

## “Farewell to America”

*The Expatriation Politics of Overland Migration, 1841-1846*

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**ABSTRACT** Historians have long tethered American overland migration to U.S. westward expansion, and they have presumed that Americans who left U.S. borders for Oregon and California in the early 1840s desired—and even assumed—that the United States would soon conquer the Far West. This article examines the words and actions of western migrants before U.S. expansion in 1846. It argues that, in fact, migrants left U.S. borders because their economic prospects were poor in the United States and thus that most migrants cared little whether the United States conquered the West in the near future. Indeed, some of the more ambitious migrants were even hostile to U.S. expansion, for they longed for a western republic of their own. Ultimately, Americans who traveled west did not ascribe to the idea of the United States’ Manifest Destiny but instead were seeking their own individual destinies. **KEYWORDS** Manifest Destiny, westward expansion, Bear Flag Revolt, Mexican California, Oregon Country, overland migration, Californios, Hudson’s Bay Company

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In 1845, California Governor Manuel Micheltorena was desperate. The Mexican president Santa Anna had tasked Micheltorena with upholding Mexican sovereignty over the distant territory and had given him an army of convicts to do so. When Micheltorena and his soldiers arrived in California, they rapidly offended the sensibilities of the local *Californio* elite. In response, the usually fractious Californios put away their differences and formed an army to expel Micheltorena’s army. Now outnumbered, the beleaguered governor looked for allies, and he found one in the Swiss settler John Sutter. To obtain Sutter’s aid, Micheltorena promised that, after a Mexican victory, the Mexican government would give Sutter the legal authority to make land grants to U.S. overland immigrants. Micheltorena’s offer was tailor-made for Sutter’s inflated ego, and Sutter jumped at the chance to gain more influence. Promising legal titles to California land, Sutter induced many Americans to join his military contingent. Thus, in early 1845, with the U.S. annexation of Texas imminent and war with Mexico only a year away, one

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hundred Americans joined a Mexican army commanded by a Mexican governor, tasked with upholding Mexican sovereignty in California.

The story of Micheltorena's U.S. contingent is often marginalized in works on Mexican California, and almost always ignored in general syntheses of nineteenth-century U.S. expansion into the American West. It simply does not fit the Manifest Destiny narrative, which portrays American settlers as eagerly expecting the imminent arrival of the U.S. state, and in turn always willing to facilitate the process of U.S. expansion. The very existence of Micheltorena's U.S. contingent does not just complicate this narrative, but counters it entirely. Micheltorena's Americans were not just neutral actors in California politics, but—briefly—bulwarks of a rival republic. And yet these Americans' remarkable disregard for U.S. interests was not atypical of many pre-1846 western migrants. More than eight thousand overlanders left the United States to journey to a North American West with an uncertain political future.<sup>1</sup> California remained a remote and marginal Mexican territory, while Oregon Country was still jointly held by the United States and Great Britain, although neither country projected effective sovereignty over the region. Of course, all of these claims obscured the continued power of native peoples over most of these lands, with the exception of California's coast and Oregon's Willamette Valley. Importantly, western migrants knew that they were traveling to places that might never become U.S. territory. Just as importantly, they knew they were leaving the United States—indeed, for many, this was a primary reason for the migration.

In the early 1840s, the United States was mired in political dysfunction and economic depression, and these conditions were particularly acute in the western states from which most migrants originated. The depression aggravated what were already poor economic prospects for many western yeomen, who often could not afford to purchase land in the first place. Although the United States somewhat liberalized its miserly land laws with the 1841 Preemption Act, many yeomen could still not afford to purchase the lands on which they had squatted, and speculators rushed to take their place. Beyond U.S. borders, both Oregon and California potentially offered more land entirely for free; migrants just needed to brave the overland journey.

1. Numbers from John D. Unruh, Jr., *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840–60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 119. I include the emigrants of 1846 in these numbers, because most left the United States before the U.S.–Mexican War and the Oregon Treaty with Great Britain.

Thus it is unsurprising that thousands of westerners chose to seek opportunity farther west, beyond U.S. borders.

Historians have documented the sad state of the U.S. economy in the early 1840s, and even more so the economic reasons for western migration, but they have failed to examine the political implications of their findings. Most simply assume that, whatever their issues with the United States at the moment of departure, a great majority of the Americans who traveled west still yearned for incorporation into the national polity.<sup>2</sup> Thus migrant attitudes and actions reify the ideology of Manifest Destiny, tethering overland migration—at its core, an act quintessential to the U.S. experience—with the U.S. conquest of the West. Yet, if American migrants left the United States because they believed it no longer offered opportunity, then why would they so eagerly wish for U.S. expansion after they arrived in the West and after many of them achieved permanent land holdings and, in some cases, political power? Examining the politics of pre-1846 western migrants, this essay argues that the people under study did not long for U.S. expansion; rather, a majority of migrants were entirely indifferent to U.S. actions and were willing to support whichever political settlement offered them the greatest range of political and economic opportunities. Moreover, a few of the more ambitious migrants were not simply unconcerned with U.S. expansion but outright hostile to it, for they hoped to create an independent western polity that they themselves would govern.

The historiographic neglect of overlanders' political ambivalence and experimentation is understandable in many respects, for their actions were truncated by the unprecedented nature of U.S. expansion in 1846. Unlike the Americans who engaged in two decades of political machination in Texas, Americans in Oregon and California had at most five years to explore

2. General works that make this assumption—some explicitly, others implicitly—include Walter Nugent, *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 147–93; Anne Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families: A New History of the North American West, 1800–1860* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 392–400; Richard W. Etulain, *Beyond the Missouri: The Story of the American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 109–115, 143–45; Richard Kluger, *Seizing Destiny: How America Grew from Sea to Shining Sea* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 400–436; Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 48, 79–81; Norman Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific: A Study in American Continental Expansion* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clío, Inc., 1983), 89–94; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought?: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 752–57; Will Bagley, *So Rugged and Mountainous: Blazing the Trails to Oregon and California, 1812–1848* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 123.

alternatives to U.S. sovereignty.<sup>3</sup> The U.S.–Mexican War and the Oregon Treaty superseded whatever these overlancers accomplished in their brief stint as independent political actors. Moreover, the independent polities they envisioned often mimicked U.S. institutions and structures of power, making it easy to conflate their actions with those of the U.S. government.

Most migrants also shared the aggressive Anglo Saxonism and racist disdain of Mexicans and Indians present in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Thus, while borderlands historians rightfully portray the arrival of significant groups of grasping Americans as marking a dramatic shift from the accommodation and collaboration typical of the borderlands, they incorrectly equate the actions of these Americans with the intervention of the United States.<sup>5</sup> They also overstate this shift: overlancers may have been ideologically committed to racial Anglo Saxonism, but they were much more committed to ruthless pragmatism. They were equally willing to collaborate with existing power structures and willing to seize power themselves, whichever would expedite their goals. To them, U.S. expansion was hardly manifest, even as late as 1846. Thus, when one particular migrant crossed the U.S. western border and turned and waved, shouting “Farewell to America,” he was not just making a glib comment: he believed he was departing the United States for good, and he was glad to be leaving.<sup>6</sup>

One final note on terminology: although migrants were never entirely consistent with their terms, at times they differentiated between their continued—and, in their eyes, permanent—identity as *Americans*, and their

3. On Texas, see Sarah Rodriguez’s essay in this volume, “‘The Greatest Nation on Earth’: The Politics and Patriotism of the First Anglo American Immigrants to Mexican Texas, 1820–1824,” *Pacific Historical Review* 86, no. 1 (February 2017). Andrew McMichael has demonstrated a similar phenomenon in Spanish West Florida in *Atlantic Loyalties: Americans in Spanish West Florida, 1785–1810* (Athens, Ga., 2008). Mormon historiography has also influenced this essay, which takes Mormon political goals in the West seriously, as much work on American overlancers to Oregon and California does not. A short sample of this historiography includes Klaus Hansen, *Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God & the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967); Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989); D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994); Michael Scott Van Wagenen, *The Texas Republic and the Mormon Kingdom of God* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002).

4. Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

5. See, for example, the section “From Nations to Nation: Imposing a State, 1840–1865” in Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families*, 348–407.

6. Jesse Applegate, “Recollections of my Boyhood,” in *Westward Journeys: Memoirs of Jesse A. Applegate and Lavinia Honeyman Porter Who Traveled the Overland Trail*, ed. Martin Ridge (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, 1989), 25.

connections with, and allegiance to the *United States*. To them, the United States was just one of many possible American-led republics on the continent. Indeed, from their perspective in the early 1840s, another American republic already existed: the Republic of Texas. Such was the difference between the two terms that one American migrant in Oregon in the 1850s argued that British subject and Hudson's Bay Company Chief Factor John McLoughlin "perhaps is an American citizen" by virtue of living in an American-dominated community for several years. However, McLoughlin was trying to win a property dispute in a U.S. federal court, and to this observer McLoughlin's claim was void, for he was not a "citizen of the United States."<sup>7</sup> With this discrepancy in mind, this essay uses the adjective "U.S." any time the subject is acting in some fashion as an agent of the U.S. state, while it employs "American" as a cultural, ethnic, and historical identity. This essay does so with the clear-eyed understanding that "American" remains a fraught term, both for its ambiguity, and more importantly for its aggrandizement of the United States over every other country in the Americas.

#### FACING EAST AND WEST FROM MISSOURI

The Panic of 1837 inaugurated the worst depression in U.S. history thus far, although it was not until 1841 that the devastating effects reached many western states.<sup>8</sup> It was from these western states that most migrants came—from Missouri above all, but also from Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana.<sup>9</sup> By the early 1840s, wheat prices had fallen by more than 50 percent across the Midwest, causing those westerners who owned lands of marginal productivity or acreage to reach a state of crisis. Many did not own any land at all, as perhaps 50 percent of all westerners were tenant farmers.<sup>10</sup> The 1841 Preemption Act, designed to help squatters purchase the

7. William P. Bryant to Samuel Royal Thurston, Jan. 6, 1851, Thurston Family Papers, MSS 379, Oregon Historical Society, Portland.

8. Jessica M. Lepler, *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Alasdair Roberts, *The First Great Depression: Economic Crisis and Political Disorder in the United States, 1837–1848* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Scott Reynolds Nelson, *A Nation of Deadbeats: An Uncommon History of America's Financial Disasters* (New York: Knopf, 2012), 117–125.

9. Dean May, *Three Frontiers: Family, Land, and Society in the American West, 1850–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 41–42; Bagley, *So Rugged and Mountainous*, 129.

10. James Christy Bell, Jr., *Opening a Highway to the Pacific, 1838–1846* (New York: AMS Press, 1968), 124–25; William A. Bowen, *The Willamette Valley: Migration and Settlement on the Oregon Frontier* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), 17–18. Melvin C. Jacobs, *Winning Oregon:*

lands on which they worked, helped little, and may have even aggravated the situation.<sup>11</sup> As subsistence farming gave way to commercialized agriculture, small farmers could no longer compete in the marketplace and thus could not afford the federal government price of \$1.25 per acre. They were left to the mercy of loan sharks and speculators.<sup>12</sup> Specie itself was hard to come by. As one migrant succinctly noted, he “realiz[ed] his limitations in that then well settled country.”<sup>13</sup> Those who chose to travel west were not the most desperate in the region, for a family required at least some capital to outfit itself for the journey.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, migrants were in sufficiently dire straits that they were willing to undertake a dangerous journey across half a continent, to settle in regions with uncertain political futures outside the United States.

