The Brittle West: Secession and Separatism in the Southwest Borderlands during the Civil War Era

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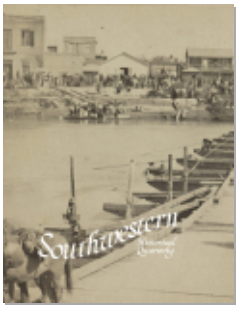

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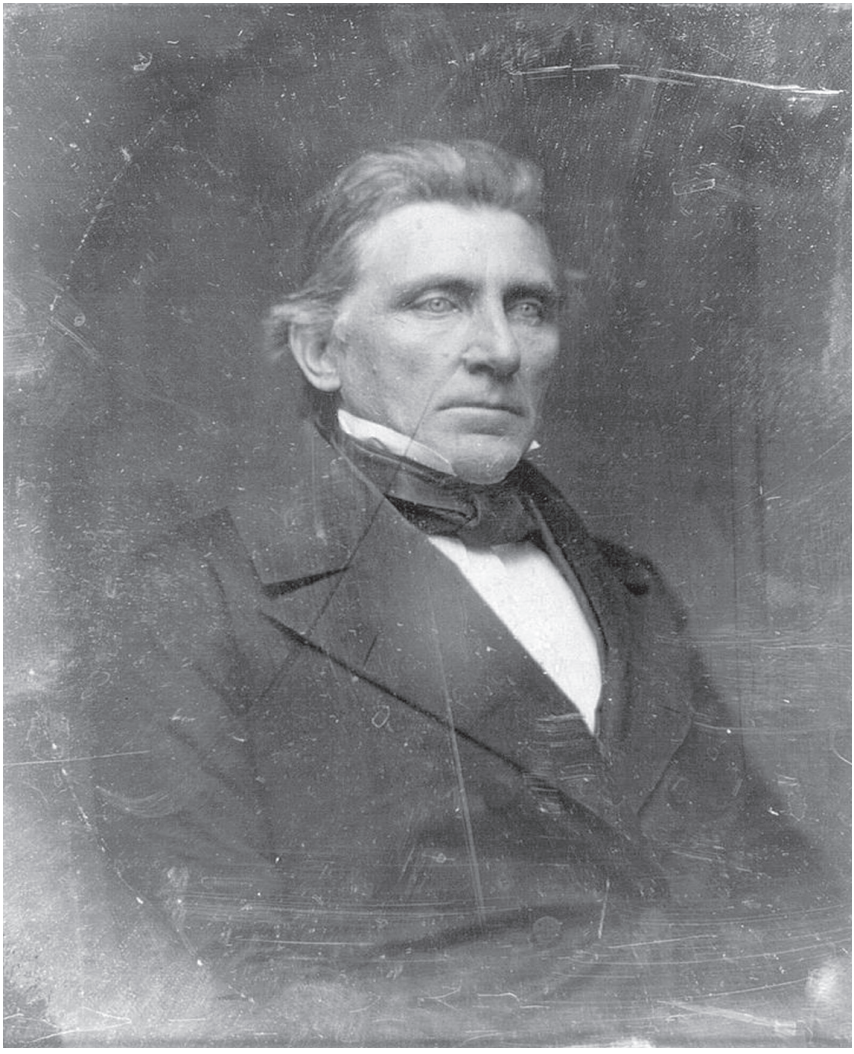

William M. Gwin, senator from California and Mississippi slaveholder, photographed between 1844 and 1860 by Mathew B. Brady. *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division,* https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004663972/ [Accessed Apr. 14, 2023].

The Brittle West: Secession and Separatism in the Southwest Borderlands during the Civil War Era

By Kevin Waite*

Less than a year into its campaign, the Confederate Army of New Mexico jettisoned nearly everything that had once made it a formidable fighting force. Clothing, weapons, ammunition, and even sick and dehydrated soldiers were abandoned along the army's 350-mile retreat from Santa Fe to El Paso in the spring of 1862. Those who were not left behind stumbled on, pursued by Union and Indigenous forces alike. When their wagons became mired in sand, they burned them. And when their cannons became too heavy to haul, they buried them. Keeping only what they could carry on their backs, the rebels staggered across the high desert landscape, from brackish water hole to brackish water hole. The 1,800 men who limped into El Paso in early May more closely resembled refugees than soldiers. The campaign claimed an estimated 30 percent of their comrades as killed, wounded, or captured, which was among the highest casualty rates suffered by any Confederate army during the war. This was the inglorious end to the Confederacy's westernmost campaign.[1]

In hindsight, the campaign's failure seems almost inevitable. The Union would eventually concentrate some 24,000 soldiers in the Far Southwest,

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[1] Megan Kate Nelson, *The Three-Cornered War: The Union, The Confederacy, and Native Peoples in the Fight for the West* (New York: Scribner, 2020), 114–121; Donald S. Frazier, *Blood and Treasure: Confederate Empire in the Southwest* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 238–277; Kevin Adams, "War in the West," in *The Cambridge History of the American Civil War*, ed. Aaron Sheehan-Dean (3 vols.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), I, 554–575; Jerry D. Thompson (ed.), *Civil War in the Southwest: Recollections of the Sibley Brigade* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 99–132.

a fighting force that outnumbered the entire pre-war U.S. Regular Army and dwarfed the 3,000 Texans who occupied parts of New Mexico at the height of the Confederacy's influence there.[2] Compared to the forces that marched in the major military theaters on the eastern half of the country, the Confederate Army of New Mexico was small, poorly equipped, and badly led. For much of the invasion, two companies carried only lances into battle, while the commander, General Henry Hopkins Sibley, was drunkenly incapacitated at pivotal moments in the campaign.[3] According to historian Gary Gallagher, the rebels' "quixotic foray into New Mexico in 1862, scarcely rise[s] to the level of inconsequential."[4] Even General Sibley, the architect of the campaign, conceded that "the Territory of New Mexico is not worth a quarter of the blood and treasure expended in its conquest."[5] By this logic, thousands of fighting Texans were wasted on an errand into the western wilderness.

Yet, such postmortem assessments obscure the deeper significance of the invasion and the strategic aims that set Sibley's army in motion. The Far Southwest was, at the outset of the war, a vast borderland of conflicting loyalties and contested ground. Sibley and his invading Texans knew this. And although his campaign was mismanaged, his strategic priorities were not misplaced. He had hoped to tap the region's deep reservoir of disunionism to propel his eventual march on California. U.S. military authorities in the Far West were as apprehensive as Sibley was confident, at least initially. They understood that this broad region, under pressure, might splinter from the Union, potentially creating another independent republic, or multiple republics, within what had once been the United States.[6]

This article investigates an array of threats to U.S. authority in the Southwest borderlands, what I call here the "Brittle West." The secession crisis was, in fact, a series of crises that reached from Charleston Harbor to the ports of the Pacific, threatening to shatter the Union along multiple fault lines. Disunionism in the Far West came in several guises, not all

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[2] Andrew E. Masich, *Civil War in the Southwest Borderlands, 1861–1867* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018), 48. Many of those troops were engaged in a war of attrition against the Native people of the Southwest, especially the Navajos and Apaches.

