation, the Spanish identity came to encompass persons of mixed racial heritage born in the Americas. As Lisbeth Haas explained in her groundbreaking study of race and ethnicity in Southern California, under these circumstances "[w]hiteness was thus not a singular or static category but included a range of color."³⁰ While Mexican society functioned with social hierarchies put in place under the Spanish caste system, which categorized people based on their ethnic ancestry, newly arrived white Americans lacked a frame of reference for understanding the complex racial identities that existed as a result. With whiteness as a negotiable concept, rather than a fixed designation, the Californio interpretation of race and class proved difficult concepts for newly arrived American settlers to grasp.

Despite assimilation by early American newcomers during the Mexican period, later waves of white migrants to California—with their staunchly bifurcated views of ethnicity—failed to fully accept the complexities of race relations in the region.

³⁰ Lisbeth Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 31.

Racialized perspectives of indolent Mexicans who neglected their land and failed to capitalize on opportunities to exploit it, filled ambitious newcomers with the bravado that led to widespread dispossession and deculturation within a couple of decades.

Encouraged, in part, by paternalistic writings about Californians, including Richard Henry Dana's popular 1840 travel memoir, *Two Years Before the Mast*, and the increasingly widespread ideals of Manifest Destiny espoused by politicians at the time, migrants arriving in the region viewed California as a land of myriad opportunities for wealth and prosperity.³¹ These ideas and the ambitious plans that accompanied them led many in the new immigrant group to encourage American annexation of California in the Mexican American War.

In spite of racial and ethnic barriers, Californios and early white Americans found common ground in a shared paternalism toward Indigenous Californians and landless Mexicans of dubious descent, as well as in their views on gender.³² As American soldier Alfred Sully wrote of the Californio lifestyle in the late 1840s, landowners lived like a "rich Southern planter, only in place of Negroes they have Indians for servants."³³

Indeed, Native Californians and Mexicans of primarily Indigenous ancestry served as the primary labor force in California *ranchos* and the exploitation of these groups became

³¹ Dana was particularly unkind to Californio women, describing them as lacking in virtue and morality, and alluding to physical violence by their spouses. According to historian Antonia I. Castañeda, his representations "set the precedent for negative images of Mexican women in California." (see Castañeda, Antonia I. and Linda Heidenreich, ed., *Three Decades of Engendering History: Selected Works by Antonia I. Castañeda* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2014), 40-41)

³² Maria Raquel Casas, *Married to a Daughter of the Land: Spanish-Mexican Women and Interethnic Marriage in California, 1820-1880*, (Reno: University of Las Vegas Press, 2007), 50; According to Casas, both Californios and European-descended Americans subscribed to ideals of true womanhood, including domesticity, piety, and submissiveness.

³³ Stephen G. Hyslop, "Courtship and Conquest: Alfred Sully's Intrusion at Monterey," *California History* 90, No. 1 (January 2012), 12.

some of the earliest legislation passed by the state legislature. Laws such as “An Act for the Government and Protection of Indians” in 1850 instituted a system of indentured servitude that ensured a steady flow of forced laborers in ranchos throughout the state. By criminalizing common behaviors and those stereotypically associated with Native Californians, the law essentially legalized slavery in California, a practice banned under the state constitution just a year earlier, but which, in many ways, factored into the grander plans for the Far West by members of congress and many in the state’s new legislature.³⁴

For the landed class, this differentiation from Indigenous laborers proved important. An emphasis on a European-based Spanish lineage, rather than mixed race Mexican heritage became the standard by which many in that group distinguished themselves from their working-class counterparts, despite sharing an obvious, but often unacknowledged, common ancestry. With some among the Californio class of mixed-race ancestry, such hierarchies presented an interesting conundrum in these social negotiations around whiteness and citizenship. As social and economic leaders, Californios retained their supposed elite status by disparaging the “lower classes who, they felt, were not their moral or intellectual equals.”³⁵ Despite this, Californios made up a relatively small number of the inhabitants of California, with laborers accounting for

³⁴ Haas, 57; Sponsored by California state senators E. Kirby Chamberlin of Southern California and John Bidwell of Sacramento, the bill proved to be the first of many anti-Indian legislations passed throughout the 1850s that had devastating outcomes for Native Californians, contributing to the genocide that led to the loss of 80 percent of the state’s Indian population in the decade that followed. (See Haas)

³⁵ Paul Bryan Gray, *A Clamor for Equality: Emergence and Exile of Californio Activist Francisco P. Ramirez*, (Lubbock: Texas tech University Press, 2012), 18.

approximately seventy percent of the population of Los Angeles alone by the end of the decade.³⁶

Through the advancement of ideas of their “moral and intellectual” superiority, Californios strived to distinguish themselves from the supposed inferior classes through staged displays of wealth and influence. Grand fiestas, and costly jewelry and clothing became public symbols of power for the landed class, even in cases where the displays of prosperity did not match actual financial solvency, a fact that did not go unnoticed by American settlers in the region.³⁷ Many later recalled the dances that accompanied the elaborate celebrations, with one American immigrant noting, “[a] Californian would hardly pause in a dance for an earthquake, and would be pretty sure to renew it, even before the vibration ceased.”³⁸ Rich in land, but lacking the fortunes to match, many Californios continued to present the ostentatious lifestyle that hastened their economic decline well into the American period.³⁹

Although these practices appeared frivolous to American observers, they held significant symbolic importance and factored into Californios’ social structure, not unlike the traditions of the American South.⁴⁰ While neither Californios nor the Southern planter class were monolithic, cultural similarities can be identified to speculate as to the appeal of the two groups as allies. Comparisons can be made between Californian *ranchos* and

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Walter Colton, *The Land of Gold; Or, Three Years in California*, (Boston: Cleaves, Macdonald & Co., 1886), 46.

³⁹ Pitt, 197.

⁴⁰ Andrew Gibb, *Californios, Anglos, and the Performance of Oligarchy in the U.S. West: How the First Generations of Mexican Americans Fashioned a New Nation*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2018), 42.

Southern plantations, both in size and in the reliance on an oppressed labor force. The Californio population remained low, while in some parts of the South blacks outnumbered whites.⁴¹ Landowning southerners controlled the state politically, including making up a powerful voting bloc in the United States Congress, while Californios held significant political power. Just as southerners recognized themselves as distinct from northern Yankees, so too did the Californios of Southern California distinguish themselves from their Northern California counterparts and often nurtured feuds that lasted decades. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, southerners fought to maintain their social, political, and economic structure despite the signs of its decline, just as the Californios of Southern California fight to maintain their own dominance, recognizing the need to ally themselves with the new American immigrants in order to retain power and continue their way of life.

As these new allies negotiated ideas of whiteness, the elite position of Californio women as Spanish, rather than Mexican, made them acceptable partners for white American settlers.⁴² In order to ensure a clear distinction between their spouses and the Mexican or Native American women whom they scorned, many American men preferred to describe them as “Spanish ladies.”⁴³ The women, too, distinguished themselves from

⁴¹ Manisha Sinha, *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press., 2000), 12.

⁴² According to Antonia I. Castañeda, “‘Spanish’ women were morally, sexually, and racially pure,” while “‘Mexican’ women were immorally and sexually and racially impure.” (Antonia I. Castañeda, “Gender, Race, and Culture: Spanish-Mexican Women in the Historiography of Frontier California,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 11, No. 1, Las Chicanas (1990): 9)

⁴³ Gray, 18; Mixed-race relationships between white colonizers and women of color date back to the earliest period of Anglo colonization of the United States. (See Anne Farrar Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families*, 48-63)

non-Spanish women and at times related to the white men who courted them. As Angustias de la Guerra of the powerful Californio family from Santa Barbara observed after meeting American soldier Alfred Sully in Monterey in the early American period, “he looks like us.”⁴⁴ While his whiteness made him acceptable to the family initially, Sully went on to surreptitiously marry Angustias’s teenage daughter, Manuela, causing the family significant distress.

Sully’s impetuous decision notwithstanding, marital relations between Californio women and white settlers often occurred in complex circumstances related to wealth, class, and land ownership. Through their familial connections and dowries, Californio women, or “daughters of the land” as they came to be known, held unparalleled social and economic value for newly arriving immigrants who wished to enter Californio society.⁴⁵ With marriage as one of the only paths to naturalization for immigrants under the Mexican legal system, these links became indispensable for anyone seeking social advancement. Assimilating into the culture through the adoption of the language, religion, and traditions, ambitious white American men became Californions by proxy. Approximately two hundred such unions existed in California at the time of the region’s annexation by the United States.⁴⁶

Analyzing Californio marriages with foreigners as part of his work to write a full history of California in the later nineteenth century, historian Hubert Howe Bancroft theorized that Californio women preferred white American men as partners because of

⁴⁴ Hyslop, “Courtship and Conquest: Alfred Sully’s Intimate Intrusion at Monterey,” 7.

⁴⁵ Casas, 9; Casas describes the appropriation of the term “daughters of the land” by Californios from Spanish colonizers who originally applied it to Indigenous women in the Americas.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

the perceived inferiority of men of Spanish ancestry who did “not treat [women] with the greatest respect.”⁴⁷ Bancroft, like many Americans who studied nineteenth century California, criticized Californio men as being unproductive and even unintelligent, while the women fit into the “Protestant ethic” of the “industrious...correct” woman.⁴⁸ As historian María Raquéel Casas explained, in Bancroft’s racist analysis, “Interethnic marriages thus became...one of the most persuasive metaphors of peaceful and beneficial conquest by Euro-Americans.”⁴⁹

Naturalized Californios, like Abel Stearns and Benjamin D. Wilson, benefited greatly from their spouses’ social connections, becoming powerful landowners and sociopolitical figures.⁵⁰ Stearns’s union with fourteen-year-old Arcadia Bandini was arranged by her father with whom Stearns established a business relationship.⁵¹ While their twenty-nine-year age difference did not present an obstacle to their union, their different faiths forced Stearns to apply for special permission to wed the teenage girl. Through his marriage to Ramona Yorba in 1843, Wilson ingratiated himself in Californio society adopting the language and customs. Following her death at the start of the American period in California in 1849, Wilson married to Margaret Hereford, a recent

⁴⁷ Casas, 10.

⁴⁸ Douglas Monroy, *Thrown Among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1990), 167; Nineteenth century Americans subscribed to the ideals of the Cult of Domesticity, or True Womanhood, which emphasized women’s roles as pious wives and mothers.

⁴⁹ Casas, 10.

⁵⁰ Hyde, Anne Farrar, *Empires, Nations, and Families: A History of the North American West, 1800-1860*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011, 77-81.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 149.

widow who was white, and reimagined himself as a white American, even renaming his children to have more Anglo-derived names.⁵²

In reality, Californio women entered into marital arrangements for a variety of reasons, not the least of which included furthering their own prosperity and that of their family. Unlike in the European and American legal systems where women became legal dependents of their husbands upon marriage, in Mexico, as in Spain, women existed as “legally recognized persons...[who] could buy, purchase, inherit, or maintain separate property” from their spouses.⁵³ While men gained rights over their wives, Californio women during the Spanish and Mexican periods retained an individuality not common in American society, often leading to conflicts in interethnic marriages. According to historian Anne Farrar Hyde, “people made choices about whom they married and the identities they created within a certain context—but in these places context was especially flexible.”⁵⁴

As the region shifted to American rule and additional white Americans migrated west in larger numbers, some mixed-race, intercultural relationships gained the stigma of immorality and even illegality and many marriages of Californio women and American men resulted in violence, abandonment, the squandering of fortunes, and large-scale loss of property.⁵⁵ As argued by Antonia I. Castañeda, American “stereotypes” about Californio women “were not static,” but rather changed with the sociopolitical

⁵² Wilson arrived in Southern California in the 1840s and established a business before marrying Ramona Yorba of the prominent Yorba family. This alliance provided Wilson with land, the ability to participate in the political sphere, and the cachet of being a member of the Yorba family. (see Hyde, 77-78)

⁵³ Ibid, 15.

⁵⁴ Hyde, 83.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 134.

circumstances of the time.⁵⁶ From these early unions, a multiethnic generation emerged that reached adulthood during the first decades of Americanization, many of which eschewed the Californio traditions of their forebearers.

As Californios gained American citizenship through the annexation agreement and with political or social power accessible outside of marital unions, the social contracts of the Mexican era marriages lost their luster for new settlers, but mixed-race families remained socially important.⁵⁷ According to Casas, regardless of these changes, Californio women retained “culturally significant attributes” that made them appealing partners for new arrivals, including “prestige, status, authority, [and] culturally valued taste,” and multicultural marriages endured throughout the nineteenth century.⁵⁸

Political connections also played an important role in the relationships established by California’s newly arrived migrants, many of which hailed from the American South. Arriving early in the period of Americanization, Southern settlers wasted no time in introducing Southern Democratic Party ideology and establishing themselves as part of a new class of elites, often to the detriment of the Californios whose social and political power became tenuous. As the region went through the motions of attaining statehood, including adopting a constitution, electing representatives, and imposing political, judicial, and social structures, white American residents applied their own understandings and expectations on the emerging Californian sociopolitical systems, effectively

⁵⁶ Castañeda, *Three Decades of Engendering History*, 44.

⁵⁷ Daniel B. Lynch, “Southern California Chivalry: The Convergence of Southerners and Californios in the Far Southwest, 1846-1866,” 104.

⁵⁸ Casas, 148.

challenging Californio culture and creating a new power structure with themselves in leadership positions.

The earliest evidence of struggles between Californio and white American representatives came during the California Constitutional Convention in September of 1849 when both sides expressed differing views on the purpose of a state constitution. Citing the rapidly increasing population resulting from the Gold Rush, future senator and political leader William M. Gwin, newly of San Francisco, brazenly stated before the convention, “It was not for the native Californians we were making this Constitution; it was for the great American population.”⁵⁹ Hailing from Mississippi where he continued to own a large plantation dependent on the labor of enslaved people, Gwin migrated to California in search of political advancement in 1849.⁶⁰ Encouraged by his political mentor John C. Calhoun, the most ardent proponent of slavery in the United States Senate, Gwin’s move west fit into a larger trend of migration from the American South into the Far West, including over 2,000 enslaved persons transported into the state during the period of the Gold Rush alone.⁶¹

For Gwin and other newly arrived American settlers, crafting a state constitution became an exercise in creating an American state out of the former Mexican colony. Unlike earlier migrants, Gwin and his cohort had no need to adopt the Californio culture or assimilate into a Californio society, instead they sought to forge a purely American

⁵⁹ Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, In September and October, 1849*, 11.

⁶⁰ Arthur Quinn, *The Rivals: William Gwin, David Broderick, and the Birth of California*, (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1994), 82; Lynch, “Southern California Chivalry: The Convergence of Southerners and Californios in the Far Southwest, 1846-1866,” 24.

⁶¹ Jean Pfaelzer, *California, A Slave State*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023), 122.

society. Ensuring a break with the motherland completed the domination of the region and its inhabitants, whom he described as “foreigners.”⁶² Justifiably, Californio representatives expressed unease at this approach. Speaking through an interpreter, José Antonio Carrillo, a representative from Los Angeles, took umbrage at Gwin’s statement and instead proposed a geographic division to create a separate territory comprised of the districts from San Luis Obispo to San Diego, leaving the north to form a state government. A territorial government, Carrillo and his colleagues supposed, allowed greater freedom to enact laws beneficial to the region without the imposition of federal taxation or the interference of officials unfamiliar with the culture of Southern California. In closing, Carrillo, a longtime figure in California politics, noted he “considered himself as much an American citizen” as Representative Gwin himself.⁶³

Carrillo, like several Californios seeking to retain their prominence, hoped the new American regime would benefit landowning Californios in a way the Mexican government had failed.⁶⁴ The rationality of the disunion proposal can be understood for several reasons, from the already present divisions between Californios of Northern and Southern California, the sheer size of the territory, and the differences in the evolution of the region in the post Mexican American War period. Long festering regionalism fueled by personal rivalries and petty jealousies created an environment where longtime residents already coexisted in an ever-present state of discord. The vast

⁶² Pitt, 45.

⁶³ Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, In September and October, 1849*, 21

⁶⁴ Far from the seat of power in Mexico City, Alta California, as it was known in the Spanish and Mexican periods, remained a distant outpost, allowing a unique society to flourish.

distance between population centers in the north and south and the infrequency in which northerners and southerners interacted allowed those divisions to mature. The speed with which the two areas changed in the period since the start of the Gold Rush only served as additional proof for the formal separation Carrillo proposed.

In response to Carrillo's statement, Gwin conveyed the paternalism of the day by asserting that the "American population was the majority" in California and explaining that the constitution "was instituted for the protection of the minority: the native Californians."⁶⁵ In closing, Gwin stated, "The majority of any community is the party to be governed; the restrictions of law are imposed between them and the weaker party; they are to be restrained from infringing upon the rights of the minority."⁶⁶ Seemingly rooted in his bigoted views of the Spanish speaking populace, Gwin's dismissal of Carrillo's proposal preceded debates about slavery in California during the Convention, the outcome of which later swayed how Gwin and other like-minded Southern slaveholders felt about dividing the state in two. Recalling the convention in his memoirs, Gwin wrote, "The old settled portions of California sent members to the convention to vote against the formation of a state government." He concluded, "they were afraid of the newcomers, who formed a vast majority of the voting population."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, In September and October, 1849*, 22; Thanks in large part to the Gold Rush, white Americans numbered approximately 76,000 in 1850, while Californios numbered only 13,000 and Native Californians nearly 150,000. See Citlali Lucia Riddell, "Californio Local Liberalism: The Lasting Impact of Mexican Ideologies in California, 1848-1890," (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2020).

⁶⁶ Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, In September and October, 1849*, 21.

⁶⁷ William Henry Ellison, "The Movement for State Division" *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* (October 1913), Vol. 17, No. 2, 103.

Where earlier American migrants assimilated into Californio culture, even adopting Spanish names, marrying into Californio families, and converting to Catholicism, the new arrivals, particularly arriving in Gold Rush-era Northern California, had no need to make such concessions. This new system brought with it the additional complication of racial identity, an issue that came to light in an additional contentious interaction during the constitutional convention. When discussing voting rights, Charles Tyler Botts, a white American representative, suggested the insertion of the word “white” before “male citizen of Mexico” in a proposed amendment to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This attempt to restrict the franchise from the portion of the population whose rights of citizenship came with the Treaty directly targeted Indians and Mexican laborers. Botts’s suggestion elicited a strong response from Pablo de la Guerra of Santa Barbara, one of the few English-speaking Californios, who challenged Botts and the delegation to determine “the true significance of the word ‘white’.”⁶⁸ Highlighting the subjectivity of the term and its application, de la Guerra cited Mexican law, which kept race and voting rights separate, decrying the injustice of restricting “the privilege of citizens merely because nature had not made them white,” but continued, “if, by the word ‘white; it was intended to exclude the African race then it was correct and satisfactory.”⁶⁹ Here the two groups began to find common ground.

Though the Mexican legal system enfranchised all male landowners regardless of their race, the Afro-Mexican population in California remained relatively small. What

⁶⁸ Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, In September and October, 1849*, 62.

⁶⁹ Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, In September and October, 1849*, 62.

made de la Guerra's concession surprising by modern standards is the fact that prominent Californio families had mixed ancestry, including some whose heritage included African and Indigenous Mexican ancestors, in addition to a European lineage. Protected by their landholdings, respected family names, and position within Californio society, mixed race Californios, complicated negotiations of whiteness. Since citizenship and the franchise did not extend to people of color—namely African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian immigrants—in the United States, conversations about expanding these privileges within California became complicated by the lack of clarity over the issue, with long discussions over how best to exclude nonwhites from attaining those privileges.⁷⁰

While mixed-race Californios proved the exception, not the rule, the question of excluding African Americans from the state became a point of debate during the convention, which ultimately came to be rejected.⁷¹ As the United States Congress concurrently considered the possibility of allowing the expansion of the American system of chattel slavery into the newly acquired territory of the Far West, the issue became a major point of contention for California's constitutional representatives. As with their counterparts in Washington, D.C., transplants from the American South in California argued for its expansion into the territory, while others feared its inclusion could present

⁷⁰ Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, In September and October, 1849*, 35-7.

⁷¹ Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, In September and October, 1849*, 44, 49. When discussing the inclusion of a clause prohibiting slavery and involuntary servitude, Representative Morton M. McCarver from Sacramento suggested the inclusion of the following statement, "Nor shall the introduction of free negroes, under indentures or otherwise, be allowed," but ultimately withdrew the proposal after further discussion. The debate continued with one representative arguing that excluding systems of enslavement and African Americans went hand-in-hand because, "the all-wise Creator has created the negro to serve the white race" and that "a free black population is one of the greatest evils that can afflict society."

difficulties in the statehood process due to the nationwide debate over the issue. In the end, the decision to exclude it from the territory became Article I in the California Constitution of 1849, which stated, in part, “All men are by nature free and independent, and have certain inalienable rights.”⁷² These rights came to be stripped away from many non-white residents through legislative measures once the area achieved statehood.

Despite this assertion, slavery already existed in overt forms in California Native Californians living in slavery and indenture for decades and enslaved African Americans being transported into the region throughout the decade, remaining in shackles despite the free state status through the loopholes created by legislators.⁷³ The affinity for systems of enslavement and suppression among American settlers is unsurprising given the legal and social structures in place nationally at the time where clear racial divides even existed in states where the practice had long been outlawed. Without citizenship and the rights it afforded, African Americans, Native Americans, and non-white immigrants represented the most vulnerable members of American society. The country’s reliance on the fruits of slave labor in both the agricultural and industrial markets ensured the continuation of that practice despite the growing abolition movement. Despite their sovereign status, American Indian tribes remained at the mercy of the ever changing policies of the federal

⁷² “California State Constitutions,” California Secretary of State. <https://www.sos.ca.gov/archives/collections/constitutions>; Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, In September and October, 1849*, 39; The convention also included a discussion of religion, with proposals being made to exclude Roman Catholics as “inconsistent with the safety of the State,” a proposal that was ultimately rejected.

⁷³ Kevin Waite, *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 98. For more information on the experiences of the systems of enslavement in California, see *California, A Slave State* by Jean Pfaelzer (2023) and *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe* by Benjamin Madley (2016).

government that favored the dreams of domestic migration over their promises to Native peoples and the mercenary actions of the American military that murdered and enslaved their friends and family members. Non-white, non-Christian immigrants, particularly Chinese laborers, with cultural traditions unfamiliar to European-descended Americans became easy targets in calls for ethnocentrism as the century progressed and migrants established communities across the state. As this occurred throughout the United States, in the Far West, each of these groups fell victim to the tumultuous negotiations centered around race and politics.

Pablo de la Guerra of Santa Barbara directly challenged the treatment of Native Americans during discussions within the constitutional assembly. Noting the prominent position of people of Indigenous ancestry in Mexican society, de la Guerra advocated for citizenship and the franchise for Native Californians, rights afforded by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, but rejected under the United States Constitution.⁷⁴ As altruistic and progressive as de la Guerra's position appears in comparison to his peers, he held the elitist, paternalistic views of race and culture that prevailed at the time. Arguing for the intelligence of Native Americans, de la Guerra condescended to call on "citizens to endeavor to elevate them and better their condition in every way, instead of seeking to sink them still lower."⁷⁵ Citing the relatively small population of landowning Native Californians, de la Guerra mentioned the group's inability to have "any serious effect" on

⁷⁴ Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, In September and October, 1849*, 38; When the discussion turned to possibly enfranchising Native Americans,

⁷⁵ Browne, *Report of the Debates of the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, In September and October, 1849*, 305.

the outcome of elections.⁷⁶ Despite his efforts, the white Americans in the assembly openly opposed the idea. While many accepted the paternalistic ideas of elevating Native People, the prospect of extending the franchise to nonwhites seemed impossible to consider and they voted against it. In spite of efforts to challenge white American legislators, the state constitutional convention demonstrated to Californios the arrival of a new world order.

These interactions between representatives of the old guard and the new, between white Americans and Californians who literally came with the territory, presented an interesting conundrum as for the two groups. They learned to coexist within the new system they worked to construct. For Californios and settlers from the American South, in particular, perceived philosophical and ideological similarities brought the groups together. With social stratifications based on land ownership, goods produced, outward displays of wealth, such as personal adornment and elaborate parties, and especially a shared interest in the continuation of systems of unfree labor, the personal, political, social bonds created in the early years of Americanization strengthened in the years that followed.⁷⁷

Recalling the social structure in early 1850s Los Angeles, resident Horace Bell wrote: “The old wealthy and intelligent Spanish families had formed a strictly exclusive class. They went to make up the aristocracy of this country, and dispensed a liberal hospitality that did honor to them as a people, as well as to the more favorable class of

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Haas, 51-54

American who were so fortunate as to gain admission to their circles.”⁷⁸ Written much later in his life, Bell’s emphasis on “intelligent Spanish families” and admiration for the chivalric Californio culture became commonplace in later years, particularly in the recollections of the period by Southerners like Bell.⁷⁹ A native of Virginia, Bell arrived in Los Angeles in 1852, following in the footsteps of an uncle who settled in the city a decade earlier and entered Californio society through marriage. Through his uncle’s connections, Bell too became well acquainted with the city’s Californio families as well as the new social and political elites.⁸⁰

As the decade progressed, members of both groups came together politically as the Chivalry, a faction of the state’s Democratic Party that worked to extend Southern influence into the Far West. Led by party leader William M. Gwin, the Chivalry called on ideals of honor and performative nobility shared by Californio and Southern cultures. The significance of the role of such a political allegiance in this period cannot be understated. With the national Democratic Party split over the issue of slavery throughout the Antebellum period, the settlement of California by Southern transplants ensured the perpetuation of Southern Democratic political views and culture. Grand schemes for the creation of a transcontinental railroad across the southern territories in the west and the establishment of a gateway to Asia for Southern cotton played an important role in

⁷⁸ Horace Bell, *Reminiscences of a Ranger, or, Early Times in Southern California* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1930), 82.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Bell, vii; Horace Bell founded the Los Angeles Ranger, one of several local militia groups organized to address criminal activity in the area. Comprised of both Californios and white settlers, the Rangers eventually evolved into an official police force for the city of Los Angeles, serving as one of many examples where members of the two groups worked together.

Southerners approach to settlements in the Far West. Southern legislators advocated for these issues throughout the decade with William M. Gwin winning appropriations for surveying parties to be sent determine the most fitting route to the west coast.⁸¹

Slavery, in particular, factored into broader plans for the expansion of the influence of the American South into the Far West, with various forms of enslavement present throughout the region, from indentures to forced prostitution, chattel slavery, and the kidnap and enslavement of Native American children. Enslaved persons transported from the American South to the free state of California proved interesting cases, with some signing contracts promising their eventual emancipation and others suing for their freedom and joining the growing community of free black residents in the state. For many among those individuals, the American West represented their salvation from bondage in the American South, while for some white Southern enslavers, the West epitomized the potential salvation of the American South and its way of life. In Los Angeles, free black residents operated within the confines of the multiethnic society that formed, including working for pro-slavery Southerners in town.

Although the state also became a safe haven for self-emancipated people who hoped the California's status as a free state and its relatively remote location would protect them from the terrifying prospect of being kidnapped by slave hunters emboldened by the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, a national law legalizing the forceable return of formerly enslaved persons to bondage, the opposite proved true. The passage of

⁸¹ Glenna Matthews, *The Golden State in the Civil War: Thomas Starr King, the Republican Party, and the Birth of Modern California*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 99; Surveying parties were sent under the direction of the War Department, which was then managed by Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, who later went on to become leader of the rebelling states of the South during the Civil War.

the law instilled terror in African Americans, both slave and free, whose tenuous freedom became even more fragile, even while the movement to abolish the brutal practice gained steam. In an effort to close the loophole created by the state's legal designation as a free state, California's majority Southern Democratic legislature addressed that gap by passing its own Fugitive Slave Act in 1852 that expanded the jurisdiction of slave hunters into the new state. Originating with a petition from legislators from South Carolina and Florida, the law demonstrated the steps to convert California in an extension of the American South.

With the long reign of Southern Democrats in the state legislature throughout the 1850s, the possibility of legalizing slavery in some way remained crucial in the prewar years. While Mexico outlawed slavery and Californios experiences with systems of bondage came in camouflaged forms, some Californio Democrats became defenders of the practice, with Enrique Abila of Los Angeles writing in a Spanish-language public letter that emancipating enslaved African Americans would only hasten their downfall into a life of drunkenness and prostitution, just as Native Californians did once liberated from the Mission system.⁸² Taken at face value, such a paternalistic statement is not a surprise, but when considered against the backdrop of efforts to legalize enslavement in California, Californio acceptance of the practice becomes increasingly troubling.

The strength of Californio political influence in Los Angeles remained evident in the early years of Americanization. The election of Californio candidates, use of the

⁸² Enrique Abila, Open Letter to Andres Pico, October 16, 1860. Antonio F. Coronel Papers, Seaver Center for Western History, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.

Spanish language in official documents, and the sociopolitical sway they wielded are all demonstrative of the power they continued to enjoy in that period. One example dates to October of 1853 when twelve male citizens of Los Angeles signed their names to a Spanish language letter to then Mayor of Los Angeles Antonio F. Coronel, putting forth his name as a potential senator for the State of California. With wealth acquired during the Gold Rush, Coronel became the owner of large swaths of land and an admired leader in the community before becoming chairman of the Democratic County Committee.⁸³ Also bearing the signatures of individuals of non-Hispanic ancestry, the Los Angeles letter lauded Coronel's "intelligence, justice and patriotism" and offered to aid him in constructing a list of potential candidates with whom he could run.⁸⁴ A dark complexioned man, Coronel's mixed ancestry became a focus of derision from some associates within the Democratic Party who openly referenced his race, referring to him as "al Negro Coronel," or the black Coronel.⁸⁵ The bigotry exhibited by new arrivals notwithstanding, he enjoyed great respect from his Californio colleagues, making him an individual of import for anyone looking to establish themselves politically in the city.

In addition to benefiting from the support of people within their own community, many Californios, like Coronel, could also expect to influence the vote of their own employees. Since most non-Californio Mexicans in 1850s' Los Angeles belonged to the working class, the likelihood of being employed at a Californio owned property or business remained high. Forging different employee-employer relationships than

⁸³ Pitt, 134.

⁸⁴ Lewis C. Granger, et. al., Letter to Antonio F. Coronel, August 10, 1853. Antonio Franco Coronel Collection, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles.

⁸⁵ Pitt, 200.

typically expected by Americans, Californio political candidates could often gain the vote of not just their laborers, but their laborers' friends and family, through social, financial, or material coercion.⁸⁶ While political engagement among the Mexicans laborer class remained relatively low throughout the decade, these interpersonal relationships proved useful to Californios and their associates.⁸⁷ The leverage inherent in such influence did not go unnoticed by Americans and served as an impetus for maintaining relationships with members of the once prominent group. Alliances between Californios and American settlers from the South became significant tools for the Democratic Party throughout the decade that followed.

While those intercultural relationships proved beneficial, not all Californios or working-class Mexicans bought into the idea of the alliances. A contingent of Mexican born residents resisted the shifts in power dynamics towards a primarily American run society.⁸⁸ Among the most vocal detractors, Francisco P. Ramirez stood out for his passion and dedication to the cause of bringing attention to the needs of Mexican Californians through the use of his short-lived Los Angeles newspaper, *El Clamor Público*. Born in Los Angeles to a Californio family, Ramirez lacked a formal education, but spoke three languages and prided himself on being self-taught.⁸⁹ He began his career in the newspaper field at the age of 14 when he worked as a typesetter at the *Star* of Los Angeles and set out on his own with *El Clamor Público* just four years later.⁹⁰ Founded

⁸⁶ Gray, 20.

⁸⁷ Pitt, 133.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 134.

⁸⁹ Gray, 10.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

in June 1855 and published until the end of December 1859, the paper allowed Ramirez to passionately express his radical ideas, expound on liberal theories, and openly challenge the bigotry and white supremacist tendencies of political figures and Democratic newspapers, most notoriously the *Star*.⁹¹ Even at a time when literacy among the Spanish-speaking population—both Californio and working-class Mexicans—remained low, Ramirez published his paper in Spanish, addressing the needs of that community and criticizing the groups who worked to suppress them.⁹²

With his liberal political views opposed by many of Los Angeles' more socially influential residents, Ramirez used his platform to speak out against the American system of chattel slavery, which remained a part of conversations surrounding disunion efforts in the state. As Ramirez wrote in an untitled editorial:

“The idea of liberty in the United States is truly curious. That delightful liberty is only imagined.... We believe liberty is a right afforded to all thinking persons... Certain people have no liberty at all—it is denied by the courts to every person of color... But there is the great liberty of any white man to buy a human being in order to arbitrarily hand him or burn him alive... This happens in states where slavery is tolerated and the vilest

⁹¹ Pitt, 186.

⁹² Gray, 21-23; At its inception in 1855, Ramirez utilized *El Clamor Público* to speak out against anti-Catholic, nativist movements beginning to gain traction in the United States at the time, especially the Know-Nothings, or American Party, which pushed an anti-immigrant, pro-Protestant agenda.

despotism runs wild—this, at the core of the nation that calls itself a “model republic.”⁹³

While many—even those not from the American South—considered his views on enslavement and racial equality to be radical, Ramirez used his platform to continue to advocate for the groups most victimized in the early years of Americanization. He also openly denounced efforts to exclude Chinese immigrants from California, as well as the exploitation of Native Californians, issues in which the views of Californios and Americans coincided.⁹⁴ His unpopular perspectives made Ramirez averse to the state’s Chivalry Democratic Party, whose leaders openly supported slavery and advocated for the Land Act of 1851, which threatened land ownership by Californios and Mexicans in the state.⁹⁵ Ramirez railed against the bill’s author, William M. Gwin, the undisputed leader of Chivalry Democrats, in an effort to create a rift between Californios and Chivalry, but failed to elicit a real reaction from his intended audience.⁹⁶

Ramirez and other politically inclined Mexicans and American-weary Californios became drawn to *Juntas Patrióticas*, or Patriotic Assemblies, established as outlets for the Spanish speaking community throughout the state. First founded during the Gold Rush, these organizations gained steam in response to legislation targeted at the Mexican community, like the Land Act of 1851 and the Foreign Miners Tax of 1850, throughout the decade. Politically and socially prominent figures, like Californios Pío Pico and José

⁹³ Francisco P. Ramirez, ed., Editorial on American system of enslavement, *El Clamor Público* (Los Angeles, CA), July 24, 1855. Translated from Spanish.

⁹⁴ Gray, 27.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 28.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 29.

Antonio Carrillo, participated in *juntas*, keeping Spanish speaking Californians engaged, while ensuring the continuation of Mexican traditions and celebrations, eventually including the triumph of Mexican forces against the French invading force in the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862 that later became celebrated as Cinco de Mayo. Spreading their messages through public gatherings and newspapers, including *El Clamor Público* in Los Angeles and *El Nuevo Mundo* in San Jose, *juntas* raised funds to aid the Mexican military in their bid to maintain Mexico's independence.⁹⁷ The group empowered California's working-class Mexican community even as Americanization took hold across the state.

Despite the increasingly apparent ideological conflicts, many Californios and Southerners continued to cooperate politically throughout the decade. In mid-August 1854, future state Governor John G. Downey issued a circular announcing the selection of Californio Antonio F. Coronel to the Los Angeles Democratic Central Committee by a majority of citizen.⁹⁸ Coronel himself received a formal notice from the group's chairperson, G.C. Alexander, about a week later, inviting him to a meeting slated for September 2, 1854 in the office of attorney Joseph Lancaster Brent, a Marylander by birth and proponent of the expansion of Southern Democratic influence in California.⁹⁹ In addition to American transplants Downey and Brent, the committee also included the participation of influential Californio Agustin Olvera. Such a conglomerate of Californio

⁹⁷ See: David E. Hayes-Bautista, Cynthia L. Chamberlin, et. al. "Empowerment, Expansion, and Engagement: Las Juntas Patrióticas in California, 1848-1869." *California History* 85, No. 1 (2007): 4-23.

⁹⁸ John Gates Downey, Notice regarding the election of Antonio F. Coronel to the Los Angeles Democratic Central Committee, August 17, 1854. Antonio F. Coronel Collection, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles.

⁹⁹ G.C. Alexander, Letter to Antonio F. Coronel, August 28, 1854. Antonio F. Coronel Collection, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles.

and white civil leaders ensured that, at least in the middle of the decade, the Democratic Party retained Californio support.