Yet, unlike the United States, these regions offered free land. In 1839, in an effort to populate Oregon Country with Americans, the Missouri senator Lewis Linn proposed a bill granting 640 acres (one square mile) to whoever made the journey. Although Congress largely ignored the legislation, westerners did not, and they seized upon the 640 acres as a primary incentive to migration. The first migrants simply claimed the land for themselves by right of occupation, but by 1843 the Oregon Provisional Government enshrined the 640-acre promise in local law.<sup>15</sup> In Mexican California, by contrast, the status of land for immigrants was much more ambiguous, as Mexican law prohibited Californio authorities from granting legal title to any non-Mexican citizen. However, with only 7,300 non-Indians living along the vast coastal strip stretching from San Diego to Yerba Buena (modern San Francisco), and none living in the interior, land seemed to be abundant nevertheless.<sup>16</sup> For both

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*A Study of an Expansionist Movement* (Caldwell, Id.: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1938), 56–58; Jeremy Atack, “Tenants and Yeomen in the Nineteenth Century,” *Agricultural History* 62, no. 3 (Summer, 1988): 31; Paul Wallace Gates, “Land Policy and Tenancy in the Prairie States,” *The Journal of Economic History* 1, no. 1 (May, 1941): 60–82; John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 181–86.

11. On the failures of the Preemption Act, see Gates, “Land Policy and Tenancy in the Prairie States”; Faragher, *Sugar Creek*, 181–86; Jeremy Atack, “Tenants and Yeomen in the Nineteenth Century,” 31.

12. Gates, “Land Policy and Tenancy in the Prairie States.”

13. John McCoy, “Memoirs,” MSS 1166, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Ore. (hereafter OHS).

14. Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 20–24.

15. See Michael B. Husband, “Senator Lewis Linn and the Oregon Question,” *Missouri Historical Review* 66, no. 1 (Oct., 1971): 1–20.

16. David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821–1846: The American Southwest under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 206.

Oregon and California, future settlers had awakened to the economic potential of these regions through a small body of western literature: for Oregon, Methodist missionary reports and Washington Irving's novels *Astoria* and *The Rocky Mountains*; for California, sailor Richard Henry Dana's travel account *Two Years Before the Mast* and newspaper articles authored by Americans living in California.<sup>17</sup> Thus, though the initial 1841 migrants had little idea what awaited them in the West, they were confident that it offered economic opportunity.

While the migrant desire to acquire land was primarily about economics, it also had ideological roots. Free land promised not just financial gain but a return to an idealized version of the traditional agrarian family. By acquiring substantial holdings, men would be able to bestow their sons with land of their own, while still providing for their wives and daughters. Until the early 1820s this agrarian practice had been standard, but by the 1830s the increasingly market-driven U.S. economy made the so-called "patrimonial family" even less feasible.<sup>18</sup> More generally, migration offered an exit from the perils of capitalism, particularly its rampant speculation and cycles of boom-and-bust. As one Oregonian wrote to his brothers in the New York, the major benefit of Oregon's economy was that "there is no money here at present . . . Our wealth consists in herds of cattle, horses, and hogs, etc., which we can exchange for all the necessaries [sic] of life."<sup>19</sup> California seemed similar. As one observer described California immigrants, "[There] are many enterprising and industrious men . . . but there are no capitalists among them, and none in California."<sup>20</sup> Thus, in the West, beyond U.S. borders, male heads-of-household—or single men aspiring to be so—believed they could return to the ideal of the agrarian yeoman, prosperous but not wealthy, beholden to neither man nor market. As another Oregon migrant wrote home to his family in the Midwest, "[In Ohio], you are a slave to your property, your labor is principally spent for [others], while here [in Oregon] a man's property will support him."<sup>21</sup> The West, in essence, was not only a solution to

17. Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 91–92; Bagley, *So Rugged and Mountainous*, 85.

18. Kathleen Neils Conzen, "A Saga of Families," in *The Oxford History of the American West*, ed. Milner, O'Connor, and Sandweiss (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 315–58.

19. Medorem Crawford, *A Letter from Medorem Crawford, 1845* (Eugene: Friends of the Library, University of Oregon, 1871), 2.

20. William Robert Garner, *Letters from California, 1846–1847*, ed. Donald Munro (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 205.

21. Alva Shaw, 1844 letter, MSS 941, OHS.

individual economic hardship, but also to a broader socio-economic world with which migrants could no longer identify.

Embedded in this traditional agrarian outlook was an aversion to slavery, for migrants from both slaveholding and non-slaveholding states. With a few rare exceptions, slaveholders did not journey to Oregon or California in the early 1840s, both because most slave owners were better able to weather the depression by using their slaves as collateral, and because if they did need to migrate, Texas was a much better destination.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, overlanders to Oregon and California were explicitly opposed to slavery. Migrants from the Old Northwest brought their free soil ideology with them, while those from Missouri and other southern states held little attachment to a system that brought them few benefits. Indeed, non-slaveholding yeomen in the East were shut out of economic advancement by the increased commercial success of slave agriculture.<sup>23</sup> However, these antislavery westerners were also decidedly anti-black, and once in the West they would attempt to codify their free soil principles by prohibiting both slavery and African Americans. Nothing demonstrated this commitment more than one of the first laws passed by the Oregon Provisional Government in 1844. “An Act in Regard to Slavery and Free Negroes and Mulatoes [sic]” barred slavery in Oregon, while it simultaneously threatened any black resident with twenty to thirty-nine lashes if he did not leave the territory.<sup>24</sup> Migrants envisioned the West as part of an agrarian white ideal.

There were, of course, other reasons to leave the United States beyond free land. The West offered several other inducements. It was thought to be a disease-free climate, especially desirable at a time when “ague” (malaria)

22. Bell, *Opening a Highway to the Pacific*, 126; May, *Three Frontiers*, 43; James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1990), 80–136, esp. 94–96; Edward Baptist, *The Other Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 288–89, 292–97; Randolph Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821–1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 50–55.

23. James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom*, 118–131.

24. For the free soil ideology of Oregon and its black exclusion laws, see Thomas C. McClintock, “James Saules, Peter Burnett, and the Oregon Black Exclusion Law of June 1844,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 86, no. 3 (Summer, 1995), 121–30; Quintard Taylor, “Slaves and Free Men: Blacks in the Oregon Country, 1840–1860,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (Summer, 1982): 153–58; John Dippel, *Race to the Frontier: “White Flight” and Westward Expansion* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2005), 259–77; Eugene Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 79–80; Elizabeth McLagan, *A Peculiar Paradise: A History of Blacks in Oregon, 1788–1940* (Portland: Georgian Press Co., 1980), 23–32.

routinely erupted in the Mississippi River Valley.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, for those Americans with the propensity to move every decade, the Far West was simply the next region of choice. Finally, for some of the more audacious migrants, the West was a new and exotic adventure.<sup>26</sup> Crucially absent from these inducements was the banner of U.S. expansion; the West did not offer a place for migrants to demonstrate their abiding patriotism. Whatever they were doing in the West, migrants were not “seizing” Oregon or California for the United States.

Of course, many migrants later recalled that they left for the West with distinctly patriotic intentions.<sup>27</sup> Upon leaving, one migrant remembered he said, “Well, I allow that the United States has the best right to that country, and I am going to help make that right good.”<sup>28</sup> Statements like these were ubiquitous in the second half of the nineteenth century, when both Oregon and California pioneers recalled how they had helped “save” these regions for the United States.<sup>29</sup> However, in the diaries and letters written by migrants at the time, the United States was largely absent from their reflections. Few migrants lamented leaving U.S. borders, and, prior to 1845, even fewer migrants expressed a desire for the U.S. conquest of Oregon or California before or during their overland journey in letters or diaries.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, overlanders were matter-of-fact expatriates, and they were conscious of their expatriation. The Methodist missionary Jason Lee even wrote the Methodist Board that he lived in an “expatriated country.”<sup>31</sup> As expatriates, migrants desired more secure lives for themselves and their families in the West and were much less concerned with the region’s political fate.<sup>32</sup>

25. Bowen, *Willamette Valley*, 18–21; Jacobs, *Winning Oregon*, 62–65.

26. Bagley, *So Rugged and Mountainous*, 121–25.

27. On Oregon, see Abner S. Baker III, “The Oregon Pioneer Tradition in the 19th Century: A Study of Recollection and Self-Definition,” (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1968). On California, see Simeon Ide, *Who Conquered California?* (Claremont, N.H., 1880).

28. John Minto, “Reminiscences of Experiences on the Oregon Trail in 1844,” ed. H.S. Lyman, *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 2, no. 2 (June, 1901): 130.

29. Baker, “The Oregon Pioneer Tradition in the 19th Century.”

30. This statement is based on reading over one hundred trail diaries and letters. After 1845, as the western geopolitical situation shifted, there was a growing sentiment for U.S. expansion, but the situation was more complicated than most historians have maintained.

31. Jason Lee and J.H. Frost to Charles Pitman, March 30, 1843, Oregon Methodist Missionary Papers, MSS 017, Collins Memorial Library Archives, University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Washington (hereafter UPS).

32. On expatriation during this era, see Schlereth, “Privileges of Locomotion: Expatriation and the Politics of Southwestern Border Crossing.”

Importantly, we should not assume that migrants themselves believed their expatriation would be brief. Although U.S. California and a U.S. Oregon both seemed natural and assured in hindsight, they were quite the opposite in the early 1840s. It is true that California was already autonomous, as the sparse population of six thousand Californios and one thousand foreigners largely governed themselves, for Mexico had neither the means nor desire to assert control over such a distant and economically insignificant territory.<sup>33</sup> U.S. officials recognized this autonomy, and at certain moments it looked like the U.S. government longed to acquire the territory: In 1835 President Andrew Jackson tried to purchase California from Mexico, and in 1842 U.S. Commodore Thomas ap Catesby Jones seized the port of Monterey, mistakenly thinking the United States and Mexico had gone to war.<sup>34</sup> It is no wonder that, with historiographic hindsight, Mexican California looks like a ripe fruit that the United States was ready to pluck and incorporate into the Union.<sup>35</sup>

Yet the Jackson and Jones moments were exceptions to what was largely apathy toward California among most U.S. politicians and the U.S. public more generally. Whigs opposed expansion as a general rule, and if Henry Clay won the presidency in 1844—as many Americans expected—California’s acquisition would not come any time soon, particularly if a successful Clay presidency paved the way for an extended period of Whig dominance.<sup>36</sup> Democrats, meanwhile, were friendlier to expansion, but California was

33. See Weber, *The Mexican Frontier*, 255–60; Miller, *Alvarado*, 45–50; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California*, Vol. 3 (San Francisco: The History Company, 1886), 455–77.

34. On Jackson’s attempt to purchase California, see Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson: The Course of American Democracy, 1833–1845* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 365–67. On Thomas ap Catesby Jones’s seizure of Monterey, see Gene A. Smith, “Thomas ap Catesby Jones and the First Implementation of the Monroe Doctrine,” *Southern California Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (Summer, 1994): 139–52.

35. On the Californios, see, among many works, Douglas Monroy, *Thrown among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Rosaura Sánchez, *Telling Identities: The Californio Testimonios* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

36. For the remarkable series of contingencies that led to Polk’s election, see William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, Vol. 1: Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 353–452; John Schroeder, “Annexation or Independence: The Texas Issue in American Politics,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 89, no. 2 (Oct., 1985), 137–64; Michael Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 60–283; Michael Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 13–95.

a tertiary concern to the more immediate issues of Texas and Oregon. Certainly expansionists hoped California would be annexed somewhere in the mid-future, but Texas and Oregon took priority. Even the famed expansionist John L. O'Sullivan, in his soon-to-be-famous Manifest Destiny article in the *Democratic Review*, maintained California's immediate future was not as a part of the United States but as an independent republic. To O'Sullivan, only when the U.S. built railroads and the populations of the "Empires of the Atlantic and Pacific . . . flow together into one," would California join the Union.<sup>37</sup> No wonder, then, that in the early 1840s, most Americans had little knowledge of, or interest in, California.<sup>38</sup> Such was this ignorance that the merchant Thomas Larkin, a California immigrant from New England, felt the need to start promoting the territory in letters to eastern presses. One of the few U.S. merchants in California who enthusiastically supported U.S. acquisition, Larkin's letters fell on deaf ears, and for two years he did not receive a response.<sup>39</sup>

Oregon was a different matter, for it had been at least partially claimed by the United States since 1818. That year, the United States and Great Britain agreed to possess Oregon by "joint occupation," and they renewed this agreement in 1827. Both believed that time would sort out the final settlement.<sup>40</sup> Until the mid-1830s, time seemed to be with the British, for the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), led by its skilled chief factor John McLoughlin, utterly dominated the vast Oregon Country, via both the settlement of HBC employees in the region and the pursuit of calculated alliances with the local Kalupuyan people.<sup>41</sup> Yet things changed in the 1830s, when U.S. missionaries

37. "Annexation," *The United States Democratic Review* 17 (July-August 1845): 9.

38. Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific*, viii, 64.

39. Fredrick Hudson (New York Herald office) to Thomas Larkin, Oct. 14, 1845, *The Larkin Papers*, 10 Vols., ed. George P. Hammond (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 4:24; George P. Hammond, "Preface," *Larkin Papers*, 4: x-xi; Harland Hague and David J. Langum, *Thomas O. Larkin: A Life of Patriotism and Profit in Old California* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 108-110.

40. For Anglo-American diplomacy over Oregon, see Merk, *The Oregon Question*, 1-215; David Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 103-110.

41. On John McLoughlin, see Dorothy Nafus Morrison, *Outpost: John McLoughlin and the Far Northwest* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1999); Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families*, 89-146. On these mixed race families, see *Ibid.*; Melinda Marie Jetté, *At the Hearth of the Crossed Races: A French-Indian Community in Nineteenth-Century Oregon, 1812-1859* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2015), 42-67, 121-26. Importantly, north of the Columbia River where the missionaries were more isolated, Indians remained geopolitical players—as would be evident in the white-native conflicts of the late 1840s and 1850s.

arrived in the region hoping to convert Oregon's natives. Missionary letters to the East publicized Oregon's potential, which gained further notoriety when the Missouri senators Linn and Thomas Hart Benton began agitating for Oregon annexation in 1838.<sup>42</sup> That year a congressional report stated that the U.S. claim to Oregon Country was valid to at least forty-nine degrees latitude. The most crucial aspect of these developments was Senator Linn's proposed bill to grant 640 acres in Oregon to any Americans who undertook the journey. While Linn's bill failed to pass—congressmen feared upsetting negotiations with Britain over the northeastern boundary—it sparked emigration to the Willamette Valley and led to the emergence of Oregon booster societies and expansionist newspapers. By the late 1830s, "Oregon Fever" engulfed western regions of the United States.<sup>43</sup> Thus, in contrast to their ignorance of California, most Americans did have some knowledge of Oregon, and they understood that the United States possessed a legitimate claim to at least a portion of the region. Nevertheless, Oregon still lay outside the U.S. borders, and there was never any guarantee that the United States would gain legal possession over any of it. For the United States to do so, first the federal government needed to push for an Oregon settlement, and then Great Britain needed to acquiesce to U.S. claims. With the Whig Party hostile to expansion and the British hoping to maximize their holdings, neither a rapid nor a favorable Oregon settlement was assured—although it still remained more likely than a U.S.-owned California.

The contrasting geopolitical situations of Oregon and California shaped the number and character of migrants who chose to travel to each region. Mexican California was the much riskier destination, for it was officially controlled by a foreign power. Abundant land was certainly available, but accessing it was not guaranteed. Acquiring land meant either relying on Mexican or Californio acquiescence or on forcible seizure. Yet with greater risk lay greater potential reward. Americans knew little of California, but potential migrants at least knew from the few California travelogues that the local Californio population controlled vast tracts of land, and perhaps American migrants could follow suit.<sup>44</sup> According to Larkin, Americans in

42. For Linn's role, see Husband, "Senator Lewis Linn and the Oregon Question," *Missouri Historical Review* 66, no. 1 (Oct., 1971): 1–20.

43. Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 42–45.

44. See, for example, the famous respective travelogues of Richard Henry Dana and Thomas Farnham. Richard Henry Dana, Jr., *Two Years before the Mast* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1912), 186; Thomas Farnham, *Travels in the Californias* (1844), 344–45.

California sought “as much as eleven leagues of land,” almost fifty thousand acres.<sup>45</sup> Unsurprisingly, Texas was on the minds of some California immigrants, who, like the Texas immigrants of the 1820s, hoped to become powerful *empresarios* wielding both economic and political clout.<sup>46</sup> Of course, neither the Mexican government nor the Californios wanted California to mimic now-independent Texas, and thus they did not make any promises in regard to land (or anything else, for that matter). California’s greater risk and greater potential for reward explains the numbers and behavior of California migrants. Because California was a riskier destination, only 1,500 migrants chose to travel there before the outbreak of the U.S.–Mexican War, in contrast to the over 6,000 Americans who chose Oregon. However, this smaller group held greater financial ambitions than their Oregon counterparts, and thus they proved much more volatile when they arrived. Although not the sole or primary factor in the tumult that ensued, this volatility helps explain why Americans in California participated in two rebellions and several other violent engagements.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, famed California pioneers often have an aura of notoriety surrounding their names, as is the case with John Sutter, Lansford Hastings, Benjamin Kelsey, and Isaac Graham. For these men, and for many more California migrants, ambitious goals bred ambitious actions.

In contrast, the 6,000-plus Oregon migrants desired a modest 640 acres of land, a figure they derived from Senator Linn’s 1841 bill. Although the bill failed, many migrants believed that it would eventually pass, once the United States and Britain finally agreed on their respective portions of Oregon Country. Thus, 640 acres in a potentially U.S.-owned Oregon appeared significantly more attainable than 50,000 acres in Mexican California.

45. Larkin to William Hooper, March 22, 1845, *Larkin Papers*, 3: 84. After U.S. conquest, an American naval officer noted how displeased U.S. settlers had become, for the United States was cutting back claims to 640 acres: Neil Howison to George Abernethy, Feb. 9, 1847, George Abernethy Papers, MSS 929, OHS.

46. For an explicit reference, see Lansford Hastings, *The Emigrants’ Guide to Oregon and California* (1845), 122–23. More generally, the Texas example always hovered in the background in the minds of both migrants and Californios, even before Texas annexation assumed international geopolitical importance. See, for example, John Bidwell, “The First Emigrant Train to California,” *The Century: A Popular Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (Nov., 1890): 111; Bidwell, “Statement of Mr. John Bidwell . . . in letter to the Rev. Mr. Willey, 1876,” John Bidwell Papers, MSS C-B 468, Bancroft Library; Almonte to Mariano Vallejo, May 18, 1841, Vallejo Papers, MSS C-B 33, Bancroft Library; John Sutter to Reading, Oct. 15, 1845, John Augustus Sutter Papers, MSS C-B 631, Bancroft Library.

47. Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 93–94; Dorothy Johansen, “A Working Hypothesis for the Study of Migrations,” *Pacific Historical Review* 36, no. 1 (Feb., 1967): 1–12.

Certainly Oregon migrants were wary of both Great Britain's legal claim over Oregon and the on-the-ground power of the HBC, but they were reassured by the continued presence and seeming success of U.S. missionaries. With the missionary presence, it seemed that, even if a *U.S.* Oregon was not certain in the near future, at least an *American* Oregon could be realized as more migrants arrived. With more modest ambitions, Oregon migrants proved more temperate than their California counterparts in the years preceding the 1846 Oregon Treaty. Despite some tensions, most Americans in Oregon had quite cordial relations with McLoughlin and the HBC, and no rebellion or even substantial violence ever occurred. Even the legacy of famed Oregon pioneers has remained more modest; the names Joe Meek and Jesse Applegate simply do not invoke the same notoriety as Sutter and Hastings.<sup>48</sup>

Yet the dissimilarities between Oregon and California migrants should not hide their shared goal of land ownership. Both traveled to the Far West to achieve this pragmatic goal, not to expand the borders of the United States. Importantly, however, this pragmatism does not mean overlanders were necessarily *anti*-American. Simply because they left the United States did not mean they abhorred their former country. While they were clearly dissatisfied with their current economic prospects and unhappy with the changing trends in U.S. society due to the Market Revolution, they were not consciously shedding their American heritage when they left U.S. borders. Indeed, the Fourth of July remained an important day for many overlanders to celebrate.<sup>49</sup> They were proud of their American background, and clearly respected U.S. institutions, demonstrated by their continued commitment to republican government in both Oregon and California. Yet, their nationalism was tethered to their ethnic identity as Americans, both as individuals and collectively, not to the United States government as a political entity. When it came to their immediate future, they were fundamentally pragmatic, willing to see which way the political winds would blow in the West, supporting whatever political settlement guaranteed them economic security.

48. This is modestly evident even in the current historiography. Many works on pre-Gold Rush California are biographical, such as the works cited below on Sutter, Vallejo, Larkin, and John Fremont, while works on Oregon tend to be collective, detailing the Oregon Trail and the patterns of settlement.

49. William Baldrige, "Days of 1846," recorded by Louisa Thompson, MSS C-D 36, Bancroft Library; Weber Proclamation, July 4, 1845, Weber Family Papers, MSS C-B 829, Bancroft Library; William Gray Diary, Gray Papers, William Gray Papers, MSS 1201, OHS; Robert Newell, Account of 1843 Champoege Meeting, Robert Newell Papers, MSS 1197, OHS.

The range of possible political settlements varied, however, depending on whether migrants chose California or Oregon.

#### **“THE REPUBLIC OF CALIFORNIA WILL ARISE”: CALIFORNIA’S AMBIGUOUS POLITICAL FUTURE**

By early 1846, only five hundred American overlanders resided in the remote Mexican territory of Alta California.<sup>50</sup> However, in California five hundred was actually a significant number, for, in addition to native peoples, the territory was populated by roughly 6,000 Californios, most of whom were the descendants of Mexican soldiers who had arrived in the late eighteenth century and the native women who became their wives or consorts. While the Californios resided in coastal hamlets, upwards of 100,000 Indians lived in the interior, giving Californios a constant paranoia that their settlements—in which many Indians worked as day laborers—would be overwhelmed.<sup>51</sup> Added to this anxiety was a lack of unity. Northern Californios and southern Californios were wary of one another, and both feared that their counterparts in the other region would try to seize power throughout the territory. In the 1820s, Californios and Indians were joined by a small but influential number of New England and European merchants, who came to take advantage of the lucrative hide-and-tallow trade. Seeking profits above all, these men readily acculturated to Californian society by becoming Mexican citizens, converting to Catholicism, marrying into prominent Californio families, and learning Spanish. The Californios accepted the new arrivals in turn. By the mid-1840s, these maritime immigrants had become an integral part of Californian politics and society, and historians have argued that most were entirely indifferent to California’s political fate, so as long as their profits and the social power that came with them could continue.<sup>52</sup>

50. Alta California’s official borders were much larger, but when both Americans and Mexicans referred to “California,” they meant the coastal region inhabited by non-natives.

51. On California Indians, see Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846–1873* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 16–41; Sheburne F. Cook, *The Conflict Between the California Indian and White Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); George Harwood Phillips, *Indians and Intruders in Central California, 1769–1849* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); James A. Sandos, “Between Crucifix and Lance: Indian-White Relations in California, 1769–1848,” in *Contested Eden: California Before the Gold Rush*, ed. Ramón Gutiérrez and Richard J. Orsi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 196–229.

