ARGONAUTS AND INDIANS IN THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE SACRAMENTO-REGION PRESS 1848-1860

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ARGONAUTS AND INDIANS IN THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH:
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A Thesis

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Abstract of

ARGONAULTS AND INDIANS IN THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH: AN ANALYSIS OF THE SACRAMENTO-REGION PRESS 1848-1860

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This thesis offers an analysis of eight newspapers published in the greater Sacramento-region during the Gold Rush era of California, 1848-1860. Topics explored include the image of Indians and white settlers in the press, Indian massacres, and the reasons for white-on-Indian violence, proposed solutions to the “Indian troubles,” and an examination of John Rollin Ridge’s editorial opinions.

A number of historians have addressed the notion that white settlers and gold seekers in California, with the support of the California government, perpetrated genocide upon the indigenous people of the region. Evidence in the Sacramento-region press confirms this assertion in a variety of ways. Additionally, historians have pointed to the reservation program in California as a failed policy. Here again the Sacramento-region newspaper editors offered substantial proof of this assertion.

This thesis draws primarily from the editorial writings of eight major newspapers of the Sacramento-region. The cited newspapers include the Daily Alta California, the Marysville Daily Appeal, the Marysville Herald, the Daily National Democrat, the Placer Times, the Sacramento Daily Bee, the Sacramento Daily Union, and the Sacramento Transcript. Additionally, this thesis examines other primary documents including journals, eyewitness histories, and letters. Finally, secondary accounts have also informed the analysis; specifically, I have relied on the works of Albert Hurtado, Robert Heizer, James Parins, George Phillips, James J. Rawls, and James Sandos among others.

The thesis concludes that the majority of editors in the Sacramento-region blamed white incursions upon Indian lands as the catalyst for violence in the gold fields. Editors worked to convince readers that the white-on-Indian violence in the diggings was the work of a small minority of white newcomers. Further, most editors supported the creation of a reservation system in the state, although they were critical of the administration of that reservation system once established. John Rollin Ridge stood alone in favor of the assimilation of California Indians into “civilized society.”

__________________________, Committee Chair

Professor Joseph Pitti

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Date
DEDICATION

For my mother and father, Jacqueline E. Tierney and Robert J. Tierney, who taught me a love of history, an appreciation for the power of writing, and a curiosity about the world.
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

James Marshall’s gold discovery at Sutter’s Mill in 1848 triggered an unprecedented flood of white immigrants into California.¹ Gold seekers came to California from every state. In addition, many others arrived from Mexico, Chile, Peru, as well as from nations separated from the United States by vast oceans. According to Kevin Starr, “The Gold Rush would be about action – about the sheer physical adventure of it all.”² The immigrants, who headed to California with dreams of tremendous riches, also looked forward to “seeing the elephant;” that is, they desired to face the dangers and adventures that awaited them in the gold fields and along the journey to California.

It was, in part, this desire for great adventure that led most miners to arm themselves. The miners who came to the gold fields via an overland route anticipated violent encounters with Indians. Their anticipation was largely a result of hearsay from stories passed along from earlier settlers who had made trips west, and from books published on the topic. For most, the anticipated encounter did not come to fruition. This reality came as a disappointment. As one miner explained, “We are armed to the teeth but on account of the consternation among the Indians because of cholera, we could

¹ The terms “whites” and “Indians” appear throughout this paper reflecting the vernacular of the press during the period covered by this work. The terms reflect a racial bias that existed in the nineteenth century; however, they do not represent the views of the author.

hardly get a sight of them…. Our arms are useless.”

It would seem, the Argonauts who trekked to California came in search of adventure as well as gold.

The population of non-native Californians increased 2500 percent from 1848 to 1852 and climbed to nearly 380,000 by 1860. While the non-native population soared, the native population plummeted; the number of California Indians declined from 100,000 in 1848 to approximately 30,000 in 1860. The sheer growth of white immigrants may not have created problems on the scale that occurred if not for the confluence of other exacerbating developments.

According to the noted California Indian historian Albert Hurtado, the richest gold regions in California were also those areas with the greatest number of native inhabitants. He observes that “Gold hunters consequently ventured directly into the territory of Indians who had previously been independent of white control.”

Additionally, in the first two years of the gold rush, the United States Army suffered desertions by soldiers determined to find wealth in the gold fields, greatly reducing the military’s ability to maintain order in the region. Finally, the nature of the gold seekers themselves was a problem. Hurtado explains, “[T]he Hispanic world-view that included

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4 J.S. Holliday, 455.


7 Ibid., 100-1.
Indians within society was replaced by the Anglo notion that Indians ought to be expelled from frontier areas.”

The new white immigrants had little or no regard for California’s Indians and traversed roughshod over their traditional lands, beliefs, and way of life.

California Indians became victims of the onrush of non-natives, particularly whites. European diseases brought to the gold fields by white settlers likewise played a significant role in undermining Indian society, as did starvation and exposure. The influx of white miners displaced Indians from jobs in the gold fields – the so-called 48ers had employed large numbers of Christianized peons to mine gold and had even permitted “wild” Indians to collect gold in their incomparable baskets. Gold seekers also destroyed the Indians’ traditional food supply by polluting the rivers with mercury and silting the salmons’ spawning grounds; by felling miles of forests to obtain fuel and lumber to build dams and other stream diversions. Oak groves that bore acorns, the major staple in the Indians’ diet, disappeared everywhere in the foothills. Animals traditionally hunted by the Indians searched for new sources of food in remote areas of the Sierra, as did many desperate and malnourished Native Americans.

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9 James J. Rawls and Walton Bean, California: An Interpretive History, 9th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008), 101. Rawls and Bean stated that Colonel Richard B. Mason, the military governor of Monterey, estimated California Indians made up more than half the gold miners in California in 1848.

10 Susan Lee Johnson, Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), 136-7; Andrew C. Isenberg, Mining California: An Ecological History (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 101-2. Susan Johnson and Andrew Isenberg speak to the issue of habitat destruction as it pertained to Indian survival. Johnson expounds on many of the specific issues mentioned here while Isenberg addressed the problem generally, stating, “By the end of the 1850s, Indians…in California faced…a populous industrial society impelled by the full weight of such society’s demand for land and natural resources.”
which, at times, escalated into massacres, also affected Indians.\textsuperscript{11} White violence drove Indians away from their traditional culture and lifestyle. Hurtado explains Indians took wage labor jobs “in a land that was increasingly dangerous for [them, because] they could expect some measure of security from assault only if they were employed by white men.”\textsuperscript{12} This last statement reflects the fact that Indians were willing and capable of taking some small steps in the interest of self-preservation. Though the California Gold Rush would have devastating consequences for the Indians in the state, many, to their credit, did find ways to survive and maintain various aspects of their native culture.

The Gold Rush, according to James Sandos, brought “tales of outsiders taking land and game, destroying the ecological basis of Indian life while killing Indians outright…; of a new legal system that sanctioned the outsiders’ behavior; of Indian agents both sincere and corrupt…; and of a confused national Indian policy subverted by local interests.”\textsuperscript{13} Indeed, the Gold Rush brought, as Hubert Howe Bancroft remarked, “a more or less revolting treatment of the natives.”\textsuperscript{14} However, Sandos cautioned that

\textsuperscript{11} Larry McMurtry, \textit{Oh What a Slaughter: Massacres in the American West, 1846-1890} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 2-3. The term “massacre” refers to the indiscriminate, wanton killing of people. Larry McMurtry explains, “Massacres are not like vast natural disasters;” rather, they “require human volition.” In defining a “massacre,” one must look to the intent of the perpetrators rather than the absolute number of victims. Larger numbers of victims would seem to be indicative of intent. Though it is difficult to assign a precise number to define a massacre, it seems appropriate to say a massacre would involve multiple deaths. The massacres discussed in this work generally involved the slaughter of dozens of Indians, though the carnage often encompassed upwards of a hundred casualties.

\textsuperscript{12} Hurtado, “Workaday West,” 11.


historians “should not let such blanket descriptions of victimization blind us to Indian
coping strategies for dealing with this catastrophic change.”¹⁵ For historians anxious to
portray Indians as more than victims of the gold craze, the newspapers of the
Sacramento-region offer considerable evidence of the Native American’s efforts to
endure. These efforts included working as laborers on white-owned ranches and farms,
relocating to higher elevations in the Sierra Nevada in an effort to escape the white
miners, violent retaliation upon trespassing whites, and stealing livestock to compensate
for the destruction of hunting grounds. Clearly, from the accounts provided in the press,
the California Indians were not just victims of white incursions. They fought and
struggled, using whatever means necessary, to hold onto their culture as well as their
lives.

Although Clifford E. Trafzer and Joel R. Hyer use the term “holocaust” when
discussing the impact of the Gold Rush on the native inhabitants of California, Kevin
Starr and Jack Norton are among those historians who embraced the much more common
term “genocide” in their account of the atrocities that occurred during the state’s first
decade.¹⁶ Although the term genocide came into use long after the Gold Rush, many of

¹⁵ James, A. Sandos, 88.

¹⁶ Clifford E. Trafzer and Joel R. Hyer, Exterminate Them! Written Accounts of the Murder, Rape, and Enslavement of Native Americans during the California Gold Rush (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999), 2; Jack Norton, Genocide in Northwestern California: When Our Worlds Cried (San Francisco: The Indian Historian Press, 1979), 37-64; Kevin Starr, 1-2. Norton’s book is one of the earliest to allege genocide. Chapter 3 of his work offers compelling evidence of “The Conflict and Terror” directed on Indians by the white miners.
the newspapers offer evidence within their columns and editorials that genocide was occurring in the gold fields, cities, and towns of California.

California’s growing number of newspapers thoroughly documented the destruction of Indian lives and culture, as well as the efforts of the government and civilians to deal with the problems resulting from this clash of cultures. This essay explores the pages of a number of newspapers that served the greater Sacramento region during this chaotic time. The intent is to offer an analysis of the press rather than an attempt to provide a narrative of the historical events of the day.

Newspapers were a remarkably important medium in the United States at the beginning of the California Gold Rush. Paul Starr recorded that “three-fourths of families [in the United States] included at least one adult who engaged in life-long reading, and that reading had become more varied, secular, and particularly focused on… keeping up with the times through newspapers.”17 The literacy rate in California in 1850 reached ninety-seven percent.18 J.S. Holliday stated, “Many thousands left home the spring of 1849 promising to keep diaries, write down each day what they had seen and what had happened.”19 With such an elevated literacy rate, obviously newspapers served a prominent role among those who labored and lived in the gold diggings of California.


19 J. S. Holliday, 58.
The press provides a window through which one can view a singular aspect of the attitudes of the Gold Rush. Throughout the period from 1848 to 1860, the newspapers selected in this study to represent the Sacramento-region reinforced the popular notion of white supremacy over Indians. At the same time, these papers generally called for a cessation of violence toward peaceful Indians and declared support for some level of accommodation of California Indians. Because editors generally thought separation of the races would benefit all concerned, they often concluded that the establishment of reservations would be a positive step toward cessation of the violence between whites and Indians. Many likewise supported the idea of forced labor for the Indians. The reasons for supporting the segregation of Indians on their own land and a system of coerced labor varied from simply separating the races to alleviate tensions that led to bloody violence to the idea that Indians might learn to be civilized if their white mentors showed them the way.20 At least one editor trumpeted the use of military force to compel the Indians onto reservations.

20 William Henry Ellison, *A Self-Governing Dominion: California, 1849-1860* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950) 142-61. Reservations, as such, did not exist in California in 1850. The newspaper editors were commenting on proposed reservations in 1850. As early as 1847, laws were established mandating labor for Indians in California. A general order directed all persons employing Indians in California to issue certificates to those Indians so federal authorities could easily identify them. Indians without these official papers were subject to arrest. In April 1849, the federal government issued Indian Agent commissions to John S. Wilson and Adam Johnston. Wilson and Johnston were to meet with the Natives to determine their general state and to provide them with assistance as needed. On September 28, 1850, the federal government passed legislation that would authorize the appointment of agents to negotiate treaties with the various groups of California Indians. The agents spent the better part of 1851 negotiating treaties with Natives. They presented 18 treaties affecting 139 tribes or bands of California Indians to the federal government to consider. Citizens and the California state legislature, largely predicated on the fact that the land in the proposed reservation sites included valuable mineral and agriculture tracts, voiced opposition to the treaties. The United States Senate bowed to the pressures applied by this powerful opposition and rejected the proposed reservations in June 1852. Edward F. Beale, California Indian Superintendent worked with the federal government to begin establishing temporary military reservations in 1853.
Once government officials set aside lands for a reservation system in California, editors began to analyze the shortcomings of this system. Some declared their absolute opposition to the notion of reservations; others expressed concern that the reservations were taking valuable land away from white settlers; and still others favored the creation of reservations, but insisted on proper management and fair treatment of the Indians. These latter journalists particularly complained about the fiscal irresponsibility of the government agents in charge of allocating resources to the natives being forced onto the new lands parceled out in California.

Rejecting reservations for “hostile” Indians, some editors instead preferred the use of military force to subdue intractable natives. Indeed, editors frequently differentiated between the treatment of hostile tribes and those who were compliant, especially expressing sympathy for the plight of docile and submissive “Digger” Indians.21 They also regularly betrayed to their reader their understanding that white incursions upon Indian lands were at the root of the problems between the races. Even so, the newspaper editors tended to place the blame for problems on small groups of white miners who were barbaric, ignorant, bloodthirsty, or in some other way predisposed to nefarious behavior. Though small groups of barbaric whites created the problems, editors believed “civilized” whites needed to seize responsibility for halting the cycle of violence that occurred between whites and Indians

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21 Clifford E. Trafzer and Joel R. Hyer, Exterminate Them, 2.
Chapter 2

THE NEWSPAPERS

The newspapers published in the greater Sacramento-region from 1848 to 1860 provide the focus for this work. The availability of newspapers for this study was limited, but those selected represent a good sample of those published or distributed in the Sacramento-region during the time in question, as well as some of the most largely circulated. This study includes the following newspapers: the *Daily Alta California* of San Francisco; the *Marysville Daily Appeal; The Marysville Herald*; the *Marysville Daily National Democrat; The Placer Times* of Sacramento; the *Sacramento Daily Bee; the Sacramento Daily Transcript*; and the *Sacramento Daily Union*. This collection of newspapers provides a variety of political and social perspectives from the period.