Among the earliest Southern transplants to settle in Los Angeles, attorney Joseph Lancaster Brent arrived in the city in 1850 and quickly ingratiated himself among Californios, learning Spanish and attending mass at the Catholic Church. Born into a slave-owning family in Maryland, Brent became instrumental in espousing Southern Democratic principles to the Los Angeles elite amongst whom he worked and socialized.¹⁰⁰ Brent forged strong ties in the Californio society, becoming fluent in Spanish, and establishing friendships that endured for decades and weathered his decision to serve in the rebel military during the Civil War. An acquaintance of Chivalry leader Gwin, Brent played a significant role in Southern California politics in the 1850s, earning the trust of his Californio clients and persuading them to support the Democratic cause. Gaining the vote of a family patriarch or employer usually guaranteed the vote of his children, making these relationships particularly valuable.¹⁰¹

By the middle of the 1850s, Southern Democrats, headed by William M. Gwin, served as the undisputed leaders of California's legislature. Writing on the first of November of 1854, Gwin wrote to his friend and fellow southern transplant Cave Johnson Coutts of the political situation in the state at the time. He wrote: "The Democratic party being in a majority in both branches of the legislature places out of the power of the Whigs to elect a senator of their own politics," continuing, "Having like you

¹⁰⁰ Gray, 18.

¹⁰¹ Pitt, 133.

long been a Democrat all my life I have no fear of my political position being doubted if a political opponent in...my own party.”¹⁰² He went on by asserting his confidence that his Democratic colleagues trust him to “promote the public interest” and that he hoped they would recognize his usefulness to the state over his “Democratic opponents.”

Originally from Tennessee, Coutts established himself in Southern California society through his marriage Californio Ysidora Bandini and her family, including brother-in-law Abel Stearns who similarly married his way into Californio society.¹⁰³

The political landscape began to change with the formation of the Republican Party in 1856, an anti-slavery party formed out of the ashes of the Whig and Free-Soiler parties. Rooted in the national conflict over the expansion of slavery into the territories of Kansas and Nebraska, the party’s anti-slavery foundation immediately put it at odds with California’s Chivalry Democrats, including state senator and future governor, John B. Weller who received a letter from friend James F. Reed of San Jose in February 1856 stating, “I examine every paper I get from the east and find the true friend of California always at his post Battling against the common enemy of our country [abolitionists].”¹⁰⁴ He continued, “I do thank God that old Democracy still stands time to the best interests of our whole country knowing no north no south, the little Band of Isreal in our Senate has drove the goths and vandals of natives Back into their spawning grounds.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² William C. Gwinn, Letter to Cave Johnson Coutts, November 1, 1854. Coutts Collection. Huntington Library.

¹⁰³ Casas, 149.

¹⁰⁴ James F. Reed, Letter to John B. Weller, February 19, 1856. Manuscript Collection. Lincoln Memorial Shrine.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

The Republican Party's first foray into national politics came in 1856 when the group held its first nominating convention for president, selecting John C. Fremont, the soldier turned politician who secured the surrender of California during the Bear Flag Revolt, as nominee for the nation's highest office. In California, the party's more liberal stance appealed to many Californians for whom the Democratic Party's stronghold appeared suffocating, including Californios Pío Pico and Vicente Lugo, who supported Fremont and earned the Republican nominations for the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors over their Chivalry Democratic colleagues Tomás Sánchez and Manuel Dominguez.¹⁰⁶ The Republican Party's rapid ascension on the national political scene became a cause for concern for their Democratic opponents who took to referring to them as "Black Republicans" for their anti-slavery platform.

During the 1856 election, one of San Francisco's Chivalry newspapers, the *Herald*, addressed this issue head-on in an editorial, which stated, in part, "The Black Republicans are moving heaven and earth to carry California—money is being lavished with an open hand everywhere," and claiming, "The Blacks are working stealthily, and have their paid agents and hireling spies all over the state."¹⁰⁷ As the conflict intensified in the press and pool hall, a Spanish language political pamphlet titled "Los Votantes Californios," or the Californio voters, entered into circulation. Addressing Californios and supposedly authored by members of that community, the pamphlet focused on the importance of electing men who would respect Californio property and advocated for the

¹⁰⁶ Gray, 42.

¹⁰⁷ Gray, 42

election of Southern California Democrats, all of whom were white, and most of whom originated in the American South.¹⁰⁸ Among this group, future Governor John G. Downey, a Democrat who openly supported the continuation and expansion of chattel slavery, an issue which loomed large over California politics throughout the decade, earned an endorsement.

Writing later in the decade, Judge Charles Fernald, a Republican from Santa Barbara, described his political rivals in the following way: “The tendency of Democrats is and ever has been to...level downward. Men of character, fitness, and integrity have, therefore, nothing to hope from that party.” Continuing, Fernald wrote, “They abandon the field to the unscrupulous and the demagogues. Whenever that happens in the state, supposing it to be a republic, anarchy is not far in the future...They appear to be willing enough to break up the Union just as soon as they see themselves likely to be kicked out of office.”¹⁰⁹

The rise of the Republican Party offered an appealing alternative to disenchanted Democrats across California. Chivalry Democrat Antonio F. Coronel from Los Angeles, addressed his fellow citizens in an open letter likely published around this period, urging them to analyze the political positions of the Democratic and Republican Parties in order to determine which of the two deserved their votes.¹¹⁰ Describing the issue as one of great

¹⁰⁸ Handbill, “Los Votantes Californios,” c1857. Antonio F. Coronel Collection, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles. Translated from Spanish.

¹⁰⁹ Cameron Rogers, ed., *A County Judge in Arcady: Selected Private Papers of Charles Fernald, Pioneer California Jurist* (Glendale, Calif.: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1954), 152.

¹¹⁰ Antonio F. Coronel, Open letter or speech to “conciudadanos” or fellow citizens, undated. Antonio F. Coronel Collection, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles. Translated from Spanish.

importance, Coronel does not advocate for one party over the other or give an opinion, instead counselling potential voters to consider which candidates adheres to the “fundamental principles of democracy” before making a decision about who is qualified.¹¹¹ While he feigned impartiality in the notice, Coronel’s political persuasion would have been clear to voters to whom he may have been a trusted social and political figure. While Coronel used his political capital to advocate for Democratic candidates, other Californios directed their efforts to addressing the systematic dispossession of California landowners through the Land Act of 1851. State senator Pablo de la Guerra of Santa Barbara, a highly respected member of the Californio community, addressed the state senate in April 1856 about the issue. Speaking in his native Spanish, de la Guerra said:

“Who are the defendants? The conquered who lay prostrate before the conqueror asking for protection for the little their bad fortune has left them with. They are the people who have been sold like slabs of meat—the ones who were abandoned and sold by Mexico. They don’t understand the language that prevails in their native land. They are strangers in their own country.”¹¹²

De la Guerra, who clashed with American representative’s at the constitutional convention just a few years earlier, introduced a bill to address the issue, only to find defeat by squatters’ rights activists.¹¹³ *El Clamor Público*’s editor applauded de la

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Francisco P. Ramirez, ed., “Los Californios,” *El Clamor Público* (Los Angeles, CA), April 26, 1856. Translated from Spanish.

¹¹³ Pitt, 116-7/

Guerra's efforts, reporting to Los Angeles residents, "If our fellow citizens and countrymen agree with these sentiments, they should tell their children to ensure that the representative from Santa Barbara is always remembered with respect and gratitude."¹¹⁴ Many Californios who encountered difficulties in language, culture, and governmental systems during the transition to the American regime, shared the feelings of abandonment by Mexico and persecution by Americans expressed by de la Guerra.¹¹⁵ As Ramirez wrote in an editorial in December 1858:

"We are Californio by birth and American by adoption. The shield of liberty and the law will protect us from threats and insults. We love our homeland with enthusiasm—and while we are proud that America is a country of liberty, it should also be a country of laws...All we desire is for our brothers to know their rights."¹¹⁶

Among those who shared de la Guerra's censure of the Land Act stood Los Angeles Assemblyperson Andrés Pico, a Chivalry Democrat, and a member of an old Californio family dating back to the Spanish regime. The vicious cycle of borrowing against property to pay taxes led Pico and his family to suffer the sting of land loss throughout the 1850s and beyond, but Pico remained a staunch Democrat until the end of the decade.¹¹⁷ His advocacy of the party and relationships with white political leaders in

¹¹⁴ Francisco P. Ramirez, ed., [Untitled], *El Clamor Público* (Los Angeles, CA), May 3, 1856. Translated from Spanish.

¹¹⁵ Pitt, 109.

¹¹⁶ Francisco P. Ramirez, ed., [Untitled], *El Clamor Público* (Los Angeles, CA), December 25, 1858. Translated from Spanish.

¹¹⁷ Pitt, 100.

state and local politics, made him an significant figure in Southern Democrats' efforts to expand their power and gain the Californio vote.

As the decade progressed and more Americans migrated to Los Angeles from Northern California, the frequency of violence between Mexicans and white Americans increased. Murder became common place and southern California turned to vigilante justice to resolve disputes. The upsurge in racialized conflict became a cause for concern for all residents, leading to calls for unity and cooperation across the spectrum. Even *El Clamor Público*'s Francisco Ramirez issued a plea, writing, "It is necessary that there be union in this city in order to have security," before concluding, "Let us all work together in the same spirit to carry out the laws."¹¹⁸ While Californios and settlers from the American South occasionally found themselves on opposite sides of this crisis, in many instances they came together to address the problem.

Throughout the prewar decade, Southern politicians worked to extend their political and social influence, and especially their dependence on slave labor, into the American West and mold the region in their likeness. California's status as a free state posed an impediment to such efforts. Led by Chivalry Democrats under William M. Gwin's governance, Californian politicians spent the decade of the 1850s debating the potential of dividing the state and creating a free territory in Southern California, while leaving Northern California as a state. Capitalizing on the displeasure of Californios in Southern California over the imposition of the new American economic, social, and political structures, Southern Democrats found allies to help promote their cause, among

¹¹⁸ Gray, 35.

them Andrés Pico, a member of a powerful Californio family and a well-respected figure in the community whose support of Southern Democratic ideology played an important role in the period before the Civil War.

Chapter 2

Negotiating Statehood

“If they seek to make two States, and turn one over to slavery, they must tell us.”¹¹⁹

Following José Antonio Carrillo’s failed attempt to create an independent territory out of Southern California during the constitutional convention in 1849, discussions for California’s admittance as a state the following year brought the issue to the fore once again. While most American provinces waited extended periods prior to reaching the 60,000 residents required to apply for statehood, California realized that number in record time thanks to the nearly unsupportable influx of people from across the globe brought by the Gold Rush.¹²⁰ Politically inclined residents of California soon organized a legislature and the United States Congress began discussions on the circumstances for admittance as a state in early 1850.

In response to the statehood issue, a committee formed in Los Angeles and held a public meeting at the home of Ignacio del Valle in La Plaza to propose a petition to create an independent Territory of Southern California.¹²¹ As influential Californio landowners and legislators, del Valle and his cohorts used their platform to share their grievances in a bid to encourage support for division. The del Valle home served as the meeting place for many Californio meetings throughout the decade.¹²² Like Carrillo, de Valle served as a

¹¹⁹ “A Novel Revolution,” *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco, CA), February 17, 1852.

¹²⁰ California was never an official territory of the United States thanks to the large population present as a result of the Gold Rush, which began in earnest in 1849.

¹²¹ Ellison, “The Movement for State Division,” 106.

¹²² Lynch, “Southern California Chivalry: The Convergence of Southerners and Californios in the Far Southwest, 1846-1866,” 162.

mayor of Los Angeles during the Mexican period and an assemblyperson in the early years of Americanization. According to the petition, the changes imposed by the newly adopted American political and financial systems posed significant threats to Californios' ability to maintain their styles of life.

Signed by residents of Los Angeles, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo, the Los Angeles committee's petition listed the reasons for the disunion proposal. Beginning with the southern districts' opposition to the creation of a unified territory at the constitutional convention, the petition noted issues of taxation and representation, in addition to the disparate economic structures and natural resources between the northern and southern regions. The petitioners also cited southern Californians' lack of familiarity with the American governmental system as a reason for their proposal and determined a separation to be the logical solution to address such disparities.¹²³

The disconnect between the northern and southern factions of the state predated Americanization. The clear contrast and division between them became especially evident in the years prior to annexation during Pío Pico's term as the last governor of Mexican California. Pico's perceived preference for Southern California and his long simmering conflicts with Northern California rancheros became fodder for those who chose to incite rebellion against the Mexican government and for American rule. Pico's difficult reentry into the California political scene after annexation and problematic

¹²³ William Henry Ellison, *A Self-Governing Dominion: California, 1840-1860*, Chronicles of California, (Berkeley: University of California, 1950), 107.

experiences with white Americans led to further conflict between the statesman and the new ruling class. Unlike his brother, Andrés, Pío never formed bonds with the American migrants who made Southern California their home throughout the 1850s.

As congress debated the issues of statehood, the ever-controversial discussions over slavery complicated the matter. Officially banned under the California Constitution, the slavery question posed an interesting challenge for congressional leaders when considering the issue of California's boundaries.¹²⁴ Armed with correspondence from southern Californians regarding statehood, Mississippi Senator Henry S. Foote drafted a proposition to reimagine the boundaries and create a new Territory of Colorado from the agricultural region of the Santa Maria River Valley, just north of Santa Barbara, to the Mexican border.¹²⁵ Under Foote's plan, the state of California would encompass all points north to Oregon and be admitted as a free state, while slavery would be permitted in the newly-created southern territory. A staunch advocate of slavery, Foote lobbied his pro-slavery allies from the American South in support of the bill.¹²⁶ Given Southern politicians' designs on the expansion of Southern influence into the American West, Foot's proposal likely found a receptive audience among his comrades in the senate. While there is no evidence that the Los Angeles petition ever made it before congress, the

¹²⁴ Section 18 of the California Constitution of 1849: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except for the punishment of crimes, shall ever be tolerated in this state."

¹²⁵ "Thirty-First Congress. First Session.," *The Daily Republic* (Washington, D.C.), July 18, 1850, <https://www.newspapers.com/>; "Thirty-First Congress. First Session.," *The Daily Republic* (Washington, D.C.), July 19, 1850, <https://www.newspapers.com/>.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

appeal sent to Senator Foote doubtlessly expressed the issues addressed in the document but ultimately went unanswered.¹²⁷

During statehood discussions, congress entered into months-long deliberations on the issue of dividing California, wavering on boundaries and the subject of public lands, prior to voting on a bill with the original borders as laid out in the state's constitution the previous year. The United States admitted California as a free state as part of the Compromise of 1850, a series of laws that determined the expansion of slavery within new American territories.¹²⁸ Despite California's status as a free state, the fate of enslaved persons within its borders remained undecided. Xenophobic attitudes and pro-slavery factions made California a dangerous place for African Americans. Fugitive Slave laws passed in 1852 and 1855 by the state's Southern Democratic legislature left Black people who entered the state with few legal recourses to prove or gain their freedom. Lawsuits brought by enslaved people throughout the 1850s chipped away at the restrictions in place. Nonetheless, the state's African American population remained relatively small, at only one hundredth of the total population in 1850 and two hundredths a decade later.¹²⁹

Predictably, statehood did not alleviate the concerns expressed in the Angelenos' 1850 appeal to congress. The social and political divide of the new state persisted

¹²⁷ Ellison, *A Self-Governing Dominion*, 110.

¹²⁸ In addition to admitting California as a free state, the Compromise of 1850 also left the issue open in the territories of New Mexico and Utah where systems of enslavement were already in place.

¹²⁹ State of California. "1850 – California."

<https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1850/1850a/1850a-47.pdf>; "Population of the United States in 1860: California."

<https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1860/population/1860a-06.pdf>.

throughout the decade of the 1850s, and California policy makers continually readdressed the grievances found in the petition. An aggrieved Californio population worked well for the newly powerful Southern legislators throughout the state who recognized it as a benefit to grander efforts to expand Southern influence across the Far West to the Pacific Coast. By courting the Californio vote and pandering to their concerns of the new American government, Southern Democratic operatives established a significant support base among Californios in Southern California.

Nearly a year after admission, the Los Angeles *Star* newspaper published a curious letter signed by “Niebla,” a word which means mist or fog in Spanish. While the identity of the ominously aliased author remained unknown, their intent could not be questioned. Advocating for California’s secession from the United States, Niebla argued that its controversial admission as a free state upset the balance of the national trend to admit a slave state each time the United States added a free state. The letter argued that this national imbalance caused South Carolina to threaten to secede from the Union, a not uncommon threat even a decade before the Civil War. According to Niebla, California should “withdraw from a family whose peace she has destroyed by her entrance.”¹³⁰ Such views at such an early date in the state’s history mimicked those of congressional representatives from the American South for whom the region’s free status posed an impediment to Southern planters’ designs on the west coast as an entryway to Asia.¹³¹

¹³⁰ “Division of California,” *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco, CA), August 2, 1851, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

¹³¹ Waite, *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire*, 28.

When reporting the Niebla “Western Republic” scheme, the *Daily Alta California* newspaper deemed it improbable, particularly if ever brought before the residents of “the rich and populous North.”¹³² These views soon proved correct. A fall 1851 letter authored by Mariano Vallejo and other like-minded northern landowners to some of California’s most prominent residents, including Antonio F. Coronel, focused on the issue of disunion. Writing of the interest expressed by many of the “long-established” segment of the population in creating an independent territory, the letter’s authors warned of a lack of support among the majority of the populace of the north, writing, “politicians and people with significant property will applaud your suggestion while trying to place it in honey from which it will be difficult to extricate yourself.”¹³³ Continuing the warning, they counseled caution in dealing with individuals from the north who pledged support for their efforts, warning their southern counterparts to “distrust all types of individuals that come out in public in these parts.”¹³⁴

In spite of opposition from their northern counterparts, southern Californians viewed the proposition differently. Concurrent with the publication of the Niebla letter, San Diego County Sheriff Agoston Haraszthy, a Democrat, issued a public notice to Southern California residents proposing a convention to discuss “the propriety of petitioning congress for a Territorial Government.”¹³⁵ Described as an “exiled Hungarian Count” and often referred to as “Colonel,” Haraszthy belonged to a wealthy land-owning

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Mariano Vallejo, et. al., Letter to Benjamin D. Wilson, et. al., September 27, 1851. Del Valle Collection, Seaver Center for Western History Research. Translated from Spanish.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ J. Judson Ames, ed., “Division of California,” *San Diego Herald*, July 24, 1851, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

family in Hungary. He migrated to the United States in 1840 and arrived in California in 1849 during the frenzy of the Gold Rush, settling in San Diego where citizens quickly selected him as a representative in the California State Assembly for the district.¹³⁶ Haraszthy wasted no time in becoming a vocal advocate for his adopted home of Southern California.

Soon after his ascension, Haraszthy sent his own proposal to create an independent territory to Senator Foote, then head of the National Democratic Central Committee in the summer of 1851. Listing a series of reasons for the radical move, Haraszthy explained that the northern and southern portions of the state had different needs and listed provisions for each part within specific state legislations. He continued by advocating for Southern California, writing, “we are an agricultural and grazing community, and have no such advantages as the north—we pay a larger, *much larger* quota for the maintenance of the Government, in proportion to our population and representation in the Government and Legislature than the north.”¹³⁷ He further explained how investments in ranchos in Southern California yielded less profit than “mining and mercantile” operations in the northern part of the state, which he believed should result in lower taxes for the southern agricultural counties.¹³⁸

Haraszthy next focused on the limitations of Southern California’s arid climate, stating that the “great deficiency of water and timber” prevented wide-scale farming and

¹³⁶ “Daughter of General Vallejo Passes Away,” *San Francisco Call*, July 31, 1913, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>; Tenney, Smith, & Holt, ed., “Mortgage Sale,” *Wisconsin Argus* (Madison, WI), March 27, 1849, <https://www.newspapers.com/>; “Circuit Court, Sauk County, March Term, A.D. 1849,” *Wisconsin Democrat* (Milwaukee, WI), April 28, 1849, <https://www.newspapers.com/>.

¹³⁷ J. Judson Ames, ed., “Division of California,” *San Diego Herald*, July 24, 1851, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

restricted properties to being used to raise cattle. This, he argued, required residents to own large swaths of land to be successful, preventing the region from becoming as densely populated as its northern counterpart. In Haraszthy's view, the region did not contain many "inducements" for new settlements.¹³⁹ In addition to the economic disparities between Northern and Southern California, Haraszthy contended that the sheer size of the state furthered the argument in favor of a split. He explained, "the extent of our State line is a serious exception, the length is over 700 miles—persons from the south having business at the Capital, have to travel 600 miles." With fares dictated by Northern California's mining prosperity, travel placed a financial burden on the residents of Southern California, making it only easily accessible to the wealthy. The system, Haraszthy alleged, appeared "anti-democratic and anti-republican."¹⁴⁰

The letter concluded by suggesting Southern California residents organize a convention and nominate representatives to discuss the issues. The split, he argued, promised to benefit both parts of the state. As an independent territory, Southern California would be free from unfair taxation and have the ability to create a governmental structure beneficial to the region. As a state, Northern California would be divorced from a useless connection.¹⁴¹ Haraszthy's reasons for supporting the scheme may lie in his ambitious nature. In the decade preceding his arrival in California, he founded and then lost the town of Szepatj in Sauk County, Wisconsin.¹⁴² Once settled in San Diego in the 1850s, he discovered winemaking and within a few years embarked on

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² "Circuit Court, Sauk County, March Term, A.D. 1849," *Wisconsin Democrat* (Milwaukee, WI).

career in that industry in the Sonoma Valley, earning him the moniker “father of California viticulture.”¹⁴³

In their analysis of Haraszthy’s letter, the *Daily Alta California* conceded the accuracy of his assessment of the inequity of California’s legislative system, writing, “There is no doubt...that the South has not been properly treated...the whole state has been abominably and shamefully maltreated, and the South has suffered the most.”¹⁴⁴ However, the writer believed “the South has little to gain and much to lose by resorting to a ‘Territorial Government’...she will commit a species of political suicide, if she do [sic] not give the present system a fair trial.”¹⁴⁵ The San Francisco-based newspaper concluded by condescendingly suggesting Southern California residents wait until their population increased sufficiently to apply for statehood before attempting separation from the north.¹⁴⁶

Interestingly, despite its significance during the statehood debates, Haraszthy did not reference slavery in his letter and his personal opinions on the issue are not documented. However, the *Wisconsin Democrat* of Green Bay provided a look at the views of the former state resident and the national response to the issue. The paper wrote, “the alarmists see in this movement no other design than to establish a slave state—this suspicion in the fervor of their zeal is speedily coined into fact, and our friends are held

¹⁴³ “California Grape Industry Marks Century this Year,” *Madera Tribune* (Madera, CA), October 21, 1952, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>; In 1861, the United States Circuit Court acquitted Agoston Haraszthy of embezzling \$152,000 worth of metal from the United States treasury in 1857. He married Natalie Vallejo, the daughter of Mariano Vallejo, arguable the most politically prominent Californio. (See: “The Trial of A. Haraszthy,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, March 6, 1861, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.)

¹⁴⁴ “Division of California,” *Daily Alta California*, August 2, 1851.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

up to public odium as slave extensionists.”¹⁴⁷ They continued, “To those who reason upon this subject, it would be just as reasonable to suppose that our friends are endeavoring to increase the number of *free* states, as that they were laboring for the extension of slavery.”¹⁴⁸ Writing in defense of Haraszthy, the paper noted he did not “have one sympathy in common with slavery,” and “from the bottom of his heart he loathes and detests slavery in any form—chattel or wage slavery.”¹⁴⁹

Haraszthy’s disunion proposal found a receptive audience among southern Californians in Monterey, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and San Diego counties, many of whom were Chivalry-leaning landowners. In a petition to “the Citizens of the Southern portion of the State of California,” in late August of 1851, supporters of the move proposed a convention where, “Each county (including San Jose and all south of that) shall be entitled to one delegate for every one hundred votes cast at the approaching election, and where the fraction shall exceed fifty votes, one additional delegate shall be allowed.”¹⁵⁰ Familiar Californio names from the southern counties like Pío and Andrés Pico, Antonio Coronel, and Pablo de la Guerra, joined longtime Anglo-descended Democratic allies Abel Stearns and Los Angeles Mayor Benjamin D. Wilson in signing the petition.¹⁵¹ While the signers of the petition, both Californio and not, represented the most politically and socially influential families of the region, many also harbored

¹⁴⁷ “Sutherland and Haraszthy,” *Wisconsin Democrat* (Milwaukee, WI), June 1, 1850, <https://www.newspapers.com/>.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ “To the Citizens of the Southern Portion of the State of California,” *San Diego Herald*, August 28, 1851, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

ambitions to represent the region in the state legislature and included a pledge to advocate for division in their campaign platforms.¹⁵²

Los Angeles's Mayor Wilson doubled down on his support of the proposition by leading a meeting in Los Angeles on September 12. Advocating for separation, the public meeting included various well-known landowners, including Southern slaveholder Joseph Lancaster Brent and assimilated Californio Stephen C. Foster, along with Foster's brother-in-law Felipe Lugo, and former California Governor Pío Pico. The committee adopted several resolutions, beginning with, "That we, the citizens of Los Angeles County, will use every effort to produce a separation of the Southern portion of the State from the Northern, and the establishment of a separate and distinct Government."¹⁵³ Further resolutions looked toward a rosy future where "vallies [sic], already gifted by nature with unbounded fertility and adorned with the choicest garments of beauty, will bloom and blossom under the thrifty hands of a teeming and industrious population; that commerce will revive in our cities and fill our harbors with the ocean brought tributes of distant climes—that the burdens of more exhausting taxation will be lessened, while the rewards of labor and the returns of capital will be increased an hundred fold."¹⁵⁴ The Los Angeles committee included speakers in both English and Spanish and resolved to publish the information in both languages.

Chaired by Haraszthy, the committee ultimately met in Monterey on September 15, only to find a lack of representation from the counties further south. To discuss the

¹⁵² Ellison, *A Self-Governing Dominion*, 112.

¹⁵³ Ellison, *A Self-Governing Dominion*, 114.

¹⁵⁴ "State Division Meeting in Los Angeles," *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco, CA), September 25, 1851, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

matter prior to start of the next legislative session in January, the group determined to meet in Santa Barbara in late October with the goal of informing representatives from the affected counties of the outcome before their departure for the state capitol.¹⁵⁵ As noted by Haraszthy in a public letter dated September 29, “By adopting this course there is reason to hope that ere another year shall have passed, we shall be freed and disenthawled [sic] from the oppressive and ruinous disadvantages, irregularities and inequities under which we now labor in consequence of an improper and unreasonable connection with the North.”¹⁵⁶

Californio Antonio F. Coronel learned of his election as delegate to the committee for Los Angeles County in October. Signed by Mayor Benjamin D. Wilson, the letter affirms Coronel’s selection by “the citizens of Los Angeles County...to consider upon measures necessary to effect a disunion of the State of California.”¹⁵⁷ A life-long politician, Coronel maintained relationships with the social and political leaders of the day, including settlers who arrived in the region prior to the American period. As a miner during the Gold Rush, Coronel lost a sizable gold claim in the face of violence from Irish miners who he described as “foreigners.”¹⁵⁸ Despite his acceptance of early American settlers, he expressed disdain for newer arrivals, learning minimal English and fighting to protect Californio land rights from American squatters in the decades that followed.¹⁵⁹ It

¹⁵⁵ “To the Corresponding Committee of the County of Los Angeles,” *San Diego Herald*, October 2, 1851, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Benjamin D. Wilson, Letter to Antonio F. Coronel, October 9, 1851. Antonio Franco Coronel Collection, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Los Angeles Natural History Museum.

¹⁵⁸ Monroy, 202.

¹⁵⁹ H.D. Barrows. “Antonio F. Coronel.” *Southern California Quarterly* 5, No. 1 (January 1900), 78.

is probable his advocacy for division stemmed from negative interactions with migrants in those early years of Americanization.

Meeting on October 20, the Santa Barbara Convention adopted a series of resolutions, noting “the peace, security and happiness of one section of the State was obtained amid the sacrifices of the other.” Commencing with the determination to dissolve the political connections between Northern and Southern California, the Committee on Resolutions addressed the issues listed by Haraszthy in his earlier letter to the *San Diego Herald*, including the inequities between “the great gold regions of the Northern and internal sections of the State and the rich and agricultural valleys of the South”; doubt in the practicality of a “uniform system of civil, criminal or revenue laws”; the need to create an independent territory under the control of the American government; and that a boundary would be established no further south than Monterey County.¹⁶⁰ Further resolutions stated that southern counties would pay their portion of the state taxes upon separation.¹⁶¹

The boundary issue proved most contentious. Whether to draw a northern border for the new territory and determining where it should lie elicited much debate. Some argued the question should be left for elected officials to decide, while others feared that leaving the question open could result in a continued connection to San Francisco.¹⁶² The *Herald* of San Francisco validated the latter concern by suggesting the inclusion of San Francisco, Calaveras, San Joaquin, and Contra Costa counties of Northern California to

¹⁶⁰ “Resolutions of the Santa Barbara Convention,” *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco, CA), October 27, 1851, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

¹⁶¹ “A Divided State,” *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco, CA), October 29, 1851, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

¹⁶² “Southern Convention,” *Nevada Journal* (Nevada City, CA), November 1, 1851, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

the proposed territory, essentially continuing to link the mining and agricultural interests that represented the source of the conflict.¹⁶³ Of this proposition, Joseph Lancaster Brent, a wealthy Southern California landowner who assimilated into Californio culture, wrote that southern counties “would be crushed to a greater extent” by the continued connection with the north and stated that such a proposal would fail.¹⁶⁴

Despite the support of many landed southern Californians, the question of dividing the state also drew sharp criticisms. The *Herald* of Sonora’s overwhelmingly negative reporting on the Convention deemed the proposition “unpopular with *all* classes, from the south and from the north, from the east and from the west,—with Englander, Irishman, and American—with merchant and miner, with farmer, mechanic and teamster.”¹⁶⁵ Blaming support on “persons who greatly over-estimate their own influence,” the *Herald* outlined the economic, political, and social repercussions of division and stated the overwhelming condemnation among residents of the area.¹⁶⁶ Noting that division affected residents’ “plans, their investments, and their prospects, money, political, and social” and concluding with a warning: “Let politicians beware how they commit themselves in favor of such propositions.”¹⁶⁷ With the state legislature out of session, the convention adjourned and the delegates disbursed.

¹⁶³ “The Southern Convention,” *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco, CA), November 15, 1851, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

¹⁶⁴ “Southern Convention,” *Nevada Journal* (Nevada City, CA); A well-known member of the Chivalry, Brent went on to serve in the Confederacy during the Civil War and remained in the South in the post-war period, without ever returning to California.

¹⁶⁵ [Untitled], *Nevada Journal* (Nevada City, CA), October 30, 1851, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

Within a month of its adjournment, talk of the Santa Barbara Convention appeared to have diminished, but the debate resumed with the start of the new year.¹⁶⁸ The Democratic-leaning *Daily Alta California* began the new year of 1852 by detailing the party's talking points around state division, highlighting the inequality of the "notorious and onerous" taxation system.¹⁶⁹ As much of a burden as it placed on the southern agrarian counties, the paper stated that the system also became an issue for the wealthy northern counties of San Francisco and Sacramento, which, the author stated, "have not only sustained [the] most expensive and extravagant municipal governments," but also paid half of the \$372,340 in taxes for the preceding fiscal year.¹⁷⁰ The taxation issue remained paramount for the land-rich, cash-poor southern landowners for whom the system appeared particularly oppressive, and provided an opportunity for Democrats to spread their small government agenda among Californios.

In the lead-up to the start of the new legislative session in 1852, the Los Angeles *Star* newspaper, reiterated its support for the plan, writing, "The subject of Division is not Slumbering. It has merely been referred to the power which constitutionally can give us remedy... The resolutions of the Santa Barbara Convention, express at this time, as they did at the period of their promulgation, the views and feelings of Southern California, and if the senators and representatives from the southern counties are guided by them, in their

¹⁶⁸ "The Southern Convention," *Daily Alta California*, November 15, 1851.

¹⁶⁹ "State Taxation," *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco, CA), January 16, 1852, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

measures to consummate a Division of the State, they will but second the views of their constituents.”¹⁷¹

Whereas disunion began as a Californio-driven proposition, by 1852, California’s White Democratic legislators began to take up the call. In early January, Democratic Governor John McDougal brought the issue before the assembly in his State of the State address. Writing from the state capital in Vallejo, McDougal addressed the concerns of the committee related to taxation, representation, and the general dissatisfaction of the residents of the southern counties, which, based on his reference to six counties, he considered to be the counties of San Diego, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Mariposa. He wrote:

“From an examination of the taxes assessed upon real and personal property... the six southern and grazing counties, with a population of 6,367 souls, as taken from the census returns, have paid into the Treasury for the fiscal year ending the first of July last, the sum of \$41,705.26, while the twelve mining counties, with a population of 119,917, have paid \$21,253.66. The latter have a representation in the Legislature of forty-four, while the former have but twelve.”¹⁷²

Rather than support the division of the state as proposed, McDougal called for a revision to the state constitution explaining that the current agreement prevented the Legislature from fully addressing the issues. Identifying constitutional provisions as the source of the problem, he pointed to passages stating “all laws of a general nature shall have a uniform operation” and “taxation shall be equal and uniform throughout the state.” McDougal discussed the high taxes paid by Southern California landowners in possession of land grants that “at best yields but a moderate dividend upon its valuation,” as opposed to “the mining counties, exceedingly prolific in the returns they make to their occupants, being almost entirely

¹⁷¹ “Dividing the State,” *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco, CA), February 29, 1852, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

¹⁷² Assembly of California, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Assembly* (Vallejo, CA, 1852), 26-27, <https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/archive-list>.

the property of the federal government, pay nothing, comparatively, into the State Treasury.” He concluded this portion of his statement by recommending a convention to revise the state constitution in an effort to address the taxation issue.¹⁷³

A Chivalry-sympathizing Democrat, McDougal, maintained a reputation as a political opportunist. Too savvy to openly advocate for separation or the implementation of slavery in California, his call to completely revise the constitution offered an opportunity to remove the anti-slavery clause opposed by his fellow Chivalry. While not discussing it publicly, pro-slavery legislators in California quietly deliberated on the question of legalizing the institution in the state. Months prior to his call for a new constitutional convention, a passenger on a steamship overheard the Governor and Senator William C. Gwin discussing slavery, with Gwin reportedly stating: “The country is ripe for it. The initiatory steps will be taken by the legislature as fast as they can.”¹⁷⁴ In his time as Governor, McDougal pushed policies that brought violence to Native California tribe, African Americans, and Chinese residents, and is further marred by his advocacy for a state carceral system that disproportionately affected people of color.¹⁷⁵ McDougal’s term ended the day after his address to the state assembly and John Bigler ascended to that office.¹⁷⁶ A pro-slavery Democrat, Bigler supported the spread of the practice within the United States, accusing slavery opponents of harboring “a spirit of disaffection toward the Union.”¹⁷⁷

Within a month, newly elected Democratic Assemblyperson Lilburn Boggs of Napa County took up McDougal’s call to action and introduced an “Act Recommending a Convention of the People of the State of California” calling for a constitutional convention to discuss the issues brought forth by the division movement.¹⁷⁸ An admittedly expensive undertaking, the bill recommended the modification of

¹⁷³ Ibid, 12-13.

¹⁷⁴ Quinn, 133.

¹⁷⁵ McDougal’s policies against California’s Native population are outlined in Benjamin Madley’s *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe*, p186-217; His role in the creation of San Quentin state penitentiary is detailed by Jean Pfaelzer in *California, A Slave State*, pp301-303.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid; *Journal of the Proceedings of the Assembly* (1852), 26-27.

¹⁷⁷ Quinn, 133.

¹⁷⁸ *Journal of the Proceedings of the Assembly* (1852), 137; “Sacramento Correspondence,” *Nevada Journal* (Nevada City, CA), February 12, 1852, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>; As Governor of Missouri, Lilburn Boggs ordered the “extermination” of members of the Latter Day Saint movement engaged in the Mormon War of 1838. This action resulted in assassination attempt in 1842, leading Boggs to seek safety in

California's constitution, rather than undergo a complete recreation. Under Boggs' plan, once assembled to debate the issue, the convention would provide an ideal opportunity to discuss the division proposition.¹⁷⁹ When considering the bill a few days later, Solano County Assemblyperson James S. Graham, a Whig, submitted a bill recommending the inclusion of a call for constitutional convention in the September general election, which earned referral to a Select Committee chaired by none other than Agoston Haraszthy.¹⁸⁰

Presented by Whig Assemblyperson Henry A. Crabb, the group submitted a "Report of the Select Committee of Thirteen on the Subject of the Revision of the Constitution," finding the complaints of the southern counties accurate and determining "those crying evils have their tap-root in the constitution, and they can never be eradicated save by the hand of the people in the convention assembled."¹⁸¹ The committee determined that the rush to statehood resulted in a hasty state constitution for which only seven percent of the populace voted.¹⁸² Referring to provisions referencing taxation and representation, the Committee determined "California demands *peculiar legislation* [publisher's emphasis] upon this all important element of government, and what is applicable to another State, will not meet her wants and guarantee the rights of her citizens" and stated that a system of representation based on the number of people who paid their taxes, rather than on population, served as a solution.¹⁸³

California. (See: Roger D. Launius, "Lilburn Bogs (1796-1860)," *Missouri Encyclopedia*, <https://missourienyclopedia.org/people/boggs-lilburn-w>).