[3] For more on Sibley, see Jerry D. Thompson, *Confederate General of the West: Henry Hopkins Sibley* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996). For a critical first-hand account of Sibley's leadership, see T. T. Teel, "Sibley's New Mexican Campaign–Its Objects and the Causes of Its Failure," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, ed. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (reprint; 4 vols.; Edison, N.J.: Castle, 1995), II, 700.

[4] Gary W. Gallagher, "Out West," *HistoryNet*, June 20, 2017, <https://www.historynet.com/out-west/> [Accessed Apr. 7, 2023].

[5] Report of Henry Hopkins Sibley, May 4, 1862, *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* (hereafter cited as *OR*), (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880–1901), Series 1, Vol. IX, 511–512.

[6] For typical Unionist fears in the West, see [San Francisco businessmen] to Simon Cameron, Aug. 8, 1861, *OR*, Series I, Vol. L, Part 1, 589–591; and William Need to Simon Cameron, Sept. 27, 1861, *OR*, Series I, Vol. L, Part I, 635–641.

of them directly aligned with the Confederate rebellion in the American Southeast: a movement for an independent Pacific republic, centered on California; the would-be separatism of Latter-day Saints in the Mormon-dominated territory of Utah; and the secession of southern New Mexico and the creation of the Confederate territory of Arizona. Simultaneously, some of the region's Indigenous people, notably the Apache and Navajo, struck against encroaching federal authorities.[7] Individually, these western rebellions may appear minor affairs within the grander drama of the Civil War, especially compared to the much larger insurrection in the slave South. But collectively, they constituted a continental crisis of the Union.[8]

What was apparent to beleaguered U.S. officials in the antebellum West—the geographic breadth of rebellion—has been less so to historians ever since. The classic accounts of the Civil War era generally confine the history of disunion to the eastern half of the country.[9] To be sure, the Civil War in the Far West has grown into a flourishing subfield, with a proliferation of books, conferences, and special issues, including the one in which this essay appears.[10] But the majority of these studies concern the war years, rather than the political crises that triggered the shooting. And while a number of excellent state and territorial histories of the West examine the secession crisis in detail, rarely do they consider the collec-

[7] Due to space constraints and because those Indigenous campaigns have been ably examined elsewhere, this essay will focus on the separatist movements led by those who identified as U.S. citizens—or erstwhile U.S. citizens. For studies on Native people in the Civil War Southwest, see Masich, *Civil War in the Southwest Borderlands;* Nelson, *Three-Cornered War;* Kevin Waite, "War in Indian County," in Sheehan-Dean, *Cambridge History of the American Civil War,* I, 576–600; Glen Sample Ely and James Bailey Blackshear, *Confederates and Comancheros: Skulduggery and Double-Dealing in the Texas–New Mexico Borderlands* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021).

[8] My framing for this era is deeply influenced by the work of Steven Hahn and Elliott West, especially West's concept of "Greater Reconstruction." West, *The Last Indian War: The Nez Perce Story (*New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); West, "Reconstructing Race," *Western Historical Quarterly* 34 (Spring 2003): 6–26; Hahn, "Slave Emancipation, Indian Peoples and the Projects of a New American Nation-State," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 3 (September 2013): 307–330; Hahn, *A Nation Without Borders: The United States and Its World, 1830–1910* (New York: Penguin, 2015), chapter 10; Richard White, *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865–1896* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), chapter 3.

[9] See many of the seminal works on the era, including David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861,* completed and edited by Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Ballantine, 1989); William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) and *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854–1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). It should be noted that Potter covers the Pacific railroad debates as a prologue to the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

[10] There are a number of excellent works, in addition to those cited in footnotes 1,2, and 3, including Alvin M. Josephy Jr., *The Civil War in the American West* (New York: Vintage, 1991); Glen Sample Ely, "Gone from Texas and Trading with the Enemy: New Perspectives on Civil War West Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 110 (April 2007): 438–463; Ari Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling over the Memory of Sand Creek* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013); Virginia Scharff (ed.), *Empire and Liberty: The Civil War and the West* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Adam Arenson and Andrew R. Graybill (eds.), *Civil War Wests: Testing the Limits of the United States* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Thomas W. Cutrer, *Theater of a Separate War: The Civil War West of the Mississippi River, 1861–1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

tive power of disunionism, which spilled across territorial and state lines to imperil the entire southern half of the country.[11] This essay explores the overlapping disunionist threats in California, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona to situate the sectional crisis in a continental framework and to underscore the fragile, contingent nature of American nationalism and nationhood.[12]

The view from the Brittle West destabilizes the traditional understanding of America's so-called Manifest Destiny. Contrary to the brassy rhetoric of certain antebellum expansionists, there was nothing predestined, or even all that likely, about the transcontinental dimensions of the United States. As historian Thomas Richards Jr. has argued, nineteenth-century Americans often moved west not to expand the United States, but to escape it.[13] National loyalties along the peripheries of the nation, in places like California and New Mexico, were especially unstable. After all, the large Hispano populations in a region recently seized from Mexico had ample reason to mistrust the U.S. state.[14] Americans often saw "their nation's boundaries not as a fait accompli but as a work in progress," according to historian Rachel St. John.[15] That was never more apparent than

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[11] See Loomis Morton Ganaway, *New Mexico and the Sectional Controversy, 1846–1861* (reprint; Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1976); E. B. Long, *The Saints and the Union: Utah Territory during the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Leonard Richards, *The California Gold Rush and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Vintage, 2007); William S. Kiser, *Turmoil on the Rio Grande: History of the Mesilla Valley, 1846–1865* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011); 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); Stacey Smith, *Freedom's Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); John Gary Maxwell, *The Civil War Years in Utah: The Kingdom of God and the Territory that Did not Fight* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016); and James Robbins Jewell, "Thwarting Southern Schemes and British Bluster in the Pacific Northwest," in Arenson and Graybill, *Civil War Wests*, 15–32. For studies of the Southwest borderlands, more broadly, in the Civil War era, see Howard Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846–1912: A Territorial History* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1966); William S. Kiser, *Illusions of Empire: The Civil War and Reconstruction in the U.S.–Mexico Borderlands* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021); Kiser, *Coast-to-Coast Empire: Manifest Destiny and the New Mexico Borderlands* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018); and Kevin Waite, *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

[12] The concept of contingency is central to this essay, as it is to many other works of Civil War scholarship. On "deep contingency," see Edward L. Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America, 1859–1863* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003).

[13] Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800–1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Gregory P. Downs, "The Mexicanization of American Politics: The United States' Transnational Path from Civil War to Stabilization," *American Historical Review* 117 (April 2012): 387–409; Sarah Rodríguez, "'Children of the Great Mexican Family': Anglo-American Immigration to Texas and the Making of the American Empire, 1820–1861" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2015). See also Andrew C. Isenberg and Thomas Richards Jr., "Alternative Wests: Rethinking Manifest Destiny," *Pacific Historical Review* 86 (February 2017): 4–17; Thomas Richards Jr., "'Farwell to America': The Expatriation Politics of Overland Migration, 1841–1846" *Pacific Historical Review* 86 (February 2017): 114–152; and Richards, *Breakaway Americas: The Unmanifest Future of the Jacksonian United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020).