Edward Kemble, Edward Gilbert, and G.C. Hubbard began the *Daily Alta California* in January of 1849. Edward Gilbert served as the primary editorial writer. All of the proprietors were New York Democrats, but in their own words, the *Alta*, as it came to be known, was intent on being “independent of all parties, cliques, and persons. The cause which it will assert is the cause of California….”\(^{22}\) Initially a tri-weekly publication, the *Alta* evolved into a daily publication in January 1850, taking the moniker of the *Daily Alta California*. The paper consistently questioned the integrity of government Indian agents, military operations carried out against the Indians, and the activities of vigilance committees. The editors also frequently expressed their support for

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the establishment and effective management of a reservation system for the Indians. In addition, in the tradition of the proprietors’ Democratic roots, the paper supported state’s rights and popular rights. Published in San Francisco the *Alta* developed into one of the most important northern California newspapers during the earliest days of the state’s history; it circulated widely in the greater Sacramento region.

The *Marysville Daily Appeal* began in January 1860 with H.B. Mighels as editor. Under Mighels’ stewardship, the paper followed a decidedly independent stance, but B. P. Avery and Company purchased the paper in June 1860, and made it into a thoroughly Republican organ that strongly opposed slavery and state’s rights. The paper published weekly through October 1861 when it merged with the *Daily National Democrat* and began daily service. The union with the *Daily National Democrat* shifted the politics of the paper dramatically, as the *Democrat* now emerged, in fact, as a strongly Democratic publication that supported Stephen Douglas for President, favored state’s rights, the Dred Scott decision, and the right of states to choose slavery through popular sovereignty.

Colonel R. H. Taylor, a merchant from San Francisco, established the *Marysville Herald* in 1850. Although the paper began as an independent politically, it soon became a voice of the Whig Party. In its infancy, the paper was a semi-weekly publication but by

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23 Kemble, 94


October 1850, it had become a tri-weekly publication. The paper underwent a number of changes in ownership and operation, and its politics, in turn, “gravitated from Independent to Whig, then Know Nothing, Republican, and Stars and Stripes,” according to William Chamberlain. In general, the Herald supported the government efforts to establish a reservation system.

The Placer Times began publishing in April 1849. The Times commenced with the support of the same men who started the Alta. Like the Alta, the Placer Times leaned toward the Democratic Party, supporting the causes of state’s rights and slavery. With regard to Indian issues, the Placer Times frequently expressed concerns about the violence perpetrated on Indians and generally favored a reservation system. They also believed “civilized” whites needed to take responsibility for ending white-on-Indian violence in the gold fields.

In June of 1851, the Placer Times merged with the Sacramento Transcript, which had begun its operations in April 1850. Though the Transcript commenced as a politically independent newspaper, it was soon leaning in the direction of the Democrats as well, so the merger of the two made some sense. The editors of the Transcript were Loring Pickering, G.K. Fitch, and J.E. Lawrence. They ceased operations in Sacramento in June 1852, electing to move to San Francisco rather than compete with the newly emerging State Journal newspaper.

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26 Quoted in Kemble, 89. No citation was provided by Kemble.

The *Sacramento Daily Union* began publication in March 1851. The proprietors, all of whom had been involved with the *Sacramento Transcript*, started publishing the *Union* when a strike halted the printing of the *Transcript*. The individuals involved were C. L. Hansicker, J. Court, and W. J. Keating. These men employed John F. Morse as the editor of the new enterprise. Morse was a man of good reputation, and, according to Kemble, he “exerted himself considerable among the citizens of Sacramento to procure a favorable reception for the paper.” Though the *Union* began as an independent newspaper, it soon found itself aligning with the Whig Party on important matters in California. Regarding Indian matters, the editors of the *Union* spoke in favor of a reservation system and the use of military force against hostile Indians in order to compel the movement of all Indians onto the reservations.

In February 1857, the *Sacramento Daily Bee* began operations. According to Edward Kemble, “it was a morning paper, independent in politics, and edited by J. R. Ridge and S. J. May.” John Rollin Ridge, a Cherokee Indian who successfully integrated into white society after his parents were murdered, served as the paper’s first editor. Though he remained with the *Daily Bee* only five months, his influence in the paper’s editorial pages was profoundly progressive. Ridge believed Indians needed to adapt and assimilate into the white man’s world. He encouraged a reservation system with the idea that reservations would assist Indians in their efforts to become “civilized”

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28 Kemble, 147.

29 Ibid., 162.
and better find their way in the white society in which they found themselves. Upon Ridge’s departure, James V. McClatchy took over as editor and emerged as one of the most influential names in the American newspaper industry. McClatchy moved the Bee in a more traditional direction, dropping the call for assimilation of Indians altogether and advocating the segregation of the races through the implementation of a reservation system.

After leaving the Bee, John Rollin Ridge moved to Marysville where he assumed the job as the editor of the Daily National Democrat. The National Democrat, as its name implies, was profoundly Northern Democratic in its leanings. From 1858 to 1860, Ridge forcefully supported Stephen Douglas for president and wrote a number of editorials focusing on the presidential race. He also wrote extensively on the topic of Indian affairs in California and the nation as a whole. At the Democrat Ridge continued to express the belief that education was the key to solving all of the problems with Indians in the state and in the nation. He frequently repeated the belief that Indians were capable of learning to be “civilized” and then of leaving their “savage” ways behind. Because he believed so strongly in the education of Indians, Ridge favored a reservation system. Then, once lands were set aside, he lobbied for their effective management.

Many historical monographs cover the California Gold Rush, California Indians, and the era examined in this work. Some of these books focus specifically on newspapers. Clifford E. Trafzer and Joel R. Hyer edited Exterminate Them! Written Accounts of the Murder, Rape, and Enslavement of Native Americans During the California Gold Rush. In this volume, the editors reprint a host of articles from a number
of different newspapers within California and offer commentary regarding the nature of the articles presented. The book, though similar to this work, covers the entire state and offers reprints of salient articles rather than a comprehensive analysis of the press.

Another volume focused on newspapers during the gold rush is Robert F. Heizer’s *They Were Only Diggers: A Collection of Articles from California Newspapers, 1851-1866, on Indian and White Relations*. Once again, the purview of this study is statewide and it tends to concentrate on the end of the 1850s and the 1860s rather than on the earlier years of the gold rush. This work, too, is merely a collection of articles with little analysis. Heizer also published *The Destruction of California Indians*, which included some newspaper articles, but also augmented the newspaper accounts with letters, official government reports, and other primary documents. Once again, this book offers few evaluative judgments concerning the treatment of the California Indians by the press. Even though a number of important monographs on Indians during the Gold Rush have relied on newspapers as a part of their primary sources, this thesis represents a unique effort to study newspapers from a specific region of California.30 The Sacramento region, in particular, was at the center of mining and cultural activity in northern California and is therefore worthy of analysis. Rather than merely reproducing complete articles from the press, this essay attempts a systematic assessment of the attitudes and positions presented in the newspapers on Indian-white relations. Only the future completion of similar regional studies for other parts of California will enable historians

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to formulate analytical conclusions about how journalists viewed native people during this turbulent time.
Chapter 3
THE IMAGE OF THE CALIFORNIA INDIAN
AND THE WHITE SETTLER

William Bradford, describing the terror of the Puritans prior to their landing in Plymouth, stated, “what could they see…but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men – and what multitudes there might be of them they knew not.”\(^{31}\) Cotton Mather, a Puritan preacher, referred to the native inhabitants of New England as “lost people” who were “decoyed” by Satan to North America in the hope of evading Jesus Christ.\(^{32}\) From this inauspicious beginning, the popular image of the American Indian remained one of an idle, uncivilized, savage, and ungodly people. The Sacramento-region press largely perpetuated this white supremacist view and, in fact, painted California’s Indians as inferior to other American Indians. At the same time, these same newspapers spoke of the “usefulness” and peaceful nature of the Indians who labored for white farmers and ranchers. Indians, according to Sacramento-region editors, thus demonstrated a dichotomous nature; that is, some Indians were docile and useful, while others were purely savages. Indeed, a number of editors appeared to be sympathetic to the former kind of California Indians and noted the imposition placed upon the native way of life by Gold Rush immigrants.


While portraying California’s Indians as lazy, uncivilized savages, Sacramento-region editors depicted white gold seekers as an assortment of civilized, learned men as well as barbarous thugs who were largely to blame for the racial conflicts that erupted in the gold diggings. This dichotomy among whites closely resembled the paradoxical images of Indians presented in the press; tellingly, however, editors never raised the hateful, racist brush used to paint Indians in reference to whites; even for the white scofflaws whom editors blamed for many of the problems in the diggings. White troublemakers ranked beneath others in society because of their actions and their character, not because of their substandard culture or racial traits.

Many of the newspapers of the Sacramento region made efforts to be objective in their articles and editorials covering difficulties between Indians and whites; managing to assign responsibility for the problems to whichever race the facts suggested. The Sacramento Daily Transcript stood apart in that the editors of that publication, more often than not, blamed the problems on the Indians while defending the behavior of white settlers. Further, the editors of the Sacramento Daily Transcript routinely expressed a

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33 Editorial, “Indian Cruelties,” Daily Alta California, July 7, 1851, 2. This article was typical of the racial bias of Sacramento-region editors. The editor was commenting on the escalating violence since the Gold Rush. The editor, speaking of the Indians prior to 1849, opined, “Their depredations … were not aimed at human life, but leveled at the property of their white neighbors, and in their irradicable [sic] propensity to steal, they exhibited their intuitive teachings of their own depraved natures….” In the same piece, the editor also advised, “We are no longer the superior beings to whom the simple minded Indians bent in fear and trembling in the early days of the country’s occupation.” Rather, the editor stated, the Indians desired to acquire the strength possessed by their white neighbors.

34 Editorial, “Indian Troubles,” Sacramento Daily Transcript, January 28, 1851, 2. In this example, the Transcript chastised other newspapers in the state for treating Indian troubles in El Dorado County lightly. The editor praised Sheriff Rogers for having “at last cleaned the Indians from his country,” resulting in the fact that “depredations … ceased in that quarter.” The editors proceeded to accuse the Indians who had been run out of El Dorado County of immediately committing depredations to
belief that the whites who engaged in subduing the Indians were “some of the bravest and most noble citizens” in California.35 Though the *Sacramento Daily Transcript* stood alone in its frequent one-sided defense of white-on-Indian violence, it had substantial support from other newspapers in its racist depiction of the California Natives, and in its assertion that whites should prevail in the struggle for the control of land and resources.36

Every newspaper in this study spoke of the California Indians in derogatory, racist terms. The press universally applied the term “Digger” when describing the more docile Indians of California. The word was a pejorative closely associated with the term “Nigger” that was applied to African Americans, and made reference to the Indians’ alleged propensity to dig in the earth.37 The *Sacramento Daily Transcript* linked the term to the “nature of their habitations” which included a sunken dirt floor dug to a depth of two to four feet.38 *The Daily Bee* associated the term with the digging of roots for food.39

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35 Editorial. “Condition of Affairs in Indian Country,” *Sacramento Daily Transcript*, November 20, 1850, 2-4. The editor lambasts the *Placer Times* in this editorial for daring to suggest the militias in El Dorado County might be taking vengeance too far. The two publications would merge as one a little more than six months following this particular editorial. The *Transcript* ceased operations in 1852.

36 Editorial, “California Indian Affairs,” *Daily Sacramento Union*, March 8, 1860, 2. This editorial is typical of the attitude expressed in the Sacramento-region newspapers. The editor opined, “The Indians of Northern California … are roving, thriftless, idle, and debased….” Discussing the Nome Cult reservation, the editor expressed that “the people of California will ere long protest against the occupation of 250,000 acres of the best farming land in the state….” Finally, the editorial called on the federal government to establish Indian reservations on lands that whites would not find desirable; thus, betraying an attitude supporting the removal of the “thriftless” Indians to land of little or no value.

37 Clifford E. Trafzer and Joel R. Hyer, 2.

Every newspaper at one time or another used the term “Digger” in reference to California Indians. *The Daily Bee* seemed to have the greatest fondness for the term, particularly in the year 1857, when they ran three editorials with the term “Digger” in the title.\(^{40}\) John Rollin Ridge, an editor discussed in detail in Chapter 8 of this work, penned two of the cited editorials from the *Bee*. Ridge also used the term “Digger” with great frequency as editor of the *Daily National Democrat*.

In addition to using racist terms such as “Digger,” “red faces,” “acorn eaters,” and others to refer to Indians, newspaper editors routinely described the Indians in the most unflattering of terms. One of the most common attributes ascribed to the natives of California was indolence. The *Daily Bee* spoke of the Digger Indians as a “perfect picture of happy indolence.”\(^{41}\) The *Sacramento Daily Transcript* stated that the California Indian is “too indolent” to hunt, preferring to eat “various types of roots and insects” to survive rather than exert the energy to track and kill game.\(^{42}\) In a subsequent editorial, the editors of the *Sacramento Daily Transcript* referred to the Indians as “a

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\(^{39}\) Editorial, “The Digger Indians,” *Sacramento Daily Bee*, April 7, 1857, 2. The editors point out that twelve to twenty Indians would dig with sharp sticks in hillsides for the roots upon which they subsisted.

\(^{40}\) Editorial, “Civilization Among the Diggers,” *Sacramento Daily Bee*, February 14, 1857, 2; Editorial, “The Digger Indians,” *The Daily Bee*, April 7, 1857, 2; Editorial, “Oppression of Digger Indians,” *The Daily Bee*, July 21, 1857, 2. Each of these editorials, although they use the pejorative term “Digger” to refer to the Indians, is sympathetic to the plight of the Indians. No other newspaper used the term as routinely as the Bee and no other paper used the term in a headline.


harmless, inoffensive race, disposed to be satisfied with a mere pittance.” The *Daily Alta California* echoed the sentiments of the *Bee* and the *Sacramento Daily Transcript* in an editorial that stated, “there need never to have been a collision between [whites and Indians],” because “the California Indian was indolent and ignorant of warlike arts.”