52. Doyce B. Nunis, Jr., “Alta California’s Trojan Horse,” in *Contested Eden*, ed. Gutiérrez and Orsi, 306–310; Douglas Monroy, *Thrown Among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in*

In contrast to these acculturated merchants, historians have portrayed the U.S. overlanders arriving in the early 1840s as the vanguard of U.S. expansion. They were, as one historian deemed them, “California’s Trojan Horse,” seemingly peaceful but in fact auguring the death knell of Mexican rule.<sup>53</sup> With this approach, historians typically narrate the final years of Mexican California’s existence as an escalation of U.S. interference in the territory, highlighting certain symbolic events: U.S. Commodore Jones’s accidental seizure of Monterey in 1842; Larkin’s appointment as U.S. consul in 1845; the arrival of the U.S. military captain John C. Fremont later that year; and, retold time and again in California lore, the tiny Bear Flag Revolt of 1846, in which thirty-three American settlers claimed to have conquered the undefended, sleepy frontier town of Sonoma.

Yet, these apparent preludes to U.S. expansion elide a much more complicated story, one revealing that Americans in California were certainly not facilitating U.S. conquest. Instead, the newcomers haphazardly experimented with different political solutions that could secure them permanent access to land, all the while caring little for U.S. interests. They acted with the belief that, while U.S. conquest was undoubtedly one possible future, there existed three others: first, an independent Republic of California, in which American migrants seized the territory from the native Californios; second, a Mexican California governed by American migrants under the loose supervision of the Mexican state; and third, an independent Republic of California governed by an alliance of Californios and Americans.

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*Frontier California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 154–162. Larkin estimated in 1845 that three-fifths of the town *alcaldes* (mayors) and two-sevenths of the legislature were foreigners: Larkin to Hooper, March 22, 1845, in *The Larkin Papers*, 10 vols., ed. George P. Hammond (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 3:84.

53. Nunis, Jr., “Alta California’s Trojan Horse,” 322; John A. Hawgood, “The Pattern of Yankee Infiltration in Mexican Alta California, 1821–1846,” *Pacific Historical Review* 27, no. 1 (Feb., 1958), 31. Other works on Mexican California that echo this treatment of American migrants include Weber, *The Mexican Frontier*; Alan Rosenus, *General M.G. Vallejo and the Advent of the Americans: A Biography* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995); Harland Hague and David J. Langum, *Thomas O. Larkin: A Life of Patriotism and Profit in Old California* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990); Neal Harlow, *California Conquered: War and Peace on the Pacific, 1846–1850* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Carlos Manuel Salomon, *Pío Pico: The Last Governor of Mexican California* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 1–108; Albert L. Hurtado, *John Sutter: A Life on the North American Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 16–203; Robert Ryal Miller, *Juan Alvarado: Governor of California, 1836–1842* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 3–129; Woodrow James Hansen, *The Search for Authority in California* (Oakland: BioBooks, 1960).

In regards to an American-dominated California republic, the individual who most worked for its realization was Lansford Hastings. Between 1843 and 1846, Hastings laid plans to seize the territory from both the Mexican state and the Californio population. Hastings was an Ohio lawyer who traveled to Oregon in 1842, and from Oregon to California in 1843.<sup>54</sup> Although he only remained four months, Hastings was captivated by California's agricultural potential, and, even more so, the ease with which he believed the territory could be taken. He then returned to the United States via Mexico to write his famous western guidebook, *The Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California* (1845). Hastings believed that he could persuade thousands of migrants to travel to California and then lead these migrants to, as Hastings put it, "revolutionize" the Californio-led government and establish a California republic.<sup>55</sup> While most migrants to California only desired vast tracts of land, Hastings also lusted for political power, and presumably he hoped to assume a prominent role in the new republic. Although the details of his plans are unknown, his general dedication to them is not in doubt.<sup>56</sup> Hastings believed that, under his guidance, California would become an independent Anglo American republic.

Hastings was joined in his revolutionary plans by a host of past, present, and future famous California residents, among them Thomas Farnham. Like Hastings, Farnham was a lawyer, western traveler, and author. In the late 1830s Farnham portrayed Mexican California as hostile to Americans, and by 1845 he was onboard with Hastings' plan to foster immigration and seize the territory.<sup>57</sup> Hastings and Farnham eventually added John Marsh to the conspiracy, who had been an early American immigrant to California in 1835

54. On Hastings, see Bagley, "Lansford Hastings: Scoundrel or Visionary?" *Overland Journal* 12, no. 1 (1994): 13–25; Thomas F. Andrews, "The Ambitions of Lansford W. Hastings: A Study in Western Myth-Making," *Pacific Historical Review* 39, no. 4 (Nov. 1970): 473–91.

55. Hastings to Thomas Marsh, March 26, 1846, Marsh Family Papers; Bidwell, *Echoes of the Past*, 92–94; Charles Putnam to Joseph Putnam, July 11, 1846, in *Overland in 1846: Diaries and Letters of the California-Oregon Trail*, vol. 2, ed. Dale Morgan (Georgetown, Calif.: The Talisman Press), 603; Ben E. Green to John C. Calhoun, April 11, 1844, in *The Papers of John Calhoun*, vol. 18, 1844, Vol. XVIII: 1844, ed. Clyde N. Wilson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 203–4.

56. Andrews raised doubts about Bidwell's second-hand account of Hastings's ambitions, but as Bagley notes, the number of other witnesses who testified to Hastings's ambitions was quite substantial: Andrews, "The Ambitions of Lansford F. Hastings"; Bagley, "Lansford Hastings: Scoundrel or Visionary?"

57. Farnham's *Travels in the California* (1844) was famous for spreading news of the "Graham Affair" of 1836. For more on this incident, see Nunis, Jr., *The Trials of Isaac Graham* (San Francisco: Dawson's Book Shop, 1967), 21–30; Miller, *Alvarado*, 80–83; Bancroft, *History of California*, 4:1–41; Bagley, *So Rugged and Mountainous*, 87.

and had since become a wealthy *ranchero*. In 1845 Hastings brought Marsh a letter from Farnham, in which Farnham proclaimed that the “Republic of California” would “arise,” and “neither Europe nor the United States are prepared for the event.”<sup>58</sup> While Marsh may not have fully dedicated himself to Hastings’s and Farnham’s scheming, he was at least sympathetic to their ideas, and he made efforts to organize immigrants in the California for defensive purposes.<sup>59</sup> Marsh’s actions prompted a fellow migrant to ponder that Marsh could become the “George Washington of California.”<sup>60</sup> Hastings’s and Farnham’s other conspirators included Sam Brannan, a young and ambitious Mormon who would lead the first maritime migration of Mormons to California in 1846, and possibly the HBC’s McLoughlin, who hoped to maintain the company’s power in Oregon by pushing U.S. overlanders to California.<sup>61</sup> Even Sutter, who would come to dislike American immigrants for their refusal to obey his orders, was likely privy to some of Hastings’s plans, for Hastings and most other immigrants made Sutter’s Fort a meeting place for all overlanders. Thus, although this revolutionary conspiracy was still inchoate in 1845, it undoubtedly connected a wide spectrum of influential people.

None of these men expressed explicitly their reasons for conspiring for an Anglo American republic, but it is hardly a stretch to claim that all were driven by political ambition. Hastings and his allies grasped for power and influence throughout their lives, often at the expense of their friends and family. California in the 1840s offered great potential for these types of men. Indeed, by overthrowing the Californio dons, they would presumably replace them as the powerful landholding elite in California’s semi-feudal society. Moreover, the military weakness and tiny Californio population made California attractive for this sort of political adventurism. As early as 1841, Sutter threatened that if the Californios did not respect his power, he would lead his Indian allies and new immigrants to declare an “independent republic.”<sup>62</sup>

58. Thomas Farnham to John Marsh, July 6, 1845, Marsh Family Papers.

59. George D. Lyman, *John Marsh, Pioneer: The Life Story of a Trail-blazer on Six Frontiers* (New York: The Chautauqua Press, 1931), 262–67.

60. Charles Weber to Marsh, Nov. 25, 1845, Marsh Family Papers; Weber to Marsh, March 8, 1846, Marsh Family Papers.

61. On Hastings’s connections to Brannan, and both of their connections with Farnham, see the letters in Bagley, ed., *Scoundrel’s Tale: The Samuel Brannan Papers* (Logan: Utah State University Press), 75–85. On the possible McLoughlin connection, see Bagley, “Lansford Hastings: Scoundrel or Visionary?,” 17.

62. Sutter to Jacob Leese, Nov. 8, 1841, John Augustus Sutter Papers, MSS C-B 631, Bancroft Library.

This threat combined bluster and truth: while he could not really establish a truly independent polity (which would have been much more monarchy than republic), his fort was already autonomous, and Californios had no means to prevent his actions. Sutter's power may have spawned Hastings's even larger ambitions, for Hastings witnessed firsthand Sutter's achievements.<sup>63</sup>

It is all too easy to impugn the ability of Hastings and company to establish an independent California republic. In hindsight, declaring California independent based on the continued migration of Americans looks simultaneously delusional and vainglorious, and thus a man like Hastings was, in the words of one historian, a "scoundrel" whose "ambition blinded him to reality."<sup>64</sup> Yet, as explained above, prior to 1846 the political future of California was ambiguous. Moreover, the would-be revolutionaries could boast of some real accomplishments. Both Hastings and Farnham had traveled to Oregon, California, and Mexico, and both wrote bestselling accounts of their journeys. Marsh had become a wealthy California ranchero. Sutter's fort dominated the Sacramento Valley. If Brannan had thus far accomplished little, he would soon start San Francisco's first newspaper, and, thanks to the Gold Rush, would become one of California's wealthiest residents. It is true that all of these men were "scoundrels," in the sense that all were, to a greater or lesser extent, unlikeable and obnoxious—both to their contemporaries and to current historians. Contemporaries saw all of them as manipulative, arrogant, overly ambitious, and reckless; historians also point out their anti-Indian and anti-Mexican racism.<sup>65</sup> Yet, while deeply flawed, all were also proven leaders. Hastings is a clear case in point. Despite his poor grasp of geography, he was elected as the head of his overland party to Oregon in 1842, guided another group of migrants from Oregon to California in 1843, and led a final group to California in 1845.<sup>66</sup> Although his prediction that 20,000 migrants would come to California in 1846 was a vast overestimation, 1,500 still came—six times as many as the previous year, many of whom chose California due to Hastings's promotional abilities. In contemporary

63. For Hastings's admiration of Sutter, see Hastings, *Emigrants' Guide*, 102–4.

64. Bagley, "Lansford Hastings: Scoundrel or Visionary?," 13.

65. For these attitudes, see Hurtado, *Sutter*; Bagley, *Scoundrel's Tale: The Sam Brannan Papers*; Bagley, "Lansford Hastings: Scoundrel or Visionary?"; Churchill, "Thomas Jefferson Farnham"; Bidwell, *Echoes of the Past*, 68.

66. Hastings's "scoundrel" status also stems from his promotion of the Hastings's Cutoff—the mythical shortcut that led to the Donner Party disaster. In this case I do not quibble with Bagley's assessment.

understanding, Hastings and his allies practiced the Jacksonian ethos of “go ahead”—and when they did, people followed.<sup>67</sup>

As Hastings and Farnham tried to implement their revolutionary vision by returning east, Americans who actually remained in California had to manage with day-to-day reality. In 1845, reality meant navigating the complex issues of land use and land titles. When the first overlanders—forty-one Missourians known as the Bidwell-Bartleson Party—arrived in 1841, Californio authorities were ambivalent.<sup>68</sup> Concerned about a replay of Texas, the Mexican government had prohibited U.S. immigration to California, and some Californios agreed that Americans posed a general threat in the future, even if in the present the bedraggled Missourians did not. However, in 1841, years before the U.S. annexation of Texas, the threat was not that these Americans would bring U.S. involvement, but that these Americans would mimic the Anglo Texans and seize California for themselves (as, of course, Hastings was presently trying to do).<sup>69</sup> Despite these reservations, many Californios also saw benefits to U.S. immigration. Americans could act as a bulwark against both Indian invasion from the California interior and the machinations of power-hungry Sutter, and perhaps they were the industrious settlers California so desperately needed to facilitate economic growth.<sup>70</sup> Weighing the risks versus rewards, Mariano Vallejo, the commandant general of the northern frontier, issued the Americans passports and allowed them to remain. However, he did not grant them legal title to any land. In this manner, American migrants to California became quasi-legal squatters; they immediately started improving unclaimed land in the Sacramento Valley near Sutter’s Fort, but their permanent possession of it remained in doubt.