[14] Anthony P. Mora, *Border Dilemmas: Racial and National Uncertainties in New Mexico, 1848–1912* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011).

[15] Rachel St. John, "The Unpredictable America of William Gwin: Expansion, Secession, and the Unstable Borders of Nineteenth-Century North America," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 6 (March 2016): 58, 61.

during the secession crisis, when those boundaries began to collapse. The separatist impulse that started in the slaveholding states of the South soon migrated west. To many Americans at the outset of the war, it appeared that the fracturing of the Union had only just begun.

Even the boldest early American visionaries had trouble imagining a transcontinental union. President Thomas Jefferson famously sent Lewis and Clark's exploring party across North America to the shores of the Pacific. But he did not expect the United States itself to reach so far. Instead of an unbroken U.S. dominion, he predicted that White American settlers would establish coexisting confederacies, "governed in similar forms and by similar laws," across the breadth of the continent.[16] His empire of liberty, in other words, would encompass multiple republics. Even as the United States expanded westward in the coming decades, statesmen and settlers clung to the old Jeffersonian logic. White Americans would one day claim the North American continent, they argued, but not necessarily in the name of the United States. California was a particularly tempting prize, with its deepwater ports, small Mexican population, and large pool of unfree Indigenous laborers. It was ripe for the taking, California's early White settlers claimed, and large enough for an independent republic.[17]

They got their wish—albeit in fleeting and illusory fashion. In June 1846, thirty-three American invaders seized the dusty frontier town of Sonoma, hauled down the Mexican flag, and raised a new banner in its place. It featured a grizzly bear on one side, a star on the other, and a simple proclamation in large letters: "California Republic." (A version of this Bear Flag remains the California state symbol to this day, stamped onto every type of apparel imaginable, and sold throughout the state's airports and tourist shops.) The Bear Flag revolt is significant for its aesthetic sensibilities rather than its political import, however. The United States declared war on Mexico that same year, and within a month, the Stars and Stripes had replaced the Bear Flag over Sonoma. In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo formally ceded California and New Mexico to the United States. The brief, unspectacular reign of independent California was at an end.[18]

Yet the federal government's hold over its newly-seized territories was feeble at best—a fact that disaffected Californians never tired of pointing out. Even President James K. Polk, the driving force behind the new U.S. empire on the Pacific, acknowledged the possibility of a California revolt. He predicted that, in the absence of strong federal support, White emigrants in the Far West "would probably organize an independent gov-

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[16] Jefferson to James Monroe, Nov. 24, 1801, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol. 35, ed. Barbara B. Oberg (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009),719–720.

[17] Richards, *Breakaway Americas,* 149–181.

[18] On the Bear Flag revolt, see Joseph Ellison, "Designs for a Pacific Republic, 1843–62," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 31 (December 1930): 321; Richards, *Breakaway Americas,* 149–150.

ernment, calling it the California or Pacific Republic, and might endeavor to introduce [*sic*] Oregon to join them."[19] Through the next decade, westerners complained that the American East took California's gold and gave little in return. Newspapers, such as the *Oregon Statesman*, the *Portland Democratic Standard*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle,* among others, argued that the Far West should keep its riches to itself, and could do so as an independent nation.[20]

For many of California's settlers, unionism was conditional on sufficient federal support. At the top of their list of demands was a railroad to link their region to the major population centers of the East. Nearly two thousand miles separated the Pacific Coast from the Mississippi Valley. Communication between the coasts required a months-long overland ordeal or an expensive, roundabout journey via steamship. A transcontinental railroad, according to California state senator Thomas Jefferson Green, "is a question of Union."[21] East and West must be linked by a bond of iron or else be sundered, he argued. Jefferson Davis of Mississippi—who, like Green, advocated for a transcontinental railroad along a far southern route—made a similar set of arguments from his seat in the U.S. Senate and later as secretary of war.[22]

Green belonged to a clique of Democratic powerbrokers in California who would soon provide vocal support for disunion. At the center of that circle was Senator William M. Gwin, a Mississippi planter-cum-California kingpin. Like Green, Gwin was a slaveholder. He continued to own roughly two hundred enslaved African Americans and to operate, by proxy, vast tracts of land near Natchez, Mississippi, even as he represented California in the U.S. Senate. He enforced strict discipline within the proslavery wing of California's Democratic machine, known as "the Chivalry," and dispensed lucrative patronage positions to those who demonstrated proper fealty. "No northern man . . . who was known to be strongly against slavery ever received anything at his hands," one California pioneer complained. "Every thing he did was in favor of Southern interests."[23] By the mid-1850s, the San Francisco Customshouse was so crowded with Southern-born appointees on federal sinecures that it became known as the

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[19] James K. Polk, Dec. 12, 1848, in *Polk, The Diary of a President, 1845–1849*, ed. Allan Nevins (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), 356. See also Norman Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific: A Study in American Continental Expansion* (Claremont, Calif.: Regina Books, 1955).

[20] Ellison, "Pacific Republic," 329–330; Richard Kreitner, *Break It Up: Secession, Division, and the Secrete History of America's Imperfect Union* (New York: Little, Brown, 2020), 251–253.

[21] *Letter from General Thomas J. Green, of California, to Hon. Robert J. Walker, upon the Subject of a Pacific Railroad* (New York: Sibells & Maigne, 1853), 7.

[22] Kevin Waite, "Jefferson Davis and Proslavery Visions of Empire in the Far West," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 6 (December 2016): 536–565.

[23] Elisha Oscar Crosby, *Memoirs of Elisha Oscar Crosby: Reminiscences of California and Guatemala from 1849 to 1864,* ed. Charles Albro Barker (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1945), 62.

"Virginia Poorhouse."[24] Although they represented no more than 30 percent of California's voting population, White Southerners prevailed in election after election.[25]

California's proslavery partisans were especially active in Los Angeles. There, an unlikely alliance of White Southerners and Mexican-born elites launched a movement to split California in two and transform the southern part of the state into the new territory of Colorado. (Present-day Colorado was not designated as a separate territory until 1861, when it was carved from western Kansas.) Southern Californians fielded petitions for state division on a nearly annual basis in the 1850s. Advocates for state division cited Los Angeles's distance from the state capital of Sacramento, a shortage of legislative representatives, and a tax system that placed disproportionate levies on Southern California's rancheros. In private, though, they spoke of a grander ambition: to transform the new territory into a future slave state. Migrants from the South formed a majority of the U.S.-born population in Los Angeles, and they intended to use their influence to impose a slave code on the would-be territory. Abraham Lincoln had been warning of such a plan since the mid-1850s. According to the former Illinois congressman, the Slave Power was at work in the Far West, and unless firm actions were taken, Southern California would become the nation's next slave state.[26]

Southern Democrats successfully steered a state division bill through California's legislative process in 1859. The bill cleared the state assembly, the state senate, and then a popular referendum in Southern California, where it passed by a three-to-one margin. From there, it faced one final obstacle: the Thirty-Sixth Congress, in which Republicans held a plurality of House seats. With the prospect of national disunion on the agenda, Congress was in no mood to endorse a measure for regional dismemberment, especially not one favored by California's powerful proslavery faction. Thus, the state division bill finally failed. Nevertheless, the campaign had galvanized Southern California's separatists. Within a year, some of the prime movers behind California state division would begin advocating for a far grander type of division: the breakup of Union.[27]

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[24] John Carr, *Pioneer Days in California* (Eureka, Calif.: Times Publishing Company, 1891), 347.