Indolence was only one of the negative attributes editors ascribed to California’s Indians. Others included savagery, ignorance, incivility, and dishonesty. John Rollin Ridge, in an editorial in the *Daily National Democrat*, referred to the Diggers as “a low, miserable, lazy, and un-intellectual race.” In an 1855 editorial appearing in the *Daily Alta California*, the editors spoke of the “hostile savages from that nest of horse thieves.” Four years earlier that same publication discussed the need to separate “the civilized and barbarous nations,” a clear reference to whites and Indians respectively. The editorial went on to discuss the problems associated with the vengeance that resides in the “savage breast” and the difficulty of negotiating treaties with the “ignorant and untutored Indians.” Additionally, *The Marysville Herald* ran a short article espousing

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46 Editorial, “Indian Depredations,” *Daily Alta California*, February 9, 1855, 2. Savagery was a characteristic that was never ascribed to “Digger” Indians. The “Diggers” were seen as peaceful and easily exploited. “Hostile savages” were a different race of people more energetic and intelligent. Diggers could never become “noble savages” because they lacked gumption and guile; they were “wusses.”


the virtues of the “social life” as compared to the “savage life.” In this article the Reverend T. R. Malthus explained, “Everything that tends to harden the heart, and narrow all the sources of sympathy is most sedulously inculcated on the savage. The civilized man, on the contrary …is taught to feel for his neighbor or even his enemy…. The civilized man hopes to enjoy, the savage expects only to suffer.”49 The implication of white superiority was clear.

Other articles and editorials discussed the Indians’ “natural propensity to steal,” and their “brutish nature,” referring to the Natives as ““weak miserable people.”50 Even editorials defending Indians referred to them in condescending terms. For example, the Daily Alta California published an editorial on May 23, 1850 opposing white violence against Indians. The editor explained, “…we must not despise the numerous native born children of the mountains and forest land, however poor their gifts, or unworthy consideration of common respect, a succession of generations of physical and moral decline may have made them.”51 The Alta was clearly sympathetic to the plight of the Indians, but their sympathy did not translate to an unbiased depiction.

In a far more overt example of racist treatment of Indians, the Sacramento Daily Transcript ran an editorial espousing the benefits of slaughtering Indians in order to


maintain a pure race of Caucasians. The editors of the Transcript admitted the Spaniards would have had difficulty exterminating the Mexican Indians, but emphatically stated, “how much better would [a policy of extermination] have been for the permanent interests of Mexico!” The editors hypothesized that, “the country which is now half filled by an indolent and semi-barbarous people might at present be the finest and best cultivated region of the American continent” had they eliminated all of the natives.  

This editorial endorsing a policy of preemptive genocide marked one of the most dramatic examples of anti-Indian racism found while researching this thesis. Though not all articles, editorials, and letters contained racist bias, the vast majority betrayed this attitude.

In addition to their racial animus toward the Indians of California, many newspapers expressed the opinion that California’s Indians were not just inferior to whites, but were also inferior to the Indians found outside of California. The Sacramento Daily Transcript ran an editorial that opined:

The Aborigines of California are perhaps the most feeble, and incapable of carrying on a formidable system of warfare, of any of the North American Indians. Certain it is, they have never shown any of that skill and boldness that have characterized the Indians in other portions of the continent…. They are different in their mode of life, more imperfect in their physical development; and in whatever light we view them, inferiority to most of the Indian race is stamped upon their character.  

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In an editorial published early in 1850, the *Daily Alta California* added that in comparison to other Indians; Native Californians were much too “tractable,” thus suggesting that their own abject servility had resulted in their unfortunate fate.54

Other Sacramento-region editors offered invidious comparisons. The *Placer Times* dismissed California’s Indians as “among the most inferior tribes west of the Rocky Mountains,”55 while an editorial in the *Daily National Democrat* concluded, “It is … idle to be drawing a parallel between such Nations [as the Choctaws, Cherokees, and other eastern tribes] and the Diggers of California.”56 The following day the Democrat’s editor explained that eastern tribes demanded respect from the United States government through their prowess as warriors. Indeed, he added, “where [eastern Indians have] made it unsafe [for whites] to lie down at night or to get up in the morning or to journey forth by day – There [the Indians’] title to land [has] been recognized and there has he been negotiated with and…mutual terms of peace [have] been subscribed to and respected.”57 The editorial concluded that the Diggers were, “a poor, miserable, cowardly race … [that] permit themselves to be slaughtered like sheep….58 In fact, nearly every newspaper editor in the Sacramento-region proclaimed the inferiority of California’s Indians, particularly the Diggers, as compared to the eastern tribes.


58 Ibid.
In contrast to the demeaning views of California’s Indians as lazy and inferior, many of the Gold Rush newspapers portrayed white miners as existing in one of two camps, neither of which was determined by the white settlers’ race or culture. White settlers were either civilized, God-fearing men of honor and distinction, or they were uncivilized barbarians who bullied and abused others and contributed to the lawlessness of the gold mining towns. According to most Sacramento-region newspaper editors, the civilized, God-fearing camp comprised the far majority of men in the mines. Even though the ruffians represented a small fraction of the denizens in the gold fields, they unfairly tainted the image of all miners. Nevertheless, a few editors viewed white settlers more generally as greedy land grabbers who believed they had the right to claim Indian lands, even if it meant they had to violate established moral and ethical principles by doing so.

The *Daily Alta California*, reporting on a massacre in Humboldt County in 1860, asserted that “The policy of exterminating the Indians is, in a great degree, the work of a few.”\(^{59}\) Ten years earlier the same paper had blamed a “recent outrage committed by a [small group of] white miscreants.”\(^{60}\) The *Daily Appeal* likewise accused a few firebrands with inciting anti-Indian violence. Less than a month after the Humboldt County editorial appeared in the *Daily Alta California* in 1860, the Marysville newspaper ran an editorial in which it strongly criticized Colonel Thomas Henley and his sons. The


editors reported that Henley and his party “owned [up] to having attacked and killed a party of Indians against whom no charge of theft or other mischief could be brought; and that they killed them because they thought they might have stolen or would steal some stock.” The editors proceeded to explain how these indiscriminate attacks drove the Indians into the mountains and into a state of desperation, a situation that then fostered even more bloodshed. Finally, the editors of The Daily Appeal called for an end to “private Indian wars,” alluding to the fact that a small number of bloodthirsty white miners provoked much of the violence between whites and Indians.

The Daily Alta California similarly expressed outrage that a few whites in the Smith River Valley were reportedly prepared to hunt down and kill Indians. The editors remarked, “We notice with great reluctance a rumor that some individuals threatened to kill or hunt down Indians even within the limits of the city, and in one instance an Indian scalp was publicly exhibited as a trophy.” Here the editors clearly distinguished between the civilized city limits and the barbarous wilds of the gold diggings. The outrage was not so much that whites would hunt down or kill Indians, but that they would do so “even within the limits of the city.” The editorial added, “We could hardly believe that white men could thus far forget themselves and outrage public decency in this savage manner.” The implication was that whites were stooping to the level of the Indians whose “savage” behavior the editors understood.

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62 Ibid.
In an earlier editorial, the editors of the *Daily Alta California* had expressed similar concerns. Speaking of violent events in El Dorado County, the editors commented that the Indian disturbances created a great deal of noise and excitement. They scoffed at the “marshalling of troops in large numbers to fight a few Digger Indians,” and speculated that those Indians “had probably been driven to hostilities by the oppressions of whites who are really far below the poor Indian in humanity and justice.”64 The editors, once again, made it clear that a small number of white settlers acted as the catalysts in the clash with the Indians. Finally, in an article published in the *Daily National Democrat* concerning a massacre of dozens of Pit River Indians, the writer focused blame for the massacre on, “a company of whites known as the Pit River Company, an organization acting without authority of any kind, a lawless, reckless set of desperadoes.”65

On the other hand, the *Sacramento Daily Union* seemed to believe that Indian problems were not limited to a small number of white settlers. The editors of that publication argued in 1860 that Indians needed protection from large numbers of whites who had eyes for Indian land. The editors proclaimed, “There are numerous illustrations of the total indifference which prevails among American pioneers upon Indian rights to land.”66 The editors remarked that the taking of Indian lands by white settlers was

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“outrageously wrong,” but believed it was unavoidable unless the government stepped in to stop this behavior.67 This statement stands in stark contrast with an editorial published in the Placer Times in 1849, in which the editors optimistically claimed that peer pressure from the increasing influx of white settlers would serve as “a check upon the vicious inclinations of the worst” elements in the society and slow down the senseless violence as well.68 The hope present in the Placer Times editorial of 1849 had obviously faded by 1860 when the Sacramento Union apparently conceded that the greedy nature of many of the white settlers was not going to yield to the pressure applied by “civilized” citizens.

Throughout the period of the Gold Rush, the editors of the Sacramento-region newspapers generally espoused and disseminated deprecatory views of the Indians of California. Paradoxically, they simultaneously sympathized with a race they viewed as inferior and incapable of fending for itself against a superior civilization. Even though the editors admitted that greed and barbarism amongst the white race prompted much of the racial conflict, they stopped short of calling for an end to white encroachment on Indian lands. Rather, the editors often called for armed militias or troops to protect both sides and establish the rule of law in the mining regions.

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67 Ibid.

Chapter 4

INDIAN MASSACRES

Racism was prevalent in Gold Rush society, inside the pages of the Gold Rush press, and within the new state’s government as well. Peter Burnett, the first governor of California, in his State of the State message, predicted that “… a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the two races until the Indian race becomes extinct,… the inevitable destiny of the race [of Indians] is beyond the power and wisdom of man to avert.”69 The prevailing attitude and message was clear: killing Indians was inevitable and acceptable. This mind-set coupled with the prevailing bias favoring the white race and compounded by the lawless environment common in mining towns contributed greatly to violence against Indians.

Western boomtowns contained a mix of characteristics that fanned violence. Clare V. McKanna Jr. examines this phenomenon in his essay, “Enclaves of Violence in Nineteenth-Century California,” and concludes that “a sudden influx of transient, ethnically diverse, mostly single male population into undeveloped regions that lacked local systems of control encouraged high levels of violence.” He adds, “These towns included a mix of saloons, gambling, prostitution, and many men armed with guns and

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knives….”\textsuperscript{70} All of these ingredients contributed to the violence perpetrated by both whites and Indians in California and elsewhere on the Western frontier.

 Alcohol appeared to be of particular import in the lethal concoction called mining camps. Historian Malcolm J. Rohrbough cites a 49er who “observed of the deliberations that led to these raids [against Indians] that the drunken miners always voted for war, while the sober ones wanted peace.”\textsuperscript{71} Alcohol played a role among the Indians as well. One editorial reprinted in the \textit{Daily National Democrat} from the \textit{Yreka Chronicle} put it this way:

\begin{quote}
We sell [the Indians] spirituous and inflammable liquor; we drive them about at caprice or will, however unreasonable, and after ingrafting \textit{sic} every conceivable vice in their untutored minds, if one of their numbers returns upon us or any of our citizens, the product of our own planting, relations and friends indiscriminately take revenge, while Government and the Military are called upon to redress the wrong.\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

Inebriated miners and Indians tended to throw reason and diplomacy aside in favor of violent and deadly encounters. But alcohol was not the only culprit in a complex web of factors that led to violent outbreaks between whites and Indians.

Thousands of white settlers moving into the gold fields of California greatly altered the environment. White settlers possessed little regard for the Indians who had inhabited the region for centuries. The Argonauts built dams that indiscriminately


\textsuperscript{72} Yreka Chronicle, “Treatment of Indians,” quoted in the \textit{Daily National Democrat}, December 30, 1858, 2.
destroyed Indian fishing grounds; they trampled Indian hunting grounds; and they erected mining camps and towns in areas traditionally used by Indians.\textsuperscript{73} These actions drove many desperate Indians away from their familiar lands into remote regions of the mountains.\textsuperscript{74} Those Indians who attempted to stay on their traditional lands inevitably clashed with the newcomers. Often the violence represented no more than a simple skirmish, but at times, it escalated into full-scale massacres.

Frequently editors applied the term “massacre” to the violence of Indians against whites. In reality, whites perpetrated most massacres against Indians.\textsuperscript{75} The coverage of large-scale slaughter by the press was varied and often included letters from witnesses; editorials suggesting, supporting, or denouncing Indian policy in the state; and articles that described the events and, more often than not, provided an opinion as to who was to blame for the violence.

One of the first massacres to occur following the discovery of gold took place in Coloma during the month of April 1849. According to Albert Hurtado, it marked the beginning of more than a decade of violence against California Indians.\textsuperscript{76} The \textit{Daily Alta}
California and Placer Times each ran accounts from witnesses detailing the events of the massacre. All the sources relied upon by the newspapers agreed that the Indians in the area had attacked and killed five miners on the Middle Fork of the American River. Within a couple of days, the same group of Indians murdered two more miners farther up the river. Upon receipt of the news, the Argonauts organized a vigilance party in Coloma to locate the murderers and exact justice. According to the Alta California, “about dusk they came upon a Rancheria on Weber’s Creek where they killed twenty-one, and took prisoners some forty Indians….” The vigilantes were convinced they had found the guilty parties because they “found some of the clothing, and little articles which had belonged to the murdered white men…. Subsequently, an eyewitness identified seven of the prisoners as those who had committed the murders. As the vigilantes removed these seven from confinement, purportedly for trial, the Indians ran and “the rifles of the mountaineer’s were instantly leveled upon them with a deadly aim.” The Indians, of course, never received the benefit of an investigation or trial; not even an impromptu hearing. The vigilance committee served as police, judge, jury, and executioner.

American West, 1846-1890 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 47-61. McMurtry stated that this massacre “illustrates a problem that was to bedevil white-Indian relations from first to last: the inability, on the part of whites, to distinguish between Indians who were friendly and Indians who were hostile. Any big gathering of Indians, however well intentioned, made whites nervous….”


78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.
Prior to printing the eyewitness account, the *Placer Times* published an editorial discussing the murders on the American River and the overall problem of cyclical, retributive violence between whites and Indians. Although the editorial calls for law and order, it also demands a more temperate approach:

It does not become us, enlightened Americans of the nineteenth century, to sally forth against a weak and ignorant people; burn their villages, butcher women and children and return at night with our saddle horns *loaded with scalps!* Let us ferret out the perpetrators of crime … and thereupon visit the severest penalty the Law affords. Let it be borne in mind we do not render ourselves a whit more secure from Indian depredation by *indiscriminate* slaughter, than by pursuing a humane method of treatment.80

If the tone of white supremacy was evident in this editorial, the authors also argued that whites should demonstrate their cultural superiority through restraint and an adherence to the law. Indeed, the indiscriminate killing of Indians was unacceptable behavior for “enlightened” whites. Additionally, the editors revealed deep concern for the chronic nature of the violence between whites and Indians, and a heightened apprehension that vigilante justice would only exacerbate the problems with Indians, increase the danger for whites, and encourage “the cry of extermination [of the Indians] among many white settlers.” Nevertheless, the editors encouraged harsh punishments for Indians who committed unlawful acts against the invading gold-seekers.81

Other Sacramento-region newspapers also expressed the sentiment that indiscriminate killing of Indians would not make white miners safer, but, in fact, would

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81 Ibid.
lead to an increase in violence. However, The Sacramento Daily Transcript, in a September 9, 1850 editorial betrayed its pessimistic view that white and Indian relations might improve, even while conceding the culpability of the invaders in the cycle of violence:

There can be no doubt of the right of men to protect themselves when their lives are endangered, and a certain degree of force is justifiable for the protection of property. We fear, however, the Indians have not always been dealt with in the right spirit in this country, and that many lives have been lost where there would have been no difficulty had more pains been taken to cultivate feelings of amity and accommodation with the aboriginal race…. There are too many who are ready, at the slightest provocation, to shoot an Indian…. We fear it is too late now… for our people to live in peace with them, and that hostilities will become more general than heretofore.82

Other newspapers found it fitting to address this issue within their pages as well.