¹⁷⁹ "Sacramento Correspondence," *Nevada Journal*.

¹⁸⁰ "California Legislature 3rd Session," *Sacramento Daily Union*, February 4, 1852, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

¹⁸¹ *Journal of the Proceedings of the Assembly* (1852), 166, <https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/archive-list>.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 167.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*.

Ten of the thirteen members signed the report advocating for revising the state constitution, while the remaining three submitted a Minority Report presented by Augustus F. Hinchman, a Whig from Santa Barbara. The minority of the committee found that the State constitution contained provisions for making amendments or revisions and determined a constitutional convention unnecessary.¹⁸⁴ Rife with veiled racism and paternalism, the minority's report deemed the complaints exaggerated, stating "native Californians, unaccustomed to our revenue system, do not always distinguish between taxes paid to cities and counties" and "southern people, sore with wounds, erroneously believe all the blows are struck by the State and the Constitution."¹⁸⁵ The report determined that the southern counties directly benefited from the gold mining of the north through increases in demand for cattle and found the taxation system just.¹⁸⁶ Such a stance certainly did not sit well with Californios whose position the report undermined, a fact that their white Southern neighbors could easily exploit.

The issues of disunion and slavery soon entered their discussions. As relayed by the *Nevada Journal* newspaper, Crabb empathized with Southern Californians concerns about taxation and representation, but openly rebuked Hinchman for "the sectional feeling which attributed to southern men a paramount desire in sustaining the call for a Convention to plant slavery in California."¹⁸⁷ Crabb continued by accusing his political opponent of having specific objectives in supporting the call for a convention, including

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 171.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 173.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 174.

¹⁸⁷ "The Legislature," *The Nevada Journal* (Nevada City, CA), March 4, 1852, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

dividing the state and creating a slave territory in the South.¹⁸⁸ The *Daily Alta California* newspaper bluntly referenced the issues, stating, “It is time this bush fighting on the part of the advocates of a constitutional convention were ended...If they seek to make two States, and turn one over to slavery, they must tell us.”¹⁸⁹

Furthermore, the committee’s use of the word “peculiar” in their report is notable given the historic use of the term when discussing slavery. Dating back to at least the 1820s, defenders of the practice adopted the word as an adjective for bondage. The *Charleston Mercury* referred to the “peculiar property and institutions of the South” in an August 1825 article about state’s rights.¹⁹⁰ South Carolina’s senators used the expression in a protest against tariffs in 1829, noting the state’s dependence on agriculture and commerce borne out of “her climate, situation, and peculiar institution.”¹⁹¹ Reprinted across the American South for several years, the statement spread across the region and began to be more widely used in reference to slavery, particularly in South Carolina where it became a synonym for horrendous practice. The state’s most ardent pro-slavery advocate, Senator Henry Clay, utilized the euphemism in defense of the practice and became closely associated with it. The term came into such wide use that abolitionists soon adopted it in their public condemnations of slavery and enslavers, which appeared to be the intent of the authors of the report.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ “A Novel Revolution,” *Daily Alta California*, (San Francisco, CA), February 17, 1852, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

¹⁹⁰ [Untitled], *Charleston Mercury* (Charleston, SC), February 18, 1825.

¹⁹¹ “From Columbia,” *Charleston Mercury* (Charleston, SC), December 22, 1828.

The *Daily Alta California* furthered its opposition of the proposed convention and the newspaper's editors did not mince words when describing advocates as "silly dabsters in politics" and the plan to divide the state as "the height of folly."¹⁹² In summary, they blamed "intermeddlers in politics who have begun their statesmanship by a contemptible disregard of the intelligence of the people" for the plan to revise the state constitution and consider division.¹⁹³ The people of Northern California, the article claimed, did not support the issues outlined in the proposition and suggested the better course of action would be for the "Legislature [to] abandon the consideration of revolutionary bills for conventions calculated to overthrow the present fabric of State government, and devote itself to endeavors to ascertain the best means for remedying the disabilities in the shape of taxation of which the South so loudly complains."¹⁹⁴ While the assembly passed a recommendation for a constitutional convention and referred it to the senate, the latter body decided to postpone the measure.¹⁹⁵

Opponents of the idea decried slavery as the true impetus behind the crusade to change the constitution. The Los Angeles *Star* denied the accusation, with an editor writing, "It might have been expected, perhaps, that irrelevant questions would be brought into the discussion, when the Legislature took up the matter, and so we see that Slavery is to be lugged in, undoubtedly with no other view than to stave off Division."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² "A Novel Revolution," *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco, CA), February 17, 1852, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>; "A Constitutional Convention," *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco, CA), February 7, 1852, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

¹⁹³ "A Novel Revolution," *Daily Alta California*.

¹⁹⁴ "Dividing the State," *Daily Alta California*.

¹⁹⁵ *Journal of the Proceedings of the Assembly* (1852), 256, 258, 352, <https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/archive-list>.

¹⁹⁶ Ellison, *A Self-Governing Dominion*, 120.

Concluding by recalling the aims of the Santa Barbara Convention as representative of the views of southern Californians. In truth, the question of expanding slavery into the Far West loomed large in the social and political evolution of the region at the time. With individuals who actively participated in the slave trade in positions of power across the state and forms of forced labor in place, the concern proved legitimate.

Further legitimizing the issue, southern slavery advocates from South Carolina and Florida openly petitioned the California state legislature to consider division in order to establish a slave colony in the state's southern region.¹⁹⁷ Initiated by James Gadsden, a South Carolinian political figure and slaveholder, the division efforts factored into his larger plans to establish a transcontinental railroad from the American South through the Southwest to California through which the wares of slavery could be transported. Additionally, Gadsden envisioned a colony peopled with enslaved agricultural workers, not unlike the plantation system of the American South with which he and his slaveholding supporters were familiar.¹⁹⁸ Although ultimately unsuccessful in California, Gadsden soon received an appointment from President Franklin Pierce to negotiate the acquisition of territory south of New Mexico from Mexico, a successful venture that eventually became known as the Gadsden Purchase and opened the Far West further to encroachment by Southern colonizers.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Matthew Willis, "Slavery in a Free State: The Case of California." *JSTOR Daily*, (February 25, 2021), accessed 7 August 2023, <https://daily.jstor.org/slavery-in-a-free-state-the-case-of-california/>.

¹⁹⁸ Beginning in 1851 and lasting until 1853, Gadsden's slave colony plan included the efforts of various prominent figures in California, including State Senator Thomas Jefferson Green, a politician from North Carolina who spent much of his career in the American West, from Texas to California. Gadsden and Green likely met in Florida, where Gadsden enslaved people and where Green once served in the state legislature.

¹⁹⁹ Waite, *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire*, 96.

The division issue took an interesting turn when Whig Assemblyperson N.R. Wood of San Francisco introduced a new bill in the spring of 1852 to split California into three parts to increase representation for the western coast in congress.²⁰⁰ Hoping to take it before the state's residents in a general election later that year, the proposal sought to split the state first from San Diego to Santa Cruz, then a second portion from Santa Cruz through wine country, with the last portion ending at the Oregon border.²⁰¹ Providing statistics for each county, Wood explained that population served as the predominant factor in the proposed boundaries for the three sections. Taking into account expected increases from migration, Wood noted "In no age has a parallel been found for the same rapid increase in any country of its population."²⁰² In extolling the virtues of California, Wood described the fertile soil, varied climate, and "mineral wealth that puts to blush the most exaggerated statements contained in ancient or modern history." His plan broke down the region into three separate industrial sections, agricultural, mineral and grazing, allocating each sector to one of the proposed states. Wood argued that past state and territorial divisions served as precedent for his proposal and indicated that splitting the state in three would triple the amount of representation in congress.²⁰³

The question of representation held importance for many who felt that California's contributions to national commerce through mineral resources merited greater representation on the federal level. The state's relatively small population at

²⁰⁰ "Legislative Intelligence," *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco, CA), April 8, 1852, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>; "Journal of the Proceedings of the Assembly," (1852), 503.

²⁰¹ "Remarks of Mr. Wood, of San Francisco," *Sacramento Daily Union*, April 26, 1852, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

admittance afforded only two congressional representatives, a number that remained the same for the decade that followed. As argued by editors of the *Evening Picayune* of San Francisco, “There is no one State in the Union—perhaps no five States combined—the products of which so powerfully control the operations of trade and commerce, as do those of California...the political influence of the Pacific coast is not only disproportioned to the importance of our position, but is in fact merely nominal, and less in reality than our interest would require.”²⁰⁴

Wood and his supporters also cited problems with the taxation system, which they argued benefited parts of the country other than California.²⁰⁵ When discussing this issue, the *Daily Alta California*’s writers issued a warning, “if this policy of taxation without remuneration is to be pursued much longer, [California’s] progress must be materially retarded and the affection of our citizens for the parent Government will be much cooled...when the child ceases to respect the parent for his watchfulness, impartiality, and generosity, the first step of estrangement is taken, soon to be followed by indignation, and possibly succeeded by opposition.”²⁰⁶ A vote on the bill came following Wood’s speech and lost 24 nays to 19 ayes.²⁰⁷

Within a few short years, the movement to divide California went from a Californio proposal to an issue backed primarily by White Chivalry legislators, with some Whig backing. Additionally, with an ally in congress in the person of California’s powerful Senator William C. Gwin, supporters of the movement enjoyed multiple public

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ *Journal of the Proceedings of the Assembly* (1852), 503, <https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/archive-list>.

platforms to spread their message. By the start of the 1853 legislative session, discussions on the issue once again sought a condemnation of the state constitution and a call for an amendment convention, with state division as the ultimate goal. Proposed by Democratic Assemblyperson Benjamin F. Myers of Placer County, the amended proposition, which focused on the central complaints of unjust taxation and representation, passed in the assembly in late March.²⁰⁸

The Select Committee on the Constitution submitted a Majority Report, finding the plan to rewrite the state constitution and consider division both impractical and unnecessary given the available options to amend the document.²⁰⁹ Getting to the core of the original proposal, the Committee's report stated: "Divide the State, and you cut off one half the more available sources of her revenue and consign her to inevitable bankruptcy. Nor is pecuniary embarrassment the only or the greatest evil that will result from the division of the State...The part that may be struck off will be still able to support the State organization than that which will remain." The report continued, "It must fall back under a territorial government, to a state of pupillage; thus diminishing, instead of increasing, the dignity of the Pacific coast in the eye of the world, and its power and influence in the council of the nation. Who that has identified his interests with those of California could consent to such a retrogressive step?"²¹⁰

The Majority Report touched on many issues for avoiding the division of the state before getting to the crux of their opposition, stating with derision toward the state's

²⁰⁸ *Journal of the Proceedings of the State Assembly* (1853), 37; "Majority Report on the Select Committee on the Constitution," *Journal of the Senate* (1853), 7, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008307925>.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 6.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 7.

southern Californios, “Vastly the greater portion of the population of California, who have been reared under the institutions of the United States, are located in the mineral or northern part of the State.” The Report continued, arguing, at length:

“Separate these from the rest of the State and you may cut off much the larger portion of our choice agricultural lands now in the hands of a few families, whose early sympathies were centered upon a different system of government, and political and social relations... They have had, before the acquisition of California by our Union, but little experience in the burthens of taxation, and would naturally... prefer a territorial government, free of cost, to that of a sovereign State at their own expense.”

In this way, the Majority Report concluded, “Thus relieved of taxation, they would have no inducement to diminish their estates, or to curtail the extent of their possessions. Their lands would be waste, increase of population would be slow, the development of our resources tardy, and the progress of our mission greatly retarded.”²¹¹ The open disdain for Californios expressed by the report’s authors demonstrated the contentious nature of the relationships between southern Californians and the representatives of the gold counties. Following months of debate, the senate tabled the bill for future consideration at the end of the legislative session.²¹²

Despite persistent public denials, the issue of dividing California into a free state and slave territory remained a concern, and even became a divisive issue within the state’s Democratic Party. Factions supporting slavery advocate Senator Gwin and those backing his political nemesis anti-slavery proponent Senator David C. Broderick debated the prudence of legalizing slavery. Arguments in support claimed southern Californians

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² “Majority Report on the Select Committee on the Constitution,” 580.

“are very anxious that slaveholding should be introduced among them,” while opponents denied the assertion and claimed that even migrants from the American South rejected the scheme.²¹³

The 1855 state legislative session began with the introduction of a new bill by representative Jefferson Hunt, a Democrat from San Bernardino, calling for the creation of a new State of Columbia, which would include the counties of Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, San Joaquin, Calaveras, Amador, Tuolumne, Stanislaus, Mariposa, Tulare, Monterey, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and San Diego, as well as the islands off the California coast.²¹⁴ A devout Mormon, Hunt maintained a close relationship with Brigham Young and served as an important figure in San Bernardino’s Mormon community.²¹⁵ First elected to the assembly in 1852, Hunt successfully advocated for the creation of a separate county of San Bernardino, which the region’s Mormon majority controlled.²¹⁶ His proposal to divide the state may have been beneficial to some of his fellow San Bernardino Mormon settlers who trafficked enslaved persons to the state, even though he personally opposed the practice.²¹⁷

Hunt’s proposal gained the support of David F. Douglas of San Joaquin County, who in turn proposed the division of the state into three separate entities: the State of

²¹³ “Non-Intervention,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, November 24, 1854, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

²¹⁴ “Division of the State,” *The Pittsfield Sun* (Pittsfield, MA), March 29, 1855, <https://www.newspapers.com/>.

²¹⁵ Thomas Sauk, *Into the Jaws of Hell: Jefferson Hunt: The Death Valley ‘49ers Wagon Train & His Adventures in California, 1846-1857*, (Danville, CA: Pine Park Publishing, 2012), 233.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, 424.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, 446; One of the most well-known legal cases where an enslaved person successfully asserted their emancipation from their enslaver occurred in 1856 when Biddy Mason of San Bernardino sued Robert Smith for her freedom.

Shasta in the north, California in the center, and Colorado in the south.²¹⁸ Additionally, the bill sought to extend California's eastern boundaries and encroach upon the Nevada and New Mexico territories. Assembly members in favor of division made familiar arguments, citing the various inequities that had a disproportionate effect on residents of Southern California. Remarking on the distance to the capital for those living in the south, the imbalanced representation, unfair system of taxation that placed a greater burden on southerners, and legislation that favored the northern counties, proponents of the bill echoed the grievances expressed by their colleagues just a couple of years earlier. As Hunt wrote in a letter to his colleague Charles C. Rich in San Bernardino, the bill "set every thing [sic] in an uproar and now from thee [sic] look of every thing [sic] I can see it appeare [sic] to me that before we break up we shall divide it in to three parts."²¹⁹

Both Representatives Hunt and Douglas clearly distinguished their cause from those who sought to inject slavery into the division movement, noting that two of the three states would not benefit from the institution, and thus the balance of slave and free states could tip in favor of anti-slavery proponents.²²⁰ A story in the *Southern Californian* newspaper also denied the importance of slavery to the division debate, noting that slavery had continually served as a "principle bugbear, laboriously brought in to prevent any action in this matter."²²¹ Describing the region as unfit for the introduction of slave labor and curiously noting that most southern Californians opposed the practice, the

²¹⁸ "Division of the State," *Los Angeles Star*, May 12, 1855, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

²¹⁹ Sauk, 449; Along with Amasa Lyman, Charles C. Rich founded the Mormon Colony in San Bernardino in 1851 at the behest of Brigham Young in Salt Lake City, Utah.

²²⁰ Ibid, 450.

²²¹ "Division of the State," *Southern Californian*, May 23, 1855, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

article concluded by supporting the Douglas three state proposition. In reality, enslaved people resided in California from before statehood, including among the Mormon missionaries in San Bernardino who Hunt represented, and the region had a large Southern population. Earning their freedom through the judicial system, like Biddy Mason, or through restitution, like Thomas Gilman, unfree African Americans in California fought for their freedom in spite of the states' free status.²²²

In April, the *Los Angeles Star* received a letter from San Francisco written by a person writing under the pen name "Cyrus," who noted that dividing the state would allow Los Angeles to "assume the position to which her location and resources entitle her."²²³ The paper soon reported southern Californians favored "immediate division," noting "great benefits will undoubtedly flow from a division, as the interests of this great State taken as a whole are so diversified."²²⁴ Theorizing that the Pacific Coast would gain greater political influence by such a division, which, the paper concluded, would in turn "strengthen the bonds of our common Union."²²⁵ The *Southern Californian* agreed with the importance of division and blamed "the great preponderance of the north in the halls of Legislation" for the lack of success of previous attempts.²²⁶ This new pro-division tactic sought to sell the idea to a larger audience whom could not empathize with plight of the landowning Californios and their opposition to taxation.

²²² Waite, *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire*, 100.

²²³ "Correspondence to the 'Star'," *Los Angeles Star*, April 28, 1855, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

²²⁴ "Division of the State," *Los Angeles Star*.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ "Division of the State," *Southern Californian*.

El Clamor Público, a Spanish-language newspaper in Los Angeles, heartily supported the division scheme, but for much different reasons. Its editor Francisco P. Ramirez wrote in the summer of 1855, “What are we waiting for comrades? Would we prefer to wait until we are submerged in the chaos of desperation and destitution to raise our voices and ask for explanations from a government that has shown itself to be unresponsive to our needs?” He continued, “It is true that dividing the state in half will require the repayment of a huge debt—We’ll pay it. While it may be difficult to pay an inherited debt, it is necessary and preferable to remaining linked to the tyrannical North.” In conclusion, Ramirez stated, “This is not a question of sides, it is a question of the good of the public.”²²⁷ Articles in *El Clamor Público* continued the discussion in the weeks that followed, publishing a diatribe signed by a group from San Diego led by Agoston Haraszthy laying out the familiar arguments for division. Ramirez warned, “The costs associated with our current system of government are too great to be borne, and if a solution is not found soon within a few years we will all find our properties in the hands of the treasury as repayment of taxes.”²²⁸

Political hopefuls took up the cause just prior to the general election in September of 1855. A candidate for the state senate, Colonel Juan José Warner of San Diego invoked the “Democratic doctrine” of slavery while endorsing division at a public meeting in Los Angeles.²²⁹ Born Jonathan Trumbull Warner in Connecticut, Warner

²²⁷ Francisco P. Ramirez, ed., “La Division del Estado,” *El Clamor Público*, June 19, 1855, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>. Translated from Spanish.

²²⁸ Francisco P. Ramirez, ed., “Apuntes sobre la Division del Estado,” *El Clamor Público*, June 26, 1855, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>. Translated from Spanish; Francisco P. Ramirez, ed., “Apuntes sobre la Division del Estado, Continuacion,” *El Clamor Público*, July 3, 1855, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>. Translated from Spanish.

²²⁹ “Democratic Mass Meeting,” *Los Angeles Star*, August 18, 1855, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

migrated to California in the 1830s and, like many Americans in the decades before annexation, became a naturalized Mexican citizen through marriage and religious conversion, changing his name to Juan José.²³⁰ A prominent landowner, Warner utilized the labor of California Indians at Rancho San Jose del Valle, a property in San Diego County given to Warner by California's Mexican Governor Manuel Micheltorena in 1844. He identified as a Democrat, as many Californios did in the period prior to the war, and his endorsement of the party's allegiance to slave traders fell in line with the goals of Democrats in Southern California, particularly those of Southern birth.²³¹

Also running for the state senate, Los Angeles lawyer Lewis Granger similarly advocated for dividing the state in a public notice published in the *Star* in August of 1855, just weeks from the September election. A northerner by birth, Granger arrived in the state after annexation, settling in Los Angeles where he entered the political fray as a Democrat and distinguished himself as a supporter of policies beneficial to his Californio constituents, writing, "I am in favor [of] Equal rights between the native and adopted citizens." Additionally, his platform included selling land to pay off state debt, reducing taxes, and protecting the local wine industry to benefit the proposed independent territory, and, notably, the completion of a transcontinental railroad.²³² Significantly, he

²³⁰ H.D. Barrows, "Memorial Sketch of Col. J.J. Warner," *Annual Publication of the Historical Society of Southern California* 3, No. 3 (1895), 23-24.

²³¹ Robert G. Cowan, *Ranchos of California, a list of Spanish Concessions 1775-1822 and Mexican Land Grants 1822-1846* (Los Angeles: Historical Society of Southern California, 1977), 81; Manuel Micheltorena served as Governor of Mexican California, 1842-1845.

²³² "A Card," *Los Angeles Star*, August 4, 1855, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

noted, “I would also advocate as virtually important to our welfare—a division of the State,” a position central to California Democrats at the time.²³³

Residents of Southern California could not avoid the disunion platforms espoused by Ramirez, Warner, and Granger. A populist, Ramirez’s endorsement held special sway with the Mexican population of Los Angeles for whom the taxation issue had less of an effect. Linked to through a shared history, social, and business ties, Mexicans and disaffected Californios who rejected the Democratic Party platform could relate to the desire to gain greater independence and, perhaps, return to a semblance of their previous lives in an independent territory of Southern California.

Despite the vocal endorsements of would-be southern legislators, the disunion issue went unresolved in 1855. Renewed interest in the proposal the following legislative year won support from northerners, with an editor of the *Yreka Union* advocating for a northern state composed of Klamath, Siskiyou, Humboldt, Shasta, Trinity, and parts of Butte and Mendocino counties. State Senator John D. Cosby, a Know-Nothing from the state’s northernmost counties, also relayed these views and formally reintroduced the Douglas division plan to split the state into three parts.²³⁴ With the failure of the northern California disunion bill, assembly member Jefferson Hunt issued another call for a constitutional convention in 1857, a decision left to voters who ultimately defeated the bill in the September general election.²³⁵ In spite of the repeated legislative failures, the

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Known as the “Know Nothings,” the American party subscribed to a nativist platform that opposed immigration and discriminated against different groups, particularly people from Ireland and Catholics.

²³⁵ *Journal of the Eighth Session of The Assembly of the State of California* (Sacramento: James Allen, State Printer, 1857), 189, 688, <https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/archive-list>.

disunion movement in California persisted until one final antebellum attempt nearly found success.

Chapter 3

Disunion Politics

“We are for a Pacific Republic... We believe it to be the true policy of California.”²³⁶

As legislators debated the issue of disunion in the mid-1850s, California’s economy experienced a significant downturn that had serious effects on landowners across the state. For Californios, the combination of lavish lifestyles, with the drop in cattle prices and decreases in the value of land, had a sobering effect.²³⁷ While some continued to host traditional celebrations, they came to a close as the realities of economic downturn became unavoidable.²³⁸ As their social and political capital dropped, Californios lost the clout that made their company appealing to social climbing white Americans, leaving them vulnerable to legislative measures seemingly aimed at their lifestyle, culture, and social prospects.²³⁹ Mainly passed in 1855, these legislative measures included the “Greaser Law” targeting Mexican American “vagrants,” a statute striking the state constitution’s requirement that laws be available in both English and Spanish, and a Sunday Law that criminalized many Mexican pastimes.²⁴⁰ Once politically prominent Californios, like Manuel Dominguez and Pío Pico, faced ill treatment from the legal system due to the color of their skin and apparent Indian ancestry, and newspapers openly used racialized language to demonize and belittle these once powerful figures.²⁴¹

²³⁶ “One Paper for a Pacific Confederacy.” *Sonora Democrat* (Sonora, CA), January 8, 1861.

²³⁷ Pitt, 196.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid, 197.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 198.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 202, 208.

Recognizing the importance of the Mexican vote, some Democratic lawmakers in Southern California sought to appease that base by nominating candidates with Spanish ancestry, including Andrés Pico, who served on the State Assembly. A Democrat, Pico allied with well-known Chivalry supporter Joseph Lancaster Brent and Tomás Sanchez, both backers of Gwin's leadership.²⁴² As a Californio and a longtime advocate for state division, Pico became the face of disunion. Writing to his close friend Ignacio del Valle from Sacramento in January 1857, he alluded to conversations about state division the year prior, stating his intention to introduce a resolution on disunion.²⁴³

Pico introduced the bill to the assembly in April 1858, asking for a referral to the Committee on Federal Relations.²⁴⁴ Citing the “unfortunate and unnatural alliance” between the northern and southern portions of the state, Pico described the south as “a sparsely populated territory differing most radically in climate, soil, and productions; inhabited for the most part by a people whose language, manners, habits, customs, and interests, are very dissimilar” from the north.²⁴⁵ He continued by describing the southern region's “physical and geographic features...as different, distinct, separate, and apart from those of the northern portion of the state, with which it is at present unhappily united.”²⁴⁶ The resolution asked the state legislature to create a new territory called Colorado out of Southern California from San Luis Obispo to the Mexican border and detailed the process

²⁴² Ibid, 203.

²⁴³ Andres Pico, Letter to Ignacio del Valle, January 25, 1857. Del Valle Collection, Seaver Center for Western History Research. Translated from Spanish.

²⁴⁴ *Journal of the Ninth Session of The Assembly of the State of California* (Sacramento: James Allen, State Printer, 1858), 564, <https://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/archive-list>.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 565.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 565.

for resolving financial matters between the north and south.²⁴⁷ Introduced near the close of the legislative session, supporters withdrew the resolution to allow for proper consideration the following year.²⁴⁸

As he embarked on this seemingly impossible task, Pico's motivations came under scrutiny. According to an editorial in the anti-slavery newspaper, the *Sacramento Daily Union*, "Pico is ambitious, and desires to be Governor of the proposed new Territory."²⁴⁹ As a member of the rancher class for whom the preceding decade—the first under American rule—brought previously unimaginable social and political changes, Pico's efforts obviously erred toward self-preservation. His proposal, which bore striking similarities to the bill supported by Mississippi Senator Foote during the statehood discussions a decade earlier, and his support of Chivalry Democrats, are indicative of the political and social sway of that faction.²⁵⁰

Pico reintroduced the resolution in the early days of February of 1859.²⁵¹ As reported in the *Trinity Journal* of Weaverville, California, "A concurrent resolution has been presented in Assembly, proposing that the State relinquish San Louis [sic], Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, San Bernardino and San Diego counties, to help constitute a new territory to be named 'Colorado.'" The report continued by explaining, "The Spanish residents are dissatisfied with heavy taxation and vagabond politicians see a good

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ellison, *A Self-Governing Dominion*, 131

²⁴⁹ "Division of California." *Sacramento Daily Union*, June 15, 1859.

²⁵⁰ Lynch, *Southern California Chivalry: The Convergence of Southerners and Californios in the Far Southwest, 1846-1866*, 159; Andres Pico's support for the Chivalry Democrats dated back to his appointment as Southern California tax collector by William M. Gwin.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 130; Pitt, 204.

opening thus for preferment. The proposition will hardly meet with great favor, we suppose.”²⁵² Referred to a special committee that agreed with the spirit of the proposal, a minority report questioned the constitutionality of the measure and again suggested a constitutional amendment.²⁵³ With the support of the majority of the group, the special committee submitted the Act for inclusion in the general election of the following September. After passing in both the State Assembly and Senate, Governor John Bigler, a pro-slavery Chivalry Democrat, approved its inclusion in the election.²⁵⁴

The *Bulletin* of Sacramento also met the proposal with disdain, with an editor stating, “It is not worth while [sic] to waste time in discussing these projects...it is merely introduced as an offset or checkmate by some of the northern members to the demand of the southern delegations for a separate Government. There was no intention or desire whatever, on the part of those who introduced it, that it should be passed.”²⁵⁵ They continued, “If the Revenue law were amended so as to reduce the burdens in the agricultural counties, or to tax mining claims, and compel the mining counties to contribute their just proportion of the State expenses, it would deprive the southern counties of the only argument...in favor of the segregation of their counties for the proposed Colorado Territory.”²⁵⁶

²⁵² “Colorado Territory,” *Trinity Journal* (Weaverville, CA), February 12, 1859, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

²⁵³ Ellison, *A Self-Governing Dominion*, 132.

²⁵⁴ Leonard L. Richards, *The California Gold Rush and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 216.

²⁵⁵ Henry Hamilton, “Division of the State – The Proposed Northern Territory,” *Los Angeles Star*, April 23, 1859, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Some who opposed the bill criticized Californio involvement in its conceptualization and worried that as an independent territory, the southern counties would turn to slavery. The editors of San Francisco's *Herald* clearly expressed this sentiment in late February 1859, writing of Californios, "part of them are so black that one needs much work to distinguish them from Indians; there is little difference between them and the Negro race," going on to warn that a territorial government would result in interracial families "until all would be amalgamated and all would be slaves!"²⁵⁷ Senator Foote weighed in on the matter, asserting that the state would in fact be split "for that purpose."²⁵⁸ Many, including former state senator and defender of Californio land claims, Elisa Crosby of San Francisco, recognized the coercive nature of the relationship between Californios and Southern Democrats, Gwin in particular. As Crosby recalled in his memoir: "It was understood by those who knew that Gwin had at the time we were seeking to have the state admitted, promised the southerners that if they would admit the state he would further the plan of colonizing the southern portion of California with Southern people, and quietly with out [sic] attracting attention get a majority in the Legislature of California to pass a bill dividing the state, making the southern part of it slave."²⁵⁹

Writing in *El Clamor Público*, editor Francisco P. Ramirez, once an advocate for division, also theorized that manipulation lay at the root of Pico's proposition of such a

²⁵⁷ Richards, 216.

²⁵⁸ Lynch, *Southern California Chivalry: The Convergence of Southerners and Californios in the Far Southwest, 1846-1866*, 112.

²⁵⁹ Charles Albro Barker, ed. *Memoirs of Elisha Oscar Crosby: Reminiscences of California and Guatemala 1849 to 1864* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1945), 62-63.

“descabellado proyecto,” or crazy project, believing that while Southern Californians once sought an independent territory, they had become accustomed to American rule.²⁶⁰ An editorial in the *Sacramento Daily Union* similarly stated that while the division bill appeared like “a plan for restoring the old native families in the South to the easy life,” in fact, it allowed “secessionists, in the character of restless, designing political speculators and adventurers” to manipulate naïve Californios, and concluded that Californios received “credit for more shrewdness, fairness and intelligence than they possess.”²⁶¹

In spite of the blatant paternalism and hostility demonstrated by the press, their criticism exposes the consequences of the Californio alliance with the Southern Democratic machine in the state. Pico’s political association with Gwin and his supporters brings into sharp focus the ways in which the Pico Bill aligned with broader efforts to link California to the American South.²⁶² By tapping into Southern Californians discontent over issues of property rights and taxation, white Southern Democrats had a legitimate vessel to convey their plans for disunion and ultimately Southern domination.

In March, the state legislature voted for a referendum to bring the bill before the residents of California. As the election approached, Southern Californian Jose Rubio published a Spanish language handbill addressed to the “Voters of the counties of Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and San Diego” where he openly opposed Chivalry Democrat John G. Downey as Lieutenant Governor, describing him as universally hated and

²⁶⁰ Francisco P. Ramirez, ed., “División del Estado,” *El Clamor Público* (Los Angeles, CA), February 26, 1859, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

²⁶¹ “A Bud in Blossom,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, March 3, 1859, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

²⁶² Pitt, 203.

accusing him of enriched himself through the labor of the state's "native sons."²⁶³ Rubio and Downey's squabble throughout the campaign, coupled with pushback against Los Angeles candidates at the Democratic nominating convention laid bare the deepening rift in the party within California.²⁶⁴

Taking place on June 22, 1859, the state convention resulted in the nomination of Democrat Milton S. Latham for Governor, as well as the adoption of a resolution directly addressing states' rights and slavery, favorite topics of Southern Democrats. It stated:

"Resolved, That the organized Territories of the United States, although not endowed with all the attributes of sovereignty, are yet justly entitled to the right of self-government, and the undisturbed regulation of their domestic and local affairs, subject to the Constitution of the United States, and that any attempt by Congress, or by any of the States, to establish, or prohibit, or abolish, the relation of master and slave in a Territory, would be a departure from the original doctrine of our American institutions, and that we adhere immovably to the principle of "non-intervention" by Congress with slavery in the States and Territories, as declared in the Kansas Nebraska bill, and openly disclaim fellowship with those, whether at the North, the South or the West, who counsel the abandonment, limitation or avoidance of that principle."²⁶⁵

As the election approached, the editors of *El Clamor Público* published a letter by Ramon Carrillo of the Republican County Committee that cautioned against keeping the Democrats in power, warning of their ultimate designs to expand slavery into the California. Carrillo wrote, "The SLAVE CODE is sought to be introduced among us; and if the Democratic party are again seated in power in 1860, who knows but Colorado Territory will be spread over with 'Guinea N-----s!'" He continued, "we must be warned

²⁶³ Jose Rubio, Handbill, "A Los Votantes de los condados de Los Angeles, San Bernardino, y San Diego," August 31, 1859. Antonio Franco Coronel Collection, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum, Los Angeles. Translated from Spanish.

²⁶⁴ Pitt, 203.

²⁶⁵ [California Democratic State Convention]. *Daily National Democrat* (Marysville, CA), August 2, 1860

in time against the introduction of this great evil, and now is the time.”²⁶⁶ Despite Californios complicated rationalizations around race and ethnicity and their own complicity in the plight of California’s Indian population, the threat of officially introducing American chattel slavery into the region induced many to express concerns.

In spite of the views of naysayers, the Pico Bill enjoyed support among landowners in the cattle-rich southern counties for whom division represented an arduous, decade-long ordeal.²⁶⁷ Known as Assembly Bill No. 223, the bill came to a vote on September 7, 1859 and found widespread acceptance in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and San Diego counties, where two-thirds of voters voted in favor.²⁶⁸ State representatives referred the successful bill to congress for approval. Finally, after ten years of effort by southern Californians and Southern Democrats, the creation of a territory in Southern California appeared on the horizon.

In the spring of 1860, congressional leaders in the House of Representatives passed H.R. No. 706, “An Act to Authorize the President of the United States, in Conjunction with the State of California, to Run and Mark the Boundary Lines between the Territories of the United States and the State of California.” The bill requested the creation of a separate territory out of the counties in Southern California, leaving the counties north of San Luis Obispo to encompass the State of California. Signed by President James Buchanan in May, the separation of Northern and Southern California

²⁶⁶ Ramon Carrillo, “Fellow-Citizens and Fellow Countrymen,” *El Clamor Público* (Los Angeles, CA), August 13, 1859.

²⁶⁷ Pitt, 204.

²⁶⁸ “Colorado Territory,” *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco, CA), September 30, 1859, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

appeared imminent.²⁶⁹ A friend of Gwin and supporter of efforts to expand Southern influence into the west, President Buchanan kept abreast of the situation in California through updates from Chivalry allies. But the president had many other concerns on his mind in the spring of 1860, namely the storm brewing nationally that threatened to dissolve the union of the United States, a storm that ultimately put the California bill on the backburner.

After a decade of attempts to divide California, the threat of disunion spread across the national stage in 1860, effectively killing the Pico Act and leading to discord within the ranks of its supporters. Even among supposed allies, Californians' split between loyalty to the United States, calls to join the Southern secessionist cause, and efforts to gain support for an independent nation made up of the Pacific states. As residents took sides on the nation-wide question of secession and the state division movement halted, political rhetoric in California split along political and physical boundaries. Chivalry Democrats, particularly those in Southern California, expressed support for the disunion cause, with many advocating for California declaring its own independence if the situation progressed to state secession. Republicans throughout the state denounced such advocacy.

Splitting over the issue of slavery, the Democratic Party's national influence waned in the late 1850s as support for the party split between pro- and anti-slavery factions. The Compromise of 1850, Dred Scott decision of 1857, and John Brown's raid

²⁶⁹ "Message from the President," *Congressional Globe* (Washington, D.C.), May 28, 1860, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001719526>.

in 1859, all contributed to the internal rupture among Democrats, and the rise of the Republican Party presented a threat to its political hegemony. From the state house to the pulpit, Americans debated the role of slavery in the United States. Published works like Harriet Beecher Stowe's fictional *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Frederick Douglass's autobiography, worked in tandem with the efforts of orators across the North who broadcasted the horrors of slavery far and wide, creating deep moral and philosophical divisions between people across the nation, but especially among Democrats. With the presidential election of 1860 on the horizon, threats of secession and civil war loomed large in the political and social landscapes.