[25] On the southern influence in California, see Richards, *The California Gold Rush and the Coming of the Civil War;* Waite, *West of Slavery,* 91–122; Smith, *Freedom's Frontier;* and Daniel Brendan Lynch, "Southern California Chivalry: The Convergence of Southerners and Californios in the Far Southwest, 1846–1866" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2015).

[26] Abraham Lincoln, Draft of Resolutions for presentation in the U.S House of Representatives, Jan. 1855, in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln,* ed. Roy P. Basler (8 vols.; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), II, 301. Numerous commentators noted the machinations of slaveholders in the state division movement; see Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Land of Gold: Reality Versus Fiction* (Baltimore: Henry Taylor, 1855), 278–279; John B. Peirce to Hitty Peirce, Sept. 17, 1851, John Bachelder Peirce Papers (Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts); Carr, *Pioneer Days in California,* 346.

[27] Ward M. McAfee, "California's House Divided," *Civil War History* 33 (1987): 118–119; Lynch, "Southern California Chivalry," 114–130.

Some of these regional separatists represented California at the Democratic National Convention in Charleston in the fall of 1860. Delegates from Oregon and California threw their support behind the slave states, effectively blocking the nomination of the moderate Stephen Douglas. Previously, at their own state convention, California Democrats had endorsed the *Dred Scott* decision and the unrestricted rights of slaveholders in the territories. There would be grave consequences, they threatened, if those rights were in any way imperiled. In a long fiery speech in support of his Southern colleagues, Austin E. Smith of California raised the specter of a western rebellion. If slaveholders' appeals were ignored, disunion would follow, he claimed. In which case, "The Pacific States, have, thank God, the domain upon which to build up a splendid empire of their own," he gloated.[28]

Smith may have been a proslavery radical, but he represented more than just a fringe within California. Publicly or privately, the state's entire congressional delegation endorsed the formation of an independent Pacific republic. According to Senator Milton Latham, California would go its own way in the event of a war between North and South. "Why should we trust to the management of others," he asked, "what we are abundantly able to do ourselves?"[29] Senator Gwin was more circumspect in his public comments, but in his private correspondence, he thrilled to the possibility of national dismemberment and California independence.[30] So too did U.S. Representative Charles L. Scott. "In my heart of hearts I warmly sympathize with the South," he wrote in a widely reprinted letter. Yet in the event of war, he vowed, "I will strenuously advocate the secession of California and the establishment of a separate republic on the Pacific slope."[31] Governor John Weller and Representative John C. Burch made similar predictions about a far western independence movement.[32] Thus, by the eve of the Civil War, the idea of a Pacific republic had moved from the realm of vague threat to the domain of distinct possibility.[33]

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[28] Murat Halstead, *A History of the National Political Conventions of the Current Presidential Campaign* (Columbus, Ohio: Follet, Foster and Company, 1860), 79.

[29] Cong. Globe, 36th Congress, 1st session, 1727–1729. See also, *Alta California* (San Francisco), "Pacific Confederacy," Jan. 12, 1861. Ever the opportunist, Latham retracted his remarks when they kicked up a firestorm of controversy in the Senate.

[30] William Gwin to Calhoun Benham, Feb. 8, 1861, *OR*, Series II, Vol. II, 1015; Gwin to Joseph Lancaster Brent, Mar. 27, 1863, Joseph Lancaster Brent Papers (Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California; cited hereafter as HEHL).

[31] Charles L. Scott to Charles Lindley, Chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee of California, Dec. 21, 1860, printed in the *San Francisco Bulletin*, Jan. 16, 1861. See also *Los Angeles Star*, Dec. 8, 1860, and Dec. 22, 1860; William Carey Jones to the *San Francisco Herald*, Dec. 15, 1860, in Benjamin Hayes Scrapbooks, Vol. 19, no. 10 (Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California).

[32] For Burch's position, see *Red Bluff (California) Independent*, Jan. 8, 1861; *Sacramento Daily Union*, Feb. 13, 1861. See also Winfield J. Davis, *History of Political Conventions in California, 1849–1892* (Sacramento: California State Library, 1893), 128–129.

[33] For much of this period, the Pacific republic movement ran in parallel to filibustering operations,

Despite its considerable appeal and powerful backers, the Pacific republic movement has long been considered a mere historical curiosity, generally confined to a footnote, if that, in most major accounts of the Civil War era. Perhaps that is unsurprising. The Pacific republic movement was, after all, stillborn. For all the talk of California independence, an independent California was just that—talk. As rebels in the South took up arms, most rebels in the West merely conspired. Western disunionists themselves acknowledged that their independence was contingent on the success of the Confederate rebellion. In the meantime, they watched and waited.

Contingency is not the same as implausibility, however. Confederate defeat was not inevitable, and neither was California's loyalty. Leaders from across the country and the political spectrum—Confederate vice president Alexander Stephens, U.S. general George McClellan, editor J. D. B. De Bow, and many others—anticipated a multi-directional fracturing of the United States.[34] First the South would split, they believed, then parts of the West. The Pacific Coast occupied a precarious place within the United States. California had been part of the Union for barely a decade when the war broke out, and many of its residents had been advocating for independence long before that. The state remained isolated from the country's major population centers and often overlooked by its political leaders. And it harbored a powerful class of proslavery Democrats who openly sympathized with Confederate rebels. Only from the vantage point of the post-Civil War era—with Union victory secured, a Pacific railroad constructed, and the electoral crisis of 1876 averted—does a continental United States appear manifest.

The territory of Utah was born from a separatist impulse, and through the Civil War era, its Mormon settlers remained a people apart. They first arrived in the Salt Lake Basin in 1847, led by Brigham Young, who sought to establish a new Zion for his people outside the United States, in what was then a thinly populated corner of Mexico. Years of persecution—in New York, Ohio, Missouri, and most recently Illinois—had convinced the Latter-day Saints that their long-term survival could only be secured beyond the reach of most American "gentiles" (that is, non-Mormons) and their government. As Church elder Sidney Rigdon put it in 1844, the Latter-day Saints (LDS) would "form a Theocracy according to the will of

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several of which were launched from California. For more on those filibusterers and their proslavery sympathies, see Robert E. May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854–1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973).

[34] Henry Cleveland (ed.), *Alexander H. Stephens in Public and Private with Letters and Speeches Before, During, and Since the War* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1886), 717–729; George B. McClellan to Abraham Lincoln, July 7, 1862, in *OR*, Series I, Vol. II, Part 1, 73–74; "The Perils of Peace," *De Bow's Review*, October–November 1861, 396–397; Gwin to Brent, Mar. 27, 1863, Brent Papers, HEHL.