The Sacramento Daily Union published an editorial addressing the attack-retribution cycle by describing the outbreak of Indian hostilities on the Klamath:

“[Indians] commenced the attack on the Klamath, but who can determine their provocation or the amount of destitution suffered before the hostile blow was struck…. The [whites] look upon it there [in the Klamath region] as a war of extermination, and are killing all grown up males.”83 The Placer Times, Sacramento Daily Transcript, and Sacramento Daily Union all recognized that the actions of whites often provoked the violence between whites and Indians in the gold diggings, and that stopping the cycle of

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82 Editorial, “Bloody Doings on the North Fork,” Sacramento Transcript, May 9, 1850, 2. The suggestion that white settlers might be treating Indians unfairly is a rare charge from the editors of the Sacramento Daily Transcript. Usually they supported whites over Indians in their editorial pages; thus, the editorial lends credence to the claim of white culpability.

violence was extremely challenging. Still, none of these newspapers advocated the removal of white settlers from Indian lands, nor did they suggest a prohibition of encroachment by whites upon the traditional lands of the California Indians.

Many of the Sacramento-region newspapers that condemned the violence in the gold diggings rarely passed up an opportunity to sensationalize the bloodshed in the mining regions. Newspaper coverage of massacres was akin to modern television news showing sensational video tape of violent acts simply for the sake of drawing viewers to their broadcasts. If the newspapers received a first-hand report of a massacre, they were likely to print that account. The exciting, often explicit descriptions probably attracted readers. On May 28, 1850, the *Daily Alta California* published a version of the Clear Lake Massacre provided by Captain John B. Frisbie:

> The troops … immediately surrounded [the Indians] and … poured in a destructive fire indiscriminately upon men, women and children…. Little or no resistance was encountered, and the work of butchery was of short duration. The shrieks of the slaughtered victims died away … and stretched lifeless upon the sod of their native valley were the bleeding bodies of these Indians.\(^{84}\)

Frisbie’s account of the incident revealed a disturbing callousness and genocidal intent on the part of the military stirring the ire of military leaders in the state.

Brigadier Major General Persifor F. Smith, a leader of the attack at Clear Lake, in a letter to the *Daily Alta California* published on June 3, just five days after Captain Frisbie’s account ran, denied the targeting of women and children, saying that some women may have drowned and some mothers killed their own children. The general

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declared Captain Frisbie’s version of events “a falsehood from the beginning to the end.”\textsuperscript{85} The general questioned the respectability of the \textit{Daily Alta California} and condemned the paper for “assail[ing] the officers and soldiers of [the] army with accusations of cruelty and cowardice.”\textsuperscript{86} The \textit{Daily Alta California} published General Smith’s letter with a statement explaining, somewhat apologetically, that it printed Captain Frisbie’s account without acknowledging it as truth and welcomed the opportunity to publish Smith’s version of events.\textsuperscript{87} The \textit{Daily Alta California} did not clarify in any follow-up edition which version of the story was factual, an indication it may not have fully supported the military action at Clear Lake, or that the editors feared the potential repercussions high level military leaders might present should they side with Captain Frisbie. Later scholarly research indicated Frisbie’s account was the more accurate of the two printed in the \textit{Alta}.\textsuperscript{88}

With two notable exceptions, newspapers found reason to support Indian massacres when undertaken by the military, as opposed to those carried out by small

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\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
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\textsuperscript{87} Ibid. An editorial comment preceding this article contains the apologetic statement mentioned. The statement said, in part: “We received the following communication last night, too late for publication in our regular steamer edition. The necessity of at once sending forth an official contradiction of a charge so monstrous … has induced us to issue an extra this morning.”
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\textsuperscript{88} Tomás Almaguer, \textit{Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 122-25. Almaguer cited first-hand accounts of the carnage at Clear Lake that established Captain Frisbie’s description as much closer to the truth than General Smith’s version, including the recollections of William Benson, a white man raised with the Pomo who witnessed the attack as a boy. Benson told a story of brutal carnage that involved soldiers deliberately stabbing women and children and throwing their lifeless bodies into the lake, and shooting defenseless Indians who raised their arms in surrender to no avail.
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groups of miners or vigilance groups. As indicated above, the *Daily Alta California* departed from the usual endorsement of military action against California Indians, as did the *Sacramento Daily Bee*. Perhaps John Rollin Ridge, a Cherokee Indian and one of the *Sacramento Daily Bee*’s first editors, left a lasting mark of compassion upon the *Bee*, even though he only worked with the paper a few months. In April 1859, the *Sacramento Daily Bee*, referring to the conclusion of the Humboldt War with the Indians, quoted the governor’s humane orders to the state militia: “The women and children must be spared, and there must be no indiscriminate slaughter of the Indians.” According to the *Bee*, such a laudatory policy by the state “does credit to both [the governor’s] head and his heart, for it is not to be denied that Indian wars conducted by State troops have, heretofore, been more like cold blooded massacres than anything else.”89 This blanket condemnation of previous militia actions in California marked a dramatic aberration for a Sacramento-region newspaper. Despite the two above instances of anti-military criticism, the *Daily Alta California*, the *Sacramento Daily Bee*, and other Sacramento-region newspapers generally supported military action undertaken against Indians for the protection of white lives and property.

In January 1855, the *Daily Alta California*, which generally did not support the wholesale killing of Indians, spoke favorably of actions taken by a local militia group, the Klamath Rangers, on behalf of the citizens of northern California. The *Daily Alta California* supported the Rangers in their efforts, because it believed the Indians acted in

an organized, purposeful manner and threatened the safety of white citizens. The editorial remarked:

As to the expediency or necessity of an attempt to exterminate the Indians, various views are held by our citizens, and some deprecate very much the course taken…. [H]ostilities have now been pushed so far that, in the interests of our neighboring settlers, it becomes a necessity to drive the Indians from the valley.  

In other words, preemptive military action against Indians proved vitally necessary when the lives of white settlers were threatened, regardless whether any racial motivation provoked the initial conflict with the Indians.

*The Marysville Herald* also favored government-sponsored policing of ill-behaved Indians. In an editorial discussing crime in the Marysville area, the paper proclaimed:

A very large proportion of the murders committed here are by Indians, in revenge for fancied or real wrongs or to gratify an innate love of deeds of impropriety…. [N]owhere in [California] with the single exception of San Francisco, is there an organization at all resembling a police system, much less a preventative police.  

Both the *Daily Alta California* and *The Marysville Herald* saw value in using state troops to control what they perceived to be as hostile Indians. Both newspapers implied the Indians may have been provoked to their violent behavior by whites, but the violence directed by Indians against whites, and the threat to the lives of white settlers, absolutely justified the military action. Here again, the white supremacist message was blatant.

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Other newspapers, such as the Placer Times, for the purpose of “enforcing measures necessary for the public quiet and welfare,” called for a “presence of military power” in areas threatened by Indian-white hostilities. In one instance, the Placer Times after lamenting the senseless slaughter of Indians by a group of white vigilantes in El Dorado County expressed concern for the safety of both races and hence urged occupation of the area by the state militia. The Daily Alta California espoused a similar position in an editorial discussing problems in “the Mariposa country. The Legislature,” suggested the editors, “should at once take measures to furnish the necessary supplies” to a militia put in place to keep the peace while government representatives attempted to negotiate a treaty with the Indians of the region. In this case, the editors saw value in peaceful negotiations for both the Indians and the whites, and they viewed the militia as necessary for bringing the accord to fruition and for keeping the peace. The editors firmly believed the presence of a militia might help to avoid a massacre rather than create one.

Even the Daily National Democrat supported the use of armed military expeditions to end Indian violence against whites. In an 1859 editorial reprinted from the Humboldt Times, the editor discussed such a campaign against the Indians on the Upper Mad River. He referred to the capture of over 160 Indian prisoners by General Kibbe and spoke in favorable terms of the operation. The editorial went on to state, “The


importance of this successful termination of the expedition, to this section [of the state] can scarcely be estimated.”94 Daily National Democrat editor John Rollin Ridge thus supported military force to suppress Indian-on-white violence.

The coverage of Indian massacres evolved over the years, moving from sensational accounts of the events themselves toward a measured call for pragmatic action on the part of the government to protect both the Indians and the white settlers. Many editors sympathized with the docile “Diggers,” but expressed an intolerant attitude toward groups that exhibited violent tendencies. In 1858, the Daily Alta California ran an article originally printed in the Columbia Courier reflecting this position. Discussing the dispatch of a vigilance committee to track down a group of Indians who had murdered a white settler, the Courier stated, “The Walker River Tribe are far superior and more warlike in their habits than the miserable Diggers seen in the neighborhood.”95

In 1860, the Sacramento Daily Union suggested using military strength to compel the Indians in northern California onto reservations. The Indians, according to the editors, had become a race of “roving, thriftless, idle and debased,” individuals who, unable to “obtain employment from our citizens,” were therefore in need of assistance from the government.96 Clearly, by 1860, though some violence continued to occur sporadically, the editors of the Union were more concerned with separating the Indians


95 Columbia Courier, “Indian War in Tuolumne,” quoted in Daily Alta California, February 17, 1858, 2.

from white civilization and providing them with a minimal level of care that would ease
ethnic tensions and facilitate the final economic conquest of California by white farmers
and ranchers. Newspaper editors increasingly displayed greater concern that state and
federal officials furnish the Indians their most basic needs. One editor, writing about
“300 Indians” who had moved into Murphy’s Camp reported, “[The Indians] beg from
door to door and have lately killed several horses and cattle.” Despite the Indians’
obvious hardships, the editor charged that the “Indian Agent … has done nothing to
relieve the red men under his charge.”97

Most of the Sacramento-region newspapers included in this study covered Indian
massacres extensively. They published first-hand accounts of the sensational events,
followed those up with strongly opinioned editorials, and printed occasional letters with
opposing views or differing versions of the events. In general, the Sacramento-region
newspapers saw massacres as an unfortunate reality in the Gold Rush era, and often
conceded that whites were the catalyst of the violence, creating intolerable Indian
behavior that then led to catastrophic results. By the end of the decade, massacres were
no longer the main concern of the editors; rather, the editors focused their prose on
“assisting” Indians by placing them on reservations and thus removing them as obstacles
to white prosperity and the advancement of, what they would label, “civilized society.”

In reality, the “inevitable destiny” Governor Burnett had spoken of years earlier was, in
the minds of many, becoming a reality as the decade of the 1860s began. Indians were, in
point of fact, nearing extinction.

Chapter 5

INDIAN BEHAVIOR – WHITE RESPONSIBILITY

Albert L. Hurtado in *Indian Survival on the California Frontier* claims that prior to 1848, “Indians sought survival through raiding, labor, and trading, while whites wanted to suppress the former as they gained advantage from the latter.”98 Hurtado further maintains that the advantage whites possessed in technology was outweighed by the superiority in numbers possessed by the Indians. Although both whites and Indians engaged in violence when it suited their needs, Hurtado writes, “Diplomatic relations were based largely on personal – indeed, intimate – relations between whites and Indians.”99 The mass movement of thousands of miners onto Indian lands did away with the “intimate” relations between whites and Indians, decreased effective communication between the two groups, and increased depredations by both sides contributing to a cycle of violence that was harmful to both Indians and whites. The Sacramento-region newspapers used in this study were unanimous in recognizing the encroachment upon Indian lands by white settlers as a fundamental cause of problems in white-Indian relations.

All eight papers ran editorials expressing the view that white trespasses upon Indian lands were ultimately the reason for violence between the parties in the gold fields. In response to the murder of whites by Indians, the *Placer Times* in April 1849,

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99 Ibid.
conceded editorially that the actions of the Natives simply represented retaliation against the baneful actions of whites. Indeed, wrote the editor, “It may be readily believed the Indians have wreaked vengeance for deeds of blood, the bloody and cruel murders [of Indians] on the American River.”

Approximately one year later, the Placer Times issued an editorial outlining the work of Adam Johnston, a federal Indian subagent working to establish supply depots for the Indians. The Times editorial applauded Johnston’s work, noting that “The Indians generally complain that the palefaces are occupying their fishing places, overrunning their country, and rapidly taking from them the resources that have heretofore been their support.”

The Times editors clearly acknowledged that white incursions onto traditional Indian lands served as the main motivation for violence in the gold fields. Concurring, the editor of the Daily National Democrat noted, “There are villains among us who care but little more for the life of an Indian than that of a chicken; and yet it is too often the case, that for murdering such a character, a whole tribe of Indians is held responsible.” If the editorial thus indicted those small number of whites acted as savages, it likewise chastised a hypocritical white society that reveled in its moral superiority.

The Marysville Herald published an editorial discussing events leading up to the Clear Lake massacre just one month after the Times commentary on Indian agent Adam

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101 Editorial, “The Indian Agent,” Sacramento Transcript, August 17, 1850, 2.

Johnston. The editors of the Herald related how “one of [the Kelsey brothers] was killed some time since, by a party of Indians for cruelty to one of their tribe, and since his death frequent and daring have been the acts of [white] retaliation and revenge visited indiscriminately of sex or age upon [the Indians] in the vicinity of Sonoma.”¹⁰³ The editors of the Herald blamed the Kelsey brothers and their cruel acts upon the Indians in their employ, for the violence at Clear Lake. This view was consistent with that presented in the Daily National Democrat as well as the Placer Times.

The Daily Alta California reduced the problem of white-on-Indian violence to profoundly simple terms. “Bloodshed has followed on the track of civilization and settlement,” declared the newspaper’s editors.¹⁰⁴ Because the term “civilization” could only be applied to white settlers, bloodshed clearly followed the trail of white settlement. Without a doubt, early editorial opinion recognized the actions of the white newcomers as the prime catalyst to Indian violence in the gold diggings.