67. On the Jacksonian ethos of “go ahead,” see John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol of an Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 58; Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957).

68. For the Bidwell-Bartleson Party, see Bagley, *So Rugged and Mountainous*, 84–110; Bidwell, *Echoes of the Past* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1962), 5–76; Nunis, Jr., “Introduction,” in *The Bidwell-Bartleson Party: 1841 California Emigrant Adventure*, ed. Nunis, Jr. (Santa Cruz, Calif.: Western Tanager Press, 1991), 1–26.

69. Tellingly, the Californios referred to early American immigrants as either “Missourians” or “*estrangeros*”—foreigners—not as “Americans”: Vallejo to Thomas Marsh, Nov. 11, 1841; San José Alvarado pronouncement, Nov. 11, 1841; Vallejo pronouncement, Nov. 13, 1841, all in C-B 10, Mariano Vallejo Papers, Bancroft Library.

70. Vallejo, “Historical and Personal Memoirs Relating to Alta California,” 5 vols., trans. Earl Hewitt, 1875, MSS C-D 17–19, 3: 307–8; Vallejo, *New Light on the History, Before and After The ‘Gingos’ Came, Based on Original Documents and Recollections of Dr. Platón M.G. Vallejo* (Fairfield, Calif.: James D. Stevenson, 1994), 59; Rosenus, *Vallejo*, 35–43.

By 1845, these dozen Americans had turned into several hundred, but their status as squatters, albeit on tracts of land that greatly exceeded the maximum squatter's claim of 160 acres in the United States, remained largely the same. However, the Californio revolt against Governor Micheltorena and his army of Mexican convicts offered an opportunity to alter this ultimately untenable status quo. The actions of Americans during the Californio revolt against Micheltorena demonstrate the second political alternative to U.S. conquest: an alliance of Americans and the Mexican state. Of course, the one hundred Americans who joined Micheltorena's army at the behest of Sutter did not do so out of any loyalty to Mexico. They volunteered because they believed Sutter's and Micheltorena's promises: fighting for Mexico would secure them legal titles to their lands, thereby securing their economic futures.<sup>71</sup> Undoubtedly their political allegiance followed whichever political entity would give them prosperity, and if this meant fighting for Mexico, so be it.

Although this initial alliance appeared promising, it quickly frayed as Micheltorena's army pursued the Californio force from Monterey to the outskirts of Los Angeles. While the Americans' growing discontent resulted from numerous factors, they all revolved around one growing realization: Micheltorena and Sutter could never fulfill their promises about land grants, for Mexican power would always remain fleeting in distant California.<sup>72</sup> This recognition fully crystallized as the two armies faced each other near Los Angeles. The Californio force was now equal to the Mexican force, having been augmented by one hundred southern Californios and fifty Americans. These Americans lived in southern California, and, like their Californio neighbors, disliked Micheltorena's convict soldiers and the disorder they brought. As each army lobbed shells over the other (neither side ready to commit to initiating bloodshed), the Californio-allied Americans met with Mexican-allied Americans, and persuaded the Mexican-allied Americans that Micheltorena's promises were meaningless, for the Mexican state had no ability to control California

71. There may have been a few volunteers who hoped for revenge against the Californios, stemming from their imprisonment during the Graham Affair of 1836 (including Isaac Graham himself). Yet vengeance could only have motivated a select few, for in 1836 the population of non-merchant Americans and British was miniscule.

72. Hurtado, *Sutter*, 142–44; Bidwell, "California, 1841–1848," 122–26, C-D 8, Bear Flag Memoirs; Lyman, *Marsb*, 254–57; William A. Streeter, "Recollections of Historical Events in California," ed. William Henry Ellison, in *California Historical Society*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (June, 1939), 157–59; Bancroft, *History of California*, 4: 500–501.

permanently.<sup>73</sup> Even if American immigrants received land from Micheltorena, so their argument went, he and his soldiers would eventually leave California, and the land grants would vanish with them. Therefore, the only sensible decision was to side with the Californios.

Eventually the Californio-allied Americans summoned Pío Pico, the senior member of the Los Angeles assembly, to the meeting. Pico promised the Mexican-allied Americans that, although he could not legally grant land to any non-Mexican citizen, he would not disturb their current occupation of it.<sup>74</sup> Ultimately, most Americans abandoned Micheltorena and withdrew from the battle, giving numerical superiority to the Californio rebels. Understanding the new reality, Micheltorena surrendered the next day following a casualty-free artillery duel.<sup>75</sup> Within months he and his convict soldiers had returned to Mexico, and California was free of Mexican forces.

After Micheltorena surrendered, the main political issue going forward was whether American immigrants and Californios had mutually supporting self-interests. They had agreed that California was better off without Mexican oversight, but could they agree on California's political future? For a time their interests undoubtedly coincided, and in the aftermath of Micheltorena's expulsion we catch glimpses of a third political alternative for California: an independent or autonomous region governed by an alliance of Californios and Americans. Californios had always disliked Mexican rule, and, because of the events surrounding the Micheltorena revolt, now so too did most Americans. Also, like the Californios, American immigrants disdained and feared natives, prompting Californio leaders to contract with several Americans to undertake retaliatory raids against Indians in return for 500 cattle and half of all Californio property they recovered from the expeditions.<sup>76</sup> In another area of mutual self-interest, Californios had long detested Sutter's arrogance and power, and now so did many Americans, who blamed Sutter for misleading

73. The leaders of the Californio-allied Americans were members of the twenty-five-person 1841 Workman-Rowland Party, the only significant immigration to California that came via the Santa Fe Trail. On this party, see Bagley, *So Rugged and Mountainous*, 110–11.

74. There are conflicting accounts of these negotiations: Streeter, "Recollections," 157–59; Bidwell, "California, 1841–1848 . . .," 122–28; John Chamberlain, "Memoirs of California since 1840," 15–19; Antonio María Osio, *The History of Alta California: A Memoir of Mexican California*, 219–21; John Gantt to John Marsh, March 11, 1845, Marsh Family Papers; Larkin to Calhoun, March 24, 1845, *Larkin Papers*, 3:95–96; Frank J. Polley, "Americans at the Battle of Cahuenga," *Annual Publication of the Historical Society of Southern California, Los Angeles* 3, no. 2 (1894), 47–54; Bancroft, *History of California*, 4:506–7.

75. For this debate, see Bancroft, *History of California*, 4:507, note 34.

76. Bancroft, *History of California*, 4:543.

them into joining Micheltorena.<sup>77</sup> Interests seemed so aligned that Californio authorities acquiesced to the growing American presence on the frontier by agreeing to extend “all the guarantees they may desire for establishing themselves in this department, and for living securely in the exercise of their respective occupations.”<sup>78</sup> With coinciding self-interests, there seemed to be the makings of permanent Californio-American cooperation.

Of course, it is important not to overstate this cooperation: it did not mean an outright alliance, and both sides recognized that the relationship could fracture at any time. Perhaps this fracturing might come as a clash of legal traditions, since immigrants quickly became frustrated with the paternalistic and, as they saw it, largely ineffectual Mexican legal system.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, although Pico had promised to allow them to remain on their land, most overlanders still had no legal title, which could produce conflict down the road. Significantly, the immigrant leaders Marsh and Charles Weber put out a “call to foreigners” in March 1845, urging representatives to meet in San José on July 4th for the purposes of uniting their political interests.<sup>80</sup> They hoped to avoid a replay of the Micheltorena rebellion and ensure that in future conflicts all immigrants fight for the same side.<sup>81</sup> Although it is uncertain if this meeting was ever held, clearly immigrants perceived that their interests could conflict with those of the Californios in the future, even if these interests aligned for the present.

Despite the ongoing uncertainty of the relationship between the Californios and the American immigrants, it is worth considering a different political future for California, one that briefly revealed itself in the first half of 1845. The Mexican state was clearly powerless in the territory, and California residents were on their own.<sup>82</sup> For ambitious Americans like Hastings, who in late

77. Gantt to Marsh, March 11, 1845, Marsh Family Papers.

78. José Castro to Weber, April 12, 1845, Weber Family Papers, MSS C-B 829, Bancroft Library. Castro also permitted American immigrants from Hawai'i: Larkin to Calhoun, June 6, 1845, *Larkin Papers*, 3:227.

79. David J. Langum, *Law and Community on the Mexican California Frontier: Anglo-American Expatriates and the Clash of Legal traditions, 1821–1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 131–278.

80. Weber Proclamation, March 27, 1845; Weber to Marsh, March 24, 1845, both in Weber Family Papers.

81. Weber told Hubert Howe Bancroft thirty years later that the purpose of this “call to foreigners” was to initiate a Texas-style rebellion, but this made little sense at the time for both Weber and Marsh had everything to lose by taking such a risk. Bancroft, *History of California*, 4:599.

82. For a frank assessment of Mexican impotence, see Larkin to Manuel Micheltorena, March 21, 1845, *Larkin Papers*, 3:74–75.

1845 was readying his overland party in Missouri, this powerlessness meant Americans could seize California and establish an independent, American-dominated republic. By contrast, in the eyes of Californio leaders and more established Americans, independence could be created via an alliance between the two peoples. New England merchants had adapted and assimilated in the 1820s and 1830s, so perhaps overland immigrants could do the same in the 1840s. Indeed, surveying the results of the revolt against Micheltorena, one established American trader in San Diego believed a joint Californio-American declaration of independence “will no doubt be the case soon.”<sup>83</sup> He did not anticipate a development on the northern frontier that irrevocably changed the Californio-American relationship: the outbreak of the Bear Flag Revolt.

The Bear Flag Revolt has often been characterized as the logical culmination of Americans’ underlying hostility to Californio authority and the unbridgeable divide between the two peoples. Yet, like the patriotic sentiments of pre-departure overlanders, this portrayal reflects the revolt’s predominantly memoir-driven source-base. Examining the revolt from the perspective of 1846, the picture becomes much hazier. As we have seen, hostility between Americans and Californios was not in evidence at the time. Instead, the two sides were at their most cooperative. Moreover, northern Californios and southern Californios were on the brink of yet another miniature civil war, and thus there was no imminent threat to the American presence in California. Californios were about to attack each other, not drive the Americans out of the territory. Just as importantly, if Americans did want to take control of California, the most logical method to do so was simply to wait. The massive U.S. immigration to California in 1846 augured for bloodless demographic victory within a few years. Most Americans, ranging from established merchants like Larkin to would-be filibusters like Hastings, believed they would soon be a majority, at least in northern California. With this perspective, the Bear Flag Revolt looks exceedingly rash, a rupture rather than a culmination of the status quo.