Heaven, planted without any intention to interfere with any government of the world. We wish to have nothing to do with them."[35]

The dream of an independent Mormon kingdom, however, soon ran up against the expanding U.S. state. By the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the United States gained title to the land that Mormon settlers had dubbed Deseret. Suddenly finding themselves residents of the U.S. territory of Utah, Mormons attempted, repeatedly, to secure statehood. Congress rebuffed their efforts. When federally appointed officials within the territory complained of mistreatment by Mormons, the United States responded with armed force. An army of 2,500 U.S. troops marched toward the Great Basin in 1857, in what would be the most expensive U.S. military operation of the decade. Young, in turn, mustered the Nauvoo Legion, Utah's militia. This was, according to Elliott West, the first independent American military command to take up arms against the U.S. government in the country's history. Four years later, the Confederate army became the second.[36]

When slaveholding states began to break from the Union in the winter of 1860–61, Mormons saw little reason to rally to the Lincoln administration's defense. Indeed, the Republican Party had previously campaigned on a platform against the "twin relics of barbarism," slavery and polygamy. Not only had the LDS leadership licensed the practice of polygamy, but Utah's lawmakers had also legalized multiple forms of unfree labor. Passed in 1852, "An Act in Relation to Service" allowed Latter-day Saints to hold Black people in lifelong bondage and to buy and sell their labor.[37] Although Utah's enslaved Black population numbered less than one hundred, slaveholders could be found among the Mormon elite: a member of the Council of Twelve Apostles, the first mayor of Salt Lake City, and Utah's territorial representative in Congress.[38] Also in 1852, the Utah legislature legalized the purchase and adoption of Native American children. Young called this "purchasing them into freedom," meaning that the law would rescue Indian children from the region's notorious slave traders and bring them into Mormon households, thus ensuring their religious

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[35] Quoted in Richards, *Breakaway Americas*, 81. For more on the persecution and flight of the Saints, see Stephen C. LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987); Benjamin E. Park, *Kingdom of Nauvoo: The Rise and Fall of a Religious Empire on the American Frontier* (New York: Liveright, 2020); Richard E. Bennett, *We'll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus, 1846–1848* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).

[36] Elliott West, *Continental Reckoning: The American West in the Age of Expansion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023), chapter 4; David L. Bigler and Will Bagley, *The Mormon Rebellion: America's First Civil War, 1857–1858* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011); Richard D. Poll and William P. MacKinnon, "Causes of the Utah War Reconsidered," *Journal of Mormon History* 20 (Fall 1994): 16–44.

[37] "An Act in Relation to Service," in *Acts, Resolutions and Memorials, Passed at the Several Annual Sessions of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Joseph Cain, 1855), 160–162.

[38] Newell G. Bringhurst, "The Mormons and Slavery—A Closer Look," *Pacific Historical Review* 50 (August 1981): 332.

salvation. But it also required those children to labor for their adoptive families to pay off the price of their own purchase. Adoption and bondage were often variant spellings for the same thing.[39]

Like Southern California, the southern portion of Utah harbored a sizable proportion of proslavery partisans. Brigham Young dispatched the first Mormon missionaries to southern Utah in 1852 to establish a cotton-growing colony there. The enterprise relied heavily on Mormon converts from the American South, who lent the region a new name: Utah's Dixie. Residents "were all southerners and southern sympathizers," wrote George Armstrong Hicks, one of the few Northern-born cotton missionaries. The bishop of the main settlement in Dixie and his first councilor both hailed from Mississippi cotton planting families. The second councilor had migrated from Texas while the probate judge came from Tennessee. When the Civil War broke out, these Southerners freely aired their native sympathies. The bishop "was a strong Rebel sympathizer and rejoiced when ever he heard of a Southern victory," according to Hicks.[40]

Even outside Utah's Dixie, anti-Union feelings ran deep. Brigham Young's estimate that "nine-tenths of the people of the Territory were southern sympathizers" may have been overblown, but it was based on a palpable sentiment, especially among the territory's elite. "The abolitionists of the North stole the [slaves] and caused it all," claimed Heber Kimball, the first vice president of the LDS Church. Another vice president, George A. Smith, concluded simply, "The South was right."[41] Walter Murray Gibson, a South Carolina adventurer and father to two Confederate soldiers, circulated in the upper echelons of the Mormon hierarchy and reported directly to Young on secessionist activity in the Far West. Denunciations of the Union war effort rang from the Tabernacle, from local

[39] "An Act for the Further Relief of Indian Slaves and Prisoners [1852]," *Acts, Resolutions, and Memorials of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah*, 87–88; Young, "Governor's message to the council and house of representatives of the legislature of Utah, Jan. 5, 1852," in *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City), Jan. 10, 1852. See also Sondra Jones, "Redeeming the Indian: The Enslavement of Indian Children in New Mexico and Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 67 (summer 1999): 220–241; Andres Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), 266–273; Kiser, *Borderlands of Slavery*, 81; Waite, *West of Slavery*, 142–143. For an important forthcoming study of unfree labor in Mormon Utah, see W. Paul Reeve, Christopher B. Rich Jr., and LaJean Purcell Carruth, *This Abominable Slavery: Race, Religion, and the Battle over Human Bondage in Antebellum Utah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024)

[40] George Armstrong Hicks, "George Armstrong Hicks: A Life among the Poor of Utah," *Playing with Shadows: Voices of Dissent in the Mormon West*, ed. Polly Aird, Jeff Nichols, and Will Bagley (Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark, 2011), 65, 172–178. See also Leonard J. Arrington, "The Mormon Cotton Mission in Southern Utah," *Pacific Historical Review* 25 (August 1956): 221–238; Juanita Brooks, "The Cotton Mission," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 29 (July 1961): 201–221.

[41] All three quotations were recorded by Samuel Bowles during his travels through Utah at the end of the war; see Bowles, *Across the Continent* (Springfield, Mass.: Samuel Bowles & Company, 1869), 391–394. Similarly, Brigham Young blamed the Republicans for setting "the whole national fabric on fire;" Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People within Mormonism* (reprint; Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2018), 102.

church meetings, and from the pages of Utah's press. The *Deseret News,* a mouthpiece of the LDS leadership, declared the Emancipation Proclamation unconstitutional.[42] Brigham Young thumbed his nose at Lincoln's appointee for territorial governor of Utah, Stephen Harding. "If you were to fill a sack with cow dung," Young jeered, "it would be the best thing you could do for an imitation."[43]

Most Mormons, however, were not avowed Confederates. After all, the vast majority of the territory's White population came from either the Northern free states or from northern Europe. Many of these residents nurtured deep-seated grievances against the U.S. government and the Republican Party, but they had no love for the slaveholding oligarchs of the South. In the words of historian E. B. Long, Mormons took a "watchful, waiting, tongue-clacking attitude" toward both sides in the conflict.[44] "What will King Abraham do?" Young shrugged in the midst of the secession crisis. "I do not know, neither do I care . . . God will accomplish his own purposes."[45] Young studiously avoided any formal overtures to the Confederacy. Such an act, he recognized, might prompt a U.S. invasion of Utah territory, a bloody encore to the Utah War of 1857–58. But he offered scarcely more to the United States: a mere ninety-five volunteer troops to patrol mail and telegraph lines for a month-and-a-half in 1862. "I will see them in Hell before I will raise an army for them," Young declared. No U.S. state or territory gave fewer resources to the Union war effort than Utah.[46]

Mormons had more in common with the advocates of a Pacific republic than they did with the architects of Southern disunion. Like many would-be separatists in California, the Saints in Utah sought greater sovereignty and autonomy rather than any formal connection to the Confederacy. Prophecy guided their position. As early as 1832, Joseph Smith, the founder of the LDS Church, received a revelation of a great civil calamity involving American slavery, which would "terminate in the death and misery of many souls."[47] When that prophecy came to pass, many Mormons saw an opportunity: After North and South tore the nation asunder, the righteous would inherit the remnants and extend the kingdom of Zion. Young thus readied his people for any exigency. Utah stockpiled munitions and gunpowder, while an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 Mormons mus-

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[42] Maxwell, *Civil War Years in Utah,* 41, 57, 171–172, 314.