The Sacramento Daily Union, still delivering the same message of white culpability years after the Daily Alta California piece, stated:

The intrusion of the white man upon the Indians’ hunting and fishing grounds has driven off the game and destroyed their fisheries. The consequence is, the Indians suffer every winter for sustenance. Hunger and starvation follow them wherever they go. Is it, then a matter of wonder that they become desperate and resort to stealing and killing?¹⁰⁵

Here the editors were clearly sympathetic with the plight of the Indians. They recognized that the Indians “stealing and killing” involved desperate attempts to survive, rather than crimes of brutality or vengeance. The same paper published still another editorial in 1860 admitting, “When [whites] want land occupied by Indians they take it, and if the original occupiers offer to resist, they are killed.”\(^\text{106}\) In the *Sacramento Daily Union*, the editors consistently explained the cause of violence as white encroachment on Indian lands.

A *Bee* editorial titled, “Oppression of Digger Indians,” described a wealthy white man living in a valley near the Eel River who ordered hunters in the region to, “shoot down every Indian… they should come across.”\(^\text{107}\) The hunters, the editorial explained, would then kidnap the Indian children, now orphaned because of the murder of their parents, and sell them in different parts of the country.\(^\text{108}\) In this example, the editors suggested that the government was falling short of its responsibility to protect the Indians from, what the *Bee* termed, “white savages.”\(^\text{109}\) Clearly, the editors of the *Bee* blamed white settlers for instigating the violence against Indians, and they likewise echoed the sentiment of the *Daily National Democrat*, which concluded that whites were every bit as capable of savage behavior as the Indians.


\(^{108}\) Ibid.

\(^{109}\) Ibid.
The *Marysville Daily Appeal* chimed in on this topic in an 1860 editorial that focused on the cause of “Indian ‘wars’ in this State,” adding to the chorus of newspapers that put the responsibility directly on the white settlers’ shoulders:

A white man loses a hog or some other animal, or thinks he does, and, incontinently seized with the idea that he is the victim of Indian dishonesty and depredation, he calls a party of his neighbors together, magnifies his losses and excites them to an immediate hunt for Indians; the first party of which is found, is generally annihilated before search is made among them and their effects for the missing property.110

Clearly, the editors of the *Marysville Daily Appeal* embraced the above example as revealing a tragically common pattern of behavior in California – a pattern that testified to a form of cultural paranoia where whites, always predisposed to blame Indians for alleged criminal behavior, jumped to conclusions, without being furnished proof of their guilt, then slaughtered scores of innocent Natives.

The editors of the Sacramento-region newspapers showed unanimity in their belief that encroachment by white settlers onto Indian lands was largely to blame for the violence occurring between the races in the gold fields. The editors expressed this opinion as early as 1849 and repeated the accusation often over the next twelve years. Still, many of the editors favored removal of the Indians from their lands as a proper action that would allow white settlers to work the land in a civilized and productive manner - the way God intended. The majority of editors simply believed in an orderly and lawful removal of Indians, rather than at the hands of murderous white scofflaws.

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Though the editors of the Sacramento-region newspapers deplored white violence against docile “Digger” Indians, they frequently supported the idea of holding “hostile” Indians responsible for their violent actions regardless of the source of the hostilities. Hence, the editors often supported vigilance groups and military campaigns against the Indians as long as the action clearly protected white citizens and their property in the gold fields. Yet at other times, editors opposed armed action, claiming it was irresponsible and unwarranted. As the Sacramento Daily Bee put it in 1857, “We are among those, both on the Vigilant and anti-Vigilant side….”\textsuperscript{111} The editors of the Bee accepted vigilance as necessary at times, but feared it was often overused and that vigilante groups could become overzealous. The Daily National Democrat appeared to support a similar view when it opined, “The idea of the existence of a Vigilance Committee at all in a county where the laws are in full force as they are here, is very offensive to all right-thinking men.”\textsuperscript{112} The editor implied, however, that Vigilance Committees might be appropriate for other counties, thus confirming the view of the Bee that vigilante groups could be a blessing or a curse.

The editor of the Sacramento Daily Union saw a need for military action against the Indians along the Klamath River in 1855 because, “unless aid is immediately extended[,] the Klamath River and Trinity Valley must be entirely abandoned by the


whites.”  On the Klamath the Indians have killed six white men, and I understand some stock. From the Salmon down the whites are in arms, with a determination, I believe, if possible, to destroy all the grown up males, not withstanding this meets with the opposition of some few who have favorite Indians amongst them. I doubt whether this distinction should be made, as some who have been considered good have proved the most treacherous.

Editors of the *Daily National Democrat* had a similar view regarding problems in Humboldt County, where Indians had been stealing and killing cattle in the region. The editors expected the Native insurgents to “continue their outrages until [the volunteers have the Indians] gathered in.” Not surprisingly, Sacramento-region newspaper editors regularly cited the protection of white property and lives as justification for the use of violence against Indians.

The protection of white citizens was central to an editorial published in the *Marysville Herald* in 1850. The *Herald* referred to the murder, at the hands of the Indians, of some settlers on the North Fork of the Feather River. Though “a whipping” of an Indian thief by whites inspired the murders, the newspaper still strongly supported military action to protect and avenge white lives. The editors stated, “A party of twenty persons left here last Sunday, well armed, determined to surround the Rancheria

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and kill each and every Indian they may fall in with. May they be successful, for poor
Blanchard’s sufferings and death deserve to be bitterly atoned for.”\textsuperscript{117} The editors
rejected the notion that the white flogging of a thief justified homicidal retaliation by the
Indians. As was the case in any civilized society, corporal punishment represented a
time-honored way of maintaining law and order against thieving Indians and other
miscreants. Moreover, government officials had an obligation to protect law abiding
citizens from vengeful elements who had been treated justly.

Even the progressive \textit{Sacramento Daily Bee} displayed little sympathy for wrongly
treated Natives if the well-being of white citizens was threatened. In an editorial
commenting on military action in Humboldt and Trinity counties, the \textit{Bee} made its
position clear:

\begin{quote}
Much credit is given in the [official military] report to both the officers and men
of this expedition, and it would seem from all the facts before us that this praise is
not undeserved. By this action a large tract of fertile country has been opened up
to actual settlers, and the lives and property of those there residing have been
protected from future depredations from the Indians.\textsuperscript{118}
\end{quote}

The reference here to the “actual settlers,” is clearly a slight against the Indians who no
doubt were viewed by the editors as nomadic hunters and gatherers, as opposed to the
white newcomers who represented sedentary farmers. In addition to embracing the
common white stereotype that “less civilized” Indians like those in California roamed
across the land in search of sustenance, many of the newspapers made a distinction

\textsuperscript{117} Editorial, “Murder by the Indians on North Fork Feather River Mining &c.,” \textit{Marysville
Herald}, September 13, 1850, 2. The italics appeared in the original article.

\textsuperscript{118} Editorial, “The Indian War in the North,” \textit{Sacramento Daily Bee}, April 12, 1859, 2.
between “good, well mannered, and compliant” Indians and “bad or hostile” Indians. An article in the *Alta* is illustrative of this tendency. Admitting whites made “inroads” upon the hunting and fishing grounds of the Indians that did not please the Natives, the author explained:

The more sensible, however, among the Indians felt their weakness and acted submissively, while the majority of the whites were inclined to deal with them kindly and generously. Bad Indians and unscrupulous white men were... the first to disturb this good feeling.\(^{119}\)

This editorial was gracious enough to admit “unscrupulous white men” bore some responsibility for the disruption of peaceful relations between whites and Indians; but was also quick to point out that “bad Indians” contributed to the violence.

Though many Sacramento-region editors viewed the actions of white settlers as a catalyst to the white-on-Indian violence that often erupted in the gold fields, many were adamant that the number of these unsavory white culprits remained small. Those same editors nonetheless understood the need to protect settlers from organized Indian resistance that threatened the newcomers’ lives and property. A number of editors thus advocated the use of military force against tribes of Indians who responded violently to white settlement. For many, the few “unscrupulous white men” that caused the problems most likely entered California from Oregon.

Chapter 6

THE OREGONIAN THEORY

Theodore Taylor Johnson, a California settler from New Jersey, wrote one of the first books about life in the California gold diggings. Relating his personal experiences and offering observations, he blamed the slaughter of Marcus Whitman and Whitman’s family in Oregon for sparking many of the Indian troubles in California. In late 1847, the Cayuse Indians murdered the Whitmans, blaming the American missionary for spreading a deadly measles epidemic among their tribe. White settlers and military personnel retaliated almost immediately, and a prolonged war between white settlers and the Cayuse ensued for several years. The inability of the whites to defeat the Cayuse quickly created a deep sense of frustration and a desire for vengeance among white Oregonians.

A number of recent historians describe vengeful and frustrated Oregonians heading south to Gold Rush California less than a year after the tragic events. Well armed and vigilant, these migrants were determined to respond to any Indian menace with utmost violence. James Sandos writes, “While the Oregonians did not represent all the white men working claims, their treatment of Indians led to a tense racial climate in

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121 Robert H. Ruby and John A. Brown, *The Cayuse Indians: Imperial Tribesmen of Old Oregon* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 109-143. Ruby and Brown state, “The [white] peace commissioners had failed to induce the Cayuses to deliver the murderers so that they, as a people, might escape white wrath. If the [white Cayuse War] volunteers had sought to kill some Indians, it may be said that they succeeded.”
the diggings and ushered in a period of tolerated abuse and destruction of ‘Diggers.’”

Albert Hurtado also notes the advent of these edgy gold seekers: “Some whites brought with them a violent animosity towards Indians, as shown by a conflict near Coloma between the Nisenans and a party of Oregonians with fresh memories of the Whitman killings and the Cayuse War.” As distinguished students of Gold Rush California, Sandos and Hurtado drew their conclusions about the newcomers from the north from thorough research in California’s contemporary press. Indeed, a number of contemporary newspapers in the Sacramento-region reported the propensity of Oregonians for anti-Indian violence.

The *Daily Alta California* devoted attention to the Oregonians in a lengthy editorial published on May 30, 1850. The paper described the murder of the Whitman family and then went on to discuss how the Cayuse War sparked difficulties with Indians in California. The editors first described the immense frustration felt by the Oregonians in their efforts to crush the murderers of the Whitmans:

> It was for naught that company after company of volunteers proceeded against these well mounted and equipped warriors and the attempt to visit vengeance upon the savage foe pitifully failed not only from want of means to prosecute the war, but because there was no considerable force of the enemy to oppose the whites where battle would have given to superior generalship an easy victory…

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122 James Sandos, “Because He Is a Liar and a Thief,” 91.


This frustration, claimed the editors, led many Oregonians to seek revenge against the Indians they encountered in California on the way to, and while working in, the gold fields. The editors opined, “Disdaining to treat otherwise with the most friendly in pretension than through the muzzles of their rifles, it is well known their trail was marked with Indian blood.”\textsuperscript{125} The editors asserted that all of the “Indian outrages” had commenced “but a short time after the Oregonians arrived in California,” and thus the \textit{Daily Alta} placed responsibility for “disturbances between our people in the Placer, and the Indian tribes of the North,” squarely in the domain of the miners from Oregon.\textsuperscript{126} The editors, in blaming the Oregonians, identified the small number of whites who created the cycle of violence between the races.

The editors of the \textit{Placer Times} similarly pointed an accusing finger at the Oregonians in an editorial published in 1849. The editors discussed a massacre on Bear Creek and initially in their commentary appeared to blame the local Indians. After reporting that “numerous thefts had been committed by the Indians in that vicinity,” and that “a murder had been committed last fall by Indians in that neighborhood,” the editors ceased their sarcastic tone and identified the real

\textsuperscript{125} Editorial, “The Indians – Important Movement,” \textit{Daily Alta California}, May 30, 1850, 2..

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
cause of the problems on Bear Creek that “several Indians had been killed by whites coming through from Oregon.”

Other newspapers also alluded to the Oregonians as the source of the anti-Indian violence, though they may not have stated this idea forthrightly. The *Sacramento Transcript*, in an editorial published in May 1850, discussed the Indian problems in Oregon as they related to problems with Natives in the gold fields. But if the editors did not blame the Oregonians for violence against Indians in California, they did state, “The Oregonians are highly incensed at these outrages [in Oregon] and it is thought they will not be satisfied until the offensive Indians are exterminated. The energetic steps taken by the [Oregon] Governor will doubtless be the means of opening a safe overland communication between Oregon and California.”

The various editors in Northern California suggested that Oregonians brought to California pernicious attitudes toward Indians that resulted in the unleashing of destructive forces upon the indigenous population. Albert Hurtado agrees, but is quick to point out, “Perhaps the memory of the Whitman murders caused recent arrivals from Oregon to kill Indians, but other whites without such hardening frontier experiences were also quick to resort to violence.” Given the great number of violent altercations between white settlers and Indians in the gold fields of California, Hurtado’s statement is

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sensible. One can accept with confidence the proposition that white-on-Indian violence extended well beyond the Oregonians.

Many editors of the Sacramento-region newspapers felt the Oregonians brought a homicidal attitude to California. Further, they believed that attitude had a tragic impact on Indians and reflected poorly on the white population in general. Though some editors may have believed the Oregonians were at the forefront of the violence in the gold fields, it mattered little. Whether the white Oregonians, white settlers in general, or hostile Indians created the difficulties, the press of the Sacramento-region could not escape the need to bring an end to the violent racial carnage in the gold fields.
Chapter 7

INDIAN POLICY – ULTIMATE SOLUTIONS

In looking for a solution to the problems between white settlers and Indians in California, the press never questioned who would end up with the land and wealth in the state. Therefore, the debate regarding what to do with California’s Indians generally focused on whether to exterminate the supposedly inferior Indian to make way for the presumably superior white race, or for the “civilized” whites to assist the Indians with their “miserable lives.”130 An analysis of the Sacramento-region newspapers reveals parties who subscribed to both ideas, although much of the editorializing centered on the idea of Indian reservations.

Beginning in 1849, the United States government appointed Indian agents in an effort to deal with the problems created by the rapid influx of white settlers into the newly acquired territory of California and especially the invaders’ encroachment on Indian lands. The first attempt to resolve the problem took on the form of establishing reservations in the state and signing treaties with Indian tribes under which the Indians would relinquish their lands and agree to live on the established reserves. The federal agents negotiated eighteen treaties between 1849 and 1853 that affected 139 Indian tribes or clans in California and at least 25,000 Indians.131 In addition, the treaty agreements set

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130 Editorial, “Indian Affairs,” Placer Times, May 29, 1850. This editorial refers to the Indians of California as “miserable,” while Sacramento-region newspapers routinely espoused the idea of white supremacy over Indians in their pages.