In spite of the geographic distance, the party rift reached the western states and territories, particularly those in the south where Southern slaveholders established a foothold. In California, where the Democratic Party controlled the state, the national conversations over slavery and disunion gained traction throughout the debates over state division. As early as January 1860, outgoing California Governor, John B. Weller, voiced his support for an independent "Pacific Republic" in the event of civil war, stating "if the wild spirit of fanaticism which now pervades the land should destroy this magnificent confederacy (which God forbid) she will not go with the South or the North, but here upon the shores of the Pacific found a mighty republic which may in the end be the

greatest of all.”²⁷⁰ Given his stance as a proslavery Democrat, historians have cited Weller’s sentiments as a rallying point for secessionists within California.²⁷¹

Secession debates among Californians soon matched those occurring throughout the country. Reporting on the increasing threat of national disunion in early 1860, *Los Angeles Star* editor Henry Hamilton wrote, “A dissolution of the Union, to allude to at one time was profanity and heresy, is now the common topic of conversation in political circles in Washington and elsewhere... We hope the crisis will pass over—that peace will be restored, harmony and good feeling prevail, and the Union will long continue the admiration of the world and the source of numberless blessing to the people of this country.”²⁷² A native of Northern Ireland, Hamilton became a fierce defender of the Democratic Party and spent the 1850s promoting its candidates and condemning their opponents. While he went on to become a vocal proponent of the Southern cause once the war began, he remained a loyalist in the secession debate’s earliest months, even as calls for a national dissolution becoming louder and impassioned. In response to fearmongering in the media, Hamilton reported, “Those who from the violent speeches of Southern and Northern Democratic Members of Congress, make up their minds with fear and trembling that the whole South is in favor of disunion, and about to madly and recklessly rush into it, are very much mistaken.”²⁷³ Continuing, he reprinted reports from

²⁷⁰ Henry Hamilton, ed. “The Duty of California.” *Los Angeles Star*. January 28, 1860; The Pacific Republic scheme advocated for the creation of an independent nation out of the states of California and Oregon.

²⁷¹ Both of California Senators and Representatives vocalized support of Weller’s Pacific Republic suggestion, only to retract their position once it became politically volatile.

²⁷² Henry Hamilton, ed. “The Union—State of Parties,” *Los Angeles Star*, January 14, 1860.

²⁷³ Henry Hamilton, ed. “Southern Conservative Opinion,” *Los Angeles Star*, January 21, 1860, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/>.

newspapers throughout the American South under the banner of “Southern Conservative Opinion.”²⁷⁴ From New Orleans to Savannah, and Baltimore to Washington, D.C., the authors of the passages selected by Hamilton—at least one of whom was an admitted enslaver—reiterated the importance of accepting the integrity of elections and argued against dissolution of the Union of the United States.

The tone of conversations in the Golden State shifted in late January when Governor Weller delivered his last message to the state legislature in favor of “a mighty republic” on the Pacific Coast.²⁷⁵ While Hamilton dismissed the statement as “merely wise and judicious recommendations, without any power to press them,” Weller’s statement mimicked the position of many of the state’s leading Democrats.²⁷⁶ As Hamilton readily admitted, Southern Democrats, many of whom openly expressed sympathies with the calls for insurrection, dominated the California State Assembly and Senate thanks to Senator Gwin’s decade of purposeful political maneuvering in the 1850s. About such sympathies among persons in position of power, Hamilton conceded, “it is not within the range of probability that members will resurrect the recommendations...and give them force and vitality.”²⁷⁷

Weller’s replacement, Democrat Milton S. Latham, only remained in the post for two days before being elected to fill the senate seat left vacant following the murder of United States Senator David C. Broderick four months earlier.²⁷⁸ In an unfortunate twist

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Henry Hamilton, ed. “The Duty of California,” *Los Angeles Star*, January 28, 1860.

²⁷⁶ Henry Hamilton, ed. “Governor Weller’s Message,” *Los Angeles Star*, January 21, 1860.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Senator David Broderick was killed in a duel with David Terry, the former Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court, in September 1859. A Northern Democrat, Broderick openly feuded with

of fate, Broderick's political nemesis, Chivalry leader Gwin, endorsed Latham, a pro-slavery Democrat, to replace him.²⁷⁹ For Latham, as for any Democrat in California at the time, an endorsement from Gwin—inarguably the most powerful politician in the state—carried significant gravitas. Originally from Ohio, Latham never actively participated in the American system of chattel slavery, but supported the practice nonetheless, making his election to replace free soiler Broderick an ideological shift for California's representation in the senate. As a final act before resigning his gubernatorial seat, Latham issued a statement supporting the constitutionality of the Pico Act, before warning of the consequences of division.²⁸⁰ Ever the political opportunist, Latham's noncommittal tendencies became a pattern throughout his political career.

Latham's resignation as governor created a vacuum in which Democratic Lieutenant Governor John G. Downey of Los Angeles took his place, ensuring the preservation of the state's Southern sympathizing leadership.²⁸¹ Born in Ireland, Downey arrived in Southern California during the American period of transition and married Los Angeles-born Maria Guirado, daughter of Don Rafael and Vicenta Guirado, socially prominent citizens of the city. Employing the same method of attaining power as his predecessor migrants had in the Mexican period—namely through marriage to a “daughter of the land”—Downey rose in prominence as a political leader among

Senator William M. Gwin throughout the 1850s. A free soil proponent, Broderick clashed with Gwin over the issue of slavery and the issue ultimately became the root of his disagreement with Terry. A slavery advocate, Terry spent the war years in exile in Texas.

²⁷⁹ Broderick ceded the power to make appointments to Gwin during their political negotiations over the state in the 1850s.

²⁸⁰ “Legislative,” *The Hydraulic Press* (North San Juan, CA), January 21, 1860.

²⁸¹ “Portrait of Governor John G. Downey.” *Calisphere*, <https://calisphere.org/item/08b45518ddd12685cb7ef36e17bbf588/>.

Democrats. A former enslaver, Downey's views on the subject aligned with many of his contemporaries among Los Angeles's migrant population.

In spite of his marriage to a Californio woman—whom he surely considered to be white—Downey exhibited racist tendencies, opposing the nomination of non-white political candidates and, as Joseph Lancaster Brent later recalled, expressing an “intention to enforce by violence” his opposition.²⁸² Democratic Angeleno political and social figures such as Sheriff Tomás Sánchez and Andrés Pico, came into conflict with Downey in the 1850s, with the latter even challenging Downey to a duel in 1859 over accusations of election fraud and a violent confrontation with Californio Jose Rubio.²⁸³ Nonetheless, his ascendance to the state's highest seat in 1860 brought celebrations in Los Angeles where, as Henry Hamilton reported, a “salute of one hundred guns was fired from the Plaza, in honor of the new Governor, and in the evening, a torch light procession paraded the town, headed by a band of music, carrying transparencies, inscribed ‘Senator Latham,’ ‘Governor Downey,’ ‘Our Union.’”²⁸⁴ His affiliation with the Chivalry came to an end in his first year in office over the issue of secession, a position with which Downey disagreed.

In his new role as a senator in Washington, D.C., Latham reiterated his support for the division of California, arguing that the counties in Southern California “undoubtedly consider the union of the southern and northern counties of California

²⁸² Lynch, *Southern California Chivalry: The Convergence of Southerners and Californios in the Far Southwest, 1846-1866*, 109.

²⁸³ Lynch, *Southern California Chivalry: The Convergence of Southerners and Californios in the Far Southwest, 1846-1866*, 117.

²⁸⁴ Henry Hamilton, ed., “Rejoicings,” *Los Angeles Star*, January 21, 1860.

unnatural.”²⁸⁵ Phrasing his argument in secessionist language similar to that being used to argue for national disunion, Latham clearly tied California to the secessionist cause and brought into focus his own political leanings on the issue. At the same time, his California counterpart in the senate and president pro tem of the chamber, Gwin became Lieutenant Governor of the state under Downey.²⁸⁶ Long festering hostility between the two Democrats left a collaboration between Gwin and Downey out of the question, particularly as the latter openly ridiculed his political counterpart and eventually endorsed Stephen A. Douglas’s run for President over Gwin’s candidate, southerner John Breckinridge.²⁸⁷ Well-known among politically-inclined Californians, the Gwin-Latham feud prompted Republican Jacob Stillman, a doctor from Sacramento, to remark that “old Gwin would rather see Broderick’s ghost back [in Congress] than Latham.”²⁸⁸

In the spring of 1860, the Democratic Party held a State Convention where Sacramento delegate Benjamin F. Mauldin proposed a resolution in case of a civil war, “That we, the people Democratic, while we deprecate all efforts at disunion, are prepared to maintain the independence of California.”²⁸⁹ Mauldin argued for the necessity of such a resolution to avoid the state becoming a political football used by both sides in case of disunion. California, he claimed, had already been “promised...to the South” and could be promised to the North, making his resolution a stopgap against further political

²⁸⁵ “Arrival of the Overland Mail,” *Buffalo Courier* (Buffalo, NY), February 6, 1860.

²⁸⁶ “Later from California,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 7, 1860.

²⁸⁷ “Political Items,” *Hartford Courant* (Hartford, CT), September 17, 1860.

²⁸⁸ Jacob D.B. Stillman, Letter to Thomas Stillman, January 21, 1860. Thomas Stillman Correspondence, 1854-1864. Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley.

²⁸⁹ “The Great Pacific Republic,” *Nevada Democrat* (Nevada City, CA), March 7, 1860.

maneuvering.²⁹⁰ With civil war deemed improbable by his colleagues, the resolution did not attain approval, but his support for an independent California echoed many in his political party, just as his claims of intrigue proved warranted. As the months went on, South-leaning delegates from some of the most populous counties in California also issued their own resolutions in case of a civil war.

Reporting on this story, an editorial in the *Nevada Democrat* identified Senator Gwin as being the person who pledged California to a potential Southern cause to “accomplish partisan purposes.”²⁹¹ Continuing, the paper claimed Gwin and his associates expected that, “in case a Republican was elected to the Presidency, the people of this State would take up arms and help the South in tearing asunder the bonds that unite us as one common people.”²⁹² Acknowledging Gwin’s role as the most politically prominent figure in the state, the story concluded with disdain that his aim to create an independent Pacific Republic would “tickle the politicians” but “would be scouted by the people.”²⁹³ Gwin denied these claims before the U.S. Senate weeks later, claiming the accusations to be “utterly destitute of truth,” and stating, “I hope...this Union will be imperishable; but if it is ever broken up, the eastern boundary of the Pacific Republic will be...the Sierra Madre and the Rocky Mountains.”²⁹⁴ Following Gwin’s statement, Latham, ever the opportunist, also explained his preference for the creation of a Pacific

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ “Senator Gwin’s Denial,” *The Placer Herald* (Rocklin, CA), May 26, 1860.

Republic that would link the states of California and Oregon and the territory of Washington to create an empire on the Pacific Coast.²⁹⁵

With the endorsement of such prominent political figures, the Southern-sympathizing *Semi-Weekly Southern News* of Los Angeles published a story titled “A Prophecy,” which included a quote attributed to former Massachusetts Senator Daniel Webster from 1845, which stated, “There will exist at the mouth of the Columbia, or more probably farther south, a great Pacific republic—a nation where our children may go for a residence, separating themselves from this government, and forming an integral part of a new government...”²⁹⁶ A Secretary of State under three presidents between 1841 and 1852, Webster is credited with shaping American policies in the “Pacific region.”²⁹⁷ His views on a supposed republic on the Pacific originated in his work as a senator under James K. Polk. Opposed to Polk’s agenda on westward expansion, Webster argued for the creation of an independent republic on the Pacific Coast populated by Americans but forging its own path.²⁹⁸ His belief that expansion would agitate the ever-present issues brought about by sectionalism proved to be accurate once debates over the admittance of California as a free state erupted in 1850.

With the fracture of California’s Democratic Party deepening as rhetoric of national disunion overwhelmed the national conversation, the state’s Californio majority

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ “A Prophecy,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, April 4, 1860.

²⁹⁷ Kenneth E. Shewmaker, “Forging the “Great Chain”: Daniel Webster and the Origins of American Foreign Policy Toward East Asia and the Pacific, 1841-1852.” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 129, No. 3 (September 1985), 225. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/987008>.

²⁹⁸ Clyde A. Duniway. “Daniel Webster and the West,” *Minnesota Historical Society Press* 9, No. 1 (March 1928), 14.

in the south began to experience the ideological shift. Hosting a Democratic County Convention in Los Angeles's Court House, the sharply divided convention resulted in the adoption of resolutions that condemned "anyone who seeks to perpetuate the division that now exists," and denounced such people as "unworthy to be considered soldiers in that great and patriotic army, that is now preparing to meet the enemies of the constitution and of the Union, in the approaching Presidential contest."²⁹⁹ Among the delegates selected from the county, Andrés Pico, Antonio F. Coronel, Enrique Abila, and Geronimo Ybarra served with a variety of other Angelenos, including long-time resident and former mayor Benjamin D. Wilson.

The Southern Californians' presence at a meeting of the Democratic Central Committee the following month elicited backlash from their counterparts in the state, with Andrés Pico provoking the ire of many.³⁰⁰ Given his outspoken support for state division, Pico earned the indignation of many who later came to be known as Union Democrats, members of that party who opposed secession. In response to his selection to the Committee, Pico became the target of the Democratic Committee of San Luis Obispo County who adopted a series of resolutions directly in opposition to him. Accusing him of using his position as a prospective delegate to the upcoming Democratic National Convention in Charleston, South Carolina to further his aim at dividing the state—which they deemed "anti-Democratic, impolitic, and an outrage"—the resolutions read, in part, "That our delegates to the State Democratic Convention...be instructed to vote against

²⁹⁹ "Proceedings of the Democratic County Convention," *Semi-Weekly Southern News* (Los Angeles, California), February 15, 1860.

³⁰⁰ [Untitled], *The Sacramento Bee*, February 22, 1860.

and use their entire influence against the election of Don Andres Pico as delegate to the Charleston Convention.”³⁰¹

Even prior to authoring the bill to divide the state, Pico found himself embroiled in legal disputes over land claims throughout California. A resident of Southern California, Pico, like many of his contemporaries, exhausted their resources to verify their claims to lands acquired in the preceding decades. With cases moving as far up as to the United States Supreme Court, land claims throughout California faced scrutiny as settlers assessed the relative value of what they considered to be underused tracts of land.³⁰² Accusations of fraudulent grants supposed to be issued by his brother, Pío Pico, during his time as governor became national news.³⁰³ The dispossession and degradation experienced by Pico and his contemporaries served to strengthen their support for a governmental system in which they could have more say.

While Andrés Pico developed an affinity for Americans in the decade before the war, his brother, Pío, did not. Pío Pico’s rejection of the Democratic Party dated to the earliest years of the American period. As the Governor of California at the time of the Bear Flag Revolt and Mexican American War, Pío opposed American annexation of the region and even attempted to negotiate British protection as the conflict seemed likely to end poorly for Mexican forces.³⁰⁴ After his reluctant acceptance of American rule, Pío’s disdain for new settlers increased as the fallout from the Democratic Party-backed Land

³⁰¹ “San Luis Obispo,” *The Sacramento Bee*, February 28, 1860.

³⁰² “Supreme Court of the United States,” *The Baltimore Sun*, February 8, 1860.

³⁰³ “Report of the Attorney General on California Land Claims: Andres Pico’s Claim,” *Valley Spirit* (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania), June 27, 1860; “Francisco Pico’s Claim,” *The Sonoma County Journal*, June 29, 1860.

³⁰⁴ Salomon, 100.

Act of 1851 became widespread. Opposing the party's stance on Mexican land ownership and slavery, Pío unsuccessfully warned his brother Andrés against supporting their policies, and eventually aligned himself with the Republican Party along with cousin Antonio Maria.³⁰⁵ As the family aligned politically during the turbulence of 1860, Antonio Maria earned a nomination as a Republican elector for the state from the Southern District at a Republican State Convention in late June.³⁰⁶

Abraham Lincoln's nomination as the Republican nominee for President in May only served to fan the flames of discontent among Democrats in California. Running against his old political rival Democrat Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois and two southern Democratic slaveholders, John Bell and Vice President John Breckinridge, Lincoln's chances of winning greatly depended on the depth of the fracture of the Democratic Party. Already entrenched in the secessionist cause, Democrats across the country turned their ire against the mid-western lawyer, vilifying his character, scrutinizing his past statements, and threatening calamity in the case of his election, offering secession as the only solution. While not the cause of secessionist rhetoric, Lincoln's position as a Republican and his past statements on slavery added fuel to the growing fire.

Clubs formed across the state in support of the four candidates, with John C. Breckinridge becoming a favorite among members of the Chivalry. The longtime politician and exponent of the ideals of Manifest Destiny, Breckinridge ran on a states' rights platform that protected slavery, despite personally opposing the practice. In spite of

³⁰⁵ Ibid, 120.

³⁰⁶ "Political," *Hartford Courant*, August 1, 1860.

his reputation as a secessionist candidate, the Vice President enjoyed the support of California's two senators, Latham and Gwin, as well as Los Angeles's leading Democratic politicians.³⁰⁷ Former Governor Weller even became "permanent President" of the Breckinridge State Convention in Sacramento, with Antonio F. Coronel of Los Angeles serving an appointed elector.³⁰⁸ Governor Downey stood apart in his advocacy for Stephen Douglas.³⁰⁹

As in the rest of the country, pro-secession meetings took place across California, with communities deciding for or against a potential rebellion. In late July, the *Daily National Democrat* of Marysville reported that such a meeting in the sheriff's office in Oroville reached a resolution to recruit locals to their cause. To that end, "flaming handbills were stuck up on every tree and public house in the country, private letters were sent to all parts of the country," and a torchlight procession took place, leading to a public meeting where proponents of different candidates spoke.³¹⁰ Just weeks later, the *Placer Herald* newspaper reported, "Chas. E. Pickett the disunion Pacific Republic advocate, has declared his intention to vote for Abraham Lincoln. He says he is in favor of the dissolution of the Union—believes that Lincoln's election will soonest accomplish that result, and therefore supports him."³¹¹ The reports from predominantly Democrat Oroville and Placer demonstrate the depth of the ideological divide in the state.

³⁰⁷ Edward L. Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: The Civil War in the Heart of America, 1859-1863*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2003), 69; Waite, *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire*, 161.

³⁰⁸ "Breckinridge State Convention." *Semi-Weekly Southern News* (Los Angeles, CA), September 19, 1860.

³⁰⁹ Waite, *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire*, 161.

³¹⁰ "Gran Bolters' Fizzle in Oroville." *Daily National Democrat* (Marysville, CA), August 1, 1860.

³¹¹ Pickett for Lincoln." *Placer Herald* (Rocklin, CA), September 15, 1860.

In late August, the *Daily National Democrat* named both of the state's immediate former governors, Weller and Latham, among "California Fire Eaters" who supported secession, concluding "the hottest California fire eaters are from the North."³¹² Going even further, the paper's editors ran an article from the *Nation* of San Francisco denouncing supporters of secession, calling out Senator Gwin specifically and warning Californians of secret disunion plans for the state, writing, "The arch enemies of the Union...are getting up a model Republic of the Pacific for you, and are now trying...to work upon the ambition of young men, and get them enlisted in the project."³¹³ Likely written by a future Union Democrat, the damning article demonstrates the depths of division within the party even months prior to the election.

Vocal support among advocates of disunion only intensified as the election approached. Californio Chivalry Enrique Abila penned an open letter to Antonio Maria Pico in mid-October disparaging Andrés Pico's new-found allegiance to the Republican Party and refuting his claims that Californios suffered under the Democratic Party's rule in California. A member of a well-respected Southern California family, Abila served as the second mayor of Los Angeles just prior to Americanization, having followed in the footsteps of many relatives who also filled the post in the city's history. Printed in a handbill, the letter hit the Democratic talking points of the day, complaining of the attention paid to the plight of Black Americans by the Republican Party and arguing that

³¹² "California Fire Eaters." *Daily National Democrat* (Marysville, California), August 28, 1860.

³¹³ "Why Should They Not Hang?" *Daily National Democrat* (Marysville, CA) October 9, 1860

enslaved persons should be allowed to remain in shackles.³¹⁴ Continuing with this argument, Abila wrote:

“You, sirs, desire to do with [Black Americans] what the Mexican government did with the Mission Indians in California. Those Indians were content and happy, sober and industrious, under the care of the venerable Fathers of San Francisco, who instructed them in religion, and showed them the virtues of labor. But, a group like yours rose up and spoke of *humanity*, and of the evil of keeping the Indians enslaved. Unfortunately, that group was triumphant in Mexico; and what was the result? The Indian became a drunk animal, working just to buy enough moonshine to get drunk; the Indian women became prostitutes—the plague of society. This is what you want to do to [Black Americans], take them away from their current happiness where they are useful to man, and degrade them like the Indians of California!”³¹⁵

Mirroring the arguments of slavery proponents, the letter’s publication came thanks to the efforts of several prominent Californios who remained loyal to the Democratic Party in this early period, including Cristobal Aguilar, Ignacio del Valle, Antonio F. Coronel, and Vicente Lugo, Diego Sepulveda, and Julian Chaves. Andrés Pico’s defection to the Republican Party signaled a sea change in the alliance between Californios and the state’s Chivalry Democrats and presaged a shift in the social and political structure of the state in the years that followed.

State Democrats furthered their propaganda crusade against their Republican opponents in the closing weeks of the campaign. A Spanish language handbill signed by Philip “Felipe” A. Roach, a Southern Democratic informant who lived in San Francisco, urged Californios to support the Democratic Party, warning of the supposedly deceitful

³¹⁴ Enrique Abila, Open letter to Antonio M. Pico, October 18, 1860. Antonio F. Coronel Collection, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Translated from Spanish.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

aims of the Lincoln Administration and Republican Party to challenge land ownership, an issue of great importance to landed Californios.³¹⁶ Citing slavery, Roach wrote, “Republicans humanitarian ideas are not inspired by a desire to improve the situation for the Blacks,” claiming that facts prove the presence of more free African Americans in the South than in the North and of their superior “moral and physical conditions” in the South.³¹⁷ Continuing in this incredulous vein, Roach further claimed to prove Northerners’ hypocrisy through their continued association with the slave trade, an association opposed by southern states who worked to prevent the practice.³¹⁸

Roach’s diatribe went on to explain the benefits of Breckinridge’s election for Californios, citing the similarities between the Southern planter class and Californio ranchers, from the ownership of land, inheritance traditions, the hatred of non-landed citizens, and a past affiliation with Spain.³¹⁹ Furthering his commitment to Southerners and Southern political aspirations, Roach expounded on the importance of establishing a transcontinental railroad through the southern United States, writing, “The best route, most practical and shortest, which is best protected from weather-related incidents, is the route from Los Angeles to Mississippi, through El Paso.”³²⁰ He continued by explaining

³¹⁶ Felipe A. Roach, Handbill, “Los Hijos del Pais,” October 16, 1861. Antonio F. Coronel Collection, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum, Los Angeles. Translated from Spanish; Born in Ireland, Phillip Augustine Roach immigrated to the New York at a young age. He migrated to California and entered the political fray as a representative to the California Constitutional Convention in 1849. A Democrat, Roach openly opposed Chinese immigration to the United States, but demonstrated support of Californios. (see Citlali Lucia Riddell. “Californio Local Liberalism: The Lasting Impact of Mexican Ideologies in California, 1848-1890,” University of California, Los Angeles, Dissertation, 2020.)

³¹⁷ Felipe A. Roach, “Los Hijos del Pais,” 2; Called *Clotilda*, the last ship to carry enslaved people from Africa to the United States arrived in Mobile, Alabama in July of 1860

³¹⁸ Felipe A. Roach, “Los Hijos del Pais,” 2

³¹⁹ Ibid, 3.

³²⁰ Ibid.

that the route could branch out northward from Los Angeles and “with time residents will benefit from the augmented value of their possessions as the train will move through their land, with commercial arteries from India to the United States.”³²¹

Dedicating the remainder of his statement to condemning the Republican Party, Roach claimed Republican officials opposed progress and sought to keep California, especially Southern California isolated, discontinuing the mail service through the Pony Express and advocating for a northern route for the railroad. Nearing the end of his diatribe, he summarized his views thusly: “Republican actions speak louder than their promises.”³²² Closing with a push for the Breckinridge campaign, Roach assured the audience that Breckinridge’s running mate Joseph Lane, a pro-slavery, pro-secession senator from Oregon, understood the Pacific states and was “one of us.”³²³ Like Southern California, Southern Oregon became home to many migrants from states where slavery thrived in the 1850s. A new state in 1859, Oregonians experienced the same discord and unrest caused by the war and the rest of the country, with the state’s Southern Democratic contingent mimicking many of the arguments of their counterparts in Southern California and other Southern sympathizing areas.³²⁴

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid, 4; A North Carolinian, Lane fought in the Mexican American War, earning an appointment as governor of the new Oregon Territory as a reward for his service by President Polk. Upon statehood, Lane became one of the Oregon’s first Senators, enjoying the support of southern Democratic transplants who made southern Oregon their home. Unabashedly pro-slavery and pro-secession, Lane’s views ruffled feathers in the new state and ultimately cost him his political career.

³²⁴ Jeff LaLande. “‘Dixie’ of the Pacific Northwest: Southern Oregon’s Civil War.” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 100, No. 1, The Civil War in Oregon. (Spring 1999), 36.

Lincoln's platform and the effective campaigning of his surrogates earned him the support of many young people across the state. Identifying themselves as part of the national Wide Awake movement—a moniker alluding to members' nighttime marches and enthusiasm for progressive causes—these clubs formed throughout California after Lincoln's nomination and attracted many to become engaged in the campaign.³²⁵ In spite of vocal opposition from influential Democrats, Lincoln carried California in the 1860 election, earning a narrow plurality in the state's most populous counties, all of which were located in Northern California.³²⁶ In Democratic Southern California, Lincoln only received 20% of the vote in Los Angeles County, totaling about half the vote of Southern Democrat John Breckinridge in that county, but won Democratic San Bernardino County to the surprise of many.³²⁷

As Chicago's *Tribune* mentioned at the time, delegates "conceded on all hands that Lincoln would poll a larger vote in [California] than any other candidate."³²⁸ The article also stated that the Democrats "are everywhere divided, and quarreling among themselves," while the Republicans "are organizing themselves into a compact body, with confident expectation of carrying the State."³²⁹ The adverse consequences of the nationwide split within the Democratic Party became quite apparent as the election neared. In a letter written to Cave Couets from Los Angeles physician John Griffin, the

³²⁵ Helen B. Waters, "Confederates in Southern California," *Historical Society of Southern California* 35, No. 1 (1953): 50.

³²⁶ Waters, 51; Abraham Lincoln won California with a margin of only 700 votes, narrowly beating John C. Breckinridge. (see: Richard Hurley. *California and the Civil War* (Charleston, NC: History Press, 2017) 38.)

³²⁷ Waters, 52; "A State Election." *Sacramento Daily Union*, November 15, 1860.

³²⁸ "The Campaign in California." *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1860.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

latter remarked on results of an election in Kentucky, stating, “this takes one wing of the Democrats a little aback.”³³⁰ With the outcome of the election triggering the domino effect of attempted secession throughout the American South, Lincoln’s victory spurred disunion sentiment among California Democrats. Just days after the election, rumors swirled of a new San Francisco newspaper devoted specifically to advocating for a “Pacific Confederacy” comprised of California and Oregon.³³¹ Welcomed in Oregon’s agricultural south, where talk of disunion dated back to the 1850s, the possibility of a united republic on the pacific became a topic of discussion throughout the early months of the war.³³²

Soon after the election, California’s own congressional representatives began surreptitious discussions of the probability of an independent Pacific Republic. Writing privately to Charles R. Street of Marysville, Democratic Representative John C. Burch of San Francisco prophesized that Lincoln’s inauguration in March could result in a call for secession in federal and state legislatures, forcing legislators to make a decision.³³³ Recognizing the divide within the state, Burch wrote cryptically, “the action of the people will depend on events to transpire...and the way matters are managed.”³³⁴ Heeding Burch’s warning, Street broached the subject of disunion with Marysville residents prior

³³⁰ John Strother Griffin, Letter to Cave Johnson Coutts, September 8, 1860. Coutts Collections. Huntington Library.

³³¹ “A Pacific Confederacy.” *Sacramento Bee*, November 19, 1860.

³³² LaLande, 42-43.

³³³ “The Scheme of Secession.” *Express* (Marysville, CA). August 24, 1863; Although written in 1860, the letters between John C. Burch, Charles R. Street, and Street’s brother regarding secessionist activity in Marysville were not exposed until the summer of 1863 when they were published by several state newspapers.

³³⁴ “The Scheme of Secession,” *Express*.

to the news of South Carolina's declaration of secession, including James Shields, a politician and military veteran, who theorized that financial, political, and social interests would assure California's continued loyalty to the Union. As relayed by Street, Shields claimed he refused secessionist proposals for him to "take the initiative" in secession efforts in the state during that tense period.³³⁵

In the midst of the chaos of the national secession crisis, the editors of the *Sonora Democrat* newspaper made their allegiance to the disunionist cause clear in early January of 1861. In a now infamous statement, they wrote:

"We are for a Pacific Republic... We believe it to be the true policy of California, in such an event, to cut loose from both sections, and not involve herself in general ruin. She has all the elements of greatness within her borders. Situated thousands of miles from the distracted States, she would be an asylum of peace and safety... and many thousands would flock to her shores—the effect of which must be to build up on the Pacific a mighty, prosperous and independent nation... If the foul spirit of fanaticism which has run riot in the North during the past quarter of a century... is to culminate with the destruction of the Confederacy, we would be loth, indeed, to see our young State arrayed on the side of injustice and oppression."³³⁶

Weeks later, *Los Angeles Star* editor Henry Hamilton expressed unease with the move toward disunion spreading across the country, proclaiming "There are still sensible people at the South" and reprinting a variety of editorials from newspapers across the region that condemned the move.³³⁷ Despite the voices of Unionists, the *New York Times* warned of secessionist movements in California, writing, "under the rallying cry of a

³³⁵ "Another Letter about the Pacific Republic Scheme." *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco, CA). September 5, 1863; Shields went on to serve as a Brigadier General for the federal army during the war before returning to California briefly in 1863 ("James Shields." *American Civil War Database*. Accessed 22 February 2023. <https://www.civilwardata.com>).

³³⁶ "One Paper for a Pacific Confederacy." *Sonora Democrat* (Sonora, CA), January 8, 1861.

³³⁷ Henry Hamilton, ed. "Southern Conservative Opinion." *Los Angeles Star*, January 21, 1861.

‘Pacific Republic,’ they will, bye and bye, endeavor to advance their programme [sic] by forming a Slave State of Southern and Lower California, with a view to joining the ‘Southern Confederacy’ as the alternative should they fail to make an impression upon the people of California and Oregon, ultimately, in favor of a Pacific Republic.”³³⁸

Concurrently, agriculturalists actively engaged in experiments to determine the viability of crops from the American South in Southern California, generating, as Hamilton reported, “considerable interest...to introduce the growth of tobacco into this section of the country.”³³⁹

Offering a counterpoint to secessionist rhetoric, Oregon’s newly elected Senator Edward D. Baker rallied Unionists in San Francisco on October 26, forewarning of Southern legislators’ motives in the west and denouncing slavery. A longtime close friend of Abraham Lincoln and a former resident of California, Baker referenced the forthcoming presidential election, stating, “People of California, you meet soon, as is your custom every four years, to conduct a peaceful revolution. There is no danger. Disunion is far away,” he continued, “[all] the omens are good, and the best of omens is a good cause.”³⁴⁰ A skillful orator, Baker’s message resonated with the city’s loyalists, strengthening their resolve in the face of vocal disunionists. He departed for Washington, D.C. shortly after to take his seat in the senate and went on to play an important role in

³³⁸ “Disunion the Pacific.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 4, 1861.

³³⁹ Henry Hamilton, ed. “Tobacco Plant,” *Los Angeles Star*, January 6, 1860.

³⁴⁰ “From California.; Col. E.D. Baker’s Speech,” *New York Times*, November 14, 1860.

the Lincoln administration's approach to political appointments in California and the west before losing his life on the battlefield a year later.³⁴¹

While Lincoln's election would not be confirmed in a Joint Session of Congress until February 1861, Antonio Maria Pico, along with three other California electors met in early December where they unanimously voted for the Lincoln-Hamlin ticket.³⁴²

Andrés Pico wrote to friend Enrique Abila, a staunch Democrat, early that month about the coming war, stating, "we will have civil war, and it is necessary that we remain united [and] begin to prepare our countrymen so they are not deceived."³⁴³ He closed with a postscript asking Abila to speak with other Californios, including Chivalry Sheriff Tomás Sanchez, about ways to provide aid to "their country."³⁴⁴ Though still a Democrat at the time of his letter to Abila, Pico's eventual defection from the party months later served as an actual and symbolic rupture in the alliance between Californios and white southerners and set the stage for the political disruption in the years to come.³⁴⁵

³⁴¹ Robert S. Harper, *Lincoln and the Press* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951), 96; Historian Elijah Kennedy credited that Edward Baker's speech as a contributing factor to California's loyalty during the Civil War. See: Elijah R. Kennedy, *The Contest for California in 1861: How E.D. Baker Saved the Pacific States to the Union* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912; Senator Edward Dickinson Baker died during the Battle of Ball's Bluff on October 21, 1861.

³⁴² "Meeting of the Presidential Electors." *The Placer Herald* (Rocklin, California), December 8, 1860.

³⁴³ Andrés Pico, Letter to Enrique Abila, February 16, 1861. Ignacio del Valle Collection, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Translated from Spanish.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Salomon, 124.

Chapter 4

Rebels in California

“Preparations are being made for revolution,
and a Pacific Republic will be formed.”³⁴⁶

With the region so far removed from the national seat of political power in Washington, D.C., the threat of secession in the Far West caused real concern for Abraham Lincoln’s incoming administration. Reliant on western ore to fund the conflict and fearing loss of connection with the Pacific Coast, the administration kept as close a watch as possible on the happenings in the western states and territories.³⁴⁷ Nonetheless, fear of widespread insurrection in the west unnerved the Lincoln administration, a situation worsened by the unreliability of methods of communication that prevented them from gaining a clear understanding of sympathy for the rebellion in the region.³⁴⁸ Reports of public expressions of support for secession by the state’s representatives in congress, and the State Assembly and Senate left administration officials unsure of the stability of the most populous state in the west. By the time of Lincoln’s inauguration in early March, seven states announced their intention to secede, with many more on the cusp of joining the rebellion.

³⁴⁶ Boyd Finch, *Confederate Pathway to the Pacific: Major Sherod Hunter and Arizona Territory, C.S.A.*, (Tucson: Arizona Historical Society, 1996), 64.

³⁴⁷ According to Philip L. Fradkin, “unprecedented amounts” of gold and silver extracted from western Nevada’s Comstock Lode “sustained eastern banks and the Federal government” during the Civil War. In 1864, the Comstock Lode yielded \$16 million in bullion; Philip L. Fradkin and Andy Anderson, *Stagecoach* (New York: Simon & Schuster Source, 2002), 68-70.

³⁴⁸ Ball, “Liberty, Empire, and Civil War in the American West” in *Empire and Liberty: The Civil War in the West*, 68.

With the American West manned by troops from the Departments of the Pacific and New Mexico, as well as local militias, the new administration addressed the political maneuverings of secessionists in the Far West through political appointments, selecting loyal Republicans for key positions across the region.³⁴⁹ Counseled by Oregon Senator Edward D. Baker, a former California resident, rather than the state's own elected representatives, the appointments of the Lincoln administration resulted in significant criticism from the newly-marginalized Democratic leaders throughout the state. Making selections from outside the affected cities and counties, many of the administration's appointments raised eyebrows even among Republicans. As reported by Henry Hamilton in the Democratic mouthpiece of Southern California, the *Los Angeles Star*, "So we have imported to fill our local officers, men who have no connection with our county directly or indirectly," he continued "[we] wonder that Abe...didn't expatriate suckers for every office in the State."³⁵⁰ Given the freedom previous enjoyed by Senator Gwin to fill positions with Democrats, this move by the administration proved especially consequential.

As anti-Lincoln, pro-secession chatter intensified in California, communities across the state split over support for the rebellion, with tensions running high as the question of California's loyalty remained an unknown. Depending on their political allegiance, state of origin, and activities in their communities, Californians varied in their expectations of what could and would happen in case of a civil war. Once news of the

³⁴⁹ Prior to the war appointments in the Far West, particularly in California, were primarily held by Southern Democrats.

³⁵⁰ Henry Hamilton, ed., "The Appointments," *Los Angeles Star*, April 26, 1862. USC Digital Library, Los Angeles Star Collection, 1851-1864.

attack on Fort Sumter reached California on April 24, twelve days after the start of the conflict, hundreds left their adopted state within weeks, joining both sides of the battlefield, while others remained, engaging in an ideological war against their friends and neighbors.³⁵¹ Met with disappointment by some and excitement by others, the reality of the long threatened war of secession left many uneasy, particularly as reports of disunionist activities in the state increased.

One of the greatest perceived threats to the Lincoln administration in the early weeks of his presidency was Albert Sidney Johnston, commander of the Department of the Pacific and a Southerner. Among his final acts as President, James Buchanan appointed Johnston to the position and ordered him west in late 1860. A Kentuckian by birth and Texan by preference, Johnston spent much of his life in the military, both in the federal and Texian armies, rising to the rank of Brigadier General in both organizations.³⁵² As a participant in the slave trade, Johnston's orders to oversee the Pacific division at that critical period in the nation's history served as a part of the Buchanan administration's larger strategy to strengthen the South in preparation for a civil war, which included reinforcing southern arsenals. Arriving in January of 1861, Johnston's Southern sympathies immediately cast a shadow of doubt over the veteran, making him a target for both loyalists—who distrusted him—and secessionists—who hoped to bring him to their cause.