[43] Quoted in John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 325.

[44] Long, *Saints and the Union,* 18.

[45] Brigham Young, "Human Intelligence and Freedom – National Administrative Movements, &c." *Journal of Discourses* 8 (February 10, 1861): 323; Long, *Saints and the Union,* 19–20.

[46] Maxwell, *Civil War Years in Utah,* 59, 73–74. Young quoted in Turner, *Brigham Young,* 318.

[47] Quoted in Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage, 2005), 191–192. See also Orson Pratt, *Millennial Star* (Liverpool, England), Dec. 15, 1850.

tered into militia units, a larger force than the territory commanded during the Utah War.[48]

U.S. authorities, meanwhile, tracked movements in Utah with growing unease. It was an article of faith among many western Unionists that Mormons were working for the breakup of the United States.[49] Anxious Americans often paired the perceived Mormon menace with the threat of Indigenous violence. The popular newspaper *Alta California*, for instance, fretted that the withdrawal of federal troops from several forts in the region left "the great overland routes to California and Oregon without protection against Indians or hostile Mormons."[50] To be sure, the presumed Mormon menace existed primarily in the imaginations of beleaguered Unionists in the West. There was little threat of open violence with the Saints, so long as the United States maintained a viable military force in the West. In fact, when it came to violence among White Americans, Mormons were more often the victims than the perpetrators (the major exception being the Mountain Meadows Massacre of 1857). On the other hand, there was no saying what might come to pass if a Confederate military victory—a distinct possibility until the final year of the war—prompted a further fracturing of the United States. Like the separatists of California, many Mormons in Utah eagerly anticipated such an outcome.

Barring a major U.S. military defeat, most separatist schemes in the West remained in the realm of the imagination. Many would-be separatists expressed an affinity for the Confederacy, but not a willingness to fight for it. There were, however, numerous westerners who did indeed take up arms in the name of independence. At least for a time, they succeeded in detaching a large part of the Southwest from the United States. They did so as the far western wing of the Confederacy.

The highest proportion of western Confederates could be found in southern New Mexico. The area was inhabited by a mix of Indigenous people, Mexican-born residents, and a growing number of White Southerners, who mostly came by way of Texas. By the mid-1850s, those Texans had seized control of the region's political affairs and launched a movement for a separate territory to be carved from the southernmost county of New Mexico. They called it Arizona. Like the advocates for a separate Southern California territory, self-proclaimed Arizonians complained of their distance from the capital at Santa Fe and the regional imbalance in legislative representation. And like many Southern Californians, they too

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[48] Maxwell, *Civil War Years in Utah,* 59, 73–74.

[49] See, for instance, Clarence Bennett to General Edwin Sumner, Aug. 6, 1861, *OR*, Series I, Vol. L, Part 1, 556–558; and *OR*, Series I, Vol L. Part I, pp. 550, 564.

[50] *Alta California*, June 11, 1861. (False) rumors of a conspiracy between Mormons and Native Americans had been circulating for decades; see W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 59–90.

hoped that their territory would provide a far western outlet for slavery. However, unlike in California, slavery was already legal across the length of New Mexico (including the unorganized region of Arizona), thanks to a draconian slave code passed by the territorial legislature in 1859.[51]

Arizonians did not know it at the time, but their territorial movement was a dress rehearsal for secession. It also became a proxy battle in the sectional struggle between North and South. Arizona's political leaders, mostly Southern in origin and proslavery in outlook, held conventions in 1855, 1856, 1858, 1859, and again in 1860 to organize a territorial government. They also sent unofficial delegates to Washington to plead their case. Because the proposed territory was expected to eventually become a slave state, Northern congressmen rallied against the Arizona movement. Southern congressmen rallied in support. A group of slaveholding senators, including Thomas Jefferson Rusk of Texas, William Gwin of California, and Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, formally endorsed Arizona's organization as a territory, as did President James Buchanan.[52] Ultimately, however, slaveholding support was unable to overcome Republican opposition. Arizona remained unorganized. But the repeated rebuffs created something that would soon grow beyond the territorial campaign: a distinct sectional identity within southern New Mexico, which fed off years of resentment toward the federal government and Northern politicians in particular. With a divisive national election looming, there was no mistaking where Arizona's loyalties lay.

Abraham Lincoln's election in fall 1860 sent shockwaves across the country and triggered a transcontinental secession movement. It began with South Carolina in December that year and then swept west, all the way to Arizona and California by the spring of 1861. As historian Charles Dew has shown, secession commissioners fanned out across the South to preach the gospel of disunion. Less well known is the success that agents of disunion achieved within the Southwest borderlands. Philemon T. Herbert, a former U.S. representative from California, traveled west from Texas to help organize Arizona's secession movement. He found a receptive audience: a group of settlers emboldened by years of failed territorial bids and eager for a new political alignment.[53]

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[51] Kiser, *Turmoil on the Rio Grande,* 133–142; Ganaway, *New Mexico and the Sectional Controversy,* 105. For a comparison of the territorial movements in Arizona and Southern California, see Waite, *West of Slavery,* 151–159. On New Mexico's slave code, see Mark J. Stegmaier, "A Law That Would Make Caligula Blush? New Mexico Territory's Unique Slave Code, 1859–1861," *New Mexico Historical Review* 87 (Spring 2012): 209–210; and "An Act to provide for the protection of property in Slaves in this Territory," in *Laws of the Territory of New Mexico. Passed by the Legislative Assembly, Session of 1858–59* (Santa Fe: A. De Marle, 1859), 64–80.

[52] Cong. Globe, 34th Congress, 3rd session, 817; 35th Congress, 1st session, 13, 62; U.S. Senate Journal, 35th Congress, 1st Session, 41–47; Cong. Globe, 35th Congress, 2nd session, appendix, 48; 36th Congress, 1st session, 2071; *Richmond Daily Whig,* Mar. 2, 1860.