How, then, to explain it? Without wading into the murky details of the conflict, it is possible to draw three important conclusions.<sup>84</sup> First, whatever his

83. John Coffin Jones to Larkin, Feb. 25, 1845, *Larkin Papers*, 3:49. Italics in original.

84. Despite an ongoing historiographical debate over the Bear Flag Revolt, the most judicious historians largely agree that we can never know what truly happened. Careful secondary analyses of the revolt include Harlow, *California Conquered*, 74–114; Tom Chaffin, *Pathfinder: John Charles Fremont and the Course of American Empire* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), 289–335; Rosenus, *Vallejo*, 81–134; Bancroft, *History of California*, 5: 77–190. For a sampling of the ongoing historiographical debate, particularly its local manifestations in Sonoma, contrast Linda Heidenreich, “*This Land Was Mexican Once*”: *Histories of Resistance from Northern California* (Austin: University

intentions, the arrival of Fremont at the head of several dozen armed Americans acted as a catalyst for the revolt, for it confirmed Californio fears of U.S. aggression, and in turn offered Americans protection against Californio hostility. As one Bear Flagger remembered, Fremont's arrival "made the [Americans] bolder and the Californians suspicious."<sup>85</sup> Second, despite the comfort of Fremont's presence, the number of initial rebels was trivial. Only thirty-three Americans captured Sonoma (no military feat, for the tiny town was undefended). This number pales in comparison to the one hundred Americans who had joined Micheltorena's army the year prior, when the American population in the Sacramento Valley was less than half as large.<sup>86</sup> As the Micheltorena volunteers proved, Americans in California could mobilize themselves in significant numbers *if* they thought it would serve their interests, but clearly most did not believe the rash actions of the Bear Flaggers served any purpose whatsoever. Indeed, one participant even remembered that some of the Bear Flaggers' American neighbors would have betrayed the rebels to Californio authorities if only they had had the opportunity.<sup>87</sup> Third, the thirty-three men who joined the revolt were not a representative sample of American immigrants in California. Most Bear Flaggers were in their late teens or early twenties, were unmarried, had arrived in California the previous year, and were, as one pioneer termed them, "unsettled"—that is, they made a precarious living by hunting, trapping, and working for Sutter.<sup>88</sup> They had little to lose and much to gain by revolting. The few more senior Bear Flaggers had other reasons to resort to violence, several having had personal disputes with Californio authorities in the past.<sup>89</sup> These men differed from other Americans in the territory, most of whom had little inclination to disturb the status quo.

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of Texas, 2007), 75–92, with Barbara Warner, *The Men of the California Bear Flag Revolt and Their Heritage* (Sonoma: Arthur H. Clark Publishing Co. for the Sonoma Valley Historical Society, 1996), 13–74.

85. William Hargrave, "California in 1846," transcribed by Ivan Petroff, C-D 97 transcription, Bancroft Library. See also Bidwell, "Statement of Mr. John Bidwell of Chico, California, Concerning the Conquest of California, In Letters to the Rev. Mr. Willey, 1876," 19, C-B 468, Bancroft Library

86. Bear Flaggers were likely 10 percent of the Sacramento Valley population, while Micheltorena's volunteers may have been as large as 50 percent. These percentages are based upon the number of California migrants in Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 119.

87. Benjamin Kelsey and Mary E. Foy, "The Bear Flag Revolution," *The Quarterly: Historical Society of Southern California* 28, no. 2 (June 1946), 65.

88. This is Bidwell's term; he divided California into the "settled" and "unsettled": Bidwell, "California, 1841–1848 . . ." 159–161, C-D 8, Bancroft Library.

89. For snapshot biographies of the Bear Flaggers, see Warner, *The Men of the California Bear Revolt and their Heritage*. While Warner's account of the revolt itself is problematic, these individual biographies are generally reliable. The "unsettled" Bear Flaggers include Granville Swift, Horace

After the initial uprising however, the Bear Flag Revolt quickly transformed from a tiny and atypical frontier squabble to a full-fledged rebellion that epitomized Manifest Destiny, initiating a racialized and nationalized discourse that had been largely muted in California. Because of Fremont's involvement, Californio leaders from both north and south logically tied the actions of the Bear Flaggers to the United States and united their forces in order to defeat the rebels.<sup>90</sup> Although incorrect, their assumption—namely, that the Bear Flaggers were representative of most Americans in California, and most Americans in California were representative of general U.S. aggression—was logical, particularly with the recent U.S. annexation of Texas. This assumption then forced many American migrants who previously wanted nothing to do with the revolt into Bear Flag ranks. As the pioneer John Bidwell remembered, when the “unsettled” portion of the American immigrants initiated the rebellion, the “settled” portion “was compelled to carry out the war in self defense.”<sup>91</sup> When U.S. Commodore John D. Sloat arrived in Monterey several weeks later with the news that the United States and Mexico were at war, the racialization and nationalization of the conflict was complete. The war confirmed the Californio suspicion that American migrants had been promoting U.S. interests ever since their arrival, while American migrants now welcomed U.S. protection against the newly hostile Californios. Manifest Destiny had finally arrived in California.

#### **“DEMAGOGUES HARANGUING FOR INDEPENDENCE”: THE MOVEMENT FOR AN INDEPENDENT OREGON**

While the actions of American settlers in California belie the Manifest Destiny narrative, historians of Oregon seem to be on firmer ground when they claim that the 6,000 American migrants to Oregon Country always hoped the United States would annex the region. Perhaps these migrants did

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Saunders, Robert Semple, Sam Neal, Henry Booker, Will Buzzell, Henry Ford, William O'Fallon, Thomas Cowie, George Fowler, John Kelley, Harvey Porterfield, William Scott, John Scott, Marion Wise, and Peter Storm. This list does not account for the ten or so men whose backgrounds are largely unknown.

90. Pío Pico Proclamation, June 23, 1846, 22–24, Bear Flag Papers, C-B 70, Bancroft Library. A translation can be found in Bancroft, *History of California*, 5: 138, note 21. See also Larkin to Anthony Ten Eyck and Joel Turill, June 21, 1846, *Larkin Papers*, 5: 62.

91. Bidwell, “Statement of Mr. John Bidwell of Chico, California, Concerning the Conquest of California, IN Letters to the Rev. Mr. Willey, 1876,” 3, C-B 468. Similar statements include Baldrige, “Days of 1846,” 56, transcribed by Louisa Thompson, Jan. 28, 1878, MSS C-D 36; Henry Ford, “On the Bear Flag Revolt,” Bear Flag Memoirs, C-E 75.

not travel to Oregon with the explicit aim of securing it for the United States—as some pioneers claimed after the fact—but they nevertheless desired U.S. annexation as soon as they arrived in the fertile Willamette Valley. Their pro-annexation attitude was the result of many factors, but one in particular. Unlike California's many possible political futures, in Oregon there seemed to be only two: U.S. or British annexation. Whatever migrants may have thought of the United States upon leaving for the West, they absolutely disdained living under British rule.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, when Americans formed the Oregon Provisional Government in 1844, they did so with the explicit prerequisite that they were only adopting the government “until such time as the United States of America extend their jurisdiction over us.”<sup>93</sup> Thus, in Oregon, Americans' desire for U.S. expansion seems unambiguous.

Yet, upon closer examination, Oregon was not the proto-U.S. territory that historians have claimed. Perhaps Americans *were* destined to populate Oregon, but an American population did not necessarily portend U.S. annexation. At issue was not international diplomacy; the United States' claim to the southern portion of Oregon, including the Willamette Valley, rested on solid ground. Rather, the issue lay with the Oregon settlers themselves: a significant number desired an independent government, not U.S. annexation. Americans created the relatively weak Oregon Provisional Government not as a maneuver against the designs of Great Britain but because they wanted to curtail the “independence party,” a group of Americans and their allies who hoped to establish a strong government through which Oregon could potentially assert independence. Even after pro-U.S. Oregonians thwarted these ambitions in 1844, sentiments for Oregon independence remained strong in the region, and grew even stronger, until Oregonians learned of U.S. annexation in late 1846. Moreover, while settlers favoring U.S. annexation did remain in the majority during this entire era, their attitude stemmed from their self-interestedness, not their abiding patriotism.<sup>94</sup>

92. For this general Anglophobia, see Sam W. Haynes, *Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 106–132; 204–273.

93. Oregon Organic Laws, May 1844, in David C. Duniway and Neil R. Riggs, ed., “The Oregon Archives, 1841–1843,” *Oregon Historical Society* 60, no. 2 (June, 1959): 273.

94. Scholars who have ignored or underplayed the Oregon independence sentiment in larger syntheses include Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families*, 400–408; Etulain, *Beyond the Missouri*, 143–45; Carlos Arnaldo Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History*, (rev. ed.; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 113–19; Johansen and Gates, *Empire of the Columbia: A History of the Pacific Northwest* (2d ed; New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 189–94; Ray Billington, *The Far*

When the first substantial group of roughly 125 American overlanders arrived in 1841 in the Willamette Valley, they encountered an already complex and developed—albeit not very populous—community, comprised of one hundred *metis* families who worked for the HBC and a few dozen American missionaries. The HBC's McLoughlin did not welcome these new Americans, but neither did he wish to see them dead, and he therefore provided provisions to allow them to survive their first winter. After 1841, every subsequent year brought exponentially more newcomers, to the extent that the migrations of 1843 (875 migrants) and 1844 (1,475 migrants) led to significant yearly changes in the community's political formulations. These formulations began small: in 1841, after Oregon's wealthiest settler died intestate, the community appointed a probate judge to adjudicate his property. However, as the population increased, many saw the need for something more than a probate court, which culminated with the creation of the Oregon Provisional Government in the summer of 1843. The 1843 migrants then pushed to strengthen this government structure in the summer of 1844, and the 1844 migrants again modified the structure in 1845. Oregon continued to be governed under this 1845 version of the Provisional Government until it became an official U.S. territory in 1848.<sup>95</sup>

Although Oregon's government constantly shifted throughout the pre-annexation period, a majority of Americans in Oregon always favored U.S.

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*Western Frontier, 1830–1860* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1956), 156–57; Frederick Merk, *The Oregon Question: Essays in Anglo-American Diplomacy and Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 234–54; Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, 169–86; Kluger, *Seizing Destiny*, 405–431; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought?*, 711–22; Bagley, *So Rugged and Mountainous*, 191–92. Historians of Oregon have also largely ignored this sentiment for independence, at most giving it passing independence: Malcolm Clark, *Eden Seekers: The Settlement of Oregon, 1818–1862* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981), 139–76; John Hussey, *Champoeg: Place of Transition: A Disputed History* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1967), 150–72; Hubert Howe Bancroft (ghostwritten by Frances Fuller Victor), *History of Oregon, 1834–1848* (San Francisco: The History Company Publishers, 1886), 1:292–445. The few historians who treat this sentiment seriously include Robert Loewenberg, *Equality on the Oregon Frontier: Jason Lee and the Methodist Mission, 1834–1843* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), 140–69, 195–228; Loewenberg, “Creating a Provisional Government in Oregon: A Revision,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 68, no. 1 (Jan., 1977): 13–24; Jetté, *At the Hearth of the Crossed Races*, 167–73; Richard Maxwell Brown, “Oregon,” in *The New Encyclopedia of the American West*, ed. Howard Lamar (New Haven: Yale University Press), 830; Robert M. Utley, *A Life Wild and Perilous: Mountain Men and the Paths to the Pacific* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1997), 212–26.

95. On the Provisional Government, see Hussey, *Champoeg*, 119–91; Loewenberg, *Equality on the Oregon Frontier*, 140–68, 195–228; Loewenberg, “Creating a Provisional Government”; Jetté, *At the Hearth of the Crossed Races*, 166–79. For earlier accounts, most from the early twentieth century, refer to Loewenberg, “Creating a Provisional Government,” 14, note 4.

oversight. First the Methodist missionaries in 1838, then a conglomerate of Oregon settlers in 1839, 1843, and 1845, petitioned Congress to extend U.S. dominion over Oregon, for they had settled Oregon “under the belief it was a portion of the public domain” of the United States.<sup>96</sup> To them, the Willamette Valley was unambiguously U.S. territory, ready to be immediately incorporated into the Union.