³⁵¹ John W. Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days, 1860-65*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, (1977) 2013), 24.

³⁵² Hurley, 43-44.

During his short tenure as commander of the Department of the Pacific, General Johnston worked to secure San Francisco from such activities, fortifying the military fortifications and arsenal in and around the Bay, rooting out and dismissing secessionist sympathizers from Army employ, responding to reports of disloyal activities, and destroying vessels belonging to disunionists.³⁵³ As he worked to ensure the stability of western forces, Johnston fielded proposals to participate in a coup and allow secessionists to take control of federal fortifications and their munitions. He later claimed to have proclaimed his intention to “defend the property of the United States with every resource at my command,” and ultimately chose to resign his post on April 9, 1861, days before the official start of hostilities.³⁵⁴ A highly respected military figure, the Texan fielded offers from both the Lincoln administration and the rebel leaders prior to his resignation. The arrival of his replacement Edwin V. Sumner within two weeks of his notice demonstrated to Johnston and local civilian and military leaders the new Lincoln administration’s lack of faith in his loyalty.

Years after the war, Colonel Orlando Hurley Moore of the Sixth U.S. Infantry revealed the depths of the secessionist plot in which disunionists hoped to involve Johnston. He claimed that, by early 1861, secessionist officers controlled the federal arsenal in Benicia, down the bay from San Francisco, where they held “sixty-thousand

³⁵³ Robert J. Chandler, “The Velvet Glove: The Army During the Secession Crisis in California, 1860-1861,” *Journal of the West* 20, No. 4 (1981): 40.

³⁵⁴ David Keehn, *Knights of the Golden Circle: Secret Empire, Southern Secession, Civil War*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 131; Hurley, 45.

stands of arms” sent to effectuate a rebellion.³⁵⁵ According to Moore, he worked with intelligence agents to resist the planned coup and “strike down any officers who stood in their way who were committed to this infamous plot of treason.” Conspiring with loyalist citizens and officers, Moore and his compatriots prepared for an attack that never materialized. Convinced of Johnston’s culpability, Moore claimed the disgraced officer failed to execute his devious plot due to the arrival of General Sumner, although definitive proof of his complicity never materialized.

While the allegations of his role in a larger plot to link California to the rebellion lacked proof, Johnston’s allegiance to the Southern cause and his status as a well-respected military figure appeared to pose a serious threat to the state. After leaving his post, Johnston and his wife Eliza moved south to Los Angeles where they stayed with her brother, Dr. John Strother Griffin. A longtime resident of the city, Griffin hailed from Virginia and arrived in California with the American military following the Mexican American War. An unabashed supporter of slavery and the rebel cause, Griffin, along with his sister, spent the war spewing rebel propaganda and denigrating loyalist Angelenos. Contradictorily, Griffin contracted recently freed Biddy Mason as a midwife and maintained lifelong friendships with Californios. Sustaining intimate acquaintances with the region’s Democratic leaders, Griffin made his views on slavery, the war, and Republicans known through his correspondence and community interactions.

³⁵⁵ “Colonel Orlando H. Moore Played Important Part in Early California History,” [date and newspaper unknown]. Col. O.H. Moore Civil War Letters, Stanford University Library, Department of Special Collections.

The Johnston's arrival in Los Angeles in May 1861 coincided with an increase in the federal military's presence in the city at the behest of Captain Winfield Scott Hancock, Quartermaster of the Southern District of the Department of the Pacific and the highest ranking official in the city.³⁵⁶ For weeks before the upheaval in command of the Department, Hancock contended with secessionist rhetoric and rebel activities in Los Angeles. In addition to the nearly two hundred men who joined rebellion in the east when the conflict began, militia companies formed throughout Southern California to aid the Southern cause in the early weeks of the war.³⁵⁷ Led by political, social, and public safety figures who openly sympathized with the rebellion, groups like the Los Angeles Mounted Rifles and the Monte Mounted Rifles formed in support of the Southern rebellion. Captain Hancock warned of the high probability of insurrection in a region populated by Southern sympathizers, a fact that caused anxiety and fear among its residents.³⁵⁸ A story published in the *Mesilla Times* in the early months cautioned, "private letters...from California, indicate a high feeling of political excitement in that state; preparations are being made for revolution, and a Pacific Republic will be formed."³⁵⁹

Incidents of public support for the rebellion took place across the region. El Monte, home to an especially high preponderance of settlers from Texas, held a parade where a rebel flag flew. In Los Angeles, supporters chanted anti-Lincoln songs and loudly proclaimed their support for the South. Reports reached military officials of

³⁵⁶ Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days*, 52.

³⁵⁷ Ronald C. Woolsey, "Politics of a Lost Cause: 'Seceshers' and Democrats in Southern California during the Civil War," *California History* 69, No. 4 (Winter 1990/1991): 376.

³⁵⁸ Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days*, 47.

³⁵⁹ Finch, 64.

Southern sympathizers meeting in communities across Southern California, including throughout San Bernardino County.³⁶⁰ Despite ultimately proving unorganized and lacking sufficient support or the initiative to do more than bluster, these groups served as a perceived threat for military officials and loyal residents alike throughout the war.³⁶¹ As noted in news reports and private correspondence from the period, opposition from Unionist Californians led to occasional violent interactions, leaving communities on edge.

Southern sympathizers in Los Angeles felt particularly emboldened to express their views in the early months of the conflict. Avowed secessionists held meetings in public places, like the Bella Union Hotel—which the *Star* described as “headquarters of the most noted Secessionists”—and cheered for Jefferson Davis on the streets.³⁶² Conspicuous among the vocal secessionists in the city stood Peter Biggs, a formerly enslaved man who called Los Angeles home for many years. Whether his views served as a survival tool in Southern Democrat dominated Los Angeles or actually reflected his true political and social perspectives, Biggs made his allegiance clear throughout the war.³⁶³ As one of twelve African Americans living in Los Angeles at the time of the war, Biggs position as a free person remained tenuous before the Thirteenth Amendment

³⁶⁰ Waite, *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire*, 188; In Los Angeles, the Bella Union hotel served as the city’s meeting point for Chivalry secessionists who openly flaunted their allegiance to the rebel cause. (See Maymie R. Krythe, “First Hotel of Old Los Angeles ‘The Romantic Bella Union,’” *The Historical Society of Southern California* 33, No. 2 (June 1951): 162.)

³⁶¹ As L. Boyd Finch explained in *Confederate Pathway to the Pacific: Major Sherod Hunter and Arizona Territory, C.S.A.*, “if an organized Confederate military force ever entered California...‘it would inevitably inaugurate a civil war’” within the state; Finch, 99.

³⁶² Maymie R. Krythe, “First Hotel of Old Los Angeles: The Romantic Bella Union,” *The Historical Society of Southern California* 33, No. 1 (1951), 164.

³⁶³ Kendra Field and Daniel Lynch, “‘Master of Ceremonies’: The World of Peter Biggs in Civil War-Era Los Angeles,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 47, No. 4 (November 2016): 386.

rendered the practice illegal. Nonetheless, Biggs spent the war years on the perch of his barber shop or on the streets of the city cheering for Jefferson Davis and celebrating military victories by rebel forces, including the horrific massacre at Fort Pillow where over 300 African American men, women, and children lost their lives after surrendering to rebel troops.³⁶⁴

In response to overt actions from Southern sympathizers, General Sumner ordered Company K, 1st Dragoons to Los Angeles from Fort Tejon not long after his arrival in San Francisco. Under command of Colonel James H. Carleton, the company helped Captain Hancock maintain control of the city and surrounding areas.³⁶⁵ The presence of the military emboldened loyal Americans to voice their support for the cause, forming pro-Union organizations and planning a “Grand Union Demonstration” for May 25, which rebel sympathizers vehemently opposed and even threatened violence to prevent it from happening.³⁶⁶ The event emulated the large, successful “Great Union” demonstration in San Francisco earlier in the month, which drew an estimated 25,000 people and cemented the city’s reputation as a loyalist stronghold.³⁶⁷

Despite initial claims of neutrality during his short time in Southern California, Johnston became a draw for disaffected Angelenos and former military figures who hoped to play a part in the eastern conflict. Lincoln administration officials recognized the potential threat posed by Johnston in the already unpredictable region, leading Secretary of War Simon Cameron to issue an arrest warrant for the former general, a

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days*, 55.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Matthews, 89.

move that many theorized cemented Johnston's determination to join the conflict.³⁶⁸ With the news of his impending arrest, Johnston elected to make his way to Texas, where his former counterpart, General David E. Twiggs, had surrendered military installations and stores, before defecting to the rebel military in the spring of 1861.³⁶⁹ Through Twiggs betrayal, Texas ultimately became a safe haven for rebel sympathizers from the west, including Johnston and many other traitors from California. The opportunity for Johnston's escape presented itself with the planned departure of a local militia regiment, the Los Angeles Mounted Rifles, from the city in mid-June with blessing of the city's Sheriff, Californio Tomás Sanchez.³⁷⁰ Travelling in the early weeks of the summer, the group made their way across the desert of the New Mexico Territory, through Southern-sympathizing Tucson, before reaching Texas where they joined the rebellion.³⁷¹

Although Sheriff Sanchez supported the Southern Democratic cause, he did not move east as many of his confederates did, but instead played an instrumental role by helping to arm the Mounted Rifles prior to their eastward expedition to serve the rebellion.³⁷² An unrepentant Chivalry supporter, Sanchez's allegiance brought him under the watchful gaze of military officials in the city throughout the war.³⁷³ A member of a Californio family with a long history in Southern California and a landowner, Sanchez

³⁶⁸ Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days*, 62.

³⁶⁹ Among the group congregating around Johnston in Los Angeles were George Pickett, Lewis Armistead, and Richard Garnett, all of whom resigned from the Federal military at the outset of the war. The three men would face off against the Major General Winfield Scott Hancock in the Battle of Gettysburg in July of 1863 where Armistead and Garnett would lose their lives.

³⁷⁰ Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days*, 62.

³⁷¹ Albert Sidney Johnson became the highest-ranking military figure in the rebel army. He died from injuries sustained during the Battle of Shiloh in April 1862.

³⁷² Pitt, 234.

³⁷³ Ibid.

often expressed displeasure with the American government and advocated for the Pico Bill just prior to the war. Rooted in the Bear Flag Revolt in California—a conflict in which he served—Sanchez’s distrust of Americans may have influenced his pro-secession stance during the war.

As Sanchez remained steadfast in his support of the Chivalry agenda, his friend Andrés Pico began his ideological shift away from the party. As a member of an influential family and the author of the Democrat-backed Pico Bill, Pico came to the attention of Lincoln administration officials who feared his family’s influence could sway other Californios to oppose their plan to boost support for the Union. As a result, Edward F. Beale, the newly appointed United States Surveyor General of California, demanded both Andrés and his brother Pío “define their positions as regards their positions to the Union and federal government.”³⁷⁴ While Pío openly affirmed his confidence in President Lincoln, the Union, and the constitution, Andrés declared his support for the Union and constitution, but failed to reference Lincoln or his policies.³⁷⁵ Nonetheless, his pro-Union stance demonstrated a clear shift away from Chivalry politics, a break that deepened as the war progressed.

In the early months of the war, officials in Southern California dealt with secessionist cells across the region. In the summer of 1861, the *San Bernardino Patriot*, a new and ultimately short-lived Republican newspaper edited by Edwin Sherman, reported the presence of “many secessionists in the southern counties of the state,”

³⁷⁴ “Correspondence between E.F. Beale, Esq., and Messrs Pico,” *Semi-Weekly Southern News*, June 14, 1861.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

adding, “it says the secessionists are recruiting all through these counties” and that “Mexicans are being enlisted, and everyone who can raise a horse is busy drumming up recruits.”³⁷⁶ Marginalized by white settlers in California, the Mexican population of the state, with their status as recently colonized people and growing numbers, greatly concerned military officials. In the state as part of a multi-year geologic survey of California, geologist William H. Brewer noted the fear of Mexican cooperation with southern sympathizers and of secessionists attempts to incite the hatred felt by Mexicans against the American government.³⁷⁷

As reported by the media at the time, Californios and Mexicans factored into rebel plans to create chaos in the state. The editors of the *Sacramento Bee* reported about Southern California, “Revolution was to be stirred up in our midst; a surveying or revenue schooner at San Pedro...was to be seized, and all the horrors of civil war let loose upon this southern country,” continuing “Some of the native Californians...refused to engage in it... They said that their own country had sold them once without their consent; but that they would not be sold again, but would remain true to the Government.”³⁷⁸ Despite the actions of the loyal contingent, the *Bee*’s reporting referenced unidentified figures from the “Spanish population” who engaged in seditious

³⁷⁶ “Secessionists Recruiting in the Southern Counties,” *Daily National Democrat* (Marysville, CA), June 30, 1861, 1861; According to an editorial by Edwin A. Sherman in the *Sacramento Bee* on April 29, 1862, the *San Bernardino Patriot* was only published for three months in the summer of 1862.

³⁷⁷ Francis P. Farquhar, ed., *Up and Down California in 1860-1864: The Journal of William H. Brewer, Professor of Agriculture in Sheffield Scientific School from 1864 to 1903*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 197.

³⁷⁸ “The Bear Flag at Los Angeles.” *Sacramento Bee*. June 24, 1861.

actions before being stopped when news of their plans to march a bear flag into Los Angeles became more widely known and resulted in efforts to prevent their movement.³⁷⁹

In an attempt to court the support of the Spanish-speaking population, Democratic operatives published a Spanish language broadside titled “Californios, Leed, Leed, y Reflecionad!” or “Californios, Read, Read, and Reflect!” in the summer of 1861. Signed by “A Citizen,” the document openly blamed the war on Republicans and warned that Californians would bear the financial brunt of the conflict. Listing a series of taxes supposedly imposed on Californians for that purpose, the document stated, “These taxes will increase in the coming year, and every year after that, until the working citizen won’t have enough money to support their family.”³⁸⁰ Then, citing “section 16,” the alarmist “Citizen” cautioned the audience of the possibility that a tax collector—“chosen by Mr. Lincoln”—could enter their home and search through their personal belongings to determine the value of their holdings for taxation purposes.³⁸¹ Comparing Lincoln’s power to Julius Caesar’s influence in ancient Rome, the writer closed with a call for the Democratic Party, stating, “Californios! If you want war and taxation vote for the Republican party; otherwise, vote for the Democratic party that advocates for peace, and is not in favor of those who impose these ruinous taxes.”³⁸² A familiar tactic from the 1850s, the reference to taxes as a means of imposing fear into Californios demonstrated the importance of their support for white legislators.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Handbill, “Californios, Leed, Leed, Reflecionad!”, c1861. Antonio F. Coronel Collection, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles. Translated from Spanish.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid.

As Edwin Sherman reported in the *Patriot*, “The Secessionists were in regular organized armed bodies, and threatened the lives of the few Union men in that section and the destruction of their property.”³⁸³ Continuing, he wrote of the obvious preferential treatment given to secessionists over Unionists in San Bernardino, and described the many Southern-sympathizers in positions of military, political, and social prominence in the state as a whole, including some who had taken the oath of loyalty to the United States despite expressing disunionist tendencies. In September, the *Daily Alta California* newspaper published a letter from the secessionist stronghold of Holcomb Valley in San Bernardino County that reiterated the concerns expressed in the *Patriot*, writing:

“This place is getting hot. The secessionists are holding secret meetings two or three times a week. There is a rendezvous on the Colorado, and runners are continually passing back and forth. Some of the leading men of Los Angeles and San Bernardino are encouraging them. The Union men hold meetings here every Saturday night, and we are well armed, and we think that if they make a break, we can clean them so quick that it will make their heads swim. They are very saucy, and some of the Union men expect lively times before long.”³⁸⁴

The letter continued by speculating of the impending arrival of rebel forces under Major Earl Van Dorn from Texas, which, they claimed, would “revolutionize Southern California.”³⁸⁵ This news refers to rumors of a militia believed to have been forming throughout the southwest with the express purpose of establishing a foothold in Mexico from which to execute their plans. Reporting in the *Los Angeles Star* by its editor Henry Hamilton furthered the rumors, providing specifics of Van Dorn’s advanced guard’s

³⁸³ Sherman, Edwin A., ed., “Col. Carleton and his Command.” *Sacramento Bee*. April 29, 1862.

³⁸⁴ “Letter from Holcomb Valley,” *Daily Alta California*, September 2, 1861.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

movements, their arms, and supplies, and even alleging plans by Californians to meet them.³⁸⁶ Although Van Dorn did not move further west than Texas at the time, the threat of such a possibility instilled fear for many southern Californians in the first months of the war.

Regional concerns heightened at rumors of the presence of supporters of the Knights of the Golden Circle (KGC), a secret organization whose members worked surreptitiously to benefit the rebel cause throughout the war. Based on the belief that the American constitution “was a tyrannical document,” the KGC formed in 1855 in response to the growing abolition sentiment in the country and partially hastened by the rise to prominence of the Republican Party.³⁸⁷ Adopting the “chivalrous” title of knight, the group drafted a constitution in which members pledged the following: “to stand united in the promotion of Southern interests, and opposition to the encroachments of abolitionism; and...in case of any encroachment on the part of the United States Government, to do all within their power to establish a ‘free Southern Government.’”³⁸⁸ Taking an anti-government, secessionist stance from the beginning, the group’s leadership made their intentions clear, stating that “the Southern mind must be instructed, and the Southern heart fired, in order to precipitate the Cotton States into a revolution.”³⁸⁹

³⁸⁶ “Filibustering.” *Stockton Independent*. August 12, 1861.

³⁸⁷ A Member of the Order, “An Authentic Exposition of the ‘K.G.C.’ ‘Knights of the Golden Circle;’ Or, A History of Secession from 1834 to 1861,” (Indianapolis, In: C.O. Perrine, Publisher, 1861), 5; Concerned with guaranteeing the continuation of chattel slavery, the KGC advocated for the annexation of territory in Cuba and Mexico to expand the physical territory in which the practice would be implemented.(see J.W. Pomfrey, “A True Disclosure and Exposition of the Knights of the Golden Circle: Including the Secret Signs, Grips, and Charges, of the Three Degrees, as Practiced by the Order.” Cincinnati: Printed for the Author, 1861.)

³⁸⁸ Ibid, 8-9.

³⁸⁹ Pomfrey, v.

Working closely with secessionist newspapers to spread disunionist propaganda in the years leading up to and during the war, KGC members coordinated with political leaders to bolster the rebel arsenal as the conflict came under way. As relayed by “an old Indiana farmer” who had dealings with the group, the KGC’s tact focused on “misrepresentation,” which an unknown member described as “like an army with banner” to the “Southern cause.”³⁹⁰ Continuing, the farmer recalled being told that newspapers, like the *Chicago Times* and *Cincinnati Enquirer*, among others, “are fomenting a fuss that will set the East and West at loggerheads,” an outcome that served to emphasize the divisions simmering under the surface.³⁹¹ Early efforts to stage a coup under Albert Sidney Johnston in the first months of the war reportedly included members of the KGC. As opined by the editors of the *Sacramento Bee*, “The K.G.C.’s of California do nothing seemingly but go about the streets misrepresenting, and their organs in this State teach them the art of falsifying.”³⁹²

Finding support among Peace Democrats, or Copperheads as they came to be known, in the western United States, reports of the KGC’s recruitment and paramilitary drilling by members throughout California raised alarm bells for many. With members from the state’s sociopolitical elite, including leading Democratic politicians, such as former Senator William M. Gwin, former Governor John Bigler, and other prominent Democrats, the organization successfully raised money and stockpiled munitions to assist the Confederate war effort in the state. Southern sympathizing strongholds such as

³⁹⁰ “The Value of Misrepresentation,” *Sacramento Bee*, April 9, 1863.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid.

Marysville in northern California and El Monte in southern California served as easy recruiting grounds for the group.³⁹³ Dedicating themselves to the rebellion, members of the San Bernardino “castle,” as chapters were known, pledged “our lives, our property, and our sacred honor to sustain our brethren and of the Southern States in the just defense of all their constitutional rights.”³⁹⁴ The KGC and its related secret society, the Knights of the Columbian Star, remained active in California and the west throughout the war.³⁹⁵

San Bernardino’s Holcomb Valley proved a hotbed of secessionist rhetoric and seemingly a center for KGC activity in the area. As reported by the *Stockton Independent* in the summer of 1861, locals identified Colonel Jack Hays as the leader of a movement of obstructionist “filibusters” who concealed a “secret design” and “[awaited] a favorable opportunity to act treason.”³⁹⁶ Just weeks later, the paper reported, “A band of forty-five filibusters, supposed to be preparing for a march overland to aid the Secessionist of Texas and Missouri, have organized in Holcomb Valley.”³⁹⁷ Unionists reportedly thwarted KCG efforts in the area, preparing themselves for armed resistance. Rebel-sympathizing minister Joshua Phelps referenced this when writing of a well-known secessionist in San Francisco, stating, “‘you have probably seen Dr. Fox’s name in the Press as the supposed Secretary of the supposed traitors secret organization called the ‘Knights of the

³⁹³ Keehn, 129.

³⁹⁴ Waite, *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire*, 185.

³⁹⁵ Keehn, 184.

³⁹⁶ “Filibustering,” *Stockton Independent*, August 12, 1861.

³⁹⁷ “Filibusters,” *Stockton Independent*, August 22, 1861.

Columbian Star.”³⁹⁸ Fox himself claimed the group’s membership swelled to 24,000 supporters in the early part of the war.³⁹⁹

No one was above suspicion. Even John C. Frémont, leader of the occupying forces in California during the Mexican American War and a favorite among many residents, could not escape accusations of allegiance to the disloyal group. An article published in the *San Francisco Journal* claimed the former Republican presidential candidate secretly supported the idea of a Pacific Republic, stating that the rebellion opened an opportunity for an “invasion of Sonora by Californians,” which would earn the support of “the French Emperor, and aid could be relied upon in the way of a few men, cannon, arms, and ammunition.”⁴⁰⁰ With the French invasion of Mexico and the KGC’s alleged desire to expand southern influence in Mexico and the Caribbean, these claims brought to light additional areas of concern for supporters of the Union. In response, the military formed a California Native Cavalry comprised largely of Californios and Mexicans to patrol the border with Mexico and suppress rebel movements in the area.

The origins of the new Cavalry group came about in an effort to gain the endorsement of the state’s non-immigrant population. Initially offered to Andrés Pico, leadership of the Cavalry went to Californio Salvador Vallejo, with many others, like José Pico of the Northern California branch of the family, joining the ranks. Pico soon issued a call to arms to the “Sons of California.”⁴⁰¹ Calling for the “rebellion” to be “crushed” and for the rebelling states to “pay obedience to the Stars and Stripes,” Pico

³⁹⁸ Joshua Phelps, Letter to Benjamin D. Wilson, December 10, 1864. Wilson Papers, Huntington Library.

³⁹⁹ Keehn, 174.

⁴⁰⁰ “Fremont a Traitor,” *San Joaquin Republican*, October 1, 1862.

⁴⁰¹ Pitt, 230-1.

looked ahead to a fortified “united” nation.⁴⁰² Growing in numbers, the Native Cavalry also came to include many South Americans and American settlers.⁴⁰³ Proudly wearing their Union blue uniforms, these loyalists even became fixtures in rebel-sympathizing towns like Los Angeles and spent much of the war patrolling the Colorado River area near the border with Mexico through New Mexico Territory to Texas.⁴⁰⁴

In the state Executive Office, Governor Downey, recognized the challenges presented to Democratic hegemony in California. Writing to his friend Benjamin “Don Benito” Wilson—a Tennessean who migrated to Mexican California and assimilated into Californio culture—Downey mentioned the need to strategize against “Black Republicans” in the next election, stating that his “only object will be to see the state government in the hands of true Democrats who alone can do any thing [sic] towards saving the Union.”⁴⁰⁵ He continued by railing against “cursed fanatics” who “style themselves Patriots” despite being the cause of the war.⁴⁰⁶ Such sentiments from the state’s political leader to one of Southern California’s most prominent Democrats is demonstrative of the transformation brought on by the war. Downey’s sentiments were those of the War Democrats, members of the party that opposed both the war and efforts to negotiate with rebels, as opposed to Copperheads or Peace Democrats that opposed the

⁴⁰² Ibid, 231.

⁴⁰³ Ibid, 231-2.

⁴⁰⁴ Charged with protecting lines of communication and preventing a possible alliance between rebels and French Imperialist forces in Mexico, a battalion of Native Cavalry did briefly encounter Mexican troops under the French flag, but the confrontation ended without violence. (See Leonard Pitt, *Decline of the Californios*, 232-233)

⁴⁰⁵ Governor John G. Downey, Letter to Benjamin D. Wilson, May 19, 1861. Wilson Papers, Huntington Library.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

war but advocated for a negotiated peace. The distinction between these two factions rendered the Democratic Party politically impotent during the war, particularly after the formation of the Union Party, comprised of both Democrats and Republicans.

The efforts of disloyal California Democrats became national news in the Fall of 1861 when news of the arrest of Senator William M. Gwin, San Francisco District Attorney Calhoun Benham, and Los Angeles attorney Joseph Lancaster Brent became public knowledge.⁴⁰⁷ The trio of Southern sympathizers, each with undeniable political and social influence in the state, found themselves in the crosshairs of California's military officials for their unreserved support for the rebel cause prior to their departure for the South. The arrest came aboard a steamer bound for Panama where they imprudently propositioned military troops accompanying Union General Edwin Sumner on his way to the battlefields of Virginia. Recently replaced as Commander of the Department of the Pacific by General George Wright, Sumner placed the triad under arrest aboard the ship and ordered them remanded into custody on Governor's Island in New York pending further instructions from the government.⁴⁰⁸ Communicating with Secretary of State William Seward and President Abraham Lincoln himself, the trio gained their freedom with an oath not to act against the United States, an oath they quickly set out to break, Gwin through political means and Benham and Brent through service in the rebel military.

⁴⁰⁷ As District Attorney in San Francisco, Calhoun Benham served as second to Judge Terry in the duel that led to Senator Broderick's murder in 1859. (see: "Murderers Rewarded," *The Racine Advocate* (Racine, Wisconsin), June 13, 1860)

⁴⁰⁸ Matthews, 193.

California newspapers reported heavily on the arrest. The *Sacramento Bee* published alleged witness statements that the trio disposed of incriminating evidence by throwing papers overboard once news of their impending arrest became known and claimed to know their plans to support the rebellion.⁴⁰⁹ The paper also discussed reports from the *Marysville Express* on the reaction of secessionists in the state that alluded to the arrest as a double cross by Sumner who they claimed promised not to arrest Gwin on the trip.⁴¹⁰ The Southern sympathizing *Shasta Courier* reported on Gwin's release by writing, "We hope and believe that he will break his promise, and get out of the country as quick as possible."⁴¹¹ The Spanish language California newspaper *El Amigo del Pueblo* also reported on the arrest, detailing the efforts by friends of the prisoners to secure the release, including a local military leader who supposedly maintained an intimate friendship with Gwin, and a proclamation by the Panamanian governor ordering their release.⁴¹² Reporting the story without commentary, the inclusion of the news in a Spanish language publication demonstrates its significance among Spanish speaking Californios.

Even as the war progressed, reports of secessionist sympathizers throughout the state persisted. As noted in journal entries by geologist William H. Brewer during his travels in California, "There are many more Secessionists in this state than you in the

⁴⁰⁹ "Overboard," *The Sacramento Bee*, November 29, 1861.

⁴¹⁰ "Gwin and Sumner," *The Sacramento Bee*, November 29, 1861.

⁴¹¹ "Gwin Released," *Shasta Courier* (Shasta, CA), November 23, 1861.

⁴¹² [Gwin, Benham, Brent arrest], *El Amigo del Pueblo*, November 30, 1861. Ignacio del Valle Collection, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Translated from Spanish; The story only notes the work of "General Herrera" and "The Governor of Panama," without further identifying information. The Governor of Panama at the time was Santiago de la Guardia y Arrué.

East believe, and many of them are desperadoes ready for anything in the shape of a row.”⁴¹³ Writing a few weeks later, “we have some desperado population, most of whom belong to the Secessionists—men ready for anything, who care nothing for the cause of either North or South in the abstract, but who would inaugurate war for the sake of its spoils.”⁴¹⁴ Continuing, he wrote, “Then there are men of southern birth and southern sympathies to lead them. A large Mexican population, but semi-civilized at best, and who, as a class, hate the Americans with inveterate hatred, is being incited by the Secessionists, especially in the southern part of the state.”⁴¹⁵ Written in the early fall of 1861, Brewer’s assertions of pockets of disloyalty matched reports coming from all corners of the state during that time.

Once out of office, former Governor John G. Downey wrote to his successor Leland Stanford about the question of disloyalty in Southern California.⁴¹⁶ Blaming the press for bringing attention to the issue, Downey conceded that “men of property, standing, and means” supported the secessionist cause in the region, but argued they were “deeply interested in maintaining the peace, harmony, and dignity of the state.”⁴¹⁷ Going so far as “positively” asserting their innocence in any plots to undermine the loyalty of the state of California, Downey urged Stanford to “consult with General Wright...and see

⁴¹³ Farquhar, 176; Kentuckian John C. Breckinridge was a Democratic nominee for president in 1860 and enjoyed overwhelming support in the states of the American South. In describing his supporters in California, William H. Brewer wrote: “Some of its men are open and avowed Secessionists, but the majority call themselves *Union* men, *Peace* men, most bitterly opposed to the Administration and opposed to any war policy—in fact, are for letting all secede who wish to.” (Farquhar, 175-6)

⁴¹⁴ Farquhar, 197.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ John G. Downey was not up for reelection in the September 4, 1861 state gubernatorial election due to the division of the Democratic Party.

⁴¹⁷ John G. Downey, Letter to Governor Leland Stanford, October 21, 1862. Benjamin Hayes Papers, 1849-1864. Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

that there be no unnecessary arrests of our citizens,” reasoning that “the ties of family and property” would take precedence over political affiliations or views.⁴¹⁸

Elected by a combined force of loyal Democrats and Republicans known as the Union Party, Stanford came into office in January of 1862. A New Yorker by birth, Stanford emigrated to California during the Gold Rush and worked his way up as a mercantilist and eventually became a founding investor and first President of the Central Pacific Railroad. His electoral victory in the 1861 gubernatorial race can be credited to the division of the Democratic Party, which once again put forth two candidates, splitting the vote and further weakening their power within the state.⁴¹⁹ This political division hastened the formation of the Union Party that weakened the political power of Democrats nationwide and came to dominate state politics into the postwar period.

Once an advocate for a Pacific Republic, Democratic Senator Milton Latham took to the pulpit in Placerville on August 27, 1862 to solidify his stance against secession. Writing of the folly of the Southern cause, Latham methodically pointed out the weaknesses in disunionists arguments, including that “the institution of slaveholding up to the time of the inauguration of Lincoln, was protected fully and adequately by every legislative Act that these Southern States had demanded.”⁴²⁰ Latham also referenced that Democrats controlled both houses of congress and had the support of Supreme Court justices, points that could have rendered President Lincoln ineffectual in any potential attempt to strike at the South.⁴²¹ He also defended himself against claims of his support of

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Hurley, 59.

⁴²⁰ “Speech of Milton S. Latham,” *Sacramento Union*, August 27, 1862.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

an independent California, claiming to have been misunderstood and reasserting his loyalty to the Union. Like many of his political colleagues, Latham worked to distance himself from his earlier call for a Pacific Republic once the impracticality of the idea became apparent.

The fall from power of California's Democratic Party and the overwhelming presence of the military served to suppress much of the overt treasonous activity in the state as the war wore on. Sabotage in the form of disrupted communication became a frustrating tactic for Californians, a fact that Californio Ignacio Sepulveda relayed in a letter to his friend Ignacio del Valle in the late spring of 1862. Writing from Los Angeles, he stated, "I send...the latest newspaper from San Francisco which doesn't have any news because the telegraph was cut," before relaying news of what is likely the Battle of Puebla, in which Mexican forces defeated the French on May 5.⁴²² Copperhead Dr. John S. Griffin of Los Angeles reported further disruption a year later in May, 1863, writing "telegraph broken...France is inclined to kick up about the Mexican [issue]."⁴²³ Similar tactics were employed by combatants on both sides of the battlefield.

Contemporary newspaper accounts and exposed plots revealed the threats posed by secessionists in California and the Southwest, with many more going unrealized and unreported. In one failed plan, rebel sympathizing mining mogul Asbury Harpending intended to disrupt shipments by capturing a Pacific Mail ship, taking its bullion, and using the ship to attack Union merchant vessels on the Pacific Ocean in 1862. Others

⁴²² Ignacio Sepulveda, Letter to Ignacio del Valle, June 5, 1862. Del Valle Papers, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles. Translated from Spanish.

⁴²³ John S. Griffin, Letter to Benjamin D. Wilson, circa May 1863. Wilson Papers. Huntington Library.

planned by Daniel Showalter, a rebel sympathizer who opposed California's resolution of loyalty to the United States, and Lansford W. Hastings, a pre-war explorer of the West, made inroads with rebel leadership, with Showalter serving with the insurrectionist army in the Southwest for much of the war.⁴²⁴ By gaining control within the state, rebel leaders hoped to strengthen their position and ultimately achieve their long hoped-for goal of opening a pathway to the Pacific Ocean, finally extending Southern influence across the continent.

Military officials eventually turned to censorship to quell secessionist rhetoric in California, arresting and intimidating secessionists and assumed secessionists, and muzzling seditious newspaper editors.⁴²⁵ At the time California boasted one of the highest numbers of newspapers in the country, with a majority published in Northern California, mostly in San Francisco, Marysville, Sacramento, and Stockton.⁴²⁶ Openly partial in a highly polarized society, many Democratic-leaning newspapers published anti-Lincoln, pro-secession views, becoming a cause for concern for those attempting to maintain an impression of loyalty within the state. Incidents of newspaper offices and writers being subjected to physical violence or losing "political patronage and paid subscriptions and advertising" put some papers out of business.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁴ Matthews, 117-118 and 190; Waite, *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire*, 198-199; Lansford W. Hastings gained recognition after publishing *The Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California* in 1845, which is credited with the increase in western migration in that decade. After the war, he published *The Emigrants' Guide to Brazil* and attempted to establish a colony of former Confederates in the South American country.

⁴²⁵ Waite, *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire*, 182.

⁴²⁶ Robert Chandler, "Fighting Words: Censoring Civil War Journalism in California," *California Territorial Quarterly*, No. 51 (Fall 2002): 4.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

Secessionist newspapers soon faced an additional threat to their ability to operate when the United States Postal Service banned seditionist papers from the mail. Chief among the instigators, Henry Hamilton of the Los Angeles *Star* published such extremist material that his paper became the first to be banned; instead, he chose to hand deliver the papers himself.⁴²⁸ General George Wright later ordered Hamilton's arrest for "persistently and publicly...[seeking] to array the sympathies of the good people of this community against the Government" and imprisoned him in the newly-constructed Drum Barracks near Wilmington in Southern California.⁴²⁹ Bound for Fort Alcatraz via steamer, Hamilton arrived in San Francisco where he remained for ten days before being released without ever stepping foot on the prison island.⁴³⁰ The rebel-sympathizing populace of El Monte held a celebratory barbeque in his honor upon his return to Los Angeles.⁴³¹

Federal military official's incarceration policy for secessionists earned frequent and vocal criticism throughout the state. As claimed in the *Grass Valley Daily National*, allegations of sedition led to the arrest of many prominent Democrats and prompted Unionists to advocate for arming citizens against the potential threats they posed.⁴³² In

⁴²⁸ Ibid; Born in Northern Ireland, Henry Hamilton immigrated to the United States during the Irish potato famine in 1848. Arriving in New Orleans, Hamilton made his way to California to take part in the Gold Rush. Even without any firsthand experience with slavery, Hamilton became an ardent supporter of the institution and of Southern values. After moving to Southern California in the mid-1850s, Hamilton purchased the *Los Angeles Star* newspaper and turned it into a mouthpiece for the Democratic Party; Paul Spitzerri, "Portrait Gallery: Los Angeles Star Publisher Henry Hamilton and William McKee, circa 1869," *Homestead Blog*, March 22, 2019. Accessed October 29, 2021. <https://homesteadmuseum.blog/2019/03/22/portrait-gallery-los-angeles-star-publisher-henry-hamilton-and-william-mckee-1869/>.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, 8.

⁴³⁰ Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days*, 110.

⁴³¹ Ibid, 111.