131 William Henry Ellison, A Self-Governing Dominion: California, 1849-1860, 149.
aside over seven million acres of land for Indian reservations.\textsuperscript{132} The newspapers offered mixed reactions to the proposed creation of Indian reservations, with most editors supporting the idea of reservations, but disagreeing on the ultimate goal of such a plan.

In an editorial published in 1851, the \textit{Daily Alta California} declared, “We are perfectly well satisfied that the [agents] are anxious to adopt such a course as will tend to place the aborigines and whites on the most amicable footing.”\textsuperscript{133} Even if the agents had good intentions, the \textit{Daily Alta California} expressed doubts about the feasibility of their plan. The editors stated “Treaties may be formed, and compacts made between our agent and the wild tribes, but the same obstacles which were presented to the early pioneers of the western wilds of the Mississippi, in the settlement of that country, will be found to maintain in our uncultivated or mountain districts, viz: Indian depredations and cruelty.”\textsuperscript{134} This statement indicated doubts about the viability of the government’s reservation plan, as well as a lack of trust towards the Indians.

Other editors in the Sacramento region expressed their doubts about the government’s reservation plan as well. The \textit{Sacramento Transcript} published a letter to a competing paper that, by its own introduction, “[admitted] the truth of the position assumed by the \textit{Transcript} some time since.”\textsuperscript{135} The letter referred to Colonel J. Neely Johnson’s efforts to negotiate treaties with Indians, claiming, “I think he has heard

\begin{footnotes}
\item[132] William Henry Ellison, 149.
\item[133] Editorial, “The Indian Reservations,” \textit{Daily Alta California}, September 16, 1851, 2.
\item[135] Author Unknown, “Indian Affairs in the South,” \textit{Sacramento Transcript}, February 21, 1851, 2.
\end{footnotes}
enough since he has been here, to convince him that all attempts to treat with the Indians will be futile, until they have been whipped into a practical knowledge of the power of the whites.”

On the other hand, most newspaper editors believed a reservation system represented the best course of action concerning Indian affairs. Editors understood that the new California immigrants would not tolerate the Indians living among them; however, they also knew that driving the Indians to the mountains for safe haven represented a death sentence. In an editorial published in January 1851, the Daily Alta California expressed a need to help the Indians who, in the opinion of the editors, had a right to the land on which the Argonauts trespassed. The editors were urging the establishment of reservations to end the violence and offer the assistance the Indians would need to survive, when they wrote:

It was fortunate that the eastern states had … land on the western side of the great river where they could transport these poor red children of the forest. It is not so, however, with California. If we drive the poor Indian from his old hunting grounds, and break up his fisheries, and cut down his acorn orchards, and burn up his grass seeds, and drive him from his old haunts which the god of nature have given him, it is to the mountains and

136 Author Unknown, “Indian Affairs in the South,” Sacramento Transcript, February 21, 1851, 2.
starvation that we drive him…. The Indians have a right to a portion of the soil, a better right than we have to the whole of it.  

Editorials in other Sacramento-region newspapers took this position throughout the Gold Rush era and argued the necessity of separating the Indian population from that of the whites. They warned that failure to manage this segregation through a reservation system would either result in the destruction of the Indian population through starvation and exposure in the mountains or in the extermination of the Indians at the hands of the military and vigilance groups.

The editor of the Daily National Democrat, John Rollin Ridge, spoke often of the need for reservations, but his desire for the institution stemmed from a different objective than most other editors. Ridge believed strongly in the ability of Indians to become “civilized” and live among the white population. He believed the reservation system provided the best opportunity to achieve this end. Ridge spoke frequently of civilizing Indians through education, and he viewed the reservation system as the means to deliver the necessary schooling. He opined that, “In the course of time, after thorough training upon the Reservations, it is very likely that the present system might safely be abandoned and plan of individual apportionment of the soil be prudently substituted.”

As California sought to develop a reservation system, problems between whites and Indians continued. Newspapers in the Sacramento-region implored the federal government to manage the reservations in a responsible way, lest the violence continue.

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An editorial appearing in the *Sacramento Daily Union* in 1855 called for stronger stewardship of the reservations than had previously been established. The editorial claimed, “The repeated and long absences of the [government Indian] agent…have caused much unhappiness and misery to the Indians in their social and domestic relations.” Additionally, the editorial stated, “Were we to recount the half of what has been told us [regarding the atrocities committed by white employees against the Indians] it would exhibit a page as black as the blackest that darkens the history of the Spanish conquests on this continent.” The editorial put forth a call for the correction of the situation in order to prevent Indians from using violence as their only recourse to address their grievances. In an editorial appearing four years later, the *Union* continued to support the Indian reservation system but urged that “[Indians] should … be concentrated and kept, by force if necessary, upon the Reservation.” Clearly, the editors of the *Union* saw the segregation of the races as the best solution to a difficult and complex problem.

Federal government policy regarding Indian reservations during the Gold Rush era in California actually exacerbated tensions between Indians and whites. Because of strong local opposition to the establishment of permanent reservations, the federal government created temporary reservations that could be shut down when demanded by

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whites. Temporary reservations only served a small minority of the total Indian population. Plans for the reservations to become self-sustaining never materialized and the majority of California’s Indians were left to fend for themselves, either by finding work on ranches or farms, by living off the land, or by stealing livestock. Some even fled to the higher reaches of the Sierra Nevada Range. As the Indian problems grew, some newspapers in the Sacramento region began variously to call for better management of the reservations, the closure of the reservations, the assimilation of Indians into white society, or the ultimate extinction of Indians.

Once again, the Sacramento Daily Union led the call to continue operating the reservations. In an editorial supporting better reservation and fiscal management published in January 1859, the Union, in the interest of “peace and security,” argued, “The reservation system must be overhauled and changed (not abolished, as some inconsiderate heads have suggested) – the cost of taking care of the Indians now upon the Reservations must be greatly lessened.”

Echoing the Union’s sentiments, the Marysville Daily Appeal noted:

…that while enormous sums of money have been exacted of the Government for the establishment and support of the Reservations, the Indian has received no benefits therefrom, but has rather been made worse off than he originally was…. [B]ut that the Reservations properly controlled would fail in the attainment of their desired ends we do not believe.

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The *Sacramento Daily Bee* also favored the reservation system. It endorsed the idea of creating a reservation on the Pit River as “a good one.”

Other editors repeated the *Union’s* call for better management of the reservations in California. The *Daily National Democrat* published an editorial espousing proper management of the reservations, stating, “It has been already demonstrated that, with proper supervision, the Indians work well, and extensive farming operations have been carried on with the most complete success.” Later, in 1860, the same paper offered editorial approval to a proposed change in the administration of the reservations “still reserved for the support of the Indians” that will ensure “they will be managed differently…. We are inclined to think the system a better one than the previous.”

The *Daily National Democrat*’s strong interest in improved management derived from its view of reservations as perhaps the last best hope to civilize Indians, to remove them from white society, and to put them to work. Of course, the editor had no way of knowing that the new arrangements would actually lead to the systematic closure of most of the reservations.

Though many editors were concerned about outbreaks of violence should the government fail to isolate Indians upon well-managed reservations, others expressed concern that the Indians were being placed upon desirable land that would soon be

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coveted by enterprising whites. As one writer plainly noted, “The valuable land assigned to Indians as Reservations will ultimately be needed by citizens of the state.”149 With an eye toward the reality that reservations were temporary, the major concern of the writer was the possibility of violence between whites and Indians. While wishing for a peaceful resolution, the author emphasized that the needs of citizens had to take precedence over those of the Indians.

Miners in the diggings were less concerned with peaceful outcomes. Some white gold seekers pushed for a policy of extermination of the Indians of California. Following his account of the Coloma massacre, a writer to the Daily Alta California warned:

After what has occurred, revenge will be sought by both parties, and many a solitary white man will be cruelly murdered by Indians, and many an Indian picked off by a mountaineer’s rifle. Hereafter treaties cannot be made and the two races can never live together harmoniously; and I doubt not but a war of extermination will soon be commenced.150 The author clearly valued the lives of whites more than the lives of Indians, thus leading him to conclude that a “war of extermination will soon be commenced” against the California Natives.

A number of letters to the newspapers address this genocidal theme. Despite the variety of reasons given, most often, as with the letter quoted above, whites saw no other option. As another letter writer put it, “The Indian and the white man cannot well live together; they seem to be, at least in this part of the country, sworn foes, [who] kill each

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other wherever they meet.”151 The reasons for the widespread sentiment in favor of genocide included racism, acute paranoia, and an official government policy that perpetuated the idea of irreconcilable differences between the races. California’s first governor, Peter Burnett, declared the inevitable extinction of the Indians to be a foregone conclusion, and the attitude of the governor reverberated through the gold fields and found support upon the pages of California’s newspapers.152

Several editors supported the ideas of Indian extinction, extermination or both. The Marysville Daily Appeal said, “No country is wide enough for a joint occupancy by the white and red man.”153 Firmly asserting a belief in white supremacy, the paper called for supporting the extirpation of Indians in the name of “civilization and enlightenment.”154 The editors stipulated that the Indians’ disappearance “from [their] old hunting grounds [should] be tempered with humanity and mercy.”155

The Sacramento Union proffered the opinion that “the fate of the Indian is fixed. He must be annihilated by the advance of the white man.”156 The Daily Alta California also believed the Indian was destined for extinction, and suggested the state should “place within [the Indians’] reach the power of supporting themselves” as they gradually

152 Robert F. Heizer and Alan F. Almquist, 26.
154 Ibid.
155 Ibid.
perished. The Placer Times concurred, saying, “A check upon the inclinations of the worst [Indians], will arise with the rapid growth of society, and gradually they will recede before the advances of the white man as is destined the Indian race in general.”

The majority of Sacramento-region newspapers expressed the idea that Indians in California would disappear with the advancement of white civilization, and they expressed no concern other than to suggest the provision of comfort to the evanescent race.

Once again, the Daily National Democrat stood apart from the rest of the publications. In 1860, the Daily National Democrat ran an editorial that offered a sardonic retort to those who called for the extermination of California’s Indians. Responding to an editorial that ran in the Red Bluff Beacon, John Rollin Ridge stated in part:

> We suppose the idea is that, while the squaws and female children are to be spared, the grown up men, lads and boys are to be massacred. Whether the State or General Government is to take charge of this work, or whether it is to be the result of an adequately aroused public sentiment, we cannot determine from the Beacon’s article. At any rate, there were to be no more California Indians reared. The breed is to be stopped. This is a pretty effectual way of settling the Indian question, we must admit. But, it occurs to us that the business would be much more complete if the squaws and female children were also all killed off at the same time.

With his tongue firmly planted in his cheek, Ridge continued on this tack in the lengthy editorial filled with contempt for the editors of the Beacon. Toward the end of the commentary Ridge remarked that whites had condemned eastern Indians for killing

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157 Editorial, “The Indian Reservations,” Alta California, September 10, 1851, 1.
women and children. But now, he continued, “It does not follow that, because it is not right for a savage people to kill women and children, it is wrong for a civilized people to do so whenever they feel like it.” Next, Ridge took the opportunity afforded him to take a swipe at those who, in his eyes, had been largely responsible for instigating the racial conflict that had aroused the *Beacon* to call for extermination in the first place. Finally, discussing the difficulty of finding men willing to carry out the task of extermination in the Sierra, the editorial ironically advised: “There are hundreds who are now lying idle and who would consider it an honor to do this business…. Why there are numerous individuals up in the northern sections of the State who have been killing Indian squaws and papooses, gratis.”

Ridge’s editorial demonstrated one of the primary differences between the Cherokee journalist and other editors in the Sacramento region. Ridge genuinely believed Indians, given support and assistance, would adapt to “civilized” white society and assimilate over time. Other editors, if they embraced reservations at all, viewed them as ephemeral institutions that would at best deliver palliative care to a dying race. But even among this group, newspapermen seemingly understood that whites would not await the gradual outcome, but would use extreme violence to hasten the inevitable demise of the “feathered race.”

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161 Ibid.
John Rollin Ridge, lured to California in 1850 by the promise of riches and a desire to escape his problems in the East, abandoned mining quickly and set to work in the newspaper business. Ridge would build his knowledge and experience in the newspaper industry and eventually serve as the editor of a number of California newspapers centered in the Sacramento and Marysville area, including the *Sacramento Daily Bee* between April and July of 1857 and the *Daily National Democrat* for three years from 1858-1860. Ridge held many unique views regarding the Indians and the on-going “Indian troubles” in California. Ridge’s life experience strongly influenced his views on Indian affairs and that experience, not surprisingly, formed the basis for the editorials that appeared on the pages of his newspapers.

Born on March 19, 1827, in Georgia, John Rollin Ridge entered a Cherokee Nation mired in political mayhem. John Rollin Ridge’s family stalwartly believed education provided the means by which the Cherokee could survive. James Parins, noted Ridge biographer, stated, “John and Sarah Ridge were determined to provide the best

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162 James W. Parins, *John Rollin Ridge: His Life and Works*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 67-73. In these pages, Parins provides a detailed sketch of John Rollin’s trek west as well as his efforts with placer mining. In August, 1850 Ridge and his partners abandoned mining, sold their mules, and headed to Sacramento to find employment. While in Sacramento Ridge met Joseph Grant, the local agent for the *True Delta*, a paper published out of New Orleans. Grant asked Ridge to write an article for his paper and was astounded at Ridge’s ability. He offered Ridge eight dollars per article he produced for the paper. This marked the beginning of Ridge’s foray into the newspaper business in California.

163 Ibid., 113-37.
education they could for [John Rollin] and the rest of the children.”

John Rollin Ridge attended missionary schools beginning at the age of seven. The instructor in this first school, Miss Sophia Sawyer, became a strong influence in John Rollin Ridge’s life. Sawyer was a strong-willed woman, like John Rollin Ridge’s mother and grandmother, who provided direction, discipline, and formal instruction to the young Ridge. Ridge put Sawyer’s tutelage to good use throughout his life, and the education he received, along with the strong belief that education provided a means of survival for Indian people, would be a consistent theme in Ridge’s later editorials.