Yet, while a majority of Americans in Oregon favored U.S. annexation, this attitude did not stem solely, or even primarily, from their patriotism. Certainly Oregon settlers’ petitions to Congress were couched in patriotic language (“We pray for the high privileges of American citizenship”), but the desire for U.S. oversight was much more about eliminating rivals than facilitating expansion.<sup>97</sup> These adversaries included McLoughlin, the HBC, and recently arrived Catholic missionaries. McLoughlin claimed the same land at the Willamette Falls as the Methodist missionaries. If the United States acquired Oregon, the recently passed 1841 preemption bill would give the Methodists the land, for a provision in the law favored American preemption over that of foreigners.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, the HBC’s continuing economic power angered U.S. settlers. Many had quickly accrued debts to the company for supplies, and they hoped U.S. oversight would curb the HBC’s economic stranglehold.<sup>99</sup> Additionally, the Protestant missionaries felt increasingly threatened by what they perceived as successful Catholic inroads into the Indian population, and unsurprisingly they blamed this development on the HBC’s support for the Catholics. Overlooking the long anti-Catholic history of Great Britain, many missionaries believed that the British government, the HBC, and the Catholic priests were all working together to ensure that Oregon would become “foreign and mostly papal.”<sup>100</sup> U.S. annexation would stop this development in its tracks.

Crucially, however, in addition to the self-serving but still pro-U.S. feelings of a majority of Americans, a certain minority of the small American population desired not U.S. annexation, but complete independence. The feelings of

96. Farnham Petition, 1840, quoted in William H. Gray, *A History of Oregon, 1792–1849: Drawn from Personal Observation and Authentic Information* (Portland, 1870), 194–96. See also C.J. Pike, “Petitions of Oregon Settlers, 1838–1848,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (September, 1933): 216–35.

97. Farnham Petition, quoted in Gray, *A History of Oregon*, 196.

98. Loewenberg, *Equality on the Oregon Frontier*, 188–192.

99. Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families*, 141.

100. Marcus Whitman to David Greene, November 1, 1843, *Letters and Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Vol. 138: Oregon Indians 1838–1844, Vols. 1–3*, 723.

this minority are accounted for in the vote taken at the village of Champoege in May 1843, in which Oregon residents debated whether and in what form they should create a government. A faction composed largely of Americans sought to implement a weak government, one that lacked a strong executive (in place of a single governor there would be a three-man committee) and the ability to tax. Presumably this very weakness would facilitate U.S. annexation, crucially avoiding the peril that a strong centralized government could—whether intentionally or unintentionally—lead Oregon toward complete independence. Opposed to this faction were many HBC-employed French Canadians who favored a strong government and potential independence. Crucially, they were joined by a group of Americans. Unfortunately the dearth of sources makes it impossible to determine the names of most of these pro-independence Americans or even to loosely estimate their numbers.<sup>101</sup> At best we can simply conclude that they existed. However, they and their French Canadian allies were in the minority, and the pro-U.S., weak government faction carried the day, which led the French Canadians to withdraw from all political participation. Perhaps nothing attests to the minority status of the strong government faction more than the actions of the infamous Hastings, who had arrived in Oregon in 1842 and who pushed for Oregon independence at an earlier Champoege gathering in March 1843. Voted down, Hastings left for California before the pivotal May meeting, searching for a more fruitful place to implement his dreams of independence.

The results of the Champoege referendum determined that Oregon settlers would await U.S. annexation via a weak Provisional Government, but this development lasted for less than a year. When the hundreds of 1843 migrants arrived and became a majority of the population, they promptly altered much of the Provisional Government's original form. These new arrivals realized that a weak placeholder government would be unable to function effectively

101. The events of Champoege have assumed almost legendary status among local Oregon historians, who have debated them for over a century. To briefly summarize: the "traditional" account of Champoege was recorded by the eyewitness Gray, who was repeated verbatim until the 1970s, when the historian Robert Loewenberg demonstrated Gray's untrustworthiness and offered a persuasive revisionist account. See Gray, *A History of Oregon, 1792-1849, Drawn from Personal Observation and Authentic Information* (1870), 279-87; Newell-Gray Letters, Robert Newell Papers, MSS 1197, OHS; Bancroft, *History of Oregon* (San Francisco, 1886), 1:292-314; Johansen, *Empire of the Columbia*, 178-94; Hussey, *Champoege*, 145-76; Loewenberg, *Equality on the Oregon Frontier*, 140-68, 195-228; Loewenberg, "Creating a Provisional Government in Oregon: A Revision." Since Loewenberg's analysis, some historians have echoed his assessment, while others have largely ignored it. See, for example, Utley, *A Life Wild and Perilous*, 212-16; Clark, *Eden Seekers*, 158-60; Jetté, *At the Heart of the Crossed Races*, 170-73; Morrison, *Outpost*, 365-72.

as Oregon's population exponentially increased.<sup>102</sup> Perhaps, too, they realized that the prospects for speedy U.S. annexation had become more distant; prior to their departure from the United States, Congress refused to pass Linn's Oregon bill, and the recently signed Webster-Ashburton Treaty made no mention of Oregon's fate. A functional government was now much more necessary. Led by the future California governor Peter Burnett, the newly elected officials of the 1843 migration promptly strengthened the executive by replacing the three-man committee with a governor, and they granted the government the ability to tax. These officials also passed several laws that made the government more palatable to the French Canadians, which persuaded them to reengage with community politics, although McLoughlin and the HBC still remained aloof.<sup>103</sup>

Burnett and his allies did not strengthen the Provisional Government in order to foster Oregon independence—or, at least, there is no evidence that this was their purpose. Rather, they wanted a more effective government for immediate, practical reasons: to organize self-defense, to settle property disputes, and to maintain law and order amidst the burgeoning population. As Burnett described, "We . . . found, by actual experiment, that some political government was a *necessity*."<sup>104</sup> However, by creating a stronger government, Oregon officials provided a space where independence once again became an option—and, for some, a preferred alternative to U.S. annexation. A significant number of prominent people testified to this strong sentiment for independence, and several 1846 articles from the *Oregon Spectator*, Oregon's lone newspaper, buttress these accounts.<sup>105</sup> Considering the general dearth of

102. The catalyst for this realization was that Cockstock, a Kalupayan Indian, and James Saules, one of Oregon's few black settlers, disputed ownership of a horse. This dispute, known as the Cockstock Affair, led to several deaths, and it led Oregon's white population to dread both a native uprising and a potential native-black alliance. See McClintock, "James Saules, Peter Burnett, and the Oregon Black Exclusion Law of June 1844," 126–27; Taylor, "Slaves and Free Men," 156.

103. Hussey, *Champoeg*, 168; Jetté, *At the Hearth of the Crossed Races*, 172–74.

104. Peter Burnett, *Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer* (New York, 1880), 168.

105. McLoughlin to the Governor, Deputy, Commissioner, and Committee of the HBC, November 20, 1844, in *The Letters of John McLoughlin, Third Series, 1844–1846*, ed. E.E. Rich (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1944), 32 (hereafter *LJM*); McLoughlin to HBC, July 4, 1844, *LJM*, 199; McLoughlin to HBC, March 28, 1845, *LJM*, 73; McLoughlin to HBC, December 12, 1845, *LJM*, 153; McLoughlin to Pelly, July 12, 1846, *LJM*, 162; Burnett, "Letter from Peter Burnett, Esq.," in *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 24, no. 1 (March, 1923): 108; Executive Committee Message, Dec. 14, 1844, quoted in Joseph Henry Brown, *Brown's Political History of Oregon, Vol. 1: Treaties, Conventions, and Diplomatic Correspondence . . .* (Portland, 1892), 136; Elijah White to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, April 4, 1845, in White, *A Concise View of Oregon Territory, Compiled from Letters and Official Reports, Together with the Organic Laws of the Colony*

sources for Oregon's early political history, the sheer number of documents attesting to the movement for independence is remarkable. Even more interestingly, rather than diminish as U.S. annexation became more likely, the pro-independence movement actually gained strength until the very moment of annexation in 1846.

In some cases, the men who attested to the independence sentiment in Oregon clearly had an ulterior motive in making their statements: they hoped to propel the U.S. government to act decisively to promptly annex the region. For example, Burnett mentioned the strength of independence sentiment in a letter to a Missouri newspaper, while the U.S. Indian agent Elijah White made similar pronouncements in a letter to the U.S. Office of Indian Affairs. Both sent a simple message: if the U.S. did not annex Oregon soon, Oregonians would take matters into their own hands and declare independence. Burnett noted, "The people here are worn out by delay, and their condition becomes everyday more intolerable."<sup>106</sup> White expressed similar sentiments: "Already demagogues are haranguing in favor of independence, and using the most disparaging language regarding the measures of our government as a reason for action. These are but the beginnings . . ."<sup>107</sup> Yet simply because their letters served an ulterior geopolitical purpose does not mean that Burnett and White fabricated their information. Their accounts largely conform with other writers who did not have ulterior motives. For example, by 1844 McLoughlin understood that the British were not gaining possession of the Willamette Valley, and thus he had little reason to exaggerate independence sentiment—yet his reports are similar to those of Burnett and White. The *Oregon Spectator* offers the best evidence for the growing independence sentiment. Only months before annexation, "A Friend to Oregon" published a detailed editorial in the paper, in which the writer hoped to persuade his fellow settlers not to support independence. The writer noted, "This subject is one of great importance to [Oregon's] people, and one which seems to be engaging considerable attention."<sup>108</sup> Clearly a conviction had grown among some Oregonians that independence was the preferable future.

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(Washington, 1846), 54; *Oregon Spectator*, April 2, 1846; *Oregon Spectator*, May 28, 1846; J. Quinn Thornton, *Oregon and California in 1848* (New York, 1864), 2:34.

106. Burnett, "Letter," 107–8. See also Benjamin Stark Jr. to Benjamin Stark, November 15, 1845, Benjamin Stark Papers, MSS 115, OHS.

107. White to B.I.A., April 4, 1845.

108. *Oregon Spectator*, April 2, 1846.

Despite the growth of independence sentiment, however, all of this evidence also establishes that the pro-annexationists remained in the majority. Moreover, this majority faction believed the 1844 Provisional Government had gone too far to swing the pendulum toward Oregon independence. In response, pro-annexationists voted against holding a constitutional convention for Oregon out of fear that it implied outright independence, and in 1845 the newly elected officials once again petitioned the U.S. government for annexation. Despite their shared commitment to the principle of annexation, however, this majority faction was not united as to *why* they desired it. A minority of pro-annexationists were motivated by their U.S. nationalism. Known as the “Ultra-Americans” or simply the “Ultras,” they were hostile to the HBC and the British, and they sought U.S. annexation at any cost. Significantly outnumbering the Ultras were the moderates, who also supported annexation but not with the same nationalistic vehemence. Instead, the moderates desired annexation for the practical reasons of permanent land titles and permanent laws.<sup>109</sup> They were willing to work with McLoughlin and the HBC, and they were much less ideologically committed to U.S. annexation than the “Ultras.” For them, time was an issue: annexation needed to come soon, or they would contemplate Oregon independence as a way to solve the legal ambiguity of their land titles. Their attitude points to an ironic consequence of increased U.S. migration to Oregon: the more Americans who arrived, the less they felt the need for U.S. annexation. When a hundred-some Americans barely outnumbered the HBC’s French Canadians in 1843, the Americans longed for U.S. support against this foreign population. By 1845, when thousands of Americans dwarfed the French Canadian population, the need for U.S. intervention seemed much less pressing.

Not only did Americans dominate the internal dynamics of the Willamette Valley, but they also gained more geopolitical confidence vis-à-vis Britain: they realized that, with every increase in the U.S. population, the specter of British rule became increasingly unlikely.<sup>110</sup> In 1845 they even welcomed McLoughlin and the HBC into the government structure—an

109. In the 1845 election for governor, moderates cast 363 votes (split between the winner George Abernathy and another moderate), against 130 for the independent candidate, and 71 for the Ultra-American candidate. See Hussey, *Champoege*, 169; Walter C. Woodward, *Political Parties in Oregon, 1843–1868* (Portland: J.K. Gill and Co., 1913), 25–26; Clark, *Eden Seekers*, 194.