⁴³² "Arming for Democrats," *Grass Valley Daily National*, August 9, 1864.

describing the supposed double standard, the paper's editor alleged that the actions of military and political leaders in California denied Democrats the right to bear arms, while their Republican counterparts "can publicly arm themselves" and "[counsel] armed organization," while Unionist Governor Frederick Low ordered the formation of militias and encouraged members to "take their arms home, and have them ready for any emergency."⁴³³ Such extreme actions by military officials in the state became fodder for detractors who openly condemned arrests and censorship efforts.

Although newspapers led to the disgrace of many Democratic editors, they became the perfect avenue for Unionists to shift the message. Publications like *The American Flag*, "a straight-out, radical Union newspaper, destitute of every sympathy with Copperheads, which was never tainted by Pacific Republic treason," provided an outlet to expose secessionists.⁴³⁴ Founded in 1860 by abolitionist Daniel O. McCarthy, *The American Flag* experienced significant resistance from the majority Southern residents of its original home in Sonora, forcing McCarthy to move his offices to the more tolerant climes of San Francisco.⁴³⁵ McCarthy and partner Calvin McDonald worked to uncover seditious behavior among politicians, including publishing information leading to the arrest of prominent Democrats John Chipman and Charles Weller of San Francisco.⁴³⁶ Both Chipman and Weller found themselves on Alcatraz Island, along with other seditionists.⁴³⁷

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ McCarthy, D.O., ed., "The Daily American Flag." *Marin Journal* (Marin, CA), June 11, 1864.

⁴³⁵ Hurley, 92.

⁴³⁶ Hurley, 93.

⁴³⁷ Hurley, 94.

Stories about the Lincoln Administration's suppression of individual rights led many to turn their back on the newly elected leader. As B.J. Coil of Sierra County wrote in an advertisement in the *Messenger* of La Porte, "the present administration...I understand appointed a provost Marshall for the purpose of suppressing all those who entertain such opinions therefor I am no longer a supporter of the present administration or a reunion of the States but am in favor of a Pacific Republic as a LASTING MONUMENT for our once glorious Union."⁴³⁸ The concerning news inflamed disunionists across the state.

For military officials, the conspicuous disunionist tendencies of Californians continued to raise serious alarms. By the fall of 1862, the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* reported the concerns of Adjutant-General William C. Kibbe about secessionists in the state, noting, "Enemies to the Government congregate in no insignificant numbers in every town and village in the State," before adding, "Their movements and plans are as still as death—and the more secrecy the more danger."⁴³⁹ The editorial continued by warning of the danger that, if defeated in the east, rebel forces may shift west where a Pacific Republic would become the objective. Given the federal government's inability to protect California, the story recommended adopting Kibbe's proposal of preparing the state militias under his command for war to meet the threat should it arrive.⁴⁴⁰

The detention of suspected disunionists at the newly built Fort Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay became fodder for Californians. Civilian Charles Way commented on this

⁴³⁸ "A 'Coil'," *Sonoma County Journal*, October 24, 1862.

⁴³⁹ "Best to be Prepared." *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, October 18, 1862.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

in a letter where he wrote, “Whenever a copperhead lets himself out a little too heavy we lock him up.” He continued, “Copperheads are very unpopular here.”⁴⁴¹ Exploiting the Lincoln Administration’s suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, officials arrested several questionable characters, including the aforementioned detention of newspaper editor Henry Hamilton of the *Los Angeles Star*, as well as Los Angeles’s newly elected Democratic assemblyperson Edward J.C. Kewen, an ardent Southern secessionist who came to be detained on treason charges.⁴⁴² In the cases of Hamilton and Kewen, each of which openly criticized the Lincoln administration and supported the rebel cause, their short imprisonment concluded with warm receptions upon their return to Los Angeles.⁴⁴³ Kewen’s release came after he pledged an oath of allegiance to the United States. In the months after the conclusion of the war, Kewen surprisingly shifted his pro-slavery perspective and came to openly support Black suffrage.⁴⁴⁴

The September 1863 Gubernatorial election in California became a major turning point for state politics. Recognizing the challenges to their control, California Democrats understood the gravity of the political contest, as evidenced by the communications of the day. Once unrivaled Chivalry Democrats met opposition from Republicans, some of whom they counted as friends. In Southern California, popular Chivalry Judge Benjamin I. Hayes engaged in a fierce contest against Californio Pablo de la Guerra of Santa

⁴⁴¹ Charles Way, Letter to “Friends at home,” August 1, 1864. Manuscripts Collection, Lincoln Memorial Shrine, Division of Special Collections of A.K. Smiley Public Library.

⁴⁴² Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days*, 110-111.

⁴⁴³ Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days*, 110.

⁴⁴⁴ Philip Alexander Bell, ed., “Submitting to ‘Manifest Destiny’,” *The Elevator* (San Francisco, CA), June 30, 1865.

Barbara, with both sides engaging in bribes and manipulation to earn a victory.⁴⁴⁵ As the Union candidate, de la Guerra enjoyed the support of loyalists across the region. As the election neared, the military made their presence felt in Los Angeles. As written by Copperhead Angeleno John S. Griffin in an August 1863 letter, “The Soldiers are in town. I hope we will have no difficulty—at least until after the election is here.”⁴⁴⁶

William H. Brewer described the election in a journal entry, writing, “let me say the so-called ‘Democratic’ ticket was by no means loyal,” explaining, “the mass of Democrats are unquestionably loyal men, but in this state the leaders of the party are many of them southern men, avowedly Secesh.”⁴⁴⁷ Brewer went on to name former state governors John Bigler and John B. Weller as openly disloyal men who “tried hard to be arrested and be made martyrs...have publicly said everything they could against the government to bring about such an end.”⁴⁴⁸ Additionally, he named other prominent figures, including Judge Todd Robinson who refused to take an oath of allegiance and flaunted his treasonous activities, as vocal secessionists.⁴⁴⁹

A lot depended on the contest, which pitted former governor John G. Downey against Republican Congressperson Frederick Low. On the evening of the election, Los Angeles Judge Hayes wrote to his friend and fellow southerner Cave J. Couets of his anxiety over the results, relaying a message from Downey that afternoon, which stated,

⁴⁴⁵ Pitt, 236.

⁴⁴⁶ John S. Griffin, Letter to Benjamin D. Wilson, August, 1863. Wilson Papers. Huntington Library.

⁴⁴⁷ Farquhar, 452.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid, 477.

“The return not in-vote very close!”⁴⁵⁰ Hayes took the cryptic communication to signify Downey’s victory, concluding “This county elects the entire Democratic ticket.”⁴⁵¹ His premature prediction proved wrong as the election resulted in a Republican victory, making Low the second consecutive Republican to hold the state’s gubernatorial office.

News of the Republican triumph did not illicit a joyous response from everyone. Just days after the election, Minister Joshua Phelps of Sacramento wrote to Angeleno Don Benito Wilson of the sociopolitical outcomes of the election, “a number more of my supporters will leave here in consequence of the success of the Reps at the late election; and others who would have come here...if the election had gone differently, will not now.”⁴⁵² The election results, coupled with the passage of an Enrollment Act in March of 1863, led many secessionists to abandon the state. As S.H. Mott explained in letter from Sonora, California, “there was not a little excitement among some of the cecesh [sic] so much so that it caused a number to leave the state for Nevada [Territory], but they find they can’t do just as they have mind to there, but they will endure most anything rather than face the draft.”⁴⁵³ Even Wilson himself considered leaving, with Phelps writing of the benefits of moving to Mexico, including the cheap labor source and low taxes, citing Wilson’s familiarity with Spanish as an advantage.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵⁰ Benjamin Ignatius Hayes, Letter to Cave Johnson Coutts, September 9, 1863, Coutts Collection, Huntington Library.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Joshua Phelps, Letter to Benjamin D. Wilson, September 7, 1863, Wilson Papers, Huntington Library.

⁴⁵³ S.H. Mott, Letter to his brother, September 19, 1864. Manuscripts Collection, Lincoln Memorial Shrine, Division of Special Collections of A.K. Smiley Public Library; According to historian James McPherson, “the real purpose of the Enrollment Act was to stimulate volunteering,” but it unfairly affected “the poor and the foreign-born.” See James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War, Volume Two* (New York: McGraw-Hill, (1982) 2001), 385-389.

⁴⁵⁴ Joshua Phelps, Letter to Benjamin D. Wilson, December 27, 1864, Wilson Papers, Huntington Library.

In an editorial published in Los Angeles's *Star* editor Henry Hamilton warned his readers of the "tyrannical" Republican Party in November, 1863, writing, "No man can call in question any act of the Administration without being subjected to the operation of that far-reaching edict which suspends with regard to Democrats...all appeal to the judicial tribunals of their country, and leaves them to be hung, drawn, and quartered at the dictate of the Executive power or Military Necessity."⁴⁵⁵ In spite of his strong support system in and around Los Angeles, Hamilton sold the *Star* in October of 1864. Writing of the presidential election a year prior to the sale, he warned:

"We lay our hopes for the future of this Nation in the coming Presidential Election. We want no rebellion upon this coast, with now or hereafter, unless the people be 'driven to it', by the persistent persecutions of those who deliberately shove aside Constitutions and Laws in order to trample down the rights of citizens. And these autocrats of the hour can be assured that they do thus continue to persecute and proscribe, Revolution will come and they already have a taste of what Revolution is."⁴⁵⁶

Hamilton's sale of the newspaper dealt a blow to Democrats in Southern California. Without an outlet for their theories and interpretations of the war and its causes and with the deteriorating chances for victory for the rebel cause, many Democrats moved in the shadows, both politically and socially. Dr. John S. Griffin wrote of this in a letter to his friend Cave Johnson Coutts, writing, "We Copperheads are in...trouble here," and stating that the sale of the Democratic paper left Democrats with "no organ south of San Francisco."⁴⁵⁷ To make matters worse, Republican Phineas Banning purchased the

⁴⁵⁵ Henry Hamilton, ed., "A Pacific Republic." *Los Angeles Star*, November 14, 1863.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid; After a brief period out of California, Henry Hamilton returned in 1866 and attempted to open a new paper in San Bernardino.

⁴⁵⁷ John S. Griffin, Letter to Cave Johnson Coutts, September 29, 1864. Coutts Collection. Huntington Library.

typesetting equipment from the *Star* and used it for his new Union newspaper, the *Wilmington Journal*, a weekly publication that operated until 1866. A savvy businessperson, Banning maintained relationships with Copperheads throughout the war, despite their ideological disagreements.

Talk of the Pacific Republic threat reemerged in early 1864 as part of the conversation about Lincoln's National Currency Act, which established a system of national currency and chartered banks.⁴⁵⁸ Republican newspapers charged anti-greenback Democrats and Unionists with using averseness toward the law to reintroduce the idea of disunion, writing histrionically, "Had Satan desired a scheme for the purpose of weakening the bonds that bind us to the Union, no better one than this could have been adopted."⁴⁵⁹ These allusions to disunion and sabotage in a presidential election year signify the challenges to reelection faced by the Lincoln Administration. His surprising victory in California four years earlier could by no means be considered a guarantee after the devastation wrought by the still raging war and the policies implemented by his administration. The decision to even hold such an election in the middle of a civil war appeared inadvisable to many, but Lincoln wisely considered it a "necessity."⁴⁶⁰

Across the state, Californians came out in force in support of or opposition to the incumbent president. In the Southern stronghold of El Monte, residents assembled a "Democratic Club...to present serried ranks to the attacks of the foe in the coming

⁴⁵⁸ "Founding of the OCC & the National Banking System," *Office of the Comptroller of the Currency*, <https://www.occ.treas.gov/about/who-we-are/history/founding-occ-national-bank-system/index-founding-occ-national-banking-system.html>.

⁴⁵⁹ "A Pacific Republic or Nullification Threatened," *Stockton Independent*, February 3, 1864.

⁴⁶⁰ Jonathan W. White, "How Lincoln Won the Soldier Vote." *New York Times*, November 7, 2014. <https://archive.nytimes.com/opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/11/07/how-lincoln-won-the-soldier-vote/>.

election.”⁴⁶¹ In discussing the new development, the *Star*’s Hamilton—writing just a month a half before shuttering his operations—described the city’s citizens as “genuine dyed in the wool true blue” Democrats and the Monte Boys militia as “enough posted on democratic doctrine [to] ably edify, exhort, and strengthen one another.”⁴⁶² Noting the unquestionable support of the majority of El Monte residents for the Democratic Party, Hamilton stated, “Of the various precincts in the county, El Monte is the one where there is least necessity for a formal organization...But it is well to unite,” ending by writing ironically, “In Union is strength.”⁴⁶³

Presbyterian Minister Joshua Phelps of Northern California visited Los Angeles where he served as guest speaker at a Democratic rally in the weeks prior to the election. As recalled by John S. Griffin, Republicans interrupted the meeting, writing, “The blacks here just at the time about to hold a great meeting...had a torch light procession and the American and Mexican flag...the crowds numbered some 500 or 600, more than half Copperheads.”⁴⁶⁴ From Griffin’s description, the Democrats overtook the meeting, insulting the Republican speakers—whom he referred to as “blacks”—and causing a disturbance that lead to the meeting’s cancellation. An avowed Copperhead and unabashedly racist man, Griffin became an active correspondent during the election period, writing to many of his friends of the goings-on in Los Angeles. The use of

⁴⁶¹ Henry Hamilton, ed., “Democratic Meeting at El Monte,” *Los Angeles Star*, August 13, 1864.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ John S. Griffin, Letter to Cave Johnson Coutts, October 19-20, 1864, Coutts Collection, Huntington Library.

“Black” as a pejorative term by Democrats became a common feature prior to the war in references to Republicans and abolitionists.

On the Republican side, Phineas Banning held a rally in support of Abraham Lincoln in October. A Unionist throughout the war, Banning raised significant funds for the war effort and campaigned for loyal politicians, while maintaining relationships with his Democratic counterparts in the area. As Griffin relayed Banning’s remarks, he wrote, “I am told he made the Blackest of a speech,” before accusing his political opponents of drinking “Copperhead wine.”⁴⁶⁵ Los Angeles Californios, such as Andrés Pico, Manuel Requeña, José Mascarel, and Abel Stearns, joined together to establish a Lincoln-Johnson political club, and others met surreptitiously at a meeting in Agustín Olvera’s home to decide on Unionist candidates for Los Angeles County.⁴⁶⁶ As Griffin wrote of Californios in the lead up to the election, “The native vote seems united in our favor. I do not hear of but two men of standing going against us, Don Andres Pico and Fernando Sepulveda.” He continues by expressing his disappointment in former Democrat Pico, whom he described as working for “Abraham.”⁴⁶⁷

Not all Californios supported the Republican cause. In a lengthy anti-Lincoln diatribe written in the midst of the campaign, Antonio F. Coronel railed against the incumbent’s supporters, describing the supposedly desperate measures to which they

⁴⁶⁵ John S. Griffin, Letter to Cave Johnson Coutts, October 27, 1864, Coutts Collection, Huntington Library.

⁴⁶⁶ Pitt, 241; According to Edwin A. Sherman in his short-lived *San Bernardino Patriot*, Mexicans continued to observe Mexican Independence Day in September, including by firing guns in the air. (*Sacramento Bee*, September 28, 1861)

⁴⁶⁷ John S. Griffin, Letter to Cave Johnson Coutts, November 1, 1864, Coutts Collection, Huntington Library.

turned to secure his reelection, including portraying Lincoln as the “savior of Mexico.”⁴⁶⁸ With the country’s southern neighbor engaged in its own war against invading French forces, Coronel claimed, the Lincoln administration secretly buoyed the aggressors, while preventing Mexican supporters from providing aid to the embattled nation despite private claims of support.⁴⁶⁹ In reality, Lincoln allowed representatives of Mexican President Benito Juarez to raise funds in the United States and maintained diplomatic relations with that country, refusing to recognize the invading French regime.

With the election just days away, Los Angeles Democrats held a “Copperhead gathering” in opposition to a planned gathering by Republicans under Banning. The rally would include a barbeque, along with a nighttime march, and bilingual speakers, a clear attempt to reach the Spanish speaking voters in the city.⁴⁷⁰ The Republicans, on the other hand, had “all the stages, and bands of music.” Hosted by Banning, the rally brought out troops from Camp Drum in his hometown of Wilmington, leading Griffin to theorize about Banning’s influence over their votes.⁴⁷¹ Continuing his rant, Griffin informs Coutts of a letter received by Mr. King in Los Angeles from a resident of San Bernardino informing the former of the impending arrival of federal troops, to which he states, “It is a beautiful state of affairs that we must be watched in voting,” continuing, “if Lincoln is elected, what outrages will be committed on all of us.”⁴⁷² While allegations of voter

⁴⁶⁸ [Antonio F. Coronel on Lincoln, 1864]. Antonio F. Coronel Collection, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles. Translated from Spanish.

⁴⁶⁹ Valone, Stephen J. “‘Weakness Offers Temptation’: William H. Seward and the Reassertion of the Monroe Doctrine,” *Diplomatic History* 19, No. 14 (Fall 1995), 583-599.

⁴⁷⁰ John S. Griffin, Letter from to Cave Johnson Coutts, November 1, 1864.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

manipulation by Republicans plagued the party, evidence of wrongdoings by operative of both groups came to light, including stories of ballot stuffing by Democrats and the dismissal of Democratic officers from federal forces in fear they might cast their vote for Lincoln's opponent, George B. McClellan.⁴⁷³

Lincoln won reelection easily, not only taking California, but also the former Democratic stronghold of Los Angeles County.⁴⁷⁴ His hard-fought victory spurred a range of emotions across the deeply divided political spectrum, leading military officials to anticipate trouble in Democratic strongholds, even sending troops to San Bernardino in preparation for potentially violent reactions.⁴⁷⁵ In Los Angeles, Griffin wrote, "the Blacks celebrated their victory last night with a torchlight procession," which he described as a "lame affair" that included "negroes and Indians and generally the *pelados* of the town."⁴⁷⁶ *Pelados* is a Spanish language pejorative that can be translated as "bum," but which has a history of being applied to poor, mixed-race Mexicans. As a longtime resident of Los Angeles, Griffin would have likely heard this term used to describe Mexican laborers and Native Americans. Simultaneously, he believed San Francisco's African American community waited to hear of the "fall of Richmond, before they celebrate Lincoln's victory."⁴⁷⁷ Republican Californios also celebrated Lincoln's victory, as exemplified by Don Ignacio de Valle's letter to Ignacio Garcia in which he wrote, "I

⁴⁷³ White, "How Lincoln Won the Soldier Vote."

⁴⁷⁴ Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days*, 151.

⁴⁷⁵ John S. Griffin, Letter from to Cave Johnson Coutts, November 17, 1864. Coutts Collection, Huntington Library.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

believe you must be happy by the results of the election,” before explaining Lincoln’s majority win in the area.⁴⁷⁸

Despondency among Democrats worsened in the months that followed as the impossibility of a rebel victory in the war became apparent. News of the fall of the rebel capital of Richmond in early April 1865, the surrender of Robert E. Lee days later, and the death of Abraham Lincoln just days after that, sent shockwaves across the country. Writing after the news of Richmond’s fall reached California, Andrew Jackson Coffee—himself named for an infamous Democratic president—wrote to Benjamin Wilson, “I have not the heart to write about it, but will hope that the future may be brighter.”⁴⁷⁹ A month later, Wilson’s daughter Maria de Jesus Wilson Shorb wrote of her sadness over “how our enemies triumph in our downfall” and expressed concern at how the news of the war affected her father’s health.⁴⁸⁰ The rebel minister Joshua Phelps wrote to Margaret Wilson from San Francisco of a sense of loss and feeling of being anchorless by the failure of the rebels and of turning to God for spiritual guidance.⁴⁸¹

In Los Angeles, the jubilation over Lee’s surrender, complete with a cannon salute at Camp Drum and a parade by members of the California Native Cavalry, turned to shock as news of Lincoln’s death arrived via telegraph on April 15.⁴⁸² John S. Griffin learned of the news while visiting his friend Harris Newmark and reacted by jumping to

⁴⁷⁸ Ignacio del Valle, Letter to Ignacio Garcia, November 10, 1864. Del Valle Papers, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles. Translated from Spanish.

⁴⁷⁹ Andrew Jackson Coffee, Letter to Benjamin D. Wilson, April 10, 1865. Wilson Papers, Huntington Library.

⁴⁸⁰ Maria de Jesus Shorb, Letter to Benjamin D. Wilson, May 19, 1865. Wilson Papers, Huntington Library.

⁴⁸¹ Joshua Phelps, Letter to Margaret S. Wilson, June 2, 1865. Wilson Papers, Huntington Library.

⁴⁸² Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days*, 159.

his feet and hurraing for Jefferson Davis and the so-called Confederacy before attempting to run out into the streets to celebrate.⁴⁸³ Detained for his safety by Newmark, Griffin's reaction mimicked that of many other Southern sympathizers in the city, some of which celebrated the news with such enthusiasm that they passed out drunk on the street.⁴⁸⁴ But even among secessionists, the realities of the consequences of the assassination soon set in and many chose to refrain from expressing their joy at the news.⁴⁸⁵

Among the celebrants, Peter Biggs, the formerly enslaved African American who had been a fixture in Los Angeles for over a decade, made his elation known.⁴⁸⁶ A self-proclaimed secessionist, Biggs's celebration of the news of Lincoln's assassination led to his arrest along with several other rebel sympathizers. Imprisoned at Camp Drum, Biggs and his confederates worked on a chain gang until their release in the months that followed. Among the last to be freed, the conditions of Bigg's release ironically included pledging to "abide by and faithfully support all laws and proclamations which have been made during the existing rebellion in reference to the emancipation of slaves."⁴⁸⁷

As supporters wept and opponents celebrated, fear of a grand plot to destabilize the government distracted military officials across the country. While any larger schemes by Lincoln's assassin and his conspirators fell apart in the weeks after his death, military officials took open sedition seriously. In Marysville, the third largest city in California at

⁴⁸³ Harris Newmark, *Sixty Years in California, 1853-1913, Containing Reminiscences of Harris Newmark*, (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1926), 337.

⁴⁸⁴ Fields and Lynch, 400.

⁴⁸⁵ Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days*, 161.

⁴⁸⁶ Fields and Lynch, 379.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid, 400.

the start of the war, rebel sympathizers celebrated President Lincoln's assassination openly, suffering arrest and imprisonment. As J.A. Graves recalled in his memoirs, L.W. Thomas of Tennessee pinned a homemade Confederate flag to his chest "and boldly strutted around the streets of Marysville, hurrahing for Jefferson Davis" after news of the assassination became known.⁴⁸⁸ Thomas wound up in prison on Alcatraz Island, along with other political dissidents where he refused to work, invoking his status as "a Southern gentleman."⁴⁸⁹ The uncertainty and fear caused by Lincoln's death reverberated across the county. With the war ending and the possibility of disunion no longer a feasible option, a restructuring of the Democratic Party proved their only means of survival.

⁴⁸⁸ J.A. Graves. *My Seventy Years in California, 1857-1927*, (Los Angeles Times-Mirror Press, 1927), 14.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid, 15; Thomas returned to Tennessee after the war, where he met Jefferson Davis after Davis's release from prison. Thomas remained in Tennessee for the remainder of his life.

Chapter 5 **Reconstructing California Politics**

“Would to God 1865 could be blotted out forever.”⁴⁹⁰

In what proved to be the closing months of the Civil War, California Copperheads continued to work surreptitiously in support of the rebellion. While the infeasibility of an independent California became apparent as the war continued, supporters of secession shifted their messaging, rather than give up on the idea of linking California to the ideals of the American South. Even then, the likelihood of a Southern defeat weighed heavy on the minds of many Southern sympathizers. During the election of 1864, Angeleno John S. Griffin warned his Southern sympathizing ally, Cave John Coutts of the consequences of the failure of their efforts to elect candidates sympathetic to their cause, writing, “you can’t escape the fact that will surely befall the rest of us, that, increased taxation, forced loans, military arrest, and probably exile, and maybe hanging.”⁴⁹¹ He continued, “all these things are in clear view if the Blacks win.” The Blacks, of course, meant Republicans, most of whom identified as members of the Union Party to shore up support for the federal cause in the election.

A victory for the Union Party nationwide in 1864, in the previously staunchly Democratic county of Los Angeles, Unionist Californios from well-respected families, including Agustín Olvera, Ignacio del Valle, and Manuel Grafias, won their contests.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹⁰ Alfred Beck Chapman, Letter to Cameron Erskin Thom, January 15, 1866. Thom Papers, Huntington Library.

⁴⁹¹ John S. Griffin, Letter from to Cave Johnson Coutts, October 27, 1864. Coutts Collection, Huntington Library.

⁴⁹² Pitt, 241.

Others, like Andrés Pico, Abel Stearns, and José Antonio Sanchez, cousin of Los Angeles' notorious Copperhead Sheriff Tomás Sanchez, hosted a grand celebration in support of the county's Republican candidates.⁴⁹³ Even formerly loyal Democrat Benjamin Hayes spurned the party and joined the Unionists in order to win a post as district attorney. Noting that "Native Californians were then in the ascendancy," Hayes found it necessary to translate legal texts to Spanish to aid the newly-elected public servants, a move that many in his old party rejected before the war.⁴⁹⁴

Political divisions worsened following President Lincoln's assassination and the simultaneous attempted assassination of Secretary of State William H. Seward on April 14, 1865. Writing just days after the news reached Los Angeles, Angeleno Uplano Yndarte wrote, "I fear this act without comparison in the history of the United States can lead to bad omens and that innocent people will come to pay for the guilty."⁴⁹⁵ Warning of postwar retribution, Yndarte advised his friend Ignacio del Valle to forego participating in the state election in September, describing the political hatred present in the state and blaming the people of the American South for the president's murder.⁴⁹⁶ Yndarte continued by prophesizing that by making the right decisions, del Valle could prevent accusations of treason from being lobbed at his family or himself.⁴⁹⁷

Many political dissidents sought refuge in exile and Mexico became a destination for disaffected Southerners. Months after the end of the war, former Los Angeles

⁴⁹³ Woolsey, "The Politics of the Lost Cause," 381.

⁴⁹⁴ Pitt, 241.

⁴⁹⁵ Uplano Yndarte, Letter to Ignacio del Valle, April 18, 1865. Del Valle Papers, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles. Translated from Spanish.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

undersheriff Alonzo Ridley wrote to Benjamin Wilson to provide an update on his new role as a colonization agent in Mazatlán, Mexico, where a new colony for Americans disillusioned by the outcome of the Civil War attempted to get off the ground.⁴⁹⁸ As a member of the group that left Los Angeles to join the rebel war effort in 1861, Ridley spent considerable time in Texas and the Trans-Mississippi Theater of the war. Writing to Wilson, Ridley explained that the leader of French invading forces in Mexico, Emperor Maximillian, made “very liberal offers...to those desirous of settling in the country,” including “some very desirous lands in this state...placed at my disposal.”⁴⁹⁹ Continuing in colonial terms, he concluded that locals refused to allow their land to be given away, but that “[their] day...will soon pass, whatever Yankee bombast to the contrary may say.”

Members of the Southern-sympathizing Pleasants family of Southern California wrote of the appeal of Mexico in their correspondence throughout the war, with Eliza Pleasants describing her fiancé as a rebel who, like Ridley, left for Mazatlán, Mexico, during the war and began to cultivate cotton, as well as her brothers discussing the possibility of moving south of the border themselves.⁵⁰⁰ As Pleasant’s fiancé discovered, starting over in a foreign country proved difficult. She wrote of his experience, “he says he wished that he had studied Spanish in the place of laten [sic] and greek [sic] if he had he could have gotten in to [sic] good business.”⁵⁰¹ Nonetheless, Eliza hoped to join him

⁴⁹⁸ Alonzo Ridley, Letter to Benjamin D. Wilson, December 15, 1865. Wilson Papers, Huntington Library.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ Eliza Pleasants, Letter to Joseph E. Pleasants, September 5, 1864. Pleasants Family Papers, Special Collections, University of California, Irvine.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

in Mexico after marrying, even while recognizing how difficult her life would be there. John Griffin referenced these would-be colonizers in a post-election letter to Cave Coutts in November of 1864, writing “hard times, and no prospect of better...it is said many Copperheads are preparing to leave California for Mexico...I would like to go but fear I am too damned poor.”⁵⁰²

Among the secessionist who joined Mexican colonization schemes stood disgraced former Senator William M. Gwin. By 1864, his co-conspirator Calhoun Benham, wrote to their ally Joseph Lancaster Brent of his determination to follow Gwin—whom he referred to as “Chief of Colonization in the Department of Sonora and Chihuahua”—to Sonora in Northern Mexico.⁵⁰³ The plan, as Benham described it, involved “Southern people from California” colonizing the region and returning land to the Apache people, before “exploiting the rich silver and gold mines.”⁵⁰⁴ Benham further stated that Gwin left “the City of Mexico with a French military force.”⁵⁰⁵ Initiated through visits to France where he lobbied Napoleon III earlier in the war, Gwin received a ducal title from Maximillian, a move that led United States Major General Ulysses S. Grant to instruct Major General Irvin McDowell of the Department of the Pacific to prepare for a possible attack from Mexico in January of 1865.⁵⁰⁶ Gwin’s Mexican sojourn proved untenable once the American Civil War ended and his benefactor’s cause began

⁵⁰² John S. Griffin, Letter from to Cave Johnson Coutts, November 17, 1864. Coutts Collection, Huntington Library.

⁵⁰³ Calhoun Benham, Letter to Joseph Lancaster Brent, November 25, 1864. Joseph Lancaster Brent Papers, 1826-1905, Huntington Library.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, Letter to Maj. Gen. Irvin McDowell, January 8, 1865. Temple Crocker Collection, California Historical Society.

to fall apart. With few options left, the once prominent politician elected to return to the United States where he faced the legal consequences of his treasonous wartime activities.

Gwin kept busy during the war. While his compatriots partook in military efforts, Gwin initially idled away in his Jackson, Louisiana, plantation, where dozens of persons lived in slavery. In a July 1862 letter written just months after their initial parole, Gwin wrote to Brent where he described living in constant fear of federal naval forces who “commit depredations and outrages” wherever they land and of his children being homeless. Describing the South as being “in a starving condition,” Gwin wrote, “[from] Richmond to this place I witnessed nothing but want.”⁵⁰⁷ Of himself, he stated, “I have had nothing but trouble...ever since I saw you,” before informing Brent of Benham’s declining health, describing him as “a wreck” and relaying tales of his drunkenness and move to Texas after leaving his military position.⁵⁰⁸ Nearly a year later, in March of 1863, he wrote to Brent again, lamenting his circumstances and expressing his desire to leave the South, writing, “I have scarce had one cheerful moment since I came into the Confederacy...I want to go away from war.”⁵⁰⁹ Lest he express regret for his treasonous stance, he wrote, “[when] the war is over and the South gains her independence we will return to California.”⁵¹⁰ He soon went to Paris, where he advocated for himself and the Southern cause in interactions with Napoleon III and eventually accepted the position of colonizing agent in Sonora, Mexico, an ultimately unsuccessful decision.

⁵⁰⁷ William M. Gwin, Letter to Joseph Lancaster Brent, July 7, 1862. Joseph Lancaster Brent Papers, 1826-1905, Huntington Library.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ William M. Gwin, Letter to Joseph Lancaster Brent, March 27, 1863. Joseph Lancaster Brent Papers, 1826-1905, Huntington Library.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

Made possible by his many friends and acquaintances in the state, Gwin returned to political prominence in postwar California, albeit behind the scenes, after a brief period of incarceration. A beacon for southerners hoping to establish themselves in the west, Gwin aided new arrivals, writing personal letters of introduction and providing advice to those hoping to make it in the Golden State. These favors are exemplified by a letter from Gwin to Angeleno Benjamin Wilson asking the latter to aid a “Doctor Hardee” from Virginia to establish a medical practice in Los Angeles and to provide guidance on how to navigate the intricacies of the growing city.⁵¹¹ Following his return, Gwin expressed his discontent with the state of the Union, but also wrote of regret of the outcome of his decisions, writing, “[as] to my historical connection to the great struggle...I think I paid rather dearly for such an obeisance appearance in the history.”⁵¹² Described as a person “devoted to his own aggrandizement,” by California historian Hubert Howe Bancroft, Gwin’s regret stemmed from his suffering, rather than a reevaluation of his ideological stance and actions.⁵¹³

Even before his return to the Golden State, Gwin bitterly complained of the treatment of southerners by President Andrew Johnson’s administration, referencing the oaths taken by former rebels to return to their lives in the United States. Disparaging Johnson, Gwin described the president as a “traitor a low vulgar fellow lifelong demagogue...his policy it seems to...destroy or degrade the great men of the South and

⁵¹¹ William M. Gwin, Letter to Benjamin D. Wilson, December 4, 1868. Wilson Collection, Huntington Library.

⁵¹² William M. Gwin, Letter to Joseph Lancaster Brent, June 13, 1866. Joseph Lancaster Brent Papers, 1826-1905, Huntington Library.

⁵¹³ Robert Kirsch, “Sen. Gwin: An Early California Wheeler-Dealer,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 1969.

get the people to adopt him as their savior and liberator.”⁵¹⁴ Continuing in dismay, he lamented the South being at Johnson’s “mercy” through his use of pardons and a reconstruction policy he failed to implement fairly.⁵¹⁵ Although his assessment of Johnson as a person harmonized with many other contemporary accounts of the man, Gwin’s perspective revealed the fear that many Southerners had of being held accountable for their seditious behaviors before and during the war.

Gwin’s complaints also extended towards members of congress, whom he said “fought over the conquered South” while Southerners “sullied their chivalry by applying for pardons, and turned their backs on the place they had fought for and moistened the earth with the last blood of the South.”⁵¹⁶ Continuing with bravado, he wrote, “[thank] God I have never taken an oath since I took my seat on the senate and I cuffed the idea of procuring my liberty by applying for pardon.” Gwin conveniently forgot the pledge he made not to take up arms against the United States to secure his release after being arrested with Brent and Benham in 1861. In closing he wrote, “[like] you I cannot go to California which if alone I would prefer to any place on Earth.”⁵¹⁷ Like many southerners who left the state to join the rebellion, Gwin and Brent both expressed qualms about returning once hostilities ceased, although Gwin did return and Brent remained in the South.

The loyalty oath requirement caused many California residents to delay their return west after the war ended. Writing to her son Harry in late January 1866, Lucy

⁵¹⁴ William M. Gwin, Letter to Joseph Lancaster Brent, June 13, 1866.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

Thornton of San Francisco expressed her relief at talks of repealing the oath, which would allow her son to return to California, relaying her conversation with various political figures—including “a strong republican”—who believed repeal had the support of a majority of lawmakers.⁵¹⁸ As Lucy found out, Harry’s fate, like those of his philosophical cohort, could not be guaranteed in the political climate of the postwar period. Angrily relaying a conversation with two state politicians where one expressed doubt that Harry could “recover from the effect of having fought through the southern war,” Lucy described the offender as “a poor, lame selfish cowardly simpleton.”⁵¹⁹ Lucy’s rebel tendencies did not diminish despite the outcome of the war. In August 1866, she wrote to Harry describing the imprisonment of “President” Jefferson Davis as “abusing...in the most emphatic and annihilating grandly solemn tone and style.”⁵²⁰

Many rebels encountered challenges in returning to their prewar lives, particularly in areas where Union or Republican politicians came to dominate. Many no longer had homes to return to, while others endured the guilt of the tremendous sacrifice that their loved ones endured. For those from loyal states who joined the Confederacy, rebels from California and Oregon chief among them, it appeared they encountered harsher treatment than those who joined in support of rebelling states.⁵²¹ Writing in 1867, a *Daily Alta California* editor warned against trusting former rebels, stating, “these men have not been on probation long enough, and we do not believe that the loyal State of California is yet

⁵¹⁸ Lucy Smith Crittenden Thornton, Letter to Harry Innes Thornton, January 22, 1866. Thornton Paper, Huntington Library.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ Lucy Smith Crittenden Thornton, Letter to Harry Innes Thornton, August 6, 1866. Thornton Paper, Huntington Library.

⁵²¹ Finch, *Confederate Pathway to the Pacific*, 226.

ready to invite them to seats in the Government.”⁵²² Historian John W. Robinson wrote of postwar Los Angeles, “war’s bitter after taste lingered on,” a sentiment echoed by Harris Newmark who wrote of the city, “it was some time before noticeable progress was felt here.”⁵²³

Other than Gwin, Joseph Lancaster Brent proved to be the most notorious example of a former Californian who joined the Confederacy and never returned to the Golden State in the postwar years. Leaving his daughter in the care of trusted friends when he chose to join the rebellion in 1861, Brent remained out of communication for the four years that followed. In the immediate aftermath of the war, he began a series of letters to his friends in Los Angeles, the first correspondence they received from him since his departure four years earlier. Expressing relief at his survival, their responses provided the former rebel officer updates on the state of Los Angeles in the intervening years. Corresponding both with Californios and white Angelenos, regardless of their political affiliation, and in English and Spanish, Brent’s postwar correspondents provide insight into the state of politics in Los Angeles at the time, with some expressing concerns of the rise of Republicanism in the region.