John Rollin Ridge’s family had a protracted history of involvement with Cherokee Nation politics, dating back to his grandfather’s role in determining the parameters around which the ancient Cherokee blood law should apply. The Ridge faction, consisting of John Ridge (John Rollin Ridge’s father), Major Ridge (John Rollin Ridge’s grandfather), and Elias Boudinot, determined the Cherokee people had little choice but to move from their lands in the southeast to the Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma. The Ridge faction signed a treaty in 1835 giving up the eastern lands of the Cherokee to the United States government. Under the agreement, the Cherokees would receive acreage in the Indian Territory along with a lump sum of cash. Upon signing the

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164 James W. Parins, 14.

165 Ibid., 14-15.

166 Ibid., 4
document, John Rollin Ridge’s grandfather remarked, “I have signed my death warrant.” His words proved to be prophetic.

A group of Cherokees, led by John Ross, stood in opposition to the treaty signed by the Ridge faction. Ross and his group decided, in 1839, that the signers of the treaty giving away Cherokee land rights in the East must die. They justified their decision based on a Cherokee law, ironically written under the guidance of John Ridge, which stated anyone selling Cherokee land without the consent of the tribe would be killed. The execution squads carried out the death sentences on June 22, 1839. With his mother, John Rollin Ridge, twelve-years-old, helplessly witnessed his father’s execution first hand at his home in Honey Creek, Arkansas. The executioners stabbed his father nearly thirty times and then slit his throat. The hit squads next dispatched Boudinot and Major Ridge in similar fashion. John Rollin Ridge ached for revenge. On occasion, his festering anger and resentment emerged in his editorial opinions.

John Rollin Ridge shared many of the popular views of California’s Indians expressed by other editors. For example, Ridge viewed the “Diggers of California,” as being, “so low in the scale of being, that it puzzled the observer to conceive of a condition more nearly illustrating the absolutely primitive state of mankind.” He reiterated this notion one year later in the Daily National Democrat, stating that the “poor

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167 James W. Parins, 21.

168 Ibid., 29.

169 Ibid., 29-31.

Diggers [were] the most inferior of all the tribes of North America.”171 However, at the same time, Ridge believed the Diggers to be victims, in the truest sense of the word, of white impositions. He stated, in a July 1857 editorial discussing white violence upon Digger Indians, “There is no plea for the poor Digger but that of humanity. He has none of the romance that gathers around the noble savage of the western prairies – he cannot defend himself or his rights, and a prayer for mercy is his only argument against cruelty and oppression.”172 In December 1858, Ridge further revealed his own contempt for California Indians when he suggested that Diggers were a “truly degraded and inferior race, [that was] almost destitute of all human affections.”173 Ridge’s view of the Diggers appears somewhat inconsistent with the other ideas he shared with his readers.

In Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America, Thomas Hietala suggested that white Americans propagated an image of Native Americans as primitive and savage beings in order to compensate for their own insecurities.174 According to Hietala, “When held up to the Indian tribes, rather than the European nations, the United States appeared to be on the high road to advanced civilization.”175 Is it possible John Rollin Ridge was using the California “Diggers” in


175 Ibid.
this same fashion? By comparison to the Diggers, the Cherokee Nation appeared to be a much more advanced culture. One cannot say with certainty that Ridge’s insecurities served as motivation for his anti-Digger statements, but it may explain the attitudes and opinions he regularly expressed in his editorials. Though Ridge was adamant regarding the inferiority of the “Diggers” of California, he proposed a most unusual solution to the Indian problems in California during his editorial tenure with the *Sacramento Daily Bee*.

Ridge’s solution, informed by his own background as the son of a white mother and the husband of a white woman, seemed in marked contrast to the opinion that whites were superior to Indians. Ridge publicized his novel ideas in the *Sacramento Daily Bee* in 1857. In what must have been considered an astonishing editorial at the time, Ridge extolled the virtues of sexual “amalgamation” for the “Diggers”:

Some advocate extermination – others the subjection of them to domestication and servitude in white families, while others are in favor of the present policy of the United States, the placing them on reservations, and teaching them husbandry and mechanical trades. Others, again, are in favor of removing them beyond the limits of the State…. Our own idea may be somewhat startling, but we believe it to be the only true solution of the difficulty – AMALGAMATION [emphasis original]. People who have been in the mountains, and seen, as we have, hundreds of white men living with their Digger wives, will not be so much surprised at this declaration of opinion. Wherever the white race goes, amalgamation takes place.\(^{176}\)

In July 1857, the *Bee* published a follow-up editorial prior to Ridge’s departure from the newspaper. It discussed the assimilation of the races and declared with startling prescience, “[W]e are bound to believe, and not afraid to assert, that a universal amalgamation of the races seems to be going on, and that it is possible that the present

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identity of nations and tribes will someday be entirely lost in the comingling and absorption of specific elements.”

Ridge also noted in this editorial that “some people, hereabouts affect to be tremendously horrified and undertook to create the impression that because we stated a philosophical fact, we therefore were in favor of such an amalgamation of the races. We care not…” Although Ridge’s claim of widespread miscegenation had provoked a negative reaction, he quickly pointed out that he had not offered an opinion but simply a statement of established fact. Whether he was merely reporting the phenomenon of interracial sexual mingling or was advocating miscegenation as a positive long-term feature for California, his comments doubtlessly proved provocative and even revolutionary.

In *John Rollin Ridge: His Life and Works*, James Parins explained that the *Sacramento Bee* editor “was very conscious of his Cherokee identity, yet he wrote in favor of assimilation policies to settle the ‘Indian question.’”

Though he never stated his belief in Indian “amalgamation” so forthrightly again, Ridge would consistently support the notion that the Indians of California were capable of becoming a civilized race that could eventually become a part of mainstream white society. He ran an editorial in April 1859 in which he alluded to the idea of assimilation, but did not offer outright

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178 Ibid.


180 Although Ridge left the *Bee* shortly after the publication of these editorials, no evidence was found to suggest their publication was directly related to his departure.

181 James W. Parins, 2.
support for the plan. He responded to the idea of racial protectionism with a statement that, “The United States might as well turn itself into a second China or Japan, and refuse to have any intercourse whatever with the outside world. The idea that there is no virtue outside the Anglo-Saxon stock is simply ridiculous.” Ridge’s belief in assimilation was less obvious in the pages of the Daily National Democrat; however, he continued to support the idea in a more surreptitious way.

Rather than infuriate traditional readers with talk about a racially integrated society, as he had with his first editorial in the Sacramento Daily Bee, Ridge now took an approach that broke the assimilation issue down into its various components. He presented logical, cogent, and intelligent arguments concerning the ability of California Indians to become civilized through education, and he expressed optimism in the government’s ability to make available those resources needed to establish schools, churches, and other institutions that would nudge the indigenous population into the mainstream of American culture. Ridge’s views on assimilation were less edgy in the Daily National Democrat.

Ridge’s opinions while writing for the Democrat focused on the worthiness of the reservation system, the need of the Indians to follow the supervision and guidance of whites as a prerequisite to civilization, and the recognition that all races, including Anglo-Saxons, required time and education to achieve a civilized society. Ridge, consistent with his upbringing and a strong sense of majority rule, called on all American

Indians to conform to the norms of white society. He espoused this belief repeatedly in his editorials and suggested that once the Indians absorbed these values, assimilation would easily follow.

Writing in the *Daily National Democrat*, Ridge encouraged the federal government to “respect the Indian title, recognize them in their national capacity, and keep faith with them on all occasions.” Ridge urged Washington to adopt a friendlier approach to the indigenous population of California because heretofore, “This policy has resulted in civilizing several large and powerful tribes and will work well in every instance.” Ridge believed all Indians, indeed, all races, were capable of achieving a civilized way of life and it was the job of society to grant inferior races the opportunity to cultivate and improve themselves toward that end.

In an editorial in 1859, Ridge wrote, “Every race of men upon the face of the globe should be allowed every possible advantage of cultivation and improvement, consistent with the safety of society and the peace of the world.” Ridge added, “Especially should this treatment be extended to the North American tribes of this continent, many of whom have shown the very greatest qualities that belong to human intellect, and furnished to history as noble examples of true native greatness of character.

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184 Ibid.

Ridge repeatedly revisited this idea in his editorials and compared the state of American Indians to the state of all races of people in their earlier history. Ridge opined, “The growth of the civilization, intelligence and refinement of other races [including the white race], now boastful of their greatness, was slow and gradual, the tedious work of centuries.” In another editorial, he asserted, “Those who deny the practicability of civilizing the Indian are ignorant, not only of the character of the Indian, but the history of the world.” Ridge repeatedly insisted that Indian nations were making progress toward civilization at a much more rapid rate than had the white races historically.

Ridge assumed California Indians needed the tutelage of civilized whites in order to make their progress toward an enlightened state. In this conviction, Ridge may have been reflecting upon his own experience and the lessons passed on to him by his father and grandfather regarding his own education under the supervision of white missionaries. With regard to the “Diggers,” Ridge wrote in 1859, “They can easily be taught to work, and there is no earthly reason why they should not be induced willingly to work upon the Reservation farms and to support themselves.” In another editorial, Ridge referred to the American Indians as being “Under subjection to the white race; [but that]… it has

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been found necessary, for their sake, as well as our own, to regard them as in a state of pupilage, and to legislate to a certain extent over them and the territory they occupy.”

In no editorial did Ridge make his belief in the necessity of white tutelage for Indians clearer than one he wrote in December 1858. Addressing a proposal to close down the reservations in California, Ridge noted:

The Indians would lack the supervisory and compulsory care, which they now have on the Reservations, and would, in the great majority of cases, from disinclination to work or ignorance of the manner in which to proceed, at once abandon their patches of ground and take to their strolling vagabond life, or their horse and cow stealing business in the mountains.

Ridge concluded that the plan to close down reservations was a misguided. “Were the Indians more civilized,” he added, the plan “would without doubt operate admirably.”

Ridge reprinted an editorial from the *Yreka Chronicle* in the *Daily National Democrat* that supported Ridge’s view that Indians needed guidance from whites. That editorial asked, “Where should lessons of morality and of humanity originate, if not among our own people?” Ridge’s strong convictions regarding the Indians’ need for assistance by “civilized” whites placed him strongly in support of the reservation system. His unwavering belief that Indians could become civilized and assimilate into white society set him apart from all other Sacramento-region editors.

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192 Ibid.

Though Ridge’s views of assimilation were far-reaching, by supporting the reservation system in California, he aligned himself with the editors of the *Daily Alta California* and the *Sacramento Daily Union*. Like the editors of these publications, Ridge believed, “No other plan could be substituted that we can now think of, that would work half so well.”¹⁹⁴ Ridge, too, like a number of other editors, believed the problem with the reservation system resided with those who managed the system. “Put honest men in charge of these Reservations, and give them an honest Superintendent, and the Reservation policy will fulfill all the expectations originally entertained of it,” Ridge remarked.¹⁹⁵ With the proper administration Ridge believed, “In the course of time, after thorough training upon the Reservations, it is very likely that the present system might safely be abandoned and the plan of individual apportionment of the soil be prudently substituted.”¹⁹⁶ In other words, Ridge would only support the abolition of the reservation system when it became clear the Indians, under the guidance of the whites, demonstrated an ability to live a civilized lifestyle and to operate as yeomen farmers.

Ridge supported the reservation system because he saw it as a means to an end. Ultimately, as noted earlier, Ridge believed the Indians would become civilized and no longer need the reservations. Ridge based his convictions on his strong belief in education; a belief he acquired during his own formative years in Arkansas. Though educated in the arts and sciences, Ridge did not necessarily believe this was the best kind

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¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.
of education for California’s “Diggers.” In 1860 when Congress abolished the California superintendence over Indians, and the state government passed laws essentially forcing many Indians into a system of indentured servitude, Ridge expressed support for the changes. Ridge believed, “The provision for apprenticing the Indians, under certain circumstances, which are stated, will probably attract more comment than any other feature of the bill. With proper guards, it might be well.”197 Ridge considered that the training of Indians in various types of labors could redound to the welfare of the Indians, but he clearly understood the potential pitfalls of the proposed legislation. He added to his previous remarks, “But this kind of apprenticeship should be vigilantly restricted, lest it run into abuse, from the inability of the ignorant Indian to protect his own rights and his consequent liability to be imposed upon.”198 Though Ridge expressed concern for the fate of Indians under the bill, the Cherokee journalist seemed inclined to blame any labor exploitation on the “ignorant Indians” and not on the abusive white overseer.

Ridge remained adamant in his vision that Indians possessed the necessary intellect and character to become civilized. During his reign as editor of the *Daily National Democrat*, he wrote no fewer than twelve editorials championing this concept.199 His staunch support of the reservation system and the education of Indians


198 Ibid.

199 Editorials supporting Ridge’s belief in the ability of Indians to become civilized included: “The Indian Reservations,” December 19, 1858, 2; “Treatment of the Indians,” December 30, 1858, 2; “Indian Reservations,” January 7, 1859, 2; “Savage or Semi-Civilized Races,” January 20, 1859, 2; “More About the Civilized Indian States,” February 24, 1859, 2; “Refinement not Degeneracy,” July 8, 1859, 2; “Political Status of the North American Indians, West of the Missouri and Arkansas,” October 23, 1859, 2; “Injins! Injins!,” November 16, 1859, 2; “Indian Republics,” December 10, 1859, 2; “Indian Bill,”
aligned with Ridge’s earlier stated belief in assimilation of the races that appeared in the *Sacramento Daily Bee* in 1857. Ridge had clearly not abandoned his hope for the integration of the Indian into the general society; rather, he had become more adroit at advancing the concept to the public.

John Rollin Ridge offered a unique perspective on the conflicts arising between whites and Indians during the California Gold Rush. His Cherokee heritage, combined with his childhood experiences and education, channeled his opinions in a different direction than most other Sacramento-region editors. Although others believed in the reservation system, they supported it for reasons different from Ridge. Ridge believed the reservation system would be useful in the training of Indians in civilized behavior; most other editors simply wanted the Indians out of the way of the rush of white civilization that was sweeping across the region. In Ridge’s view, the ultimate goal of the government should be to prepare the Indians as laborers or, for those few, who demonstrated the aptitude, in the arts and sciences. Education would lead to civilization, and civilization would lead to assimilation. Ultimately, Ridge believed California Indians could become civilized, just as a number of eastern tribes had shown. But, according to Ridge, the government bore the ultimate responsibility to provide the support and training necessary to “enlighten” the Indians and assist them in adopting the white man’s ways.