[53] Charles B. Dew, *Apostles of Disunion: Southern Secession Commissioners and the Causes of the Civil War*

Not content with a single convention, Arizona's rebels held three meetings to renounce the United States. They gathered first at Piños Altos on March 4, 1861, and then with more ceremony at Mesilla twelve days later. Secessionists did not bother consulting the region's significant Hispano or Indigenous populations, knowing that neither group was likely to lend support to a slaveholding rebellion. The Mesilla convention unanimously resolved "that we will not recognize the present Black Republican Administration and that we will resist any officers appointed to this Territory by said Administration with whatever means in our power."[54] A week later, Anglo American residents met at Tucson and also adopted secession resolutions. Thus, White Arizonians finally achieved as Confederates what they never could as U.S. citizens: a territory to call their own. Only six other states had followed South Carolina out of the Union by this point. In the rush to disunion, Arizona was ahead of Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina.[55]

Arizona's secession was a Southern rebellion with a western twist. General W. Claude Jones, one of the region's staunchest disunionists, regarded Arizona as an extension of the slave South. "Our destiny is linked with the South," he argued. "Her memory of the past, her principles, her interests, her present glory, her hopes of the future, are ours." But Arizona also had a unique set of grievances, based on its geography and demography. Chief among them, according to Jones, was insufficient military protection against the region's powerful Native people, especially the Apaches. Arizonians also craved secure transportation links with the East. A Southern postmaster general had routed the nation's major overland road through the slave states and into the Far Southwest, but Republicans threatened to eliminate funding for the route. From Arizona, most roads led to the slave South.[56]

After breaking from the United States, White Arizonians attempted to secure military control over the region. They raised a militia of several hundred volunteer troops, under the command of committed secessionist Thomas J. Mastin, to guard against Native Americans and U.S. forces alike. They also sent a delegate to the Confederate Congress to lobby for additional support. Arizona soon received it in the form of Colonel John

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(Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002). For more on Herbert, see James J. Ayres, *Gold and Sunshine: Reminiscences of Early California* (Boston: Gorham Press, 1922), 120.

[54] This resolution was included in the report of Lorenzo Labadie to James L. Collins, June 16, 1861 in *When the Texans Came: Missing Records from the Civil War in the Southwest, 1861–1862*, ed. John P. Wilson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 27. See also *OR*, Series I, Vol. IV, 39.

[55] For a report of this meeting, see *Mesilla Times*, Mar. 30, 1861. My thanks to Sarah Allison, special collections librarian at New Mexico State University, for making available to me this scarce issue.

[56] Speech of General W. Claude Jones at the secessionist convention at Mesilla, Mar. 16, 1861, in *Mesilla Times*, Mar. 30, 1861. On western infrastructure and sectional politics, see Waite, "Jefferson Davis and Proslavery Visions of Empire," and Waite, *West of Slavery*, chapters 1–3.

Baylor and his unit of roughly two hundred-and-fifty Texans. By August 1, 1861, Baylor had captured Fort Fillmore and its five hundred U.S. troops and installed himself as military governor over the Confederate territory of Arizona. U.S. authorities called this an invasion; but for Arizona separatists, Baylor was a conquering hero. Confederate Arizona now had an army behind it—and more men were on the way.[57]

Rebellion in neighboring California began with an attempted military coup. At the outset of the conflict, General Albert Sidney Johnston, a slaveholder, was in command of the U.S. Department of the Pacific. Knowing him to be a closeted disunionist, a group of California rebels approached Johnston, urging the general to cede control of his military department to the insurrectionists in the same way that General David Twiggs had done in the Department of Texas. Johnston, although sympathetic to their cause, refused. "If you want to fight," he told them, "go South."[58] A group of conspirators attempted something similar in Los Angeles—with similarly unsuccessful results. They approached Joseph Lancaster Brent, the unofficial Democratic party boss of Southern California and ally to William Gwin, offering him the command of a two-hundred-man unit of secessionists in Los Angeles. Brent likewise urged California's Confederates to take their fight to the East.[59] He and Johnston heeded their own advice. Both men left California for the slave states, where they commanded forces as Confederate generals. Hundreds of California rebels followed suit, including a unit known as the Los Angeles Mounted Rifles, which escorted Johnston out of the state. In heading east, the Los Angeles Mounted Rifles became the only militia from a free state to fight under a Confederate flag.[60]

Although many of the staunchest secessionists headed east, the Far Southwest still harbored a deep reserve of rebels. One of them, an adventurer named Ashbury Harpending, attempted to launch a war of piracy on the gold shipments leaving from California's harbors. He recruited several dozen fellow rebels and outfitted a schooner before his plan was betrayed and he was arrested in San Francisco Harbor.[61] Another Califor-

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[57] John R. Baylor, "Proclamation to the People of the Territory of Arizona," Aug. 1, 1861, *OR*, Series 1, Vol. IV, 19–20.

[58] Ashbury Harpending, *The Great Diamond Hoax and other Stirring Incidents in the Life of Ashbury Harpending*, ed. James H. Wilkins (San Francisco: James H. Barry, 1913), 25–43; Josephy, *Civil War in the American West*, 34–36.

[59] Joseph Lancaster Brent, *Memoirs of the War Between the States* (n.p.: Nanine B. Sloo, 1940), 52–53. See also Benjamin Hayes, *Pioneer Notes from the Diaries of Judge Benjamin Hayes, 1849–1875*, ed. Marjorie Tisdale Wolcott (Los Angeles: Marjorie Tilsdale Wolcott, 1929), 251–256.

[60] John Mack Faragher, *Eternity Street: Violence and Justice in Frontier Los Angeles* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 385–386. For another prominent California rebel, see Gene C. Armistead and Robert D. Arconti, *"An Arch Rebel Like Myself:" Dan Showalter and the Civil War in California and Texas* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland Press, 2018).

[61] Harpending, *The Great Diamond Hoax*, 43–89.

nia Confederate, the partisan leader Captain Rufus Ingram, raided the bullion of Wells Fargo stagecoaches near Sacramento and attempted, in the words of one of his subordinates "to raise [an] insurrection in California."[62] A combination of local police and U.S. soldiers finally defeated Ingram's band of roughly fifty rebels in the summer of 1864.[63] Confederate sympathizers were especially active in Southern California. They formed secret societies, stockpiling arms and ammunition in preparation for the overthrow of the U.S. government. They staged rallies to celebrate Confederate victories, parading rebel flags (and even a portrait of General Pierre Gustave Toutant-Beauregard) through city streets. And they brawled with U.S. soldiers and Unionists, tossing one Yankee sympathizer from the balcony of a Los Angeles hotel. As a rare Los Angeles Unionist lamented, "The leading men of the county were for the Jeff Davis government first, last and all the time."[64]

Rebel activity created something of a siege mentality among California's Unionists. The threat had become apparent to General Edwin Vose Sumner, the new commander of the U.S. Department of the Pacific, by the first month of the war. While "there is a strong Union feeling with the majority of the people of this State," Sumner reported, "the secessionists are much the most active and zealous party."[65] He estimated that as many as 32,000 Californians stood ready to rebel if the opportunity presented itself.[66] In response, U.S. authorities mustered overwhelming force to preserve California for the Union. They banned pro-Confederate newspapers from the mails, they arrested leading secessionists in the state, and they concentrated troops at the sites of the greatest rebel activity. Near the pro-Confederate hotbed of Los Angeles, the U.S. military constructed Camp Drum (later Drum Barracks), a complex of nineteen buildings and ample drilling space, at the cost of roughly $1 million. Drum Barracks would become the headquarters of the new military District of Southern California and Arizona and the staging ground for some eight thousand

[62] Tom Poole quoted in *Alta California*, Sept. 10, 1864.

[63] John Boessenecker, *Badge and Buckshot: Lawlessness in Old California* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 133–155.