Despite their stark philosophical differences during the war, Brent and staunch Republican Phineas Banning soon resumed their acquaintance via correspondence. Responding to a letter written by Brent on May 26, 1865—just one day after the final large rebel army surrendered in the South—Banning began his response by gloating over

⁵²² Waters, 59.

⁵²³ Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days*, 163.

the outcome of the war, writing, “I am truly glad the war is over and much pleased with the way it has ended.” Reminding Brent that he “was always in favor of sustaining the government at all costs,” Banning continued sanctimoniously, “[now] that the war is over and all resistance...has ceased, I consider it the duty of Every [sic] good citizen to do all in his power to prevent angry discussion, and try to heal...the wounds...caused by this fearful war.”⁵²⁴ Brent and Banning’s friendship went deeper than many, with the latter having a son named after Brent. As Banning joked in one letter, “I have not changed his name.”⁵²⁵

Listing the names of several known Los Angeles Democrats, including John Griffin, Benjamin Wilson, and Matthew Keller, Banning referenced the productive relationships he kept with them despite their vastly different political and social positions during the war.⁵²⁶ Additional insight into Banning’s powerful station in the postwar era came thanks to a letter from Copperhead John W. Shore to Brent in the summer of 1865. Describing Banning’s work in Los Angeles during the conflict, he stated about the presidential election, “[through] his influence the county went anti-democratic for the first time, giving Lincoln a majority.”⁵²⁷ Further explaining the ascension of the new political party, Shore stated, “at the last municipal election (May 1865) the republicans carried the city by majorities...the democratic party is dead for the present in this

⁵²⁴ Phineas Banning, Letter to Joseph Lancaster Brent, August 3, 1865. Joseph Lancaster Brent Papers, 1826-1905, Huntington Library.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ John W. Shore, Letter to Joseph Lancaster Brent, July 9, 1865. Joseph Lancaster Brent Papers, 1826-1905, Huntington Library.

county.”⁵²⁸ As the election neared, that state of affairs created “a great disaffection among the democrats, many of the most prominent considering that there are no democratic issues to run upon...they having been destroyed by the termination and results of the war,” according to Shore.⁵²⁹

Throughout his correspondence with like-minded Angelenos, Brent expressed a desire to return to projects in California. Writing in Spanish to his friend Ignacio del Valle a few years after the end of the war, he reminisced about life on the *ranchos* and expressed regret that personal matters kept him away, not unlike many Southerners lamented the end of the plantation system and romanticized the antebellum era for generations after the war. Complaining about life in the postwar South he wrote, “the Federal government’s terrible vengeance is unequalled in history.” Then, turning his attention to California, he wrote, “I expect Californios have been placed under the control of the Indians” and theorized how that societal structure would work, including Native Californians appointed to government positions, baseless arrests, and other supposed injustices he imagined would be inflicted on his friends and colleagues.⁵³⁰ He eventually sold his property at Marengo (now a part of Pasadena) in the late spring of 1868. Writing to his friend Benjamin Wilson, who oversaw the sale, Brent wrote, “[if] I had been able to reconcile a sense of duty, which has detained me here, with the desires that calls me

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Joseph Lancaster Brent, Letter to Ignacio del Valle, February 27, 1868. Del Valle Family Papers, Seaver Center for Western Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.

back to Los Angeles, I would long since have returned.”⁵³¹ A once powerful political and social leader, Brent remained in his birth state of Maryland until his death in 1905.

Like Brent, Cameron Erskin Thom also spent the months following the war initiating correspondence with his friends at home in Los Angeles, including his business partner, Alfred Beck Chapman, a native of Alabama who worked as an attorney and real estate investor in Southern California. Expressing relief at the news of Thom’s survival after the war, Chapman admitted that the Democratic Party “lost considerable of its former...prestige.”⁵³² Sharing news of friends and his own family, Chapman closed his letter by stating, “I cannot advise you to come home...your political status tho [sic] would endear you to many,” a statement alluding to the large contingent of Southern sympathizers still in Los Angeles.⁵³³ As many of his colleagues did, Thom remained in the South after the end of the war rather than take the oath of allegiance. In response to a later letter from Thom, Chapman wrote, “would to God 1865 could be blotted out forever,” a sentiment shared by many in postwar America.⁵³⁴

As ideological rifts reemerged after the war, so too did the issues at the root of the divisions that drove people apart in the antebellum period, particularly those dealing with race and class distinctions. As a multiracial society, California presented a unique set of

⁵³¹ Joseph Lancaster Brent, Letter to Benjamin D. Wilson, June 17, 1868. Wilson Collection, Huntington Library.

⁵³² Alfred Beck Chapman, Letter to Cameron Erskin Thom, August 7, 1865. Thom Papers, Huntington Library.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Alfred Beck Chapman, Letter to Cameron Erskin Thom, January 15, 1866. Thom Papers, Huntington Library.

issues during Reconstruction.⁵³⁵ As early as 1863, Unionists in the California legislature began the task of doing away with the legal restrictions placed on African Americans in the state.⁵³⁶ Democrats predictably responded with indignation. John G. Downey, former governor and 1863 gubernatorial candidate, voiced his opposition to equality for Black Americans and condemned President Lincoln for issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, describing it as an attempt “to protract indefinite civil war, incite servile insurrection, and inevitably close the door forever to a restoration of the union of these states.”⁵³⁷ Furthering his alarmist rhetoric, Downey warned that Californians may be forced to share the financial burden of “compensated emancipation,” the Lincoln administration policy that reimbursed enslavers for emancipating their unfree labor force.⁵³⁸ His gubernatorial predecessor Democrat John B. Weller also expressed similar sentiments, warning that free African Americans could expect nothing more than “cold indifference and contemptible hatred.”⁵³⁹

The wartime decline of the Democratic Party can be attributed to the divide between the Copperheads, those who supported the South during the war, and War Democrats, those who opposed it. Joining with Republicans to form the Union Party during the conflict, War Democrats nonetheless leaned conservative on social issues, particularly those related to the emancipation of enslaved people. Held together by a

⁵³⁵ Michael D. Bottoms, *An Aristocracy of Color: Race and Reconstruction in California and the West, 1850-1890*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013) 7.

⁵³⁶ Waters, 54.

⁵³⁷ John G. Downey, “To the People of the State of California,” *Los Angeles Star*, September 5, 1863.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid*

⁵³⁹ Philip Alexander Bell, ed., “Speech of Mr. Wm. H. Hall,” *The Elevator* (San Francisco, CA), November 10, 1865.

tenuous bond, the Union Party found success in the election of 1864, but became strained once the war came to an end. Without a common cause to hold them together, the philosophical differences between the group's Republican and Democratic members became accentuated and the party once again fractured into two factions, with conservative Democrats soon returning to political prominence in the state senate and assembly.⁵⁴⁰

As early as July 1865, the *Sacramento Union* published an article about efforts to bring an end to the Union Party, writing of politicians who “sought affiliations with copperheads [sic], and thus endeavored to destroy the integrity of the union organization, and thus give aid and comfort to the enemy.”⁵⁴¹ State Assemblyman John P. Bucklee brought this issue to the fore in a Union Party meeting, stating, “[losing] sight of the work of reconstruction yet before the union party, ambitious men have allowed themselves to be drawn into a course of action which cannot be other than the destruction of the union party, and the triumph, not alone of its enemies, but of the deadly enemies of the country.”⁵⁴²

Although Republican factions managed to retain political power in the state elections that year, Democrats demonstrated their continued popularity, particularly in their views on extending the franchise to Black Americans, an issue about which many

⁵⁴⁰ Woolsey, “The Politics of a Lost Cause,” 382.

⁵⁴¹ William Heath Davis. *Seventy-five Years in California: A history of Events and Life in California; Personal, Political and Military, Under the Mexican Regime; During the Quasi-Military Government of the Territory by the United States, and After the Admission of the State Into the Union.* (San Francisco: John Powell, 1929), 223.

⁵⁴² Ibid. A native of New York, John R. Buckbee represented Stockton in the state assembly.

expressed strong feelings.⁵⁴³ Openly in opposition to the civil rights measures proposed on the state and federal levels, the Democratic Party found receptive audiences across the state, especially as stories from the states formerly in rebellion reached friends and relatives in California. In a letter written from his home in Oxford, Mississippi, to his brother Benjamin Wilson in Los Angeles in June of 1866, Wiley Wilson stated, “Brother I am ruined by the war...I have now to return to work in the field to support myself and family,” going on to note his financial responsibility for five single daughters, a widowed daughter, grandchild, in addition to his wife.⁵⁴⁴ Emma T. Brent, the niece of rebel Joseph Lancaster Brent, also wrote to Wilson asking for financial assistance for the people of the South in the closing months of the war, writing, “I ask if it would be possible among my uncle’s friends [in California] to collect means no matter how slender, to [aid] the sufferings, and supply the wants of those whom Providence has given to our care?”⁵⁴⁵ Explaining the depredations suffered by the residents of the rebelling states, Brent described the “lack of comfort [and] necessities” as winter descended upon the region.⁵⁴⁶ These stories elicited significant concern from Californians, particularly when asked to consider supporting measures to improve the living conditions of African Americans.

Led by the group’s Democratic faction, California’s faltering Union Party convened in the summer of 1865, adopting a series of postwar resolutions that directly addressed the question of enfranchising Black Americans. Acknowledging the “humanity” of African Americans, one resolution asserted the group’s position as being

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Wiley R. Wilson, Letter to Benjamin D. Wilson, June 10, 1866. Wilson Papers, Huntington Library.

⁵⁴⁵ Emma T. Brent, Letter to Benjamin D. Wilson, November 17, 1864. Wilson Papers, Huntington Library.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

“inflexibly opposed to negro suffrage, and its inevitable consequence: the political and social equality of the negro in every form, and especially to the unnatural and revolutionary scheme for thrusting universal suffrage, by action of congress, upon the negroes of this state.”⁵⁴⁷ Similarly, the Democratic Central Committee of Los Angeles, also met in the summer and concentrated on Black voting rights. Led by known Southern sympathizers, the convention “unanimously adopted” resolutions opposing “the extension of the right of suffrage in this State to negroes, Indians, or Chinamen” and that “neither Congress, nor the President of the United States, have any right under the Federal Constitution, to impose negro suffrage upon any State lately in rebellion.” Relating specifically to Southern states, the latter statement demonstrated the close ties of Southern California’s Democratic Party and the states formerly in rebellion.⁵⁴⁸

The region’s Republican political candidates avoided the issue of suffrage while campaigning for the state election in 1865. Even party leader Phineas Banning “dodged” the topic. As reported in the Democratic *The Los Angeles Tri-Weekly News*, Banning supposedly stammered while addressing the issue at a political rally, stating, “[if] the question comes up there, I-I-I will v-vote against it.”⁵⁴⁹ Banning and other Southern California political candidates instead focused on issues more likely to gain widespread support, like civic improvements and improved transportation. Despite this, the editors of the *Tri-Weekly News* did their best to inflame public opinion on the subject, writing in an

⁵⁴⁷ Davis, 224.

⁵⁴⁸ C.R. Conway and Alonzo Waite, eds., “Los Angeles County Democratic Convention,” *The Los Angeles Tri-Weekly News*, August 5, 1865.

⁵⁴⁹ C.R. Conway and Alonzo Waite, eds., “The Banning Canvass,” *The Los Angeles Tri-Weekly News*, September 5, 1865.

editorial focusing on the selection of United States senator from the state, “[if] a man should be chosen who favors negro suffrage, then we may consider the State, so far as the action of the present Legislature can commit it, not only thoroughly committed to the doctrine of negro suffrage, but to that most disgraceful and disgusting of all sins, miscegenation and complete negro equality...”⁵⁵⁰

Conversely, Banning’s political rival, well-known orator Edward J.C. Kewen, an ardently pro-slavery Copperhead from Los Angeles, reportedly declared his intention to accept Black emancipation and suffrage in early 1865, just prior to the end of the war. As reported in *The Elevator*, a Black newspaper, Kewen’s proclamation demonstrated an understanding of the “behests of the times,” with the paper’s editor Phillip Alexander Bell writing optimistically, “[individual] efforts and opinions are powerless to stay the mighty tide of freedom and equality now sweeping over the land, from the Dead Sea of rebellion.”⁵⁵¹ He continued, “[men] may raise their voices against it, but their protests will be drowned in the thunder of passing events; they may hurl themselves in desperation against the popular will, but they cannot check or turn in.”⁵⁵² Despite the report, Kewen, whose arrest for sedition in 1863 earned him the respect of like-minded Southern sympathizers, soon lived up to his reputation as a loyal Southern Democrat and unrepentant bigot as a leader of the Los Angeles County Democratic Convention in the summer of 1865 where he supported the party’s anti-Black suffrage resolutions.⁵⁵³ The

⁵⁵⁰ C.R. Conway and Alonzo Waite, eds., “Election of Senator,” *The Los Angeles Tri-Weekly News*, December 5, 1865.

⁵⁵¹ Philip Alexander Bell, ed., “The Day We Celebrate,” *The Elevator* (San Francisco, CA), June 30, 1865.

⁵⁵² Philip Alexander Bell, ed., “The Day We Celebrate,” *The Elevator* (San Francisco, CA), June 30, 1865.

⁵⁵³ John W. Robinson, “Colonel Edward J.C. Kewen; Los Angeles’ Fire-Eating Orator of the Civil War Era,” *Southern California Quarterly* 61, No. 2 (Summer 1979), 174.

editors of Los Angeles's *Tri-Weekly News* openly mocked the misreporting of Kewen's supposed philosophical turn.⁵⁵⁴

While California's legislators debated Black civil rights, the state's Black community celebrated their freedom on July 4, 1865, the first Independence Day since the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment. As reported by Bell in *The Elevator*, "[we] rejoice that not only has one disgraceful and disabling act been removed from the statute books of the State, but in the progress of public opinion others will ere long be removed."⁵⁵⁵ He continued, "Let every Black man, every one [sic] who claims affinity with a race who were once enslaved, but by the grace of God and Great Lincoln's Proclamation are now made free, rejoice."⁵⁵⁶ Residents of Los Angeles heard the Emancipation Proclamation read during the city's celebration, and in San Francisco, the Black community openly participated in the festivities for the first time in the state's history.⁵⁵⁷ Despite Bell's celebratory declaration, he acknowledged "Copperheads" who "are prejudiced against the negroes, and refuse to celebrate our great National Holiday, that the majority of the people are opposed to it."⁵⁵⁸

Although the distance and expense of moving to California may have made the journey particularly difficult for many newly emancipated people, for the state's Black

⁵⁵⁴ C.R. Conway and Alonzo Waite, eds., "Candidates, 'Come Out.'" *The Los Angeles Tri-Weekly News*, June 24, 1865.

⁵⁵⁵ Philip Alexander Bell, ed., "The Day We Celebrate," *The Elevator* (San Francisco, CA), June 30, 1865.

⁵⁵⁶ Philip Alexander Bell, ed., "The Day We Celebrate," *The Elevator* (San Francisco, CA), June 30, 1865; Bell's celebratory reference to Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation is an early example of the Great Emancipator persona that persists even today.

⁵⁵⁷ C.R. Conway and Alonzo Waite, eds., [Los Angeles, Independence Day], *The Los Angeles Tri-Weekly News*, July 1, 1865.

⁵⁵⁸ Philip Alexander Bell, ed., "The Day We Celebrate," *The Elevator* (San Francisco, CA), June 30, 1865.

population, the period after the war brought many challenges, especially from those who opposed the extension of civil rights to people of color. In December 1865, legislators from the rural communities of Tehama and Colusa just north of Sacramento introduced a bill to ban African Americans from migrating to California altogether. Opponents cited the need for laborers in the state and noted, “[cotton], rice, sugar, tobacco, all the productions of the Southern States can be raised here; but we need laborers, and who so competent as those who are inured to toil, and accustomed to that kind of labor?”⁵⁵⁹ Such allusions to slavery and the continued exploitation of Black laborers foreshadowed the fraught experiences of African Americans in the postwar period. Coming at the start of the implementation of the federal government’s Reconstruction policy, which sought to rebuild a united nation and address the enormous issues of the integration of formerly enslaved Americans, this stance presaged the state’s response to the civil rights issues on the horizon, a response that closely resembled the policies of the states of the American South.

With debates over extending civil rights raging on, Black Californians themselves advocated for citizenship and the franchise. As journalist Philip Alexander Bell argued in a late 1865 editorial, California’s leaders should extend suffrage to its African American residents in order to “redeem her name from the obloquy which now attends it, and take her true stand as the noblest State in the Union.”⁵⁶⁰ This statement held a light to the ways

⁵⁵⁹ Philip Alexander Bell, ed., “Legislating on the Negro,” *The Elevator* (San Francisco, CA), December 15, 1865.

⁵⁶⁰ Philip Alexander Bell, ed., “Citizenship and Suffrage,” *The Elevator* (San Francisco, CA), December 22, 1865; A well-known abolitionist and journalist from New York, Bell arrived in California the year prior to the start of the war and founded, *The Pacific Appeal*, an anti-slavery newspaper focusing on the African American community, before starting *The Elevator* in 1865 to advocate for Black civil rights.

Chivalry Democrats weakened the state's free status in the turbulent antebellum period. A Black convention in California in early December 1865 resulted in a petition to the state senate and assembly arguing for citizenship and the right to vote for African American residents based on the fact of their birth within the United States, the taxes they paid, their intelligence, and the "recently demonstrated service of two hundred thousand of our race in the great rebellion."⁵⁶¹

Members of the state's still-intact Union Party met again in January 1866 to determine additional postbellum resolutions, including an endorsement of views espoused by President Andrew Johnson which skirted the issue of suffrage for Black men by referring it to state governments to decide.⁵⁶² The committee also discussed the fate of Jefferson Davis, former leader of the rebel cause, with some arguing for an "unconditional pardon" and others recommending a trial and a punishment if convicted.⁵⁶³ Another source of disagreement came in response to Johnson's Reconstruction proposals, which included a veto of the Freedmen's Bill that would have given the military jurisdiction over newly-freed African Americans, a decision California Democrats celebrated with "speeches and the firing of salutes in honor of the President."⁵⁶⁴ Party members reacted with similar enthusiasm to Johnson's veto of the Civil Rights bill the following spring. A measure to define citizenship as the right of anyone born in the United States, congress passed the bill over the president's veto,

⁵⁶¹ Philip Alexander Bell, ed., "Memorial," *The Elevator* (San Francisco, CA), January 12, 1866.

⁵⁶² Davis, 231.

⁵⁶³ William S. Moss, ed., "Sacramento Correspondence," *The Daily Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), January 12, 1866.

⁵⁶⁴ Albert A. Polhamus, ed., "President Johnson," *The Wilmington Journal* (Wilmington, CA), March 3, 1866.

further frustrating Democrats across the country. A party comprised mostly of individuals who considered themselves either Democrats or Republicans, these disagreements often fell along ideological lines among Unionists, with members often openly contradicting their colleagues when suggesting legislation.

As tensions rose within the Union Party, Republican members made harsh pronouncements about the federal government's approach to Reconstruction, suggesting severe punishments for the states formerly in rebellion, including curbing their rights and denying congressional representation. As stated in an editorial in the *The Daily Bee*, "If after being heard [President Johnson] shall prove to be headstrong or treacherous, let him abide the consequences," continuing "[the] act should therefore be overt before we pronounce him guilty of such folly and such crime."⁵⁶⁵ California's Republican-leaning Unionists also strongly condemned Johnson's decision to reject the Civil Rights bill, calling on the national party to organize a convention to discuss the president. Additionally, Republican members of the Union Party blamed Johnson's Reconstruction policies on the influence of "those recreant Californians who have always denounced the suppression of the rebellion, openly avowed themselves traitors...and always rejoiced over the reverses of the union armies."⁵⁶⁶ Despite rebuttals by Johnson's supporters who came together to urge Californians to form clubs to advocate for his policies, leaders of both factions of the Union Party made clear their positions on the cessation of slavery and the extension of basic civil rights to Black Americans.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁵ L.P. Davis, ed., "Hasten Slowly," *The Daily Bee* (Sacramento, CA), February 24, 1866.

⁵⁶⁶ L.P. Davis, ed., "State Central Committee," *The Daily Bee* (Sacramento, CA), February 28, 1866.

⁵⁶⁷ Coming at a convention of the State Central Committee in February of 1866, Republicans openly criticized Confederate sympathizers for working against the federal war effort during the conflict,

In order to maintain California's white supremacy, the state's Democrats adopted various resolutions in the summer of 1867, including several that addressed race directly. In one resolution, the group wrote, "[that] we based upon the suffrages of negroes, Chinese, and Indians and that the doctrines avowed by the radical leaders of indiscriminate suffrage, regardless of race, color, or qualification, if carried into practice, would end in the degradation of the white race and the speedy destruction of the government."⁵⁶⁸ Another resolution read, "it is the duty of [Congress] to protect the Pacific states and territories from an undue influx of Chinese and Mongolians, and it is the duty of the legislature of this state to petition congress [sic] to endeavor to obtain the adoption of such regulations as shall accomplish this object, and the legislature should use all its power to prevent the introduction of Mongolian laborers."⁵⁶⁹ In a session the following month, Democratic lawmakers proposed additional race-based resolutions, specifically, "[that] the people of California are irreconcilably opposed to conferring the elective franchise upon negroes or Chinese."⁵⁷⁰ The fear of diluting the voting power of white residents in California caused significant outrage and fear that the state could suffer the same fate as the beaten states of the American South.

The use of such inflammatory terms in reference to non-White residents mirrored the way newspaper editors and many citizens described Black and Asian Californians, with the latter group especially becoming a focus for Democrats and Republicans alike.

demonstrating the existing divisions between those who supported the federal government and those who supported the rebellion.

⁵⁶⁸ Davis, 265.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid, 270.

As a correspondent wrote to *The Daily Bee* newspaper, “In behalf of the laboring citizens of California I ask, can nothing be done to protect them from the ruinous competition of Chinese labor, and is it right that men and women should be thrown out of employment or forced to work for wages that will barely sustain life.”⁵⁷¹ They continued by invoking Southern slavery, which the correspondent argued “did not drain them of their circulating medium, while Chinese labor does.”⁵⁷² The invocation of the system of chattel slavery in the South as a means of instilling fear in the public became a common trait in anti-Chinese rhetoric throughout the decade. Without the civil rights newly afforded to African Americans, Chinese migrants became the new target of white supremacists in California, including degrading treatment, low wages, and work conditions that mimicked enslavement.

As the state’s social structure shifted in the postwar era, national Reconstruction plans elicited harsh responses from many of California’s political leaders. State Democrats directly addressed the civil rights measures that appeared on the horizon in their December 1867 meeting, resolving “[that] the negroes of the south are now incapable of self government, and therefore it would be unsafe and unwise to intrust [sic] them with political power or social, equality,” and “[that] the action of congress in establishing pretend state governments in the said ten states, wherein the whites are disenfranchised and the negroes enfranchised, is unconstitutional and void.”⁵⁷³

⁵⁷¹ Philip Alexander Bell, ed., “Chinese Servants and Laborers,” *The Elevator* (San Francisco, CA), March 9, 1866.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Davis, 269; The rebellion was comprised of eleven states: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, Tennessee, Texas, and Arkansas. In the period after the

Continuing their bold rhetorical statements, Democrats also moved to remove references to “secession” in state legislative resolutions, an early attempt to sanitize the narrative of the Southern states’ rebellion, a trend that continued into the twentieth century.

The election of 1867 proved a significant turning point for California politics, with California Democrats regaining political control of the state and the short-lived reign of Republicans coming to an end. Comprised of many of the same transplants from the American South who dominated the party in the prewar years—including some who joined the rebellion—California’s revitalized Democratic Party regained a stronghold in the state. The party swept in every major seat in the state, from Governor to State Printer. Analyzing the death of the Union Party after the election of 1867, the *Daily Alta California*, noted the inability of the party’s Democrats and Republicans to move past their differences and find common ground once the war ended.⁵⁷⁴

In Southern California, where Chivalry Democrats once reigned and where many pro-Southern residents resided, post-war politics looked to the future, with candidates running on platforms that centered the region and its progression.⁵⁷⁵ Los Angeles’s Antonio Coronel, a Democrat, became the only Californio elected that year, defeating fellow Californio Romualdo Pacheco, a Unionist, for the position of State Treasurer.⁵⁷⁶ Other once-powerful Californio political figures, like Andrés Pico and the controversial

war, Reconstruction government were established in those states and enacted progressive reforms that were in open contradiction to the antebellum policies of those states.

⁵⁷⁴ Waters, 58.

⁵⁷⁵ Woolsey, “The Politics of the Lost Cause,” 382.

⁵⁷⁶ A.J. King, ed., “Election Returns, Los Angeles,” *The Los Angeles Semi-Weekly News*, September 6, 1867.

Tomás Sanchez, lost contests to newcomers.⁵⁷⁷ Members of both dominant parties struggled for control of the region in the years that followed, with the Democratic mouthpiece *The Los Angeles Semi-Weekly News* issuing a call to action in the spring of 1867, its editor A.J. King warning of Republican influence and writing, “every democrat [sic] in the city should attend promptly at the time and place, and lend his influence to the party for its and the people’s good.”⁵⁷⁸

Through representation on the state and national level, California’s Democrats rejected the progressive legislation of the postwar congress and passed racialized legislation that mimicked the policies of the states formerly in rebellion. State legislators openly opposed the Civil Rights Acts and Reconstruction Amendments of the 1860s and 1870s, joining the Southern states in successfully blocking California’s ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments until the Civil Rights movement of the mid-twentieth century.⁵⁷⁹ As the new targets for white supremacists in the state, many states laws focused on Chinese residents, with the introduction of policies that subjugated Chinese laborers. The topic became a hot button issue in the 1867 gubernatorial campaign where the candidates each expressed their views on Chinese immigrants in California, with some identifying the similarities between Chinese labor contracts and

⁵⁷⁷ A.J. King, ed., “Elections, as far as Hear From,” *The Los Angeles Semi-Weekly News*, September 13, 1867.

⁵⁷⁸ A.J. King, ed., “Call for Convention,” *The Los Angeles Semi-Weekly News*, April 19, 1867.

⁵⁷⁹ Stacey L. Smith, *Freedom’s Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 13; The Civil Rights Act of 1866 passed in April 1866, despite the veto of President Andrew Johnson and the objections of many state representatives, including from California. The Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship to persons born in the United States, extending that status to formerly enslaved Americans; California did not ratify the amendment until 1959, becoming one of only four states to hold off ratification until the 20th century. The Fifteenth Amendment granted formerly enslaved men the right to vote; California did not ratify the amendment until 1962.

slavery, and one Republican candidate, George C. Gorham, writing in an a letter, “I am emphatically opposed to all attempts to deny Chinese the right to labor for pay, and I am to the restoration of African slavery whereby black men were compelled to labor without pay.”⁵⁸⁰ In this way, Democrats’ antebellum efforts to link California to the states of the American South came to fruition. Despite remaining a loyal state during the war and the rise of Republicanism in that period, the Golden State came to resemble the former rebel states politically for decades after the conflict came to an end.

Characterized by legislative hostility toward nonwhite people, Reconstruction in California, the most racially diverse region in the United States, reverted to the recognizable social structure with whites on one side and nonwhites on the other.⁵⁸¹ According to census data, the state’s black population remained practically stagnant between 1860 and 1870, increasing less than five percent while the white population saw a 55% increase in the same period and the Chinese population grew by over 40%.⁵⁸² While many factors likely contributed to these statistics, including the war, the inability of census takers to record all residents accurately, and the challenging financial and practical realities of moving west at the time, these figures may be indicative of the state’s reputation as inhospitable to people of color. In the same period, the black population grew 165% in the state of Oregon and 693% in the state of Nevada.

⁵⁸⁰ Davis 241-2.

⁵⁸¹ Bottoms, 18.

⁵⁸² *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census*, “Population, by Race, Sex, and Nativity,” (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, Census Office, 1880), 378; In 1860, California had a white population of 323,177 (including Californios and Mexicans), a black population of 4,080, and a Chinese population of 34,933. By 1870, the white population had increased to 499,424, the black population rose to only 4,272, an increase of less than five percent (the slowest growth of any state or territory in the American West), and the Chinese population grew to 49,277.

In spite of the financial devastation of the war years, Southern California's Californio population fought to keep hold of their influence, even as their wealth and landholdings dwindled each year.⁵⁸³ Personal and professional relationships with antebellum-era American settlers continued, even as new arrivals did not conform with the racial, cultural, and political negotiations that brought the two groups together in the prewar years. In the decade between 1860 and 1870, the county saw an increase of 59% in its white population, 54% in its black population, and over 2000% in its Chinese population.⁵⁸⁴ These demographic shifts coupled with the coming of age of the children and grandchildren of unions between Californios and white settlers, created a new Los Angeles where the accommodations previously made for the old guard fell out of necessity. Those who could adapt, did so with some success. Democrat Antonio Coronel served as California State Treasurer into the 1870s and Democrat-turned-Republican Andrés Pico, father of the last real attempt to divide California, served as a state senator for the same period. Many watched as their descendants rose to be well-respected civic figures, and others faded into obscurity along with *ranchero* lifestyle they so desperately tried to prolong.

After the sociopolitical turmoil of the antebellum and wartime periods, efforts to divide the state remained dormant until the early 1880s when a new proposal came to the fore. Citing similar arguments to their predecessors in the 1850s, its proponents referenced the size, differences in climate, commerce, and unfair taxation as reasons for

⁵⁸³ Inclement weather and widespread disease contributed to the decline of the cattle industry in the early 1860s; Pitt, 250.

⁵⁸⁴ *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census*, "Population, by Race, Sex, and Nativity," (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, Census Office, 1880), 382.

splitting California into two states.⁵⁸⁵ With Los Angeles as its nexus, the proposed southern state would be bordered by the Tehachapi Mountains to the north. Eventually resulting in a conference in Los Angeles, the measure ultimately went nowhere, but reappeared various times throughout the twentieth century, with the same arguments made and similar borders proposed.⁵⁸⁶

Later attempts included a call for the creation of a State of Jefferson by “rebels” in the Northern California counties of Siskiyou, Del Norte, and Modoc in 1941 that promised a new state free of sales, income, and liquor taxes.⁵⁸⁷ Ostensibly named for President Thomas Jefferson, father of the Declaration of Independence, the name also alludes to the Civil War and the supposed president of the rebellion, Jefferson Davis. With proponents self-identifying as “rebels,” the comparisons to Southern secession efforts become even starker. Going so far as to establish a provisional government and beginning a promotional campaign, boosters actually sought to gain state grants for the expansion of highways into the region, supposedly using secession as a bargaining tool.⁵⁸⁸ The movement came to an end following the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and the subsequent preoccupation with World War II, but remnants of the brief crusade remain, with supporters to this day. Several attempts followed in the mid-

⁵⁸⁵ Jason J. Ayers, ed., “Division of the State,” *The Evening Express* (Los Angeles, CA), January 22, 1881; The 1881 division scheme cited was the brainchild of prominent Los Angeles physician Dr. Joseph P. Widney who settled in the city after the Civil War and became enmeshed with many of the individuals who played a significant role in the city during the conflict.

⁵⁸⁶ Joseph D. Lynch, ed., “State Division Conference,” *Los Angeles Daily Herald*, September 9, 1881; Los Angeles’s *Evening Express* cited the 1859 Pico Act as proof that Californians supported state division. (Jason J. Ayers, ed., “State Division (San Diego News),” *The Evening Express* (Los Angeles, CA), August 15, 1881)

⁵⁸⁷ “‘Rebels’ Intend to Name New State Jefferson,” *Long Beach Sun* (Long Beach, CA), November 25, 1941.

⁵⁸⁸ “Name Given to Proposed State,” *Santa Ana Register* (Santa Ana, CA), November 25, 1941.

twentieth century. In writing of a 1970 state division proposal, journalist Sam Stewart wrote exasperatedly of the scheme, “It keeps recurring, like a bad dream. Each time it goes away, but it keeps coming back, like a sacked cat thrown into the drink.”⁵⁸⁹

In the twenty-first century alone, several attempts to divide the state have been made, including a reintroduction of the call for a State of Jefferson.⁵⁹⁰ Introduced along political lines, these calls for disunion most often include conservative principles related to smaller government, less taxation, and a rejection of progressive legislation. Using the language and arguments of their mid-nineteenth century predecessors may not be coincidental. In the nearly 160 years since the end of the Civil War, American memory of the conflict came to be dominated by the Southern perspective, one that emphasized a just war and heroes on both sides. Spread through the work of academics and popular culture, these messages shaped generations of Americans’ understanding of the causes and consequences of the war. Only relatively recently have those arguments been challenged more broadly, with renewed conversations about historical figures, their legacies, and the legacy of the war for the nation. As a state with an historic attachment to the American South, California’s place in these discussions has recently come to light with the publication of several works demonstrating how, from its earliest years as an American territory, the ideals Southern Democracy shone bright in the Golden State.

⁵⁸⁹ Sam Stewart, “‘Divide the State’ bad dream back,” *Daily News Post* (Monrovia, CA), March 24, 1970.

⁵⁹⁰ Katie Orr, “The Renewed Effort for the State of Jefferson,” *KPBS, Capital Public Radio*, October 28, 2013. <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2013/10/28/renewed-effort-state-jefferson>.

Epilogue
**The Long Shadow of the
Civil War in American Memory**

“Memory of the Confederacy continues to divide.”⁵⁹¹

No other event in American history transformed the nation’s social, political, and physical landscape like the American Civil War. Enduring for four years between 1861 and 1865 and resulting in the loss of between 620,000 and 800,000 people, the war wreaked devastation across the country and resulted in consequences that never ceased to reverberate in spite of the passage of time and social and political advancements.⁵⁹² Through the concerted efforts of defenders of rebellion and their heirs, American memory of the war developed a supposedly skewed perspective, where Southern military and political figures and symbols became glorified and their northern counterparts became analogized as extremists, drunkards, and butchers. The purposeful development of this ideology originated in the rebelling states of the American South, which bore both an emotional burden as the instigators of the conflict and a physical burden as the site the war’s greatest destruction, but eventually spread across the nation. From a ruinous, futile exercise in self-indulgence by the guardians of the American system of bondage, the war transformed into a supposedly virtuous cause defended by noble people who faced persecution from the more powerful, populated industrial states.

⁵⁹¹ Nicole Maurantino, *Confederate Exceptionalism: Civil War Myth and Memory in the Twenty-First Century*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2020), 172.

⁵⁹² Accepted for generations to be 620,000, new estimates by demographer J. David Hacker reveal a death count as high as 800,000 people. See: J. David Hacker, “A Census-Based Count of the Civil War Dead,” *Civil War History* 57, No. 4 (December 2011): 307-348.

Known as the Lost Cause, this mythical narrative shaped how generations of Americans understood the Civil War, designated its heroes, and overlooked the difficult reality of its origins and ultimate costs. Disseminated by organizations like the Daughters of the Confederacy, United Confederate Veterans, and later the Sons of Confederate Veterans, at reunions, memorial days, and anniversaries of battles, the mythos of an honorable Lost Cause became engrained in American popular culture through film, television, music, journalism, and the public memorials that dotted the landscape across the country. Academia and institutions of history and culture also bear responsibility for the propagation of the narrative, with historians, sociologists, and writers of literature helping to transform the myth into an accepted fact.

The four-year struggle challenged how Americans understood their identities as citizens and their relationship to the nation as a whole. Through more than 10,500 military engagements, the movement of approximately three and a half million people across thousands of miles of land, and the emancipation of nearly four million enslaved Americans, the Civil War created a new nation from the damaged remnants that remained once the fighting came to an end.⁵⁹³ With the fate of American chattel slavery—the undeniable basis of the war—decided once and for all with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1865, national leaders worked to reunite the country. With regional interpretations at odds, a national consensus on the war, its causes and consequences, eluded politicians and scholars alike for decades.

⁵⁹³ “Civil War Facts.” *National Park Service*. <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/facts.htm>.

The social and political issues that led to the war started long before the conflict began. Debates over the morality of the American system of bondage predate the founding of the nation and went through various iterations in the decades leading up to the war. The United States ended its formal involvement with the Atlantic Slave Trade in 1808 and by the time the war began, more than half of the states in the Union had abolished the practice.⁵⁹⁴ As the nation developed, the North became increasingly industrial, while the South remained agricultural, deepening the social and ideological divide between the two regions, especially with regard to the controversial issue of enslavement. As the driver of the Southern economy, debates about chattel slavery intensified in the years leading up to the war, reaching a fever pitch with the presidential election of 1860.