February 24, 1860, 2; “Our Indian Policy – A Plan Proposed,” April 14, 1860, 2; “The Reservations,” July 1, 1860, 2. All from *Daily National Democrat*.

Chapter 9

THE QUESTION OF GENOCIDE

In his landmark work, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, Raphael Lemkin defined the term genocide as, “the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group,” and that, “Genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor.”\(^\text{201}\) Lemkin went on to explain the various techniques of genocide. The United Nations embraced Lemkin’s work and further defined genocide in the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* in 1948:

The Convention defines genocide as any of a number of acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.\(^\text{202}\)

Relying in part on the Sacramento-region press of the Gold Rush era, a number of modern historians have written on the tragedy of the California Indians in terms of genocide.

The first specific act identified in the United Nation’s definition of genocide involved “killing members of the group and/or causing serious bodily or mental harm to

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members of the group.”203 Previous chapters of this work, most specifically Chapter 4: Indian Massacres presented evidence of this horrific practice. The Sacramento region press included numerous articles and editorials documenting the systematic destruction of Indian lives at the hands of white settlers and militias in the name of retaliation, retribution, justice, vengeance among other justifications. Nevertheless, the newspapers recorded other examples of this type of systematic killing of Indians that were not directly associated with the infamous massacres of Indians.

One such commentary appeared in the *Daily Alta California* on March 11, 1850. In a letter, rather than an article, the writer described vigilante missions carried out as ancillary activities to the main massacre at Clear Lake. The writer noted that the vigilantes first called a meeting to discuss “[D]riving all the Indians from the country.”204 The writer then explained how those at the meeting set their plan in motion, systematically rousting and killing many innocent Indians in cold blood. The writer added:

A party of twenty-four armed horsemen … proceeded to Mr. Yount’s rancho, set fire to the rancheria, and chased near one hundred Indians to the mountains; thence proceeded on to Fowler’s ranch and there shot down fifteen innocent Indians. After this, they passed on to Santa Rosa, chased the Indians from thence; came on to Jesse Beasley’s ranch in Sonoma, and there killed two of his household, Indian servants; a third was fired at but escaped…. Yesterday the

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204 Veritas, “Correspondence of the Alta California,” *Daily Alta California*, March 11, 1850, 2.
party that is said to have killed the Indians, passed through this town, and threatened to hunt and kill every Indian, male and female, found in the country.\textsuperscript{205}

This letter illustrated not only the callous slaughter of innocent Indians but also the genocidal mindset of those doing the killing. The last statement in the letter, as well as the comment regarding the desire to “drive all the Indians from the country,” reveals the vigilantes’ plan to destroy a race of people. Their aims and actions align clearly with the definition of genocide provided by Lemkin and the United Nations.

In another letter published in the \textit{Placer Times} in 1849, William Daylor told a similar tale of white settlers killing large numbers of Indians in cold blood. Daylor employed many Indians to mine for him along the Cosumnes River. He had left the Indians to work his claim when “a party of armed white men came to their camp, or where they were at work, and killed an Indian while working with a crow bar, and on his knees; they then shot another through the arm, who tried to escape.”\textsuperscript{206} According to Daylor’s account, the white settlers continued their murderous spree, killing fourteen innocent Indians farther along the trail, kidnapping “a small party of [Indian] women and children,” and leaving twenty-two men and thirty-four women and children missing from the area; an additional fifty-six Indians Daylor believed were murdered.\textsuperscript{207} Though Daylor never speculated about the motives of the white men, it is clear they were on a homicidal binge, killing and kidnapping many of the Indians they encountered on that excursion.

\textsuperscript{205} Veritas, “Correspondence of the Alta California,” \textit{Daily Alta California}, March 11, 1850, 2.


\textsuperscript{207} Ibid.
day. Once again, little doubt exists that this behavior fits the definition of genocide previously stated.

Indeed, the Sacramento-region press is replete with accounts of white settlers massacring and murdering Indians throughout the gold fields during the Gold Rush era. Ample evidence likewise exists in these pages suggesting that white settlers deliberately inflicted violence on the California Indians that would annihilate the latter as a group. This action satisfies another criterion for the definition of genocide.

The Sacramento-region press documented extensively the planned displacement of Indians from their traditional lands. The *Sacramento Daily Union* stated this clearly in an editorial that ran on March 8, 1860. The editors remarked, “The United States surveys and sells land as public whilst the Indians are still upon it, and this too, without making any efficient arrangement to protect the purchasers, or the Indians they are forced to reject.”

Obviously, government officials made decisions that removed Indians from their lands with little or no regard to the Natives’ well-being. Other editorials and articles made it clear that policy makers and officials were well aware of the deadly results of this action.

An editorial in the Marysville *Daily Appeal* in 1860 illustrated an understanding of the sufferings Indians experienced, once forcefully deracinated from their traditional lands. In part, the editors stated, “[T]hese repeated attacks [by white settlers], have driven the Indians into the mountains…. While they are out in the bleak, barren

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mountains, they steal and kill such stray stock as they can find, preferring to take the risk of being shot, therefore, to languishing and dying of starvation.”

The severity of their suffering warranted the risk of a white man’s bullet in order to steal a stray animal for food. The same paper published a small article telling of a shooting competition among “Diggers” in Marysville. The article proclaimed, “The white folks made targets for them with two-bit pieces, and the Digger that struck the mark first, took it. Quite a little pile was thus collected by the poor, half-starved natives.”

Certainly, the editors of The Daily Appeal understood the price Indians paid for displacement from their ancestral lands.

The editors of the Sacramento Daily Union, in addressing the condition of the Indians in the northern part of the state, remarked, “The situation of the Indians in the northernmost counties of the state is truly deplorable. Not only do they stand in need of the ordinary necessities of life, but they are on the very verge of starving.”

Even though the paper took no position on the proposed solutions the article spoke to, it reported a meeting where county officials conceded that “Indians of the vicinity are continually thronging the streets, begging for food, and compelling the whites either to support them or witness cases of actual starvation.”

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212 Ibid.
compelling evidence both of the tragic results of Indian displacement and the fact that white Californians were incontrovertibly aware of the suffering of Native people from 1849 forward. Society’s decided lack of will in seeking to reverse the inexorable decline of the state’s Indian population would likewise seem to fulfill one of the requirements of the United Nation’s definition of genocide.

To be sure, some whites in California’s society recognized the tragic results of Indian displacement and, therefore, espoused a solution in the form of a reservation system. But, as reported in the Sacramento-region press, this approach hardly proved to be a panacea. Instead, Indian suffering continued on the reservations. In 1855, the *Sacramento Daily Union* editors related how white reservation employees raped Indian women with impunity. The editorial continued: “Young girls, almost children, are forcibly separated from their parents, and submitted to the foulest outrages. Drunkenness, violence, and disease are the daily concomitance of [the Indians’] daily existence.”

Five years later the *Daily Appeal* in Marysville published a scathing editorial that indicated conditions on reservations had not improved. Citing an eyewitness to the conditions on the reservations, the editors of the *Daily Appeal* remarked, “He never in his life saw so much squalid misery and suffering as he witnessed while on a visit to the Reservation at Round Valley. He represented the Indians as miserably clad, filthy and, in many instances, suffering from the most loathsome

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Clearly, the editors understood the abysmal hardships to which the Indians were subjected.

The editors of the *Sacramento Daily Bee*, in 1859, also spoke harshly of the reservation system in California. The editors explained the Indian troubles as the fruits of contact with whites. They further opined:

If there be anything calculated to arouse the animosity of those helpless, harmless people, it is the attempt to force them from their native streams and mountains, to the Government Reservations; they shrink from the change, with an instinctive horror; most of those who have been taken thither fled as from the wrath to come, and a pallor comes over them at the very mention of an Indian Agent’s name.

The editors clearly understood that removal from their traditional lands was a severe hardship upon the Indians, and that they suffered horribly, even when placed in government care upon the reservation. Once again, the evidence for the dominant society’s insouciant compliance in the gradual demise of the Indian race in California is sadly evident.

The final pieces of the definition of genocide involve the prevention of reproduction within the group and the transfer of children to another group. The evidence of these activities did not appear as frequently and as vividly as the evidence of the other components of the definition, but evidence did exist. To begin with, the 1855 editorials and articles in the *Sacramento Daily Union* mentioned previously made it

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214 Editorial, “The Indian Reservations,” *The Daily Appeal*, February 9, 1860, 1. The “loathsome diseases” addressed were undoubtedly venereal diseases.


216 Ibid.
clear that the rape of Indian women and girls on the reservations was common. This would indicate that single men and women slept in separate quarters on the reservations, as the women were clearly vulnerable and unprotected by Indian males. In addition, the massacres inflicted upon the Natives likely resulted in a shortage of males which would have left Indian women on reservations vulnerable to attack.

The *Sacramento Daily Bee* published an editorial in 1857 that directly addressed the destruction of the Indian population by white hunters who kidnapped “Digger children” from their parents and sold “them in different parts of the country.” Indeed, elaborated the editors, “A great many Indians have thus been shot down in cold blood by those white savages, and the inhuman practice of kidnapping is now going on with the steadiness of a regular system.”

Even though newspapers offered few accounts of whites segregating Indian men and women on the reservations, frequent stories related how militias and vigilante groups killed Indian warriors in battle while taking the women and children as prisoner. In addition, an occasional article would appear describing the kidnapping of Indian women. The *Sacramento Daily Union* published such an account on March 13, 1860. It stated that a white man kidnapped an Indian woman in Mendocino, took her to Redwood

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218 Ibid.
Valley, and sold her to another white settler.\textsuperscript{219} Though evidence is scarce, the press did suggest that whites did make efforts to separate male Indians from female Indians; thus, reducing opportunities for reproduction amongst California Indians and supporting the argument of genocide.

Articles and editorials in the Sacramento-region press generally lent credence to the allegation that white newcomers perpetrated genocide upon the California Indians during the Gold Rush era. Newspaper accounts clearly documented indiscriminate killing of natives in great numbers as well as the forceful removal of Natives from their ancestral lands to marginal, sterile lands where survival was tenuous at best. Further, the newspaper accounts of native land dispossession indicated that the white residents and government officials were well aware of the hardships imposed by this displacement, yet intervention on behalf of the Indians was not often forthcoming. When intervention in the form of reservations did occur, it did not slow the genocidal efforts of whites; rather, it merely shifted the effort to a more manageable theater. Finally, the Sacramento-region press provided some evidence of the forcible transfer of Indian children to white families and efforts to separate Indian men and women, which would slow reproduction of the Indian people. What is perhaps most disturbing was the lack of consistent outrage on the part of the press against neither the overt acts of genocide nor against the more subtle methods of annihilation brought about by government officials. Only rarely did the newspapers show genuine compassion for the besieged group of human beings.

Chapter 10
CONCLUSION

The California Gold Rush was an exciting and complex time. Hostile relations between white settlers and native Indians, defined by the pervasive racism and providential notions of the era, were encouraged by government policy and nourished by a legal system that failed to punish the murder of Indians. Most whites viewed native people as inferior “Diggers” standing in the way of progress. The newspapers of the greater Sacramento region reflected these views, as they grappled with the job of presenting the news and their opinions on the complexities of white-Indian relations.

The Sacramento-region newspapers in this study unanimously and consistently asserted their view of white supremacy over Indians. Most editors placed the responsibility for stopping the violence squarely on those of European extraction. The majority of editors called for a cessation of white violence against Indians, not because it was destroying another people and culture, but because it was unbecoming of a civilized, enlightened, white, Christian population and costly to the state.

Editors did not reach a consensus on the best means of solving the Indian problems in California. However, many agreed that the establishment of a reservation system warranted consideration, even as they disagreed on what that institution’s primary role should be. Some espoused the virtues of the reservation system as a means of separating the races. Others supported reservations because they believed they provided the best path toward indentured service by Indians. John Rollin Ridge supported
reservations because he believed they were the best body available to educate Indians either in proper labor methods or in the arts and sciences. In either case, he believed reservations furnished Indians with a path toward assimilation into civilized white society.

Editors of Sacramento-region newspapers were unanimous in their support of military action against Indians to protect white lives and property. Even the editors most sympathetic to the native population bought into the idea that violence was a necessary component of law enforcement in the battle between the two races. The *Daily Alta California, Placer Times*, and *Daily National Democrat* ranked among the most Indian-friendly newspapers in the Sacramento-region, yet they all supported the efforts of armed military and vigilance committees for the defense of white lives and property. Other editors championed the establishment of military outposts throughout the rural regions of the state to assist in keeping Indians in line.

There is little question, but that the greed, intolerance, and bloody violence committed against California Indians during the Gold Rush period constituted an act of genocide. Indeed, evidence of acts fulfilling the definition of genocide as put forth by the United Nations filled the pages of the Sacramento-region newspapers. Articles and editorials discussed murderous acts perpetrated by whites on Indians, the deliberate infliction upon Indians of conditions calculated to bring about their physical destruction, forcible actions by whites that prevented reproduction of Indians, and the aggressive kidnapping of Native children. Reading the Sacramento-region press of the Gold Rush
era leaves little doubt that genocide against Indians occurred in the gold fields of California.

The California Gold Rush was a time when tens of thousands of Argonauts trekked to the Pacific coast in hopes of striking it rich and making a better life for themselves and their families. For the California Indians it was a time of horror and suffering. The newspapers of the Sacramento-region recorded the quest for gold alongside the brutal atrocities suffered by the Indians. Most editors believed, as did California’s first governor, that the extinction of the Indians was inevitable. John Rollin Ridge, once again, stood alone in his desire for the assimilation of Indians rather than their extermination, which he vehemently opposed.

Ridge, a Cherokee Indian, envisioned a world in which race distinctions would disappear. While working for the Sacramento Daily Bee he openly and directly called for the integration of Indians into white society. Ridge called his plan “amalgamation,” or the blending of races, and remarked that it was already happening everywhere human beings existed. Later, when Ridge worked for the Daily National Democrat, he continued to support the idea of assimilation, though his editorials were less direct and more circumspect in their nature. Still, if Californians had listened to John Rollin Ridge, the Gold Rush could have offered an opportunity for learning, growth, and acceptance. Though Ridge possessed racist views and white supremacist ideals, he believed Indians deserved an opportunity to live and flourish in the United States. Most Sacramento-region newspaper editors did not agree with Ridge, filling their pages with traditional
Indian-hating attitudes. Indeed, as the more progressive ideas of John Rollin Ridge succumbed to a steady stream of racism, California Indians would continue their valiant struggle to survive in a new world dominated by greed, intolerance, and bloody violence.
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