[64] Horace Bell, *On the Old West Coast: Being further Reminiscences of a Ranger*, ed. Lanier Bartlett (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1930), 72; Henry Dwight Barrows to Col. J. H. Carleton, Apr. 9, 1862, *OR*, Series I, Vol. L, Part 1, 993; Barrows to Brigadier Gen. George Wright, Apr. 10, 1862, *OR*, Series I, Vol. L, Part 1, 996. See also, John W. Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days, 1860–1865* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977); Helen B. Walters, "Confederates in Southern California," *Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* 35 (March 1953): 51–52; Ronald Woolsey, "The Politics of a Lost Cause: 'Seceshers' and Democrats in Southern California during the Civil War," *California History* 69 (Winter 1990–1991): 372–383; Albert Lucian Lewis, "Los Angeles in the Civil War Decades, 1850–1868" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1970).

[65] Sumner to Colonel E. D. Townsend, Assistant Adjutant-General, Department of the Pacific, Apr. 28, 1861, *OR*, Series I, Vol. L, Part 1, 472.

[66] Sumner to Colonel George Wright, Sept. 30, 1861, *OR*, Series I, Vol. L, Part 1, 643.

U.S. troops.[67] The Union had essentially garrisoned Southern California against itself.

The response was proportional to the depth and longevity of the threat. Disunionism in California had been percolating for roughly a decade before war broke out. It was evident in the repeated appeals for an independent Pacific republic. And it was evident in the political allegiances of some of California's leading antebellum figures, including William Gwin. The former Golden State senator himself fled the United States in 1864 to found a breakaway colony in Sonora, Mexico, under the protection of Napoleon III of France. Gwin—or "El Duque de Guino" as he was known disparagingly in the loyal press—intended the colony as a launching pad for an independence movement of his own. The near simultaneous collapse of the Confederacy and of Napoleon's puppet government in Mexico doomed his plans, however. Gwin was arrested when he returned to the newly reunited United States. He spent his next eight months in prison at Fort Jackson, Louisiana. Not until April 1866 was Gwin, perhaps the very last rebel of the American West, released.[68]

The Brittle West never fractured in the way many expected it would. Ultimately, none of the separatist movements surveyed here—the campaign for a Pacific republic, the drive for greater Mormon sovereignty in Utah, and the rebellion of Confederate Arizona—succeeded. California remained loyal to the Union, Mormons in Utah endured further encroachments by the federal government, and southwestern Confederates were driven from the region by superior U.S. forces. The Union war effort not only brought together North and South; it also held together East and West.

None of these outcomes were foreordained. They were contingent on shrewd maneuvers by the Lincoln administration and the vigilance of U.S. authorities. Beginning shortly after he took office, Lincoln dismantled the Democrats' political apparatus in the Far West, which could have otherwise provided support for a regional rebellion. The president purged nearly every single Democratic appointee under executive control, a total of roughly 1,500 officials across the country. (Lincoln made a strategic exception in New Mexico, where Republicans remained unpopular. Thus, for the role of territorial governor he selected the Unionist Democrat Henry Connelly, a longtime resident of the region who was well-liked by the Hispano majority.) No president in American history up to that point,

[67] Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days*, 58–61, 68–69, 93–94; Matthews, *The Golden State in the Civil War,* 116–117. The figure of 8,000 troops comes from Drum Barracks Civil War Museum, https://thedrumbarracks.org/california-in-the-cw [Accessed Apr. 8, 2023].

[68] St. John, "The Unpredictable America of William Gwin"; Waite, *West of Slavery,* 203–207. For more on the unstable U.S.-Mexico border during the Civil War, see Kiser, *Illusions of Empire,* and Alice L. Baumgartner, *South to Freedom: Runaway Slaves to Mexico and the Road to the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 2020).

not even Andrew Jackson, the famed master of the spoils system, had wielded federal patronage so aggressively.[69]

Other than those purged by Lincoln, hundreds left voluntarily to offer their services to the Confederate military and government. The list of those who departed from California amounts to a who's who of antebellum western politics: Senator William Gwin; former chief justice of the California Supreme Court David Terry; former congressmen Charles L. Scott and Philemon T. Herbert; at least three state senators; a handful of assemblymen; and future Confederate generals Albert Sidney Johnston, Joseph Lancaster Brent, John B. Magruder, George Pickett, Lewis Armistead, and Richard Garnett.[70] Perhaps there would have been greater support for rebellion in the West had more western rebels stayed put.

One factor more than any other saved the West for the Union: overwhelming U.S. military force. The strategic deployment of troops, including thousands of soldiers diverted to Southern California over the course of the war, halted the formation of a consequential disunion movement in the region. Rebels in places like Los Angeles would continue to bully and bluster until the very end of the war, but they were reduced to observers of, rather than participants in, the conflict's outcome. The Confederate invasion of New Mexico, too, succumbed to superior U.S. firepower. Sibley beat a hasty retreat to Texas to escape advancing columns of Union soldiers from California, New Mexico, and Colorado. Twenty-four thousand U.S. troops eventually occupied the Far Southwest, the largest concentration of military might the region had ever seen. Secessionists in Arizona continued to dream up ways to reclaim the Southwest for the Confederacy.[71] But, in the face of a massive U.S. military buildup, there was ultimately nothing they could do.

The focal point of most studies on the Civil War in the Far West, Sibley's New Mexican campaign, obscures as much as it illuminates. Just a year into the war, his army's madcap retreat to Texas all but foreclosed the possibility of a Confederate takeover of the Southwest. But before Sibley's failure, the U.S. West appeared on the verge of a breakup—and not solely due to advancing Confederate armies. By some metrics, the idea of an indepen-

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[69] Phillip Shaw Paludan, "War is the Health of the Party: Republicans in the American Civil War," in *The Birth of the Grand Old Party: The Republicans' First Generation,* ed. Robert F. Engs and Randall M. Miller (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 64; Allen C. Guelzo, *Fateful Lightning: A New History of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 127–129. Deren Early Kellogg, "Lincoln's New Mexico Patronage: Saving the Far Southwest for the Union," *New Mexico Historical Review* 75 (2000): 524–528; John S. Watts to Abraham Lincoln, Apr. 1, and Watts to Lincoln, Apr. 2, 1861, in Robert Todd Lincoln Collection (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C). Utah's territorial governor, a native of Georgia, chose to flee the territory before he could be formally sacked by Lincoln; Long, *Saints and the Union,* 31–32.

[70] Waite, *West of Slavery,* 183–184.

[71] L. Boyd Finch, "Arizona in Exile: Confederate Schemes to Recapture the Far Southwest," *Journal of Arizona History* 33 (Spring 1992)," 81; see also, *OR,* Series I, Vol. L, Part 2, 1204; and Kiser, *Illusions of Empire,* 106–110.

dent western republic predated the movement for an independent southern confederacy. Westerners had been dreaming of alternative American geographies—a Pacific republic, an autonomous Mormon kingdom, an Arizona slaveocracy—for years. Western separatists often cheered Confederate victories without identifying as Confederates themselves. Theirs was a world of possibilities and contingencies and theirs was a nationalism both flexible and conditional. For a harrowing moment, they transformed a sectional rebellion into a continental crisis.