The American West became a beacon for slavery's most ardent proponents. Concerted efforts to expand slavery into the western territory taken from Mexico following the Mexican-American War resulted in a high preponderance of Southerners in the states and territories that developed in the west, particularly in California, whose moderate climate, mining riches, and, perhaps most importantly, coastal access, made it especially attractive. With the national conversation over the expansion of slavery moving west, delegates to California's first constitutional convention elected to exclude the practice from the new state, even as enslavers continued to exploit their enslaved

⁵⁹⁴ Illegal involvement in the Atlantic Slave Trade by American slave traders continued until the start of the Civil War; See: Manish Sinha. *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016; Joel K. Bourne, Jr. "Last American Slave Ship is Discovered in Alabama." *National Geographic*, May 22, 2019. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/clotilda-the-last-american-slave-ship-found-in-alabama>.

laborers across the state, a practice that continued in various forms throughout the antebellum period. Concurrently, efforts to divide the state and create an independent territory where slavery could thrive remerged on an annual basis in the decade leading up to the war.

While such threats of national disunion had a long history in the saga of American politics, by the time the war seemed certain, conversations became increasingly impassioned, particularly as the presidential campaign of 1860 progressed and the socially progressive Republican Party gained influence and support across the country. Considered to be the party of abolition, the newly established Republican Party posed a threat to leaders of the Democratic Party, which dominated in the South and had split over the issue of slavery in the years leading up to the election. Following the victory of Republican Presidential candidate Abraham Lincoln without the support of the states in the American South, a disunion crisis erupted that threatened his legitimacy as the president elect and the stability of the nation as a whole. Prior to Lincoln's inauguration in March of 1861, seven states declared their intention to secede, with four additional states and one territory—the self-proclaimed Territory of Arizona—joining what quickly became an insurrection in the months that followed. The crisis devolved into a war in April.

By the time of its conclusion in 1865, the unimaginable death and destruction caused by the war permanently scarred the nation. Nowhere were these scars as evident as in the American South. Once the breadbasket of the nation, at war's end, the region faced economic, infrastructural, and social devastation, with the loss of nearly two-thirds

of Southern wealth and one-quarter of white men under the age of forty.⁵⁹⁵ Without the involuntary manpower once made possible by chattel slavery, white Southerners abandoned farms and allowed fields to go fallow.⁵⁹⁶ The once powerful city of Charleston, South Carolina—the “Queen City of the South” and the original epicenter of the conflict—serves as a good example of its devastating effects.⁵⁹⁷ Prior to the start of the war, Charleston residents boasted “the highest per capita income” in the country, even while the enslaved population outnumbered the free white population by as much as nine to one in some areas.⁵⁹⁸ Having endured a year and half siege by the United States Navy, by the time the war ended, the city remained in ruins and appeared to be a shadow of its former self for decades, never regaining the luster it once had.⁵⁹⁹

For Californians, this period also proved contentious. The economic, social, and political collapse of the American South affected many residents directly. Those who either originated in the region or supported the rebel cause during the war, experienced the outcome of the war in a personal way, with many having lost property, both in land and in enslaved people, and others receiving desperate pleas from their friends and family asking for assistance and lamenting their sad circumstances. The implosion of the Union Party not long after the war’s end and the return to prominence of the Democratic Party emboldened Southerners in the state. Although the California legislature remained

⁵⁹⁵ David Goldfield, *Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern History*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 18.

⁵⁹⁶ Lisa M. Brady, *War Upon the Land: Military Strategy and the Transformation of Southern Landscapes During the American Civil War*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 132.

⁵⁹⁷ James McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War, Volume Two* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 511.

⁵⁹⁸ Tony Horowitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War*, (New York: Pantheon, 1998), 50.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

outwardly loyal during the war, the “uncomfortable similarities” between the state’s legislation and that of the states from the American South quickly resurfaced.⁶⁰⁰ Tensions over the issue of extending the franchise to Black Americans and questions about the state’s Chinese and Native Californian populations—largely originating from Democrats—demonstrated the continuation of the party’s prewar influence and the success of their antebellum efforts to expand Southern political and social ideologies into California and the American West.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, newly freed Africans Americans travelled throughout former rebel states in search of friends and family lost through sale and kidnapping before or during the war. As described by David Goldfield, “Union soldiers in the occupied South told of roads clogged with former slaves streaming in both directions.” Continuing his description, he noted, “observers initially attributed the migration to a wanderlust born of slavery’s confinement; in fact, the travelers were simply looking for their lost families, for children sold away, for fathers, mothers, husbands, and wives taken to the Deep South to work on plantations or in towns and maybe to start new families, or grieve forever the ones they had left behind.”⁶⁰¹ For enslaved persons in the antebellum period, separation due to sales represented incredibly traumatic occurrences, the mere suggestion of which produced fear and anxiety.⁶⁰²

Many free Blacks from California also travelled east in this period in search of loved ones, attempting to put together disparate fragments of information and reaching

⁶⁰⁰ Bottoms, 5.

⁶⁰¹ Goldfield, 188.

⁶⁰² See: Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*.

out to the Black community for assistance.⁶⁰³ Through the work of Black activists, including Philip Alexander Bell of *The Elevator* newspaper, Black Californians formed a support system that promoted civil rights issues and challenged the racist agenda of state Democrats. As early as October of 1865, a California State Convention of Colored Citizens took place in Sacramento, where delegates celebrated the end of slavery in the United States and advocated for the expansion of the right to vote to African Americans.⁶⁰⁴ Although the state legislature refused to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment that made this possible, Black Californians fêted the passage of the bill. In Los Angeles, Black residents and hundreds of their white allies held a day-long celebration, complete with anvils shot into the air and a feast at midnight.⁶⁰⁵

Despite the strides made in extending civil rights to African Americans in the postwar period, substantial hurdles still existed, with new impediments being imposed as time went on. As one of the most significant issues, land ownership eluded many Black families, forcing people into the sharecropping system or to relocate into urban areas in the northern part of the country.⁶⁰⁶ Additionally, white southerners utilized physical and psychological violence and discriminatory legislation to prevent African Americans from gaining true independence, ensuring the a continued subjugation that endured for

⁶⁰³ Pfaelzer, 235-6.

⁶⁰⁴ Pfaelzer, 241.

⁶⁰⁵ Nathan Masters, "How the 15th Amendment Came to Los Angeles," *PBS SoCal*, February 6, 2015. <https://www.pbssocal.org/shows/lost-la/how-the-15th-amendment-came-to-los-angeles>; Black residents in Los Angeles still faced significant obstacles before gaining the right to vote, resulting in a major lawsuit in which Congress intervened, citing the Enforcement Act of 1870, which prohibited the use of intimidation to violate another person's civil rights.

⁶⁰⁶ Brady, 134; The distance and cost associated with travel to the American West likely proved prohibitive for newly freed people, resulting in an insignificant increase in California's Black population between 1860 and 1870. (Federal Census of 1870, "Population, by Race, Sex, and Nativity," 378.

generations.⁶⁰⁷ With the Southern states in disarray as new state and local governments formed, vigilante groups took control, meting out “punishments and humiliations on white Unionists and African Americans” in the region.⁶⁰⁸ Uninterested in adopting the progressive civil rights legislation enacted during the Reconstruction era, leaders in Southern states and California rejected calls for equality and instead passed laws that guaranteed both racial discrimination and the continuation of white supremacy.⁶⁰⁹ This period of confusion, anger, and defiance in the American South set the stage for the reimagining of the Civil War in American memory in the decades that followed.

As the American public worked to move past the chasm created by the conflict, competing narratives began to arise, focusing on selective memories and interpretations of the war, its causes, and outcomes. According to historian Alice Fahs, “just as the Civil War was a defining event in our national history, so too have memories of the Civil War helped define membership in the nation.”⁶¹⁰ Several distinct versions of Civil War memories arose in the postwar period. From reconciliationists, who sought national healing by taking the stance that refused to cast blame for the conflict on one side or the other, to Unionists, who focused on the noble efforts of the white men who served in the United States military against the rebels, and emancipationists, who focused on the social

⁶⁰⁷ Kate Masur, *Until Justice Be Done: America's First Civil Rights Movement, from the Revolution to Reconstruction*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2021): 305.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid, 307.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid, 309.

⁶¹⁰ Christian J. Spielvogel, *Interpreting Sacred Ground: The Rhetoric of National Civil War Parks and Battlefields*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 6.

and legal advancements for African Americans, specifically through the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments.⁶¹¹

Often at odds with one another, these differing memories of the war came to be overshadowed by the myth of the Lost Cause, an ideology which sought to overhaul the narrative in order to justify a failed insurrection that resulted in unimaginable suffering and loss across the country.⁶¹² Rooted in trauma and anxiety produced by the war, the creation of the Lost Cause mythology became a defense mechanism that both validated and protected white Southerners from responsibility for the war.⁶¹³ As historian Gary Gallagher explained, advocates of the Lost Cause, “blamed sectional tensions on abolitionists, celebrated antebellum southern slaveholding society, portrayed Confederates as united and waged their war for their independence, extolled the gallantry of Confederate soldiers, and attributed northern victory to sheer weight of numbers and resources.”⁶¹⁴

Importantly, the narrative harkened back to a romanticized version of the past characterized by southern gentility, prosperity, independence, and “faithful slaves.”⁶¹⁵ Historian C. Vann Woodward described this creation of an “Old South” as “one of the most significant inventions” of the postwar period.⁶¹⁶ The mythological Old South

⁶¹¹ Often known as the Reconstruction Amendments, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution were adopted in the postwar period and addressed civil rights for African Americans, banning slavery, granting citizenship, and extending the franchise to black men; See: Eric Foner. *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution*. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2019).

⁶¹² Goldfield, 41.

⁶¹³ Maurantino, 24; Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 6.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid, 5.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid, 168.

⁶¹⁶ Domby, 6.

worked to legitimize the narratives espoused by Lost Cause proponents. Developed at a time when progressive civil rights legislation granted African Americans freedom, citizenship, and the right to vote, the myths of the Old South and Lost Cause degraded African Americans and asserted white supremacy. As legal racial barriers collapsed, these fabrications provided fresh justifications for the continued exclusion of people of color from American society. As Michael Bottoms wrote of postwar California, the “broad categories that defined” racial groups in the antebellum period “were replaced by a much more complicated scheme” in the Reconstruction era.⁶¹⁷

A significant element of this mythology involved the rejection of slavery as a cause of the war and the idealization of the experiences of formerly enslaved Americans. Termed the “myth of Confederate exceptionalism” by Nicole Maurantino in her work of the same name, this phenomenon evolved as an amalgam of the ideology of the Lost Cause and the belief in American exceptionalism.⁶¹⁸ According to scholars Lisa Flores and Christy-Dale Sims, removing the most indefensible element of Southern history from the narrative allowed the development of “frames of neutrality, objectivity, and distance that associate inappropriate emotional intensity with racist bodies and race consciousness.”⁶¹⁹ As David Blight explained, this exclusion of race and racism from the story “not only absolved southerners of responsibility for slavery, but made them the truest abolitionists.”⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁷ Bottoms, 205.

⁶¹⁸ Maurantino, 2.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

⁶²⁰ Ibid, 6.

Counter measures employed by loyal war veterans and the African American community sought to correct the disturbing narrative. In his remarks at a Memorial Day Service at Arlington National Cemetery in 1871, famed orator Frederick Douglass said:

“We are sometimes asked in the name of patriotism to forget the merits of this fearful struggle, and to remember with equal admiration those who struck at the nations life, and those who struck to save it; those who fought for slavery and those who fought for liberty and justice. I am the minister of malice, I would not repel the repentant, but may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I forget the difference between the parties to that bloody conflict. I may say if this war is to be forgotten, I ask in the name of all things sacred what shall man remember?”⁶²¹

In the midst of attempts to establish a dominant memory of the war, Southern legislators introduced laws to suppress post-war civil rights gains by African Americans through the constitutional amendments and civil rights legislation of the 1860s and 1870s. Beginning with the introduction of Black Codes that restricted freedoms afforded to African Americans, and then by Jim Crow Laws that segregated and disenfranchised the Black community for generations. As Clyde Woods described, during this period of defiance against progressive legislation, legislators in the former rebel states replaced Reconstruction governments and “former ‘slave catchers’ now travelled the roads of the South looking for [Black] men and boys to kidnap for the levee camps.”⁶²² These efforts to suppress African American agency in the United States allowed white supremacy to flourish, legitimizing the Lost Cause and codifying its ideology.

⁶²¹ Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 4.

⁶²² Clyde Woods, “‘Sittin’ on Top of the World: The Challenges of Blues and Hip Hop Geography” in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, edited by Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods (Toronto, Ontario: Between the Lines, 2007), 59.

Despite the competing categories of memorialization, advocates of the Lost Cause “gained long term strength from its success in controlling history books, and by banishing slavery from the war’s causation, it drew its staying power from the image of the faithful slave in the overall ideology of white supremacy.”⁶²³ With white southern women leading the charge, generations of Americans absorbed the Lost Cause saga through storytelling, media, and the erection of memorials across the country. Political and military leaders of the insurrection, most prominently Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee, became mythologized as national heroes who represented what came to be understood as both American and Southern values. In time, these fables of the Old South and her champions defined Americans’ collective memory of the war and became intertwined with ideas of Southern heritage that prevail into the twenty-first century.

The earliest forms of commemorations of the conflict, Dedication Days (observed as Memorial Day today) allowed Americans still healing from the war’s devastating effects to remember the loved ones they lost, while acknowledging the causes for which they fought and died. White southern women, in particular, banded together through such commemorative occasions, forming local memorial associations and raising funds for the creation of monuments to be erected first within cemeteries and later in the public sphere.⁶²⁴ According to David Goldfield, as the traditional “record keepers” of the Old South, white southern women were well suited to the task of “chronic[ing] the heroic deeds of a dead civilization so that it might live again.”⁶²⁵

⁶²³ David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2001), 284.

⁶²⁴ Ibid, 77.

⁶²⁵ Goldfield, 96.

The most prominent of these groups, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, became a powerful force in the creation of monuments to the rebellion. Focusing first on the common soldier, before shifting to the political and military figures who factored more prominently into the narrative, these monuments fit into “a larger project to celebrate white supremacy, remind the public of the proper order of things, maintain white racial unity, and cement white control in the South’s politics and upon the landscape.”⁶²⁶ Due to their perceived permanent and unchanging nature, monuments have served as the ideal vessel to perpetuate the Lost Cause mythology and “mold a landscape of collective memory” of the war.⁶²⁷

Such memorials came during a broader period of commemoration in the country, with monuments to the Union cause also marking the landscape in American communities from coast to coast. As Erika Doss explained, in the post-Civil War era “countless American cities and towns vied for statues (and other symbolic markers) that helped reimagine what Benedict Anderson termed the ‘affective bonds of nationalism.’”⁶²⁸ Like their Southern counterparts, Northern monuments “represented local pride, masculine ideals, racial beliefs, and community values” of the day and served as a means of controlling the narrative of the war, who emerged victorious and the “meaning of that victory.”⁶²⁹

⁶²⁶ Domby, 21.

⁶²⁷ Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4.

⁶²⁸ Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 20.

⁶²⁹ Evan Faulkenbury, “‘A Problem of Visibility’: Remembering and Forgetting the Civil War in Courtland, New York,” *The Public Historian* 41, No. 4 (2019): 84.

By focusing almost solely on white figures, memorials to the war effectively exclude African Americans from the narrative. As Kirk Savage argued, “More than any of the other arts, sculpture was embedded in the theoretical foundation of racism that supported American slavery and survived long after its demise.” He continued, “For racism, like sculpture, centered on the analysis and representation of the human body.”⁶³⁰ Examples like Thomas Ball’s *Emancipation Monument* sculpture in Washington, D.C., which infamously depicts Abraham Lincoln standing in front of a kneeling Black man, are evocative of the messaging inherent in public memorials and how United States history has been molded in the image of white supremacy. Literally set in stone, the prevalence of such monuments and the fervor with which they have been defended, are demonstrative of the level of entrenchment of racism and the Lost Cause myth in American society.

Popular culture also played a significant role in the dissemination of Lost Cause mythology. As described by Jan Lin, late nineteenth century agricultural expositions across the South included “‘Negro’ ethnological displays, ‘Old Plantation’ villages, and minstrel sideshows.”⁶³¹ This nostalgia for the mythologized Old South became profitable for use in advertisements, radio programming, music, and literature well into the twentieth century, normalizing the use of caricatures, like Aunt Jemima and Uncle Remus, in popular consciousness for generations of Americans. As journalist and civil rights activist Claude Barnett explained, “such characterizations also damaged black

⁶³⁰ Savage, 8.

⁶³¹ Jan Lin, *The Power of Urban Ethnic Places: Cultural Heritage and Community Life*, (London: Routledge, 2011), 66-7.

morale and symbolized how the nation had capitulated to the South.”⁶³² Karen Cox theorized that “rapid industrialization and urbanization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created social as well as economic conditions that led to Americans’ anxiety about modernity, and in the mediums of popular culture the South was frequently represented as its antithesis.”⁶³³ Playing on romantic perceptions of Southern gentility and the conditions of enslavement, these depictions of the antebellum period also served to soften the popular understanding of the war itself.

Imagery served as a powerful tool to solidify skewed interpretations of the past. Even before the war, depictions of African American men as stereotypes of either Jim Crow, a slow-witted enslaved laborer on a plantation, or Zip Coon, a “preposterous citified dandy” freedman, became popular characters in minstrel shows featuring white actors in blackface performing the exaggerated caricatures.⁶³⁴ Such portrayals became prevalent and could also be found in “political cartoons, songbook covers, and illustrations of blackface performance.”⁶³⁵ These caricaturized depictions continued into the postwar period as migration increased and the nation became more reliant on “mass consumerism and mass culture,” normalizing offensive portrayals of African Americans.⁶³⁶

⁶³² Karen Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 7.

⁶³³ Ibid, 3.

⁶³⁴ J. Stanley Lemons. “Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880-1920.” *American Quarterly* 29, No. 1 (Spring 1977): 102; See: “Anti-Black Imagery,” Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, Ferris State University. <https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/antiblack/#>.

⁶³⁵ Savage, 12.

⁶³⁶ Cox, 1.

Coming to dominate public consumption of popular culture, film and television became an additional medium for the dissemination of Lost Cause messaging. As Gary Gallagher explained, the narrative of the Lost Cause “flourished in films for nearly half a century [and] exposed generations of Americans to strongly positive depictions of the Confederacy and the slaveholding South, as well as to hostile treatments of Reconstruction.”⁶³⁷ Films like *Birth of a Nation*, *Gone with the Wind*, and *Song of the South*, as well as the source materials from which they were mined, are often cited as representative of the blatant portrayals of a romanticized Old South, with Northerners denigrated and demonized as “Yankees,” and African Americans depicted as mere caricatures. Criticized upon their release and in the decades that followed for their biased interpretations and racist messaging, all three films found incredible success nationally, with multiple rereleases throughout the twentieth century. Myriad films depicting a similar perspective followed for decades after the fact. While the overt racism in *Birth of a Nation*, *Gone with the Wind*, and *Song of the South* eventually became a recognized fact, their effect on popular perceptions of the Civil War and the American South in general cannot be understated.⁶³⁸

As historian Adam Domby postulated, “what makes the Lost Cause so relevant to contemporary history is not that it was heavily based on fabricated stories but that it's shaped the twentieth century.”⁶³⁹ Nearly 160 years after the end of the conflict, the work of “Confederate” mythmakers to reimagine the war into a righteous cause remains

⁶³⁷ Joan Waugh and Gary W. Gallagher, eds. *Wars Within a War: Controversy and Conflict over the American Civil War*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 157.

⁶³⁸ Ibid, 159.

⁶³⁹ Domby, 17.

engrained in American culture, a standard bearer of white supremacy in the United States. Attempts to question this belief system or introduce information that counters its message have been interpreted as attacks on Southern “heritage” or as disrespectful to the memory of those who fought in the conflict. The fight to preserve these memories becomes especially important when one considers that, for many Americans, the narrative of the Lost Cause is intertwined with identity.⁶⁴⁰ As Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone explained, “memory is not only individual but cultural [it] draws on countless scraps and bits of knowledge and information from the surrounding culture, and is inserted into larger cultural narratives.”⁶⁴¹

War-related historic sites and museums have traditionally served as additional outlets for the spread of biased rhetoric about the Civil War. Calling on ideals of heritage and patriotism, war-related sites across the country traditionally adopted reconciliationist perspectives of the war, seeking to capitalize on heritage tourism, “without denying its Confederate or antebellum past, including slavery.”⁶⁴² By the twentieth century, tourists from outside the American South, for whom the war and its aftermath lacked the same significance applied to it by Southerners, found the contradiction of American patriotism and pride in the rebellion compelling.⁶⁴³ Coupled with the effects of representations absorbed through text books and found in popular culture, defiant manifestations of Southern pride and the defense of Southern heritage became marketable elements for tourism to the region.

⁶⁴⁰ Goldfield, 4.

⁶⁴¹ Hodgkin and Radstone, 5.

⁶⁴² Cox, 132.

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

The invocation of heritage within the tourism industry has lent cultural value and validity to historic sites, legitimizing the messages they convey. By “[distilling] complicated and often contested histories into manageable units,” heritage tourism contributed to the normalization of dangerously biased interpretations of the past.⁶⁴⁴ From battlefields to historic house museums and other war-related sites, the application of notions of heritage and civic pride overshadowed the missing elements of the narrative. With an emphasis on white reconciliationist memory, many historic sites across the country reshaped historical accounts to overlook or disregard the experiences of African Americans, effectively cowing to the mythology espoused by Lost Cause proponents.⁶⁴⁵

Museums also present significant avenues for reinterpretation of the Civil War. Taking the narrative out of the battlefield, Civil War history museums can be “a powerful arbiter between history and memory, as visitors share experiences that draw groups together.”⁶⁴⁶ Considering the important role that museums can play in communities, their interpretive messaging must be reflective of the shifts in ideologies relating to the cultural imprint of the war, particularly as it pertains to the traditional white, male narratives of the conflict that exclude women and nonwhite groups.⁶⁴⁷ Since, as Bella Dick explained, “heritage is frequently validated by institutions and individuals who have attributed to it cultural value,” the long-established link between heritage and history in museum spaces

⁶⁴⁴ Glenn Hooper, *Heritage at the Interface: Interpretation and Identity*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2018), 1.

⁶⁴⁵ Christian J. Spielvogel, *Interpreting Sacred Ground: The Rhetoric of National Civil War Parks and Battlefields*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press), 4.

⁶⁴⁶ Maurantino, 16.

⁶⁴⁷ Amy K. Levin, “Why Local History Matters?” from *Defining Memory: Local Museums and the Construction of History in America’s Changing Communities* by Amy K. Levin and Joshua G. Adair, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 8.

must be reevaluated and reinterpreted.⁶⁴⁸ Recent emphases on the present manifestations of the past, such as monuments, memorials, and historic sites, have presented ideal opportunities to reconsider the war and open public dialogues about its role in modern day methods of memorialization.

The tragedy in Charleston's Mother Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2015, caused a seismic shift in popular perceptions of the war. The horror produced by the murder of nine parishioners by a white nationalist who showed an affinity for the "Confederate" battle flag brought the banner into public consciousness once again. Soon after, Civil War historic sites and museums across the country began to reevaluate their use of the flag. Long seen as a symbol of hatred and white supremacy in the United States, this event reopened conversations of the true role of the that symbol in American culture.⁶⁴⁹ Debates about its placement at state capitals and at federally funded historic sites, brought into sharp relief the ways that representations of white supremacy have found acceptance. By no means the first example of civic contestation over the flag, the brutality of the events in Charleston caused a palpable change in sentiment noted by academics and the general public alike.

Soon after the tragedy, the National Park Service publicized the reevaluation of their Confederate battle flag policy, including items for sale at museum stores within visitor centers, with Director Jonathan Jarvis stating, "We strive to tell the complete story of America" and explaining that "all items in parks are evaluated based on educational

⁶⁴⁸ Hooper, 3.

⁶⁴⁹ Olivia Williams Black. "The 150-Year War: The Struggle to Create and Control Civil War Memory at Fort Sumter National Monument." *The Public Historian* 38, No. 4 (2016): 150.

value and their connection to the park...any standalone depictions of Confederate flags have no place in park stores.”⁶⁵⁰ Located just miles from Mother Emmanuel, Fort Sumter National Monument became one of the first sites to adopt the policy. However, the flag continued to fly over the South Carolina State House in Columbia for nearly a month after the tragedy. Originally raised in protest to the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-twentieth century, the flag remained a symbol of defiance and a celebration of the state’s instigation of the Civil War. After its removal, lawmakers gave the flag to the South Carolina Confederate Relic Room and Military Museum, located just a mile away from the State House.⁶⁵¹

These actions renewed arguments about the preservation of Southern heritage and culture that long protected manifestations of the Confederacy and the Lost Cause. The connection between preservation and memorialization has been emphasized at all manner of history-related sites, from battlefields and museums to public monuments and cemeteries, and include the work of organizations, like Civil War reenactor groups and Civil War Round Tables across the country.⁶⁵² When applied to the defense of Confederate representations, invocations of heritage and culture have often evoked neo-Confederate, reconciliationist views of a conflict in which both sides bore equal blame.

⁶⁵⁰ Katie Lawhon. “Statement Regarding the Confederate Flag.” *Gettysburg National Military Park*. <https://www.nps.gov/gett/learn/news/statement-regarding-the-confederate-flag.htm>.

⁶⁵¹ “About the Flag from the State House...” *South Carolina Confederate Relic Room & Military Museum*. https://www.crr.sc.gov/information/about_the_flag.

⁶⁵² Civil War Round Tables seek to promote interest in the history of the American Civil War. Membership in these groups varies, with chapters across the American South ranging from hundreds to thousands of members.

The more complex histories behind the creations of monuments or the sanctification of symbols of the rebellion, have often been ignored.

Examinations into the origins of Confederate memorials reveals a clear through line from the Lost Cause manipulation of public memory to the creation of monuments, and finally to the defense of such memorials today. For decades, memorials to the rebellion have been “preserved as fetish,” daring any attempts to question their meaning and recoiling at the suggestion of ties to racism or white supremacy.⁶⁵³ As long-established elements of the American landscape, memorials have become a part of public memory of the insurrection, a memory that is intrinsically divorced from “facts, sources, or evidence” and which “is not reliant upon research as much as it is upon culture and the needs of the present.”⁶⁵⁴ As argued by W. Fitzhugh Brundage, “it is insufficient to focus on public commemorations and symbols, for it is individuals who remember.”⁶⁵⁵

While academics and institutions of public history have taken up the mantle of openly examining the root causes of the falsehoods and exclusions of the Lost Cause, Civil War-focused community organizations, including commemorative and reenactor groups, have lacked self-evaluation into their own interpretation of the issue. In his expository work on reenactor groups in the American South in the 1990s, journalist Tony Horowitz revealed the openly white supremacist rhetoric espoused by members of the Daughters of the Confederacy and Sons of Confederate Veterans, including efforts to

⁶⁵³ Hodgkin and Radstone, 11.

⁶⁵⁴ Domby, 6.

⁶⁵⁵ Michael A., McDonnell and Clare Corbould, et. al., *Remembering the Revolution: Memory, History, and Nation Making from Independence to the Civil War*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 4.

indoctrinate children on the myth of the Lost Cause.⁶⁵⁶ While the popularity of these groups waned since the time of Horowitz's exposé, Civil War reenactor groups remain one of the main avenues for Civil War history enthusiasts to share their interpretations of the war and its outcomes, making them an important outlet to share interpretive shifts in the field.⁶⁵⁷

From his conversations with unreformed "Confederates" in the late twentieth century, Horowitz opened a window into the subculture of white supremacy and its ties to the American Civil War, a subculture that came into the mainstream just twenty years later as instances of racial hatred and the racialized treatment of people of color became more widely recognized and led to renewed calls for civil rights for African Americans. Precipitated by the murder of George Perry Floyd, Jr. by police in May 2020, the latest of countless examples of police brutality against people of color, the Black Lives Matter civil rights movement drew attention to the origins of American racism, shining a bright light on symbols of the rebellion found across the United States, from state capitals and public thoroughfares, to public schools and university campuses.

Inspired by the call to remove such memorials after the massacre in Mother Emmanuel Church, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) created the *Whose Heritage?* database, a survey of public monuments, place names, and symbols to the rebellion across the country. Updated in 2019, the findings of *Whose Heritage?* revealed the removal of 114 "Confederate symbols" since their initial report in 2016, 1,747 still

⁶⁵⁶ Horowitz, 37.

⁶⁵⁷ See: Sue Eisenfeld, "The Decline of the Civil War Re-enactor," *New York Times*, July 28, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/28/style/civil-war-reenactments.html>

remained, “protected by state laws in the former Confederate states [and] shielded by civic leaders who refuse to act.”⁶⁵⁸ Referencing the revisionist history represented by such memorials, the SPLC noted the upsurge in rallies staged in defense of relics of the Lost Cause by white supremacist groups and the dangerous outcomes that resulted in recent years, including the 2017 murder of counter protester Heather Heyer by a white nationalist in a Charlottesville rally in support of the city’s monuments to the rebellion.⁶⁵⁹

Additional findings in *Whose Heritage?* revealed 318 schools named for Confederate figures, one hundred more than originally reported in 2016. Mainly located in primarily Black or nonwhite communities, of the 198 identified schools, twenty-two percent were located in the state of Georgia, with an additional twenty percent in Texas.⁶⁶⁰ As noted by Lecia Brooks, Chief of Staff of the SPLC, “School districts across the United States need to not only eliminate the revisionist racist propaganda used throughout their curricula, but also remove any and all imagery glorifying the insurrection located on and around school property in the form of monuments, statues, plaques, markers, mascots, and street names.”⁶⁶¹ The harsh reality of the data revealed by *Whose Heritage?* demonstrated the extent of the entrenchment of the Lost Cause narrative in institutions that mold public understanding the past and present across the

⁶⁵⁸ Southern Poverty Law Center. “Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, February 1, 2019; See also: “National Monument Audit,” *Monument Lab*. (Philadelphia, PA: Monument Lab, 2021).

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ Southern Poverty Law Center. “Report: Georgia Leads the Nation With 45 Public School Named After Confederate Leaders,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*. Accessed on October 27, 2021. <https://www.splcenter.org/presscenter/report-georgia-leads-nation-45-public-schools-named-after-confederate-leaders>.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

country. From grade schools to universities, Confederate namesakes and monuments normalized the rebellion and treason that nearly broke the country apart.

Interpretations of these momentous issues by educational institutions and their staff shaped generations of Americans' perceptions of the Civil War. The Lost Cause myth became so engrained in literature, popular culture, and public memorials that reframing the story became imperative to right the wrong of the past. Historian Allen C. Guelzo addressed this in an editorial for the *New York Times*, "How Do I Tell the Story of Robert E. Lee?" Discussing his seven years of work to write a biography of the controversial figure, Guelzo acknowledged the turn of the tide that came after the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, which he noted "quickly turned Lee into something different for many Americans...a symbol of our racial trauma."⁶⁶² In discussing the difficulties inherent in writing a biography of the man who became "the apex of the 'Lost Cause' mythology, which treated him as the peerless Southern cavalier and the ultimate vindication of white supremacy," Guelzo explained the "need to confront those delinquencies head-on rather than tiptoe conveniently around them."⁶⁶³

This acknowledgement of Lee as a traitor, rather than a hero, found resistance from generations of Americans indoctrinated into the Lost Cause. As Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia that protected the seat of the insurrection, Lee became a widely revered figure among rebel sympathizers during and after the war, so much so that his surrender in April of 1865 is still often considered the end of the Civil War, despite

⁶⁶² Allen C. Guelzo, "How Do I Tell the Story of Robert E. Lee?" *New York Times*, September 25, 2021. Accessed October 25, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/25/opinion/robert-e-lee-monument-american-history.html>.

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

the fact that fighting continued and armies surrendered for months after the fact. His refusal to condemn the war and his defense of Jefferson Davis in the postwar period belie his subsequent characterization as a reconciliationist.⁶⁶⁴ Nonetheless, like Davis, Lost Cause propaganda sanctified Lee into a martyr of the Confederacy, a “noble character [who] won by losing,” an distinction not popularly conferred upon the Northern generals who won the war.⁶⁶⁵

As Virginia Governor Ralph Northam stated at the removal of the Lee statue in Richmond in September 2021, Confederate statuary “were really a way to re-fight the Civil War.”⁶⁶⁶ As spectator Lamonte Rigmaden rightly stated, “the stain of white supremacy is all over this monument.”⁶⁶⁷ The statue, whose dedication in 1890 drew a crowd of nearly 150,000 people, became a selling feature for the neighborhood that developed around it, as did the other Confederate statuary that eventually made up the city’s Monument Avenue. As Kevin M. Levin explained in *The Atlantic*, monuments to the insurrection “were never intended to be passive commemorations of a dead past; rather, they helped do the work of justifying segregation and relegating African Americans to second-class status.”⁶⁶⁸ Upon its completion, images and descriptions of the statues appeared in advertisements for the Monument Avenue neighborhood. With

⁶⁶⁴ Janney, 65.

⁶⁶⁵ Blight, 284.

⁶⁶⁶ Gregory S. Schneider and Laura Vozzella, “Robert E. Lee Statue is Removed in Richmond, Ex-Capital of Confederacy, After Months of Protests and Legal Resistance.” *Washington Post*, September 8, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/robert-e-lee-statue-removal/2021/09/08/1d9564ee-103d-11ec-9cb6-bf9351a25799_story.html.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁸ Kevin M. Levin. “Richmond’s Confederate Monuments Were Used to Sell a Segregated Neighborhood.” *The Atlantic*, June 11, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/its-not-just-the-monuments/612940/>.

restrictive covenants as a major draw, the advertisements included the assurance that “no lots can ever be sold or rented in MONUMENT AVENUE PARK to any person of African descent.”⁶⁶⁹ The Confederate figures of Monument Avenue formed a protective bubble for the residents in their shadows, a manifestation of the white supremacy and racial terror that they represented. An Arthur Ashe monument installed in 1996 posed as a counterbalance to the messaging of the Confederate statuary but could not alter the effects of more than a century of Lost Cause propaganda they embodied.

The Lost Cause and its messaging have not been relegated to the American South. As the SPLC’s *Whose Heritage?* report revealed, Confederate symbols can be found across the country, with California holding the most of any state outside of the former rebel states. As a state with a high preponderance of transplants from the South before, during, and after the war, California’s Confederate sympathies are not surprising. Antebellum efforts to tie the state to the slave states and introduce slavery to its southern region, heralded a disunion movement before and during the war and racialized legislation in the postwar period. California’s strong ties to the American South in the antebellum and Civil War-eras are important issues that factor into wider discussions of the state’s development in the nineteenth century.

In 2020, while Black Lives Matter demonstrations marched across the country, *Los Angeles Times* staff writer Hailey Branson-Potts reported on calls to address the various odes to the Confederacy throughout the state of California, including the city of Fort Bragg, named for rebel General Braxton Bragg, the Rebel mascot of Quartz Hill

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid.

High School in the Antelope Valley, and the giant sequoia named for Robert E. Lee in Kings Canyon National Park. The national reckoning resulted in the reconsideration of each of these Confederate memorials, a long overdue process that historian Kevin Waite described as deliberate, stating “I think part of the reason that this history is hidden for a lot of Californians is because it doesn’t really sit well with the stories we like to tell ourselves about this free state that’s now on the edge of cosmopolitan liberalism.”⁶⁷⁰

Waite continued by explaining California’s past as a stronghold of Confederate sympathizers before, during, and after the war, noting that “no state beyond the South has had as many monuments and place names honoring the Confederacy and its soldiers,” all of which stand or stood as markers of the Lost Cause mythology. Ryan Keating also addressed this issue in his interview with Elizabeth Castillo of Cal Matters, explaining “these monuments and these memorials tend to be in very public places,” continuing “[they] coincide with moments in which African Americans seem to be gaining some political power or voice and they are designed with a very specific intent of protecting a certain type of power and serving as a reminder of who’s in control.”⁶⁷¹ Forced to recognize the Confederate legacy apparent in the state, public and private efforts resulted in the removal and replacement of monuments and memorials to the rebellion throughout California, a task likely made easier by the state’s distance from the physical battlefields

⁶⁷⁰ Hailey Branson-Potts, “California Confronts its Racist Past as Tributes to Confederates and Colonizers Fall,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-06-26/california-statues-confederate-name-changes-racism>.

⁶⁷¹ Elizabeth Castillo, “What’s Left of Confederate Monuments in California,” *Cal Matters*, July 13, 2020. <https://calmatters.org/multimedia/2020/07/whats-left-of-confederate-monuments-in-california/>.

of the Civil War and the indifference with which many residents confront a past that appears far removed.

In the midst of a twenty-first-century civil rights movement when questions about the long shadow of the war on American memory and culture have found renewed relevance, the dangerously divisive issue elicited scrutiny by academics and non-academics alike. The tragedies of the 2015 massacre in Charleston's Mother Emmanuel AME Church by a white supremacist, and the murder of Heather Heyer, shine a critical light on the cultural and social significance of the memory and reverence of the Civil War.

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