110. See Merk, *The Oregon Question*, 248; McLoughlin to Pelly, July 12, 1846, in *LJM*, 169. See also James Taylor to his father, May 21, 1845, James Taylor Letters, MS 1006, OHS.

action that was unthinkable a few years before, when the HBC possessed a commanding hold over the region.<sup>111</sup> This stance stood in direct contrast to that of the U.S. government, whose posture towards Britain had become increasingly belligerent. Yet most Americans in Oregon cared little for this flag waving, with the exception of the minority Ultra-American faction. It was clear to most Oregonians that, if a U.S.-British war erupted, Oregon would remain at peace. As one writer to the *Oregon Spectator* urged: “As the main war would be on the Ocean, I see no use of our fighting here . . . let our provisional government stand, and those who wish to stay at home and cultivate their farms, be permitted to do so without censure or molestation.”<sup>112</sup> Thus, by 1845, Oregon settlers’ policies differed from the United States. Oregonians had, essentially, created a second American republic, one in which they mimicked the qualities of the United States they still celebrated—for example, republicanism and American culture—but shed the aspects they abhorred—notably its unfettered market capitalism, slavery, and the presence of a black population.

Moreover, by 1845 the Willamette Valley community was flourishing. Oregon was hardly perfect, but it did fulfill many of the hopes that migrants possessed when they first left the United States: most settlers were able to claim their 640 acres, the region was at peace, the land was bountiful, Oregon’s republican government functioned effectively, and Indians remained unthreatening.<sup>113</sup> However, Oregon settlers did not yet have permanent possession of their land because Oregon’s political fate remained uncertain. The Oregon Provisional Government made the preemption claims legal, but it was still a *provisional* government. Oregon settlers needed the United States to annex the region and enshrine the 640-acre claims into law, in order to make their ownership secure. It was this uncertainty that made the situation, in Burnett’s words, “intolerable.” Thus the alternative presented itself: declare Oregon independent and make the Provisional Government a permanent body, thereby securing all preemption claims.

In all likelihood some American supporters of Oregon independence wanted much more than secure land titles: namely, they wanted political

111. McLoughlin to HBC, Nov. 20, 1845, in *LJM*, 98–106; Hussey, *Champog*, 170–71.

112. *Oregon Spectator*, September 3, 1846. Although this was written after the Oregon Treaty, Oregonians did not learn of it until late November.

113. James Gibson, *Farming the Frontier: The Agricultural Opening of the Oregon Country, 1786–1846* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 144. This perspective reflects attitudes of 1845—during the 1847 Cayuse War, settlers would no longer view natives in the same light.

power and social clout. These ambitious men were the “demagogues” over whom White fretted, or as another settler put it more subtly, they were “Persons . . . respectable for their character and influence.”<sup>114</sup> If Oregon became independent, these men could gain access to high office on the international stage. Yet if Oregon were annexed, these men would be shut out of power, and Oregon would become a U.S. territory and thus subject to the appointments of a government thousands of miles away. McLoughlin noted that Oregonians were concerned about this distance: “If the Country becomes a territory, they will be so remote from the seat of Government that it will be very difficult to get the Laws passed which they require.”<sup>115</sup> Moreover, territorial government would be a step backwards; Oregonians had already achieved self-sovereignty, but they would have to give this up after annexation.<sup>116</sup>

In the *Oregon Spectator*, “A Friend to Oregon” argued against these anxieties. While the writer did acknowledge that Oregon would give up some self-government, this minor drawback would be outweighed by all the benefits of U.S. protection. Moreover, Oregon would quickly become a state, and thereby would be “entitled to all the privileges and immunities of all the older states.”<sup>117</sup> Significantly, however, the writer’s arguments for annexation were rather abstract; the paper noted that an independent Oregon would be the pawn of international empires, and, echoing President James Madison, as a small republic Oregon would be plagued by faction. Arguments for the immediate, tangible benefits of annexation were glaringly absent, pointing to the current reality: annexation did not bring immediate, tangible benefits to the currently thriving Willamette Valley community. Thus it is unsurprising that some Oregonians argued for independence for the sake of their own ambition, for they imagined they had a much greater chance of keeping or gaining power in an Oregon Republic than in Oregon Territory.<sup>118</sup>

114. Thornton, *Oregon and California in 1848*, 34.

115. McLoughlin to HBC, November 20, 1844, in *LJM*, 3: 32.

116. Many of these fears were realized after annexation. See Robert W. Johannsen, *Frontier Politics and the Sectional Conflict: The Pacific Northwest on the Eve of the Civil War* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1955), 11–50; Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families*, 423–34.

117. *Oregon Spectator*, April 2, 1846.

118. Note the similarities to Texas annexation: Most of the Republic of Texas’s cabinet members opposed U.S. annexation, for they feared losing their individual power: Stanley Siegel, *A Political History of the Texas Republic, 1836–1845* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1956), 246–47.

Unfortunately, sources are scarce on the names of these “demagogues,” which is unsurprising. After Oregon annexation, and even more so during and after the Civil War, any pro-independence Oregonian would have appeared a fool at best, a traitor at worst.<sup>119</sup> Those who supported Oregon independence would have likely concealed their former involvement in a now-discredited movement. This may have been the case with the Methodist layman William Gray, whose influential *History of Oregon* became a key source for later historians. Gray was present at the famous Champoege meeting, and he described in his book how Americans at the meeting narrowly outvoted the French Canadians, thereby “saving” Oregon for the United States. According to Robert Newell, a prominent Oregon settler also present at Champoege, Gray actually desired independence, and he wrote his book to act as a smokescreen for his earlier “secessionist” tendencies.<sup>120</sup> Of course, there is no definitive proof that Newell’s portrayal of Gray was accurate, but as the historian Robert Loewenberg has demonstrated, Newell’s account aligns much more with the remaining fragmentary evidence of the Champoege meeting.<sup>121</sup> Thus Gray was not the harbinger of America’s Manifest Destiny, but its antithesis.

Importantly, while Gray and the other men who pushed for Oregon independence were clearly working for an unlikely scenario, unlikely did not mean impossible or illogical, particularly when an alternative geopolitical solution presented itself. Recall that few observers believed the U.S. conquest of California was imminent, and unsurprisingly Oregonians believed that, if Oregon were to succeed on the international stage, it would do so only by joining with California to form a vast “Pacific Republic.” A fledging trading network already connected Oregon to California; perhaps a political alliance could follow. After all, many Oregonians had traveled with California migrants in the initial months of their overland journeys, and thus the

119. While there were Confederate sympathizers in Oregon during the Civil War, most were not secessionists; rather, they disliked what they perceived as a tyrannical central government. See 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): 32–81.

120. Gray, *A History of Oregon*, 279–87; Newell-Gray Letters, Robert Newell Papers, OHS. Newell’s account was published in several 1867 issues of the *Oregon Herald*. Newell’s repeated use of the word “secession” reflects a post-Civil War view; before 1846, making Oregon independent was not in fact secession.

121. Loewenberg, “Creating a Provisional Government in Oregon: A Revision.”

populations knew one another.<sup>122</sup> As McLoughlin noted, “Others again think that the whole of Oregon united with California would make a respectable Independent state—and that such a union would be more advantageous for them—and be Independent than the two states be Dependent on a Distant Government.”<sup>123</sup> This possibility became even more likely if Americans overthrew the Californio government, which, with intriguers like Hastings bringing increased immigration, seemed a distinct possibility.<sup>124</sup> There was also an ambitious but palpable historical logic to Oregon’s independence: Oregonians often referred to their settlement as a “colony,” and if their knowledge of American history demonstrated anything, it was that small colonies could eventually become powerful nations.<sup>125</sup> Finally, and importantly, Oregon independence did not mean it was *never* going to join the United States, but that if it did join, it would do so on its own terms as an independent republic, thus securing land claims and other laws of the Oregon Provisional Government.

Revealingly, when pro-annexation Oregonians argued against independence in 1846, their strategy depended less on appealing to American patriotism, and more on geopolitical practicalities. For example, *The Oregon Spectator*, a strong advocate of annexation in 1846, employed two main points to defend its stance. First the paper argued that the U.S. federal government was not too distant to govern Oregon effectively. On the contrary, as soon as annexation occurred, Oregon would reap many benefits. These benefits included a secure mail route to the East, U.S. military protection, and eventually the building of a transcontinental railroad to permanently connect Oregon to the rest of the country.<sup>126</sup>

Second, the paper argued that geopolitical necessity mandated that Oregon join the United States. This argument relied on changing international circumstances. With every expansionist step taken by the United States, Oregon independence became increasingly untenable. Unsurprisingly, the

122. On McLoughlin’s ties to California, see Morrison, *Outpost*, 319–325; Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families*, 127–28, 136–37, 191–94.

123. McLoughlin to Pelly, July 12, 1846, *LJM*, 162.

124. *Ibid.*; McLoughlin to HBC, Nov. 15, 1844, in *LJM*, 130–36.

125. Indeed, at one point the Methodists claimed they were starting a second Plymouth: John Barbour to N. Bangs, Jan. 7, 1839, Methodist Missionary Papers, UPS; Loewenberg, “Saving Oregon Again?: A Western Perennial,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (December, 1977): 349; P.L. Edwards, “Instructions to Immigrants,” in *St. Louis New Era*, May 25, 1843, typescript in OHS, MS 235.

126. *Oregon Spectator*, April 2, 1846, September 4, 1846, September 17, 1846, and October 1, 1846.

*Spectator* gave frequent updates on Texas annexation, the Mexican War, and the conquest of California, for each buttressed the annexation cause.<sup>127</sup> One pro-annexation Oregonian was even more forthright, writing, “Polk is elected and Texas is annexed, also a revolution in California. The patriots will be reinforced from this place.”<sup>128</sup> In late November, after Oregonians finally learned of their annexation to the United States, the *Spectator* reported that the fates of Oregon and California were tied together. California, now conquered by U.S. forces, could never be an independent country. The implication was clear: neither could Oregon. The *Spectator* rejoiced: all Oregonians were “again citizens of the United States.”<sup>129</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Bernard DeVoto once famously wrote that 1846 was the “year of decision.”<sup>130</sup> But what decision, and whose? While DeVoto documented many individual decisions, *the* decision to which the book referred was the U.S. conquest of the American West.<sup>131</sup> And the ironic effect of this momentous decision was its foreclosure of the many other, smaller decisions of pre-1846 American migrants. Would Americans in California continue to cooperate with the Californios, or would they seize northern California for themselves? Would their counterparts in Oregon declare independence? And if they did so, would they then seek to join the United States, or would they try to unite with California? It is of course impossible to answer the “what ifs” of North American history for this period or any other. U.S. actions truncated the independent political actions of American overlanders. Yet, undoubtedly, overlanders left U.S. borders with these “what ifs” in mind. Many were indifferent to U.S. expansion, and a few of the more ambitious were even hostile to it. Even those who supported U.S. expansion when they began their journey may have changed their minds once they established themselves in

127. *Oregon Spectator* 1846 issues mentioning Texas: March 19, 1846, June 25, 1846, July 4, 1846, July 23, 1846, August 6, 1846, August 20, 1846, September 3, 1846, October 1, 1846, November 12, 1846.

128. James Nesmith to Samuel Wilson, June 27, 1845, James W. Nesmith Papers, MS 577, OHS. Nesmith referred to the Micheltorena Revolt, which many took as a sign the Californios may seek U.S. annexation. See also *Oregon Spectator*, November 26, 1846.

129. *Oregon Spectator*, November 12, 1846.

130. Bernard DeVoto, *The Year of Decision: 1846* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1942).

131. And, in this decision, two other decisions: the march to the Civil War, and the beginnings of U.S. industrialization. See Louis Masur, “Bernard DeVoto and the Making of the Year of Decision: 1846,” *Reviews in American History* 18, no. 3 (September, 1990): 443–44.

the West, realizing that they could—presumably—fend for themselves. Ultimately, they were fulfilling their own personal Manifest Destinies, not the destiny of the United States. ■

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